

Book Review of "The Arm", Part 2

A Tribute to Timing and the Harm of Fall Ball

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In case you missed Part 1, [click here](#). Today for Part 2, we cover Chapters 3 and 4.

Before we get to the concept of timing, Passan highlights Sandy Koufax and the arm pain he suffered throughout his career that caused him to retire at age 29. He has a great passage for those who believe we are "babying" today's pitchers and need to return to "the good ol' days when men were men" regarding pitching:

*"When Koufas joined the Dodgers organization [in the 1950s], more than 600 players came to spring training, an exercise in Darwinism. **Dozens developed arm injuries** - either arm fatigue or tendinitis or dead arm or some vague complaint - and never returned. **The survivors were major leaguers.**" (pg. 52)*

A theme that resonates throughout the first few chapters of the book is THE IMPORTANCE OF TIMING in keeping the throwing arm healthy. In Chapter 2, Passan explains the process of throwing and **how energy is transferred** from the lower body to the upper body, a process called "the kinetic chain" ("kinetic" = movement).

The kinetic chain is used in ALL rotational sports: golfing, tennis, hockey, and baseball. If you can play golf well, chances are you can hit well.
Hence, training at one rotational sport will help you in another (hint hint...stop playing year-round!).

He correctly states that **shoulder weakness is a contributor to elbow injury** since "those weak shoulder muscles cannot withstand the onslaught of energy [from the legs] and spill it down to an already-loaded elbow".

He then quotes Brent Strom, the Houston Astro's pitching coach:

*"If you're one-thirtieth of a second late or early, you're basically, over time, doing damage. And that's how fine the thing is. It's like hitting a golf ball. You've got to be right on time. **Those that can maintain that timing stay healthiest the longest.**"*

In Chapter 3, Passan discusses Tommy John's rehabbing, starting with a little known fact:

*"History glosses over an important part of the original TJS: for almost 3 months, it looked like a complete failure. After the procedure, John's left hand curled into a claw, his pinky and ring fingers numb bordering on frozen...
The tendon in John's elbow was assimilating fine, the pain dwindling, but his hand looked gnarled."*

What did John do that was most important to help his recovery? He didn't pitch. He threw:

"Tommy John simply embraced the conventional wisdom of the time, as imparted by his old pitching coach, Johnny Sain: the more you throw, the healthier you get."

**But WHY do you get healthier the more you throw?
Because your timing gets better!!!**

This is why Fall Ball is so terrible for pitchers of all ages. In Fall Ball, coaches sell the concept to parents by saying "all we do is play tournaments. No practices." This No-practice-only-weekend-playing has been DISASTROUS for pitchers because of how **the lack of throwing during the week ruins their timing**. The less you throw, the worse your timing gets.

This turns young pitchers into "Weekend Warriors" and increases their risks of injury. Instead of throwing more and pitching less, Fall Ball fosters a pitcher-more-throw-less schedule on young pitchers.

Finally, Passan gives us a 56 year-old example. He cites Paul Pettit, a young pitcher who in 1959 "was among the best-known baseball players in Los Angeles". Even back in 1959, pitchers fell into the trap of Fall Ball-type throwing and never recovered:

"I remember one winter I played for a team over in Hermosa Beach. I didn't throw during the week. I was playing basketball. And I went out and threw on Sunday. That wasn't good."

What happened to Paul Pettit? After a 154-pitch game at Double A, "I messed up my elbow" and never recovered, retiring after 7 years in the minor leagues.

Some sayings never get old...TIMING IS EVERYTHING.

And my new saying that I hope catches on...FALL BALL HURTS PITCHERS!

Have A Question About This Newsletter?

Contact (631-352-7654 / PitchingDoc@msn.com) Dr. Arnold!