The Hershiser Drill for Youth Pitchers: Step by Step

Drills | Coach Nick & the YSC Coaching Team

Last fall I had an 11-year-old right-hander who threw every pitch like he was falling off a curb. Leg up, head forward, front shoulder diving at the catcher, arm dragging behind trying to catch up. He was a strong kid and he threw 46. I walked him over to the outfield fence, stood him sideways about a foot away from it, and told him to lift his leg and bump the fence with his back pocket before anything else moved. He missed the fence completely on the first three tries. His shoulders got there every time and his hip never did. That is the whole reason the Hershiser drill exists.

What the Hershiser drill is

The Hershiser drill is a hip lead drill. The pitcher stands sideways next to a wall or fence, lifts the front leg, and lets the front hip drift sideways until it touches the wall while the head and shoulders stay back over the back leg. It teaches a pitcher to start the move toward the plate with the pelvis instead of the upper body, which is where stride length and lower-half power come from.

It is named after Orel Hershiser, whose delivery showed that front-hip-first move about as clearly as any pitcher on film. Coaches also call it the wall hip drill, the fence drill, or the hip bump. Same drill.

Most write-ups stop there: stand by a wall, lead with the hip. What they leave out is how far to stand, how many reps to do, what it should feel like, and how to get from a wall touch to an actual pitch. Those are the parts that decide whether the drill works, so that is what the rest of this covers.

Why young pitchers need it

When a kid lifts the front leg, something has to move toward the plate first. In most 9-to-12-year-olds it is the head. The shoulders tip forward, the weight lands on the front foot early, and the stride comes up short. From there the arm has to do all the work because the legs already spent their energy falling.

A hip lead flips that order. The pelvis moves first, the back leg stays loaded longer, and the upper body rides along stacked over the back hip until the front foot is close to landing. You get a longer stride without telling the pitcher to reach, and the arm has more time to get up. We go deeper on that chain in our guide to how to use your legs when pitching.

The drill is not magic and it does not add velocity by itself. What it does is give a kid a clear physical target for a move that is very hard to explain with words. "Stay back" means nothing to a 10-year-old. "Touch the wall with your pocket" does.

Setup: distance is everything

Get the setup wrong and the pitcher will either smash into the wall or lunge to reach it.

- **Surface.** A padded gym wall, a chain-link fence, or a dugout fence all work. On a bare block wall, tape a folded towel or a throw-down base at hip height.
- **Stance.** Sideways to the wall in the stretch position, glove side closest to the wall, feet about shoulder width apart.
- **Distance.** Start with the outside edge of the front foot roughly one of the pitcher's own shoe lengths from the wall. For most youth pitchers that is 8 to 12 inches. Taller or older pitchers can work out to a shoe and a half.
- **Check it.** Have the pitcher lift the leg and drift. If the hip touches while the head is still over the back foot, the distance is right. If the head has to travel to make contact, move in an inch or two.

No ball and no glove for the first round. Hands together at the chest.

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The Hershiser drill, step by step

Run these in order. Do not move on until the step before it looks clean three reps in a row.

Step 1 — Balance and Drift, No Lift (2 min) Pitcher stands in the stretch with hands at the chest and feet on the ground. Without lifting the leg, shift the front hip sideways until it touches the wall, then return. Head stays over the back foot the whole time. 8 slow reps. This shows the pitcher what the pelvis moving without the shoulders feels like. Coaching cue: "Pocket to the wall, nose stays home."

Step 2 — Lift, Drift, Touch (3 min) Now add the leg lift. Lift to a normal balance point, and as the knee reaches the top, let the front hip drift to the wall. The touch should be light, like tapping a door closed. The front knee stays lifted and the front foot hangs under the knee, not reaching for the plate. 8 reps. Coaching cue: "Lift, then lean your belt, not your head."

Step 3 — Touch and Hold (3 min) Same move, but freeze for a two-count once the hip is on the wall. Coach checks three things from the open side: the back knee is slightly bent and over the back foot, the shoulders are level or tilted slightly back, and the front hip is the closest body part to the wall. 6 reps. If the front shoulder touches before the hip, go back to Step 1. Coaching cue: "Hip wins the race."

Step 4 — Touch and Go, Dry (3 min) Move the pitcher one small step farther from the wall so the hip can no longer reach it, and turn them so they have room to stride. Lift, drift the hip toward where the wall was, and keep going into a full stride and dry throw with a towel or empty hand. The stride should land noticeably longer than their normal one without any effort to reach. 6 reps. Coaching cue: "Find the wall that is not there, then go."

Step 5 — Hip Lead Throws (5 min) Away from the wall, with a ball, throwing to a partner or into a net from about two thirds of game distance at 70 percent effort. Every third throw, go back to the wall for two touch-and-hold reps, then return and throw again. 12 to 15 throws total. Alternating between the wall and real throws is what makes the feel transfer. Coaching cue: "Same pocket, now throw it."

For Step 5 at home, a youth pitching net at theranchsports.com lets a pitcher get the throws in without a partner, and readers get a 10% discount with no sales tax there.

Reps and frequency by age

More is not better with this drill. It is a feel drill, and feel fades when a kid gets bored or tired.

Age	What to run	Volume	How often
8 and under	Steps 1 and 2 only	8 to 10 touches	Once a week, as a game
9 to 10	Steps 1 through 4	15 to 20 touches	2 times a week
11 to 12	All five steps	20 touches plus 12 throws	2 to 3 times a week
13 to 14	All five steps, hold for three counts	20 touches plus 15 throws	Before every bullpen

The wall touches are not throws, so they do not count against pitch counts and they are safe on rest days. For older pitchers we use Steps 2 and 3 as part of the pregame warm-up routine: six touches right before they pick up a ball.

The mistakes we see most

Shoulder gets there first. The most common one by far. The pitcher tips the whole body sideways like a falling tree. Fix: move closer to the wall and have them hold a ball cap against the wall with their hip in Step 3. If the shoulder leans in, the cap is the least of their problems and they can feel it.

Sitting instead of drifting. The pitcher bends the back knee deep and drops straight down, so the hip never moves sideways. Fix: cue "tall and sideways" and put your hand an inch from the wall at hip height as a target.

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Reaching with the front foot. The foot kicks out toward the plate to keep balance. Fix: go back to Step 3 and hold. The foot hangs under the knee until the hip has touched.

Closing off the front side too far. Some kids turn their back pocket so far toward the wall that the front shoulder flies open to compensate. The hip should move sideways toward the target, not rotate. If this shows up, pair the drill with the cues in our piece on teaching young pitchers to stay closed.

Standing too far away. A coach sets the pitcher two feet from the fence because it looks more athletic. All it teaches is a lunge. Start close.

What nobody tells you: the wall is a crutch

Here is the gap in most Hershiser drill instructions. A pitcher can get very good at touching a wall and throw exactly the same way the moment the wall is gone. We have watched it happen for a full season with a kid who could do 20 perfect touches and then dive headfirst on every pitch in the game.

The fix was Step 4 and the back-and-forth in Step 5. The wall gives the feel, and the throw right after it is where the pitcher has to reproduce that feel without help. Two wall reps, three throws, repeat. If you only have five minutes, skip the extra wall reps and keep the alternation.

That 11-year-old from the top of this article took about three weeks of this, twice a week, before his head stopped beating his hip to the plate. His stride went from roughly four of his own shoe lengths to five and a half. We did not teach him to stride longer. He just stopped falling.

One more thing worth checking: if a pitcher cannot get the hip to the wall no matter how close you put him, it may not be a coordination problem. Tight hips make this move hard, and a few weeks of hip mobility work often does more than another hundred wall touches. Keep him moving in other ways too. The kids who pick this drill up fastest are usually the ones who also play a second sport and spend time sprinting, shuffling, and jumping.

Where it fits in practice

- **Team practice:** run Steps 1 through 3 as a station along the outfield fence. Six pitchers can go at once, and one coach can see every shoulder from the open side.
- **Bullpen day:** six wall touches, then the bullpen, with a return to the wall any time the head starts drifting.
- **At home:** a hallway wall and a pair of socks to throw. Five minutes, three days a week.

For more pitching and position work, see the rest of our baseball coaching library.

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