

# The five most common pitching mistakes

By Garland Cooper \*\*

In the game of softball, the pitcher is often to most important person on the field. That is why she must be on her game at all times. Like anyone, pitchers can have slumps and struggle. Below are five of the most common mistakes that pitchers make. These tips will help all you pitchers to better understand what is happening when you are struggling and how to fix it.

## 1. LEANING FORWARD

As a pitcher your shoulders must always be behind the front knee. That is to say the head should always be balanced directly over the back drag knee. Also, you should not be bent at the waist. When you lean forward, your release point has to adjust. Usually you want to release at the hip, so if a pitcher is leaning forward they have to release out in front of their hip in order to not throw the ball in the dirt. If your shoulders remain behind the front knee, you can always release at the hip and it will be the right height in the strike zone. If you are leaning forward there is no consistency in the release point, the height location of the ball will be off, and there will be no point of reference for a release point. To fix this think about keeping your chin up and keeping your head over your back knee.

## 2. NOT DRAGGING ON THE TOE

If you don't drag on your toe and your heel is dragging on the ground instead, there is too much friction on the back leg. Furthermore, you are relying on the strength of your groin instead of your quad. The quad is the strongest muscle in the leg so you will want to use it right from the beginning of your motion and as much as you can. If you are dragging on the side of your leg, you will not only have ankle and knee problems but you will lose all your power. Not only will it cause you to lean over and put your body weight on your front leg, but it will also inhibit you from creating power to transfer into your hip motion. If you are dragging on the toe, you are using the strongest muscle in your legs and ensuring that you will have the power you need to set your hips in motion. The easiest way to correct this is to make sure your heel is in the air and your ankle is relaxed. This is an important element of pitching. Women's strength is in their legs more than their arms so you will want to be able and generate speed from using them in your motion.

## 3. PROPER HIP TIMING

If you don't properly time the opening and closing of your hips it can reduce the amount of power that is produced. When you push off the rubber you have to make sure you don't immediately open your hips. You have to allow yourself to drive forward and as your foot is coming down to land, that is when the hips should start to open. As that foot lands, you need to immediately snap the hips closed [to 45°]. The most common problem in pitchers is that they will start to open their hips immediately instead of driving forward, generating power, and snapping them shut upon landing. When your arm reaches the top of its circle your hips should be at their most open point. If they are open before or after your arm reaches that point it is too early or late.

#### **4. MUSCLING WITH THE ARM INSTEAD OF USING LEGS**

Again, in a woman's pitching motion the majority of power comes from the legs. When you are muscling with your arm, although it may feel like you are throwing hard, you are actually slowing down your arm. This in turn is going to tighten up your wrist, inhibiting your ability to throw hard or with good movement. To solve this problem, take a deep breath and make sure your arm and wrist are loose. When gripping the ball, only grip tight enough so that you can hold onto it. A drill that may help is distance throwing. Start at the rubber and throw to the catcher while thinking about keeping the arm relaxed, long, and loose. As long as you are able to make it to the catcher, keep moving back until you reach centerfield. The only way to get it to the catcher from far distances is to relax the arm and not muscle the ball in.

#### **5. NOT PUSHING THROUGH THE BALL IN WRIST SNAP**

A lot of times when people snap they let it roll off the fingers without putting anything behind it. You have to get a full snap to get faster spin and put some "oomph" behind the ball. It should be like a slingshot where the wrist is fully cocked backwards and once the ball is released it is fully bent forwards with the fingers curling in. Some girls try and correct this by curling their arm up upon release, but this only encourages pulling up behind the ball and not pushing through the ball. You want to push through the ball, reaching towards the catcher without bending over, and at the last minute snap your fingers. Everything in the body should have a forward motion upon release including the wrist. To fix this, stand on the rubber and use only your wrist to get the ball to the catcher. You will have to keep the elbow straight, but you also will have to push through the ball while reaching for the catcher, and snap the ball off using your wrist.

These are just a few of the problems that pitchers encounter when they are struggling. This also can be a good checklist for pitchers who are trying to generate some additional power. If you aren't doing one of these things correctly, chances are you have the potential to be throwing harder and producing more power from the mound. Keep working hard and use these tips to give you that extra edge!

\*\*This article was written with the help of Jennie Ritter, former National Champion (Univ. of Michigan, 2005) and National Team member.