



**P**itching is one of the most important aspects of the game of Fastpitch.

We all know that. But, when it comes to the 'strategy of our pitching game,' how much do we really know about how easy--or difficult--we can make the game on ourselves as pitchers? Let's face it, when you see a pitcher walking batters, hitting batters and falling behind in the count, you know she is hurting herself. She is making her job much harder on herself. Many times young pitchers don't have a strategy for their

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outings. And if they do, and it's not being effective, they will abandon their pre-game ideas and just hope for the best. For inexperienced, and experienced pitchers alike, having a successful strategy will help take your game to new heights. Let's take some time to learn and understand what a successful strategy is.

*[Before we start, I want to add that most of the numbers and percentages you will read below are 'generalities' and not exact. In order to get 'specific' or true numbers for yourself and your team, keep statistics of your own games to personalize your pitching strategy.]*

**Goal # 1 for a Successful Pitching Strategy:**

Getting ahead early in the count is very, very important and the first point I want to discuss. To get ahead early, you must throw first pitch strikes. First pitch strikes are critical. Only about 15 percent of batters swing at the first pitch. Therefore, as a pitcher, it is important to get that first pitch in the strike zone and get ahead in the count. Of the 15 or so percent of batters who do swing at the first pitch and make contact, they average only about a .185 batting average. So, it is safe to assume that the more pitches the batter sees from a pitcher, the better her opportunity will be to get a good pitch, and hit it well. The flip slip of this is that we don't want to throw our first pitches right down the middle of the plate. Obviously, a pitch down the middle will lead to batting averages higher than the .185 approximation mentioned above. The point is, throw a good strike on the first pitch, get ahead and make the batter have to chase from there.

**Goal # 2 for a Successful Pitching Strategy:**

Once we get ahead in the count there is more of a chance we will be able to get the batter out, therefore keeping her off the base paths. So, being successful with our first goal will help us to accomplish our second goal, which is to keep

the lead off batter of each inning off of the base paths. Approximately 65 percent of lead off batters who get on base score. That is huge. Like the popular cheer goes, "You get the first batter on...you bunt her over...you score...you win...that's it!" Keeping the lead off batter of each inning off the base is paramount. Of the base runners who follow the lead off--that is who get on base after the first out of the inning--only 20 percent score. I know I like those odds when I am on the mound! Remember, when a runner is on first base with 1 out, it takes at least 2 singles to score her, or an extra base hit in the gap. But, when

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the lead off batter gets on, there are more opportunities for her to move into scoring position. That means there is a greater opportunity for her to score. Most players and coaches don't realize it, but the games of softball and baseball are all about 'outs.' When we are playing offense, we don't want to 'give' outs away, and when we're on defense, we need to 'get' outs as quickly as possible. If you are having one or two bad innings a game, go back and analyze those innings. See how many outs you 'gave' the opposition in the innings in which they scored. Odds are you were not successful with goal # 2: Keep the lead off batter of each inning off the base paths.

**Goal # 3 for a Successful Pitching Strategy:** Pitchers with great ball control are normally more in control of the game. Being able to master your pitches will enable you to throw the right pitch when you need to. And, you will need that control to accomplish goal #3 which is to throw strikes 70-75 percent of the time. Keep in mind that a strike can be a 'called' strike or a 'swung at' strike. Herb Dudley once said, "Control is the ability to throw a ball when you want to, and a strike when you have to." When you think about it, that is what the best pitchers in world do; they control the game and almost 'appear' to control when the batter swings and when she does not! Now, we know that in reality, that really can't happen. But, when you watch the best pitchers in the world, they have an uncanny ability to make batters watch strikes and swing at balls. It is important that you chart your games to see what percentage of strikes to balls you are throwing during games. Our goal is 70-75 percent strikes, whether they are 'called' or 'swung at' strikes. The more pitches you throw, that are 'called balls,' the harder you are making the game on yourself. Obviously, you

are going to be a much more successful pitcher if you can make batter's swing at balls. But, in most cases only the best pitchers in the world are able to make batters actually swing at pitches that are 'true balls.' Remember, no matter what your level, most batters who fall behind in the count have batting averages under .200. Why is that? Because when hitters are in the hole, the pitcher has control, and she can throw her best 'stuff.' That usually results in the batter chasing something that looks like a strike, when it is really a ball.

**Goal # 4 for a Successful Pitching Strategy:** Our fourth goal is an obvious one, but even though it is obvious, we can't forget it as an important part of our strategy. Goal # 4 is to limit your free passes. In other words, avoid walks, past balls, and hitting batters. All of these allow the opposition to get on base or move into scoring position without having earned it. When pitchers make opponents earn their runs by having to put together a string of 3 or 4 hits and sacrifice outs for scoring position, it will be much more difficult for them to score. So, do your best to limit your free passes and make them earn every opportunity to get on base.

While most pitchers already strive for one or two of these goals, it is important to incorporate all of them into some form of a pre-game or pre-tournament strategy. What is your vision of your game? What type of pitcher do you want to be? The mind is the most powerful and important part of a pitcher's presence. If your aim is to be the best pitcher possible, you need a strategy...and a good one. I can assure you that if you incorporate these 4 goals into your pitching strategy, you will be on your way to a successful outing.

For more information or to register for a course, go to [www.nfca.org/college](http://www.nfca.org/college)

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- **Jan 11 405: Teaching a Run-Producing Team Offense & Strategy; Columbus Hilton - Columbus, Ohio**
- **Jan 13 403: Position Play & Practice Organization San Diego State University - San Diego, Calif.**
- **Jan 19 404: Teaching Solid Team Defense & Strategy Mt. Hood Community College - Gresham, Ore.**

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