

The Physical Tools of a Major League Player

Major League Baseball's scout rating system explained

Some organizations use the 20/80 scale others use 2 to 8. They are the same thing.

2 or 20 is the low end of the scale and 8 or 80 is the high end.

Scouts typically use two numbers when grading, such as 4/6 or 3/5. The first number is the player's current rating on the 2 to 8 scale the second is his "projected" future professional baseball rating. Of course those numbers are based on the individual scout's opinion.

When only one number is given, such as a 7, it is usually (almost always) that scout's projection opinion of that player's professional baseball potential.

THE PHYSICAL TOOLS OF A MAJOR LEAGUE BALL PLAYER

Arm Strength

This is a tool that is often overlooked by ball players today and one of the most lacking tools at the major league level. With 10 teams playing on artificial surfaces, making fielders play their position deeper, a strong arm is even more necessary today than in the past. The player with a strong arm will have less teams take a chance by running against him thus preventing runs from scoring. Thus a team with a weak throwing outfield or catcher will have more opportunities taken against them leading to more throwing errors and more runs given up.

When scouts are evaluating a players arm strength it is usually during pre-game infield-outfield practice. A scout will get to see several throws by the outfielders to second, third, and home plate. If a player has a good arm, chances are he will show it here, particularly on throws to home plate. Scouts are looking for four things from outfielders: a strong overhand throw, a straight-line trajectory, good carry, and good life on the turf when the ball finally hits the ground.

A strong arm is also necessary for infielders particularly the shortstop and third baseman. Scouts will pay the most attention to throws made from the outfield grass from deep short. If a player has a strong arm, it will show here. Look for a straight-line trajectory, strong hissing noise, and a sharp smack in the first baseman glove.

Running Speed

Foot speed is the only common denominator of offense and defense. This is one tool that does not go into slumps. A fast runner is of greater priority for clubs that play on artificial turf because they are playing in a bigger park and the ball travels faster than on grass. A fast outfielder may be able to catch up to two more balls a game thus saving his ball club an average of one run a game. The same player can steal bases thus putting ore pressure on the defense and making the pitchers throw more fastballs.

A players running speed is usually timed in two ways; 60 yard dash and from home to first. The average major league time is 6.9 for the 60 yard dash, from home to first 4.3 seconds for right handed hitters and 4.2 seconds for left handed hitters.

The clock start on times from home to first on the crack of the bat to when the foot hits first base. A fast runner at the major league level can run home to first in 4.0 seconds or below. The ability to run, will force fielders to rush their throws and make more throwing errors.

A team without speed will often have to hold their runners at third base thus scoring less runs.

60 Yard Dash

80: 6.4 seconds or faster

70: 6.5-6.6 seconds

60: 6.7-6.8 seconds

50: 6.9-7.0 seconds

40: 7.1-7.2 seconds

30: 7.3-7.4 seconds

20: 7.5 seconds +

Home To First (Right Side)

80: 4.0 seconds or faster

70: 4.1 seconds

60: 4.2 seconds

50: 4.3 seconds

40: 4.4 seconds

30: 4.5 seconds

20: 4.6 seconds

Home To First (Left Side)

80: 3.9 seconds or faster

70: 4.0 seconds

60: 4.1 seconds

50: 4.2 seconds

40: 4.3 seconds

30: 4.4 seconds

20: 4.5 seconds

Fielding Ability

This is the one tool that has the greatest chance of improvement. While you can not develop great foot speed or a great arm, fielding has the greatest chances of improvement with contest practice. When judging fielding scouts are looking for a number of traits:

(Quick Feet) the ability to move quickly laterally and forward and back.

(Range) how much ground does he cover?

(Soft Hands) the ability to catch the ball smoothly in the center the glove.

(Quick Hands) the ability to field bad hops.

Hitting Ability

This is the most difficult tool to scout because you are judging a hitter on how they will hit do at the major league level, by watching them hit against amateur pitching. There are a lot of amateur hitters that will look great against amateur pitching and then fall flat on their face once they enter professional baseball.

A hitter should have these lists of skills:

(Bat Speed) the ability to swing the bat quickly the ability to consistently hit the ball hard.

Knowledge of the strike zone the ability to turn on a major league fastball.

The ability to hit breaking pitches.

The ability to hit to all fields.

The ability to make adjustments at the plate when fooled.

Hitting With Power

Hitting the ball for power is one of the more desirable traits for any hitter, unfortunately it is often the most poorly projected tool at the major league level. In order to hit for power, a hitter needs outstanding batspeed. Batspeed is what makes the ball travel and all outstanding hitters have it. A hitter with major league power will regularly hit the ball over the fence in batting practice and should be able to drive the ball over 400 feet.

A lot of care should be taken when judging amateur hitters swinging aluminum bats. The aluminum bat has a greater hitting surface, and because they are lighter they can be swung with much greater bat speed, driving the ball 18% farther than with wooden bats. A 400 foot drive with a wood bat will travel 470 feet with aluminum.

Many hitters are home run hitters swinging aluminum and become warning track hitters with a wood bat. It is very important for hitters to get used to a wooden bat before signing into professional baseball. Most hitters find they have a tough time getting used to not driving the ball the way they used to in college or high school baseball.

What Scouts Look For In Pitchers

When scouting a pitcher the first quality a scout will look for is a strong arm. This is a God-given talent that can only be improved to a certain degree. One game under a radar gun will tell if the pitcher has the arm strength to be a major league prospect.

There are two basic models of radar guns used to clock the speed of fastballs. The Jugs Speed Gun (Fast Gun) will pick up the speed of the fastball after it has traveled 3.5 feet and the Ra-Gun (Slow Gun) will pick up the speed after the ball has traveled 40-50 feet.

A fastball will lose 8 mph from the time it leaves the pitcher's hand to the time it crosses home plate. The JUGS speed Gun is usually 3-4mph faster than the Ra-Gun.

The average major league fastball is 88-89 mph on a JUGS Speed Gun and 84-85 mph on the Ra-Gun. Scouts will rarely if ever sign a pitcher who does not throw at least 85 mph on the JUGS Speed Gun.

CHECKLIST FOR GRADING PITCHERS

Fastball - The first thing a scout looks for is a fastball with good velocity and movement. A fastball should sink, rise, slide or tail. A major league fastball is in the high 80's.

Curveball - When grading a curveball, scouts look for a fast tight rotation on the ball. A good curveball will break both laterally and downward about two feet. A good curve ball gives the illusion of falling off the table with its sharp downward breaking motion as it approaches home plate.

Slider - A good slider can be a tremendous compliment to a good fastball. A good slider will have a tight lateral spin, like a bullet. A slider will break about 6-18 inches as it approaches home plate. It should look like a fastball until it breaks across the plate.

ChangeUp - A good change up can be a tremendous asset to any pitcher by making a fastball seem that much quicker to the hitter. A good change-up should look identical to the hitter only it travels 15-20 mph slower than the fastball. It will make the hitter way out in front of the pitch.

Delivery - A pitchers delivery should be as smooth as possible. It should look effortless with no mechanical problems like: throwing across the body, landing on a stiff front leg, overstriding, landing on the heel or his arm lagging behind his body. Any mechanical problems left uncorrected can lead to control and arm problems.

Control - The ability to throw strikes on a consistent basis is vital for any pitcher to have success at the major league level. If the pitcher has less than overpowering stuff his control becomes even more important to his success. A good pitcher will be able to throw 70% of their pitches for strikes and can throw breaking pitches for strikes when behind in the count.

Scale - Pitchers Velocity

80: 98 mph +

70: 93-97 mph

60: 90-92 mph

50: 88-89 mph

40: 85-87 mph

30: 83-84 mph

20: 82 mph -

What Scouts Look For in Catchers

A good catcher is vital to the success of a championship team. The catcher will provide leadership on the field and work with the pitcher when setting up the hitters and calling the game. The catcher must be durable and is responsible for the teams defense.

A catcher needs soft hands , quick feet and the ability to block pitches in the dirt. A good catcher can catch and throw to second base under 2.0 seconds, some catchers can break 1.8 seconds.

Catchers Release Times to Second Base

80: 1.7 seconds - below

70: 1.7 - 1.8 seconds

60: 1.8 - 1.9 seconds

50: 1.9 - 2.0 seconds

40: 2.0 - 2.1 seconds

30: 2.1 - 2.2 seconds

20: 2.2 - 2.3 seconds

What Scouts Look For In Infielders

A good infield is worth its weight in gold to a successful team. A strong defense will take the opposition out of more rallies and save wear and tear on the pitching staff.

Teams are looking for these qualities in their infielders

Arm Strength: A strong arm is especially necessary from the shortstop who will often be making throws up to 150 feet flat-footed on the edge of the outfield grass. The third baseman also needs a strong arm when called upon to make throws up to 120 feet from along the foul line. Look to see if the infielders throws are straight and do not die as they approach the first baseman.

Range: Look for infielders with good body control. They need first-step quickness able to field the ball to their left, right, over their head and able to charge the ball and come up throwing. Also they need soft hands, able to move their hands quickly and smoothly to bad hops and sharply hit line drives

What Scouts Look For In Outfielders

A good outfielder is vital to the make up for a successful team. Although most outfielders are in the lineup for their bats, their defensive skills can not be overlooked.

Scouts are looking for these basic skills from outfielders

Arm Strength: A strong arm is vital for the defensive make up of the outfield. A strong arm will cut down baserunners trying to score and prevent runners from taking extra bases.

When evaluating a players arm strength, it is important to be at the game in time to see infield-outfield practice. If the player has a strong arm, chances are he will show it here. Teams will often decide whether to run on a team by the strength of the arms demonstrated before the game.

You should look for four things from outfielders: a strong overhand throw, a straight-line trajectory, good carry, and good life off the turf when the ball finally hits the grounds.

A strong arm is vital for rightfield because he will often be called on to make throws to third base and home plate up to 275 feet.

Range: A good outfielder will be able to cover a lot of ground in the outfield. The centerfielder has the most territory to cover, so obviously getting a good jump on the ball and having good speed is vital for a good outfielder.

The outfielder must be able to field ground and fly balls and come up throwing. Outfielders need to be able judge how hard a ball is hit and be able to field fly balls hit over his head. The centerfielder requires the most speed and the rightfielder the strongest arm.

A good centerfielder can run the 60 yard dash in under 6.6 seconds. Left and right-fielders should run the 60 yard dash under 6.8 seconds.

What Scouts Look For In Hitters

This is the hardest all tools to predict whether a player will hit major league pitching because you often do not know whether they will hit at the major league level until they get there.

The quality the most necessary to become a major league hitter is a smooth quick level swing. A player with a quick bat can wait on the pitches longer therefore have a better chance of hitting the ball harder.

Another important quality to look for is a good knowledge of the strike zone. A player will not become a good hitter by swinging at pitches outside the strike zone. The more patient the hitter is, the more dangerous they become.

When watching a hitter pay close attention to his hands when he strides. If a player drops or raises his hands when the pitch is being delivered, he increases his chances of not hitting the ball hard. The hands should go back, the less unnecessary movement, the better. The harder the pitcher is throwing, the more mechanically correct the hitter needs to be to hit. A hitter that lunges, doesn't keep his hands back, hitches or has a pronounced uppercut will not hit at a consistent level.

When evaluating hitters focus on tools, not statistics. You should scout tools not performance. Statistics are good for evaluating weaknesses. A hitter with a high strikeout and low walk total is swinging at too many bad pitches, unless corrected will never hit at a constant level.

A hitter should be able to turn on a good fastball on the inside part of the plate. If he can't, he has little chance of becoming a good hitter, because pitchers must throw inside to be successful at the major league level. A hitter must be able to hit breaking pitches or he will not last at the major league or minor league level. Once word gets out about a hitter's can't hit the breaking pitches, he will see nothing else until he learns to hit it.

PLAYERS MAKEUP

The player's makeup is vital to his success in professional baseball. Often the player with the greatest desire will develop into a better ball player than the one with better physical tools.

Most of the players when they are sent to the minor leagues, are used to being the star on their team and often have never been in a slump or have lost a game before. This for many players is difficult to accept. For the first time in their lives, they are knocked out in the first inning or go 0 for 4. If a player can overcome this, they have a better chance of reaching their goal of playing in the major leagues.

One of the most important factors in a player is makeup is whether they can adjust to being away from home. Most high school players have never been away from home for any length of time and many are not prepared mentally to handle the long bus rides, bad lights, and poor playing conditions.

For many college players, the minors is a step down from playing on good fields, good lighting, flying, and large attendance.

The college player often comes into the minor leagues more mature because he has been away from home, but a player with a college degree may quit after two years if he does not feel he is being promoted quick enough. It is very difficult for players to see their teammates being promoted while they are staying put.

A player who works hard and puts up good numbers in the minor leagues will be noticed by the organization.

PLAYER CHECKLIST

(What to look for in a player)

CATCHERS: Arm strength, agility and quickness, soft hands, aggressiveness plus leadership.

INFIELDERS: Arm Strength, speed, instincts, aggressiveness, soft hands, hitting ability (especially from the corners).

HITTERS: Strength, batspeed, plane of swing, absence of fear, aggressiveness, top-hand extension, and follow-through.

PITCHERS: Arm strength, velocity, movement, and a curveball with tight rotation, free arm action and proper delivery, with complete extension on the follow-through (basically a live, quick arm, aggressiveness, and the ability to concentrate.

MAKEUP: Strong desire to succeed, coachability, maturity, temperament, improvement, drive, hunger, consistency, knowledge of the game, competitiveness, (how badly does the player want to reach the major leagues and how well he will work at.)

PHYSICAL CHANGES: Has he reached his full height yet? Can he gain or lose weight? Will he become faster or slower? Has he filled out yet? Does he have history of being hurt? How much has his skills improved from last year.

Does the player have the physical tools plus the strong make up to play in the major leagues. Only about 10% of the players who sign a minor league contract will.

