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"Importance of Reconditioning After Off-Season"



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TOPIC ARTICLE

In the world of baseball, decades worth of research has led to a consensus recommendation of taking time off from pitching each year. These recommendations vary slightly but most healthcare professionals would recommend that adolescent pitchers take 4 months off a year from pitching with at least two of those months

being consecutive. Research over the last two decades has all shown that higher workloads directly relate to an increased risk of elbow and shoulder injuries. Particularly, the more innings a pitcher throws throughout a year, the more risk for injury they incur.

Aside from baseball, this is generally true for all sports. When we require our bodies to perform the same tasks, over and over without rest, we begin to tip the scales from adaptation and improvement, to fatigue. When we continue to perform in a state of chronic fatigue, our risk of injuries increases. This is why it is vitally important to give our bodies a break each year. Even professional athletes have an offseason and take some amount of time away from their sport all together. However, taking a break without a plan to recondition can be just as problematic as never taking a break in the first place.

I often see youth baseball players come in to see me early in the baseball season with elbow and shoulder pain. Some end up minor and unfortunately, some end up being season ending injuries. There is a common theme I see when I ask these players to walk me through their offseason leading up to the injury. Most say something along the lines of this, "I played my last tournament in the middle of October and then shut down. [Some played other sports some didn't in the winter.] I then started playing some light catch again around the middle of January. I threw my first bullpen around the 1st of February and have thrown 1-3 total bullpens until now. (beginning of March – start of high school season). Each bullpen I threw 20-40 pitches. In our first high school game last week I threw 87 pitches and then 2 days ago, I threw 93 pitches and felt pain in my elbow/shoulder after the game."

The common theme: taking a break from their sport for 3 months = good. Taking 1 month to build back up = bad. In my baseball example, I also see this a lot where a player has only thrown a couple times off of the mound in a practice setting for an average of 30 pitches. Then, game 1, they throw 80+ pitches. That is like building up and practicing to be able to run a 5K and then going out and trying to run a marathon. Said another way, their body is not prepared for what they are trying to do.

So what is the solution? Building out a structured off-season plan to ensure players have built back up. I always recommend working backwards from when you need to be ready. For example, if high school baseball tryouts are March 1, work backwards from that date to determine when you need to start building back up. My recommendation is for every day you don't throw (or take a break from your sport), you should spend 1-1.5 days building back up. Furthermore, we have to have more buy in from coaches. If a player has only thrown a max 30 pitch bullpen, they are not ready to throw 80+ in a game. Coaches should have a game progression for players to build them up over the course of the season. Pitch counts have been great but they are far from perfect.

I would advocate for progressive pitch counts in high school. For example, March = 65 max pitches, April = 75, May = 85 etc. Regardless of the sport, it is paramount our youth athletes understand the importance of taking time away from their sport but just importantly, how to progressively build their bodies back up to competition level.

Resources

R.A.D. System o Check out www.royals.mobilecoach.org for resources on:

- Coaching Development
- Player Development – Including progressive return to throw programs
- Sports Medicine – including nutrition, sleep, injury protection and more

[Project Play - An Initiative of the Aspen Institute](#)

[Pitch Smart | MLB.com](#)

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EMERGENCY

In a crisis call “911” immediately

● If considering self-harm, call “988”
The National Suicide Intervention Lifeline

SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

To speak to a counselor,

Call (800) 656-4673
RAINN

BULLYING/HAZING, VIOLENCE, ADDICTIONS & SUBSTANCE ABUSE

For helpful resources,

thebmsproject.org/Safety

CHILD ABUSE

To report suspected child abuse,

Call (800) 422-4453

Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline

It is recommended that incident(s) of serious misconduct be reported to law enforcement.
Minors should report incidents of misconduct to their parent(s) or guardian(s).