

Pitch Grips

Finger Position, Finger Pressure, Hand Action



By: Chris Gissell

About the Author



Chris Gissell

Chris is 35 years old. He is married to Rachael and has 3 children (Christopher 10, Zachary 7 and Brooke 4). Chris graduated from Hudson's Bay HS in Vancouver, WA in 1996. In June of that year he was drafted by the Chicago Cubs in the 4th round. He went on to pitch professionally for the next 14 years for various organizations (Cubs, Rockies, Cardinals, A's, Seibu Lions in Japan and the Uni President Lions in Taiwan) briefly reaching the big leagues in 2004 with the Rockies. Click [here](#) for Chris's complete career stats.

Chris is currently a minor league pitching coach in the LA Angels organization. During the off season, you can find him instructing youth baseball players at Extra Innings in Vancouver, WA, of which he is co-owner. Lastly, Chris is the Owner and Founder of "Baseball Dudes".

Hobbies:

- Enjoys golfing, though he rarely gets to.
- Loves watching his children play/do basketball, baseball and gymnastics.
- Spending time with friends, though he rarely gets to!
- Favorite thing to do is spend time with his beloved family.

Career Highlights:

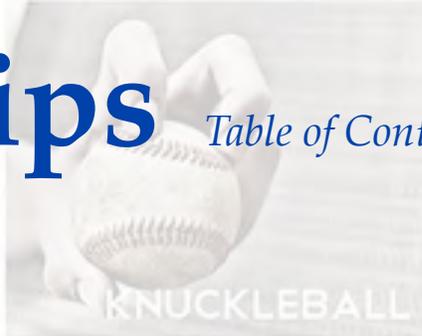
- 2000 AA Southern League Champions
- 2004 Led the Pacific Coast League with 14 wins
- 2004 Made Major League debut vs the Expos on 8/22
- Made first and only start 9/26 (his wife's birthday) vs. The STL Cardinals
- 2005 Started the AAA All Star game, was Winning pitcher and MVP
- 2006 Tied NPB record for rookie in Japan to start career 5-0
- 2008 AAA Pacific Coast League Champions with the Sacramento River Cats
- 2008 Won AAA championship game and was MVP
- 2009 Pitcher of the Month (March) in the CPBL (Taiwan)

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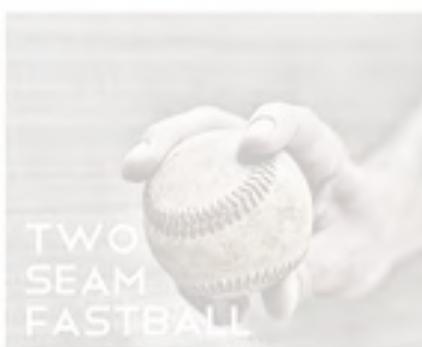
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4 Seam Fastball



Feel the seam across the finger tips. Most of the finger should be resting on the ball.



Thumb should be between finger tips.



Notice where the ball is resting on the thumb and how the fingers are resting completely on the ball.

The 4 Seam Fastball is the best control pitch in baseball. More often than not, when a pitcher is asked which fastball he can command better, the 4 seamer is the answer. This pitch usually has a truer/straighter flight to the plate. You will find some pitchers whose 4 seamer has some run and maybe even a little sink. I recommend every young pitcher start with this grip.

I hear often that kid's fingers are too small to use just 2 fingers. Not true! My oldest has been using 2 fingers since he was 6. The 3 finger fastball is just a change-up. The sooner a child can get comfortable with this, the better they will be in the long run. It has proven to be a tough transition for pitchers, to try changing from the 3 finger grip to the 2 finger grip, the older they get.

With this pitch, you should be trying to get as much back spin on the ball as you can. You should feel as if you are pulling down on the seams.



Notice hand position here. Pulling down on the seams.
Try to ignore the face!!

When playing long toss, always use this grip as it carries much better than the 2 seamer.

If you are a coach, recommend that your players use this pitch, especially the younger players, as a pitcher's number one job is to throw strikes. Even players at the pro level have to make this adjustment because they have a hard time throwing their 2 seamer consistently in the zone.

2 Seam Fastball/Sinker



Fingers along the seams. Try pressure with the index finger.



Notice thumb position on this grip. It can also help to have the thumb up on the side of the ball.



With this grip, have the whole index finger along the seam.

The 2 Seam Fastball, also known as a sinker, is the pitch you see big leaguers throw that has a lot of run and often will sink. It is a natural action for the arm to pronate after release. Pitchers with good sinkers have this happen at some point during release, thus getting a unique spin on the ball causing it to sink. When a player uses this grip during long toss, they have a tough time throwing it long distances because of the air reacting to the spin created with this grip. A pitcher with a side arm action or low 3/4 slot can see a lot of sink with the 2 seamer. Like I said before though, the number one job of a pitcher is to throw strikes. A pitcher should only be allowed to throw this pitch if they can already control the strike zone.

There are many different ways to hold a 2 seamer. The grip on page 6, is the grip I used early in my career to throw a sinker. I recall seeing pictures of Greg Maddux showing his grips and this is the one he used. To find out which one is best for you, just go out and play catch using different finger positions and different finger pressures.



Notice the pronation of the hand after release. Again, please ignore the face!!

Curveball/Knuckle Curveball



The grip I used. Pressure with the middle finger on the inside of the seam.



Notice where middle finger is on the seam. Pull down on the seam to create as much rotation as possible.



As you get older, you want some space here. If it is choked to the point where there is no space here, it will come out slower with less rotation.

The Curveball has almost become a lost art since the slider and cutter have become so popular. Not everyone can spin a curveball but it should always be the first breaking ball a young pitcher tries to learn. A true curveball will have good downward break, 12 to 6 or 1 to 7 for right handers. A pitcher with a 3/4 arm slot might have one that is in between a 1 to 7 and 2 to 8 break. We call this a slurve because it is between a slider and curveball. Nothing wrong with this.

A big issue I see with curveballs is it popping up out of the hand at release. This is something that pitchers can get away with at a young age, but if and when they reach pro ball, every hitter will recognize it and whack it. A proper curveball will come out of the hand at the same angle as their fastball. It will have tight rotation

with the opposite spin of the fastball. The fastball has back spin and the curveball will have top spin. Just like the 2 seam fastball, experiment with different grips.

Below is a picture of proper hand position at release. Many young pitchers have a tough time getting to this position at release and end up releasing this pitch with their hand too open, thus end up throwing a slider.



Proper hand position at release.



Slider hand position. Notice the hand isn't closed all the way like the picture on the left.

Knuckle Curveball



Changeup



Notice this pitch is thrown with the middle and ring fingers. Bring pinky up on ball for better fade.



Circle with the index finger.

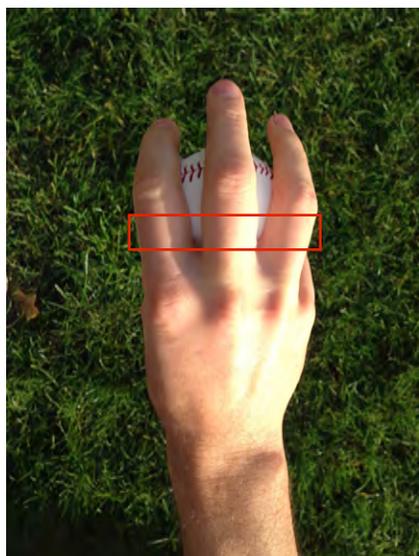


Feel the ball come out of this side. Should feel like the circle pointed towards the first base dugout at release for a right handed pitcher.

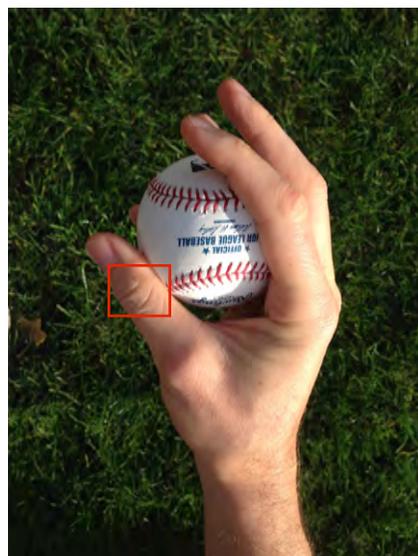
The changeup is the pitch most can get away with not having in little league, but if you want to be a starter at higher levels it is a pitch you must have in your repertoire. There are so many different grips for a changeup. It is just a matter of trying different ones while playing catch to find the one that is comfortable in your hand.

The most important thing with the changeup lies within your delivery. To have a good changeup at the higher levels, your delivery **MUST** look the same as your fastball. I'm talking about the speed of your delivery, especially your arm speed. The arm speed is what sells the pitch. One can have a changeup that is only 4-5 mph slower than their fastball, but because their arm speed is spot on when compared to their fastball, it can be their second best pitch.

Below is the grip I used for my changeup. It took me half of my career to find one that worked for me. I was able to throw a 4 seam changeup (pictured) which was straight (for strikes) and a 2 seam changeup (for swing and misses). It is a huge advantage when a pitcher can learn to throw it against an arm side hitter (righty vs righty, lefty vs lefty).



I would apply finger pressure where you see the red box.



I would apply thumb pressure where you see the red box.



Notice that the ball is not jammed into my palm. It is very tough to control a changeup that is too deep in the hand.



Changeup



Changeup

Slider/Cutter



I used the offset 4 seam fastball grip for both my slider and cutter.



With this grip, you want to feel the seam along both finger tips.



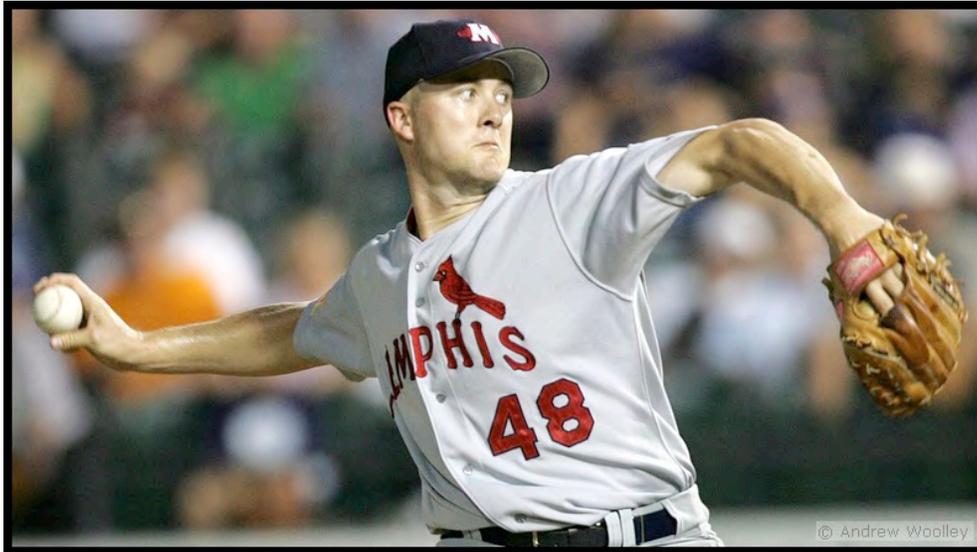
Pressure with the middle finger tip.

Let's talk about the slider first. When thrown correctly, it has somewhere in the area of a 2 to 8 break. I have seen some that go more downward and look like a mini curveball. Nothing wrong with this, it's a special thing that some are able to do with the ball.

Just like the curveball, use finger pressure with the middle finger. Although, on the slider, you add more pressure on the tip of the finger not the whole finger.

Often when this pitch is thrown, the hitter can see a dot from the seams. Do your best to find a grip where this doesn't happen. You can get away with this when you are younger, but the higher you go in this game, the hitters will pick up on this.

At release on the pitch, you want to feel like you are hooking down across the front of the ball. Think of pulling down the front of the ball, similar to the curveball, with your finger tips pointing at yourself after release.



Notice the offset 4 seam fastball grip.

With the cutter, I used the same grip here for both the slider and cutter. I strongly believe that the offset 4 seam grip is the best for both of these because if it is done right, there will be no dot, and thus harder for the hitter to pick up.

With the cutter, you still want pressure with the middle finger tip, but instead of hooking across the front of the ball, you want to stay behind it like a fastball. At release you want the feeling that you are pulling down the side of the ball with your middle finger. When the ball leaves your hand you should be pointing at the catcher for a split second.



Cutter release.

Forkball/Splitter



Notice how the ball is jammed into the middle of the fingers. A splitter will have a space here.



Try even finger pressure with the forkball. Try index finger tip pressure with the splitter.



Thumb directly underneath on the forkball.

The forkball is often referred to as a splitter (split finger fastball). A forkball comes out of the hand with not much spin, kind of like a knuckle ball. It has a tumbling rotation and will have a hard drop as it gets to the plate. Focus on staying on top of this pitch. It will be tough to control if you get on the side of it (talking about hand position at release here).

A true splitter will have a screwball rotation and move the opposite of a curveball (11 to 5 for a right hander). You do not see this pitch thrown very often these days.

You can mess around with different grips, finger positions. Try using a seam to pull down on with your index finger.

Knuckleball



Two finger grip. Also try this with three fingers.



Dig your nails into the ball, not your knuckles.



Notice the thumb placement.

The pitch every kid wants to throw! The ultimate trick pitch! What most kids don't know is this is a pitch that professional pitchers throw when their regular stuff has stopped getting batters out.

Like the changeup, there are many different ways to grip this pitch. You can use two or three fingers. You can put your fingernails in between the seams, or just dig them into the leather. At release, you want to feel as if you are pushing the ball out of your hand. The goal is for it to have as little rotation as possible after you release it. The air will hit the seams creating the dancing movement.

Play catch with different grips to find what grip you can make dance the most.

Conclusion

As an instructor, when I first meet a student, one of the first questions is “How do you hold your fastball?” The younger the kid, the more likely he is to have no true grip. They just grab it and throw it. I always start my students, and my own children, with the 4 seamer. It’s the easiest to control and will give them some good direction from the start. Also, get them using 2 fingers as soon as you can.

I believe it is okay for kids around the age of 12 to start throwing breaking balls. It is very important that when they start throwing these pitches, they are doing it with correct arm action and hand position at release. Make sure when they are learning these, they are doing it with someone qualified. A kid might throw something that Mom and Dad think is an awesome pitch but don’t realize that their child is doing something that will hurt them in the long run. This is an area where a qualified instructor is a must-they can see, just with playing catch, if the player is doing the right things at release.

With everything you have read here, always remember, the first job of a pitcher is to throw strikes. If they have a great moving curveball but can’t throw it in the zone when they want to, then it is good for nothing. This is all information I learned over my 14 year playing career. A lot of learning a pitch is trail and error. Trust the process and don’t give up if something doesn’t work right away. Go get’em!!