

Tactical Games for Pitcher



CORNERSTONE

coaching academy

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Why Tactical Games Are Important

Planning baseball practices that are competitive, game-like, fun, fast paced, and give players skills that will translate to game performance is very difficult. Many baseball practices are slow, with a lot of standing around, and work segmented skills that don't closely mimic what happens in game play.

We have all seen the player who looks great in the batting cage. He crushes the ball, has great bat speed, textbook mechanics, and tons of confidence. Then he gets to the game and struggles mightily. Nobody can figure out why.

Chances are it's because his batting practice doesn't look anything like what he will see in the game. He doesn't need to make a decision prior to swinging. He gets in the cage, or on the tee and just swings.

This can be great for developing the skill of swinging, but many times swinging doesn't translate to hitting. Hitting is the process of recognizing a pitch, deciding if it is a good pitch to swing at, and putting a good swing on it.

This is the basic premise behind tactical games. They put players in competitive environments, where they have to make decisions, react, and execute. Just like the game itself.

Tactical games involve failure. Many players don't understand how to fail because we don't let them do it in practice. Batting practice pitches are thrown right down the middle and if they aren't, it's the coach's fault, even if the player swings at it. When using tactical games, players learn to make decisions that affect their success, and learn to handle and learn from their failures.

Since we implemented more tactical games in practice, we have seen the skills we teach translate into competitive situations

Tactical Games for Pitchers

S-T-R-I-K-E-S-

There are two versions of this game. The first is for younger players, or players who are not as advanced. The second one is for older players (over 15) or more advanced younger players.

Version 1 - Younger Players - Pitchers compete against one another during a bullpen session. Players take turns throwing pitches. If the first pitcher throws a strike, the second pitcher must throw a strike or he gets a letter (very similar to P-I-G or H-O-R-S-E in basketball. If player one doesn't throw a strike, then player two gets an opportunity to throw a strike and force player two to throw one or he gets a letter. The player spells S-T-R-I-K-E-S first loses. Feel free to change S-T-R-I-K-E-S to your mascot, or some other meaningful word or phrase.

In version one, all pitches should be fastballs, and you are only measuring strikes.

Version 2 - Older players (15U+) - The game is played the same as version one, with two major differences. The first difference is the distinction between a "strike" and a "quality strike." A quality strike is one that is on the corners of the plate, or over the middle of the plate but at the knees (see "Quality Strike Chart" in Silver-Library for visual). If player one throw a strike, player two can match him with a strike or steal the letter with a "quality strike." If player one throws a quality strike, then the only way player two can match and not get a letter is by throwing a quality strike.

The other change in version two is that the second pitcher must also throw the same pitch as the first pitcher did. So if pitcher one threw a breaking ball for a quality strike. Then pitcher two must also throw a breaking ball for a quality strike to match.

Timed pickoffs-

From the mound, a pitcher makes a pickoff move. The coach begins the stopwatch on the pitcher's first move and stops it when the ball hits the first basemen's glove.

Players can compete against each other for the fastest time, and against themselves to improve their time. This drill can be done with picks at second base as well.

Quality strike drill

Set up a tee on the outside and inside corners of the plate so that the top of the tee is about at the top of the strike zone. Tie a string on both tees so that it is tight across home plate at knee height (or slightly below). Put a net behind home plate. Do not use a catcher in this drill because the ball can hit the tee and ricochet off the catcher. They get hit enough as it is.

Each pitcher gets a specified number of pitches. Each pitch that passes in the “strike zone” which is above the knee string, inside the tees and under the top of the tee, give the pitcher 1 point.

If the pitcher hits either tee, or the knee string (quality strike) give them 5 points. The pitcher who has the most points after a given number of pitches wins.

Fast Paced PFP-

This drill is difficult to get the hang of and should be done slowly at first so all players know exactly where they need to be at all times.

Pitchers start in two lines (one slightly to the 1st base side and one slightly to the 3rd base side) with one coach and one catcher at each line. You will also need a full infield for this drill. Each time the pitchers come up the coach has a variety of different options for skills they can work on.

Coach at first base line -

- 1.) Shows bunt and rolls bunt down first base line
 - a.) Pitcher fields bunt, steps back away from line, throws to first
- 2.) Hits ground ball to first baseman (starts very deep)
 - a.) Pitcher covers first base and catches flips from 1st basemen
 - b.) Pitcher hits the inside of the bag and turns to the infield side looking for the another runner and staying out of the way runner
- 3.) Hits ground ball back to pitcher (make sure other players waiting in line are out of the way)
 - a.) Pitcher initiates a 1-6-3 double play
- 4.) Coach hits a ground ball to 2nd basemen
 - a.) 2nd basemen initiates a 4-6-3 DP

5.) Coach hits a “tweener” in between the pitcher, 1st baseman and 2nd baseman

- a.) The pitcher takes his normal path to the ball, if he can pick the ball up ON HIS PATH to the first base, he should pick it up, run over and touch first base. He should not deviate off of path at all to pick up the ball.
- b.) If the pitcher doesn't pick up the ball he should run over and cover first base and let the 1st baseman or 2nd baseman field the ball and flip it to him.

Coach on third base line-

1.) Shows bunt and rolls ball down the third base line

- a.) The pitcher sprints to the ball, gets his back to the line, stays low and throws a strike to the 3rd baseman.

2.) Coach hits a come-backer

- a.) The pitcher initiates a 1-2-3 double play. The catcher steps to the ball with his right foot, receives the ball and lines up to throw to first base. He doesn't throw because there is no first basemen working with them.

3.) Coach rolls a bunt right back to the pitcher and yells “squeeze!”

- a.) The pitcher sprints straight at the ball and shovels the ball to home plate simulating a do-or-die suicide squeeze.

As your players get more comfortable with this drill, it can become a good conditioning drill as well.

Do not allow pitchers to switch lines after they go. Stop the drill about 1/2 way through your allotted time and switch lines.