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2,964,316

PITCHING PRACTICE APPARATUS

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**Fig. 2**

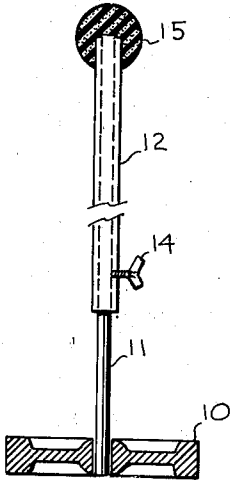


**Fig. 1**

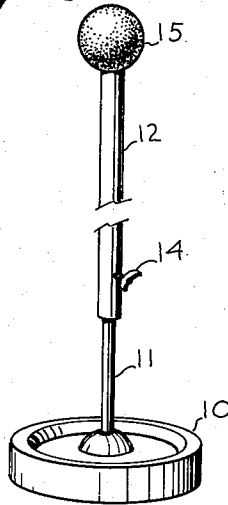


**Fig. 3**

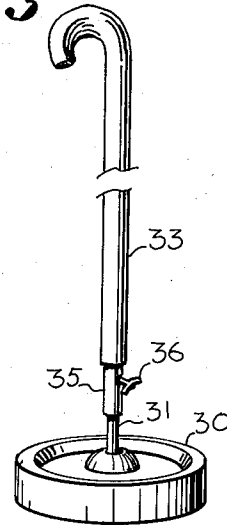


**Fig. 4**

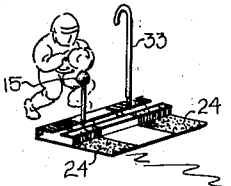
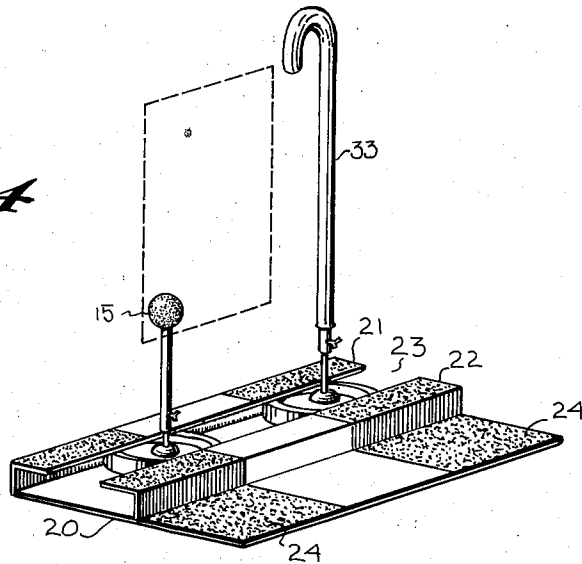
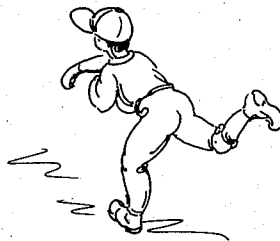


**Fig. 5**



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## PITCHING PRACTICE APPARATUS

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This invention relates to devices for teaching throwing accuracy, and more particularly to baseball instruction devices for improving pitching control and catching skill.

Virtually every attempt to increase the effectiveness of the baseball pitcher begins with an attempt to improve the control and accuracy with which the pitcher throws. The pitcher who can direct the ball to a selected spot in the pitching zone has a weapon which materially increases the natural effectiveness of fast balls, sliders, sinkers and curve balls. In addition, he also becomes markedly more confident in his own abilities, which in turn tends to increase his effectiveness.

With the objective of imparting control to pitchers, therefore, there have been developed many devices which are intended to simulate pitching zones. Few if any of these devices heretofore available, however, provide desirable combinations of effectiveness, simplicity and economy. A device may define the pitching zone, for example, but usually does so in a way which cannot be effectually visualized under actual game conditions. The technique of having someone stand in the batter's box during pitching practice is not convenient, nor does it appear to be particularly effective. This problem is made particularly difficult when it is recognized that a pitcher must be able to throw to varying strike zones, and that the strike zone varies in vertical dimension for different hitters. Further, the pitcher must keep the strike zone in mind no matter where the batter is standing relative to the batter's box and the plate.

Whatever device is used for improving pitching control should also be useful in improving the catching skill of the catcher, inasmuch as the two must work together as a team. Achieving both these objectives has heretofore been extremely difficult, because the elements which have been utilized to define the strike zone and the pitching spot relative to the strike zone have increased the problems of the catcher materially and have therefore made training virtually impossible for him. In addition, it is desirable that the equipment which is adopted be as light in weight as is feasible, so that it may be transportable conveniently and readily and quickly adjusted to simulate a wide variety of game conditions. Such a device is particularly effective in imparting the skills of baseball to children who are just beginning to learn the game. If the actual conditions are effectively simulated, the lessons which are learned are retained in such a way that they are thereafter put to use in actual games.

It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide an improved baseball teaching device for teaching pitching accuracy.

It is another object of the present invention to provide an improved instruction apparatus for the simultaneous teaching of pitching accuracy and catching skill.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a training device for teaching pitching, which device is simple to construct, inexpensive, and which is readily adjustable to provide a wide variety of simulated game conditions.

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It is a further object of the present invention to provide an improved baseball teaching device for training both a pitcher and a catcher, which device is relatively compact, easily adjusted, and which accurately simulates game conditions.

These and other objects of the present invention are achieved by an arrangement in accordance with the invention which uses a primary pitching target which can be positioned at a desired point in or adjacent to a strike zone. The primary target may be defined by a round ball mounted on the end of a long and narrow support which is positioned on a base. The entire structure may be moved laterally relative to home plate, and the round ball may be vertically movable to various points within the strike zone, or outside it. It has been found that such a target is remarkably suitable in providing an aiming point for teaching pitching accuracy, and also for enabling the visualization of the pitching spot under actual game conditions.

Along with the primary target may be employed a structure for cooperatively and simultaneously teaching pitching a ball when a batter is in position. The structure utilizes a secondary or obstruction target which may be positioned adjacent to the primary target and the home plate area so as to simulate the position and height of a batter. Thus, the secondary target may be utilized to define strike zones of different heights, and also to represent the position of the batter in the batter's box. With this, the primary target member then teaches how pitches may be directed to certain spots for individual batters. These elements may be effectively combined into a single overall structure through the use of a common base member having elements for laterally guiding the target members, and also including indicia for defining the position of home plate. Although simple and extremely compact, this structure provides essentially all that is needed for the simulation of actual game conditions, and also permits simultaneous training of both the pitcher and the catcher.

A better understanding of the present invention may be had from a reading of the following detailed description and an inspection of the drawing, in which:

Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a primary target device in accordance with the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a side elevational view, partly broken away, of the primary target element of Fig. 1;

Fig. 3 is a perspective view of a secondary target device in accordance with the invention;

Fig. 4 is a perspective view of an arrangement in accordance with the invention, showing the primary and secondary target elements as used together in conjunction with a base structure; and

Fig. 5 is a simplified representation of the manner in which an arrangement in accordance with the invention may be utilized for imparting pitching control and catching skill.

A primary target device in accordance with the invention may utilize a base structure in the form of a wheel shaped element 10. The wheel shaped element 10 is adapted to lie flat on the ground without external support, but in addition may be used in combination with other elements as described in more detail below. The primary target device may also include a vertically extending base rod centrally positioned within the wheel shaped element 10. This base rod 11 may be partly encompassed along an upper portion of its length by an elongated sleeve member 12. The sleeve member 12 fits coaxially around the base rod 11 and a set screw 14 may be threaded through the sleeve member 12 to provide vertical adjustment of the sleeve relative to the base rod 11. Although the sleeve member 12 is large enough to fit around the base rod 11, it may none the less be con-

sidered to be narrow and elongated. A target point may be defined by a round element or ball 15 positioned on the uppermost end of the sleeve member 12. The target ball 15 is preferably painted a bright color, such as red, and is desirably of a size which approximates that of the baseball being thrown, or which is somewhat smaller.

This structure is all that is needed for simulating game conditions and teaching pitching accuracy in such a way that the lessons learned may thereafter be effectively used under game conditions. In use, the wheel shaped base 10 is placed in any desired lateral or depth position relative to home plate. The sleeve member 12 is adjusted relative to the base rod 11 by fastening the set screw 14 at a selected point. Thus, the pitcher sees primarily only the target ball 15 at a given lateral and height position in the strike zone. The size and position of the ball are such that they do not introduce an artificial aspect into the training of the pitcher. At the same time, the image provided is essentially so simple and clear that it may be readily re-created or visualized during actual game conditions.

If a frame rectangle were used for defining a strike zone, for example, a pitcher would learn to throw toward an imaginary or artificial target. Moreover, this target could not be shifted so as to teach throwing to points near but outside the strike zone. Similarly, the target would have to be of an average height dimension and could not accurately simulate the changes in the strike zone which occur for various changes in batter's shape and size.

The present device does not attempt to simulate a strike zone in this manner, but in the much more effective and easily visualized manner of pointing out definitely where the ball should be located when passing the strike zone, and in doing so in such a way that no artificial conditions are created. The device is particularly easy to adjust in any position desired relative to the strike zone. Furthermore, the entire structure is extremely inexpensive, and although light in weight and compact in size is rugged enough to withstand any blows it might take during actual practice.

The primary target device of Fig. 1 may, of course, be utilized in conjunction with someone standing close thereto to simulate the position of a batter in the batter's box. It is preferable, however, to utilize a device such as is shown in Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 to provide simulation of the height and position of the batter relative to the primary target. The secondary or obstruction target is shown in detail in the perspective view of Fig. 3, and in an overall structure combined with the primary target element in the view of Fig. 4. As may be seen in Fig. 4, both elements may be mounted on a base plate 20 which may be simply a flat iron or steel plate, if desired. On this plate 20 may be mounted a pair of angle members 21 and 22 which are spaced apart and extend laterally across the base plate 20. One side of each of the angle members 21 and 22 extends vertically from the base plate 20, and the remaining sides are directed toward each other so as to define a channel opening 23 extending laterally across the base plate 20. The channel opening 23 therefore constitutes a guide aperture for elements to be described below. The angle members 21 and 22 are relatively low in height so as to not provide a visual or actual obstacle to a thrown ball. Home plate marking indicia, in the form of marks or shading 24 may be located on the top surface of the base plate 20 and the angle members 21 and 22 so as to define the home plate area. Thus, the base plate 20 may be positioned anywhere as desired, to denote a home plate and the remaining elements may be positioned relative thereto. Only the pitchers mound need be marked off a selected distance.

With this arrangement, as shown in Fig. 4, the primary target ball 15 mounted on the structure including the wheel shaped base 10 may be employed at any desired

lateral and vertical position relative to a strike zone. The wheel shaped base 10 fits between the angle members 21 and 22 and the base-rod 11 extends through the channel opening 23. A secondary target device may also be employed so as to slide laterally within the guide defined by the angle members 21 and 22. As shown particularly in Figs. 3 and 4, this secondary target element may consist of a substantially vertical elongated structure. A wheel shaped base 30 may fit within the space defined by the angle members 21 and 22, and a base rod 31 fixed to the base 30 may extend vertically from the center of the base 30. The principal part of the secondary target device is provided by a length of flexible tubing 33 which provides an extension of the base rod 31. The inner part of the flexible tubing 33 is set about a sleeve member 35 which fits coaxially over the base rod 31. Although the tubing 33 is held frictionally on the sleeving 35, the sleeve member 35 slides on the base rod 31 and is arranged to be set at any desired axial position by a set screw 36 threaded in the side of the sleeve. The terminating portion of the flexible member 33 may be bent over, or hooked to simulate the head of a batter.

Despite the relative simplicity of the elements and their relationship to each other, it has been determined that the structure of Figs. 1 through 4 realistically simulates actual game conditions. In Fig. 4 the strike zone is defined in a general way by a dotted line rectangle. The vertical dimension is of course established by the height of the secondary target device and the horizontal dimension by the home plate indicia. As illustrated, the target ball 15 defines a target point which represents a strike which is low and on the outside corner. Actually, of course, it is left to the pitcher to visualize the strike zone himself, as he must do under actual game conditions.

In training, therefore, these relationships can be varied at will to simulate a variety of conditions and the most troublesome conditions. Often for example, an inexperienced pitcher will have difficulty with a batter who crowds the plate. There is a natural tendency then to throw to the outside, in order to avoid the batter. This tendency is perhaps augmented by the fact that it is not as easy to visualize the strike zone when it is being partially obstructed by the batter. The present device permits the target ball 15 to be put in any position relative to the batter, and thus through practice enables the difficulties to be overcome.

At the same time as the pitcher is being trained valuable experience can be derived by the catcher. It is of course necessary for the catcher to learn where to stand relative to different batter positions, as well as where to stand to form a target for the pitcher and also to be in a position to catch the ball no matter where thrown near the strike zone. The present device creates the impression of a batter in the box thus aiding the catcher to learn where he must stand for different batter positions. Additionally, the secondary target provides an obstruction to the vision of the catcher and to the flight of an erratically thrown ball. Consequently, the catcher is further aided in a manner which assists him under actual game conditions. It will be recognized that when a pitch is very accurately thrown it will strike the target ball 15 and most likely glance off to a side. This too provides good experience for the catcher, inasmuch as he must learn to stay steady and catch the ball despite a swing by the batter. Further, he must learn to hold his ungloved hand so that it is protected against foul tips, and the present device is also instructive in this regard.

Although there have been described above and illustrated in the drawing particular arrangements of the invention for teaching pitching and catching skill to baseball players, it will be appreciated that the invention is not limited to the specific illustrative embodiment. Accordingly, any modifications, variations, or equivalent

arrangements falling within the scope of the annexed claims should be considered to be a part of the present invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A baseball instruction device for simultaneously teaching pitching control and catching skill, the device including in combination a base plate structure having home plate indicia thereon and a guide structure extending laterally with respect to the home plate indicia, a primary target device including a base portion registering with the guide structure, an elongated central portion and an uppermost spherical target, the primary target device being movable laterally and adjustable vertically with respect to the home plate indicia, so as to place the spherical target in a selected position relative to a pitching zone, and a secondary target device including a base portion registering with the guide structure and laterally movable therein, and an upper-most substantially vertical flexible target which is vertically adjustable relative to the base portion, so that the spherical target and the flexible target may be positioned in two dimensions relative to each other as well as the pitching zone.

2. A baseball instruction device for simultaneously teaching pitching control and catching skill, the device including in combination a substantially planar base plate structure having home plate indicia thereon, the base plate structure including spaced apart angle members defining a channel extending laterally across the home plate indicia, a vertical primary target member including a support registering partially within the channel and movable laterally with respect to the home plate indicia, the primary target member being adjustable in height and including a terminating spherical primary target element of a selected size, and an obstruction target member including a support registering partially within the channel and movable laterally with respect to the home plate indicia, the obstruction target member being adjustable in height, and also including a terminating flexible member extending from the support.

3. A baseball instruction device for simultaneously

teaching both pitching control and catching skill, the device including in combination a plate element, a pair of spaced apart angle members defining a channel which extends laterally across the plate element, the plate element and the angle members including home plate indicia thereon, a vertical primary target member including a wheel shaped element registering between the angle members, a vertically extending relatively narrow base rod affixed to the wheel shaped member and extending through the channel in the angle members, an upper, elongated sleeve member coaxial with a length of the base rod and extending vertically therefrom, the sleeve member being vertically adjustable relative to the base rod, and a spherical target of selected size attached to the uppermost end of the sleeve member, the size of the target being no larger than the size of the baseball being used, and an obstruction target member including a wheel shaped base element positioned between the angle members and movable laterally with respect to the home plate indicia, the obstruction target device including an elongated base rod extending vertically from the wheel shaped element and a terminating vertically extending flexible member providing an extension of the base rod and vertically adjustable with respect to the base rod, the height of the vertically extending flexible member being substantially greater than that of the primary target member and thereby defining the vertical dimension of a pitching zone, the lateral dimensions of which are defined by the home plate indicia, whereby the position of a batter may be simulated by the position of the obstruction target member, and simultaneously the position of a desired pitching spot may be selected relative to the pitching zone as well as to the obstruction target member.

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