

PRESENTED TO THE PITCH COUNT AND REVIEW PANEL - OCTOBER 2023

Introduction

This report is a culmination of findings from a recent review on pitching and arm health in the context of youth players in Great British teams, university baseball, coaching practices, and the availability of pitching and arm health education in the region. The review has raised several concerns that need immediate attention to ensure the safety and development of young athletes in the sport of baseball.

Concerns Raised

- 1) **Overuse of Youth Players in Amateur League Games:** The primary concern identified during the review is the overuse of youth players in Great British teams during amateur league games. Many young players are subjected to high pitch counts and insufficient recovery time, putting them at risk of arm injuries and affecting their long-term development.
- 2) **Similar Issues in University Baseball:** The same issues concerning the overuse of young players have been observed in university baseball, further emphasizing the need for intervention in this area.
- 3) **Lack of Pitch Count Tracking for Youth & University levels:** Currently, there is no system in place to track pitch count data for youth and university levels. This absence of data collection impedes the assessment of player workload and injury risk.
- 4) **Lack of Coach Alignment and Awareness:** It was noted that some coaches may not be fully aligned with or aware of the principles of Pitch Smart and arm health concerns. This lack of awareness can lead to mismanagement of young pitchers and increased injury risks.
- 5) **Overreliance on a Single Pitcher:** In certain cases, teams were found to rely heavily on one pitcher throughout the season, creating a 'boom or bust' culture. This practice increases the risk of pitcher burnout and injury.
- 6) **Lack of Education in Coaching Pitching:** A general concern exists about the lack of education and training for coaches in the area of pitching. The absence of proper guidance can contribute to overuse and injury risks for young athletes.
- 7) **No Current Pitching or Arm Health Education via BSUK:** It has been noted that there is no current pitching or arm health education available for the community, limiting the resources accessible to coaches and players for learning about safe and effective pitching techniques.
- 8) **Concerns About the Number of Injuries in Young Adults:** The review also highlighted concerns about the high number of arm injuries among young adults in the sport.
- 9) **Concerns about Insurance Coverage and Long-Term Injuries:** In light of retrospective insurance claims against National Governing Bodies (NGBs) for long-term injuries sustained in sports, there is concern about whether our current coverage is adequate to address any similar claims.

Recommended Actions

To address the concerns raised during the pitching and arm health review, the following recommended actions are proposed:

- 1) **Mandated Education for Coaches:** Establish a mandated education program for coaches who interact with anyone under the age of 23. This program should include components related to safe pitching practices and arm health.

- 2) Implementation of Pitch Count Tracking: Recommend utilising the World Baseball Softball Confederation (WBSC) scoring platform for youth and university baseball games. This would provide valuable data for workload assessment and injury prevention.
- 3) Use of USA Baseball A & B Online Certificates and Pitch Smart: Recommend that coaches complete the USA Baseball A & B online certificates, which include valuable information on player safety and development. Encourage the implementation of Pitch Smart guidelines in youth and U23 within the amateur leagues.*
- 4) Collaboration with University Baseball: As university baseball is under the wing of BSUK, work closely with the British Baseball Federation (BBF) to establish a similar course of action for university baseball, including coach and Pitch Smart education.
- 5) Review of Double Header Pitching Rules: Conduct a thorough review of pitching rules for double headers in the BBF handbook to ensure the protection of young arms while maintaining the integrity of the game. Review to also include pitchers playing catcher.
- 6) Establish an Injury Monitoring Procedure: Explore the feasibility of creating an injury monitoring procedure to monitor arm injuries among young players. This procedure should facilitate the collection of data and enable the development of injury prevention strategies.
- 7) Creation of Safety Guidelines for Adult Leagues: Develop comprehensive safety guidelines regarding arm care and pitching for adult leagues. These guidelines should be added to the handbook to mitigate the risk of future claims and to ensure players' well-being and the promotion of safe practices in adult-level baseball.

Conclusion

The concerns highlighted during the pitching and arm health review underscore the importance of taking immediate action to safeguard the well-being and development of young baseball players in Great Britain. By implementing the recommended actions outlined in this report, we can work towards a safer, more sustainable, and well-informed approach to pitching in the sport. It is imperative that all stakeholders in the baseball community, including governing bodies, coaches, and parents, collaborate to address these concerns and promote the long-term health and success of young athletes.

Review Panel

Commissioner Michael Hayward – BBF Coaches

Drew Spencer – GB Senior Team Head Coach & LPM

Chris Ward – GB U12 Head Coach

Zach Graefser – GB Pitching Coach

Colin Barratt – BSUK Performance Pathway & Academy

Manager Lee Manning – BBF Youth and Development

Commissioner

Will Lintern – Smarter Performance and GB

* We need to acknowledge that Pitch Smart was designed with the USA system in mind and may not align with the way that we play the sport. Also note that there is no advice around athletes who take breaks. Recommend reviewing these points at the end of Season 2024.