

## Essential Exercises for a Youth Baseball Player

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Baseball is such a dynamic sport that involves complex communication within the body making it difficult to pinpoint a few exercises that *all* baseball players should be doing.

An exercise that might be essential for one athlete may not be good for another. Individualization is important and you need to pick the 5 exercises that work best for you.

First, consult with a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist with knowledge of the baseball game and familiarity with the sport's movements and demands.

- 1) Pick exercises that work for you,
- 2) Consult with CSCS

To pick just a few essential exercises you need to keep in mind that regardless of your age, experience, and goals, you want to become a well-rounded athlete. There are 5 important Athletic Skills that all athletes need to improve to avoid injury and maximize performance. Your program and its progression should include exercises and drills that train to improve: Balance, Agility, Strength, Explosiveness, and Speed. All of these skills, working together, result in improved power output.

### Push Up Plank Hold

First and foremost, an athlete has to be strong and support the body without added resistance. An exercise that focuses on Balance, or Core Stability, is a Push Up Plank Hold. It strengthens the core musculature around three important structures of the body, the scaps, the spine, and the hips. Lack of adequate core strength and the stamina to hold this position accurately for one minute will place unnecessary added stress to the shoulder, elbow, knees.



Important joints and muscles for a hitter or pitcher of course! It is an absolute must that all of our players can hold the correct position for at least one minute. If you can't hold this position for one minute forget about heavy squats, push ups, and bench press.

Ultimately, you want to improve arm velocity, bat velocity, and foot speed. It's often forgotten that power is much more than lifting heavy weights. You also need to improve your range of motion, your mechanical efficiency, and your reaction time. Again, our primary goal is to improve function and strength around the scaps, spine, and hips. A Standing Throwdown works combines all of these components. Perform it slow, and under control, and focus on moving through a full range of motion with excellent technique. The stop and go action also has a neuromuscular effect, commonly called coordination, that improves response time, essential to reducing reaction time and improving your ability to quickly change direction.

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### Power Throwdown

As you improve use the same Throwdown, focusing on Explosiveness. With proper mechanics throw the ball harder and stop it quickly when it returns. To improve reaction time and the muscle's ability to activate and deactivate quickly, perform with a lighter ball faster, but with less force. To improve Strength and Explosiveness, use a heavier ball, throwing it down into the ground with more force. This is an important "core" exercise. Not only because this exercise works your abdominals, but because it works your lats, pecs, hips stabilizers, and many other muscles throughout your entire body, all important in more powerful swings and throws.



### Six Pack Routine



The most necessary Upper Body Strength exercise for a baseball player is what is commonly called the Six Pack routine. Due to the highly stressful act of throwing and swinging a bat, the rotator cuff muscles that stabilize the shoulder joint are often misused, or overused and injuries become the result. The Six Packs work the rotator cuff muscles but more importantly, focus on very important upper back muscles that stabilize and move the scapula. An

improperly functioning scap and/or lack of strength of its muscles most often cause improper shoulder joint function resulting in labrum and rotator cuff tears. Nowadays there aren't many professional baseball players that refuse to do this exercise sequence and unless contraindicated, all of them need to do them.

### Squat

The Squat is under a large amount of scrutiny among health professionals, coaches, parents, and players. If this exercise is done improperly and without expert supervision it is very dangerous. Lower back and spine problems will result due to the combination of improper technique and heavy loads. Conversely, this exercise is extremely beneficial for the baseball athlete and will undoubtedly improve lower body strength and power. Hip extension is important in the acceleration phase of throwing and hitting. The ability to decelerate the lower body to accelerate the upper body is important at contact when hitting and at ball release when throwing. Besides that, Baseball is ground-based, and although many movements are performed with one foot, and then the other, all movements on the field yield more successful results when both feet are on the ground.



### DB Squat

A squat should be used to help strengthen the lower back, not to hurt it and, improve your function on the field. A proper squat, similar to a proper, athletic, fielding position, is when your hips remain neutral and no forward or backward tilting occurs. If you can't execute this properly with weight on your back, don't do it. Instead, use a dumbbell squat to improve your range of motion and master your technique. Learn how to stabilize your scaps, spine, and hips properly prior to placing any weight on your back.



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### One-Leg Squat or Step Up

Regardless, lying down in a leg press machine won't do! If there is no hip extension involved in your leg exercises you aren't incorporating an essential exercise. If the squat doesn't work for you or is contraindicated supplement it with a One-Leg Squat or Step Up on a box.

### Pick Up Drills

Another essential exercise to include in a baseball-specific conditioning program is a Baseball Pick Up drill or the more reactive Pick Up Gauntlet. The ability to react quickly and move in any direction is important. Unlike the traditional baseball pick up drill, shuffling side to side, this multi-directional drill involves the unknown! You're not going to be able to shuffle to every ball either. If you're just starting out, shuffle back and forth and learn how to start and come to a stop efficiently. Then, use this drill to polish your reaction time and 1<sup>st</sup> step Explosiveness moving in the most efficient manner to get to the ball in a good position.



### Split Jumps w/ toss

Split Jumps with a med ball toss involves balance, agility, strength, explosiveness, and speed and with its rotational component, offers a dynamic movement specific to all aspects of the game of baseball. The various lunge angles, hip extension, sequenced rotation is required in fielding, throwing, hitting, and running. Including the ball toss works every muscle in your body and its complexity demands efficient communication be made within the

body. The short ground contact time improves muscle elasticity. The jump landing and resisted throw will improve strength. The fast but powerful jump into the air and the quick catch but powerful toss back to your partner will improve Explosiveness and Speed.

With these exercises strategically programmed into your workout routine, your athletic skills, and the ability to apply them on the field will greatly improve. Depending on the time of year and your particular focus, mix up the order of these exercises after completing a in-depth warm up. Make sure to stretch after your done!

For further instruction and to view these exercises and more, go to [www.basesathlete.com](http://www.basesathlete.com).

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