

Since the day my son came home from tryouts last year saying he wanted to pitch, I have done everything in my power, to make him the best he can be!

Well, ALMOST everything.

It was his first year in traveling ball, so we had no idea what to expect out of it (I'm a product of Little League).

I remember giving the coach full permission to work on anything with my son (Bailey) EXCEPT pitching! I said "I work with him on my own"

The coach told me how it was the same fundamentals as throwing from SS or OF, as the assistant coach rolled his eyes and walked away!

Its a little more complicated then that!

Well, to me its a little more complicated then that. Pitching is about Hip separation, the power angle, front foot strike, Glove arm side (G.A.S), correct arm position etc.....

I respect you coach, but I'm training my son for the long haul, not the quick trip. I'm not teaching him goofy phrases and half of the proper things now, to re teach later.

I spent ALL winter working with players, fixing improper mechanics because they heard from their gym teacher in 1st grade, how to throw a baseball. The last thing I want is someone who doesn't know the proper techniques, teaching my son something!

Statistically speaking, once a child is over the age of ten, trying to change body mechanics is very hard to do.

I don't believe in teaching them one thing this year, and then add another next year, and then something else the year after!!! That's not how you become successful. You will always be trying to catch up!

Why is it hard to teach a kid to hit a moving ball?

Because unless your the parent who's been working with your son or daughter since they could walk, they don't ever try to do hit one, until they are 6-7 years old. I think halfway through their last year of T ball is when they introduce hitting a moving object!!

This moment in time is CRUCIAL to your child. Do you have a smart coach or not? Does your coach have those "witty" catch phrases that the kids "eat up"? "squish the bug", "back elbow up", "step to the ball" etc....

Are those "witty" catch phrases correct?

Want a good example? How about "Squish the Bug"!

This is the worst thing to teach young hitters. "Squishing a bug", causes bad weight transfer, gives you a false hip turn, and prohibits your arm from "slotting" into your body correctly.

It was hard trying to "re" teach my hitters the proper mechanics for 4 reasons.

- 1 I got them as 10 year old's. How long have they been swinging incorrectly, 4-5 years?
- 2 They have been hearing "squish the bug" for so long it cant be wrong, can it?
- 3 Some of their favorite coaches taught them that phrase, so its mentally and physically embedded.
- 4 Getting ALL the coaches (UN successfully) and parents to realize "squishing the bug" is a bad cue.

Can you tell the difference between the two pictures below? Who's been worked with properly? Who will be easier to work with next year?



All I have heard the last couple years is that the boys are too young, to be taught complicated parts of hitting and pitching. The boy on the right, cant be much more then 5 or 6 and he looks like he "gets" it. He also looks s 2-3 years ahead of his counterpart on the left.

The image on the left (boy with helmet) is a pure "linear" hitter. The boy on the right (orange hat) is Rotational.

I've covered this before in some of my articles, about coaches teaching what they were taught! Now I'm going to tell you why. Here is a clip from an article, written by Mike Epstein. The full article is, "[Rotational Hitting History](#)"

The Jackrabbit Era: 1970's and 1980's

Linear hitting

Beginning in the early 1970s, two important factors contributed to the changeover from rotational to linear hitting mechanics. One was the change in venues from cozy, traditional baseball-only "natural" grass parks to the faceless, concrete, "synthetic" grass multi-purpose stadiums. The other was the introduction of the ultra-light, ultra-resilient aluminum bats.

Synthetic grass

Astroturf was beginning to make its mark on these new multi-purpose major league stadiums, followed by many colleges and universities. Many of us can remember those days of "pinball" baseball in the National League. Faded fields of artificial turf with huge watermarks and stains and permanent yard markers left over from NFL games. New multi-use stadiums were being built incorporating this new, ultra modern "carpet." To take advantage of these "fast" playing fields, offensive baseball went through a metamorphosis. "Little Ball"—"jackrabbits" running rampant on artificial turf in Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Houston, Kansas City, Toronto, Chicago, Seattle, Tampa Bay, Philadelphia, Montréal, and Minnesota. Hitting ground balls became the rule of the day.

Astroturf infields were so fast, infielders couldn't catch up to ground balls. "Beat an infielder" was the daily advice. Hitters were taught to swing down, which automatically predisposed their weight to come on to the front side. This change fueled the re-birth of linear mechanics.

This phenomenon lasted for about twenty years. Accordingly, we entered baseball's "Jack Rabbit Era." Hands and arms hitters, speed, contact, ground balls, and "little ball" became instant buzzwords. Staying back, power, working the count, and high slugging percentages were out.

The "carpet" did indeed reward players for hitting ground balls; it was like playing on concrete. A hard-hit ground ball could not only beat the infielders, but could also beat the outfielders on the same ground ball! Many a triple and inside-the-park home run was hit on these "routine" ground balls. Defensive players were simply not quick enough to catch up! There were an excessive number of "soft" .300 hitters in those days.

A terrific club, managed by a wonderful manager, Whitey Herzog (a former manager of mine), the world champion St. Louis Cardinals of the mid 1980s epitomized this trend.

Dwindling attendance and the absence of power hitting ushered in the "Steroid Era" in baseball in 1995. A few years later, McGwire and Sosa broke Ruth's home run record.

Aluminum bats

The other factor fueling the changeover to linear mechanics was the introduction of the aluminum bat. These ultra-light, ultra-resilient bats enabled amateur hitters to put up numbers radically incongruent with their talent levels. These metal bats further rewarded poor mechanics.

As per the "copy cat" custom in baseball, college and high school coaches and amateur players emulated their professional counterparts in terms of game strategies, cues, and accompanying hitting mechanics. Scouts turned their attention to signing players who could "fly." Many a player was drafted with these qualifications: "A great athlete. Can really run. Limited experience. Must teach him to hit." Teaching him to hit was to teach him to put the ball in play—on the ground—and run like hell.

The "Dead Ball Era" and "Jackrabbit Era" were not Dark Ages in baseball history. To the contrary. They were simply periods where coaches and players responded to the challenges of changing conditions. They were looking for any advantage they could find.

So if you look at the “Jackrabbit” “Era” What was the time period of this era?

The 70's and 80's!

That tells me if you were learning how to hit in the 70's and 80's and your dad was doing, the same thing Im doing right now! Watching the pros to see how they hit!!

So now our dads were trying to teach us how to hit hard, sharp, ground balls, that the infielders cant get to. Trying to gain the same edge as the pros.

Here are the problems with this.

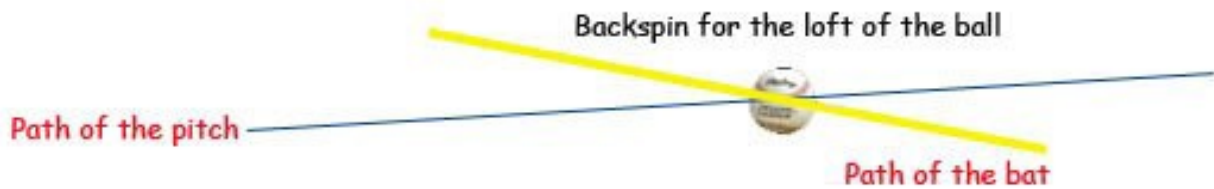
Unless you MAKE IT to the show, you wont be hitting on AstroTurf!

How many little league fields , high school fields or college fields have you seen with it? Even professional stadiums are starting to convert back to natural surfaces!

How many pros use an aluminum bat? Wait until the ball doesn't have the same trampoline affect on your wood bat as it does with your aluminum or composite bat! Guess when you'll notice the difference? When your struggling in minor league ball having a tough time to change your swing!!

Here's my favorite picture of the different styles

Linear approach



Rotational approach



Now if we put the bat on the same plane as the pitch, you get those nice line drives OVER the infielders and in time, over the fence. The next thing is, look how long your bat is in the “window” to make contact VS linear. Well after two years of reading up on the difference in the two, I'm not having just anyone work with Baileys hitting either!!

As far as my beliefs are in teaching pitching, I got most of them out, in my [Long Toss](#) article

But to nutshell it here.....

For pitchers to improve, they need to pitch! I'm not talking once a week!!! I'm not talking about two innings!!

I'm talking about pitching to their to physical limits....I'm talking about pitching past that limit once again!!!

Just like any other physical thing we train our body to do, running, weight lifting, swimming....etc We need to keep pushing our body to the limit to increase our stamina or we will never become stronger!

One last quick, pitching article, to back this up. I don't have the link, but I have the whole article saved. If interested and you cant find it, let me know and I will send it to you. But here are some key points!

How Pitching Changes Little Leaguers' Shoulders

ScienceDaily (Oct. 9, 2007) — While shoulder changes can allow pitches to go faster, too much of a good thing can be bad for growing kids.

What the researchers found was that repeated pitching does cause changes in the upper arm bone and soft tissue in the shoulders of young baseball players, but that these types of changes generally help protect players from injury, so it's not necessarily a bad thing. Mair said these changes may actually allow for better throwing velocity and less injuries to the shoulder.

"However," he cautioned, "pitching too much and playing year-round can push those adaptive changes to the point of injury. Young men in particular may be prone to injury, because some play the game year-round, and because the bones and muscles in their arms are still growing and changing."

One surprise finding in the study was that X-rays showed changes in the growth plate in the throwing shoulder in almost all of the kids. In the past it had been thought that these types of changes only occurred when there was a problem and resulted in pain with throwing.

Overall, Mair said parents of young baseball players shouldn't be overly concerned about their children's shoulders. "Throwing is fine as long as it's in moderation and the parents and child use common sense," he said.

"A 10-year-old pitcher shouldn't be throwing through pain to win a Little League game, for example."

Young players do need a break from throwing, Mair said. In the old days kids played baseball in the summer and then played basketball or football in the winter. "That was better for growing children because varying the sports used different muscles and movements," he said. "But now, some children play only baseball year-round, and that can be a problem. It can cause shoulder changes that go beyond normal adaptation, and can lead to pain and even growth plate injuries."

"Kids that are pitching in three different leagues and pitching 12 months of the year tend to get growth plate problems that turn into a source of pain," Mair said.

So what does all this information mean to me?

How am I "Reinventing Baseball"?

Well, to go back to the top of this article, I said I had done “almost” everything for Bailey!

Going back to last year as a 9 year old, he was “UN Hittable”! He had only one or two walks ALL year. If the ump even called a ball, you could see the parents look around in disbelief.

BUT

I was working with him on a daily basis. We would spend half an hour before practice and after, and also on the nights we didn't have practice. We were up at the fields 6-7 days a week!

So basically we were always training

So after a couple practices the head coach asked me if I would work with all the kids on pitching. I loved it and jumped at the chance. The coach always asked for my opinion on how the boys did in practice and I would always tell him HONESTLY.

Then came game time

(Remember, this is Competitive baseball. We paid \$200 for this league)

Here in MN we are only allowed to play within our school district. You can ask for release, but then you would have to ask another school district to accept you. If we want to join little league, you have to live within a certain mile radius. The closest one to us is a 25 minute drive.

Out of the 13 boys we had, only 5 or 6 of them had any business going out on the mound in a game. But the coach pitches them all. It was actually embarrassing at times, because I could see the parents looking at me, like I was making the decisions. I mean, I was the pitching coach.

We started games off losing by 4,5,6 runs because the pitching was horrible and it was walk after walk. After a couple of walks imagine the shock when a ball gets hit. The kids in the field have been standing around for the last 10-15 minutes doing nothing. Now they are more surprised VS ready for the ball, which led to errors. If we started a good pitcher, we would blow the lead because here comes “little Stevie” to close out the game, and there goes our lead.

Now as the pitching coach, I wasn't allowed in the dugout, and I wasn't allowed to really talk to the players as a team. So that left me standing behind the dugout with the other dads. Now all year long these dads would stand shoulder to shoulder with me and complain about how the team was run. How we needed to win, how little “Stevie” shouldn't be pitching. I think we were 0-9 before we won a game. Our final record was 2-14!

Having to listen to Bailey cry on the way home from all those games was the toughest thing do hear. Hearing my son saying he wanted to quit game after game was killing us as parents. It's the only thing he loves.

With all the training Bailey does, I was NOT OK with how the team was run for a “competitive” league! I'm also not one to sit idle by. If you aren't doing anything to change your problem, you have no room to complain about it.

So I did something!!!

Here's My Story

Last year we went 2-14, and scored only 90 runs. The boys were well coached but we didn't play to win. Everyone pitched and played every position. The rides home were always negative. Bailey would wonder why we put in all this work, to watch someone else pitch because he wants to "try it". We had at least 5 kids, walk 6 or 7 kids to start a game and be down 4 or 5 runs before we even had an out. Hearing Bailey say he wanted to quit the only sport he plays and loves, was heartbreaking, game after game, after game. We didn't win our first game until the 9th or 10th game.

After hearing all the complaints from the parents, I decided to put a fall team together. It was half the 9AAA and half 10AAA. It was the team that we should of had all year. But since half of the best kids at try outs were 9, they split everybody up and had two teams. One bad 9AAA and a bad 10AAA.

So after coaching some of these same kids and watching them play and win, got me more upset about how summer went. I talked to the league president a lot over the course of fall and decided to join the board and make sure we had a competitive season this year. [The story of my youngest team](#)

I spent the last year learning how the board for our association works. I spent all winter talking with the high school coach and learning what he coaches. Also within the last year, I have spent 4 or 5 days a week, working with a couple of kids on a, one on one basis. When we opened the cage in December the number of kids jumped to about 15 on average. Working with the kids also let me hear what parents wanted out of traveling baseball. Whats weird is, it sounded like more people had the beliefs I did. So why isn't Buffalo baseball competitive?

Well after a unanimous vote from the board, I was elected head coach for this years 10AAA. It was a great feeling in our house. I couldn't wait to show people what I could do with this team.

BUT WAIT

It started right out of the gate!! During my pre season parent meeting I told the parents, Their son would play where he helped the team. Positions would be earned at practice. Each kid would play 2-3 positions and not everyone would pitch. The first thing out of a parents mouth was "that's how hockey does it, but don't you think they need to play everywhere for a learning experience?" It turned into a good debate with about three parents, saying I was wrong and not fair.

I was getting complaints within the first week of practice. I was told kids were going home crying because I was so mean. Then after the second game the complaints started coming in about not rotating positions. After the fourth game it turned into the batting order not changing. After the 7th game it turned into playing time (every one of my kids, played 4 and sat 2. *every game, every kid*). After game 10, the board wanted to sit down and try to "salvage whats left of our season". We were 8-2. Just to prove a point I switched the lineup for our 11,12 and 13th game. We didn't score a run in the first three innings of any of those games and lost one because of it.

This is an email I received from a dad when I switched the lineup. It really got me!!

Jason,

"I just wanted to let you know with all the flack you've been getting from some of the parents that we are behind you 100%. I think you've had a bulls eye on your back since day one and no matter what happened someone would have found fault with your coaching. Everyone would agree that this is not community ed. baseball as long as their kid is playing shortstop and batting third. There in lies the problem if little Johnny is struggling at batting it is not because he is batting lower in the lineup. One of the greatest things about baseball is it does not discriminate you can be some small in stature, or any skin color you will get your chance to succeed it's what you do with your chance. You earn your place in the lineup or the position you play on the field. What is more fair than that it's the American way that's why it's called the American past time. I know you have strong beliefs you have to stay true to that if you never coach again because of this go out doing it your way. If our son needs to bat lower in the order or has to play a position he doesn't like we will take care of that at home and make him understand that's part of being a team player. Just keep in mind, you do have parents pulling for you no matter what happens"

We ended up the season 13-3 and the parents divided. I asked every coach in our division how they played. EVERY single coach but one, did it the same way. But the best explanation came from This one;

1. I wanted them to focus on a side. Play the left side you get used to throwing to the cut off and also being the cut off receiving the ball. Understand it from both aspects. Become an expert.

2. It is OK to want to win. My goal is still to make each an every one of the boys a better player but this is the highest level in 10 ball. These guys all want to win and even if they feel bad about not playing as much as others, it doesn't mean they won't become better ball players when they are 11 or 12. I don't believe I am deflating anyone's dreams...at least not yet.

Parents want to complain about kids "regressing" because positions were earned. How is that possible going 13-3? How in the world did we win 13 games with bad fundamentals? The number one parent who says their kid "regressed", The parent to jump out and tell a room full of 65 people her son "regressed", went 26/52, a .520avg. and led the team with triples (4). He didn't have any fielding errors that I or another parent can recall either, but he regressed????

Here is the list of complaints from a parent

Kids sit two innings in a row

(its hard enough getting 13 kids into 6 innings, I get this as a complaint?)

I make kids get in run downs

(when there is a man on third and the batter walks, I send the batter straight to second) & (we do delayed steals)

My son is the only one who hit a homerun and never batted above 5th

(not true, he batted in the top 5 half a dozen times)

Same kids played the same positions

(every kid played 4, and more then most played about 6, the kid of this parent played 8)

Making kids square to bunt

(I tell the boys do whatever you need to, to get it down. I suggest how I do it, but it was never made the standard)

I never took advice

(not true, I always had my ear open to suggestions. Most were just about being Community Ed)

I wear my hat backwards

(yes, but not when on the field)

Im never around during practices.

(I float from one station to the next watching my asst. coaches and kids and talking to parents)

I would talk to the kids for too long at practices. Their 10 and cant pay attention for that long

(?????)

Im a young punk

(?????)

I use the wrong kids for cut offs

(This one may be valid, I just grew up different)

My practices aren't structured

(This is total BS. All I do is have drills and stations)

I'm teaching the kids to hit like Albert Pujols

(I coach rotational hitting just like the high school coach. I talked to him all winter about how he coaches, not only hitting but where to play kids in the field as well. Parents want unified coaching and high school run practices? 10AAA had that this year.)

I dont take off my sunglasses while I talk to the kids!

(?????)

Look around ANY town and other sports. Hockey doesn't have 13 goalies. Football doesn't have 13 QB's and basketball doesn't have 13 point guards. Why aren't they teaching every position to every kid in those sports. Why is baseball the sport that kids need to learn every position.

Practice is for learning new things and games are for winning. Why should the boys who devote 12 months a year to one sport, have to pay the consequences, because little Johnny's mom, thinks little Johnny should pitch and catch and bat third in the line up. All that most of these parents care is that their son is on AAA team and he plays everywhere. They only want the league to be competitive as long as their son is the star!! As soon as their son isn't the star, here come the complaints.

So basically what it comes down to is, its about 70/30 split on what competitive baseball is. I'm on the 30 side!

So what I'm I going to do about it?

I'm glad you asked, Everyone else is!!!

My initial thought was to form a team and only compete in tournaments. We would be able to practice all week and and play two tourneys a month. Being from the great state of MN, you come to realize there is a small window to get in practice and I believe kids need more practice then games. So if we had some bad days, it wouldn't matter.

We opened our season May 5th. With all the snow we had and cold temps we had our first two practices inside a batting cage at the school and the 3rd was, renting out the old indoor hockey rink. I think we had 3 or 4 practices as a team before the first game. Then with all the rain this spring, our practices started getting bumped so they could use the field for games (we have two fields and one was under water ALL year, it was never playable)

I don't remember anymore but I think we had 28 games this year. I would guess we had about 20 -30 practices. Our practices turned into game prep more then practice.

Our practice schedule was based on the weather. If it was a nice day, I would send an email out saying I would be up at the field for anyone to join. I never made my practices mandatory, because if you don't want to help yourself, don't wonder why you don't pitch, catch or hit 3rd!

I had a solid 6-7 kids who NEVER missed practice. Guess how many positions those kids played!! Guess where they hit in the order? That's right, wherever they helped the team.

So back to the tournament team idea. It would take a lot of work and and leagues around here wont accept you, unless you come from a "bonafide" baseball organization (an organization of two or more teams). Meaning, I need to start two teams or I cant join the league or play in their tournaments!

The hard work didn't scare me, I have fliers ready to rock. I have contacted all the schools within a 20 mile radius and I had spoke to someone about renting a dome for try outs! All I have to do is hit "send all" and the word is out.

HERES THE PROBLEM

With doing all this work and trying to organize one team if not more, how much time could I work with Bailey? He was very dominant this past summer but he wasn't the same killer as when he was a 9 year old. He never really struggled, but his walks jumped **dramatically**.

What was the difference between the two years?

Last year I was working with one kid (my own) and this year I was working with an upwards of 20. Bailey was put on the back shelf because I was busy helping other kids. I love working with kids, but I neglected my own!!! I wasn't able to spread it out evenly. So once the season started Bailey got ZEREO training from me.

My goal for Bailey and what I'm training him for is High school, College and beyond. Its time to ditch the “important” league of the summer and quit looking at the small picture! If he wants to play games for fun, he can play in community ed baseball. Our “competitive” league decided this year that competitive baseball begins at 12 anyway!

Bailey will be in school ball next year anyway (7th grade) so he will get the competition there and we will continue to train in the summers! I know people around here will criticize me and feel sorry for Bailey, and its a shame but were OK with that (Bailey is too). These are Baileys choices and he will ALWAYS choose what he wants to do. The ones who know what our beliefs are, will understand that I am training him for the future not summer.

Our summers will be spent, training for the fall and his future. I will still work with as many kids who want it. I know I have already had 4 dads ask if I would.

So for the answer to everyone's question, Were out of traveling baseball!



