

### AN OLD BASEBALL PITCHER

Defines the Various Tricks Practiced in the Box.

Slow Balls the Most Difficult to Circumvent But the Pitcher Must Keep His Head.

Most spectators at a baseball game have an exaggerated idea of the curve ball in pitching. They think the man in the box can send in all kinds of twisters and thus fool the opposing batsmen. Of course, mastery of the curve ball is part of the pitcher's stock in trade, but control—emphasis the word—and knowledge of the batsmen's weaknesses are much more important, and no pitcher with curves can be successful unless he also has control. The throwing of a curve ball is partly mechanical, and to accomplish the result all pitchers use the same motion. The difference is in the degree of efficiency and the control in placing it where the curve will count the most. Left-handers usually throw broad curves, but on the other hand are more likely to have had innings.

The balls which are usually classed under the head of curves are the out-curve, the drop ball, the jump ball, and the so-called in-shoot, which is really misnamed, as the in-shoot is a ball thrown naturally which breaks in. I grasp the ball the same way to throw these different varieties, a firm hold on the sphere with my thumb, index and middle finger. The out-curve is then allowed to slide over the top of the index finger with a sweeping sid-arm delivery. The curve is rather gradual, but is supposed to take the greatest degree of variation from its course as it reaches the plate. The drop ball leaves the hand directly over the top of the index finger with a full arm motion and a quick snap of the wrist as it leaves the hand. It is probably the hardest ball in the category on a pitcher's arm. It is frequently combined with the out-curve, producing the out-drop.

The jump ball is not properly a curve. The first element necessary is extreme speed. It is thrown with a full over-arm motion and is allowed to slide out from under the ends of the index and middle fingers. As it reaches the plate it will jump an inch or two

and perhaps more. Nichols, of Boston, when he was in his prime had the most effective jump ball within my memory. Some pitchers throw a ball with a gradual rise, but the batsman can gauge this better.

The ball which breaks in or the misnamed in-shoot is the ordinary straight ball thrown with speed. Perhaps the reader has noticed that the balls as thrown from the catcher to the second baseman curve inward. This is the same principle as in pitching except that the ball has greater speed and the break is more marked. To be effective the ball is supposed to go from under the index and middle finger slightly to the right from a right-handed pitcher. This, too, is delivered with a side-arm motion, differing from the out curve in that it goes from under the fingers instead of over the top. That about constitutes the pitcher's list of curves.

Then there is the important slow ball as accomplished by a change of pace. It may be combined with a curve or thrown straight, and is one of the most effective balls used in the game. All the great pitchers, like Griffith, McGinnity, Nichols, Cy Young—in fact, all the men who use their heads to win games—depend on the slow ball frequently. I think Griffith has the greatest control of the slow ball of any pitcher now in active service.

This same slow ball has pulled me out of more trouble than any other, a swift out drop ranking second. It takes nerve in a pitcher to throw a slow ball when he is "in a hole" or men are on bases, and yet that is just the time when it is most effective. You see many pitchers who are right until men get on bases, have not time for their long, sweeping delivery, and they fall off in effectiveness. When men are on bases is the time to try everything you know. The most trying time is with men on second and third and two out. Then a hit usually means two runs.

I figure in such a case that it's a cinch the batter cannot hit a slow ball any farther than a speedy one, and he's more likely to pop up on a fly or hit to the infield. I used to have a sign at the west side to let the infielders know when I was going to pitch a slow ball. Often with two balls and no strikes on the batter you can curve a slow ball over the plate without his striking at it, for he naturally expects a straight one; but, as I say, it takes nerve and excellent control.

To know what curves to try is shown the pitcher by what kind of a batter he is facing. If a right-handed batter has a tendency to back away from the plate an out-curve is likely to fool him. If he plays close to the plate

an in-jump ball is more likely to be effective.

If you see the batsman is trying to bunt, a high jump ball is good, because he is more likely to knock a fly or a foul fly and give chances for put-out. Similarly a slow ball is preferable, because it gives the infielders and pitcher a chance to start in to field it in case the bunt is short. The batsman who swings usually has more difficulty in hitting a high ball, while he can hit a low ball harder and better.

With a swinger I pay attention to the place I offer the ball. But with the scientific hitters, most of whom are choppers, and the men who follow the ball with their bat and meet it as it comes in—men like Keeler, McGray, Fred Clarke, Jones, and others of that school—I always try to put the first ball over the plate, no matter what the curve and what the height. If they hit it, trust to your fielders, but never let them get you "in a hole." Try to get them "in the hole." If they get one or more balls called on you they are clever enough to foul off enough more to get their base on balls, or, knowing that you must put the ball over the base, they have the advantage in their attempts to hit it out. They are just as wise as you are and are generally good waiters. But even with these men the high ball close in toward them is difficult.

Perhaps one of the greatest things in the art of pitching is to keep the batter in "the hole." When you get one or more strikes and no balls—it is the batter who is doing the guessing. When it is one or more balls and no strikes, then the pitcher is on the anxious seat. This advantage is greater than many suppose. Again, it is a case of my oft-repeated plea for control—"Jimmy" Callahan.

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