



How to Pitch Horseshoes

PITCHING TECHNIQUES

Editor's Note: Roy W. Smith of CA was a top ranking player in his own right a few years ago and is one of the foremost students and authorities on the game. Author of *Science at the Stake* no one is better qualified to put into words the correct way to pitch horseshoes and improve playing techniques.

The Delivery

Assuming that you are a spectator on the sidelines of a public court, you will see an expert player perform this way. (right handed pitcher)

The player takes a position on the pitcher's platform, to one side opposite the stake. Placing the feet carefully, so the pitcher is well balanced, standing erect. Gripping the shoe, extending it to full-arm length in front. The pitcher holds the shoe -caulks down- at about a 45 angle to the ground. Swinging it up on a level with the eyes, sighting it at the opposite stake. Bending slightly at the knees and leaning forward at the waist, the pitcher swings the shoe backward in an easy manner. A split second before the back swing is completed the pitcher steps forward. This delivery-step is executed with the foot that is opposite the delivery-arm. The shoe does not pause at the end of the back swing. The arm swings forward, straight from the shoulder, like the pendulum of a clock. As the shoe passes the standing leg, in the front-swing, the pitcher brings -it to a level position with a free, natural roll of the arm. At this exact moment, the delivery-step is completed and the body-weight is smoothly shifted to the left foot. The right knee straightens up to its natural position and the body rises with the swing. The shoe is released as it swings up in line with the eyes and the opposite stake.

Released in a level position, the shoe leaves the hand cleanly. The release is effected with a deft and delicate wrist-motion. There is no jerk or snap of the arm and wrist. After releasing the shoe, the player's hand swings up, above the head, in a graceful follow-through. At no time is there any lost-motion in the delivery. All movements are smooth and well-coordinated. The shoe floats lazily through the air in an arc that is about 8 feet high at its highest point. (The height of the trajectory varies with different players.) Wobbling as it travels, the shoe begins to "break open" just before it crosses the foul line of the pitcher's box. The shoe drops open-end-first onto the stake. There is a sharp clink as the shoe encircles the stake. *A ringer!* A few moments later, the second shoe is sent on its way to land on top of the first one. *A double ringer!*

The Fundamentals of the Delivery

Wherever horseshoe pitchers gather to play, you can see many different styles used in delivering. Some of these styles are smooth and correct. But many others are not. Merely picking up a pitching shoe and throwing it does not mean that a person can control it. On many occasions, you can hear a great deal about the importance of the delivery. But, all too often, the fundamentals that go to make up the delivery do not receive enough attention. Even though a horseshoe may represent a symbol

of luck to some people, there is little or no luck involved in pitching ringers. Nor is there any shortcut that will quickly transform a novice into an expert player. Many hours of patient and correct practice are necessary to develop a good pitcher.

Described and analyzed are the necessary basic-fundamentals in their proper sequence. These are: (1) The pitching grips; (2) Stance; (3) Footwork; (4) Pendulum swing; (5) The follow-through; (6) Timing and rhythm.

The Pitching Grips and Different Turns

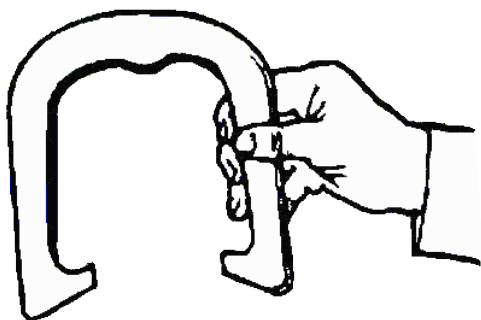
A beginner must start with a proper hold on the shoe. It is impossible to establish a fixed rule relative to the grips. Very few of the champions hold and deliver their shoes alike. This is because of the variation in the size and shape of their hands, the length of their fingers and methods of release.

There are several ways of gripping a horseshoe to make it land "open" at the stake. With the grip for the one and one-quarter ($1\frac{1}{4}$) turn, it is possible to also throw the one-quarter ($\frac{1}{4}$) turn, and two and one-quarter ($2\frac{1}{4}$), and the three and one-quarter ($3\frac{1}{4}$) turn. The one and three-quarter ($1\frac{3}{4}$) grip can be used for the three-quarter ($\frac{3}{4}$) turn and the two and three-quarter ($2\frac{3}{4}$) turn. Then there are the single and double flop shoes. These are frequently called "tumble" shoes. Sometimes a turn and a flop are combined. Backward or reverse turns are quite common.

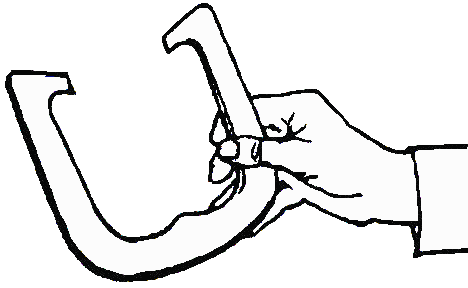
With the exception of the one and one-quarter and the one and three-quarter turns, all the others are considered unorthodox and are called "freak" or "off turns. A few pitchers have become skillful enough with some of the "freak" turns to win a state championship title. As a rule, however, an off-turn pitcher cannot play a consistent game.

Finger Positions

The "turns" given a horseshoe is indicated by the number of revolutions it makes in flight. To make a shoe turn either $1\frac{1}{4}$ or $1\frac{3}{4}$ times around in flight, it must be held by one or the other of its two shanks. When picking up a horseshoe, the proper way to hold it is with the fingers wrapped around one of the shanks. The thumb extends across the top of the shank. It is very much like holding a dinner plate between your finger and thumb. The index or forefinger and middle fingers go underneath. But here, the comparison with the dinner plate ends because the first joints of the fingers curve up over the edge of the inner-circle of the shoe. The third finger may be used like the index and middle fingers. Or, if the little finger is small and unable to balance the shoe alone, the third finger is used to assist the little finger. Some authorities call this the "gun-handle grip." That is a good definition too because the grip is very much like that used on a pistol-butt, with the forefinger acting as "the trigger finger."



Hold for $1\frac{1}{4}$ turn



Hold for 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ turn

While holding for the 1-1/4 turns, the opening of the shoe is to the left. With the 1-3/4 turns, the opening is to the right. This explanation applies if the player is right-handed. Left-handers or "southpaws" hold the opposite way.

To balance your shoe best, grip it about halfway between the heel and toe caulks. A few days practice will show whether your grip should be shifted a little either way to perfect the balance. If you want a more full-hand grip, shift the weight of the shoe from the first to the main joint of your index finger. This places the shoe farther back in your palm. The best way to place your thumb is straight across the shank. If you want to change the pointing of your shoe, merely shift your grip and change the pointing of your thumb. Don't try the obsolete method of curving your forefinger around one of the heel caulks! That is as outmoded as the Model T Ford. The correct balance and turn cannot be secured in any way but the way out-lined.

Features of the One and Three-Quarter Turn

The 1-3/4 turns requires a slightly different muscular action of the arm and a little more wrist-action than the 1-1/4 turns. Having an additional half-turn to make, the 1-3/4 shoe opens a little slower. It is not so easily affected by wind as other type shoes. Most players using the 1-3/4 turn, find that the shoe balances better when held near the toe. It can be pitched fairly low and made to wobble nicely in flight. (A good flight wobble is desirable.) As a rule, however, the 1-3/4 turn's shoe must be pitched higher than the 1-1/4 turn's shoe. As stated before, it needs more time to complete the extra half-turn and "break open."

Gripping the shoe near the heel makes it open more quickly. Actually, it does not turn any faster, but when held near the heel - with the thumb in a parallel position to the shank - the shoe is already turned in the hand. In reality, this is a one and five-eighths turn. When gripped near the toe, the opening of the shoe is pointed halfway between the right and front. (That is when the shoe is extended, in the flat position, before the player.) This is, in reality, a one and seven-eighth turn. However, regardless of the pointing of the shoe, the turn is called the one and three-quarter. The slightest change in your grip will make a difference in the way your shoe balances and turns. Pitchers with long, supple swings, find it unnecessary to hold their shoes near the heel to secure enough turns.

Features of the One and One-Quarter Turn

As a rule, the 1-1/4 turns requires more careful attention than the 1-3/4 turns. Less wrist-motion is required to pitch the 1-1/4 turns. It is easier to watch in flight. It can be pitched rather low and made to wobble nicely in flight. Usually, the fingers are spread a little more widely on the shank of the

shoe. Holding the 1-1/4 shoe near the toe, with the thumb placed in a parallel position of the shank, makes it a one and one-eighth turn. Gripping near the heel will produce a one and three-eighths turn. However, this turn is always called the one and one-quarter. It is not as good a wind shoe as the 1-3/4 turn's shoe. A slow turning 1-1/4 turn shoe that lands too flat is likely to rebound off the stake. But when given a good wobble and made to hook the stake from the right and left sides, the 1-1/4 turn shoe is very effective.

How to select a Turn

To find out which turn is best for your style of pitching, experiment with both for a while. Choose the one that is easiest to control. After selecting the turn you prefer, stay with it until you master it. Don't try to change your grip and turn to conform to that of every expert you meet. Some players, after using a turn for years, try to improve their pitching by changing to the other turn. After doing this, they may play well for a while, then begin to "get off" their game. This adverse reaction may be due to the fact that their muscles have been trained for a long time to function for the first turn. When the novelty of the second turn has worn off, the player begins to lose control because his muscles have not been properly trained for the new turn.

Some players can switch turns without much difficulty. Many of the experts can throw all the various turns, but rely on their most natural one for competitive playing. The average pitcher will do best by sticking to his original turn, providing it is one of the two championship turns.

Unorthodox or "Off" Turns

Without correct instruction, many beginners make a great mistake by starting with the three-quarter (3/4) turn. Because it is easy to watch in flight, they deceive themselves by thinking it is their natural turn. Here are several reasons why the three-quarter turn is a poor one:

1. To be controlled in the air, the shoe must be delivered in a low, swift manner. This calls for a stiff-armed delivery on the part of the player. After using a stiff arm for a while, the pitcher finds it difficult to change to a better turn.
2. A shoe that turns less than 1-1/4 times in flight is hard to control because it does not have enough flight-wobble to break the velocity of its fall. It goes too straight on the stake. More ringers are lost, due to rebound, with the three-quarter turn than any other, with the possible exception of the flop-over shoes.
3. The way the three-quarter shoe must be delivered prevents a player from keeping a consistent line on the stakes. To keep the shoe from turning too much, the pitcher has to swing it by the leg in a flat or horizontal position. To avoid fouling the shoe against the leg, the pitcher has to either pull the leg inward at the knee or swing the shoe farther out or away from the leg. Either method prevents the pitcher from keeping the swing in line with the stake.

It is possible to make most of the shoes land open with the three-quarter turn. But there is much more to pitching horseshoes than merely throwing an open shoe. Zipping low and swiftly through the air, the three-quarter shoe often skids out of scoring distance when it misses the stake. Very few players are able to pitch over 60% ringers with it.

A turn that is faster than the 1-3/4 is difficult to watch and control. It turns too fast to permit the accurate timing required for it to arrive open at the stake. Besides, pitching a fast-turning shoe requires too much arm and wrist effort, which works a hardship on the player. The poorest turns of all are the single and double-flop (tumble) shoes. That is a shoe that turns end over end, instead of around, in flight. The least bit of wind affects them adversely. Like the three-quarter turn shoes, the flop-over shoes go too straight on the stake and rebound badly.

Exceptions Prove the Rule

There are exceptions to these rules, but they only serve to prove the rules, to use an old cliché. Curt Day of IN won the 1966 and 1971 World Title with a 3/4 reverse.

Harold Reno of OH won the 1961 and 1964 World Title with a reverse 1-1/4 turn and Danny Kuchcinski, formerly of PA, won the World Title in 1967, 1969 and 1970 with a reverse.

However these three exceptions tend -to prove the fundamental rules. All have tremendous natural accuracy, which is probably superior to all other players. Furthermore the swing step, rhythm and timing of these experts is almost letter perfect and fundamentally sound. All throw their reverse turn in a natural fashion. Day was formerly a star softball pitcher and his release of the shoe which gives it the reverse turn comes naturally because of the style he developed pitching softball.

Both Reno and Day seem to lose more ringers from bouncing off the stake in national competition than other top players which is the biggest fault to be found with unorthodox turns because of the extra force and effort which must be put into the delivery.

Turning the Shoe

Without proper instruction, many beginners acquire the bad habit of forcing their turns with their wrists. When held and delivered correctly, the shoe - not the player - does most of the work. The late Guy Zimmerman, who was one of the world's top-flight pitchers, gave the following instructions about securing the proper turn:

"Hold your shoe at full-arm length before you. Swing it - in the flat position -up so it is in line with your eyes and the opposite stake. As you start your back swing, turn the shoe to the vertical position. Keep the shoe in this position until after it passes your leg in your forward swing. Then, bring the shoe back to a level position with a free, natural roll of your arm. Keep your wrist stiff and in its natural position. As the shoe again comes up into a direct line with your eyes and the opposite stake, relax your fingers and release. Be sure to release your shoe in a level position so it will land flat and 'dead.' Otherwise, the shoe will land on edge and roll."

Most top players make their aim-point correspond with their release-point. This prevents a variation in the length of their swing. Swing your shoe back and forth in the vertical position. Note the slight pull exerted on your fingers as the shoe starts to level into release position. Just for an experiment, swing the shoe back and forth while letting it hang vertically from only one or two fingers. Notice how the shoe almost levels itself with your arm roll. Your wrist merely turns with your arm as the shoe swings into a level or release-position. This deft, delicate movement of your wrist is all that is necessary to secure your turn. This wrist-motion is commonly called "wrist-snap" or "wrist-flip."

However, this definition is incorrect. Several different motions can be made with the wrist without "snapping" or "flipping" it. Prove this for yourself. Let your arm hang naturally at your side. Touch your thigh with your palm. Swing your arm up in front of you, letting your palm turn upward, with a free, natural roll of your arm. There is not any "wrist-snap" involved in such a motion, regardless of how fast you do it.

The late Guy Zimmerman, a former world champion, described the wrong method of securing the turn: "When you hold your shoe in the flat or horizontal position, during your swing, your arm is deprived of its free, natural roll. Thus, the only way the shoe can be made to turn is to force it with a snap or jerk of your arm and wrist. This works a hardship on your arm. Your shoes will not open consistently because you cannot regulate the turn with your wrist alone. It is difficult to swing the shoe - in the flat position - by your leg without fouling. Like the three-quarter-turn pitcher, you must either pull your leg inward or swing the shoe farther away from your leg. Either way is not conducive to consistent alignment.

Regulating the Turn

Much patient practice is required to master a turn. A beginner usually starts by spinning the shoe too much. The grip and method of delivery should keep the shoe from turning less than twice in flight. For the maximum of control, a shoe must turn more than once and less than twice around during flight. If your turn is too slow, raise your trajectory (flight elevation of your shoe). If your turn is too fast, lower the elevation. In other words, to speed the turn, swing the shoe up a little more in the vertical position before leveling it into release position. To retard or slow down the turn, level the shoe into the flat or horizontal position a little more quickly before releasing. Shifting the grip a little up (nearer the toe) and down (nearer the heel) on the shank of the shoe will also speed and retard the turn. But raising and lowering the trajectory is the best method of regulating the turn because no variation of the grip is necessary.

The Release

It is difficult to describe the release because it occurs too quickly for the eye to follow. The best way to study your release is through the eye of a slow-motion video camera. But video cameras are not always available for this purpose; nevertheless, you can learn a great deal about your release by employing slow motion in your delivery during practice.

Your grip should be firm, yet flexible, neither too tight nor too loose. Holding too tightly causes undue strain on the hand and wrist. Besides, it may cause your shoe to either turn too much or flop over in flight. If your grip is not firm enough, the shot may either fail to turn enough or slip from your fingers before you are ready to release. Finger control is very important. To release your shoe correctly, you must train your fingers to relax at precisely the right time. This split-second action becomes automatic with practice.

Your release-point should correspond with your aim-point. Your finger positions on the shoe's shank must be correct and they must not be allowed to slip during the swing. Your turn is entirely dependent on the way you grip, swing and release your shoe. All your fingers - not just a certain one - along with your thumb, are the governors of your release. Study your release closely. Notice that

your forefinger ("trigger finger") remains in contact with the shoe longer than your other fingers and thumb. Thus, your forefinger imparts the final influence to the shoe.

When preparing to deliver, extend the arm. Hold the shoe - caulks down - in the flat position. Grip it just tight enough with the fingers and thumb to keep it from tipping down. The weight-feel of the shoe should impart the proper finger tension for a firm, yet flexible grip. When released, the shoe must leave your hand cleanly. Don't let it slide off your fingers. The less drag on your fingers the better. Don't try to affect the release with a jerk of your arm or wrist. Let the shoe flow smoothly from your hand.

At this point, you have been instructed as to the proper ways of gripping, turning and releasing your shoe. Now you must learn the correct stance and footwork.

The Stance

Ted Allen, one of the greatest champions in the history of horseshoes, regards proper stance as one of the most important fundamentals.

Several different methods of stance are popular among experts. At no time should you stand rigid or tense. Your body should be naturally erect, with all your muscles free from tension. Most good pitchers assume a slight crouch. Stand to one side, on a line about even with the stake. Stand on the pitcher's platform not in the clay around the stake. A right-handed player should stand to the left of the stake. A left-hander takes his position on the right-hand side of the stake. Thus, you keep your delivery-arm in line with the stakes.

The stakes are the center of the alignment. Each stake leans three inches toward the other. When you deliver from the wrong side of the stake, you are pitching crossfire or off center of the alignment. Not only that, you are pitching several inches farther than necessary and it is difficult to gauge your step properly. Always pitch from the same side of the stake at both ends of the court, i.e., if you stand to the left of the stake at the south end of the court, stand on the left at the north end.

One of the most popular methods of stance is with the left foot six or eight inches back of the right. All of the body-weight rests on the right foot. The left foot is merely used to balance the body. As you swing your shoe backward, relax your right hip and knee and bend slightly forward at the waist. Your weight remains on your right foot until your forward step is completed. Then your body-weight is smoothly shifted to your left foot. Your body straightens up as you swing forward and release. Such is the style of many top-ranking players.

Some experts stand with the left foot a few inches ahead of the right foot. Others stand with both feet together. Either way, the body-weight is chiefly on the right foot. (That is, if the player is right-handed.) Regardless of the method you adopt, always assume a "square stance." That is, stand squarely facing the opposite stake, with your shoulders square with the court. Point your right toe straight at the opposite stake. Your left foot, whether a few inches ahead or behind your right, should be parallel with your right foot. Don't allow your right toe to point off to the right. This may off balance you just enough to cause you to pitch to the right of the stake.

Be sure that you are well balanced before starting your delivery. Perfect balance means perfect coordination and accurate alignment. The square, well-balanced stance will become a habit with practice. Here is why such a "habit" should be cultivated right at the start: A player pitches 100 shoes and makes 60 ringers. The pitcher fails to get ringers with 40 of the shoes. About 15% of the misses are due to a poor turn trajectory. The remaining 85% of the misses are due to poor alignment, most of which is caused by the careless way of standing.

Footwork

The delivery-step governs the swing and follow-through to a great degree. This step serves a twofold purpose. It makes it easier for the player to swing the shoe and maintain balance. Employ a normal step, like that used when walking. A short, easy stride is sufficient to place ample propelling power behind your shoe. A too long step will throw you off balance and cause a too low trajectory. The step is started a split second before the arm reaches the summit of its back swing. The step is completed about the moment the shoe passes the standing leg, during the front-swing. The step must be perfectly timed with the swing.

A right-handed player should step forward with his left foot. A left-hander should go ahead on his right foot. A perfect coordination of the right arm and left leg (or vice versa) enables a player to develop a longer swing, a smooth follow-through and a well-balanced delivery. Always step and swing directly toward your mark, be careful not to acquire the bad habit of cross stepping. Stepping out of line is one of the most common faults to overcome. A "pigeon-toed" step (turning the toe inward) throws the body off balance and ruins the alignment. Proper footwork is one of the secrets of balance and timing in all sports. It is too bad that so many pitchers fail to realize this.

Some rather good right-handed players step ahead with the right foot. But, very few champions are developed with this form. Such a method of footwork throws the body into a contortion, in the region of the hips, at the peak of release. A contortion-like delivery gradually affects the spinal nerves and robs a player of endurance. Study this form closely in front of a full-length mirror and see how awkward it looks. Notice how it twists your body to one side and causes you to pitch with a lunging motion.

If you are using such poor playing form, make up your mind to step with your other foot. (The foot opposite your delivery arm.) It may be rather difficult to make such a change, but it can be done with practice. A better delivery is well worth the effort. Frank Jackson, many times a national champion during his playing career, stood with his left foot planted firmly ahead. He did not step at all. But, he was a powerful man with an exceptionally long back swing. Jimmy Lecky, a former Arizona State champion, pitched right-handed and stepped with his right foot. However, this was due to an injury of his left heel and it was not his natural style. These two great players are exceptions to the rule. The average player cannot develop an easy delivery with their methods of footwork. Many years have elapsed since anyone has won a national title with the wrong-foot-ahead method of footwork. To acquire control of your shoe, you must learn to control your feet.

Body and Knee-action

The body plays an important role in the delivery. A great deal of propelling power is placed into the swing by body-rhythm, which is coordinated with the swing. An expert player usually drops the

shoulders as the pitcher starts the back swing. The body straightens up with the front swing. This body-action is virtually identical to the one used in bowling or in pitching softball.

Correct knee action is very important too. Relaxing the right knee and drawing it slightly inward, behind the left knee, permits the shoe to swing close by the leg, in a straight line to the stake. The danger of fouling the shoe against the leg is reduced to a minimum. Proper knee action helps secure a uniform trajectory and makes the delivery easier and smoother. Relaxing the right knee, and shifting the body-weight to the left foot, acts as a spring, thus checking the forward swing without an abrupt jar or jolt. As the knee straightens up to its natural position, the body rises and its weight goes into the swing.

Don't crouch too much when delivering. (I have seen some players go down so low they scraped the platform with their shoes). Bending the knees too much causes a player to lift extra body-weight when straightening up to release. That extra weight can cause body sway, which results in poor alignment.

The Pendulum Swing

In reality, a horseshoe is not "pitched", "tossed," or "thrown." It is swung. The "swing" is the governor of the pitching distance. There are three parts to the swing. (1) The Back-swing; (2) The Front-swing; and (3) The Follow-through. The swing is the most difficult of all the fundamentals to master. It is here that most horseshoe pitchers fail, because they lack either the knowledge or the ambition to develop their swings fully. As a general rule, most players use much the same grip, stance and step, but the factor that distinguishes them apart is the swing.

Developing a good swing brings into play a number of rarely used muscles in the shoulder and arm. The gradual strengthening of these muscles requires a considerable amount of patient practice. Inexperienced players who neglect to either train or warm-up properly before entering competition, become victims of tension or "ringer mortis." When the chips are down and the pressure is on, their swings deteriorate into little more than stiff-armed, pushing motions. Once acquired, the bad habit of using a stiff-armed delivery is difficult to break. The swing must be rhythmic, with the arm kept free from tension, at all times.

Let the shoe swing backward in an easy manner. Extend it as far back as possible, without causing discomfort of the shoulder and arm muscles. Going too far back will cause the body to twist to one side and pull you off balance. The back swing may be as high or higher than your head. That depends on the muscular development of your shoulder and your method of delivery. A long swing, to secure elevation and distance, is best.

Just before the termination-point (end) of the back swing is attained, step forward. Don't allow the shoe to pause at the end of your back swing. Let the weight of the shoe start your forward swing. When the shoe swings into line with your eyes and the stake, relax your fingers and release the shoe. The swing does not stop here. The hand continues to swing up, above the head, in the follow-through. The arm swings back and forth, straight from the shoulder, like the pendulum of a clock. This is called "the pendulum swing." There is no jerk or snap of the arm and wrist. All movements are rhythmic and perfectly coordinated with the step.

The backward and forward swings should be very much alike. Allow the weight of the shoe to start both swings. Put little or no propelling power behind the shoe with your arm. Your body weight is used for that purpose. Don't rush either your backward or forward swings. Endeavor to keep your swing in line with the stake at all times. It is well to repeat that the failure to develop the proper swing ruins more potentially good players than any other thing.

The Follow-Through

Although the majority of players realize the importance of a good follow-through, many are unable to define the exact purpose of this part of the swing. A smooth, accurate delivery is impossible without a proper follow-through. This applies to a bowler, a golfer and a baseball pitcher, as well as a horseshoe pitcher. The follow-through is often erroneously defined as the finish of the swing. A careful analysis shows that the follow-through is not confined to the arm-swing alone. It is a part of the body-swing, too. Actually, it starts with the stance. A poor stance and a poor step result in a poor swing and a poor follow-through.

When delivering a horseshoe, the swing of the arm - if completed - would describe a perfect circle. The follow-through is merely a continuation of the swing toward completing the circle. In other words, the hand continues to move toward the stake after releasing the shoe. That short distance traveled by the hand, before it begins to rise above the head, is the follow-through.

Always try to secure the maximum amount of follow-through with each pitch. At first it may seem rather futile to concentrate on that part of the swing which occurs after the shoe is released. For, once the shoe is in flight, the player cannot alter its course. But, if he will strive to make his hand follow the shoe on a line to the stake, he will develop consistent alignment and a uniform trajectory.

Trajectory and Alignment

Pitch the shoes in an arc that is 7 to 10 feet high at its highest point. Try to pitch a "dead-falling shoe." That is, make the shoe land flat and "dead." A proper and uniform trajectory is essential in securing the correct turn, alignment, and distance. When pitched too low, and too swiftly, a shoe cannot open properly. It may be in perfect line and turning at the right speed, but lack of height prevents it from landing open. The shoe must be timed in the air. If a low-pitched shoe does go on the stake, it lands hard and is likely to spin off or rebound. If the shoe misses the stake, it usually skids out of scoring radius.

Keep the shoes well up in flight, but don't waste energy by throwing them too high. Too much flight-elevation causes a shoe to turn too much. Besides, it makes accurate judgment of distance difficult. A high shoe, however, has a decided advantage over a low one. The high floater will hook the stake from all angles. Keeping the shoes well up in flight requires much less effort in delivering.

If difficulty is experienced in pitching the proper distance, don't try to correct the distance by changing your standing position. Moving ahead or back, as the case may be, may only increase your trouble. You must "get the distance" with your swing. If your swing is too slow, or you fail to put enough body-weight into your delivery, the shoe will not turn enough and land short of the mark. Too much swing and a too high trajectory may result in too much turn and overshooting the stake. Here is an example to show the importance of pitching the shoes at a proper and uniform height:

Two shoes are delivered with an equal amount of propelling power. The first is elevated to a height of 6 feet. The second reaches a height of 10 feet. That makes a difference of 4 feet in the height of the two shoes. The first may land several inches short of the stake. It may not open due to lack of height. Also, the chances are it will be out of line because it was released too quickly. The second shoe may top the stake by several inches. It may turn too much and be out of line because it was not released quickly enough. Again, the first shoe may hit at the base of the stake and the second strike near the top. Neither scores as a ringer because they are not open.

Such a wide variance in the trajectory makes accurate pitching impossible. Many beginners are timid about putting their shoes well up in the air. In their efforts to "line up the stake" they pitch too low and too hard. The definition that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points does not apply to the trajectory of a horseshoe.

Beginners often become discouraged by their inability to line up the stake. Even experts have their "off days" in securing good alignment. As a rule, right-handed pitchers have a tendency to pitch to the right of the stake. Left-handers throw to the left. With the maximum opening between the shoe's heel-caulks only 3 1/2 inches and the pitching distance 40 feet, the smallest error in delivering will cause a miss.

When you have difficulty in lining up, (and you will) check all the fundamentals to see what is wrong. Your trouble may be caused by only one error; or, it may result from a combination of several mistakes occurring at once. Check your stance and footwork. Be sure to observe a "square stance." Step directly toward the mark. A long stride can cause a low trajectory. Check your grip and don't force your turn. Let the shoe flow smoothly from your hand. Extend the shoe to full-arm length. Make your aim-point and release-point correspond. That prevents a variation in your swing. Always follow through on each pitch. Watch your trajectory. Don't be tense. Tension destroys coordination.

Obstacles and Hazards

The horseshoe game has as many obstacles and hazards as golf. During a horseshoe game, the stakes are often completely blocked by shoes. They land on edge in the clay and wedge tightly against the stakes. Often, it is impossible to knock such shoes down or away and make a ringer at the same time. Here are a few examples that show how such obstacles and hazards occur:

When an opposing shoe is leaning up in front of the stake, you must try to place your ringer either over, under or through the obstructing shoe. In a "tight" game, you dare not waste one of your shoes just to knock an opponent's shoe out of the way. Shoes that are just short of being ringers can be knocked or dragged on as ringers by another shoe. When a shoe is laying, caulks up, with its toe near the stake, you can experience either the good or bad "break" of having another shoe hit the toe-caulk of the reclining shoe and flip it over for a ringer. When capping ringers, the danger of losing ringers is greatly increased by the unyielding iron of the opposing shoes.

There are many more ways of making clever and difficult shots. During practice, prop other shoes up against the stakes. Try to make ringers while these obstacles are blocking the stakes. Such practice will help you to cope with similar barriers when they occur in competition. You must first learn the knack of making ringers. Then you must learn the knack of keeping them on the stake.

Flight-Wobble and Landing

As in boxing there are "right and left hooks" in horseshoe pitching. Right-handed players should try to make their ringers hook onto the stake from the left-handed side. Left-handers should try for right hooks. That way, the shoes do not go too straight on the stake, thus lessening the hazard of rebound. The hooking-type shoe, with a good wobble, will stay on much better than one that is thrown too flat and too straight on the stake. A good flight-wobble helps break the shoe's momentum in landing. The wobble imparts enough twists to the shoe to keep it from going on too straight and rebounding. A shoe will usually stay on when it hooks the stake from either side, just off center of the toe-caulk.

Too much, flight-wobble can cause a shoe to travel erratically and fly off the stake. Also, it is difficult to watch in flight. Excessive wobble can be caused by too much arm and wrist effort. Another cause may be a faulty grip especially if you try to correct the trajectory with your thumb when releasing the shoe. Some expert players have more wobble on their shoes than others. That depends on their grips and methods of delivering.

The "breaks of the game" means a lot to champion pitchers. The way in which their shoes land can mean either the winning or losing of a title. When a shoe lands heel-caulks first, it nose-dives at the stake. It may either jump away or wedge against the stake. If the toe-caulk lands first, the shoe may either turn over backward or skid past the stake. The "dead-falling shoe," with all the caulks landing simultaneously, is best. Horseshoes, like airplanes, must make a good three-point landing. Otherwise, they bounce, skid and roll.

Timing

You have now gained considerable knowledge of the basic-fundamentals required to pitch correctly. Many hours of patient practice are necessary to master and coordinate these fundamentals. You must develop a rhythmic delivery. Rhythm is the dominating fundamental in all sports.

According to the dictionary, coordination, precision, rhythm, and timing all have about the same meaning. It is: "To arrange things in a proper and relative order; to combine for a common action or purpose; to harmonize. In short, the four terms mean the regulated movement of all the combined fundamentals in a rhythmic order during the delivery.

A pendulum clock presents a perfect illustration of timing. When the clock is running properly, all its combined parts work together in perfect unison. The entire mechanism functions as one unit. Each spring, gear and balance wheel does its precise work. No unnecessary part is included that might cause lost-motion. The pendulum swings to and fro with a steady unbroken rhythm. As long as each part does its work and aids the other, coordination, and harmony prevails. The clock keeps accurate time. But, if one unit ceases to function as it should, the swing of the pendulum becomes irregular. The clock either stops entirely or perfect timing ceases to exist.

That is precisely what happens to the delivery of a horseshoe pitcher who "gets off his game." The "pendulum swing" becomes jerky, and inaccurate, because the pitcher is unable to coordinate the fundamentals. Many players, as they grow older, lose some of their coordination because they lose some of their ambition to train and keep themselves in good condition. The champions spend more

time practicing than playing to sharpen and improve their timing. They know that if they neglect their training, they will soon cease to be champions. No one ever becomes so perfect that they can quit training. Timing is elusive and quickly lost.

The Warm-up

An experienced player seldom enters competition without first warming up to assure good coordination of the muscles. All players experience some difficulty starting to warm up because their muscles are not functioning properly. After limbering up for a few minutes, they "get the feel of the shoe." Your warm-up has much to do with determining how you will play; therefore, take plenty of time to coordinate your muscles.

PITCHING PSYCHOLOGY

A great many people attempt to pitch horseshoes without realizing that it is a game of great science. After practicing for a time, paying little or no attention to the proper fundamentals, they fail to improve beyond a certain stage. Becoming discouraged, they say, "It looks like I was not cut out to be a good player." Some think that they are very lucky when they make a ringer or two during a game. And, considering the way they try to deliver their shoes, they are lucky. Although there is a certain amount of luck involved in all games, other factors besides luck are required to pitch ringer after ringer on stakes forty feet apart.

An expert pitcher has a pretty fair idea of what a horseshoe will do the moment he releases it. Such skill is acquired only by long periods of correct physical and mental training. Along with this, a player must possess a considerable amount of natural talent, good eyesight, nerve control, patience, and a deep love of the game. To master the *science* of pitching, one must also learn to master his emotions. Bad temperament or lack of self-discipline ruins many otherwise promising players.

Don't try to master all the fundamentals at once because this is impossible. It is a mistake, at first, to center all your attention on trying to make ringers. Of course, that is the object of pitching, but you must approach this objective slowly and correctly. The fundamentals must be worked out one at a time. "Haste makes waste." A player must learn to "pitch with the head" as well as the arm.

How to Practice

In the beginning, the shoe will feel heavy and cumbersome, but this will soon pass with practice. It takes time to "get the feel of the shoe." Practice on a well-built court. Use good equipment. Always try to do your best. Pitch the full distance of 40 feet. For women, (and males under age 18 years old), the distance is 30 feet. Don't overdo, especially at first. You need to become accustomed to this form of exercise. Too much practice can cause staleness, a strained arm and loss of control. An hour a day is usually sufficient to put one in good form. When practicing alone, pitch your shoes in groups of 50 and count all points. Merely tossing the shoes back and forth, without a definite objective in mind, does not bring about much self-improvement.

Expert pitchers train hard and intelligently to condition themselves for a major tournament. There is a lot of walking to do in a meet. The muscles of the legs and feet must be in good condition. Partnership (four handed) games, which are favored by older players who dislike so much walking

to and fro, are poor practice for tough tournament competition. It is not so much the amount but how one trains that is important. When you become tired, quit practicing and rest. Fatigue brings on tension and tension prevents you from concentrating on your playing.

After gaining fair control of your shoes, seek good competition with more experienced players. Pitching under pressure develops self-confidence. Be a close observer and a good listener. You will learn much to your advantage from the experts. However, don't try to change your style by copying that of every good pitcher you meet. Most of the champions have little personal quirks in their deliveries that may not work with your style. The old saying that, "one man's meat can be another's poison," is applicable here. The personal development of your natural style is the best course to follow, providing you observe the fundamentals that are fundamental.

Nearly all beginners experience difficulty in elevating their shoes high enough. Ted Allen, one of the game's all-time greatest, perfected his trajectory by erecting two poles out in the center of his court - one pole on each side of the pitching lane. With a wire stretched from pole to pole, about 8 feet above the ground, he practiced pitching over the wire. Thus, he trained himself to pitch the proper height - for his style of pitching.

When an opponent is unavailable, two or more pairs of horseshoes can be used to good advantage. Place a shoe around each stake. Leave it there. Then regard those ringers as a dummy opponent. Endeavor to beat him. Score three points each inning for your imaginary opponent. To defeat him, you have to pitch over 50% ringers. Pitching against the iron of the opposing shoes is excellent practice in topping ringers.

Concentration

Learn to concentrate on your game. Mental concentration is about 75% of the battle among experts. Many of them appear to be self-hypnotized when engaged in strong competition. They grit their teeth with each pitch and refuse to talk to anyone until the game is over. It isn't that they want to be rude and unsociable, but they realize that they cannot carry on a conversation and concentrate on their playing at the same time.

Nervous Tension (Pressure)

Public enemy Number One for all tournament pitchers is that old mental devil, "tension" -more commonly called "pressure." When two champions meet in a title match, the air becomes charged with tension that grips the players and spectators alike. Endurance, nerve control and the "breaks of the game" are the factors that decide the winner. Under such circumstances, it is common to see some players become the victim of "pressure." When that occurs, they become easy marks for their opponents. Pressure plagues all players at times. Those who deny it are dishonest with themselves. It is no disgrace to be afflicted by pressure. It is natural. Boxers, football players, opera singers, public speakers - even race horses can be seen to tremble, breathe rapidly, perspire and become rigid with suspense before going in to action. However, insofar as a successful public performance is concerned, tension is fatal, unless ways and means are devised to conquer it.

A tournament pitcher must mentally condition himself to overcome pressure. The pitcher may be in the pink of condition and capable of playing well under ordinary circumstances. But, if the pitcher

has neglected the mental training, this omission instantly becomes apparent when engaging strong competition. A good player does not become tense because of being afraid. The pitcher is afraid because the pitcher becomes tense.

The first step toward conquering pressure is to recognize it for what it is. Pressure is a self-created enemy that destroys coordination and deprives one of physical and mental endurance. All successful public performers (I mean horseshoe pitchers here) have devised methods of combating pressure. Because it affects each individual in a somewhat different manner - but always adversely they may solve their problem in their own way. It is not easy, however, it can be done by (1) Preparation or training; (2) Physical Control; (3) Proper Mental Attitude.

When you find yourself growing tense during a game, slow down and take plenty of time delivering. Walk from stake to stake with slow, measured strides. Let your arms hang loosely at your sides. Shake your fingers and wrist occasionally to relax the muscles of your delivery arm. Raise your arms above your head and breathe deeply and evenly from your diaphragm. This will relax your muscles and help restore your mental composure. Tension causes fatigue, which in turn causes tension. Don't let a few bad breaks rattle you. Once you acquire the power of "mind over muscle," you will become a better player.

Relaxation is the secret of success in all sports

Although horseshoe pitching is one of the most healthful of all sports, tournament pitching builds up more pressure than most other sports. A golfer has plenty of time to relax between strokes. A baseball pitcher can miss the plate any number of times and still pitch a fine game. But to get anywhere in a big horseshoe tournament a player must throw an average of 70% to 80% ringers. The opponents will cancel over 75% of these ringers. After two players pitch their shoes they walk 40 feet to the other end and pitch the shoes back to the other stake. This is continuous action over a long period of time. Players pitch as many as 3,000 shoes during the course of a National Tournament. The pressure and competitive tension is on every pitch.

Tips and Comments by Top Players

Elmer Hohl, the great Canadian Champion, and 3-time World Champion: "The stake is the only thing I see when delivering a pitch. Anything could happen immediately behind the stake and I wouldn't see it."

Harold Reno of OH, twice World Champion: "Blot out all interference. Concentrate on the stake, don't talk to people, listen to noises or watch something going on outside your court during a game."

Paul Focht of OH, 1962 World Champion: "Pitch every shoe in practice just as you would in a tournament - as if the title depended on throwing a ringer."

Don Titcomb of CA, the first left-hander to win the World Title: "Mistakes made in practice through lack of concentration and determination will form bad habits and come back to haunt you in tournament games."

Carl Steinfeldt of NY: "Poor mental attitude and lack of confidence in -Your ability will defeat you in a close game every time."

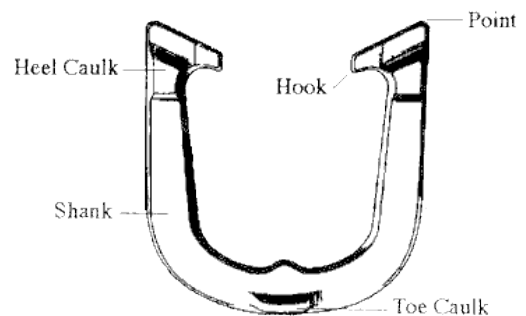
Guy Zimmerman, 1954 World Champion: "The reason many players tense up is because they don't try hard during practice as they do in competition. While practicing they merely toss their shoes back and forth without concentrating enough on what they are doing. The result is they play like they practice-halfhearted with little confidence. They may pitch very good for a while but when the chips are down they break under pressure of competition."

Ed Sharpe of IN: "The right amount of practice is the amount you really want at a time you want it. Some days you may be tired and disinterested don't practice. Other days you may want to practice all day. Sloppy pitching habits develop when you are tired or lack interest."

Note: This material taken from "The Horseshoe Pitcher's Manual on how-to-do-it", compiled by the NHPA, F. Ellis Cobb, Editor, rev. 1978

The Pitching Shoe

Although regular horseshoes were pitched for centuries, specially made pitching shoes have been used since the first world tournament in 1909 and today are in universal use. Pitching shoes are similar to regular horseshoes, with toe and heel caulks. The balance, temper, and hook design are all carefully determined to promote maximum success and for regulation play certain design specifications are carefully followed to ensure fairness in competition.



From web site: <http://www.horseshoepitching.com/gameinfo/howtopitch.html>