

# The Five Tools of a Baseball Player

*This document will help everybody further understand the importance of the five tools (and the importance of projectability) that professional, college and other organizations use when scouting a player. We will use the Major League Baseball's scout rating system of 2 to 8 or 20 to 80 (same thing). 2 or 20 (not a prospect at the current time) will be the low end of the scale and 8 or 80 will be the high end (definite major league prospect and probably an all star at every level played at).*

Before we address the five tools we will discuss some key components that have nothing to do with physical ability. Those components are: projectability, confidence and physical makeup.

## CONFIDENCE

You will never see a professional prospect play the game scared. You cannot play this game with fear. If a scout sees you play with fear then your project-ability becomes very low and might even get you crossed off the list. You must have the utmost confidence in your physical abilities and love to compete. You don't have to be a cocky and arrogant to the public but you must feel extremely confident in yourself and teammates.

## PHYSICAL MAKEUP

The player's physical makeup is absolutely vital to his success in a high level college or professional atmosphere. It's also probably the single most important aspect (along with confidence) of becoming a major league baseball player or having a solid college career. How are you going to handle going into a hostile environment or being away from friends or family for weeks at a time? More often than not the player with the bigger heart, passion and desire to get better will develop (project) into a player with better physical tools. If you play at a high level chances are you won't play every game of every inning, how are going to handle that? Up until that point you have been the all star and played in almost every game. How are you going to handle having to sit a couple games because you are 0 for your last 10? If a player can overcome the odds of failing more often than succeeding then they have a better chance of playing in the big leagues sooner and longer. The mental approach to this game determines professionals from amateurs as well as a AA player from a major league player.

Most high school players have never been away from home for a long period of time and aren't prepared mentally to handle the long bus rides, bad flights, and poor playing conditions. For many college players, minor league baseball is a step down from playing on good fields and a large attendance.

## PROJECTABILITY

When scouting a prospect, projectability is probably the most important part of scouting and determining a major league prospect or a college prospect. Because of this a lot of times scouts will use two numbers such as 4/6 or 3/5; the first number representing talent level now and the second number is projected future professional baseball rating (or a few years ahead). For example, if a player is very polished at the five tools at the young age of 16 or 17 then a scout will soon pay close attention to his body type (although usually that is the first thing noticed when scouting a player) and see if there is 1) room to grow and/or 2) room to get stronger. A 5'10" infielder weighing 160-170 lbs senior year will show more room to get stronger than a corner infielder or catcher who is 6'2" 220 lbs AND already has his "man muscle". Thus, the infielder will show more projectability at the next level; doesn't mean he will be better it just means he will get stronger with size and coaching. Obviously, every player is different depending upon genetics (and age plays a part in projection) but, scouts realize that you really don't grow

into your body until your early 20's and also the weight programs and diet plans in college and minor leagues will benefit a players projectability.

When only one number is given is usually represents the scout's projection opinion of that player's professional baseball potential. Remember every scout's opinion will be different depending upon what they are looking for and what they like. Scout's are looking at the big picture; they make the most money from players who make it to the big league level, not the minor leagues. Projectability is by far the hardest part of scouting. If a player continues to improve on areas needed to improve on from year to year then it make their projectability that much better because it shows the willingness to put in the work off the field.

### **ARM STRENGTH**

God given but can improve with long toss and using your body properly when throwing. Not many amateur players are 8's on the scale for arm strength. This is a tool that is often overlooked and yet Perfect Game post velocity times for all positions (C, P, OF and IF). Catchers have velocity time as well as a pop to pop time which has more to do with the ability to catch and transfer the baseball more so than arm strength; catcher with strong arms can get away with poor catch and throw abilities. If you want to play in the outfield or left side of the infield you MUST have arm strength. *Need to have arm strength if playing in CF, RF, 3B, SS or C and obviously pitchers need arm strength as well.*

Scouts arrive at games early to evaluate arm strength during pre game. They are able to see several throws and look at arm slots and footwork and then the ability to play long toss. If lucky enough to get a pre game infield outfield session, then a player must take full advantage and show off your arm strength.

Outfielders need to be able to throw the ball over the top with good carry on the baseball and be accurate; if you don't hit your cut you better be on line to your target.

Which side of the infield you will play on will be determined by how well you can field and throw a ball with velocity from the backhand side. If you want to play shortstop you must be able to make a play in the deep '6 hole' and throw the ball on a line flat footed or with a 'Jeter Jumpman throw'. Again, no matter where you are throwing the baseball from you must be accurate whether in the dirt or on a line.

Catchers must show a good transfer with a short arm circle and be accurate. Footwork comes into play here to make your velocity and pop time better but you must be under a 1.8 if you want to catch at the professional level. In a game situation your pop time doesn't matter if you are throwing runners out OR if your pitcher takes too long to deliver the ball to home plate. A strong arm from a catcher can keep teams from taking advantage with runners on base eliminating hit and run and straight steal opportunities.

### **RUNNING SPEED**

You can't teach speed and it doesn't go into slumps. Every team wants fast runners and players get a college education and make money off being able to run fast between the bases. A fast outfielder can stop fly balls and ground balls from getting into the gap and steal bases when he gets on first putting more pressure on the defense to not make mistakes.

Players running speed is usually timed two ways; a 60 yd dash and home to first base. A 60 yd dash is somewhat equivalent to a first to third time and a good home to first time is under 4.1 from the right side and under 4.0 from the left side. Most fast players in the minor leagues will be well under 4.0 seconds from either side of the box. Big

league players with long contracts don't need to run hard so, please don't base your times off them. Go to a Tacoma Rainiers game and base them off those times.

### **60 YD DASH TIMES**

**80: 6.4 or under**  
**70: 6.5-6.6**  
**60: 6.7-6.8**  
**50: 6.9-7.0**  
**40: 7.1-7.2**  
**30: 7.3-7.4**  
**20: 7.5 seconds or over**

### **HOME TO FIRST TIMES**

**80: 4.0 or under (subtract .1 seconds for left side)**  
**70: 4.1**  
**60: 4.2**  
**50: 4.3**  
**40: 4.4**  
**30: 4.5**  
**20: 4.6**

If you don't run a 60 yd dash under 7.0 seconds you better be able to something else VERY well. Certain positions require faster times obviously and are ranked first among the five tools before others but we will go into that later.

### **DEFENSE/FIELDING ABILITY**

You can always improve defense with repetition and coaching thus this tool has the greatest chance of improving over time. Players can switch positions at the big league level at any point in their career. As long as you are not a liability at a position you will find yourself playing there. That is why we believe it is good to learn to play multiple positions at a young age. A lot of the better players and players that play at the highest level can play all positions and understand the game better because of it. However, if you want to play at the highest level you must excel at at least one defensive position.

*What do scouts look for in defensive players?*

Quick feet – the ability to move your feet quickly and take good routes to the baseball. Lateral movement is huge for middle infielders while quick reactions are a must for a corner guy or outfielder.

Range Factor – how much ground does the player cover and how many balls can they get too compared to the average player; can they make the routine plays (more than 95% of plays are routine).

Soft hands – the ability to catch the ball and transfer it smoothly from the glove the throwing hand. Middle infielders and catchers should have the softest hands on the field.

Quick hands – the ability to catch bad hops. Although most fields are turf now a days you will still get the occasional bad hop and if you play in warmer climate you will have less turf fields. Corner infielders must have quick hands as well as a catcher.

### **HITTING FOR CONTACT OR AVERAGE**

This is a difficult tool to rate because of the poor amateur pitching in high school and summer ball. Scouts have to rate your hitting ability and project it against major league pitching. Also, players learning how to hit with wood can affect the projectability of this tool. The more you train with wood the better hitter you will become and easier transition it will be for you to swing wood on a regular basis. Taking a good approach (not swinging at pitches out of the strike zone, focusing on pitches you hit well, and swinging and connecting with fastballs) at the plate can help raise both your current and projectability rating.

Hitters should possess good bat speed and have a short path to the baseball and square it up more often than not. You must be able to square the ball up to all fields and hit breaking balls. The ability to adjust to pitches mid swing is a must to play at the next level; this is why the sooner you understand the type of hitter you are and what you are capable of doing with certain pitches is a must to figure out. How do you figure it out? HIT. EVERY DAY YOU NEED TO HIT.

### **HITTING FOR POWER**

Learning how to hit for power is the last thing you learn to do as a hitter and is ultimately the hardest tool to project at the big league level. You must have tremendous bat speed and show the capability to hit the ball over 400 feet. The more you swing with wood the better you will be at driving the baseball ; it's a slightly different swing than an aluminum bat swing in a sense that an aluminum bat can create A LOT of false positives. Bat lag in a short period of time is a must if you want to hit for power. You must figure out how to maximize your bat lag without jeopardizing being short to the baseball.

### **WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN PITCHERS**

The first and obvious thing is arm strength and/or velocity. For projecting purposes' it's more about arm action/looseness, which almost has to do more with body type. One game and sometimes even one inning under a radar gun will determine if the pitcher has the arm strength to be a major league prospect. While each radar gun has it's pros and cons (fast gun or slow gun) most of them are within 2-4 mph of being accurate. You will often hear people say "he throws 86-88 topping out at 90" or something like that.

The average major league fastball is 88-89 mph and scouts will RARELY ever sign a pitcher who does not throw at least 85 mph consistently. Unless, you are above 92 on the radar gun your fastball should show good sink, rise, slide or tail.

Secondly, feel for a breaking ball (curveball or slider doesn't matter; arm slot and grip will determine off speed pitches). Big league pitchers must be able to throw a breaking ball for a strike (curveball, slider, splitter, cutter, screwball, etc). Whatever the secondary pitch is it must come from the same arm slot or within a few inches. The best pitchers in baseball create late movement by throwing all pitches with a fastball mentality; if you slow your arm up you will cause injury and tip your pitches.

Mechanics, a pitcher must show good mechanics and be as smooth as possible almost effortless. Any poor mechanical problems can lead to arm problems and control issues. Remember sometimes less is more – limit your glove movement until your hand break. A good pitcher must show the ability to repeat good mechanics and throw 70% strikes.

#### ***Rating Scale for Pitchers Velocity***

**80: 97mph plus**

**70: 93-96**

**60: 90-92**

**50: 87-89**

**40: 85-86**

**30: 83-84**

**20: 80-82**

Poise or composure in pressure situations or when things just aren't going your way. The ability to hold your composure on the mound is key to a pitcher's success. It's the loneliest place on a baseball field and you must know how to handle the spot light and stay calm and collected, make adjustments when needed and have a plan for every hitter/pitch.

### **Where do the 5 tools rate amongst different positions?**

Again, every scout is different and your ratings vary from scout to scout. For most ball clubs the order of importance for each position will be this:

#### **Catchers**

Defense, Arm, Contact, Power, Speed. Most catchers don't need to hit and it's a bonus if they do. However, if you can hit and throw people out then you will play on any team.

#### **Middle Infielders**

Defense, Arm, Contact, Speed, Power. You must be able to play defense and control the middle of the field. Offensively you must be able to reach base consistently.

#### **Corner Infielders**

Arm, Power, Defense, Contact, Speed. You must have a strong arm to play 3B and a lot of teams will hide their big hitters or RBI guys at 1B or 3B.

#### **Corner Outfield**

Speed, Defense, Arm, Contact, Power. You must be able to catch a fly ball and be close to throwing out a tagging base runner. Power hitters and strong arms will hide in these positions.

#### **Centerfield**

Speed, Arm, Defense, Contact, Power. You must be able to track ball that is hit in the gap and be able to get the ball in quickly to the infield. Speed is a must at this position and separate a LF from a CF in most cases. A good CF will run a 60 under 6.6.

#### **Pitchers**

Velocity, Body, Stuff, Poise, Control. You must be able to throw three pitches for strikes and repeat solid mechanics while maintaining your composure. Your body must be able to withstand the innings pitched.

#### **Hitters**

Smooth bat path through the hitting zone, and gap to gap power and knowledge of the strike zone. The more patient a hitter is, the more dangerous he becomes. The harder the pitcher is throwing (they throw harder at each level) the more mechanically correct/sound a hitter must be. Hitters must be able to hit an inside pitch hard and keep it fair while doing so. You must be able to hit a breaking pitch IF you can hit the fastball consistently. Once a pitcher knows you can't hit a certain pitch, odds are you won't see anything else until you can prove you can hit it.

**NOTICE THAT NOTHING ABOVE SAID TO HAVE FUN. THAT PART IS ON YOU. IF YOU CAN'T HAVE FUN PLAYING THIS GAME THEN YOU SHOULDN'T PLAY IT. THE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THIS GAME AND IN OUR ORGANIZATION LOVE IT AND HAVE A GREAT PASSION FOR IT. IF YOU AREN'T HAVING FUN THEN CHECK YOUR ATTITUDE OR FIND ANOTHER PROGRAM.**

**Ten things to do every day if you want to be considered a MLB prospect:**

- 1. Tuck in your shirt**
- 2. Take care of your body**
- 3. Agree to be coachable**
- 4. Maintain a solid work ethic, daily plan/approach**
- 5. Never argue with an umpire or coach**
- 6. Maintain the grades that keep you eligible**
- 7. Love and respect the game**
- 8. Control your body language; it screams, never whispers**
- 9. Never walk on a baseball field**
- 10. Hustle. It doesn't take any talent to hustle.**

**Five things to keep in mind if you want to be considered a MLB prospect:**

- 1. Someone else is always working harder to get better**
- 2. There is a reason that the word student comes first in student-athlete**
- 3. Good pitching beats good hitting on any day**
- 4. Competitive strong is usually better than technique strong in a live environment**
- 5. You are the best player on the field every time**