

Take Care of that Pitching Arm!

by Olan Suddeth

My own son plays in a Dixie Youth baseball league that follows the optional rule of allowing kid pitch at the "Shirt & Cap" level - in other words, instead of facing pitching machines, our seven and eight year olds pitch to one another. In many ways, I think this is a boost to their overall skills; by the time they reach the 9-10 year old league, where most leagues being pitching these days, our kids seem to have a leg up in regards to both pitching and plate discipline. Of course, we do endure a lot of walks from young pitchers to get there...

But I digress. This article is about arm care, and making sure that you do all you can to prevent injury and maximize recovery. One of the very best players - and consequently, one of the very best pitchers - in our league last year began complaining of arm pain halfway through the season. Now, I understand that pitching is stressful on the arm, and youth pitchers are certainly using muscles which are probably not used to such exertion, but still, I worry about the fact that if a seven year old has already hurt himself, and little was done to remedy the situation, how long of a pitching career can he really hope to have? How many kids are there across the country that injure - or even permanently damage - their arms due to lack of arm care?

Pitch count

ACB is a Williamsport sanctioned Little League baseball organization and abides by the rules set forth by Williamsport. Please defer to the most recent copy of the Little League rules handbook or your league commissioner for clarity on your league's pitch count.

Keep that arm warm!

In between innings, a pitcher's arm temperature can cool rapidly, only to be asked to undergo the stress of pitching again once the muscles have contracted due to the cooling effect. This is why you see major league pitchers on television wear a jacket in between innings, even in the middle of summer.

Follow their example. If your pitcher will be pitching again, make sure that he keeps a jacket on - if only on the one arm. This will result in less soreness the next day, as well as a lower risk of injury.

Run boy, run!

As soon as your pitcher leaves the mound at the end of his outing, he needs to run several wind sprints. This helps bring much needed oxygen via increased blood flow to those exerted muscles. It's also an excellent idea to have a coach or another player help the pitcher stretch his arm and legs joints, to prevent them from tightening up.

Of course, in youth baseball, pitchers are usually among the best fielders on the team, so they will frequently be placed at another defensive position when lifted, rather than sent to the dugout. In this case, have them run at the end of the inning.

Peas, please!

When the outing is over, we now want to cool that arm down - this stops the micro-bleeding in the muscle tissue of the arm. Of course, your park's concession stand probably has plenty of ice, and will probably put it in a ziplock bag for you. But if not, a nice bag of frozen peas works perfectly; they stay cold for a good twenty minutes or so once applied, which is about optimal time for icing the arm, they contour themselves nicely to the shape of your player's body, and they don't melt. Put a "do not eat" label on them and reuse them game after game.

Do make sure to put a thin towel between the cold and the player's skin.

Move it again.

Especially if you've iced down your muscles, you'll need to restore blood flow. A nice jog or brisk walk will handle this for you.

Feed those muscles!

Make sure that your player gets a good high protein/high carbohydrates meal 1-2 hours after pitching. The body needs to replenish the used energy, and needs to tend to those exerted muscles. Bananas are an excellent choice, by the way.

Follow these guidelines, emphasize good mechanics while pitching, and you should minimize any chance for injury to your pitchers.