

Borgmann: Explaining baseball's new pitch count proposal

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(Jack Eberhard/JacksActionShots.com)

AURORA — The CHSAA baseball committee and CHSAA ad-hoc baseball pitching committee agree that arm overuse in baseball is a serious issue in Colorado and the rest of the country.

It has been discussed at all levels of the sport. All levels of the sport have begun to take action to address this epidemic of arm overuse. It is not a life-threatening problem, but it is a life-altering issue that many players are facing.

The biggest challenge is mandating the rest that those arms need and that is what this new rule does [1].

This is a significant change in philosophy and will be challenging to implement. It may require addressing some schedule changes for schools with limited pitching staffs, as well. It

most certainly will require the way baseball programs look at pitching, but the change is about doing what we can to provide your players with a safe playing environment.

Here are some quick points that need to be considered:

This is a player health issue that the entire sport is having to address – pre-Little League and Little League, Legion, Connie Mack, NCAA, MLB – all levels. As Yahoo Sports' Jeff Passan wrote ^[2], "It's too late to save this generation. At the highest levels of research into the pitching arm, almost all the top minds agree that baseball for the next decade, and probably more, is going to be a non-stop parade of injuries, disappointments and bewilderment. This horrifies them. It should."

The Baseball Committee is recommending these limits based on the experience of the coaches in the room and on the committee. It reflects health and rest at the forefront of the need for the rule. These limits are close to what many coaches are already placing on their pitchers. These recommendations are about rest and developing pitching depth. USA Baseball has already issued its recommendations. Its maximums are 95 pitches for players ages 15-16 and 4 days mandatory rest after 76 pitches thrown; for players 17-18 the maximum is 105 in a day, plus the four days' rest after 76 pitches. There are varying degrees of mandated rest depending on numbers of pitches thrown. Here is a link to those recommendations ^[3].

CHSAA once had one of country's stronger pitching limitations (12 innings over 72 hours, with no limit on pitches), but now, after research has shown that using an innings limitation is unhealthy for pitchers, it has become one of the weakest and most potentially damaging rules for pitchers.

The NFHS is exploring its own version of these requirements and will have its recommendations for states after this summer, but Colorado felt like it needed to be out in front of those decisions so that any NFHS decision was made based on Colorado's situations, not what is happening around the rest of the country.

Colorado can be a leader in determining the direction of its own limitations, rather than having to be forced into a certain direction.

Our pitching recommendations are reflective of a great deal of research that included input from baseball doctors, trainers, high school coaches and even major league players.

Long discussions were held on the smaller school issues and the limited rosters those schools occasionally have. The result of those discussions noted that these limitations will require all schools to develop greater pitching depth than they currently have. A second piece to this was that it may take several seasons for schools to develop that depth. Those challenges could be overcome by adjusting schedules to ensure that time is available for the mandated rest.

The recommendations in the report were reviewed by two major committees – the Baseball pitching ad-hoc committee and the CHSAA baseball advisory committee. Not everyone agreed with the final determination, but all agreed that it needed to be addressed.

The Baseball pitching ad-hoc committee, which did the bulk of the research had two MDs (including one of the country's top expert in pitching injuries), two trainers, seven coaches (including small school, mid-size and big school coaches), several top club/private pitching coaches, as well as input from two former major leaguers.

The committee met three times, and recommended a more stringent rule, but the CHSAA baseball committee amended their recommendation to get a start on this switch in philosophies. It can be adjusted after it has been in place, as needed. Additionally, while the report calls for immediate implementation, it could be delayed to the 2016 season.



The pitching committee met three times over the past few months. (Bert Borgmann/CHSAANow.com)

One of the issues that this does not address is the outside influence issue. CHSAA can only control the 25 percent of the year that is high school, but the committee is developing an educational video that will highlight the issue with overuse of arms, the medical needs, the importance of proper training, the need for communication between high school coaches and club coaches for the health of the player, and will conclude with former Colorado prep players who are in MLB recounting why playing more than one sport got them where they are and the need to rest the arms.

It will also have information from collegiate and professional scouts to help give perspective that only 6.8 percent of high school players will ever play in college. The baseball committee stresses that CHSAA can only do what it can.

Here are the limitations, requirements that accompany them and a recommendation to enhance the regulations:

Varsity

Pitches Required Rest

86-1103 Days

61-85 2 Days

36-60 1 Day

1-35 0 Days*

Junior Varsity

PitchesRequired Rest

61-85 3 Days

36-60 2 Days

26-35 1 Day

1-25 0 Days^

* - Additionally, no pitcher may throw more than 60 pitches over two days. If they throw 60 pitches in two days, there will be one day of required rest.

^ - No sub-varsity pitcher can throw more than 35 pitches over two days. That limit will result in one day of mandated rest.

A pitcher will be allowed to finish a batter if they hit the limit (110 in varsity play; 85 in sub-varsity) during an at-bat, but must exit the game after the hitter.

It is strongly recommended that once a pitcher is removed, consideration be given to what position he is assigned once he is done pitching. Consideration should be given to the throwing requirement of the fielding position once the pitcher vacates the mound.

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URLs in this post:

[1] that is what this new rule does: <http://chsaanow.com/2014-11-19/baseball-committee-recommends-implementing-stricter-pitching-limits/>

[2] wrote: <http://sports.yahoo.com/news/why-mlb-s-elbow-problem--which-now-includes-yankees--masahiro-tanaka--is-worse-than-people-imagine-055237854.html>

[3] Here is a link to those recommendations: <http://m.mlb.com/pitchsmart/pitching-guidelines/>

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