



What scouts look for (By Christine Destefano / MLB.com)

Pitching

It's more than just velocity

Regardless of how alluring it is to light up the radar gun, good scouts look for much more than velocity from pitchers. As a starting point, scouts start by looking at a pitcher's strength, stamina, agility and aggressiveness, and then look at things like arm action and delivery. Sure it's nice to throw hard, but scouts are also looking for movement and deception.

For starters, here's what scouts will have looked at before a pitcher has even thrown the ball:

- Physical attributes:
- Is the pitcher going to grow more?
- How tall are his parents?
- Has he physically matured yet, or does he still have room to fill out?
If a high-school player hasn't fully matured yet and can hit 83 mph on the radar gun, it can almost be certain that he'll be adding a few more miles as he gets bigger and stronger.
- What kind of body type does he have?
- Long and lean, or bulky and compact?

"You're looking for a guy to be strong down the road and be able to eat innings," says one Major League scout. "You want a reliant arm that is going to last. A guy with a big, durable body and a strong lower half."

Intangibles

- Is he emotionally mature?
- Can he handle the pressure of pitching in big games and big situations or does he let mistakes rattle him?
- Does he know the game and the rules?
- Is he confident?
- Aggressive?
- Or does he look as though he'd rather be elsewhere?

Scouts are looking for guys who want the ball. "Watch his body language after he gives up a home run," says the scout, "or when the ball gets past the catcher's glove and a run scores in a tight game. It tells you a lot about what's going on. Some young kids are overly animated, it just depends on how you channel it.

Giving it the old Tiger Woods fist pump is OK, but you just got to note that." And scouts aren't just watching for actions during a game. They usually watch a player from the moment they reach the stands.

"In his pre-game routine, is he taking extra hacks, or hitting off a tee? Last year Mark Prior would run about three miles on days after he pitched -- that's the stuff you look for," says the scout. "If you watch close enough, body language will tell you anything."

Health

- Does he have any current or previous injuries?
- Any recent surgeries or health concerns?
- Having an injury doesn't mean a kid is no longer a prospect, but they are just flags the scouts note.

"It really depends on the injury," says the scout. "Shoulders and elbows can be bad, and breaking an arm isn't necessarily a good thing."

Before seeing a pitcher in a game, scouts will often observe a prospect in the bullpen to get a sense of his pitches, and to get a close look at his mechanics, control and velocity. Scouts aren't judging what they see in the bullpen -- players should only be evaluated from what scouts see in games -- but it helps give sort of a preview to what the pitcher is about.

"I've seen guys not really turn it on in the pen," says the scout, "but when they turn the scoreboard on, it's a whole different guy." In evaluating pitchers, scouts are looking for specific tools. A grade between 20-80 (or some clubs use a 2-8 scale) is given for each tool at the present and future level, and they are averaged to get an Overall Future

Potential number, or OFP, which projects what level the pitcher will be at the Major League level. Although clubs differ slightly on how they evaluate players, most rely on assigning grades for fastball, fastball movement, curveball, slider, any other pitches (cutter, forkball, etc.), control and velocity.

VELOCITY

Scale between 20-80, with 50 being Major League average

MPH	GRADE
98+	80
93-97	70-79
90-92	60-69
88-89	50-59
85-87	49-40
83-84	30-39
82	20-29

Velocity

This just measures one thing - how hard a pitcher can throw. Hitting 90 mph on the gun is considered something special, and scouts will take notice, but that's not all they are looking for.

"I can see big league guys in the Majors get guys out with 83-86 mph fastballs, by using location and changing speeds. Big leaguers don't even use that word 'velocity.' You got to make sure they can get someone out. Sure, 90 is considered the magic number, but there's too many other variables in the equation. Some of these kids with electric arms in low-A ball -- it's like "Bull Durham" out there -- they don't know where it's going.

But it's not a tool to be taken lightly. "Movement and secondary pitches can be taught - but velocity you're born with," the scout says.

Movement

While velocity is the easiest tool to measure, it isn't necessarily the most important. In order to be successful at the Major League level, pitches must have movement. Does the ball drop, rise, sink, slide, fade, tumble or go straight? Since a moving target is harder to hit, the more movement a pitcher has, the better.

"You're not looking for the guy who throws as straight as a string," one scout says. While breaking pitches such as curveballs and sliders usually aren't thrown with Major League quality by young pitchers, scouts look for the makings of a pitcher who could develop those pitches. Is there evidence of proper spin, tight rotation, downward movement, a flexible wrist and proper follow through? If so, the scout may project this pitcher as someone capable of developing these pitches.

"Different grips and different finger pressure on the ball create movement. If a pitcher had the right teacher and had some aptitude, sure, this can be taught. We also want to see if their second or third pitch is an out pitch."

Control

Control is the other tool a pitcher should have. Can he place his pitches and find the plate, or is he all over the place? While excellent command at a young age is a distinctive tool to have, scouts know that by looking at a prospect's other skills -- such as delivery and arm action -- control is something that can develop as the player matures.

"If you've got [control], even if you don't have plus velocity, you still have a chance to win," says the scout, "if you can throw strikes with a couple of different pitches and hit your spots. Watch where Greg Maddux's catcher sets up - he doesn't move around too much back there. [Maddux] spots the ball well."

Mechanics and arm action: Should be smooth, easy and effortless. The pitcher shouldn't look like he's laboring to throw the ball, or putting great effort into it with a herky-jerky motion. Does the pitcher get full extension and is it a fluid movement?

"But if you get a funky guy, they can be effective too with twisting, curling deliveries. Ideally, everything is in synch. More variables than there are constants here."

Delivery

Where is the release point? Is he an overhand pitcher? Does he throw from a high three-quarter angle or low three-quarter slot? Or is he a sidearmer or submariner?

"With amateurs we're looking for consistency and the ability to repeat delivery. If one time it's a perfect full wind up, and the next time he's coming from the side, that's not too good. College guys are generally more polished. In everyone we're looking for the release point to be the same on all pitches. If you go to throw off-speed, drop your elbow and slow your arm down, decent hitters will cream the guy."

Curveball

Should have tight rotation -- curveballs are thrown rotating forward instead of backward like a fastball -- and the tighter the rotation the sharper the drop or bite. Scouts will also look for the type of break it has - does it break early or late, go across the plate or down?

And they will look at how easy it is for hitters to pick up. But due to the stress throwing breaking pitches has on a young arm that's still developing, scouts take that into consideration.

"It all depends on physical maturity," says the scout. "If you're a 6-4, 150-pound kid, you want to build up arm strength first. A good coach will tell you if you have a fastball and hit your spots and have a changeup, you have five pitches already without spinning a breaking ball."

Changeup

One of the most important pitches for a pitcher to establish. Scouts will check this pitch for accuracy and frequency -- is it effective enough to be thrown in any situation?

"You need this pitch to keep hitters off balance," says the scout. "Pitchers should use the same arm slot and arm speed as they do with a fastball, but it's an entirely different pitch. It's a feel pitch -- one you have to develop a touch for throwing."

But scouts will also look at how a pitcher fields his position -- as good athletes show decent fielding skills, and any other skills like if he had a pick-off move. In all players scouts are looking for qualities that will bring winning results. To become a successful Major League pitcher, players will have to learn to make adjustments, and scouts have to decide which players demonstrate the ability -- both physically and mentally - to make that happen.

"There aren't many true No. 1 Major League starters out there -- powerful guys with focus and presence -- but that's what we're all looking for," says the scout.

Hitting

Performance at plate tough to project

Before a player even picks up a bat or glove, a scout will have already done some evaluations. Since they are looking for players who will be able to play at the Major League level, several factors go into consideration:

Size/Build

- Is the player going to grow more?
- What's his body type -- is he long and lean, or thick and stocky?
- What's his weight -- is he going to develop more, or has he fully matured?

Since heights on rosters aren't always accurate, scouts will often get near a player during practice to get a true estimate of his height. Or watch him next to an umpire, and compare his height.

"Guys with short arms aren't going to have a lot of wasted movement there," says one veteran scout. "He'll get to the ball quicker and may have less holes in his swing than a guy with long arms."

Intangibles

- Does he spend extra time in the cage?
- When it's 8:30 on a Sunday morning and it's freezing outside, is he bundled up sitting in the dugout or is he playing pepper or getting in some running?

"We look for his reactions on called balls and strikes," a scout says. "Does he go jaw-to-jaw with the umpire? Throw his helmet into the bleachers? Does he take his 0-for-4 performance in the field with him? We want to see if he lets things affect him."

One Major League scouting director said with the significant amount of money invested in top draft picks, teams will often have a player speak to a sports psychologist.

"They usually just talk to the kid, tell us a little bit about their makeup," the scouting director says. "We rely on our scouts to tell us things, too, but this is just another thing we do to try and protect our potential investment."

On the field, scouts are looking for how a prospect plays the game. "Play hard and with passion," the scouting director says. Don't act like you've been in the big leagues already.

Show me you can throw, show me you can run. Most of us would do anything to have their ability, so let's see them use it and enjoy it."

Rating players:

OFP	Type of player
70-80	All-Star, well above-average player
60-69	Above average
50-59	Major League average
40-49	Below average, fringe player
30-39	Well below-average, organizational-type player

The five tools position players are rated on are hitting, power, running, fielding and throwing.

When a player has all of these skills, he's considered a "five-tool" player. Prospects are rated on a scale of 20-80 (or some clubs use a 2-8 scale) in each of the areas in the present and future categories, and then the numbers are averaged to arrive at an Overall Future Potential number, or OFP, which projects the level that prospect will play in the Majors.

Speed

Left side	Rating	Right side
3.9	80	4.0
4.0	70	4.1
4.1	60	4.2
4.2	50	4.3
4.3	40	4.4
4.4	30	4.5
4.5	20	4.6

Every scout carries a stopwatch to measure a hitter's speed to first base. The watch starts the moment the ball makes contact with the bat and stops when the batter reaches first. The scout then gives that player his speed rating.

Hitting

One of the most difficult things a scout has to do is project who will be able to hit and will who not hit at the Major League level. There are certain similar qualities found in successful hitters: strength, bat speed, full extension and follow through after contact, aggressive (hits first good pitch) and having the ball "jump" off the bat.

"I'm looking for a guy who can get the sweet part of the bat on the ball on a consistent basis," says one scout.

There are some minor mechanical adjustments that can be made to improve future performance -- tinkering with a stance, or moving the hands -- that scouts may note as well. But there are some negative things to be aware of: fear at the plate (front foot steps away as hitter prepares to swing), hand hitches in a swing, too much uppercut in a swing and a dead bat (doesn't get it started).

"I check the rhythm on his approach," says one scout. "Is he chopping an ax, or is there rhythm with lift to his swing?"

Projecting power potential in high schoolers -- who may not reach the big leagues for seven or eight years -- is also tricky.

"You gotta get creative with kids who aren't mature yet and who are using aluminum bats. Maybe he's not going to develop his power until he's 25. But when does it come? Jeff Bagwell hit four home runs in Class-AA ball. Paul LoDuca spent nine years in the minors and now he's showing some power in the big leagues. It's a tough thing to project."

Fielding

Middle infielders with a strong arm and plus defensive skills can make it to the big leagues. Good fielders show quick feet, agility and instincts -- being in the right spot at the right time. Scouts had Derek Jeter's instincts rated high when he was just a prep shortstop in Kalamazoo, Mich., and he showed them why after that play against Oakland in the Division Series last year when he came out of nowhere to flip the ball home.

"To me, that was the epitome of baseball instincts," says one veteran scout. "That's an 8." A good fielder's actions should be smooth and graceful -- the guy who makes it look easy. Outfielders should be able to react quickly, have good range and anticipate. If a player doesn't get a good jump and is slow reacting to a play, there's little likelihood he will ever develop into a skilled defender.

Scouts look for specific things at each position:

Catcher

Tools ranked in order of preference by one Major League scout are fielding, throwing, hitting, power and running. But a big part of a catcher's job is intangibles -- calling pitches, managing a staff and being the on-field leader. "When you're a catcher, you're a full-time babysitter, too," said one scout. "You have to know what [pitchers are] thinking, and know when to pat them on the back and kick them in the rear."

First base, third base

Corner infielders are expected to provide some power to the lineup. A scout ranks his preference in their tools as: hitting, power, fielding, throwing and running. "They are run producers, but there are exceptions to every rule. [Wade] Boggs was more of a scorer, but was still effective in that position." Third basemen should also have the arm strength to make those long, accurate throws across the field to first base.

Second base and shortstop

Fielding, throwing and running are still the top requirements for players at these positions, but the recent trend has been to see more power at this position with the establishment of an Alex Rodriguez, Jeter and Nomar Garciaparra type of position player. "But power is still a later priority," says one scout. "He still has to be a good fielder and be able to throw across the diamond." Agility, quickness, soft hands and instincts are all things successful middle infielders should have.

Left field and right field

Run production is key for the corner outfielders. These guys must be able to get on base and drive in runs. Defensively, since they are making those long throws to the infield, a strong, accurate arm is a must -- especially in right field since right fielder must make a long throw to third base.

Center field

Tools in order of one scout's importance are running and fielding, then hitting, throwing and power. Center fielders are the quarterback of the outfield, so they must be able to anticipate and have good range to get to balls hit out there. Pure athleticism and quickness is something you'll find in good center fielders -- enabling them to make those over-the-shoulder catches, or climbing the fence to rob a player of a home run.

In amateur ball, often times the best player on the team will play shortstop or center field, even though he may not project at that position in the Major Leagues, so scouts have to evaluate a player's skills and tools and then decide where he best may fit with a big league club. "If I see a kid at shortstop with athleticism and running speed, can he move to a corner position with bat and power? Or will he have to play second base in the big leagues because he doesn't have the agility of a Major League shortstop," says a scout. "But if he has enough foot speed and enough bat, he can play in the middle infield."

Some scouts say it's like figuring out a puzzle -- where can these tools best fit? "Look at the kid. He's the best player on team. He's 6-3, 180 [pounds] and will go up to 205. He's got a little power, so this guy could play third base or right field. He's got good reactions, so third base isn't out of the question. It's all about seeing what the individual is like."

Physical tools + Mental makeup = Prospect

Pitchers	Catchers	First Base
Arm Strength- Life Defense	Can catch	Can hit for average
Control - Command	Arm Strength- Can throw	Hit with power
Breaking Pitch	Can hit for average	Defense on field
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Off-speed Pitch	Hit with power	Can throw
Free & loose actions	Quickness	Can run

Second Basemen	Third Basemen	Shortstop
Can hit for average	Can hit for average	Defense - can field
Defense - can field	Hit for power	Can throw- plus arm
Plus runner	Defense - can field	Plus runner
Can throw	Can run	Can hit for average
Quickness - range	Can throw	Quickness - range

Left Field	Center Field	Right Field
Can hit for average	Can hit for average	Can hit for average
Hit with power	Plus runner	Hit with power
Can run	Defense - range	Can run
Defense - can field	Hit with power	Can throw
Can throw	Can throw	Defense - can field

Other Non-Tool Factors

- Size
- Strength
- Pro Appearance (clean cut)
- Aggressiveness
- Growth potential
- Habits
- Dedication
- Agility
- Emotional maturity

Once these tools are determined, the player will be placed in the proper prospect category;

No prospect = 0 - 39 Overall Future Projection

Fringe Prospect = 40 - 49 OFP

Fair Prospect = 50 - 59 OFP

Good Prospect = 60 - 69 OFP

Excellent Prospect = 70 - 79 OFP

Hitting Components

- Vision
- Strength (Genetic or artificial)
- Balance
- Pitch recognition / Rhythm
- Decision Time

Barrel speed

Hand manipulation (in zone, out of zone) - barrel to ball example;

- John Olerud - Avg. barrel speed, great hand manipulation example;
- Kirby Puckett - Great barrel speed, great hand manipulation

Catcher's Release or "Pop" Times

- 1.9 is Major League average for catcher's release or "pop" time. All grades should be based on average, above average or below average.
- Release time is not always indicative of the grade placed on "Arm Strength".

Physical Tool Correlation with Position Profile

Running times

- 60 yd dash
- home to 1st - LH hitter, RH hitter
- steal time - 1st to 2nd

Pitcher's Velocity

- Jugs / stalker readings
- Ra-Gun reading

Injuries

- Surgery
- Broken bones
- Glasses / contacts