

chapter 2

Teaching Grips and Techniques for Pitches

Several kinds of pitches are appropriate for the young pitcher's repertoire, including the fastball, curveball, slider, and several types of change-ups. Knuckleballs, knuckle curves, slip pitches, and spitballs will not be discussed—these gimmick pitches are not good for young pitchers because they either injure the arm or do not help develop the arm.

First and foremost, a pitcher needs to develop his fastball. This is his staple, and he will throw it 50 to 100 percent of the time. A pitcher also needs a pitch that changes speeds, such as a change-up or a curveball (the curveball also adds movement). When the pitcher masters the fastball and change-up, then—and only then—should he work on a breaking ball.

Once he has mastered the fastball, change-up, and curveball and can throw them with control, these should be all the pitches a young pitcher needs. He can add a slider at a later time, depending on the success of the curveball. It is very difficult to throw both the curveball and the slider because of the different mechanics, so a pitcher should choose one or the other.

In this chapter we discuss the various pitches. *A pitcher should use the same arm slot and the same arm speed for all of his pitches.*

Fastball

The fastball is the first pitch learned and should be used more than any other pitch in the repertoire. Obviously velocity, control, and movement of the fastball dictate how often and in what situations the fastball will be used. When a pitcher is learning to throw the fastball, he should make a conscious effort to learn control and movement first, then add velocity later. This principle applies even more for the higher-level baseball pitchers.

By slightly changing the basic fastball grips, a pitcher can get various results. Variations of the fastball are four-seam, two-seam, cut, and sinker. The first fastball to master is the four-seam fastball. The pitcher should prove that he has good control of this pitch before he attempts to throw any of the others.

Four-Seam Fastball

The four-seam fastball is the easiest pitch to control. The four-seamer usually doesn't have much movement, so it is an ideal pitch for young pitchers to use to master the strike zone. Because it lacks movement, this pitch is less important to the older pitcher who has

good control but needs a fastball with movement. The exception to that rule is the pitcher with the great arm who can throw at or around 90 miles per hour. He should use the four-seamer because the ball will have good movement at that speed—and obviously a pitcher who can throw 90 miles per hour with good control will win.

The four-seam fastball is held with the index and middle finger across the horseshoe of the baseball. The end joints of the fingers should be over the seam to ensure a good grip. The thumb should be on the bottom of the ball on an imaginary line between the two fingers on the top (figure 2.1).

The pitcher should hold the ball loosely in the hand, and he should have at least a finger-width space between the ball and the palm of the hand. Ideally the enclosed end of the horseshoe seam should be closest to the middle finger; this helps with the feel of the seams, given that the index finger is shorter (figure 2.2).

Regardless of how a pitcher usually grips his fastball, certain situations always require a four-seamer.

- *Brushback pitch.* Any time a pitcher goes inside at the hands to brush back the batter, he should throw a four-seam fastball. Because this pitch has less movement than the two-seam fastball, there is less danger that the ball will tail into the batter.

- *Moving the feet.* A pitcher sometimes will try to make the hitter move his feet if the hitter stands too close to the plate or steps in

toward the plate when he strides. A hitter will step in when he has trouble hitting the low-and-away pitch. Moving the feet will keep the batter from adjusting to the outside pitch. When learning how to make the hitter move his feet, the pitcher should use a four-seam fastball. An older, experienced pitcher who has great command of his two-seam fastball may want to run the ball inside at the hitter's feet.

- *Pitchout.* When a pitchout is to be thrown, the pitcher should use a four-seam grip on the fastball. Good control and lack of movement help the pitcher give the catcher a pitchout he can handle easily to throw out the stealing runner.

- *Fielding chance.* Any time a pitcher fields a batted ball, he should attempt a four-seam grip. This helps him make an accurate throw.

Two-Seam Fastball

The two-seam fastball has more movement because of the grip and therefore is harder to control than the four-seam fastball. The pitcher should throw the four-seam fastball until he has proven that he has mastered the strike zone. The two-seam fastball becomes more important to the older pitcher who does not have an outstanding arm and must rely more on movement than on speed. The two-seam fastball moves to the pitching-arm side of the plate. Often it will also sink, producing a pitch that tails away and down.

The pitcher can grip the two-seam fastball in two ways. The fingers can go either with

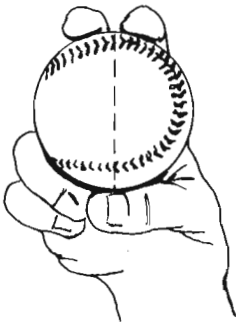


Figure 2.1 For the four-seam fastball, the fingers should be on the top of the ball with the thumb directly underneath the ball.

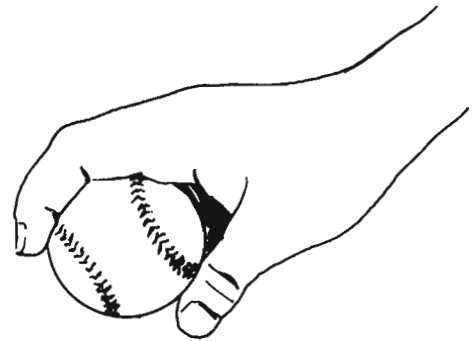


Figure 2.2 The enclosed end of the horseshoe seam should be closest to the middle finger.

the seams or across the seams. When the fingers go across the seams, the pitcher can hook the end joints of the index and middle finger on a seam and get a good feel for the pitch. However, many pitchers prefer to lay their entire fingers lengthwise on a seam. Both grips are effective (figure 2.3).

The two-seam and four-seam fastballs are thrown the same way except for the grip. For either pitch, the pitcher should keep his fingers behind the baseball for ultimate velocity. Putting the fingers off center decreases velocity and control but enhances movement.

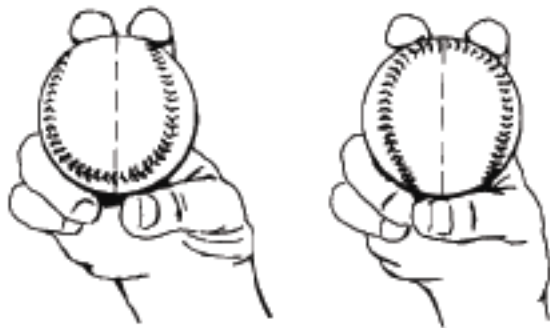


Figure 2.3 Two-seam fastball grips.

Cut Fastball

The cut fastball moves away from the pitcher's throwing side. A right-handed pitcher's cut fastball moves from right to left with approximately 95 percent of the velocity of the ultimate fastball. In the cut fastball grip, the thumb slides to the outside of the center line of the baseball (figure 2.4). With the thumb slid over, the baseball is held slightly off center and therefore does not have a regular



Figure 2.4 The cut fastball grip.

top-to-bottom fastball rotation. Instead, the ball has slightly more sidespin and runs away from the pitcher's throwing side.

The cut fastball and the slider are similar in that both balls are held off center. The slider, however, is held more off center and therefore breaks down as well as away. The cut fastball is excellent training for the slider.