

## What Scouts Look For Evaluating Pitchers



### Evaluating Pitchers



When a scout goes to a ballpark to evaluate a pitcher, there are a number of items that are observed and graded. Velocity is only part of the evaluation; There are many pitchers in high school and college that can touch 90+ mph on the radar gun but are not really considered professional prospects. Listed below is a list of pitching criterion used by most Major League clubs

- ▶ **Fast Ball:** We start with this because it is the most obvious. Scouts want to see a pitcher" average velocity - what your fastball pitches at on a consistent basis throughout a game. (some scouts call it "the cruising speed") Your top velocity is also noted and may be used, depending on your age and mechanics, to project a better fastball grade in the future. Along with radar gun readings, a scout must look at how the baseball moves, sinks, cuts, etc. in order to complete the fastball grade. If you throw 90 - 91 mph, but it is straight as an arrow and gets hit frequently, your fastball may be given a below average grade despite it's velocity.

The following fastball velocities are Major League Baseball pitcher ratings

Very Above Average	94+ mph
Above Average	92 - 93 mph
Average	89 - 91 mph
Below Average	87 - 88 mph
Very Below Average	85 - 86 mph

(Left-handed pitchers are graded on the same scale, but fastball velocities are

usually given less weight if their breaking balls and change-ups are effective.)

- ▶ **Arm Action:** Scouts will note at what **arm angle** you throw from. Moving from highest release point to the lowest, the arm angles are: over-hand, high 3-quarter, 3-quarter, low 3-quarter, or sidearm. Next, scouts will determine how much **tension**, or effort, is in the arm action. A max-effort pitcher is tough on his arm and risks injury, as opposed to someone who is smooth and effortless. Pure **arm speed** is also noted, which usually translates to tighter rotation and better velocity with pitches. A pitcher's arm action will also determine what type of break a curve or slider will have (down break, sweeping, sharp, loose, hanging, etc).
  
- ▶ **Delivery:** Are pitching mechanics clean and smooth, or is there work to be done with the mechanics? There are a wide variety of mechanical flaws that may prohibit a pitcher from being efficient and consistent. Scouts need to note both the good and the bad, or what needs improvement.
  
- ▶ **Breaking Pitches:** This includes curves, sliders and screwballs. A major league pitcher needs at least two quality pitches to keep hitters off-balance. Scouts need to grade the effectiveness of the breaking balls on a Major League scale. Good breaking balls have velocity, they break late (close to home plate), have a tight rotation (tougher to read the spin), and hitters struggle to make solid contact with them.
  
- ▶ **Other Pitches:** This includes the split-finger, change-up, knuckle balls, etc. Again velocity, rotation, sharpness, and how hitters react to them will help determine their grade.
  
- ▶ **Aggressiveness:** Does the pitcher go after hitters with his fastball? Does he challenge hitters with his best stuff? Does he work quickly on the mound between pitches? Does he intimidate hitters with his body language and attitude?
  
- ▶ **Baseball Instincts:** Does he have a feel for pitching (knowing when to use his fastball or when to go off-speed); Is there field awareness for where base runners are and where the play needs to be made; does he back-up bases and cover first base when necessary; and does he support his teammates after an error is made?

- ▶ **Control:** Can the pitcher pitch, or does he just throw in the direction of the plate? Can he locate his fastball for a strike when behind in the count? Does he pitch ahead-in-the-count, or behind? On average, a good inning for a pitcher would be 15 pitches or less. Greg Maddux of the Braves once threw a complete, nine inning game on 78 pitches, which is fewer than 9 pitches an inning ... on average.
- ▶ **Physical Maturity:** Scouts will evaluate a pitcher's body to determine if he "feels" the pitcher can improve his velocity in the future with added strength and natural, physical maturity. Scouts will examine the height, weight, visual body fat, and athleticism to help them come to a conclusion. There are some 20 year old pitchers who have been weightlifting for 3 or 4 years and are so physically developed that it is difficult to project any velocity improvement from maturation. But on the other hand, scouts have seen high school pitchers weighing 165-175 lbs. Adding 2-5 mph on their fastball as they gain weight and strength in pro baseball. The problem is, strength and maturity does not insure added velocity, so this is purely speculative, or "playing a hunch."

Each Major League team has their own report forms for evaluations, and these items are on them. Arm action and fastball grades are perhaps the two most important evaluations. Arm action evaluations are important because they will tell a team if there is a "better than average" chance of a future injury, because of how the players arm works. Arm actions are difficult to change in pitchers, and there are risks involved in changing how the arm works - velocity may decrease, the angle of the breaking ball will probably change, and the pitching arm is susceptible to injury because the muscles are being used differently. So the arm action had better be able to work efficiently and resist injury.

The fastball evaluation is largely dependent on velocity, but movement and how hitters react to it is also very important. You can teach a fastball how to move, but velocity is God-given. A Major League pitcher had better be able to have enough velocity or movement to get the best hitters in the world out.