



Keys to Nolan Ryan's Longevity

Key #3: Hamstring Flexibility



Static Stretching has gotten a lot of bad press lately...some of it deserved...but we believe it has a place in your toolbox. At the Texas Baseball Ranch® our primary flexibility tool is dynamic flexibility...in other words we stretch by moving. But when you have a personal flexibility deficit...extra stretching of the specific area(s) of your constraint is not only wise but often absolutely necessary in breaking through your personal barrier. Therefore, we have static stretching exercises in our toolbox. The only athletes in our program who do not utilize any part of the static or dynamic flexibility segments are our hypermobile athletes. Their constraints are not in the area of mobility but that is the topic of a different e-mail.

In our system, our athletes will generally follow this process:

1. Utilize the foam rollers
2. Do individual static stretches IF they have specific constraints
3. Perform Wake-up, Warm-up
4. Dynamic flexibility/ Verstegans

Every athlete of course has their personal weakness. A common one for athletes is tight hamstrings.

For pitchers, hamstring flexibility is a huge component of high performance, primarily for deceleration.

This is one exercise of the 6 static stretching exercises that many of our pitching athletes perform at the Ranch on a regular basis. The 6 exercises will be showcased in the soon to be released Athletic Pitcher 2011. We learned this specific exercise from nationally known PT's Gray Cook & Mike Robertson.

Procedure:

The athlete finds a box, bench or table at a height that will slightly challenge his flexibility. If the box is too short it will not challenge him, and he will waste his time. If the box is too high, he will have to overcompensate, and we will not get the training effect we seek.

With both feet pointing straight ahead he will:

A. First hold the position for 30 seconds and allow for a good solid, steady stretch.

Then the athlete shifts side to side very subtly for 30 seconds, stretching our hamstring as we move on the frontal plane as if we are cleaning a plane of glass with our rear end. The idea here is that we don't move just in one plane so we shouldn't stretch in just one plane.

B. Then we shift legs and repeat with the other leg.

C. Be very cognizant of one leg being significantly better in flexibility than the other...which is also common in pitchers. If that is the case double your efforts on the leg with the greater constraint and minimize your efforts on the better leg until they are close to equal. When they are close to equal, then you can give the better leg equal concern. In our opinion, a significant asymmetry is much more of a concern than simple lack of flexibility in both legs. In other words, symmetry leads everything we do. We try very hard to keep the body in balance during an otherwise very one-sided activity such as throwing a baseball.

D. If our hamstrings are tight, we will not be able to decelerate as efficiently, as our very structure would limit our ability to flex at the trunk and continue rotating around the front hip. As our arc of deceleration is reduced or minimized, the soft tissue of our elbow & shoulder will be called upon for greater participation and contribution in bringing our arm speed to zero. The harsh reality is that the soft tissue of the elbow & shoulder was not meant for that specific purpose.

E. One reason Nolan Ryan had such a healthy and durable arm was that he had very good flexibility and decelerated on a very long arc...sparing the very vulnerable soft tissue of his elbow & shoulder from exponential stress. The following pictures clearly show the difference between the decelerations of two very hard throwers.



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