

Ball Players: Learn What it Takes to Attract the Interest of College and Professional Scouts by Steve Zawrotny

Author's Note: How you perform in these five areas determines whether you're considered a solid college or pro prospect.

Every season they come out in droves and surround the backstops of ball fields all across the country looking for the next ballplayer to help their team win more ball games, a national title, a major league pennant, or even a college or major league World Series title.

These "bird dogs," and the scouts and organizations they report to are evaluating your proficiency in five areas:

- 1. Hitting for Power**
- 2. Hitting for Average**
- 3. Running Speed**
- 4. Defensive Abilities (Fielding Skills)**
- 5. Strong Throwing Arm**

So here's what **you** need to know:

How Scouts Evaluate You and What They Measure You Against

Even though a great deal has been published on this subject, much of it is usually of a subjective nature. Things like "an above average arm," "good power," "speed," and "quickness" can mean quite different things even to two scouts in the same organization.

More importantly, there is not a lot of data on more objective measures of a baseball player's physical performance to benchmark or compare against.

This lack of data led me to conduct an extensive search, both online and otherwise. I compiled information from several sources, one of which is the master himself, Gene Coleman, Strength and Conditioning Coach of the Houston Astros and his excellent book, *52 Week Baseball Conditioning*.

I've covered both the "tangible," more easily quantified physical skills and the "intangible," more difficult to observe and measure attributes like attitude and work habits.

The result...

Performance Variables You Can Measure Yourself Against

These are a set of indices specific to baseball. I'm sure more data exists and as I find it I'll update this article. Meanwhile, you can use this information to benchmark and gauge your abilities and learn what it takes to play at a higher level.

Remember, to be considered a solid college or pro prospect, you don't have to be highly proficient in all of these areas. Although, the higher your ability is in these areas the more likely you'll attract the attention of the scouts and the better your chances are for a brighter future.

Here are some interesting benchmark performance measures used for major league ballplayers. Obviously, youth league players would not be expected to perform at these levels. So, please use the following data strictly for information purposes only.

SIZE

Average Size of a Major League Ballplayer:

- 6'0" 190 lbs., 11% Body Fat (IF - 9.4%, OF - 8.4%)

Average Size of a Major League Pitcher:

- 6'1" 190 - 200 lbs., 12.3% Body Fat

Average Size of a Major League Catcher:

- 5'11" 190 - 200 lbs., 11.5% Body Fat

RUNNING SPEED

60 yard dash time:

- Exceptional - 6.3 to 6.5
- Good - 6.5 to 6.8
- Acceptable - 7 seconds or less

Home-to first time:

Home to 1B	Left Handed Batters	Right Handed Batters
Exceptional	4.0 seconds or less	4.1 seconds or less
Good	4.1 seconds	4.2 seconds
Average	4.2 seconds	4.3 seconds

1st to 3rd time:

- Exceptional - 6.7 seconds or less
- Good - 6.8 - 6.9
- Average - 7.0 seconds

Home to 3rd time:

- Exceptional - 10.4 - 10.7
- Good - 10.8 - 11.2
- Average - 11.3 - 11.7

Home to home time:

- Exceptional - 14.0 seconds or less
- Good - 14.1 - 15.0 seconds
- Average - 15.5 seconds

ARM STRENGTH / THROWING VELOCITY

Pitcher's Throwing Velocities in Miles Per Hour (mph)

Fastball:

- Exceptional - 94 - 97 mph
- Good - 92 - 93 mph
- Average - 88 - 91 mph

Slider:

- 7 - 8 mph slower than fastball

Curve, Changeup:

- 12 - 15 mph slower than fastball

Infielder's throw across the infield in Miles Per Hour:

- Exceptional - 85 mph and up
- Good - 82 - 84 mph

Outfielders:

According to Gene Coleman, one useful way of evaluating outfielder arm strength is to measure the time it takes to field a hit ball and make a throw from a distance of 270 feet from home plate. The watch is started on bat contact and ends when the ball crosses home plate. Since the average major leaguer runs from second base to home in 7 seconds or less, a strong throw will beat that time.

Catcher's Throwing Velocity in Mile Per Hour:

- Exceptional - 84 mph and up
- Good - 82 - 83 mph

RELEASE TIME

Pitcher to home plate from the stretch position with a runner on base:

- Excellent - > 1.2 seconds
- Good - 1.2 - 1.3 seconds
- Average (RH) - 1.3 seconds
- Average (LH) - 1.4 seconds

Catcher throwing to second on base stealing attempt:

- Excellent - >1.8 seconds
- Good - 1.9 seconds or less
- Average - 2.0 seconds

Catcher and Pitcher combined times vs. Base Stealers:

TIME	OUTCOME
More than 3.3 seconds	Likely stolen base
Between 3.2 and 3.3 seconds	50/50 chance of safely stealing base
Less than 3.3 seconds	Likely to be thrown out

Base Stealers:

You need to be at or below 3.2 seconds between first and second on a base stealing attempt against the combined average time of a major league catcher and pitcher. In his prime, Rickey Henderson was consistently at 3.0 - 3.1.

What's more, scouts rate players on both their present ability as well as their projected future potential. Talk about subjective.

How do you project "future potential?" Well, you can look at things like current size, age, body mechanics, the size of close family members, athletic ability of close family members and the like.

This is at best a guessing game, but it matters a fair amount in a scout's assessment of a player. You could even rate somewhat average in your present ability in a particular area, yet be considered a good prospect due to your possible "upside" or future potential. All of which leads us to the next section...

Intangibles

These are attributes deemed highly important but for which no technique exists to objectively measure the attribute. While you can easily time a thrown baseball or running speed, there is no way to measure an important trait such as "hand speed." It's just one of those things you look at and can see whether or not a hitter has it.

Yes, there are devices you can set up in a lab or clinic to measure bat speed. But, these are not convenient for a scout to use at a game, so a scout will say a prospect has good or excellent hand speed without a precise definition of what that means.

The problem, of course, is that two capable, experienced evaluators may define good and excellent somewhat differently.

Observing a good young hitter with truly outstanding hand speed and noting that fact is relatively easy. The trick, of course, is rating prospects of lesser ability while accurately projecting his "upside" or future potential.

Hence, we end up with situations like Kirby Puckett, a Hall of Famer who wasn't drafted or offered a college scholarship out of high school, and superstars like John Smoltz and Jose Canseco who were relatively low draft picks.

The most "infamous" of these stories may be that of Mike Piazza. Drafted in the 64th round by the LA Dodgers as a favor to his father, who was good friends with Tommy Lasorda (at the time the Dodgers manager) Piazza may turn out to be the best catcher in the history of the game. Many hundreds of players were selected in the draft ahead of him, most of whom never made it to the big leagues and are probably out of the game by now.

Could not ONE of these scouts have seen something in Piazza? What were the projections on Piazza's upside? There are many stories similar to these players, and more still about high draft picks who were busts (see Clint Hurdle).

This is not meant as a knock on the scouts; it's a tough gig.

The point?

Work hard, and dream on. You just never know.

12 Specific Intangible Scouts Consider

1. Work habits
2. Maturity
3. Respect for the game
4. Aggressiveness
5. Actions and preparation in the on-deck circle
6. Off-field habits
7. Intelligence (grades matter!)
8. Composure
9. Desire
10. Dedication
11. Instincts.
12. Hustle

This obviously could be a very long list and is best summed up by the following comment by Mike Batesole, Cal State Northridge Head Baseball Coach:

"I watch everything a guy does when he's not at the plate or fielding a ball. Facial expressions, how he treats teammates, these are the clues that tell me whether he will be willing to put in the time it takes to be successful."

Train Hard, Train Smart!