**Long Toss**

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Long Toss can benefit all players not just your pitchers. Long Toss can be integrated into your practice routine to gain and maintain arm strength for your entire team.

There is still a debate between advocates of the 120 foot limitations on throwing and unlimited distance throwing.

The idea originally behind the "short toss" was that if you keep a player at 120 feet, he'll throw the ball on a line. This theoretically will serve two purposes:
 1. The player will be able to keep his shoulders level (avoid "dipping")
 2. The release point will stay in similar place because there is minimal change in the arc of the ball

Mechanical reasons aside, there are two other major contributing factors to the evolution of the 120-foot throw:
 1. Timed throwing - occurs because coaches are often pressed for practice time and pitchers have to be at a certain station by a specific time.
 2. The influence of Major League Organizations which are reluctant to change

The reality is that not throwing beyond 120 feet just so you can keep the ball on a line (and that portion of practice fits into a timed schedule) prevents the arm from getting stretched out, loosened up, and opened up to its potential. It deprives the arm and muscles of much needed length, extension and stimulation. It inhibits the growth of the arm by placing boundaries and limits on the arm.

You can further examine this debate by reading Alan Jaeger on the internet. For the purposes of this article, understand that I believe in letting your Long Toss program fit the individual strength of each of your players. This type of Long Toss program is an overload activity which will increase arm strength and reduce the chances of injury if preformed with good throwing mechanics.

**There are two phases of Long Toss**:

**The Stretching Out Phase**

Three major check points:

 **1) Let the arm stretch itself out with loose arm action
 2) Allow your arm to throw as far as it wants to throw provided that it "feels good", like a massage
 3) Be aware of keeping sound mechanics (for consistency and arm support)**

For someone who is new to long toss it might take a couple of weeks at a relatively short distance (100-150 feet) to stretch and lengthen the arm to where it feels good before moving on to the more pivotal extension and strengthening phase.

Also, it should be noted that when a player goes beyond 150 feet, he should use his legs to "crow hop." This will help take pressure off the arm.

Note: though the goal (out of season) is to throw on a daily basis, it is typical that the arm will need to be rested periodically until a base is firmly established.

The stretching out phase of the long toss is critical for a number of reasons:
 **1) Stretching helps to heat and open up the arm properly
 2) With distance comes extension and length of the muscles
 3) Arm speed can be better generated as a result of a looser arm
 4) The extra distance that has been created allows the arm to optimize the pull-down & strengthening phase**

**Pull Down Phase**

After peaking out through your stretch, you will come back toward your throwing partner in a very methodical manner:

While stretching out the arm creates warmth, length and extension, the pull down phase helps:

 **1) generate arm speed,**

 **2) improve arm strength,**

 **3) lower release point, and**

 **4) acceleration or "finish" through the release point.**

The pull down phase becomes acceleration through a stretch.

Arm strength becomes a by-product of pulling down because the additional distance provides the arm with an opportunity to generate more arm speed on longer, looser and well conditioned muscles.

**A Sample Long Toss Program**

**1 - Stretch Out Phase**

Line up the players on one foul line – match up players with similar arm strength.

After they are thoroughly warmed up, throwing partners move back gradually to the extension of the 1B-2B line - each player performs four to eight (4-8) firm throws.

Then the throwing partner goes back 10 full steps (approximately 10 yards) - four to eight (4-8) strong throws are performed once again.

Then he moves back another 10 full steps and continue going back 10 full steps at a time until they reach their maximum distance.

The ultimate goal is approximately 100 yds./300 feet. Keeping in mind they throw four to eight times at each distance.

**2 - Pull Down Phase**

After reaching their maximum distance the players work their way back to the original distance (60-80 feet) - throwing one to five (1-5) times every 10 yards/30 feet/10 steps.

In the beginning, the maximum distance the players may only throw about 70 yards (210 feet). Do not be too concerned with the trajectory of throws. Some players may tend to rainbow the ball more than others.

Players should concentrate on pulling through their stretch without decelerating their arms

 - throw as you are still at your maximum distance.

Once they get to about 60 or 70 feet, continue to pull down as long as the arm "welcomes" the sensation - for several minutes after the base has been established.

Players should be aware of their direction and mechanics in both phases.

Take a few minutes to warm down once they are satisfied with the amount of pull-down work.

The work load is increased or decreased by changing the number of throws and the distance thrown. Over time, the players get stronger and can handle the 8 throws at the maximum distance.

**Scheduling Long Toss:**

**Out of season >** perform the Stretch Out Phase every practice and the Pull Down Phase 2-3 times a week.

**In Season >** Perform the Stretch Our Phase every practice and 1) the Pull Down Phase one time/week, or

 2) one Pull Down Throw at each distance on the way back to the finish distance each day.

This Long Toss Program will take more time than a “Timed Throwing Program” but I believe the benefit to your player’s arm is worth the extra time.