

## Review of 'The Arm' - Part 1

September 8, 2016

["The Arm" by Jeff Passan](#) has become one of the most popular baseball books in recent memory, so I felt the need to read and subsequently review it for my pitching students and parents.

Today's newsletter will cover the first 2 chapters.

Chapter 1 ("Dead Man's Tendon") follows [Todd Coffey](#), a major pitcher about to undergo his 2nd Tommy John surgery at the age of 31, the first which occurred when he was 19.

Chapter 1 gives a great window into the TJS procedure (Coffey's took 4 hours) that "has saved nearly 1,000 professional players' careers" in the 40 years since 1974 when Dr. Frank Jobe performed the first surgery and initially predicted a 1% chance of success.

An extremely important quote from [Stan Conte, the Dodgers trainer at the time](#), puts into perspective how difficult coming back from TJS really is:

*"A lot of people talk about Tommy John, how you're back in twelve months. It's not that easy. There are complications. There are issues. There are a ton of decisions to be made in the OR that can change things. It's like we're walking up to the tee right now and the hole is five hundred yard away. This is our tee shot. And I hope nobody shanks it."*

TJS currently has an 80% success rate in getting ML pitchers back to the majors after the first surgery. A second surgery makes it even more difficult to do so.

Chapter 2 ("Dummyball") needs a more detailed review:

The 80% success of TJS over the years "lulled baseball into a false sense of security" about fixing injured players. But more and more TJS's are occurring in younger pitchers to which Passan attributes to year-round baseball:

*"Over the last two decades, baseball's youth apparatus has been filched and privatized, and the single-sport-specialization craze has transformed the game. The best players spend most weekends year-round traveling to tournaments across the country. They participate in so-called showcase events, in which maximum-effort throws and pitch velocities that light up the radar guns separate the elite from the rest."*

This has led to "predictable results" regarding pitching injuries after which Passan rattles off a laundry list of ML pitchers (Strasburg / Harvey / Jose Fernandez / Yu Darvish) as well as high school/college prospects (10 listed) who have needed TJS.



**Greg Arnold, DC, CSCS**  
1745 Express Drive North  
Hauppauge, NY 11788  
[PitchingDoc@msn.com](mailto:PitchingDoc@msn.com)  
[www.PitchingDoc.com](http://www.PitchingDoc.com)

The American Sports Medicine Institute released [a position statement in 2013](#) citing year-round baseball ("no competitive baseball pitching for at least 4 months per year") and the use of radar guns as 1 of many risk factors for arm injury.

In 2015 they release [a position statement on TJS](#), they cite year-round baseball and pitching on multiple teams as one of a number of risk factors for elbow injury.

Chapter 2 has 1 very good strength but also 2 weaknesses that need to be highlighted.

**The Strength: Research.** Passan cites studies throughout the book on injuries, including [a 2008 study that curveballs are not harmful](#) (I wrote a newsletter on this that [you can read here](#)) and [a 2011 study](#) showing that playing more than 100 innings per year are 3.5 times more likely to get hurt and pitch while fatigued are 36 times more likely to get injured.

**Weakness #1: Pitching Mechanics.** On page 29 he describes the pitching motion of a 10 year-old pitching prodigy, Harley Harrington:

*"Harley's motion was a study in biomechanical beauty, his legs driving efficiently, his hips swiveling at just the right time, his non-throwing arm tugging down and pulling through his torso..."*

The most incorrectly taught pitching mechanic today is that the glove tucks/pulls down during the pitching motion: IT DOES NOT. I wrote a 2015 newsletter disproving the glove-tuck that [you can read here](#).

**Weakness #2: Mark Prior.** On page 38 he talks about Mark Prior's arm injury:

*"Prior's delivery looked symmetrical...he threw his last major pitch when he was twenty-five...Was it his delivery? Too much throwing as a kid? Bad genes? The unnecessarily high pitch counts he ran up as a Cubs rookie? A combination of all four? Something else that no one can name?"*

Well, it was something else and it was named in several sources: his achilles injury. In [a 2006 Baseball Prospectus article](#):

*Reliable sources--the same ones that tipped us early to Mark Prior's Achilles problem--now tell us that Prior is having shoulder problems."*

It was NOT Prior's mechanics that caused his injury. His Achilles problem forced him to alter his mechanics, eventually causing his injury. (Full disclosure: I'm a Tom House Guy).

That's it for now. Stay tuned for Part 2 as we move further through the book.

Questions About This Newsletter?  
Contact (631-352-7654 / [PitchingDoc@msn.com](mailto:PitchingDoc@msn.com)) Dr. Arnold!