



UP ON THE HILL

with Bill Hillhouse

I have been chewing on this month's topic for a few days, regarding how to approach it. It's delicate. Needs a diplomatic tone. And in my normal fashion of being neither delicate or diplomatic, I'll probably butcher what I am trying to say. So bear with me.

At a recent clinic, I was offered some constructive criticism. The person who offered it wasn't being rude or abrasive, just offering advice which I can take it or leave it. After thinking about it, and the responses I got from the clinic attendees, along with routine emails in my in-box, I'm going to leave the advice.

Those who've heard me speak at clinics and seen my presentation know that I teach things quite differently from a lot of pitching coaches. Much of what I teach is the exact opposite of what many pitching coaches are telling kids and parents. On top of that, there are people who will tell you there is no right and wrong, that you must find what works for your daughter (or son) and embrace it. Again, I fly in the face of that when I say there is right and wrong with everything in life, pitching included. Our bodies are designed to work a certain way and one doesn't need to be a doctor, biologist, or kinesiologist to see what is common sense about what feels natural. There are certainly multiple strategies we could debate. There are multiple coaching methods and ways to teach. But the substance of what's being taught is crucial. And so much of it is contrary to what we see the best pitchers in the world doing.

The person with whom I had the discussion seemed to think that I should not compare what I teach to what others teach. Instead, just focus on what I teach and explain to them why. Let the pitchers (and parents) figure out for themselves what is truly right and/or wrong. The conversation stuck with me that entire night, next day and on the flight home. Is it right for me to compare?

After thinking it over, I thought: "Of course I should

compare!" And so should everyone. But if the differences are not exploited for people to see them, they can be drastically overlooked. They need to be shown so people can make informed decisions. Otherwise, it just comes down to a war of words.

Now I think the argument made would be a little more valid if I called people out by name or belittled them. That's not what I do. I simply compare what is commonly taught in pitching to what I do. Then I explain why. Then I show them in the demonstration. After demonstrating, it leaves little room for doubt about what makes sense and what doesn't.

I've always maintained that the top pitchers in the world, male and female are doing the same things mechanically. There are some differences, for sure. But not in the overall mechanics. The whole male vs. female thing in pitching is really a weak argument when we see kids being taught the same swing for both baseball and softball. We also see the same overhand throwing motion taught (when people are actually taught how to throw overhand!). Yet far too many people teach things in contrast to what the top pitchers are doing. How can this be?

The answer is simple, yet complex in my opinion. A lot of average Joes who admit they know nothing about pitching will buy into whatever their coach tells them. Many times that's because a pitching coach has 'credentials' which can deceive. Since many will have played in college, and because college softball is held in the highest regard by many, it's easy to believe that "way" is the path to the top. Even though the days are long gone that only the best play in collegiate level softball, it still convinces people enough because everyone wants a scholarship. I admit, I'm jealous of this credential. I never got to play in college so I can't claim it on my resume. After all, there was only one thing that kept me out of college: My grades. Ha ha.

I absolutely agree that not every teacher (or pitching coach) and student will click on a personal level. That can provide quite the dilemma for people who want the information the instructor has, but not wanting it from that particular instructor. It can be a nightmare to find the same information from a different person, because so many people are teaching how to pitch differently. All too often, a kid that goes to a new coach is going to have to make big changes to conform to what that coach wants. This is where the homework and research you do before going to lessons comes in big. Do you agree with what this coach teaches? Either way, you are comparing what you believe to be right vs. the information being given. So, comparison is necessary. In fact, it's essential.

Personally, I compare what I do to what is commonly taught because I strongly believe that much of what is taught simply doesn't make sense in many cases. I was once in the same position as your daughter, I was a young pitcher struggling to learn. Only, I didn't have a coach. I didn't have lessons. I did a lot of learning by trial and error. I asked questions of the best pitchers I could find and made changes to what I do in order to achieve success. In doing this, I tried nearly everything known to man when it comes to pitching. I ended up doing what I currently do now and that is what I teach and pass on to others. The argument of it being a matter of opinion and personal preference gets thrown out the window when you COMPARE what the best pitchers in the world are doing similarly. They all get themselves into the same exact positions at the same points in the motion, they simply have different ways to get into those positions. Compare, and you'll see for yourself. And I'll still keep talking about and showing the differences in the meantime. As your winter training progresses, attend as many clinics as you can and COMPARE what you hear. You won't be sorry.

Need more Bill? No worries - catch him (if you can!) at www.houseofpitching.com.