**ELBOW RELEASE (ER)**

Successful Elbow Release positions have great commonality. Let’s take a look at our Pro Models, Jennie Finch and Lisa Fernandez. This is the final step in the sequencing phase. They are both in an upright posture. Their motions are beginning to rotate with the greatest resistance from a straightened stride leg. Both pitchers have a throwing hand and arm that have naturally released the energy in the upper body. The throwing arms are finishing through the pitch and continuing forward along the power line to allow for natural deceleration. And finally, both have released the throwing foot from the ground to maximizing force against the resisting stride leg.

Let’s take another look at both Jennie Finch and Lisa Fernandez at Elbow Release from the Target View. Elbow Release is the final step in the sequencing phase and is very important to the completion of the pitch as well as in preventing injury.

Deviations in Elbow Release happen for several reasons. Let’s examine these reasons by asking assessment questions about your pitcher’s motion. And then our youth models will demonstrate the common problems and provide a working set of drills to help you find solutions.

**The first question to ask will be “Is the pitcher’s posture upright and is her motion beginning to rotate with the greatest resistance from a straightened stride leg?”**

If the answer is no, the pitcher’s force might be locked back and unable to drive thru to the catcher. Our student model’s stride leg is blocking her ability to throw her force against and through her front side. She therefore cannot utilize the full benefits of summation behind the ball.

**The next question to ask will be “Is the throwing hand and arm naturally releasing away from body?”**

If the answer is no, pitcher is pulling up arm with bicep. Due to sequencing problems earlier in the motion, our student model must force the release with her bicep. Therefore, in the next phase when a natural elbow release should begin, she is still fighting and misguiding force.

And if the answer is no, the pitcher may have a locked and tension filled arm in elbow release. In this example, the pitcher has an excellent foundation of movement in earlier phases but is “over-pitching” in the later phases of the motion. She is releasing with stiff force instead of with a natural dissipation of energy.

**Another question to ask will be “Is the throwing arm finishing through the pitch and continuing forward along the power line?”**

If the answer is no, the pitcher’s throwing arm might be moving in a counterproductive direction. Instead of releasing energy along a direct path to the catcher, the student model in this example is crossing her body in this elbow release phase.

**And the final question to ask will be “Is the throwing foot releasing from the ground to maximizing force against the stride leg?”**

If the answer is no, the pitcher’s throwing foot might be anchored into the ground causing deceleration. In this example, the pitcher’s throwing foot is still in contact with the ground through the elbow release phase causing a braking effect to the completion of the pitch.

If you discover that your pitching movements deviate from the fundamentals of our pro models, please refer to following Elbow Release drills.

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**Is the pitcher’s posture upright and motion beginning to rotate with the greatest resistance from a straightened stride leg?**

**Common Problem ER-1: The pitcher’s force is locked back and not driving thru to the catcher**

**Solution ER-1a: Explore Options - Driving the “4” With Rotation**

***Tests a Finish and Follow Thru that creates a strong front side with maximum force and rotation through the finish.***

*The Finish and Follow Thru phase must be a healthy and natural response to an earlier movement in the pitch. It serves as a zone through which the pitcher can complete the forward attack and then dissipate that energy over time. It is important to evaluate if the Finish and Follow Thru is allowing the maximum levels of energy to be thrown through to the catcher or if there could be a roadblock that may prohibit acceleration through the sequencing phase. Exploring options of Finish and Follow Thru will help remove some of the physical and mental roadblocks by challenging the pitcher to release energy in several different ways. The drill provides five options for completion along a full range of motion. Each option can target specific problems or when used in a five pitch series, it promotes the pitcher to be more creative and free in movement. After several cycles of the five pitch series, assess which Finish and Follow Thru option (or options) produces the best speed and spin levels.*

*The Drive the “4” with Rotation drill is designed for pitchers who may be locked back behind their front side and not getting the full benefit from the rotational forces at the completion of the motion. It requires an efficient and summed drive to the front side and is then capped with a strong trunk rotation.*

*To execute, the pitcher will stay open as she moves through the sequencing phase. She will stabilize the upper arm against the body, release the ball, release the throwing foot from the ground and drive directly and accurately against the front leg making the shape of a “4”. She will add a very strong hip rotation to the finish. The movement must be crisp, clean, powerful and balanced.*

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**Did the throwing hand and arm naturally release away from body?**

**Common Problem ER-2: Pitcher is locking arm or pulling up with bicep**

**Solution ER-2a: Forehand Frisbee Throw**

***Pitching challenge: Learn a Forehand Frisbee Throw and relate it to the natural arm release away from the body.***

*Studying and demonstrating the movements of other sports provide great example that can be applied to pitching. In this drill, we examine and practice the Forehand Frisbee Throw. The website* [*www.ultimatehandbook.com*](http://www.ultimatehandbook.com) *illustrates the proper mechanics of a Frisbee throw. The following information is provided on that website:*

*A frisbee requires forward momentum and spin to be thrown well. Posture your stance athletically with your feet shoulder width apart, hips open and your arm lagged behind your throwing leg. Bring your arm backwards, so that the disc is next to your rear leg and you feel your weight shift slightly back. In this throw, most of your force will actually come from the wrist snap and weight transfer, as your arm will move only a short distance. Bring your arm forward with considerable force. Your elbow will be the pivot point, and your hand will actually stop with a jerk before it reaches your front leg. The importance of the release point and wrist snap are magnified with this throw. A good starting point is to release the disc just after your wrist crosses your rear leg. Snap your wrist quite firmly as you release. This throw will not be successful unless the disc has good spin. After the disc leaves your hand, your first two fingers should remain firmly extended. Following through is not necessary or desirable in this instance.   
The single most common fault is that the disc will turn over hitting the ground. This fault is caused by turning the wrist over during the release or using a circular swing rather than ``straight'' at the target. The following are solutions to this problem: use a motion similar to flicking a towel; use more wrist rather than arm; lead the throw with the elbow; follow through by pointing hand at the target.*

*A challenging pitching exercise would be to learn how to do a Forehand Frisbee Throw and then list all of the commonalities between that Frisbee throw and the sequencing of the pitch. It would not be possible for the bicep to pull up through release on a Frisbee throw. Focus on how the throwing hand and the arm will release away from the body to the target.*

**Solution ER-2b: ThrowMax – Wrist Focus**

***Wearing a flexible brace around the elbow straightens the arm while allowing for elasticity needed to create whip.***

*Using a ThrowMax will physically prohibit overly bending the arm. The ThrowMax is a flexible arm brace worn around the elbow. It straightens the arm while still allowing it to be elastic. It promotes the release of energy from the wrist. Pitchers often face problems when the bicep takes over and curls the snap up through this release zone. This bicep curl interrupts the natural sequencing. Once the pitcher begins wearing the ThrowMax, she may begin to make adjustments in the timing, tension and release to accommodate for the new arm length. By disabling a bicep curl, the ThrowMax places responsibility on the wrist, how it releases the angles and extends to the catcher.*

**Solution ER-2c: Weighted Ball**

***Adding a weight to the end of a rope creates a whipping acceleration through release into recovery.***

*In the fishing world, adding a split shot lead weight to the end of the line will make for longer casts. This is much the same with a towel snap. Wetting the end of the towel adds more weight to the tip, therefore more acceleration IF the sequencing is done properly along the way.*

*A weighted ball can bring the same benefits to pitching. The pitcher will generate maximum centrifugal force by adding a weight (the heavy ball) onto the end of the rope (her elastic arm). The legs must lead while the arm lags as it waits for the body mass to accelerate. The body paves the way for the sequencing of the whip. And upon the weighted release of the ball the arm will naturally extend to the catcher. The weighted ball can help pitchers who shorten and pull up with their bicep to throw the pitch. It will help to create a more natural release.*

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**Is the throwing arm finishing through the pitch continuing forward along the power line?**

**Common Problem ER-3: Throwing arm moves in counterproductive direction**

**Solution ER-3a: Sharpie Test**

***Match up a reference point on wrist with the catcher to monitor the forward continuation of movement of the arm.***

*Releasing and sending energy through a long zone to the plate is essential for speed, spin and location. Pitchers must move the throwing arm in a forward continuation to the target in the Elbow Release phase. Turning the wrist over too early or pulling it off line is counterproductive. A way to self-monitor this phase of movement is with the Sharpie Test. Take a marker and place a dot on the back of the wrist. During Elbow Release to the beginning of the Finish phase, the dot should be directed at the target. By focusing on breaking the wrist and throwing the dot at the catcher, the pitcher will continue forward along the force line.*

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**Has the throwing foot released from the ground maximizing force against stride leg?**

**Common Problem ER-4: Throwing foot is anchored into the ground causing deceleration**

**Solution ER-4a: Explore Options - Driving the “4” Plus 4**

***A Finish and Follow Thru option that attacks the hitter by driving through the finish landing one step close to plate.***

*The Finish and Follow Thru phase must be a healthy and natural response to an earlier movement in the pitch. It serves as a zone through which the pitcher can complete the forward attack and then dissipate that energy over time. It is important to evaluate if the Finish and Follow Thru is allowing the maximum levels of energy to be thrown through to the catcher or if there could be a roadblock that may prohibit acceleration through the sequencing phase. Exploring options of Finish and Follow Thru will help remove some of the physical and mental roadblocks by challenging the pitcher to release energy in several different ways. The drill provides five options for completion along a full range of motion. Each option can target specific problems or when used in a five pitch series, it promotes the pitcher to be more creative and free in movement. After several cycles of the five pitch series, assess which Finish and Follow Thru option (or options) produces the best speed and spin levels.*

*This Explore Options drill is called Drive to “4” Plus 4. It requires the pitcher to drive forces in a linear direction against the front side. And because that force is so great, after release of the pitch, the throwing leg will push out the stride leg and the entire body will replant itself up to 4 feet closer to the catcher.*

*To execute, the pitcher will stay open as she moves through the sequencing phase, stabilize the upper arm against the body, release the ball, release the throwing foot from the ground and drive directly and accurately against the front leg making the shape of a “4”. The body weight has been thrown with such force that the throwing leg will push out the stride leg and the entire body will land on the stride foot, but this time much closer to the catcher.*

**Solution ER-4b: Explore Options – Release and Replant**

***Tests a finish that adds rotational force to a releasing stride foot allowing for strong continuation of power forward.***

*The Finish and Follow Thru phase must be a healthy and natural response to an earlier movement in the pitch. It serves as a zone through which the pitcher can complete the forward attack and then dissipate that energy over time. It is important to evaluate if the Finish and Follow Thru is allowing the maximum levels of energy to be thrown through to the catcher or if there could be a roadblock that may prohibit acceleration through the sequencing phase. Exploring options of Finish and Follow Thru will help remove some of the physical and mental roadblocks by challenging the pitcher to release energy in several different ways. The drill provides five options for completion along a full range of motion. Each option can target specific problems or when used in a five pitch series, it promotes the pitcher to be more creative and free in movement. After several cycles of the five pitch series, assess which Finish and Follow Thru option (or options) produces the best speed and spin levels.*

*A drill for Exploring Options of Finish and Follow Thru that maximizes force to the catcher is called Release and Replant. It requires the pitcher to drive forces in a linear direction against the front side. After the release of the pitch and due to the great force and rotation of the body, the stride leg will release from the ground and the throwing leg will land in place of the stride leg.*

*To execute, the pitcher will stay open as she moves through the sequencing phase, stabilize the upper arm against the body, release the ball, release the throwing foot from the ground and drive directly to the front side. With forces so great and rotation beginning to occur, upon release of the pitch, the stride leg will free itself from the ground, the hips will rotate and the throwing foot will land in the place of the stride foot.*