

# Varsity Tips

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Coaches and parents, let me start by saying, I am happy to be at your child's service! I am a graduate of Howland High School (2007), and I am so excited to be the Varsity Head Coach and hopefully provide some stability to the position.

I played my youth baseball at HAC. I proudly made the all-star teams every year despite (unofficially) having the record for beaning the most kids in the history of HAC! I recall beaning almost an entire line up before I was put back out into the field.

And that brings me to my first point:

One of the most heart breaking things for a coach and a player is when a routine ball is fielded and then the athlete throws it away – and even worse is when a run scores as a result of a bad throw.

These errors are team-morale draining and mentally tough on the pitcher, but these errors can be mentally debilitating on the athlete who makes the bad throw. We can't be OK with an excessive amount of bad throws from our kids, if we want to compete better at the varsity level, more importantly is that our approach to the psyche of the athlete can be better.

## Mental Training 101:

Baseball is historically a sport full of bad attitudes, bad language, tough-guy coaches, heckling from the fans, and blaming the umpire for everything. *It's an old and tired habit of the game.* This article isn't about this, but I would advise that we begin changing this habit.

Pitching coach, Tom House, once said, *"Baseball is a game of failure, coached by negative people, in a world of misinformation..."* That is actually quite accurate. I think if you played baseball for any amount of time you would agree.

It is our job to come along side our athletes and be honest and compassionate with them, if we actually want them to succeed beyond their natural potential, which is 100% limited by their mind. Here's how this might happen:

**Honesty:** Hey, Zack, you really threw that ball away that time!

**Teach Common humanity** – Don't worry, bud, I have done that many times myself.

**Teach kindness** – Look, I get that you want to hide behind your glove, but we going to fix what needs to be fixed at next practice. Clear you mind, and go kick some butt on the next play!

## **Let's teach and be sticklers about throwing mechanics and accuracy.**

Here, I will outline my 4 step process for consistent foot work and making a good routine throw.

### **1. The first step to throwing is, ironically, to receive the ball.**

Once he receives it whether it's a ground ball or just playing catch, the athlete should bring the ball to the center of their chest as soon as possible. This will reduce the chance of dropped ball errors.

### **2. Step two is to move around the "L," and pull the glove and the ball away from each other into what I call the throwing "loop."**

If you laid out some baseballs in the shape of an "L" and had an athlete stand at the bottom of it, you can imagine how an athlete can catch or field a ball with his feet square, perform step one, and then make a quick footwork movement around the right angle of the "L" to get his shoulders in-line with his target.

At the end of this movement, the athlete should be holding the ball right next to or behind his ear and the ball facing the ground.

We want to hold the ball behind the ear with the elbow bent at less than 90 degrees, rather than the "high L" position because this is going to decrease rotational forces on the shoulder and elbow.

A key thing to look for in this phase is if the arm creates a "dangle." This is short hand for the elbow or hand dropping below shoulder level at any time before the throwing motion is completed. ***Keep the elbow above shoulder level – no dangles.***

### **3. Step three is to take the second shuffle toward the target, point the heel of the glove side hand at the target, and let it rip!**

As the athlete takes the second shuffle the ball will stay close the head, but the heel of the palm on the glove side hand will point at the target. The momentum of the body is moving toward the target, and the athlete will *throw the ball as hard as possible to finish the "throwing loop."*

The "throwing loop" is a loop the hand takes the ball on that starts from the glove, travels past the ear, and around to ball release without any "dangles!"

I emphasize this last point because it is important the athlete is fearless and completely confident about his throw; an aggressive throw is much better than a timid throw, and we need to encourage our baseball players to be fearless on the field.

### **4. Lastly, the athlete will follow their throw for at least two steps before returning to their position.**

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask me! You can reach me at [zack.byler@howlandschools.org](mailto:zack.byler@howlandschools.org)