

In-Season Baseball Strength and Conditioning: Part 1

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Over the past few weeks, I've received literally dozens of emails, Facebook posts/messages, Tweets, and phone calls on the topic of in-season strength and conditioning for baseball players. While it was a daunting task to try to organize my thoughts on the subject, I was glad to do so, as all these inquiries mean that people are finally starting to "get it:" in-season strength and conditioning is extremely important!



To that end, over the next four days, I'll outline my general strength and conditioning approach to dealing with position players and pitchers during the season. Every athlete and every schedule is different, so it might take some tinkering to make this work for you.

First, though, I want to throw out a few quick FYIs, as some of what I "omit" will actually surprise you. In terms of my in-season strength and conditioning beliefs, I'm different from many people in that:

1. I'm not big on lots of band stuff at the field – I discussed my thoughts on rotator cuff exercises frequency and overall scheduling in [Clearing Up the Rotator Cuff Controversy](#). In a nutshell, I tend to stick with 2x/week "conventional" rotator cuff exercises (mostly external rotations) and 2x/week rhythmic stabilization drills. In conjunction with the rest of our overall program – which includes compound upper body strength exercises (horizontal and vertical pulling exercises, in particular), deceleration catches, core stability drills, lower half strength exercises, soft tissue work, mobility work, etc – we cover all our needs for keeping an arm healthy. Why on earth would I *add* more rotator cuff exercises to my program when I'm already increasing throwing volume, intensity, and frequency? The cuff is already getting abused – so there is no need to crush it any more with daily tubing circuits unless they are incredibly light and just aimed at improving blood flow.

I firmly believe that many pitchers (and position players alike) overuse their arms during a season simply because they add, add, and add more to their program without fully understanding the outrageous eccentric stress that's placed on the arm during throwing. And, for those who insist that doing lots of in-season rotator cuff exercises has kept them healthy, I'd argue that this is probably the case because they weren't that prepared at the end of the off-season.

2. I don't do much medicine ball work in-season – If you haven't already watched my video, the Absolute Strength to Absolute Speed Continuum, watch it now:

During the season, players are about as far to the “absolute speed” end of the continuum as they can be, as they're hitting, throwing, and sprinting. With the overwhelming amount of “accidental” power training taking place, I feel that it's best to stay at the other end of the spectrum. You can spend more time in the middle during the off-season.

That said, we do utilize a small amount of medicine ball work during the season. Usually, it's predominantly done in the opposite direction of a player's swing/throw; in other words, a right-handed hitter would perform left handed medicine ball throws. We might also do a small amount of overhead work just to maintain power within this range of motion (as well as the thoracic spine and shoulder flexion mobility that goes with it).

3. I don't do any distance running for my guys – There's no need to reinvent the wheel here, as I already barbequed this sacred cow in [A New Model for Training Between Starts](#). So, this time around, I'll just be abrasive: coaches who have their baseball players run long distances are either lazy or flat-out stupid (or both).

4. I am a big believer in “less is more” and “quality over quantity” for in-season training – Rarely will an in-season strength training program session last more than 35-40 minutes. It's usually roughly 10-14 sets worth of work. A guy might be in the gym longer than that for foam rolling and targeted mobility drills, though.

5. Volume and intensity should be lower in week 1, but higher for the remaining weeks with in-season strength training programs – I usually keep the volume and intensity lower in the first week of the program to minimize initial soreness. Then, once the familiarity with the exercises is in place, we can load up a bit more in weeks 2-4 (or 2-6, if you opt to extend the program a bit longer).

6. Strength exercise selection changes a bit in-season, but the basics still apply – We're still using a lot of compound, multi-joint strength exercises, but there are a few modifications.

In-season, I tend to utilize more horizontal pulling (rows) than vertical pulling (pull-ups/chin-ups). We use a lot of vertical pulling throughout the year, but never really go above once a week during the season, as some guys can get a bit cranky in the elbow with the

amount of weight it takes to make them challenging. If you want some of the benefits without the elbow issues, you can always plug in the crossover reverse fly.

This doesn't mean, however, that I think chin-ups and pull-ups are bad for pitchers. Far too many coaches have (unsuccessfully) tried to beat that dead horse; let it go, fellas.

Especially with pitchers, I utilize more push-up variations than dumbbell bench pressing during the season. If we wind up doing three days of horizontal pushing, two will be push-ups and one will be dumbbell pressing. If we do two days, it's one of each. If it's only one, it's a push-up. We have several different variations (as I wrote [here](#) and [here](#)) from which to choose, so athletes are actually far less likely to get bored with them than with dumbbell pressing, anyway.

7. Don't overlook maintaining mobility – It's called "Strength and Conditioning," but the truth is that we could probably scrap the conditioning part with respect to baseball and replace it with "mobility." Guys don't just get hurt in-season because they lose strength; they get hurt because they lose mobility. All the eccentric stress leads to significant losses in mobility, as does all the standing around leads athletes to miss out on basic functional movement patterns like squatting and lunging. Don't just be a "weights coach;" there are other things to address! This is probably the primary reason why [Assess and Correct](#) has gotten such great reviews among baseball coaches; it's one piece that they were missing!