

Pitching Mentality

by Amanda Freed

When you look at the “big picture” of being a pitcher you think about three very important areas: preparation, communication, and execution.

We looked at preparation from a physical standpoint but preparing mentally may seem a little tougher. A pitcher’s mentality is not easily taught, rather, it is learned from years of trial and error, failing and succeeding. The best way to prepare oneself mentally for competition is by engaging in as much communication as possible. However, it is important to understand that most of this communication happens during the practice phase of your “physical preparation.” This is where you answer questions such as: What is my “go to” pitch? What is my waste pitch? How do I want my catcher to set up? How do I want communication (in general) during the game to go? When is the best time for my catcher to visit the mound? What about my coach? What can my coach say from the dugout that will be beneficial to me? What is our overall plan for the game? Some of these questions seem a little ridiculous but are very important to tackle before pre game warm ups. Game day communication should be limited to topics such as: What are the opposing team’s tendencies? Which pitches are “on?” And the general overall game plan, as it often changes.

Now, you can do all the thinking and communicating that you want but execution will show how it all comes together. Throw each pitch with a purpose and commit to the pitch!

THROW EACH PITCH WITH A PURPOSE: No matter what you decide to throw, make sure that you throw it with conviction and gather as much information on the batter as possible early. If I know little to nothing about the batter I personally like to throw inside because the batter tends to give you more insight to their tendencies with inside pitches. Also, speaking as a hitter, it is extremely difficult to hit a good inside pitch hard and fair. As soon as you see a tendency in the batter, hammer that weakness until she shows you that she can make an adjustment. Don’t automatically think, inside outside inside outside. Think low and in, foul ball off her shin. A little lower and a little more inside, swing and miss over the top. A little lower and more inside, she shuffles her feet out from under her and resets a few inches further off the plate. Now she’s looking inside and you hammer away. Always be thinking one pitch ahead of the batter, don’t run on automatic. If you are just waiting to see what the catcher will call next you are not thinking for yourself. This is where good communication during practice and before the game comes into play. Your catcher should have a really good idea of what you are thinking and if you shake off a pitch, it should only take one or two more calls, at most, to get to what you want. This leads us to our last point...

COMMIT TO THE PITCH: There is no right answer when calling pitches. Some options are better than others but realistically pitchers all have different tools and depending on how you learn to use them, can all be effective. For me, it all seems so easy and comes together when I throw a pitch to the batter, walk back to the mound thinking about what I feel is the next best pitch, step back on the mound and see that my catcher is flashing exactly what I was thinking. That’s easy! What happens when you and your catcher, or your coach,

are not on the same page? Do you just go with what they want or do you shake off the pitch until you get what you want? Either way, you can't be "one foot in, one foot out" in committing to the pitch because your chances for success will drastically decrease.

The wrong answer for one pitcher might be the right answer for another so trust your instincts and don't second-guess yourself. As the pitcher, you are the only one who knows how you've worked and how you feel so do not ignore your gut and don't get discouraged if you fail multiple times, learn from it and get better. It's a process and the best pitchers treat it as that. Good luck.