

Varsity Tips from The Club

Teaching Pitchers How To Use the Plate – Pitch to the Thirds!

Hey HAC Parents and Coaches! I'm back with the second installment of *Varsity Tips* today with a quick lesson on how we should be teaching our youth pitchers from the Mustang League and upward, but first a quick update about The Club's season so far.

The Howland Varsity Baseball Club is off to good start. We are 2-0 overall and 2-0 in the conference. Next week, we play Boardman, and that will be a big test for us as a baseball club. Our behavior as individuals to prepare for a team based game and our individual and corporate mental behavior during the game is all we can control. The key to having good behavior is having a well-defined and enforced culture, so this year we are spending a good amount of time talking about leadership.

If we can put it together then we should compete *very* well against teams – not only Boardman – that should beat us, at least on paper and in the minds of most “baseball guys” in the area.

Although that type of stuff I will write about extensively at a later date, that's enough about that for now.

I want to talk to about some ideas that will have a positive effect on lowering pitch counts, which allows pitchers to go into deeper innings. One of the reasons pitchers at the HAC level and even up to the varsity level rack up the pitches early in the game is because of poor pitch calling by coaches due to a cliché understanding about what to do when a pitcher has two strikes on a hitter.

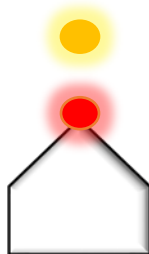
*A mistake we make as coaches and pitchers: Trying throw a **strike out pitches** too often.*

When a pitcher has a batter 0-2 (zero balls and two strikes for those new to baseball pitch counts), then that is the only time we should try to throw a **strike out pitch**, at the amateur level.

In the graphic below we have two locations a pitcher can try to *bounce* their curveball in the dirt, when they have a hitter in a 0-2 count. The yellow landing zone is meant to hit the ground; However, based on the extra distance and trajectory the curve ball would travel compared to the red landing zone it is a pitch a hitter could hit, get called a strike by the umpire, or get called a ball by the umpire. The yellow pitch is a ball the catcher would probably catch in the air.

That is too many outcomes for a great 0-2 pitch.

With a 0-2 count, we want the hitter to believe the pitch is close enough to protect the plate and end up chasing the pitch out of the strike zone. We need the pitch to travel far enough but not so far it becomes hittable. So the goal for a curve ball on a 0-2 count is to bounce it on the back half of the plate. ***This pitch has only two outcomes – it will either be a swing and a miss or it will be called a ball.***



So where is the mistake we are making as coaches and pitchers?

The mistake lies in the fact that we are carrying that philosophy out at the youth and amateur levels. Yes, the above information is 100% correct, and I think at the amateur level the only time we SHOULD throw a “strike out” type of pitch should be in 0-2 counts. However, just because we SHOULD do something and are justified because of sound baseball philosophy doesn’t mean we have to.

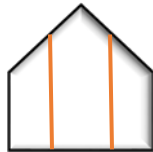
The fact of the matter is trying to throw “strike out pitches” at the amateur level, whether it be locating where we bounce the curve ball or trying to throw the ball up higher or pitch off the corners of the plate is difficult at the collegiate and professional levels – let alone the HAC and varsity level.

I think we are giving the hitter way too much credit by thinking this way, and this is one big reason we are driving up pitch counts and even delaying development of Howland’s pitchers.

So don’t do that anymore. Do this...

We can teach our pitchers to slice up the plate better in general, but especially in two strike counts – 0-2, 1-2, 2-2, and 3-2.

Below, you will see another plate that is sliced into thirds. In an effort to keep pitch counts lower and chances of success for the pitcher higher, in two strike counts let’s teach our pitchers to locate pitches on either the inner or outer thirds of the plate. So the yellow pitch location above, at the amateur level, is actually the desirable pitch location in my opinion because it is... good **enough!**



And if I wanted to have the pitcher try to make it even better then I wouldn’t ask him to bounce it on the plate, ***I would ask the catcher to move to the outer or inner third of the plate.***

The hitter would have to be well above average to hit the yellow pitch above. And if it further away from him on the outer third, it would be even harder to hit let alone hit *well*. Let’s stop give the hitters too much credit and starting bringing the game right at them, and when they surprise us we can tip our caps and watch as a great hitter in our community in being born!

There is much more we can go into, but that is all I have time for today! I hope it makes sense and you agree, but if you don’t I would love to discuss it further and see your point of view.

So if you have any questions or comments, please don’t hesitate to ask me! You can reach me at zack.byler@howlandschools.org