

April, 2017 by Clayton Voechting

Pitch Count Counts!

In the sport of baseball, what contributes to young pitcher's arm pain? This is an age old question. Do any of us really know? Can anyone pinpoint one cause?

One thing is for certain, player's arms are being abused. I gave pitching lessons to a 9 year-old player who was being used like Madison Bumgarner in the 2014 World Series. He gets the start on Saturday and then his coaches bounce him back the next day to throw in the championship game. Come on!!! The kid is 9!

With no hesitation, let's dive right in and take a look at this. Normal travel (club) baseball tournaments guarantee 3-4 games per weekend minimum. So...

SATURDAY:

Game 1:

He warms up to start: 30-50 throws

He goes to the bullpen: 15-25 pitches

1st inning warm ups: 8 pitches

2nd inning warm ups: 5 pitches

3rd inning warm ups: 5 pitches

Say he averages 15-20 pitches per inning

From what I've seen, they allow 3 innings maximum if you want to bring him back tomorrow.

But...he is not done there.

After he pitches he does not sit the bench, NO, NO, NO! He is one of the best players on the team. So he goes to 3rd base or

shortstop where he receives grounders in between innings and makes at least 2-3 throws across the diamond while the pitcher warms up. Plus, the throws he has to make if the ball is hit to him or he has to relay in from the outfield during that inning of defense. So let's say, 4-5 throws per inning in the field.

In one game, the poor ballplayer makes: 124-173 throws in that first game alone! FOR A 9 YEAR-OLD!!!

Not done yet.

Game 2: They may or may not have a break between the games. Let's say they do.

Re-warm up: 20-40 throws due to arm being tender and cooled off.

Starting shortstop, so with warm up throws and balls hit to him or relayed to him per inning: 4-5 (could be more)

Let's add it up: 36-60 throws in that second game.

Let's add game 1: That's 150-233 throw for the 9 year-old! And we all know the number could be higher depending on those disastrous innings!

Do I continue and add Sunday in there with another 1-3 games worth of throwing? Or do you get the point?

Why do coaches and parents think this is OK?

I understand your kid is a superstar. But, he won't be when he is 18 years-old if he keeps this up. I've seen this for a long time now. Players get "used up" at a young age because they are the best and the coaches lean on them to win a tournament that

gets them what, a crappy trophy, a plastic or tin medal or a \$20 ring. Those will all be covered with dust in a box in a couple years. The players won't even remember the tournament.

So these kids throw and throw and throw. By the time they are 16-18 years-old, when it really counts and they are actually being scouted by colleges and pro teams, their arm can't take it. Many times they end up with tired, fatigued and injured arms (shoulders and elbows). Often they need significant time off, rehab and even surgery. Some young men can't even come back to play the game they loved so much.

When I coached my local high school team, I had a player who was a superstar at 11-13 years-old. His coach used him up. When he got to me at 15 years-old, he could not make the throw across the diamond. For our 2-3 practices a week, he would take ground balls and hit without making any throws in order to rest his arm. He never once got a chance to pitch. He was one of the hardest throwing pitchers at age 11-13, when his coach used him to win tournament games and trophies. That coach wasted a great talent!

Parents, coaches, please STOP!

It is not your problem that the team does not have enough pitching. But, it IS your problem that you are allowing coaches to take advantage of your young athlete's talent.

Take your pick! Superstar at age 9? Or superstar at 18? Superstar at 18 could come with a pro contract or a college scholarship. The lesson is, ADVOCATE for your child NOW! Your care and his conditioning could be a great investment for his future.

The future of these kids are in the hands of the coaches and parents. You as a parent need to protect the health and future of your athlete.

In the big leagues, they keep pitch counts fresh on their minds. Let me give you an example:

Dave Roberts, Manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers, pulled his rookie starting pitcher in his Major League debut at 7.1 innings, while he was throwing a NO-HITTER!!!
WHAT???

Yes, a no-hitter was on the line for rookie Ross Stripling and he was pulled from the game in the 7th inning.

Dave Roberts had this to say about why he pulled Stripling from the game with a no-hitter on the line, "We made that decision before the game. The most he threw in spring was 78 pitches," Roberts said. "At 100 pitches, that was our number. ... I want to keep his future and health in mind."

The best thing Roberts said here was, "I want to keep his future and health in mind."

My question to you parents is: Does your player's Little League, Pony, travel ball or high school coach keep your athlete's future and health in mind when he is having him make over 200+ throws in a day? I don't think so!

Harold Reynolds, from the MLB Network, said it best. "It is on the adults to do or say something." He went on, "If you take a visit to the mound and ask a pitcher if he is okay after throwing X amount of pitches, he is going to say yes he feels great!"

Reynolds went on to say, “It is on the adults to say, “No you’re not” and take the ball.”

Kids want to play. Kids don't want to be taken out. From a player's standpoint, I never wanted to come out. But once you get to the pro levels, the coaches take the ball when it's time.

John Manuel, baseball analyst, had this to say when he was on MLB Tonight, “We need to stop asking a boy to do a man’s job. We need to stop asking 16 and 17 year-old developing bodies to shoulder the same workload as Clayton Kershaw in the playoffs.”

Parents and coaches need to be able to separate what they see on TV at the professional level with what they do with young, developing athletes.

A study from MLB Pitch Smart guidelines says that 50% of Tommy John surgeries are performed on 15-19 year-olds. Does that not blow your mind?

Dr. Stephen Nicholas, sports medicine New York Orthopedics, had this to say, “There are countless guys who have the surgery and don’t come back.”

So please ask yourself this one question, is it worth it?

PARENTS - TAKE CONTROL!



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