

The Art of Pitching



- Bobby DeWitt, Wayzata Baseball, 2024

Quick Note on the Current State of Pitching

In the past

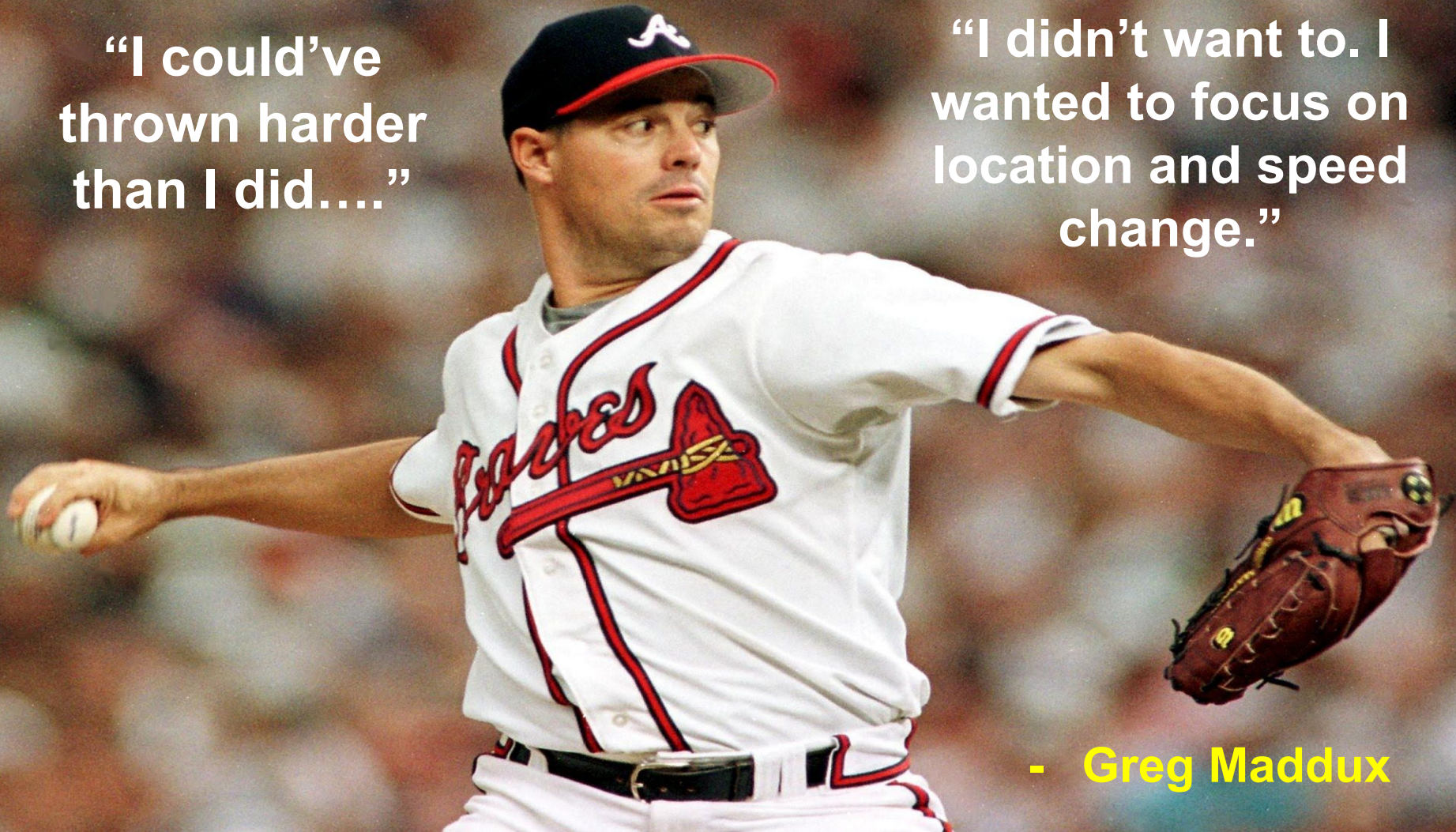
- Starters paced themselves
- Focus was on getting to the 6th/7th innings
- Keeping pitch counts around 100

What it is now

- Starters aren't expected to go much past the 4th inning
- Maximum physical effort on every pitch
- Max out velocity
- Pitch counts still around 100

The result: pitchers are throwing just as much as they used to but with far more physical effort (strain?) than before. This is part of why injuries are on the rise

“I could’ve
thrown harder
than I did....”



“I didn’t want to. I
wanted to focus on
location and speed
change.”

- Greg Maddux

My Beliefs



- **Learn the basics correctly**
- **Simple is easily repeated**
- **You can always make adjustments later on**
- **Reduce injury risk (it's already high enough)**
- **Throwing strikes is more important than the radar gun (we won't use one at WHS)**
- **Most important pitch is a LOCATED fastball**

**I don't care
how fast you
throw ball four.**





Teaching New Mechanics

Keep in mind
AND
teach your players

Any time you make
changes, there is going
to be a time of
digression.
That does not make it
wrong.

Topics for tonight:



- **Pitching mechanics - based upon my beliefs**
- **Drills for teaching those mechanics**
- **Arm strengthening leading up to the season**
- **Warming up before a game**

Jacob DeGrom



Stance, Rock Step, Pivot



- Stance rules have changed greatly - but there is a big difference between youth/amateur and high school (HS is stricter on the rules)
- Want to be have a comfortable stance
- Consider lefties on the left side and righties on the right side of rubber (perception)
- Rock Step should be minimal, while trying to move the head as little as possible
- Can be a front or a back step
- Pivot foot should end up parallel to the rubber and “in contact with” the rubber (just in front)
- Keep these movements simple in order to be repeatable



Paul Skenes at LSU



Clayton Kershaw



Leg Lift and Balance Point

- **Pivot leads to leg lift (it's a lift not a kick)**
- **Focus is on lifting with the knee, not the foot**
- **Recommend keeping foot under the knee**
- **Try to relax the foot - don't point toes up**
- **Height of leg kick is personal preference**
- **But it needs to be:**
 - **easily repeatable;**
 - **not tiring if done 60-100 times;**
- **It can't negatively affect our ability to reach good balance**



Cliff Lee

Pete Fairbanks



Max Fried



Hand Break and Arm Stroke

Ardolis Chapman



- Hands break (or separate) at the top of the leg kick
- OR when the leg moves towards plate
- Hand path should go DOWN, BACK, then UP
- Some pitchers go BACK, then UP
- Arm stroke (behind body) stays in line with body - straight back
- Think of a large clock and your ball hand needs to hit each of the numbers starting with 6:00 and back up to 12:00
- The arm needs to elongate behind the body to be able to lead with the elbow coming forward
- Glove points to the plate - strong front side

Yu Darvish



Justin Verlander



Zack Greinke



Direction

- From balance point, drop foot back towards the ground (like making an L shape)
- Balance leg will dip or sink
- Drive with back leg to increase torque power - but control it
- Back leg is flexed but not collapsed
- Foot extends out in the direction of the plate
- Lead with the heel to the plate - keeps hips closed
- Land on front of foot (balls of your feet) - NOT HEEL
- Toes should be slightly closed
- Land on slightly flexed leg - shock absorber



Paul Skenes



**BOTH
PALMS
DOWN
DURING
DIRECTION**



Ardolis Chapman

Hip Rotation

- **REMEMBER*** - lead with the heel during direction so hips stay closed
- **As the lead foot strikes the ground, the hips begin to rotate**
- **It's like a coil unwinding**
 - **The leg/foot unlocks the hips**
 - **Hips unlock the chest/upper body**
 - **Upper/body unlocks the arm**
 - **Arm delivers the ball**
- **Upper body should extend out to the plate - lead with the chest**
- **Chest should finish out over front foot (which pivots naturally straight)**
- **Glove returns to the chest as throwing arm comes forward (hand to heart)**

- **If you are trying to throw to glove side of plate - actually want to keep your hips closed longer - allows arm to catch up and be on time**

Justin Verlander



Arm Path and Release

- From the arm extended position:
- Glove points to the target and works its way back as ball comes forward
- Arm path brings the ball up to or above the head level
- Elbow MUST BE EQUAL TO or ABOVE THE SHOULDER
- Typically arm path comes forward led by the elbow
- Hand is away from head
- Release point is out in front of the body
- Chest is out over front knee
- Shoulders are slightly tilted up to the throwing side



Paul Skenes



Extension to Follow Through



- Must reach extension after the pitch
- Want the larger muscles on the back and back of the arm to decelerate
- Short-arming the ball avoids these muscles and uses the smaller more delicate muscles
- Arm should finish across to opposite hip area
- Head is out over front knee/foot
- Back becomes parallel to the ground - allows full body extension
- Typically that back foot pops up in the air
- Front leg straightens out again

Jacob DeGrom



Sonny Gray (start at about 00:15)



Yoshinobu Yamamoto

Slide Step





A few reminders:

- Pitching is an art and some will develop subtle differences - flair
- Pros do it because they CAN do it
- But some things CAN'T be avoided
- Balance/Direction/Extension
- Keep your throwing arm up
- Most sidewinders learn that out of necessity and not choice
- The goal is to be repeatable - this leads to control
- Control leads to reliable results
- Reliable results lead to more opportunities



- **Pitching mechanics are best developed without throwing (dry mechanics)**
- **Drills that focus on balance, direction and extension will allow pitchers to develop all of the key parts to the delivery along the way**
- **This is not about velocity or arm strength - but proper pitching motion**

I threw 78 in high school.

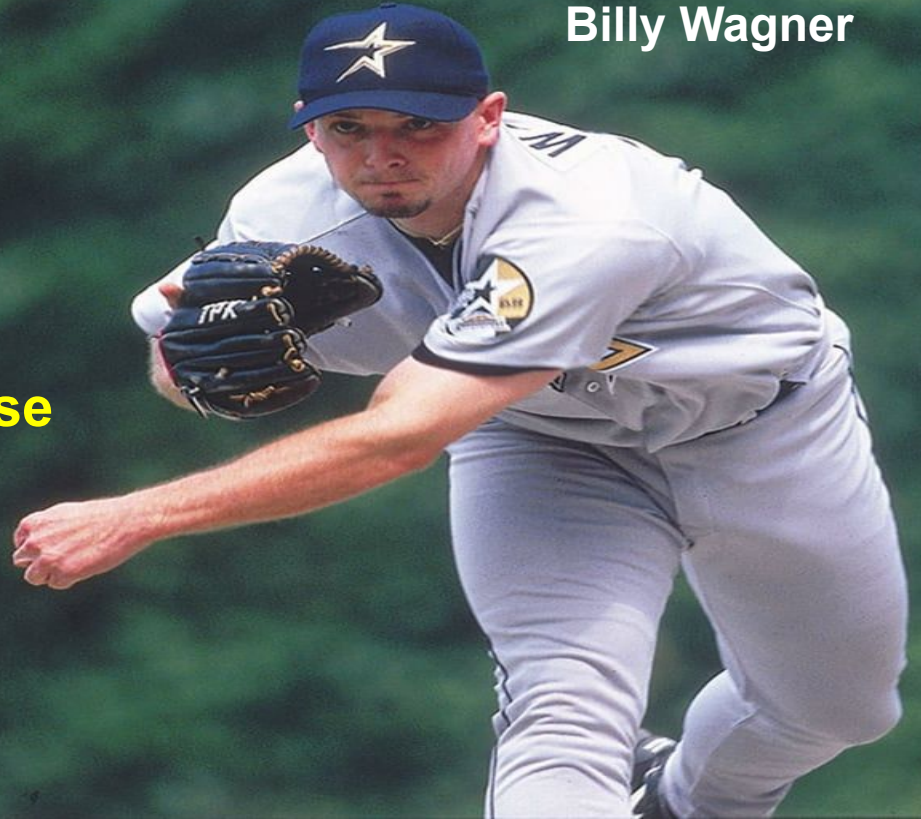
I hit 92 my freshman year of college.

And today I throw 98.

If I can name ONE thing that contributed most to my increase in velocity it would be.....

LONG TOSS

Billy Wagner



Long Toss

- **Best done out of season for strength building**
- **Can be done in season around live throwing, done for maintenance**
- **Difference between soreness and pain - soreness will (should) happen**
- **ALWAYS warm up to throw - DON'T throw to warm up**
- **Stretch, jog, weighted balls, arm bands, etc.**
- **Long toss is an event, it should be a workout**
- **But must use good throwing mechanics - elbow up, use whole body, follow through completely**
- **Listen to your arm when it comes to time and distance**
- **Start off closer and for short time periods - work your way up**
- **Long toss is a long process of slowly and carefully building up strength**
- **Slowly work your way out to distance, and slowly work your way back in**
- **Consider icing after to reduce swelling / conditioning between sessions**

Pregame routine