

Young pitchers...and often even those with years of experience... can develop a "leaping" problem. Pitching rules (for girls and women) state that a pitcher cannot become totally airborne during the pitching sequence...at least one foot has to remain in contact with the ground until the other foot lands.

We are often asked what a pitcher can do to correct this problem. Here is our reply to a recent e-mail:

The leaping problem is a pretty common one...even for many girls with a lot of pitching experience. Typically, a pitcher often forgets to keep her drag toe down when she becomes too aggressive and starts throwing harder.

So leaping is usually the result of putting more effort into the pitch. It can be corrected without shortening the stride or slowing down the pitch.

The toe-drag should be light enough just to remain in contact with the ground, and only until the stride foot lands. Therefore, the drag only needs to be for the first 10 or 12 inches in front of the rubber. An ideal drag is neither on the absolute toe of the shoe or on the side...instead, it is more on the inside of the big toe. The pattern of the drag is usually a gradual curve from the push-off spot in front of the pitching rubber going around behind the pitcher to a point that is directly in back of the original placement of the stride foot. With some pitchers it continues into a slight "S" back in the other direction.

Since the rule in ASA, USSSA, NCAA, state high school athletic associations, and other softball sanctioning bodies is always "the pitcher may not become airborne" (have both feet in the air at the same time) this is something that every pitcher needs to correct as soon as possible, so now is the time to take care of it.

Among my recommendations:

- 1) Videotape the pitcher so she can see for herself what is happening...discovery is 60% of the cure. Pay attention to the pushoff foot. As she starts her weight transfer (from the rear leg to the front leg at the start of the pitching motion) the pushoff foot will tilt forward on the pitching rubber. As soon as the toe of the foot touches the dirt in front of the rubber...that is where the drag needs to begin.
- 2) Set aside time every practice, and even on days when she doesn't practice pitching, to practice the drag. Even in the family room or in her room, do a full wind-up and throw balled-up socks against the wall or a mirror. Practice dragging the toe...until it becomes a habit, and therefore can be done subconsciously as part of the pitching sequence.
- 3) Practice dragging during the "2-step run through" drill. Starting two steps behind the pitching rubber, take the first step toward the rubber with the stride foot, the next step with the push-off foot will be right on the pitching rubber; keep both hands at your side until the push-off foot steps on the pitching rubber, then throw the ball with a running full windup at full speed. This drill tends to focus all energy straight ahead, and helps keep the drag toe down from the time it hits the pitching rubber until the stride foot lands.

It is not an easy problem to correct immediately, but even though it can become boring and even frustrating...keep at it. It is important to correct it now...not later.