

PITCHING MECHANICS

Your mechanics are the repetitive physical actions that prepare you to throw each pitch. It's that simple. Your **mechanics** are the basis for developing a consistent pitching delivery.

I talk to young pitchers about fooling around with **grips** in order to develop a variety of speeds and movement on their pitches. *Fool around with grips, but don't fool around with mechanics.* Find the motion that works for you then, through repetition, build those mechanics into **muscle memory**. With practice, your body will remember the feeling and timing of your delivery, and you won't have to think about mechanics much, except for minor corrections when you get out of sync.

In teaching, I break mechanics into three essential segments: (1) Initiation to **knee lift**, (2) knee lift to **stride landing** (flex T position), and (3) stride landing to **firing and finishing**.



KNEE LIFT

From the beginning of your windup (initiation) to **knee lift**, keep your head centered directly above your pivot foot. Avoid swinging your stride leg. It's called a knee LIFT for a reason. Lift it. Once you've positioned your pivot foot (back foot) flat against the front edge of the rubber (not on it or tilted up against it), simply raise your knee up and back to your bellybutton. The hands are pushing together, centered somewhere just below your chin, to reinforce your balance.

Lifting the knee gathers power (recruits energy) in your body for each pitch. This part of

the windup can be as slow as you like. *Breathe in as you lift the knee.* Stay tall with the back leg firm, eyes level and on target.



STAYING BACK

Don't be in a hurry. Remember, pitching is a **slow body, fast arm** exercise. In the second photo, the boy stays weighted on his pivot foot as his knee starts **down** before going forward, and his **hands drop** and break apart **thumbs down**. The pitching arm, guided by the downward thumb, performs a half-circle to launch position.

The stride foot stays **closed** as you lower it. It then glides forward, **heel leading**, closed to the target, to the landing position. The pitching hand reaches launch position in sync with the landing of the stride foot. It's a timing thing. *Hold your breath to stride landing.*

In the third photo you see the stride leg starting forward as the pitching hand circles down and then up to launch position. The heel leads. Rotation of the hips has not started yet. The hip, elbow and head are all on line to target. He stays tall over his back leg. His thumbs are down. All of the power he has gathered is still loaded, ready.



LEADING WITH HEEL

Most commonly among young pitchers, there's a tendency to rush forward when coming out of the knee lift position. This leads to wildness and arm stress, as the stride finishes too soon for the arm to have time to reach launch position. Remember: slow the body (front side) and speed up the arm (back side). It's something I say a lot in the course of a season:

Slow body, fast arm.

This particular pitcher reaches his Flex T (next photo) with his glove down, level with his elbow. Some pitchers raise the glove higher. The important thing is that his elbows are high, aligned, and level. The pitching hand is positioned so the ball faces directly away from the target (toward center field).



FLEX T, ELBOWS ALIGNED

He has his **fingers on top** of the baseball, thumb on the bottom. His body is still closed, his hips are still loaded, his stride foot has landed **closed** with the toes pointing halfway up the third base line. It is at this point that his trunk glides forward toward his stride foot *before rotation* of his hips. His belly button is still facing third base as he glides forward. A pitcher wants to get as close to home plate as he can before rotating, firing and finishing his pitch. *Blow out the breath as you fire the pitch.*



FIRING & FOLLOWING THROUGH

The breathing, to sum up, goes like this: (1) Inhale through the nose from initiation of

windup to knee lift, (2) Hold the breath until you reach stride landing and Flex T position, and (3) Blow the breath out through the mouth forcefully as you rotate and fire the ball.

The last photo is of an older pitcher who's just fired his pitch. Stay **tall and fall** is an old pitching expression relating to staying tall through knee lift and stride landing, then powering downward in the delivery of the pitch. This pitcher's head has gone down toward his target. His stride foot has naturally spun open somewhat as a result of the torque of his hip rotation. His glove is still on the front side of his body, in this case near the left hip. Some pitchers take the glove nearer to the front shoulder. The back leg flies up in the air and will eventually land closer to the plate than the stride foot.

Each pitcher delivers the ball in his own way, but these basic steps – firm knee lift, starting down with knee and thumbs, leading with the heel, staying closed to stride landing, timing it so you reach launch position in sync with the stride landing – all these steps promote consistent and powerful mechanics, and help you not only **increase velocity** and **location** but put more purpose into your pitches and less strain on your arm.

By staying closed at stride landing – with your hips loaded – you will be able to apply the power in your legs and torso to your pitches. This keeps your arm from doing all the work, allows you to pitch longer and more effectively, avoid injury, and shorten your recovery time between pitching assignments.

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