

Parentally Speaking - October 2007

What are your thoughts about getting individual pitching lessons for a youth player who is 12-years-old or younger?

That's kind of a tough question. Baseball instruction is very subjective. There are many different ways to perform many of the fundamental skills of baseball, and even more theories about the proper way to teach those skills. How much your 12-year-old is going to get out of individual pitching lessons depends on the instructor and the child's ability to pay attention and absorb what is being taught. Some kids will be mature enough to handle it and others may not. With an instructor who is willing to take the time to actually observe your son and see what kind of results he is getting before trying to instruct, the lessons can be extremely valuable. Beware of an instructor who starts teaching your child how to pitch before really taking the time to observe him. There is no one set formula that works for every player, and that goes for all aspects of the game.

Pitching lessons can be expensive. I don't really see a need to go to a personal instructor more than once per week during the off-season. At that session the instructor can analyze your son's throwing mechanics and offer suggestions. Make sure that your son asks what drills he can do in between sessions to work on the areas in which he needs to improve. Once the season starts your son should be throwing on a regular basis during practices and games, so it might be too much to ask of him physically to fit in a throwing lesson. Throwing lessons during the season, if not monitored closely, can mess up the throwing program that a coach has designed for his pitching staff, and it can be confusing for a player to receive instruction from two different adults at the same time.

The number one consideration when choosing a pitching instructor is whether the instructor has your child's best interests at heart. Sign up for one lesson and monitor the instruction. Make sure the instructor watches your child throw quite a few pitches before offering suggestions. Not all methods of instruction work with all kids, and you don't want someone forcing his philosophies on your son if they are not appropriate for him. This can lead to frustration, disappointment and possibly even injury. Good luck!

By Cal and Bill Ripken