



## **In-Season Strength Training for Baseball and Softball Players**

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Baseball season is finally upon us in New England and hopefully spring weather will soon follow. One question that is commonly asked by athletes, coaches and parents "Should baseball players continue strength and conditioning training while in-season?" The simple answer is: *absolutely it should!*

The off-season is when the biggest gains should be made in strength, agility and speed. So why would an athlete want to allow those gains to diminish during the season when they need those attributes the most. That would seem counter-productive to all the sweat equity hard-working athletes put into the preparation months. Agility and speed maintenance should for the most part continue with the everyday dynamic baseball movements and appropriate practice drills from an experienced coach. Therefore, the focus here will be on the theory behind flexibility and strength maintenance in season which will preserve power, enhance recovery, and maximize injury prevention.

Soft-tissue and mobility work should be done on a daily basis for tissue preservation. Foam rolling is a great way to reduce muscle tension and improve blood-flow to key muscle groups which will enhance daily recovery and improve flexibility needed for dynamic high-velocity movements. Static stretching should be performed daily with a focus on the entire body. This static stretching routine is best performed immediately following a ten minute baseball specific dynamic warm-up. Commitment to this 20-25 minute structured routine prior to practice or competition or even on and off-day is crucial for mobility demands, recovery and injury prevention during a jam-packed baseball season.

Strength training used to get skipped during the season for fear of excessive fatigue and wear-and-tear on the body. However, evidence now supports continuation of strength training in-season. I generally recommend a simple resistance-band program for rotator cuff strengthening and upper back dynamic scapular stabilization which can be performed 3-4 times per week. Two to three sets of 8-10 reps is appropriate. Unlike the mobility work, this should not be done every day to avoid excessive fatigue to some of the key muscles that provide much needed shoulder stability! Weight training is best performed with an appropriate frequency of twice per week and should mirror the off-season program with the exception of fewer total reps and a shortened workout duration (30-40 efficient minutes should be plenty of time). Given that strength training will only occur twice per week a full-body approach is likely best. Strength training the day before competition is likely not the best scenario especially for pitchers. Day after a game workouts make sense as long as there is a focus on quality of repetitions and good form. Quantity of repetitions again will likely be less than during the off season and two to three sets of 5-10 reps would be appropriate. Going light on weight with higher reps such as 12-15 is a myth that should be avoided for athletes as it would only promote muscle weakness and increased fatigue, thus be a waste of time.

Other variables that are often overlooked and are equally as important for proper conditioning in-season should also be considered. Athletes need to get proper sleep to allow for body recovery. Minimizing caffeinated drinks such as coffee, soda and energy drinks should also be avoided as they are diuretics and

do nothing to enhance performance. Avoidance of junk food is also vital as it impedes optimal performance and decreases the body's ability to recover. Long-toss should be incorporated into the throwing routine to build rotator cuff throwing strength. Finally, all exercises for mobility and strengthening should be performed without pain.

Consulting a healthcare provider or working with a credible personal trainer experienced in baseball conditioning is the best way to formulate an independent off-season and transition into an in-season routine. For the rogue athlete that wants to remain independent with their training, YouTube videos can be a helpful way to learn exercises with proper form if they are from a credible source. Below are a few examples of a few short videos that I found and may be helpful. The first is a 2 minute video demonstrating a simple dynamic warm-up routine and features MLB shortstop Jimmy Rollins. The other two videos include some good baseball specific resistance band exercises.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vt8r4ukSbk>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8qDM6YDp7-M>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6XmkPZgdUs>

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