



Discussions about pitching mechanics and the best way to increase velocity and avoid arm injury are akin to talking about politics or religion. There is seemingly always heated dialogue and everyone has an opinion.

Scap loading, tilt, ASMI normative ranges, weighted balls, pitching-specific weight training — you name it, it's out there being promoted and sworn to by all in the industry.

That leads us to long toss. Some players and teams swear by it, while others blame long toss and excessive throwing as the cause of today's growing number of arm injuries.

Alan Jaeger, considered the longtime long toss Godfather, and I recently sat down at a vision-training session in California and I asked him for the inside scoop on long toss. Jaeger was gracious enough to share a lifetime of work and findings in summary form.

1. Health

Long toss promotes optimal a.) range of motion; b.) endurance; c.) improved recovery; d.) relaxation and freedom; and e.) ideal preparation prior to aggressive throwing.

2. It's Natural

Nature is a powerful force. Long toss promotes your most natural, instinctive and intuitive movements. Being natural also promotes freedom, athleticism and your most natural or inherent movement patterns, also known as your mechanics.

3. Arm Strength (Life & Carry)

Long toss promotes arm strength because the arm gains range of motion from distance. And learning how to translate this freedom into aggressiveness with the right intention promotes greater explosiveness and life on the ball. More freedom equals more explosiveness, and most importantly, safer explosiveness.

4. Feel & Accuracy

When one long tosses, one has to adapt to several different distances and release points on the way out and on the way in to one's throwing partner. All of these different release points lead to mind and body awareness and sensitivity to the release point, all of which promotes better feel. The mind has to project into space, and thus, use a sense of open focus to help optimize feel.

Again, this goes back to long toss being an instinctive and intuitive art form.

Bonus: One of the greatest benefits of long toss is that there isn't a "pre-determined" amount of throws, time, or distance. This is a strength because the arm can evolve and grow void of these restraints.

Some of the critics of long toss cite faulty arm action and "timing" issues that are exacerbated by long-toss sessions. One MLB coach was convinced that control issues plaguing pitchers is a direct result of the long toss "grunt-and-throw" mindset.



I asked Jaeger his thoughts on the criticism he has heard over the years. Without a blink, he shared and refuted three long toss counter arguments.

1. It affects one's release point, or "you don't throw that way on the mound"

This is a fallacy. You want the variance of your release point, for reasons mentioned above—Feel, range of motion, health, freedom and athleticism.

2. You don't throw "uphill" off the mound

Actually, you do ... unless you pitch like Randy Johnson or Jake Peavy. Pitchers go uphill to go downhill. That's how you generate leverage, explosiveness and get over to your front side. The argument to throw the ball "on a line" so you don't impact your "release point" actually promotes several detriments. It promotes rigidity, takes away athleticism, takes away range of motion from the shoulder and stifles athleticism and inherent movement patterns.

3. You only have so many "throws in your arm"

The body is a living, breathing organism—it wants to grow and thrive. The arm wants to regenerate, not degenerate. When the arm gets fed, it grows. When the arm gets babied, it atrophies. Make throws in your arm. Counting how many throws you make is like counting how many step you take so that you don't use them up.

To long toss or not to long toss? Until we have clinical research and medical findings generated from an independent source with enough samplings of all ages, the debate will continue. Suffice to say, listen to your arm and don't let others tell you how to fell and the best way to prepare your arm for battle.