

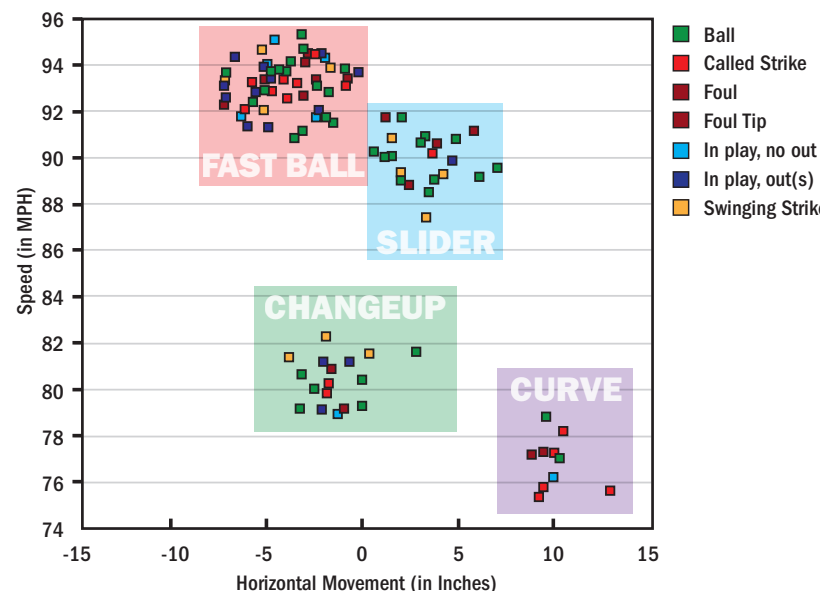
There are compensations for reduced movement—greater velocity, less strain on the wrist and elbow, and improved control. Indeed, Buchholz wanted to get a less “loopy,” more controlled breaking pitch that he felt that he could throw for strikes. Faster, easier on the arm, and easier to command in the strike zone, the slider/cutter now vies with Buchholz’s change-up as a major alternative to the fastball. Compared to 2009, Buchholz threw the slider much more often in 2010 (from 11% to 18% of his pitches). Batters did not miss the pitch as often (11% of sliders resulted in swinging strikes compared to 14% in 2009), and it was fouled off or put into play more frequently, but the contact was often weak (.215 AVG and .230 SLG against the pitch in 2010).

It appears that the increased use of the slider has reduced its effectiveness as a strikeout pitch, but it reflects another Buchholz reinvention designed to help him battle the platoon split. The slider-turning-cutter has given Buchholz another pitch in his ongoing challenges against left-handed batters. A hard-tailing

fastball like Buchholz throws usually

works best against the same-handed batter. Buchholz’s change-up is unusual in being tougher on right-handed batters. With the curve proving difficult to command from the new arm slot, Buchholz has had a tougher time with lefties, issuing more walks and fewer strikeouts. From 2009 to 2010, he increased his likelihood of throwing a slider nearly 15% to left-handed batters, going from less than four sliders per appearance against lefties during an average 100-pitch outing in 2009 to nearly 12 in 2010. Cutters from right-handed pitchers are especially useful for jamming lefties who are crowding the plate, expecting a fastball outside. Tailing fastballs on the outside edge remained his staple pitch, but in later innings he would often follow a fastball away with a cutter in on the wrists. Figure 5 shows the change in pitch frequency from early innings to late innings. While the fastball is set up for both types of hitters and thrown less in later innings than in early innings, the slider emerges as a go-to pitch later in the game.

Like Buchholz’s mistake avoidance with the fastball, however, it remains to be seen whether weak contact is a reproducible skill. Buchholz’s 2010 batting average on balls in play (BABip) was only .263, and at least part of that should be credited to luck.



*Click on a pitch type to highlight.*

