

# **Appendix**

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## **Working Pitchers In**

A dilemma that faces baseball coaches at virtually every level is how to make sure that pitchers who play other positions are able to get their mound throwing, running, and flatwork in during practices (we'll explain "flatwork" in a few minutes). In fact, depending on the number of catchers and coaches a team has, it might be a challenge to figure out when to get any of a team's pitchers the work they need between appearances.

It can be extremely difficult to balance the work that pitchers who play other positions need between outings with the amount of throwing they should do if they hope to stay sharp at their other positions. It also can be tough to find the time in practice to allow your pitchers to get their throwing in, to hit, and to work on their individual defense. We hope some of these ideas will help.

### **Plan an Effective Practice**

A coach's ability to be organized and plan an effective practice will allow him or her to accomplish all of his or her coaching goals on a consistent basis. This includes finding time for pitchers who play other positions to work on all of the fundamental skills they need to be successful.

Start by having your players perform a dynamic warm-up that gets their hearts pumping and allows them to stretch and throw for up to 20 minutes. After that, I usually spend about 20 minutes on infield and outfield fungos with players throwing from their positions for part of that time (without overdoing it).

From there we move into team fundamentals. It's important to cover at least one, if not two, team fundamentals every day in practice.

These fundamentals include baserunning, cutoffs and relays, pickoffs and rundowns, bunt defenses, and first-and-third defenses. Some days are better than others when it comes to fundamentals. If kids don't understand the concepts after 20 minutes, they probably aren't going to get them at all that day, so we move on to something else. We'll return to the problem area at another practice session.

After fundamentals comes batting practice. This is your opportunity to make the best use of your time, not only for your hitters but for your pitchers as well.

## **BP Is More Than Just Batting Practice**

An effective batting practice is more than just one player hitting and everyone else watching. By using small groups and breaking batting practice down into stations lasting no more than 10 to 15 minutes each, the process becomes much more efficient and prevents boredom from setting in. Plus, doing this allows your pitchers to get their work in.

Dedicate one station to fundamental hitting drills: Tee Work, Soft Toss, Short Toss, or another drill or a combination of drills. In another station work on live hitting and baserunning on the field. There might be two fielding stations, one in the infield and one in the outfield, at which players field the balls hit during batting practice without making throws to bases. Between pitches, a coach can hit players infield and outfield fungos to keep kids interested and allow them to work on individual defensive fundamentals.

Group pitchers and catchers together so that pitchers can get their throwing in during the fielding stations. The amount of throwing and the type of throwing that needs to be done depends on the pitcher. At the high school and youth levels, most starting pitchers get one starting assignment a week. If this is the case, they should throw a bullpen session either two or three days after their start. If they start once a week, it's probably okay to wait until the third day for their bullpen session. If they're getting two starts in a week, it might be a better idea to schedule the bullpen session for the second day.

## **Defining a Bullpen Session**

In reference to pitchers, you sometimes hear coaches say, "He needs to throw a bullpen." All this means is that pitchers throw from a mound

at the regulation distance (for the player's age) and at maximum velocity for a pre-determined amount of time or a pre-determined number of pitches. The focus should be on fastballs and location, but some pitchers should also throw a set number of other pitches *if* they throw these pitches in games. In general, younger pitchers should be throwing almost all fastballs to help build arm strength. They should be introduced to off-speed and breaking pitches only as they approach physical maturity, and even then the use of these pitches should be monitored closely by a coach.

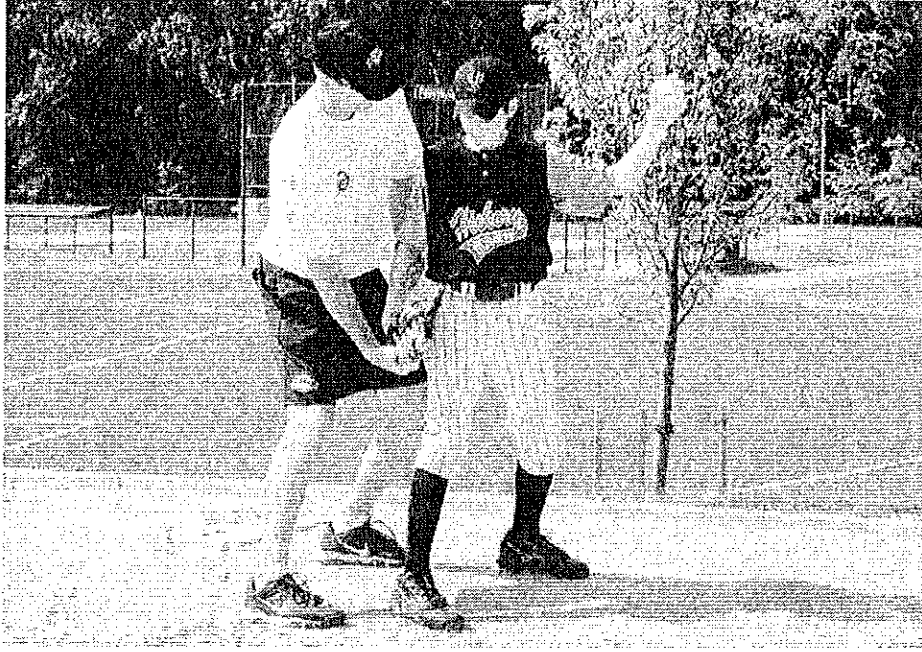
How long should a bullpen session last? This is where things get tricky. If a pitcher is only a pitcher and doesn't play another position, the bullpen session should last about 15 minutes. For players who play other positions, you need to adjust accordingly. A pitcher who's the starting shortstop, for instance, should probably throw for about 8 to 10 minutes. The amount a reliever throws between appearances will depend on how much work he's getting. A pitcher who's being used out of the bullpen frequently might not need a bullpen session at all. If your starters are getting the job done in games, you might want to have your reliever throw a full bullpen. A pitcher who has been used only occasionally might need to be scaled down to 8 or 10 minutes, or even less. Common sense should prevail here.

The bullpen session is not designed for the pitcher to work on problem areas. This session is part of the rehabilitation process after throwing in a game to help maintain shoulder conditioning. That's why it's imperative that the pitcher focuses on throwing and locating mostly fastballs. The pitcher must get his work in without worrying about why his curveball is hanging or why his change-up is staying up in the strike zone. Throwing every type of pitch from a mound is important to help pitchers stay sharp, but fastballs should be the main area of concentration.

## **Drills and Flatwork**

I don't intend to go into specifics about throwing programs, running programs, or flatwork at this point. What I want to do here is demonstrate how to fit your pitchers' extra work into the framework of an organized practice and the best way to handle pitchers who play other positions.

If a pitcher is struggling with mechanics, control, or a specific pitch, he can try to make corrections during the fielding stations at practice. This is called "flatwork" because it's done from a shortened distance on flat ground, not from a mound. Long tossing can also be incorporated



Batting practice offers coaches an opportunity to work with their pitchers more closely.

into this portion of practice. Many of the drills described in chapter 5 can be performed during flatwork. Most flatwork is done from about 40 feet or so, and pitchers can work in pairs to make even better use of their time. Fielding stations also afford pitchers an opportunity to do their running and conditioning. If a pitcher is also an infielder, make sure that player gets his or her throwing or running in during the outfield fielding station. The opposite is true for pitchers who also are outfielders. This allows them to make the best use of their time.

## **Pitcher's Fielding Practice**

When it comes to pitchers, there's one last fundamental that should always be addressed but that's often overlooked: pitcher's fielding practice (PFP). At some point during every practice pitchers should work on fielding comebackers, fielding bunts, and covering first base on balls to the right side. Once again, fitting PFP into the framework of a practice can be difficult. I've found that spending 10 to 15 minutes on PFP after every practice is the best way to go. PFP sometimes can be addressed when hitting fungos at the beginning of practice, but once again, you run into the problem of how to handle pitchers who play other positions.