

Winter Training Tips for Baseball

Ways to improve your game within the confines of your own house!

I would never contend that winter in the Midwest is a great time to play baseball. However, elite athletes find a way to get better regardless of weather or time of year. I found in my career that my teammates at the Division I college and professional level all the way up to the major leagues utilized their time off of the field and away from their team to improve their mechanics in many ways. The best players use this time as an opportunity to hone their skills using drills that are available to us anytime and anyplace.



During the months when it is difficult to get outside, baseball players must be creative and resourceful in their training. When we are confined to a small space, it is an opportunity to focus on quality repetitions, mechanics and technique. As you focus more on the quality of repetitions, our mechanics become more consistent, they feel more natural, and you trust your technique. As a result you have more success on the field.

Hitting over a tee without a ball, working on the “prep step” or stride and takeaway, or just going through a specific movement within the swing or pitching mechanics are the best ways to teach your body the details of your baseball mechanics. For this reason, the best major league players utilize the batting cages or other indoor space underneath the stadium to conduct a large portion of their daily practice routine prior to games. I guarantee that players such as Albert Pujols, Tim Lincecum, and Derek Jeter have spent more time working on their mechanics alone or with a partner than they ever did with their entire team around them.

There are myriad examples of drills to practice mechanics in their room, basement, or any other small space indoors. I have provided a few examples below. However, do not feel restricted to these drills. Feel free to be creative with the space that you have. Your main focus should be to work on a specific movement within a fundamental (e.g. hitters stride and takeaway, catcher’s footwork and exchange for a throw to second or third, or a pitcher’s balance position), and repeat it correctly over and over and over again to train your body to proper movement.

Throwing/Pitching: Shadow Work

One of the best ways to gain a better understanding and improve your mechanics is through *shadow work*. Shadow work is simply going through the motions of pitching and throwing without a ball. Attention to detail is the key to shadow work. Working through our mechanics without a ball in our hand allows us to focus our attention on each step in our mechanics, teaching our body to be in the right position to throw the ball correctly. There are certain areas of focus as we go through pitching shadow work. Work through your entire pitching mechanics slowly, focusing on balance and proper body positioning. The following are drills and positions that are vital to the pitching mechanics and body positioning, and should be an area of focus in shadow work.

Balance Position Drill

Go through your pitching mechanics and pause at your balance point. Practice getting in the proper balance point in which you are relaxed and tension free. Try the following:

1. Stand relaxed on the ground with your hand/glove together at your chest (Figure 1).
2. Raise your knee and foot above your post foot, trying not to move the rest of your body. Raised knee and foot should be in line with your post foot, or the pitching rubber. Your weight should be on the ball of your foot (Figure 2).
3. Pause here and relax in your balance position.
4. Lower your foot almost to the ground and back up again, keeping your balance.
5. That is one repetition.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Power Position Drill

1. Spread feet as if you have taken your stride to the target (feet should be slightly wider than shoulder width). Glove and hand should be together at your chest (Figure 1).
2. Take the ball out of your glove and back toward an imaginary second base, utilizing your natural arm stroke. Your glove goes out to your target with the pocket of your glove facing the target (or thumbs down). Your weight should be loaded on your back foot and head should be in line with your back knee.
3. Pause here in your power position and make sure with each repetition you are in the correct Power Position.
4. Without picking your front foot up, drive from your back foot to your front foot and go through the throwing motion. Your back foot should remain on the ground, with your heel coming up and rotating so that your shoelaces are now pointed toward the ground. Glove should come back into your glove-side hip, with the pocket facing up to your face.
5. Your head and chest should now be over and in line with your front knee, nose and chin pointed toward the target.
6. That is one repetition.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

Pitching: Pick offs

This is very simple. Work on the mechanics of holding runners and pick off moves without a ball.

For right handed pitchers, focus on proper footwork and quickness to get in a consistent throwing position to first base. Start the drill in your stretch position, and end in your throwing position with your feet set to throw and your throwing hand near your ear (see picture to the right) ready to throw.



For lefties, focus on creating a pick-off move to first base that simulates your delivery and timing to home (when you make a pitch), but striding more toward first base and the imaginary 45° angle between first base and home plate.

For pick off moves to 2nd base focus again on the quickness of your feet to get into the throwing position to 2nd base, similar to the right handed pick off to first.

Hitting: Stride and Takeaway (or Prep Step)

This is a simple drill in which you get in your stance, address the pitcher with your eyes, take your stride and prepare to swing without swing. Similar to if you were to take a pitch in a game. This drill focuses on taking the correct stride, loading weight on your back foot, and getting the hands back. This is the load position, where the hitter is prepared and in position to transfer weight from the back foot to the front foot (against the front side) and drive the hands and bat through the ball.

This drill is very important in maintaining balance and making sure the hitter “stays back” properly and is prepared to swing when the ball arrives in the hitting zone. Doing this simple drill repeatedly teaches the body to arrive at the proper hitting position consistently so that we can achieve a correct, repeatable swing.



Stride

Hitting: Vision Training

There are numerous vision training drills and products available on the market. However, there are a few very simple drills that can be done indoors that can increase concentration and visual focus on the ball. One easy drill utilizes the practice golf wiffle balls. One dozen golf wiffle balls (of different colors if possible) are needed.

Drill 1: Hitter takes his stance with his top hand back in the launch position. The hitter’s partner throws a series of 12 pitches from about 6 feet away with only about 1 second between pitches. The location of the pitches should approximately belt high or higher. The hitter attempts to “slap” the pitches back at the pitcher with short quick bursts, staying within the context of the swing mechanics. The focus of this drill is to react quickly and stay balanced throughout the stance and swing. This drill also stresses waiting on the ball to get in the proper hitting window to make contact with the golf balls. Repeat this drill using the bottom hand as well (making contact with the back of the bottom hand).



Drill 2: Take two or three balls at a time and throw short (or soft) toss to the hitter from the side. Try to locate the pitches high in the strike zone so that the hitter can make contact. As the balls are tossed, call out top, bottom, or middle. The hitter must then focus on the appropriate ball and hit it with his top hand. Repeat this drill with both the both top and bottom hand. You may also use different color balls and call out the color to hit. The purpose of this drill is to react quickly and focus eyes on the correct ball, without being distracted by the other balls in the hitting zone.

Fielding: Wall Throws

There are numerous ways to work on fielding mechanics in the house, utilizing tennis balls (of other light rubber balls) and a basement wall. Get in your fielding position about 6 feet away from a wall. Staying down in your fielding position, toss a ball easily against the wall so that it comes back with a 1 or 2 hop ground ball. Field the ball and toss the ball back at the wall as quickly as possible, repeating 20-25 repetitions.

Each set should be done without the fielder moving his feet, throwing the ball against the wall so that the ball comes back between the fielder's feet. The focus of this drill should be on staying in the fielding position throughout, working on proper fielding mechanics and transfer from the glove to the throwing hand quickly to the throwing position.



If you spend your indoor training time perfecting baseball movements, your mechanics become more instinctual and easier to perform correctly when the pressure is on during the game. It takes no more than 5 minutes a day to go through a set of these drills and teach your body the proper mechanics. When you teach your body the right way to hit, throw, and field through abundant and effective repetition, the game becomes easier and more fun, leading to more success on the field.

So now....there is never an excuse for a player to sit and wait for spring to improve their game! These indoor drills are perfect for improving mechanics and your baseball skills indoors during the winter.

- Brad Woodall; *Owner, Woodall Baseball Instruction*
Former Major League Pitcher and Professional Coach



Brad Woodall

Brad Woodall's baseball instruction experience spans nearly two decades and has reached players across the country. Since it's inception in 1999, **Woodall Baseball Instruction** has grown from a few individual pitching lessons at the local park to a thriving, all-encompassing baseball consulting business. Additionally, Brad authored the successful book: [A Parent's Guide to Pitching](#).

In 1993, Brad earned his B.A in Economics from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill where he was a pitcher, outfielder, and first baseman. He played in the College World Series in Omaha, Nebraska (1989), was an All-ACC performer (1990, 1991) and a two-time summer league All-American as a pitcher and outfielder.

Brad's professional baseball experience comprises of ten years as a pitcher and two years as a coach. As a professional baseball player, he quickly climbed the ranks in the [Atlanta Braves](#) Organization and joined one of the most talented pitching staffs in history. After being named the (AAA) International League Pitcher of the Year in 1994, Brad joined Greg Maddux, Tom Glavine, Steve Avery, and John Smoltz in Atlanta for parts of 3 seasons. He was a member of the Atlanta Braves World Championship and National League Championship teams in 1995-1996. Brad subsequently spent the 1998-1999 seasons with the [Milwaukee Brewers](#) and [Chicago Cubs](#), respectively, appearing in 40 games (23 starts) during that period. Brad transitioned into coaching and served as a pitching coach in the [Tampa Bay Rays](#) organization for the 2002 and 2003 seasons.

Based in Madison, WI, **Woodall Baseball Instruction** provides individual and small group lessons as well as a multitude of camps and clinics for players and coaches of all levels.