How to Sprint Your Way to More Pitching Speed

By: Cindy Bristow

If your pitcher wants to throw faster then make sure she understands how much sprinting during her pitch is going to help.

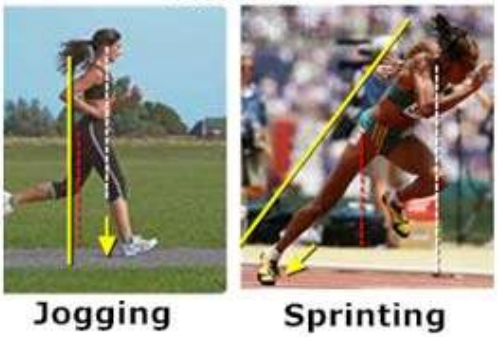
I know, it sounds crazy to think about sprinting while pitching but trust me, understanding both sprinting and jogging is important if pitchers want to throw faster.

While this might seem like a random topic when it comes to pitching, by the time I finish explaining it I think you'll be convinced just how important these running styles are to helping increase a pitcher's speed.

I discover different things through the course of a year working with pitchers and hitters, and the most recent thing I've come across in regards to pitching speed is how pitcher's use their body and their legs by maintaining either a jogging or sprinting posture.

Let's start by looking at the following side-by-side pictures of a Jogger and a Sprinter. Not only is there an obvious speed difference in these two different types of runners, but when you look at the position of these two athletes some other very obvious differences stand out as well.

Picture 1

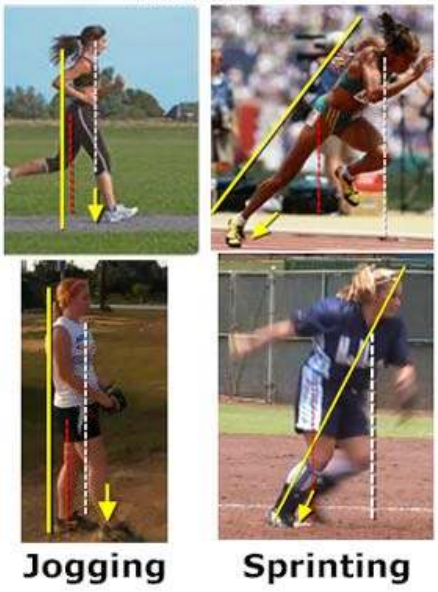


I've marked up both photos using four different colored lines; the solid yellow line represents the posture angle, the yellow arrow represents the pressure point on the foot, the dotted white line represents the position of the chest and the dotted red line represents the runner's butt or rear end location. While the main difference between jogging and sprinting is speed, how we use our different body parts plays a huge role in creating that speed. Here's a quick summary of how using our body in two totally different ways results in two totally different speeds:

	Jogging	Sprinting
Posture Angle (yellow line)	Upright	Angled Forward
Chest Position (dotted white line)	Directly over feet	Forward of Both Feet
Foot Pressure Point (yellow arrow)	Heels	Front Part of Foot
Rear End (dotted red line)	Over Feet	In Front of Feet

Now, let's see how these two different running styles look when we apply them to the skill of pitching. Looking at the two different pitchers in two different phases of the motion in Picture 2, we can see the same characteristics that are present in jogging and sprinting. In fact, it's pretty amazing how similar the pitchers are to their running counterparts.

Picture 2



While the runners achieve these body-use differences due to two completely different running goals – the sprinter going for pure speed over a relatively short distance while the jogger is going for distance by minimizing speed – pitchers must accomplish both of these within the same motion. That gets tricky.

Pitchers start with a more upright jogging posture, switch to a forward sprinting posture when they start driving off the rubber, and end up in a balanced and upright jogging posture. While this sounds like a simple thing to do, it's anything but. Particularly when the pitcher is thinking that frantic arm speed at the beginning of her motion is what creates her speed.

Basically, you throw a ball faster, whether overhand or underhand, by moving your hand faster when you let go of the ball. Your feet play an important role by moving forward at the beginning of your throw. The main thing your feet need to do is end up underneath you when you finish so you don't fall down – either forward or backwards. As a result, the slower you throw the shorter your step and the faster you throw, the longer you step. This holds true whether you're throwing overhand or underhand.

Now think running instead of throwing or pitching. When you run slow which we call jogging, you take little steps. Since you aren't trying to powerfully propel yourself forward you don't have to push off very hard with your feet – thus the little steps. But when you start sprinting, your goal is to powerfully push yourself forward. By driving your feet into the ground harder you're able to push and drive yourself forward faster – resulting in more speed. The faster you start running the more ground you cover and the bigger steps you'll take – just like pitching and throwing.

So back to our question, what does sprinting have to do with pitching, and more specifically with pitching faster? The answer lies in our feet and legs. By angling our body and driving forward off the rubber with the front part of our pivot foot (or push foot) – just as we do when we sprint – we're able to create a tremendous amount of energy that we can transfer down our arm and onto the ball, resulting in more speed.

But while all of this seems natural when we start running, it's not something we're used to doing or thinking about when we pitch. Pitchers are so worried about pitching fast that they tend to overuse their arms at the beginning of their motion and only use their stride leg to reach out – instead of allowing their upper body to lean them forward slightly and their pivot foot/leg to drive or explode them forward into their pitch. Pitching speed starts at the beginning of the motion by the pitcher shifting from an upright- jogging posture, to a more forward– sprinting posture.

Where so many pitchers lose their speed is by keeping an upright jogging posture throughout their pitching motion. Just like jogging, staying upright the entire time results in a lack of speed due to a limited amount of lower body involvement. In Picture 3 you can see how both pitchers are staying more upright with their chests, keeping their rear ends more over their feet (instead of in front as when sprinting), and their body angle is more upright. Since both of these pitchers aren't really using their lower bodies much during the beginning of their motions they're forced to overuse their arms, which is why they both have such high backswings.

Fortunately there is a way to help our pitchers understand how to properly use their body lean and legs more powerfully to create more pitching speed. The following sprinting drill will really help your pitchers feel what they naturally do when they're trying to be faster and more powerful:

Have a partner (either a coach or player) stand in front of the pitcher facing her.

- While the pitcher stands up straight her partner places her hands on the pitchers shoulders providing some resistance but not too much.
- Without her glove or the ball the pitcher begins sprinting into her partner using the hands on her shoulders as resistance as shown in Picture 4. She needs to actually try to sprint or else this whole exercise won't actually make sense.
- Have the pitcher sprint about 10 feet and then stop and turn around and do the same thing going back. But on the way back ask the pitcher to focus on the following things:
    - How are you changing your body position in order to sprint?
    - How are you changing the pressure points on your feet when you sprint?
    - What body part do you feel changes the most when you sprint?

Picture 4

When your pitcher finishes doing this drill have her stand on the pitching rubber with her glove on and a ball and her partner in front of her with her hands on her shoulders. Then ask your pitcher to slowly go through her pitching regular motion – not changing it all – and pretty quickly she'll notice whether or not she keeps her jogging posture throughout the pitch.

Most pitchers do keep a jogging posture when they begin to leave the rubber moving forward, which really hurts their speed. To help your pitcher improve her speed by using her posture and legs more like a sprinter at the beginning of her motion have her avoid the following problem areas:

Worrying too much about getting “open” so the pitcher turns her push foot (or pivot foot) sideways while it’s on the rubber thus severely limiting her ability to drive forward as you can see in Picture 5.

Sticking her rear end too far behind her back foot makes it hard for her to get into the sprinting position as she leaves the rubber (Picture 6). Remember the pitcher’s rear end will be in front of her feet when she’s exploding – or sprinting – forward to start her pitch.

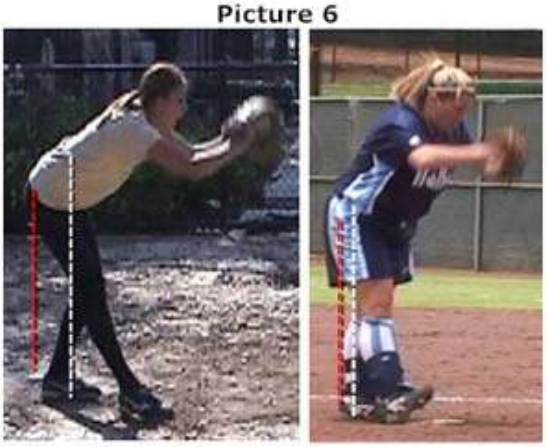
picture 5

Correct Incorrect

Pivot Foot Angle

When you start working with your pitchers on incorporating this more explosive start to their pitching motion have them be more patient and allow their upper body to lean forward enough to change the pressure to the front part of their feet. This means they won’t be as frantic with their arms at the start in order to allow time to build speed for the fast finish with their hand.

Picture 6



INCORRECT
Rear End Behind
Back Foot

CORRECT
Rear End Over
Back Foot