

## Kids and Baseball

The town I live in is crazy about baseball. So, most of the kids I train have been baseball players. I don't know why but whenever I get a kid that plays baseball, I really feel like I need to help them become as bullet proof as possible. I want to make all my kids durable, but for some reason I look at rotational athletes differently, at first. Maybe it's because they tell me about all the hours they spend throwing, or maybe it's because most of them play on three different teams at the same time. Did I mention baseball is big in my town? Anyway, most of my kids do a ton of throwing; with one arm at least. Throw in some batting practice every now and then and you've got an athlete who accumulates some serious one-side dominant, rotational volume when it comes to all those throws and swings.

If you train baseball players, It is not unusual to find an athlete who develops elbow problems, shoulder issues, or major strength asymmetries between their left and right sides. This can be found with other rotational athletes too; golfers, tennis players, or throwers are not immune. All of this throwing and swinging can create some major differences in range of motion and strength between the athlete's right and left sides. These differences, or asymmetries, can lead to some significant injuries. It is getting all too common for a teenage baseball player to have elbow surgery these days...

As a trainer or coach working with a baseball player, one of the first things you should probably check is to see if he can roll equally from back to belly, left and right and belly to back, right and left. Confusing, I know. Basically, you are trying to see if he can roll symmetrically from side to side. If he can, great! If he can't, he just earned some homework! Good things can happen when a kid possesses the ability to roll. If you are interested, Gray Cook's Functional Movement Screen is a great resource to learn more about the benefits of rolling. Once you decide your athlete can roll freely from side to side, front and back, you can introduce the athlete to three of my favorite kettlebell exercises.

The first kettlebell exercise that you might find extremely helpful to introduce to your throwing athletes is the arm-bar. If you've never seen anyone perform an arm-bar with a kettlebell, it looks as if the person was just put into an arm-bar and left for dead. Thus, the catchy name... I like arm-bars because they are great for building mobile, stable shoulders. They also address thoracic mobility and asymmetries. They even include a little rolling! Done properly, they can really pave the way to building some resilient shoulders. Arm-bars are also a great way to teach an athlete body awareness. I have never had an athlete yet who could get into a steady arm-bar on his first attempt. They always feel that "shakiness," that motor learning that is taking place.

Once you and your athlete are both comfortable with the idea of arm-bars, you should be ready to introduce the turkish get-up; perhaps the best move anyone could ever do for overall strength and health. With the get-up, the athlete moves (rolls) from a lying position to standing all the while keeping a kettlebell completely vertical over their head. The get-up is the perfect choice for checking, and addressing, strength and movement

asymmetries from one side to the other. It is also a great tool for teaching young athletes how to move and control their bodies. However, the learning curve varies greatly from athlete to athlete when it comes to learning the get-up. It can require a lot of patience (from both the coach and athlete) and encouragement. But it is so worth the effort in the end. If you can get a kid to do a perfect turkish get-up on each side, you can get a kid to believe he is capable of doing anything. I can't tell you how important helping a kid build confidence is when it comes to their training, their sport, and their lives. Anyway, getting your athlete to perform a perfect get-up will also give you some piece of mind knowing that he is put together quite well from head to toe.

The last kettlebell tool that may greatly benefit your baseball player is the kettlebell swing. A swing resembles a very fast, explosive dead lift with a relatively light weight. I love swings because they are perfect for young athletes. The swing stance itself is an athletic stance and it can be used to teach young athletes to move from their hips. Swings are also a great tool for developing explosive strength and power; they build mud-whole stomping muscles! Again, It is important to make sure the athlete is just as strong on one side as he is on the other. So, once the athlete knows how to properly swing a kettlebell with two hands, you can teach him how to swing a kettlebell with one hand. The one handed swing is a great tool for addressing both shoulder health and strength asymmetries between the left and right side.

I think any coach or trainer could ensure a strong foundation and improve an athlete's resiliency with these three exercise (four, if you count rolling!). This is not an exhaustive list of beneficial exercises by any means. But if you are looking to address asymmetries and improve your athletes' durability, they are a great place to start. Perhaps one of the biggest benefits to training your athletes with arm-bars, get-ups and swings is that they can also help your athlete gain body awareness. If your athlete has a major strength difference from one side to the other, he too will know it when he tries to perform any of these exercises. This body awareness can help make the athlete a *better* athlete. He can learn how to "coach" himself in a since. I like that. It makes my job a little easier, and it can do the same for you.

*If you would like to know more about how to perform the exercises I mentioned here, I highly recommend that you search out an RKC certified kettlebell instructor. They can teach you how to perform these moves safely and effectively. If you would like to learn more about the benefits of rolling, check out Gray Cook's FMS at [www.functionalmovement.com](http://www.functionalmovement.com).*

*Tim Anderson is a professional firefighter in Cary, NC. He is also an RKC II and a Battling Ropes II coach, and he has been a certified personal trainer for over twelve years. He loves teaching young athletes how to move well with kettlebells! You can check him out at [www.OPTfitness.net](http://www.OPTfitness.net) or email him at [TAsfitness@earthlink.net](mailto:TAsfitness@earthlink.net).*