

How to Throw a Zone Bullpen

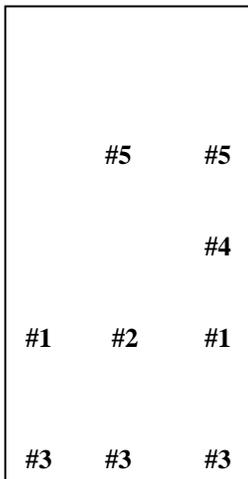
Introduction:

Before you can expect to throw a quality bullpen, you must first learn how to **relax** and establish the **goal** of **hitting the catcher's mitt** on every pitch. Begin by taking a deep breath, blow it out, and repeat to yourself, "*relax and hit the mitt.*" This approach coupled with practice, practice, practice, will give you a level of confidence that will make you feel that you can hit the mitt every time. *Learn how to be loose and limber.*

Throwing a Zone Bullpen:

Most pitchers at the youth, high school, and college levels don't know how to throw a *purpose* bullpen.

A *purposeful* bullpen routine should help a pitcher accomplish several things. First, to get his arm loose, second, to work on his pre-pitch routine and third, to lock-in pitch command and locations by throwing to specific pitching "zones." The secret and purpose of a bullpen is to be able to lock in pitch locations and take it with you into the game. Here's how we do it but first we have to set up our "pitching zones"



Our objective during any bullpen session is to spot our pitches to specific zones.

Begin by doing your pre-bullpen routine consisting of a full body stretch followed by light running to get the body warm. Continue with arm stretching using flexible tubing and finish up with short to long toss, and then head to the bullpen.

Begin by throwing 3 or 4 four-seam fastballs out of the wind-up working on good mechanics. Next, throw a couple of two-seamers. Move the ball in and out. Then throw a few out of the stretch.

If you are throwing a curveball, move the catcher up to about 40 feet and work on rotation. Next, move in back of the mound and spin a few to the catcher working on getting up and over the ball. Then work out of the stretch at the rubber and spin a few to the catcher. Move the catcher back and throw him 5 or 6 more curve balls working on rotation.

Next, work on the feel of your change-up. Throw 5 or 6 change-ups from behind the mound working on fastball arm speed and the feel of the ball. Then come to the mound and throw 5 or 6 more change-ups alternating between the wind-up and stretch positions.

By now your arm should be loose and you should have some feel for your pitches.

Ok, zones #1, #2, and #1 are our get ahead zones. It's the area from mid-thigh to the crease of the knee. This is where we want most of our pitches to be early in the count. Once we get ahead of the batter, we can begin to expand to the other "pitcher's zones." This is where we can go with our "put-away" pitches where we try to entice the batter to swing at a pitch that is on the periphery of the strike zone or even slightly out of the strike zone. To do this, we can go to any one of three areas. Zone #5 with a fastball up or "up and in". Maybe Zone #3 (below the knees) with a curveball, change-up or splitter or Zone #4 with a fastball just under the hands. We could also go just out of zone #1 with a change-up or curveball.

During the bullpen workout, the pitcher should "callout" his pitches and his location.

For example, let's begin with a first pitch fastball strike to Zone #2. The catcher locates his mitt at Zone #2, the pitcher calls out "fastball, middle down Zone 2". He locks-in and throws the pitch. Next, the catcher sets up in Zone #1, the pitcher calls out "fastball low and away Zone 1 and he locks-in and makes the pitch.

Now, with the batter behind in the count 0-2, the pitcher can go out of the zone with a fastball to Zone #5 or Zone #4. Maybe Zone #3 with a splitter in the dirt.

I suggest you throw your bullpen in sets of eight pitches. They don't have to be in any specific sequence but have a sequence that will prepare you to pitch in the game. Remember, the purpose of the "Zone bullpen" concept is to help you lock-in location. If you can do it during your bullpen and make it "second nature" you will be able to mentally take your bullpen into the game.

Consider the following:

Fastballs: throw 4 total per set- 2 down, 1 under the hands, and 1 up and in.

Curveballs: throw 2, 1 get ahead in Zone#3 and one out pitch to Zone #1

Change-ups: throw 2, 1 get ahead and 1 out pitch. *Always work on fastball movement and throw all bullpens from the stretch 60% of the time*

Make adjustments in the latter innings to keep the batters off balance. Don't develop predictable pitching patterns. **Remember, you are not pitching to the batter; you are trying to HIT THE MITT.**