

HANDLING STRESS OF PITCHING BIG GAMES

By Michele Smith

One of the questions I am asked most often is....

"How do I handle the stress of pitching big games, like those in the Olympics?"

Well, you have to be mentally strong, have a positive attitude and believe in your abilities as well as those of your team. It is very important to remember that as a pitcher the entire team is looking to you for leadership. If we act or respond to hard situations like bad calls or defensive errors in a negative way we will lead the team in the wrong direction. Pitching is a position that requires a lot of self-confidence, a positive attitude and the ability to realize that we can only control the game when the ball is in our hand. After we pitch the ball, we have no control over whether the umpire calls the pitch a ball or a strike, or if the batter swings or takes, and whether or not the defense behind us makes the play or makes an error. So, getting upset when the ump calls the pitch a ball when you thought it was a strike, or when your defense makes an error, is nothing more than wasting energy and a distraction that takes away from your focus.

The pitchers most important job is to concentrate and stay positive. Good concentration is necessary for getting the first batter out in every inning, staying ahead in the count, making the other team hit their way on base, no free passes (walks), and learning to control the pace of the game with the amount of time you take in between pitches. And, by always focusing on the positive and having fun on the mound, your team will be more relaxed and play better behind you, making it more enjoyable for everyone!