**[Baseball Showcases: A Great Way to Waste Money and Get Injured](http://ericcressey.com/baseball-showcases-a-great-way-to-waste-money-and-get-injured)**

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Written on March 26, 2010 at 4:04 am, by Eric Cressey

**Q: I read**[**your blog here the other day**](http://ericcressey.com/crazy-dads-and-kids-who-throw-cheddar)**about your “ideal competitive year” for a baseball player.  What’s your take on showcases and college camps?  They always occur during the “down periods” you mentioned: fall ball and the early winter.  How do these fit in to a baseball player’s development?**

A: To be blunt, while there are some exceptions to the rule, they rarely fit into development. In reality, they usually feed into destruction – at least in the context of pitchers.  I openly discourage all our young athletes and parents from attending them almost without exception.

I know of very few showcase directors and college baseball coaches who legitimately understand anatomy, physiology, the etiology of baseball injuries, the nature of adolescent development, or motor skill acquisition.

Showcase directors specialize in promoting and running showcases.  College coaches specialize in recruiting players, developing talent, planning game and practice strategy, and winning games.  To my knowledge, understanding scapulohumeral rhythm and the contributions of a glenohumeral internal rotation deficit (GIRD) to SLAP lesions via the peel-back mechanism isn’t all in a day’s work for these folks.



The fundamental issue with these events is their timing.  As you noted, they almost always occur in the fall and winter months.  Why?

1.  It’s the easiest time to recruit participants, as they aren’t in-season with their baseball teams.

2. It’s not during the college baseball season – so fields and schedules are open and scouting and coaching man-power is free.

You’ll notice that neither #1 or #2 said “It’s the time of year when a pitcher is the most prepared to perform at a high level safely.”  It is just profitable and convenient for other people – and that occurs at the expense of many young pitchers’ arms.

[**In 2006, Olsen et al. published a fantastic review**](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16452269) that examined all the different factors associated with elbow and shoulder surgeries in pitchers by comparing injured pitchers (those who warranted surgery) with their non-injured counterparts.  Some of the findings of the study:

-Pitchers who eventually required surgery threw almost EXACTLY twice as many pitches as the control group (healthy pitchers) over the course of the year…from a combination of pitches per outing, total outings, and months pitched per year.  For those of you who think your kid needs to play on multiple teams simultaneously, be very careful; add a team and you instantly double things – at least acutely.

**-The injured pitchers attended an average of FOUR times more showcases than non-injured kids.**  
-Interesting aside:  injured pitchers were asked what their coaches’ most important concern was: game, season, or athlete’s career.  In the healthy group, they said the coach cared about the game most in only 11.4% of cases. In the injured group, it was 24.2%!  These crazy little league coaches are often also the ones running the showcases…

The big problem is that these issues usually don’t present until years later.  Kids may not become symptomatic for quite some time, or pop NSAIDs to cover up the issues.  They might even go to physical therapy for a year before realizing they need surgery.  It’s why you see loads of surgeries in the 16-18-year-old population, but not very often in 15 and under age groups.



So why are appearances like these in the fall and winter months so problematic?  Well, perhaps the best way I can illustrate my point is to refer back to a conversation I had with Curt Schilling last year.

Curt told me that throughout his career, he had always viewed building up his arm each year as a process with several levels.

Step 1: Playing easy catch  
Step 2: Playing easy catch on a line  
Step 3: Building up one’s long toss (Curt never got onto a mound until he’d “comfortably” long-tossed 200 ft.)  
Step 4: Throwing submaximally off a mound  
Step 5: Throwing with maximum effort off a mound  
Step 6: Throwing with maximum effort off a mound with a batter  
Step 7: Throwing with maximum effort off a mound with a batter in a live game situation  
Step 8: Opening day at Fenway Park in front of 40,000+ people



Being at a showcase in front of college coaches and scouts with radar guns ***is*** Step 8 for every 14-16 year old kid in America.  And, it comes at the time of year when they may not have even been throwing because of fall/winter sports and the weather.  Just to be clear, I’ll answer this stupid question before anyone asks it: **playing year-round and trying to be ready all the time is NOT the solution**.

I can honestly say that in all my years of training baseball players, I’ve only seen one kid who was “discovered” at a showcase.  And, frankly, it occurred in December of his junior year, so those scouts surely would have found him during high school and summer ball; it wasn’t a desperate attempt to catch someone’s eye.

I’ll be honest: I have a lot of very close friends who work as collegiate baseball coaches.  They’re highly-qualified guys who do a fantastic job with their athletes – but also make money off of fall baseball camps.  I can be their friend without agreeing with everything they do; there is a difference between “disagree” and “dislike.”

Fortunately, the best coaches are the ones who go out of their way to make these events as safe as possible, emphasizing skill, technique, and strategy improvements over “impressing” whoever is watching.  So, it’s possible to have a safe, beneficial experience at one of these camps.  I’d encourage you to find out more about what goes on at the events in advance, and avoid throwing bullpens if unprepared for them.

As far as showcases are concerned, I’d encourage you to save your money and go on a family vacation instead.