Clayton Kershaw's Repertoire Makes Him a "Tight Pitcher"

by Clifton Neeley www.baseballvmi.com

Slider - Used (15%) League Wide

Average Hit/Strike Rate For 2016 = 8.37%

The slider is essentially a curveball that is thrown at a higher speed and therefore has lesser rotation in terms of rpm's. Due to its speed, it is a later breaking pitch than the curveball. In heavy air, this pitch breaks even sooner on its path toward the strike zone than it does in lighter air. In **very light air** it breaks much further down the path of travel and becomes a devastating pitch in the arsenal of the high speed pitcher. A pitcher typically likes to place this pitch low, outside and off the plate, especially when he is ahead in the count. It is a good counter pitch to the four-seamer due to its speed. It is thrown approximately 15 percent of the total pitches thrown in Major League Baseball and could be the "out" pitch for some pitchers. We, here at Baseball VMI, have identified a pitcher who throws the four-seam fastball more than 30% of the time and also the slider more than 10% of the time, as a "Tight Pitcher"--that is, one who normally conforms to the top three utilized pitches in MLB. A good example of a "Tight Pitcher" is Clayton Kershaw. He primarily throws three pitches. The main one is his fastball, but he sports a great slider to go along with it, plus, of course, his timely change-up. We'll talk about the "Tight Pitcher" in a later article sometime this season.

Two-Seam - Fastball Used (14%) League Wide

Average Hit/Strike Rate for 2016 = 11.14%

The two-seamer is simply a pitch thrown with the ball rotated 90 degrees from the 4-seam grip position. Since there are only two short seams spinning backward, the lift is less than when four seams are whipping the air. Also, due to the typical 75% to 80% arm angle of the pitcher, the circular seams acting against the air cause a Frisbee© effect, sliding the ball in the direction of the slant. This pitch is used approximately 14% of the time in MLB. It is normally used by a 4-seam dominant pitcher (tight pitcher) to induce a groundball knowing that this pitch does not lift as much as does the 4-seam.

"When" is an extremely important point in this particular discussion. This is also "*when*" the VMI comes in handy for you. But before we get into the discussion about the two-seamer, let's set a few ground rules; First, we are talking about the two-seamer after the hitter has been set-up by the pitcher's four-seamer. Second, we are talking about a 95 mph pitch, and third, we are assuming the pitcher is not struggling to hit his preferred location within the strike zone due to an extreme change in atmosphere.

So, let's assume a team of hitters has recently been hitting in an environment and weather that has caused the four-seamer to lift less than it will lift in today's game, the team will sport a Negative VMI.

Let's say the VMI is -4.00 or minus even greater, then these hitters are used to setting their bodies to swing at a pitch that is lifting 1/2 inch more than it will today. So if the typical "Tight" pitcher uses the 2-seamer, it will be right on the target of the hitter who may not need to alter his swing at all to pound that pitch.

Now, don't get confused "when" speed is considered. Always keep in mind that a speed of 5 mph less than the 95 we are featuring, will take one inch off the lift of that 4-seam fastball regardless of the environment. So, if your pitcher throws a 4-seamer at only 90 mph, then of course he will get hit much harder even at a (minus) -4.00 VMI. And, if he is substantially slower, then the two-seamer will actually be more effective within this VMI range.

You can quickly check a starting pitchers' production in the ADI and against the hitters' VMI for today by going to www.baseballvmi.com and selecting Members (you don't need a membership to look at the stats) then selecting "Pitcher Stats by ADI" and checking the "Sortable Stats" for the teams' normal performance in the VMI Range. Once you've recorded the Pitcher and the Team, then check the individual Hitter and Team Stats against the VMI Range to see what is the pitch he's most likely going to be able to square up on "Today."

The Two-Seam fastball as a leading pitch is dangerous for the pitcher against any minus VMI team. Of course, it is less dangerous for the pitcher if he is pitching in a High ADI game due to the side-to-side movement. In a low ADI environment (like Kansas City in the hot summer) the two-seamer may work well, depending on the opposing teams' VMI for today.

Next time we'll look at the "Reverse Pitcher" and how you can quickly decide if he's in trouble before the game begins.

Visual Memory by Clifton Neeley, creator of the Visual Memory Index© and author of the web-site www.baseballvmi.com. Clifton pitched and played baseball and fast-pitch softball in the mountainous southwest Colorado area from 4,000 feet in Grand Junction to 6,000 feet in Durango to 9,000 feet in Telluride prior to his college experience in baseball.