

## WHOSE HOUSE IS IT?



*Home plate.* Why is it called that? Is it because the fourth base is the last one, and you've come home safely when you touch it? That's part of it, certainly, but I like to imagine that the real reason it's called "home" is that the plate is shaped like a house. In the photo above, a boy is standing on the roof of the house. Not a good place to stand during a game, but the photo was taken when there wasn't a game going on. He was safe at home, even standing on the roof like that.

In a game, the team that wins is the team that owns that house most often. The pitcher attacks the house with his pitches. The batter stands near to the house – in the yard, you might say. The pitcher attempts to fire the ball through the house, while the batter tries – using a stick - to "protect" the house, drive the pitcher's strikes away. After two strikes, even fouling off a strike protects the house from being owned by the pitcher. Now, a good fastball, well-located, can break some windows. The windows are on the inside and outside third of the plate. A good batter, prior to having two strikes against him, can look for and feast upon pitches that come right through the front door, down the middle. Those are pitches to drive, to hit with authority, to **crush!**

Some young players stand close to the house, unafraid of the pitcher's strikes, unafraid that they'll once in a while get hit by a pitch. The thought may not even cross their minds. Other young hitters, in particular those who have been struck by a wayward pitch, tend to stand a little farther away from the plate. Some players stand farther away from the plate, then stride in, toward the strike zone, as they ready to swing.

Find what's comfortable for you, but make sure that the sweet spot of your bat covers the middle of the plate when you swing.

The hardest strikes to hit are those fired to the inside and outside thirds of the house, from where the windows are to the outer corners of the plate. Pitches thrown in these locations are hard to get the sweet spot of the bat to. More often, you'll hit the inside pitch on the skinny part of the bat (down the handle, ouch!) and the fastball to the outer third off the end of the bat (ouch again!). Your hits won't travel very far unless you get the sweet spot of your bat to the pitch.



There, I drew windows and a door on the house (I asked the boy to get down off the roof, but he refused). You can see that the windows aren't broken, but that's because there's no game on. They get broken every game if the pitchers are any good at locating their fastballs.

## FEET



When I work with young hitters, I will often ask them to try changing how they set up with

their feet. Because the back foot needs to be free to pivot quickly (“squish the bug”), I will ask a young hitter to try pigeon-toeing with the back foot, turning the toe a little toward the pitcher. This helps add some quickness to a player’s swing, and add power torque to his hip rotation.

Many young players set up with their toes pointing outward – duck-like – and this restricts their bat speed and torque. Try the pigeon-toed stance. See if it adds to your QUICKNESS and POWER.

## HANDS



The hands need to be relaxed, loose. Hold the handle of the bat in your fingers, not in your palms. Players who hold the bat in their palms lock up their shoulders, causing their head to move when they swing. This causes a loss of visual tracking of the pitch, leads to the head pulling away from the strike zone. Understand this: Power does NOT come from muscles, but from flow, from bat speed. If you tighten your grip and flex your muscles when swinging, it will actually SLOW your bat speed. Stay loose, bat in the fingers. The hands will naturally firm up at the point of contact.

## ZONING

One of the keys for a hitter is to zone in, early in the count, on pitches to the middle third of the plate. Whenever possible, you want your first swing to be at a pitch you can drive. You want to see one of those fat pitches every at-bat, a fastball to the middle-third of the zone. This approach to each at-bat is called **zoning**. Early in the count – and especially if the pitcher

shows any sign of control troubles – you want to dictate the at-bat. Lay off pitches to the inside and outside edges of the strike zone.

This changes if you fall behind in the count. Your zoning focus then needs to include the whole plate. With two strikes, you even need to include an extra two inches or so off the outside corner. Why? Because umpires tend to love calling third strikes, exactly there. Get smart first instead of angry later!

Don’t get yourself out early in the at-bat by swinging at pitches headed for the windows of the house. Look for one coming right in the front door. If you get one, crush it. If you don’t and you fall behind in the count, guard the whole house. Whose house is it? Make it yours as often as possible.

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