

What Each Player Should Do to Keep Focused Between Pitches

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Compared to football and basketball, baseball is filled with breaks in the action. A typical seven-inning game may see 120 to 140 pitches. Add in breaks between innings and delays caused by pitching changes or injuries, and you're left with plenty of opportunities for players to lose focus, according to Brian Bezek, head of player development and performance metrics at Ripken Baseball.

"Baseball is not a continual focus as in some other sports, where you're kind of locked in all the time because the game is moving," Bezek said. "You have to be taught how to lock yourself in for five or 10 seconds, take a break, then almost reset yourself every pitch."



Bezek breaks down the responsibilities of what everyone should focus on after each pitch, position by position and in general. Even players on the bench have a key role during the game.

Pitcher

The tempo of a game is mainly controlled by the pitcher. While you don't want to rush, Bezek recommends pitchers keep the pace moving as quickly as possible for his defense. The key is to have a full understanding of the current game situation: how the batter is positioned, what the score is, where you are in the lineup, and who's on base.

"If you're walking around on the mound, taking your time between pitches, all that time adds up for your fielders as well," Bezek said. "As a pitcher, you want to try and keep that pace of play up so the people behind you are staying focused."

Catcher

Like the pitcher, a catcher is involved in some way on every play. He's the eyes and ears for his pitcher and defense. A catcher should always be aware of his battery mate's rhythm and mindset. Is he showing signs of tiring? Is he focused?

Catchers should communicate where fielders need to be positioned, according to each batter's strengths and weaknesses.

Infielders

With the recent emphasis on dramatic shifting among fielders, players should have a clear understanding of how and when to shift for each batter. Bezek believes infielders should never be in the same spot twice, based on the batter and pitch location. It's important they know the catcher's signs for each pitch.

"In reality, all infielders should have small movements (or) shifts in their positioning on every pitch," Bezek said.

First Baseman

Always be aware of each batter, the positioning of the other infielders, and the current game situation. Even a split second of hesitation can be the difference between a safe and out call. Pay close attention to a runner on base, make sure you and the pitcher are on the same page as to when he should cover first, and protect the right-field line as much as possible

Second Baseman

Knowing what the pitcher is throwing on each pitch is important for a second baseman, especially with runners on base. Pitch location and the type of pitch will determine whether the second baseman or shortstop covers on a steal attempt. Depending on where a ball is hit, he should automatically know where he needs to be for a double play, cutoff, or relay.

Shortstop

If the catcher is the eyes and ears of the entire field, the shortstop is the captain of the infield. He is often considered to have the best range and covers the most ground. Communicate with the outfielders on where they should go when a ball is hit, and what each pitch will be through hand signals. Make sure to be on the same page with the second baseman as to who covers steals.

Third Baseman

The normal depth of a third baseman is a step off the foul line and three or four steps behind the bag. However, this can vary depending on his arm strength or the speed of a runner. He should understand when to shift dramatically for a left-handed hitter to protect the hole, and where to go for relay throws on balls hit out of the infield.

Outfielders

The starting position of each outfielder should be based on the type of pitch thrown, and be adjusted accordingly. Even if a ball isn't hit directly at you, Bezek says all outfielders need to be alert on every play. Everyone should be clear on which base to back up and who takes priority on fly balls. On overthrows, outfielders are the last line of defense.

The Bench

Even if you're not in the lineup, everyone on the bench should remain alert during the game in case their name is called. Hitters should always observe the opposing pitcher, and pitchers should do the same with the other team's batters. Players on the bench sometimes have a better view of the game than those on the field, so keeping track of that information can be valuable to both you and your team. If you can, Bezek recommends picking up on signs the opposition is using, and relay that to your teammates.

*From **GameChanger** and Stephen Kerr*