

Underperforming As a Pitcher?

The Texas Baseball Ranch® Explains Where to Look

Part I

When a pitcher is underperforming, parents, coaches and/or the athlete himself desperately wants to know the reason. Sometimes the answer is relatively simple, while other times it can be extremely complex. At the Texas Baseball Ranch, we have identified ten critical places to look for the possible constraint(s) or limitation(s) in a pitcher's performance.

In Part I we will look at the first five. In Part II we will look at the second five.

#1. Pain / Discomfort (0-10)

#2. Recovery / Ability to Bounce Back (0-10)

#3. Physical Structure, Asymmetries and Strength Imbalances (0-10)

#4. Mobility/ Flexibility (0-10)

#5. Strength/ Stability (0-10)

#6. Throwing Foundation (0-10)

#7. Steepness of the Throwing Ramp-Up (0-10)

#8. Mechanical Efficiency (0-10)

#9. Mental / Emotional (0-10)

#10. Internal Systemic (Sleep- Nutrition- Hydration) (0-10)

Pain/Discomfort: If a pitcher has chronic arm pain/soreness/discomfort, the pain serves as a powerful governor. As my good friend, Brent Strom of the Houston Astros likes to say, "Survival always trumps performance." Arm pain will almost always inhibit or stunt growth and development. If an athlete's arm is achy, hurting or routinely uncomfortable the athlete will 1) throw less, 2) throw with hesitation and 3) resist pushing the limits of his current abilities.

It is imperative that every pitcher who wishes to pitch in college and the professional ranks becomes obsessed with creating a healthy, durable, robust throwing arm and shoulder. Long term success is simply unattainable without it. At the Texas Baseball Ranch, we always **“Start with the Pain™”** in terms of our investigation into performance and skill development.

Recovery/Ability to Bounce Back: It is not uncommon for a pitcher to experience zero or very little abject pain or discomfort, yet experience wide variations in his performance from outing to outing. Typically, the pitcher will demonstrate a short recurring cycle made up of one exceptional performance followed inexplicably by 2-3 poor or far less effective performances.

It is also common for some to mistakenly conclude this cycle must be facilitated by some sort of mental/emotional issues. Of course, sometimes the mental/emotional elements are indeed the driving factors here but a vast majority of the time the micro trauma to the soft tissue created by disconnection/mechanical inefficiency makes it very difficult for the athlete to fully recover and repair in the window of time allowed for at their competitive level.

In short, their inconsistency is primarily a recovery issue. To pitch at the higher level of competition requires that the player performs in a very reliable and consistent fashion. It is very difficult to ascend in levels when your recovery is suspect. Your ability to pitch and return to full functionality is critical and a common contributor to athletes underperforming.

Physical Structure, Asymmetries and Strength Imbalances: Let’s suppose for one moment that I have a brand-new Maserati in my driveway. If one of its tires is completely flat, the car’s horsepower, its engine’s efficiency, the specific quality of its fuel and/or the quality of its driver will not really come into play until and unless we get the flat tire corrected. When we get the tire fully inflated and the wheels aligned... THEN these other issues can become important.

It is the same thing with pitchers. Many young men are noticeably misaligned and have structural asymmetries. Other young throwing athletes are over developed in some areas and/or are significantly under developed in others. Hall of Fame Athletic trainer and dear friend, Phil Donley once told me, “Ron, if an athlete has a postural problem, he will almost always have an arm problem. If he has a scapular weakness, it will show up in the shoulder or elbow. The body is a system. One weakness in the chain places everything up and down the chain at risk.”

That is the reason every athlete who trains at the Ranch first gets a physical assessment completed by Physical Therapists Randy Sullivan or Andy Arthur and/or our team. If you think this structure or imbalance may be an issue, please call the Texas Baseball Ranch at 936-588-6762 and we’ll mail you a free copy of the BRAT assessment that our PTs

use to evaluate our athletes. You can simply take the BRAT form to your local PT and have them perform the assessment on you or your athlete.

Quite often we see athletes make incredible strides once their physical structure is sound or enhanced. Similarly, we unfortunately often see wonderful, hard-working, young men hit a performance wall because their physical structure betrays them with any serious work load or intensity. This issue is far more common than many people realize and the popularity of video game play has added to its frequency.

Mobility/Flexibility: It is fairly common for us to have athletes come to the Texas Baseball Ranch and assume their primary performance issues are either strength, size (mass) or mechanics. After our set of six assessments we find that their primary constraint is clearly mobility/flexibility. You see, an athlete can only organize his movement pattern around his limits of mobility and stability.

Some athletes simply cannot replicate a 'preferred' movement pattern, not because they are stubborn, poor learners or unmotivated, but because they physically cannot currently organize their body in such a fashion. Of course, that doesn't mean they will never be able to do so, only that at the present time this athlete simply lacks the mobility to perform 'X'. (whatever X is)

This is where the significant danger in training exists. When an athlete's mobility limits him in his ability to organize his body for optimum velocity and power, he almost always will modify, adapt and/or compensate his movements to obtain the end result he desires and unfortunately that accommodation is quite often inefficient/unsound and places his soft tissue at even greater risks of injury. At the Texas Baseball Ranch® we refer to this as ***movement pattern corruption*** and it is indeed a widespread problem.

Our goal at TBR is to give this individual a customized plan to 1) enhance or improve the mobility constraints and 2) utilize the exercises and throwing drills in which he can currently make the most gains from without corruption and placing his arm and shoulder at greater risk. A Physical Therapist/Personal Trainer should also be used in this case so your limitations and constraints can be identified and more importantly, corrected and or enhanced.

Strength/Stability: With many young men, they lack the strength and stability to post on one leg and then move dynamically to the other. Just like in mobility constraints, if you lack the strength in one area, you are almost certainly going to try and find it in or recruit it from another area. More times than not, corruption occurs, the movement is repeated thousands of times and that pattern then becomes hard wired.

We have found that postural disconnections or the improper use/sequencing of the glove side arm or lead leg can almost always be attributed to corruption from 1) a lack of strength/stability, 2) a lack of mobility/flexibility or 3) inappropriate or misinterpreted verbal cueing (in other words bad coaching).

Finally, look at these five categories and give each a ranking 0-10. Scoring a 10 would mean that, in your opinion, for this category, the specific athlete in question is world class in this regard and it represents absolutely no limitation or constraint what-so-ever to his performance. A score of 0 would mean that this category represents a total and complete obstacle in the athlete's development. Obviously, we write the description to avoid the extreme ratings of 0 or 10 and force the evaluation to be deliberate and nuanced.

From these initial rankings you can proceed to prioritize your work going forward. In a world filled with one-size-fits-all programming, such personalized assessments and distinctions can be a tremendous benefit in managing your efforts and maximizing your return on training time (ROTT).

Categories 6-10 are covered in Part II.



For more information on the Texas Baseball Ranch and the various training programs offered, visit www.TexasBaseballRanch.com, call (936) 588-6762 or email: info@TexasBaseballRanch.com