

***Baseball***

**Spring/Summer Arm Care Plan**

**\*PLEASE….Ask your summer coach to throw you a maximum of 60 pitches per week. You are just finishing your high school season, will play 60+ games of summer ball, and will play a fall schedule at Reedy High. Take care of your arm!!!**

**Starting Pitchers - 5 or 7 Day Cycling**

Where a reliever has to play with some unknown variables as to when and how much he is going to pitch from day to day starting pitchers have it much easier in season. Starting pitchers know exactly what day they are throwing each week and therefore can plan the other 6 days (amateur) or 4 days (professional) around their game day. For this reason, setting up a starter with an “in-season” routine is much easier than a reliever. Below, I am going to go through the format and work load for a basic 7 day routine, considering that more players are at the amateur level. Also, once you understand the principles to the 7 Day routine, adjusting to the 5 Day routine will be relatively similar. Keep in mind that the first priority is to always listen to your arm.

**In Season, 7 Day Routine (Cycle)**

In order to make this routine very simple to follow I’m going to pick “Monday” as the reference point as to when you are scheduled to start your game. By establishing our “game day” we can then focus on how we maintenance (cycle) the arm back in shape most effectively for your next start, the following Monday.

Monday, Game Day (Long Toss Day) -- this is ironically your best Long Toss day “in-season” because you’ve had 6 days to rest, recover and rebuild leading into your game day from your previous start. As a simple example, if you have been long tossing out of season in the 250 foot range (~85mph), then that’s about how far your arm is going to want to stretch out to the day of your start. In essence, your game day is very similar to your best out of season long toss day, except that you may cut down on the amount of throws your making in both the stretching out (going out away from your partner) and pulling down phases of Long Toss (coming back toward your partner). If you feel like cutting a little distance out of your throwing (ie it’s later in the season) or you feel like cutting down on your aggressive throws coming back in toward your throwing partner, that’s fine. But if you conditioned your arm well throughout the off-season, your arm is going to really want a pretty thorough long toss session the day of your start.

Tuesday, Day 1 after start (Recovery/Stretch) -- Depending on how many pitches you made, Day 1 is all about blood flow, ranger of motion and “stretch throwing”. If you threw 90 pitches the day before you may only want to go out to 90-120 feet of really low impact, light catch. If you only threw 50 pitches, your arm may want a distance closer to 150-200 feet. Again, the priority is RECOVERY. The focus is on positioning the arm for the next day, and in fact, the next start. There should be little to no “downhill” or aggressive throwing on Day 1.

Wednesday, Day 2 (Recovery/ Stretch) -- Ironically, Day 2 is when most pitchers are the most sore after a start. Thus, Day 2 is a “continuance” of the stretch out, low impact mentality. Again, keep in mind that your arm is going to tend to have tremendous recovery period in general due to your off-season throwing program, but to be safe, I tell players to let the arm breathe again on Day 2, and if it wants to stretch out further, per se, 150-200 or 200-250 for harder throwers, great. Again, I would suggest to minimize downhill or aggressive throwing unless the arm tells you differently.

Thursday, Day 3 (Extension, Pull Downs) -- Day 1 and 2 have now set you up for a more normal Long Toss session on Day 3. This is the beauty of having a 7 day routine -- you can use an extra couple of days to recondition your arm in season. The arm is positioned on Day 3 to both stretch out to it’s normal out of season Long Toss distance and to “pull down” relatively aggressively. How far you go out again depends on the individual, but for someone who throws 85mph, your looking at about 250 feet. Harder throwers again are looking at 300 feet or more. So we’re both extending the arm on Day 3, and we’re beginning to integrate the pull down or aggressive phase of Long Toss. The key here is to still use Day 3 as a conditioning day and to prep for Day 4, which is your bull-pen day.

Friday, Day 4 (Long Toss/Bull-Pen) -- Now that you’ve used the first 3 days after your start to do nothing but progressively and effectively build the arm back into shape you are now set up for your bull-pen day. The key here is to not “save your arm” by minimizing your throwing prior to the bull-pen -- it’s actually to do the opposite. You have set your arm up for another great Long Toss day, and that is your priority. Again, your bull-pen tops off your work-out as opposed to being the focal point of it. It doesn’t mean that you have to have an epic Long Toss before you bull-pen…it just means to be sure that you have a pretty thorough Long Toss prior to getting on the mound. Remember, your arm is programmed now to condition before it gets on a mound…and that’s the way you want it to be.

Saturday, Day 5 (Stretching/Optional) -- Day 5 is a bit like Day 1 after your start. You’ve been on the mound the day before, you’ve had a lot of workload leading up to this point in the week so I advise pitchers to go lighter on Day 5. Again, listen to your arm, but you may find that you are only interested in a minimal amount of throwing, or you may find that you want to stretch it out to 120-150 feet without any aggressive throwing, or you may want another good day of stretching the arm out pretty far. This day is dictated by how you feel and what stage of the season you are in. Listen to your arm.

Sunday, Day 6 (Stretching/Rest/Optional) -- The day before any pitches start can truly be a personal preference. So, I always advise pitchers to do what’s comfortable. Some pitchers like to take the day off, some like to play light catch, and some like to stretch it out to about 75% of their max distance, but with little to no aggressive throwing down hill. It is the core principle of our program to listen to your arm, and this day is no different. Do what feels right.

Monday, Day 7, Game Day (Long Toss) -- Now you can see how your “start day” is actually your best day to Long Toss. You’ve spent the previous 6 days resting, recovering and rebuilding in the most optimal and effective way. You’ve allowed the arm to ***progressively*** build itself back into shape and positioned it for what it wants most -- a great Long Toss/conditioning session prior to getting on the mound.

**Relief Pitchers - “Opening The Door”**

Because relief pitchers don’t have a set rhythm throughout the season, it can be a little bit more difficult to figure out when to Long Toss and when to rest from outing to outing. As you will find with our approach, “listening to your arm” is always the first principle to keep in mind because there are so many variables. For instance, you may have made 40 pitches in relief the previous day, or you may have not thrown in a game situation for a week. In either case, your plan should be to go out each day to do your arm care program (surgical tubing, etc.) and stretch your arm out. This sensation of stretching your arm out is what I refer to as “opening the door”, meaning, you are allowing your arm to get the benefits of stretching, blood flow and range of motion each day, regardless of whether or not you are pitching that day. What you’ll begin to realize is the arm wants to stretch out every day (unless it needs a total rest), and that some days the arm will want to stretch out further than others. In fact, if a pitcher has gone more than 3-4 days without pitching in a game, the arm will probably want to not only “open the door” to a long distance, but it will want to come back in toward your throwing partner and “pull down” aggressively just like a normal, out of season Long Toss session . This feeling of wanting to “close the door” after a number of days off of the mound is essential in keeping the base strong throughout the season (note -- having an aggressive Long Toss session may be critical for your base even if you are going to pitch in the game later that night. Remember, the point is to “condition” first when the arm needs it. Besides, you will probably throw harder and have better recovery period even if you do get into the game on a night that you had a relatively aggressive Long Toss session).

In short, relief pitchers should come to the field each day to “open the door” or stretch out the arm. How far, how long and whether or not you “pull down” aggressively depends on how much throwing you’ve done the previous day or days. The key is to always go out with the intention of stretching your arm out because, quite simply, your arm has been built this way from the off-season and it is looking to condition, even in season.

**Summary**

Remember, the ideal way to maintenance (strengthen) an arm “in season” is to have a great base to in place from the “off season”. This off season base is the key to having great recovery period, which in turn allows the arm to recondition itself most effectively as bull-pen/mound work is integrated into the Fall/Winter months, and eventually into the Spring season. This ability to maintain good recovery period and a Long Toss program as bull-pen/game situations are integrated is the key to not only maintaining a healthy arm throughout the Fall/Winter, but actually positioning your arm to get more durable and possibly even stronger throughout the Spring (in season).

Finally, always “listen to your arm”. Only it knows from day to day what it needs and what it wants. Because you have learned to condition and maintenance it so well the reality is you will probably find yourself wanting to stretch your arm out (Long Toss) more often than you are used to -- but this is a great sign. It’s a reminder that the body responds best to activity rather than inactivity -- the body (arm) wants to regenerate, not degenerate. And when the arm gets into this “positive cycle”, the arm is in the best position possible throughout the year to stay healthy, strong and durable.

Alan Jaeger has worked with over 200 professional baseball players (including Major Leaguer All Star’s Barry Zito, Dan Haren, Andrew Bailey and Mike Lieberthal), consulted with the Texas Rangers and several Collegiate Programs (including 2004 National Champions, Cal State Fullerton). Alan founded Jaeger Sports in response to the growing need to address the two most neglected areas of baseball: The Arm and The Mind. For more information please feel free to call 310-665-0746 or visit us at www.jaegersports.com. A special thanks to Ken Kontor of Performance Conditioning Magazine ([*www.performancecondition.com*](http://www.performancecondition.com/baseballsoftball)) for his input regarding this article.