

The Secrets of Successful Pitching

*The Things Which the Young Pitcher Should Find Most Helpful
in Gaining Prominence in His Profession*

By **EDDIE CICOTTE**

Star Pitcher of the World's Champion White Sox

FOR several seasons I have been called a fading veteran. In fact more than a year ago I was accused of being nearly through. The fact that last season was the best I ever had, has perhaps, offset these rumors to a certain extent. But I cannot disguise my age even to myself. I am thirty-four, old for a player, with eleven years service in the Major Leagues behind me and a fifteen year stretch since I began my career as a professional pitcher.

Edward Plank had two well-known theories. In the first he contended that a pitcher has only a certain number of pitched balls in his old soup bone and that when he has relieved his system of the last of these he is through.

Upon theory number two he explained his own presence in the lineup when he was past forty years of age. "I began very late," he said, "and so I shall last a good deal longer than the fellows who started when they were youngsters."

Now Plank had a very wise head on his shoulders. He had long years of experience and he learned much. Doubtless there was more than a grain of truth in both his theories. But according to Plank, I ought to be on the verge of the 'has been' class myself. While on the contrary I never felt better in my life.

True I have lost quite a few games already this season, more than I care to lose. But in the past three games that I have pitched our team has scored exactly two runs and I drove in both those runs myself. This is certainly not encouraging from the pitcher's standpoint. My last game I lost by a score of 1-0. No pitcher can pitch shut out ball very long so I must cheerfully pass the buck up to my associates.

I should be inclined to explain Edward Plank's long years of service on a slightly different basis. Plank had a cool head that never got rattled. He had excellent control. And above all else, he had an easy arm motion. Show me the pitcher with these three things and I will show you a pitcher who, barring the hazards of the game, should last for many seasons.

You will find that the pitchers who use themselves up at an early age, almost always throw the ball with a snap motion of their arms. There was Joe Wood for

instance. Wood had unusual ability but he had a delivery that always seemed to me to be very wearing on the arm. I know Walter Johnson once said, that it made his own arm ache to see Wood pitch. Now it is true that Wood starred in the Major Leagues at an unusually early age. But it is also true that he has not done much work for the past two seasons at an age when a pitcher should just be rounding into his prime.

Every player when he grows old, as I suppose I am, manufactures a set of rules to account for whatever measure of success he may have enjoyed. My rules are neither complicated nor novel. They have all been told before. But I believe they are sound and actually account for the fact that I am in condition to do better work than I have ever done.

The first rule that I would tell any young pitcher is to live a normal, healthy life.

He can stand late hours when he is young, but he can't dodge the effects of those late hours when he passes the thirty mark. I am not a prohibitionist. In fact I enjoy a glass of beer as well as the next man. But I have lived on a fairly even schedule and have no bad debts in the form of wasted time and energy to pay up for now. I eat well and sleep well which is the main thing. Health is surely the foundation of a ball-player's success to an even greater degree than in most business. And every business man will tell

Eddie Cicotte's winning smile. How he looked after contributing his share toward the late World's Championship



COMMENTS OF EDDIE CICOTTE

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The second rule is to develop control. Control is easily sixty per cent. of a pitcher's effectiveness.

The pitcher, to last very long in the Major Leagues, must cut the corners. It takes control to be able to do this.

The third rule is to acquire coolness under fire. Getting knocked out of the box is frequently due to the fact that the pitcher himself became badly rattled.

It is the one bad inning which wrecks ball games for the winning club usually scores more runs in a single inning than the losing club did in nine.

It is when runs are beginning to come in bunches that the pitcher needs all the self control that he can possibly muster.

The fourth rule is to learn to use your head. This includes all the other rules.

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you, that health is the most important thing in the world.

The second rule that I would tell a young fellow starting out on the long road to the Major Leagues, is to develop control. Control is easily sixty per cent. of a pitcher's effectiveness. I have known dozens of young fellows with great speed and strength. They would burn the ball across the plate and for a while they would get by. But sooner or later these wise batters that infest the Major League woods, would get wise to their curves and hammer them out of the box.

A pitcher, to last very long in the Majors, must be able to cut the corners. He must be able to put the ball either on the inside or the outside as he pleases. It is then that he crosses the batters. When he sees a batter stepping away from the plate apparently set for a ball on the inside, he promptly puts the ball over the outside. When the disappointed batter crowds the plate, he crosses him again by putting the ball on the inside and making him hit the handle of the bat if he hits at all.

It takes control to be able to do this. But the trouble of acquiring control is not too great a price to pay for gaining control. It is surely the secret of all pitching success.

You will find quite a number of old time pitchers hanging around who really don't seem to have much on the ball. But they do have control and it doesn't take very much besides control to win ball games.

The third rule that I should give to young pitchers is to acquire coolness under

fire. All pitchers dread getting knocked out of the box. But getting knocked out of the box is frequently due to the fact that the pitcher himself becomes badly rattled. One or two long hits got him entirely off balance and then he went up in the air. It is the one bad inning which wrecks ball games, for statistics show that the winning club usually scores more runs in a single inning than the losing club did in nine.

It is the runs that come across the plate in bunches that count. And it is when runs are beginning to come in bunches that a pitcher needs all the self-control that he can possibly master. A perfectly cool head will not always save the situation. But it will help. And the pitcher with the cool head will not experience as many distressing innings as the pitcher who easily loses control of himself and gets rattled.

Coolness is only another name for self-confidence. And self-confidence is a very important thing for a pitcher to have. It is lack of self-confidence in my opinion, which makes it hard for a pitcher to defeat certain clubs. In my own case Cleveland is a bad actor. Last year I faced Cleveland four times and lost three games. When I go against Cleveland, I am already in the hole because my frequent beatings by that club have led me to expect failure. True I try to fight off this feeling and succeed fairly well. But I don't altogether succeed because I have not wholly mastered the difficult art of perfect coolness and self-confidence.

The fourth rule, I should tell the begin-

ner really is most important of all. It is most important because it includes all the rest. It is merely to learn to use your head at all times. The pitcher who does this will observe the other rules I have tried to enumerate and probably several more that I may have omitted. There is no good substitute for brains anywhere, in any profession. Now and then a pitcher has so much stuff that he can get by for a while by use of very little real intelligence. But I believe no pitcher ever made a lasting success without good head work.

This head work is far more exacting and complicated than many people would suppose. It involves a careful study of every player in the league, his batting weaknesses and so on. It involves an ability to adapt pitching to certain conditions when they arise and perhaps use altogether different methods in the very next inning. It is the labor of a lifetime to acquire this information and the oldest pitcher on the circuits learns something from every game pitched.

There is always the inclination on the part of the young pitcher to experiment on freak deliveries. I suppose this tendency is the wish implanted in all of us to try short cuts to a definite goal. We would all like to be able to rub Alladin's Lamp, to summon the powers of a magician and completely baffle the batter. And the thing which would most readily accomplish this design would of course, be a freak delivery, something entirely out of the sphere of the batter's experience, that he wouldn't be able to understand and therefore couldn't combat successfully.

Perhaps I should be among the last to discourage freak deliveries since I have been accused of depending upon them a great deal myself. My particular pride and joy is the knuckle ball, which I developed by a good deal of practice. But there are no patents on this delivery. In fact I have endeavored to teach it to several other pitchers.

Last season I was credited with the discovery of a new invention along this line known as the shine ball. This mysterious ball aroused a good deal of interest in various quarters. Ban Johnson must have a whole trunk full of balls that were thrown out of various games and forwarded to him for inspection. I understand that a number of these balls were analyzed by a chemist to determine if any foreign substance were rubbed on the surface. This analysis, so I am informed showed that the ball had been treated with tobacco juice. But a good many pitchers use the spit-ball occasionally, and most of them chew tobacco. None of the many investigations ever involved me in criminal practices with the ball and my own contention that the Shine ball was a myth

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was never successfully refuted.

The only freak delivery which I know of that was a freak pure and simple and valuable asset to at least two well-known pitchers, was the famous emery ball. Russel Ford discovered this ball and used it successfully for years. Later on Cy Falkenberg also used it to stage a sensational comeback with the Cleveland club. He won ten straight games before dropping a contest and succeeded in signing a big contract with the Federal League in consequence. But the Emery ball has been banished, and I believe it will be a long time before another freak delivery appears to successfully rival it. The main asset of the pitcher will always be a legitimate use of approved baseball methods. These rightly employed, will give him all the success to which he is entitled.