

Parentally Speaking February 2008

With the baseball season rapidly approaching, are there any pointers you can give coaches or parents who are working with young pitchers?

Our pitching guru, John Habyan, has developed a way to communicate the different mechanics of pitching to kids to make it easy for them to understand what he is saying. He breaks pitching down into five parts that he calls the five links of the chain. The five links are covered in our various instructional books and DVDs, which can be found at www.ripkenbaseball.com. Other articles about pitching mechanics can be found in our Parent and Coach Clipboard archives.

You need to develop an understanding of what the basic mechanics are and then come up with a way to communicate them in a simpler way to the kids. When I first teach kids about the fundamentals of pitching, I look at the five links of the chain as simply as this: Stand on the rubber at a 45-degree angle; take a small step back so that you don't lose your balance; put your foot in front of the rubber and turn it; lift your front leg up; point your front shoulder toward the target; step toward the target; and release the ball. That sounds overly simple, but when you break down the five links of the chain and look in books that discuss the mechanics of pitching in a more advanced way, all you are trying to do is communicate that same sort of method in a way that kids can understand.

Kids don't always grasp the more advanced terminology such as the balance position and "loading up," so you have to simplify the message. You want to teach your kids to use their bodies to throw the ball to home plate. That's what pitching mechanics are all about: Using the body to help the arm throw the ball with more velocity and accuracy. So educate yourself about the mechanics and test yourself to try to find a way to communicate that to a younger group. That's the fun part of coaching.

By Cal Ripken, Jr.