

FUNDAMENTALS **OF HITTING**

BASEBALL **HITTING PHILOSOPHY**

I.) LESS IS MORE –

REDUCE MOVEMENTS- KEEP IT SIMPLE AND SMOOTH

II.) STRIVE FOR CONTACT FIRST AND THEN WORK ON POWER.

OVERSWINGING WILL CAUSE PROBLEMS WITH YOUR SWING
AND DROP YOU'RE AVERAGE

III.) CONTACT VS. POWER-

* **POWER HITTERS** (AVG.-.200) → **FAIL 8 OUT OF 10 TIMES**

* **CONTACT HITTERS** (AVG.400) → ARE **TWICE** AS RELIABLE
IN GAME SITUATIONS

IV.) USE THE ENTIRE FIELD.

HIT TO ALL FIELDS WITH EQUAL STRENGTH- INCREASE YOUR
ODDS BY USING THE ENTIRE FIELD

V.) PRACTICE YOUR WEAKNESSES MORE THAN YOU DO YOUR STRENGTHS.

*BECOME A COMPLETE HITTER

VI.) GOOD SOFT TOSS (WITH A PROPER TOSS) AND GOOD TEE WORK IS THE KEY TO SUCCESSFUL HITTING.

*LIVE CAGE WORK SHOULD ONLY HAPPEN AFTER YOU HAVE
WARMED UP AND YOUR TECHNIQUE IS FLAWLESS.

VII.) KEEP YOUR SWING SHORT AND QUICK THROUGH THE ZONE.

HITTING MISTAKES AND CORRECTIONS:

COMMON MISTAKES:

CORRECTIONS:

*STRIDE TOO LONG	*KEEP STRIDE SHORTER THAN 6 INCHES
*STEPPING OUT DURING STRIDE	*STRIDE TOWARDS PITCHER –LEAD WITH YOUR HEEL
*DROPPING THE BAT HEAD	*KEEP BAT HEAD ABOVE THE BALL UNTIL CONTACT – PREVENTS “LOOPS” IN THEIR SWINGS
*AFRAID OF THE BALL	*DO “BEAM BALL” DRILL WITH TENNIS BALLS TO LEARN HOW TO GET HIT AND STAY IN THE ZONE
*HANDS DROP PRIOR TO SWING OR DURING LOAD (“HITCH”)	*KEEP HANDS AT THE NIPPLE LEVEL
*FRONT ARM “BARS” OUT OR “CASTS OUT” AND CREATES A “LONG SWING”	*KEEP FRONT ARM BENT –“POWER TRIANGLE”
*SWING STARTS FROM THE ARMS INSTEAD OF THE LEGS	*AFTER STRIDE, SWING SHOULD START WITH BACK FOOT PIVOT AND WORK ITS WAY UP
*WRONG CONTACT ZONE FOR PITCH LOCATION (DON’T WAIT FOR THE OUTSIDE PITCH OR TOO SLOW ON THE INSIDE PITCH)	*INSIDE PITCH- CONTACT 6” INFRONT OF OF FRONT FOOT
	*MIDDLE PITCH- CONTACT AT FRONT FOOT
	*OUTSIDE PITCH- CONTACT SLIGHTLY IN FRONT OF BELLY BUTTON
*DO NOT IDENTIFY TYPE OF PITCH	*USE FINE VISION FOCUS TO SEE ROTATION
*DO NOT KEEP HEAD/EYES ON BALL ALL THE WAY TO THE BAT	*SEE BALL OFF THE BAT AT CONTACT, DO NOT PULL OUT HEAD
*DO NOT USE HIPS AND LOWER HALF PROPERLY	*BACK HIP SHOULD BE DRIVEN TOWARDS PITCHER AT END OF SWING
*DO NOT DRIVE TOP HAND OVER AND FOLLOW THROUGH PROPERLY	*TOP HAND NEEDS TO DRIVE THROUGH THE BALL AND HANDS NEED TO END UP HIGH IN FOLLOW THROUGH
*FRONT HIP OPENS TOO EARLY	*KEEP STANCE CLOSED AT CONTACT AND ONLY FORCE FRONT HIP OPEN WHEN BACK HIP DRIVE THROUGH
*USING TOO LARGE OF A BAT- YOU LOSE BALANCE AND BAT SPEED	*A LIGHTER BAT WILL GIVE YOU MORE CONTROL AND BAT SPEED- IT IS WORTH THE SACRIFICE
*DO NOT KNOW STRIKE ZONE	*LEARN YOUR STRIKE ZONE BY STANDING IN ON PITCHERS BULL PEN SESSIONS WITHOUT A BAT / SWINGS
*STRIDE WHEN YOU HIT, NOT STRIDING TO HIT –CAN’T ADJUST TO OFF SPEED PITCHES	*YOUR STRIDE AND SWING HAVE TO BE SEPARATE IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO HIT OFF SPEED PITCHES WITHOUT GUESSING.

HITTING FUNDAMENTALS:

STANCE:

- 60/40 –BACK/ FRONT
- SLIGHTLY CLOSED
- FRONT SHOULDER SLIGHTLY DOWN
- ELBOWS DOWN- POWER TRIANGLE
- HANDS AT THE TOP OF THE STRIKE ZONE
- HEAD FACING PITCHER WITH BOTH EYES, LEVEL
- RELAXED UPPER BODY, SOLID BASE –RELEASE HAND FOREARM STRESS
- FEET SHOULD BE A BAT LENGTH APART- GOOD, WIDE, BALANCED BASE
- KEEP KNEES CLOSE TOGETHER

GRIP:

- KEEP BAT IN FINGERS
- KEEP FINGERS LOOSE, DON'T SQUEEZE THE BAT
- USE "WAGGLE" TO KEEP HANDS LOOSE

LOAD/ STRIDE:

- HANDS GO UP AND BACK SLIGHTY AS YOU BEGIN STRIDE
- WEIGHT SHIFT IS SLIGHTLY BACK
- STRIDE IS SOFT AND SHORT
- LEAD WITH FRONT HEEL
- STEP SOFTLY WITH FRONT FOOT- "BREAKING THIN ICE"
- KEEP WEIGHT BACK- LET THE BALL COME TO YOU (STILL 60/40-BACK/FRONT)
- SHOW BACK POCKET TO PITCHER WHEN HIS IS SHOWN TO YOU
- KEEP ELBOWS DOWN AND RELAXED AND CLOSE TOGETHER

PIVOT:

- BACK KNEE STARTS SWING
- FRONT FOOT CAN OPEN SLIGHTLY
- KEEP FRONT LEG SOLID "BRACED"
- BELT BUCKLE SHOULD FACE PITCHER (PITCH DOWN THE MIDDLE)
- KEEP THE HANDS BACK
- SHOULDERS SHOULD STAY LEVEL
- WEIGHT SHOULDER TRANSFER SLIGHTLY FORWARD
- DO NOT WRAP THE BAT AROUND HEAD
- FIRE FRONT HEEL DOWN, BACK HEEL FIRES UP

FOCUS / VISION:

- USE WIDE GENERAL OR "SOFT" FOCUS PRIOR TO START OF PITCH
- SWITCH TO DETAILED OR "FINE" FOCUS AS PITCHER BEGINS HIS MOTION
- YOU CANNOT FOCUS PROPERLY FOR LONG PERIODS OF TIME
- WATCH FOR LOCATION AND ROTATION ON EACH PITCH AND ADJUST
- LET THE BALL COME TO YOU, DON'T GO TO THE BALL

SWING:

- TAKE KNOB OF BAT TO THE BALL
- KEEP YOUR HANDS INSIDE THE BALL
- PULL THE BAT TO THE BALL AND DRIVE THE TOP HAND OVER, THOUGH THE BALL
- START SWING AT THE FEET ...LEGS... HIPS... UPPER BODY
- END SWING WITH 40/60 WEIGHT (BACK/FRONT) AND BACK LEG BENT ON TOE
- "SQWISH THE BUG" WITH BACK TOE
- KEEP FRONT TOE CLOSED AND DRIVE THROUGH THE FRONT HIP
- ROTATE BACK HIP TO THE PITCHER
- KEEP THE BARREL OF THE BAT CLOSE TO YOU EAR- "KEEP YOUR SWING SHORT"
- HEAD GOES FROM FRONT SHOULDER TO THE BACK SHOULDER – "IKE TO MIKE"
- FINISH WITH HANDS HIGH IN FOLLOW THROUGH- BOTH HANDS ON THE BAT
PREFERRED

CONTACT ZONE HITTING:

- INSIDE 1/3 PITCH ... HIT IN FRONT OF THE PLATE ABOUT 6 INCHES...REACT
FASTEST
 - -BELT BUCKLE TO LF
- MIDDLE 1/3 PITCH... HIT AT FRONT FOOT... WAIT
 - -BELT BUCKLE TO CF
- OUTSIDE 1/3 PITCH...HIT AT BELLY BUTTON...(WAIT A LOT)
 - -BELT BUCKLE TO RF
- * KEEP YOUR HANDS INSIDE THE BALL
- * KEEP YOUR HEAD ON THE BALL
- * USE SAME SWING FOR ALL LOCATIONS

HITTING DRILLS:

I.) DRY SWINGS-

- WALL DRILL (QUICK BAT)
- LOAD, STRIDE, SWING (BALANCE, RHYTHM)
- CONTACT SWINGS (ALL FIELDS HITTING)

II.) SOFT TOSS- (TOSSER NEED TO GIVE PERFECT TOSSES FOR THESE TO BE EFFECTIVE)

- REGULAR * *THESE ARE NOT SPEED DRILLS*
- OUTSIDE (OPPOSITE) * *TAKE YOUR TIME AND SET UP*
- MIDDLE * *SET UP EACH TIME*
- INSIDE (PULL)
- NO STRIDE, SWING
- LOAD, STRIDE, SWING
- DROPS TOSS (QUICK HANDS)
- OFF SET TOSS (CURVE BALL, OPPOSITE FIELD)
- BEHIND THE BACK (HIP DRIVE)
- CLEMENTE DRILL (STAYING ON TOP OF THE BALL)
- 90'S (CURVE BALL/ OPPOSITE FIELD)
- ONE HAND (TOP AND BOTTOM HAND DRIVE)
- BACK TOSS (ALL FIELDS, CALLED)
- FRONT TOSS (OPPOSITE FIELD)
- HAPPY GILMORE DRILL (PROPER LOAD)
- MATTINGLY DRILL (HIGHER TOSS- STAY ON TOP OF BALL)

III.) TEE DRILLS-

- REGULAR
- OUTSIDE – OPPOSITE
- INSIDE – PULL
- MIDDLE - UP THE MIDDLE
- NO STRIDE SWINGS
- LOAD, STRIDE, SWING
- BEHIND THE BACK
- 2 BALL
- 2 BALL- CALLED
 - * Top/Bottom

IV.) WIFFLE BALL Batting Practice-

- REGULAR
- ALL FIELDS
 - INSIDE-PULL
 - MIDDLE- UP THE MIDDLE
 - OUTSIDE- OPPOSITE WAY

V.)CAGE WORK AND PREGAME-

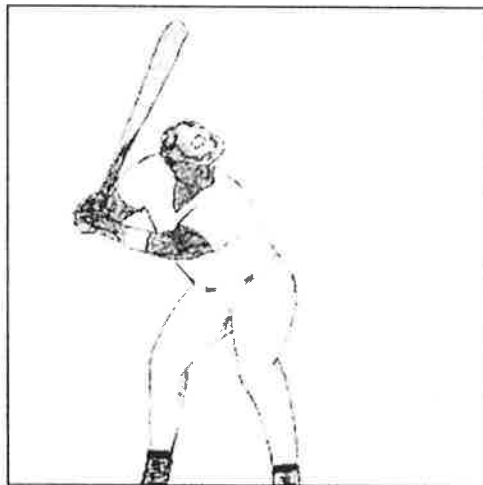
- WATCH PITCHES IN BULL PEN AND IN CAGE TO SEE ROTATION AND
 - * LOCATION (CALL CONTACT ZONES)
- CONTACT ZONE HITTING
- BUNTING
- BAT HACK
- BAT VOLLEYBALL
- PEPPER
 - * WATCH OPPOSING PITCHERS

Maximum Performance Baseball Academy Player Evaluation

Player's Name:			
Age:			
Date of Evaluation:		Entrance Evaluation	
		Final evaluation	
<u>Comments:</u>	<u>Technique:</u>	Correction Needed:	Good:
	I.) Stance:		
	a.) 60/40 weight distribution		
	b.) Closed stance		
	c.) Width of stance		
	d.) Front shoulder down		
	e.) Elbows down (power triangle)		
	f.) Hands at top of zone		
	g.) Both eyes on pitcher		
	h.) Solid base, relaxed top		
	i.) Knees close together		
	j.) Hands close to chest		
k.) Flat Bat			
	II.) Grip:		
	a.) Knuckles are lined up		
	b.) Loose Fingers		
	c.) "Waggle" present		
	III.) Trigger (Load):		
	a.) Hands move up and back		
	b.) elbows bent (no "arm bar")		
	c.) Weight moves slightly back		
	IV.) Stride:		
	a.) short stride (6" or less)		
	b.) Soft Stride ("breaking ice")		
	c.) Weight on inside of front foot (closed)		
	d.) Lead with front heel		
	e.) Show your pocket to pitcher		
	f.) Keep weight back		
	g.) Keep hands back		
	V.) Pivot:		
	a.) Back knee and foot start pivot		
	b.) Front foot tries to stay closed		
	c.) front leg is braced		
	d.) Hands back		
	e.) level Shoulders		
	f.) Front heel fires down, Back heel up		
	g.) Weight shift slightly forward		
	VI.) Swing:		
	a.) Hands inside the ball		
	b.) Barrel above the hands		
	c.) Short stroke, long Follow through		
	d.) Head down at contact, on back shoulder		
	e.) Back hip to pitcher		
	f.) Proper contact zone		

Baseball Hitting Mechanics

As we learn about the most efficient batting mechanics, it is necessary to state that there are probably as many mental images of the swing as there are coaches who teach baseball and softball hitting mechanics. Therefore, I thought it would be helpful to break the swing down to its frame-by-frame parts. The frames will offer a reference for each segment of the swing. This particular swing hit a ball well over 500 feet, so I think you would have to agree the mechanics exhibited are sound.



Batting stance

The batter has taken an athletic stance in the box. This stance would be similar to the ready position of a tennis player or soccer goalie. A slightly crouched position with the weight evenly distributed on the legs.

The hands are about shoulder high with a slight cock to the bat. The shoulders are in a fairly straight line with the pitcher.

At this time, the rear elbow is elevated to or past the midway (45 degree) point.

Timing step

(if desired)

The batter has rotated (inward turn) his lead shoulders away from the pitcher. His body is now leaning slightly away from the pitcher with about 60 % of his weight on the back leg. The lead knee is well flexed and turned away from the pitcher.

As the batter strides the hands are brought back near the armpit. The back elbow is elevated slightly more (60 to 80 degree)

which adds more cock to the bat. He is now ready to read the incoming pitch

Ready launch position

The batter has rotated to the launch position and completed his timing step. All forward movement of the body has halted and he is ready to initiate the swing.

Lead shoulder is pointed in the direction of the second baseman (right handed batter).

- Lead arm is across chest and fully extended toward the catcher.
- Back elbow is lowering past the mid-way point. ---
Note: The pulling action of the top hand has already started accelerating the bat head back toward the catcher and the normal launch position.
- The lead knee has started rotating around toward the pitcher. All slack has been taken out of lead arm so that any rotation of the shoulders will cause a corresponding acceleration of the hands. There is ample flex in the lead leg to extend and help drive rotation.
- He has read the pitch and ready to fully initiate the swing.

Initiating the swing

How the swing is initiated is by far the most important part of the swing. How the batter develops energy for the swing and the direction of the forces he applies to the bat at this point will determine his mechanics for the balance of the swing.

"A ballistic motion, once initiated, produces trajectories that can only be efficiently changed at its margins."

Although the above biomechanical principle may appear complicated, once grasped it makes understanding and teaching the mechanics of the baseball swing far more clear.

The principle basically means the batter does not have to remember when to "pop his hips," "squeeze the trigger," or any of other batting mechanic principles. Once the hitter has properly initiated his swing, the rhythm of the ensuing mechanics are on autopilot. From the launch position to follow-through, what to do with his front toe, hips, hands, and so on, need never enter the batter's mind. Forces he applied at the start of the swing determined the sequence of the following mechanics. Now, his total concentration is on timing and getting the plane of the swing inline with the path of the ball.

When a batter initiates the swing with incorrect forces, the balance of the swing will be an exercise in compensation.

The reaction of the bat to an improperly initiated swing is what causes that tense, jerky appearance.

When a player or coach uses video to review flaws in mechanics, it is imperative that he understands that the solution to a flaw will not be found in the frame that the flaw becomes apparent. The answer lies in the forces he used to initiated the swing.



- Hips, torso and shoulders start their rotation around a stationary axis.
- Back elbow comes down to the batter's side to accelerate the bat heads arc toward the catcher and allow the wrist of the top hand to rotate in-line with the plane of the swing.
- The forearm (back arm) starts its rotation and lowering toward a horizontal position (completed in frame #5).
- From this point to contact, the position of the back elbow in relation to the body will change very little (sliding forward 1 to 3 inches).
- The quick acceleration of the hand-path is developed mainly from the rotation of the shoulders and torso.

Angular bat head acceleration will be the product of constantly supplying torque and rotational energy from the body through the hands.

The middle mechanics

The swing is now on autopilot. We are combining frames # 2, 3 and 4, as there is very little change in the batter's mechanics during these frames to describe.

As the shoulders rotate, the direction of force supplied through the hands will automatically (if properly initiated) be from opposing directions. ---The top hand starts out pulling toward the catcher. But by contact, the rotation of the shoulders and the rolling of the forearm from vertical to horizontal will cause the force of the top hand to be directed toward the pitcher.

--- The bottom hand starts by being pulled in an arc toward the pitcher but finishes pulling toward the catcher.

Great hitters produce their tremendous bat speed by constantly supplying torque and rotational energies to the bat from initiation to contact. ---. Lesser hitters also attain their bat speed by applying these same forces but over a more limited portion of the swing.

From frames 1 thru 5 the legs rotate the hips 80 to 90 degrees and the shoulders about 110 to 120 degrees. But the position of the lead and back arm stay in about the same in relationship to

the turning body -- lead arm across much of the chest
-- back arm at the side and forearm rolling around and down
toward the "L" (horizontal) position.

Note: Weaker hitters lower their forearm to horizontal mainly during frames 1,2 & 3, (positioning to drive forward) with great hitters it occurs mainly in frames 3, 4 & 5.

If the pitch were headed toward the outside portion of the plate, rotation of the shoulders would need to slow and allow the lead arm to cast out away from chest. Less shoulder rotation but with more top-hand torque will allow the path of the hands to arc outward and the bat head to reach the outside portion of the plate with little or no decrease in bat speed.

Frames 2, 3 and 4 Combined

Frame #2



Frame #3



Frame #4



Contact

I think that at this point it would be helpful to read;
"Wrist Action or Torque". The article described the batter's mechanics just prior to contact for pitches from the middle-in.

If the swing was not initiated with the correct forces in frame #1, the bat's reaction (inertia vs angular displacement) will not allow the batter to have the bat in a good position to apply maximum torque in frames 4 and 5. This is especially true for outside pitches where rotation of the shoulders is more limited.

- All rotational and torque energy has been expended.
- Lead knee and leg rotation completed and lead leg is fully extended.
- The pulling back of the lead shoulder and arm toward the catcher is completed.
- Back arm and forearm has fully rolled to the "L" position with the forearm pointing toward the pitcher.

The palm of the top hand is facing upward. Palm of the bottom hand facing downward

Rotation completed -- muscles in a relaxed mode
-- lead arm casting away from chest
-- back arm extending.

The momentum of the bat supplies the power for the follow-through.

Both arms have reached full extension -- arms form the "V" position and wrist roll over. The positions of the hands are now reversing -- palm of the top hand is facing downward.

Arm positions now reversing -- lead elbow starts breaking down to side and the back arm will come across the batter's chest with full follow-through.

The bat's momentum will pull the arms through to finish the follow-through.

HITTER'S ALPHABET...

Attack the ball each swing.

Belt buckle should snap quickly toward pitcher as bat is "thrown" at the ball.

Contact each pitch in appropriate contact zone.

Do not elevate front shoulder during swing.

Eliminate weight rushing forward during stride.

Focus on the ball all the way to the point of contact.

Get the back side to stay tall at contact.

Hips, snap, elbow extend, and wrists elongate at contact.

Initiate a slow coil as pitch is being delivered.

Just keep hands loose and flexible and throw them at the ball.

Knees spin in unison during the swing.

Level hip and shoulder rotation during contact.

Maintain the front shoulder down, hip weight back and front knee during stride.

Never think about things other than the baseball during each swing in a game.

Once the bat meets the ball, the back shoulder and chin should graze together in order to keep eyes on the ball and the back side from dropping.

Point the front hip pocket slightly toward the pitcher prior to pitch in order to build hip speed.

Quit straightening out the lead elbow prior to contact - this will product a long, slow swing.

Roll wrists after contact is made.

Stride with a "closed" front toe.

Turn back heel upward during contact.

Unify the hips and hands together during the swing.

Visually track each pitch from pitcher's fingers.

Weight distribution with the hands and hips is slow during the coil and stride and then is quick during the swing.

X-ray visually the speed, spin and location of each pitch.

Yes to strikes, no to balls.

Zero tension during each plate appearance in the game.



Basic Fundamentals of Hitting

Hitting is probably the most difficult part of the game. However, it is also the most enjoyable and satisfying part, as we all love to hit a baseball. It's difficult because the pitcher has the ability to throw the ball hard, or not so hard, or to make it curve or sink. As the hitter, we not only have to determine what pitch has been thrown, but also whether it is a strike or a ball. If it is a strike, we have to attempt to hit it. All of this must be done in a fraction of a second. Like all parts of the game there are basic fundamentals that can help make us become better hitters.

Choosing The Bat

This is very much a personal preference. Choosing the type of bat is all about what feels good to you. Some people like thin handles and some like thick. Others like big barrels and still others like small. Choosing the size of the bat is also a personal preference. Feel free to experiment, but be very careful not to choose a bat that is way too heavy. If you choose a bat that is way too heavy, your swing can become long and slow. The ideal swing is short and compact. A heavy bat will not allow the maximum use of your wrists. A good guide in determining if a bat is too heavy is to have the player swing the bat and see if the bat controls the player or the player controls the bat. If the bat swings around and the player has trouble maintaining balance, it is too big.



The Grip

The bat should be placed in the fingers. Line up the knuckles. The grip should be loose at the start, it will tighten naturally when you swing. By lining up the knuckles and maintaining a loose grip you are essentially unlocking your wrists. This allows the wrists to snap or throw the bat head. The bat can also stay on a level plane throughout the strike zone.

The Stance

Remember, the stance is just a starting position. Choose one that is comfortable to you. Whether it is open or closed, straight up or crouched, there are three things essential to a stance.

1. You have to be in a position to see the ball. You can't hit what you don't see.
The most important thing a stance needs to provide is the ability to see the baseball.
2. You should have good balance. Good balance will provide you with a stable athletic base. A stable athletic base is a starting point for all of your athletic movements.
3. You need to have plate coverage. The plate is the reference point for the strike zone. The pitcher is trying to use the entire strike zone. The hitter has to be in a position to cover that strike zone.



Weight Shift

It is important to have your body and swing working together. A weight shift will help keep things together. Simply, you go from a cocked or loaded position to a swing position. Just like a cobra coils before he strikes, a hitter gathers his energy then takes that energy forward to swing the bat. We like the expression, "You have to go back to go forward." It sounds kind of goofy, but what it means is that you start in a balanced position before transferring your weight first to your back side then to your front side as you stride into the swing. The tee is an excellent way to practice weight shift. The ball is sitting still so you never have to rush. Develop a rhythm and try to do it the same way every time.

The Stride

The stride varies for each individual. Some hitters prefer a short stride, where others prefer a longer one. Some stride in toward home plate while others stride a little away from home plate. There is no right or wrong; the bottom line is what works for you. Fundamentally there are two things about the stride that we feel are important:

1. The stride should be toward the pitcher. It puts you in a position to strike the ball. By striding toward the pitcher, your body position is good for the inside pitch and the outside pitch.
2. A short, soft stride is preferable. A short stride keeps the head on the same plane, allowing you to track the ball from the pitcher's hand to the bat. A



shorter stride allows you to wait longer, which helps you from being fooled by the different pitches and the varying speeds of those pitches.

The Swing

When preparing to swing, the hands are in the ready position, which is approximately at the top of your back shoulder. The ideal swing is level. Terminology such as “stay on top of the ball” or “swing down on the ball” really means to swing level. Sometimes people use these expressions to correct a hitch. A hitch is simply dropping your hands below your shoulder as you start your swing. We encourage a short, quick swing – a swing that utilizes your forearms and wrists. We think the key here is not to get too technical or analytical on the swing. A player’s own swing will develop the more he plays.

Point of Contact

Generally, the point of contact is out in front of home plate. This allows for good extension, and it also allows for more bat speed. By hitting the ball too far back, your swing essentially has been cut in half and you have less time and space to generate full bat speed. Conversely, if you hit the ball too far in front, your swing is in the slowing-down mode when contact is made. There are optimum points of contact for everyone, and they vary for each individual. The key is to find your best point of contact. You will find however, that an inside pitch will be hit a little farther out front than a pitch down the middle, and a pitch down the middle will be hit a little farther out front than the outside pitch.



Follow Through

The follow through really means swinging through the baseball. If you do not follow through you are essentially slowing the bat down at the point of contact. We want the maximum bat speed at the point of contact. Swinging through the baseball after contact will enable the hitter to have a follow through. Basically there are two ways to follow through; keep two hands on the bat or release the top hand. Both are correct, but always remember to swing through the baseball.

Now that we have covered the basic fundamentals of hitting, we would like to focus on some specific drills.

Tee Drill

The tee can be used in many different ways. It has been used by players to work on hitting the ball the other way, hitting the ball up the middle and pulling the ball. It also has been used to emphasize the concepts of hitting the ball out in front of home plate as well as letting the ball “get deep” before making contact.

Each of these methods can be an effective way to teach young players, but we feel that the tee drill is best utilized to develop a rhythm to a player’s swing through some form of weight shift.

Weight shift, like so many other aspects of the game, is very much an individual thing. The important teaching element to stress when doing tee work is the concept of “go back to go forward.” This is easily accomplished with the tee, because the ball is stationary and the batter has no reason to rush the swing.

To execute the drill, the batter places the ball on the tee, gets in a comfortable stance, focuses on the ball, gathers energy with weight shift and swings.



Soft Toss

As with the tee, many things can be accomplished with soft toss, but once again we like to stress a very simple message. In this drill, we work on the components of the swing itself. The ideal swing is one that is short and quick to the baseball.

The important teaching concept to stress with the soft toss drill is “loose hands, quick bat.” Grip the bat loosely in the fingers and concentrate on using the wrists and hands to swing the bat. Don't worry about body position or the hips or anything else. The focus should be on the hands and wrists. The tosser is vital to the success of this drill. If the tosser is careful to consistently give the hitter good tosses, the hitter is able to focus on the drill's purpose – “loose hands, quick bat.” Soft toss is not a race. The hitter should have ample time between tosses to collect himself and assume a normal stance.

One-Arm Drill

A slightly more advanced drill, but one that we have been able to use even with 7- and 8-year-olds, is the one-arm drill. The purpose of this drill is to create a direct path by the lead arm to the baseball.

The hitter should try to use the same bat that would be used any other time. The bat is gripped with the bottom hand in its normal position, and the tosser is stationed out in front of the batter (behind a screen, please). Start out by swinging normally for the first five swings. Then take off the top hand and swing with just the one arm for five swings. This part will be difficult. Then finish by swinging with both hands again for five swings.



The batter should notice a shorter, more compact swing during the final set. If the batter is having trouble executing the one-arm set, try choking up a little or tucking the lead arm into the side of the body to help increase stability. Some kids will be able to hit the ball with one arm and some will not have as much success, but by going through this process the batter should notice a shorter, more compact swing during the final set.

Free Hitting

Once the other drills have been completed, it's time to let the player get in the cage and have some fun. We call this free hitting. Hitting is supposed to be the most fun part of the game, so as coaches the last thing we want to do is to get too technical when a young player is hitting. It's hard enough to hit when you are just reacting naturally to the pitched ball. When someone starts talking about hand positioning, weight shift, squashing the bug and other technical points during free hitting, the player may become confused or think too much and the fun may be taken out of hitting. The time to work on all of those minute details is during the previously mentioned drills. Free hitting is the player's time to take everything that was learned during tee work, soft toss and the one-arm drill and put it all together. Those drills put all the pieces together. When the player gets in the cage to hit, a rhythm and timing should automatically develop from the drill work that already has been done. So, in free hitting, let the batter swing away and have fun. Notice any flaws and address them at another time in drill work.

These drills are designed to cater to the individual. We don't want to push any concepts that are too technical and may confuse young hitters. The drills should



provide a solid fundamental base and at the same time allow the individual's specific swing and talent level to take over naturally.

Philosophy

The correct idea is to hit the ball hard someplace. With this idea in mind, we should try to hit a line drive either at the pitcher's chest or at an infielder's chest. We really are not trying to pull the ball consistently, thus making it easier to hit pitches that are on the outside half of the plate. As a result of this type of approach to the ball, we will be stepping to the pitch to hit and will not fall into bad habits such as pulling the head and pulling off the ball. The main idea of hitting is to hit the ball well or hit the ball hard each time we go to plate. Home runs and extra-base hits take care of themselves if our objective is to make solid, hard contact. We like the concept of "solid, hard contact," because just the word "contact" really is not correct. We can go to home plate, and make contact and hit the ball softly, and the infielders and outfielders can converge and make the play and throw us out at first base or catch a little soft pop fly. Approaching the at-bat correctly both mentally and physically allows us to hit for a better average. Generally speaking, we want to watch the ball coming to the plate and we want to hit the ball out in front of the body and the plate. By hitting the ball out in front we can see it, and we are able to get the bat in the position for maximum bat speed and power. By watching the ball and keeping the eyes on the ball we tell the brain the truth about the position of the ball and then the mechanics of the swing, through muscle memory, take over and function correctly. For example, if the ball is on the inner half of the plate and we



watch and see the ball, the brain will tell the hands to be a little quicker and as a result we will automatically get the bat out front quicker and pull that particular pitch.

The Ideal Hitter

The ideal hitter would probably have a combination of these qualities: strength, determination, coordination, confidence, vision, rhythm, style, body control, quick hands, and the will to learn and to take advice. This hitter also would have a relaxed body and a loose, natural arm action. The hitter would blend the important parts of hitting —grip, stance, stride, swing and follow through — into a smooth, graceful motion. While waiting for the pitch, the hitter would be perfectly relaxed in a good, balanced stance. Eyes, hips and shoulders would be level, and the weight of the body would be distributed almost evenly on both feet. The bat would be back and ready. The swing would be a clean, free, crisp swing, and the ball would be struck out in front of the plate with the swing continuing through the ball into the follow through. At no stage of the swing does the batter's head jerk out of line. The hitter follows the course of the ball from the moment it leaves the pitcher's hand until it has hit the bat and is on its way.



Hitter's Checklist



Each player is equipped differently, physically and mentally, so it is extremely difficult to determine what procedure is best for an individual player. Following is a list of ideas that can help anyone become a better hitter:

- Select a bat you can handle.
- Keep your head still.
- Concentrate on solid, hard contact.
- Hit strikes. Learn the strike zone.
- Keep your front shoulder pointed toward the pitcher.
- Keep your hands back.
- Turn your head so that both eyes are on the pitcher; don't look around your nose.
- Hold the bat in the fingers.
- Learn to hit your strength. Every hitter has strengths, just as every hitter has weaknesses. Hit your pitch. When you get it, don't let it get away.
- Start with a balanced stance.
- A rhythm and triggering mechanism is necessary to any swing.
- Go back to go forward; every hitter must have some form of weight shift.
- Take a short stride. A long stride may throw you off balance.
- Stay on top. This term is used to promote a level swing and to help eliminate a severe uppercut.

HITTING SKILLS AND INSTRUCTION

General

It has been said that hitting a baseball well is the single most difficult sports skill to master. Even in the pro's, the best hitters only get a hit 3 out of every 10 at bats.

One definite thing about hitting is that to do it well requires knowing the proper mechanics involved and to

practice, practice, practice, practice
and then

PRACTICE

some more!

Quote: "Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity"

Some general principals of hitting are to:

- Study the pitcher (get a feel for his/her speed, does he have curve/change-up, does he do anything different when he throws it, etc.
- Keep your eyes on the ball through contact. Know the strike zone and get a good pitch to hit.
- Know the situation (count, score, runners, outs) and what it calls for.
- Be aggressive, the hitter should load and stride on every pitch and be up there thinking **hit, hit, hit**, so that he/she is ready to explode with the hips and hands if it is a strike.
- If the pitch is not a strike don't swing.

Have no fear

- **Learn the game - practice matters**
- **Hustle - how you practice is how you play**
 - **Be competitive - play to win**
- **Respect and support each other - the golden rule**
- **Respect yourself - no foul language or personal remarks**
- **Play with poise - the game DOES start over with every pitch**
- **Enjoy the game - and have fun being a part of it**
- **Take pride in what you do - never be content with mediocrity**
- **Baseball is a team sport but demands individual effort**
 - **Remember that playing time works itself out over the course of the season**
 - **You are only as good as your next at bat**

HITTING

Getting Ready to Play



Whether hitting off a tee in the garage or braving cold weather at the park, many players will spend hours and hours grooving their swing before the season starts.

The problem many face, however, is that they will build bad habits by repeating an improper swing.

Repetition is the key to success if the reps are done correctly.

Batters need to do what works for them

*Working on the philosophy that
"if it ain't broke don't fix it",
We recommend you try first to understand your own swing,
then move on to correction.*

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A GREAT HITTER?

**HOW DO WE MAXIMIZE OUR POTENTIAL AND
BECOME GREAT HITTERS?**

It's obvious

Edgar Martinez, Tony Gwynn, George Brett and Mark McGwire
have all discovered the answer.

What about the rest of us?

How do we maximize our potential and become great hitters?

Since you love playing baseball, your goal is to become a better hitter. Everyone has an opinion, and everyone will give you advice.

**Your job is to take ALL the advice and weed out
everything that doesn't fit your hitting style**

How do you know what to weed out?

There are certain fundamentals common to all good hitters. Use those fundamentals as your building blocks, then be open to other advice. Try out different ways of hitting, different stances, different approaches, different drills.

**If something works for you, keep it;
if it doesn't, throw it out.**

Analyze your strengths and weaknesses; incorporate these into how you practice, and how you approach each at bat.

You want to be a great hitter?

There is **NO** substitute for desire and hard work, both mentally and physically.

KNOW YOUR STRENGTHS!!!

**Know your strengths and weaknesses as a hitter. Try to maximize your strengths and minimize your weaknesses.

If you make a conscious effort to eliminate a weakness in practice, you can make that translate into the game.

HITTING



BATTING: Precision, concentration, speed & power

Keep your eye on the ball?

The batter swings at where he thinks the ball will be when it crosses the plate. A 100 mph pitch gets to home plate in .4 seconds, and when it's halfway there, the batter must already be swinging.

POW! The bat must be moving 76 mph to hit the ball 400 feet. If the swing is even one-hundredth of a second early or late, the ball will be foul. When well hit, the baseball is smashed by 8,000 pounds of force, which compresses the ball to about one half of its original diameter.

Where the bat hits the ball determines where the ball will go. A squarely hit ball results in a line drive

3 HITTING TIPS

1. Hit off a tee. You can keep your eye on the ball all the time, and you have to make a level swing to hit it.
2. Don't have too much movement before you swing. Lots of kids - and even some major leaguers - overhitch in their swing and go up and down, then back. It's better to go back and through.
3. Keep it simple. For now, just think about hitting the ball. When you're 15 or 16, start being more specific about technique.

**Have fun and enjoy
the game!!!**

HITTING APPROACH

The best way to be a consistent hitter is to practice your swing. You don't have to hit a baseball to practice your swing! Find a comfortable swing that is affective for you, and go through your stance, stride, and swing over and over again, so that your batting technique is repetitional to you. Once you have mastered your technique, when you come to the plate you will not have to worry about your stride and swing, all you will have to do is keep your head in and watch the ball hit the bat!

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT!!!

KNOW YOURSELF

How do you step in the box?

Many players don't get prepared for an at bat until they slip on a helmet. Getting ready to hit at any at bat must first start during practice. We're not talking about the mechanics of the swing (*which will be discussed later*), but as a hitter, you must know your strengths and weaknesses.

Possible Strengths/Weaknesses:

Quick or slow bat?

Tough time handling the inside heat?

Tough time with breaking pitches?

Uncertain about personal strike zone?

When you know your strengths and weaknesses, you can incorporate them into your approach at the plate.

This process is not only important during practice but it's essential to recognize during each at bat in order to be successful.

KNOW YOUR OPPONENT

Players should study the opposing pitcher prior to the game, during between inning warmups, and while he is pitching to other hitters.

Things to look for:

What pitches is he throwing?

How is his control?

What pitches is he throwing for strikes?

What pitches does he seem to struggle?

What type of delivery does he have?

What are his strength?

STRATEGY

Apply what you observe and develop a plan for this particular pitcher. For instance, perhaps he primarily throws fastballs; while you hit fastballs well, he throws hard and you have difficulty getting around on a hard inside fastball. Knowing this, your plan may be to look for a fastball middle or away, trying to drive it up the middle or take it the other way. If he throws a fastball inside, take the pitch until you have two strikes. By doing this you will swing at fastballs that you know you can handle, and you won't be striding too early because you're worried about getting around on the inside heat. This also has the added bonus of allowing you to adjust to his off-speed pitches.

Don't be afraid of going deep into the count or of striking out.

KNOW THE SITUATION

Great players (*notice we didn't say hitters*) always know the game situation and what they need to do to help their team in a particular situation. It really comes down to your willingness to sacrifice stats for the team when the situation dictates. This may entail laying down a sacrifice bunt or moving a runner forward by hitting behind him or taking a strike so a baserunner can try to get into scoring position by stealing second.

The game situation may fit with your strategy that you are using against this pitcher or it may dictate that you try something else. Make sure you have taken everything into account when you approach the plate. Each team gets a limited number of outs during a game; don't waste this one.

BE A TOUGH OUT

No matter what the strategy, situation, or the pitcher, always strive to be a tough out. This means you battle when you are at the plate. You don't swing at bad pitches. You foul off tough pitches. To be a tough out, you need to take a different approach when you have two strikes on you. The main thing you want to do is shorten your swing slightly. It doesn't mean that you won't swing hard, but it does mean that your swing is taken down a notch. This allows you to wait a split second longer before committing.

The difference between the impossible and the possible lies in a man's determination.

- Tommy Lasorda

It's lack of faith that makes people afraid of meeting challenges, and I believed in myself.

-Muhammad Ali

PROPER HITTING GOALS

The goals of getting a hit (short term) or to hit .300 (long term) sound reasonable at first. But having goals that are not within one's control can lead to frustration, desperation and a lowered probability of success.

A line drive caught by the center fielder should be considered more of a success than a bloop single over the short stop.

A more reasonable and useful goal is to have a successful at bat. Successful at bats are under the hitter's control. They don't depend on how good the pitcher is or a great defensive play. They don't necessarily exclude a strike out. They can be monitored by parents or coaches and provide the basis for real improvement (which isn't necessarily the case with batting averages). Such a goal also puts success within every player's reach.

A good at bat first and foremost involves taking a good swing. Players should be taught to take a good swing or not to swing at all. A bad swing single is not a success at the plate. The "just make contact" mentality has hurt a lot of young players. "Good swing" in this context includes proper tracking of the ball to the plate, good weight shift, balance, etc.

The second aspect of a good at bat is swinging at the right pitches. This part of a good at bat will vary by hitter and experience. Generally, this involves swinging only at strikes or, with two strikes, swinging at pitches that are close to being a strike. For more advanced players, this might involve swinging at specific pitches in selected parts of the strike zone early in the count.

The third aspect of a good at bat is making adjustments, especially in relation to timing. Swinging late at the first pitch is fine as long as the swing isn't as late on the next pitch, etc.

A good at bat is a short-term goal. Long term goals will vary by level and experience (and concentration levels for very young players). Batting .800, or having successful at bats 80% of the time, is a reasonable goal for many young players. When a player truly adopts good at bats as their goal, their batting average will almost always increase and they will get more enjoyment and satisfaction from the game.

BAT SELECTION

Proper bat selection is a key part of the hitting procedure. As a young ball player or even a pro, the single most factor that will affect your hitting quality will rely on how comfortable you are swinging the bat. With that in mind:

1. You should always choose a bat that you can handle quite easily. One that you feel comfortable swinging and does not slow you down at all.
2. Bigger players use bigger bats, smaller players use smaller bats!!! You don't see Rickey Henderson going to the plate with Mark McGwire's bat!!!

The bat you use should be proportional to your size, weight, agility, and power.

A good test to determine if a bat is too heavy is to grab the handle of the bat with one hand and hold it straight out to the side, parallel to the ground. If it starts to shake or the bat head starts to drop in less than 12-20 seconds, then the bat is too big.



Can your child do this
for 20 seconds? If not,
the bat's too heavy.

Most boys in the 9-14 age range do best with the 20-24 ounce bat.

HAVE NO FEAR

In order to hit you must stay in the box at a distance from the plate from which you can hit any pitch in the strike zone. If you fear the ball you will "bail out" or "step in the bucket," pulling your body and bat away from the plate and making it impossible to reach a strike.



No matter how big or "mean" that pitcher looks, as soon as he lets go of that ball, it's YOUR ball. He can't do anything else to it. He's OUT OF THE PICTURE! Plus, the ball is ALWAYS the same size, and ALWAYS has to be in the strike zone. YOU HAVE THE BAT!
IT'S YOUR BALL!

If you want something to worry about when you're in the batter's box, worry about the pitcher getting hurt when you hit the ball.

The number one reason why hitters don't hit!

Fear Factor

They stand frozen, bat glued to shoulder, afraid to move.

Or

they step in the bucket, to get as far from the pitch as possible.

Fear of being hit by the pitch has taken over.

Here's what to do about it.

1. **Learn how to duck.** Turn your back to the pitch. Scrunch your head down into your shoulders - so the helmet protects the neck. And pull the bat down too - otherwise the ball could hit it which would count as a foul ball at best, or create a pop up or even accidental hit. ** **COACHES:** You might start this training out with whiffle balls.

2. **Do the no blink drill.** Another way to conquer the fear - this is a catcher's training technique. Put on the mask and learn to take balls in the face without blinking. While not directly related to being hit by a pitch it is a fear-battling exercise.

3. **Fill the bucket.** Stepping in the bucket is what happens when a batter pulls his stride leg back, away from the plate. The result is an ineffective swing, most often a miss. Get him to put his mitt on the ground (in practice of course) so that he must stride and stay on the plate side. This can also help encourage him to do the duck turn.

STEPPING OUT ON THE PITCH

This generally begins because of fear of the ball and may continue later simply because of habit. To help correct this habit, place a ball glove or something flat to the left of the hitter's stride area (for right-handers), so they know when they are stepping out. If they realize they are stepping out and continue doing it, they may have a balance problem. Have them lift their front heel off the ground during their stance and stride. This will help them keep their weight forward toward the plate.

Stepping out may also be due to the desire to pull the ball. Discourage strict pull-hitting. The hitter should develop the mental image of hitting the ball straight back at the pitcher and hitting to all fields.

If fear is a factor, it is important to convince the player that he is safer when striding straight at the pitcher than when bailing out. The proper movement of the batter when a ball is thrown at him is to turn inward toward the plate and then toward the catcher (while dropping his head if the pitch is high). This protects his head and chest (the two dangerous places to get hit). Bailing out opens the hitter up and usually results in exposing the chest and head to the ball. Also, I know several young players who have overcome their fear through on-deck prayer.

Fear at the plate may be overcome (at least in part) by knowing what to do when the ball is thrown at a hitter. The proper movement of the batter when a ball is thrown at him is to turn inward toward the plate and then toward the catcher (while dropping his head if the pitch is high). This protects his face and chest, which are the two most dangerous places to be hit with a ball.

This is illustrated below.



Staying relaxed at the plate will also help the hitter pick up the path of the ball and avoid being hit in an area that could cause serious injury. As hitters get more experience, they can begin trusting their reflexes and their ability to see that a pitch is wild well before the ball reaches them. For several players, prayer before going to the plate has proved helpful.

AVOIDING THE INSIDE PITCH

More often than not, a young hitter's lack of success at the plate can be directly attributed to his fear of being hit by a pitched ball. Let's face it, in the Little League Majors Division, a big 12 year old can throw the ball extremely hard from 46 feet. This can lead to intimidation, a very real fear of being hurt and a lot of weak swings that result in strikeouts!! The diminishing confidence that follows continued failure in front of the coach, his teammates, friends; Mom, Dad, Grandma and Grandpa can only hurt the player's next appearance at the plate.

All this from being afraid of the ball.

A good coach knows that this spiraling effect needs to be curbed right at the beginning. A good approach is to immediately demonstrate the proper way to avoid being hit by a pitch. The knowledge of the proper technique can do wonders for a player's self esteem, not to mention his playing ability. Confidence is one of the key factors in a successful at-bat. If a player confidently approaches the plate looking for a pitch to hit instead of being hit by a pitch, he has already increased his chances by leaps and bounds.

With this in mind, take the time to learn the proper technique of Avoiding The Inside Pitch.

It will make you a better hitter!

My preferred method of teaching this technique is to use the softer IncrediBalls made by Easton. With these balls the coach can actually "plunk" the batter a few times without injuring him. It is important for the player to be hit a few times in order to accept the fact (psychologically as well as physically) that:

- 1.) It doesn't hurt that bad.**
- 2.) The pain does go away.**
- 3.) The proper technique allows for even less pain**

Have the player enter the Batter's Box. Stand a few feet away from the player with an IncrediBall (or other soft ball) and hold the ball up. Walk the ball to the plate on an inside path toward the batter. This will give the player a good visual picture of the pitch he wants to avoid. The "walking" of the pitch effectively slows down the action enough to instruct the player in the proper steps to avoid the pitch safely. As the ball is nearing the plate have the player verbally alert you the moment it is apparent the ball is going to be too close to him to be a strike and a pitch he wants to avoid. You can use the command: **"NOW!"** The coach should stop at this point.

Instruct the player to do the following:

- 1.) Immediately turn his upper body (from the waist up) away from the pitch.
- 2.) The head and shoulders act as one unit turning away.
- 3.) The shoulder nearest the ball should rise up a little to protect the face.
- 4.) The elbows drop in close to the sides to protect the ribs.
- 5.) The chin dips down to the chest to protect the neck from a direct impact.
- 6.) The bat lowers directly in front of the player's upper body.

All of the above actions take place in one simultaneous motion as the player is rotating away from the pitch.

Now, continue walking the ball toward the hitter and show him how protected he is while in this position. Walk the player through this sequence a few times until they feel comfortable with the maneuver. Once they tell you they are ready to move to the next step then proceed with the following drill.

Kneel about 20 feet from the player. With an IncrediBall (or other soft ball) begin softly tossing the ball into the strike zone. Let the player know before hand that a pitch may hit him, albeit a soft one. Instruct him to turn away from the pitch, in the manner he has been taught, the moment he identifies the pitch as being one that may hit him. Conversely, have the player yell out "**NOW!**" when he recognizes the pitch as being a strike (this is a great tactic to help a player recognize a pitch he can hit). Throw a few soft strikes and then progressively move the pitches closer and closer to the player until you finally strike him (aim for the buttocks). Praise the player for every pitch he properly turns away from (or properly calls a strike - purposefully throw a few outside pitches to see if he mislabels them as strikes).

If at any time during the instruction the player reverts to the age old "jumping back with the hands in the air" technique of avoiding a pitch, immediately stop and have the player freeze in that awkward position. Then walk the pitch up to him and show him how vulnerable he is to injury in that position.

Continue with the drill until you see the player begin to naturally turn away from every pitch that is questionably inside. Repeat the drill periodically, even when you know the player is completely comfortable with the technique. I guarantee you will see a tremendous increase in the player's confidence and performance as he masters this very important fundamental skill.

PRESSURE OR OPPORTUNITY?

How many of you have been in a position to win the game in your final at-bat? You know, 2 outs . . . bases loaded . . . your team losing by one run in the last inning. The other team changes pitchers as you step up to the plate. The "Big Kid" moves from first base, saunters up to the pitcher's mound and starts throwing fastballs that look like BB's streaking to the plate.

How would you handle this situation?

Most kids will look at this situation with "Fear":

Fear of failure, fear of striking out, fear of being hit by the pitch, fear of letting his teammates, coach and parents down.

There is nothing to fear!

The game has not changed; it is still "see the ball, hit the ball". The fear is created in the mind; it is a choice the player makes. He can choose to fear the situation or relish in the opportunity to win the game for his team. A conscious choice is made based on what he perceives the situation to be.

The poor player will look at this situation as a "no win" position; "That pitcher is a horse, look how fast he is throwing that ball. There is no way I can hit that. Man, this stinks&ldots; why did they have to put him in when I was coming up to bat?" All of that negative self talk does nothing more than perpetuate the likeliness of failure for the player. He is preparing himself to fail and justifying that failure in his mind. This is the wrong mental approach to hitting in any situation, let alone one like this.

So, what is the right mental approach? Positive self-talk is one of the most important ingredients to success in any sport, or life itself for that matter. If you believe&ldots; you can achieve! Don't just say; "I can do this." **Believe you can!** Take a moment to stand in the on-deck circle and study the pitcher, visualize hitting sharp line drives to the outfield every time he throws a warm-up pitch. Say things like: "**Cool, I'm going to win this game!**" See your teammates jumping up and down with joy. Joyful anticipation is the proper mental approach in these situations. You "get" to go up to bat and win the game.

That is awesome!!!

Winners want to be in this position.

**Winners don't fear failure . . .
they anticipate success!**

Armed with the proper mental approach, what about physical symptoms that can impair your performance? In the above situation the poor player with the improper mental approach actually initiates physical responses in his body that virtually put him against greater odds to succeed. His fearful and negative thoughts can create slower reaction of his muscles. He has created a tension level so high that his movements and reactions are stiff. This is the "choking" referred to by sports announcers on many occasions. The

pressure felt by the poor player results in indecisiveness, impaired eyesight, jumbled thoughts (mostly negative), hyper breathing. None of these symptoms is helpful to the player.

By contrast, the good player looks at this situation in a totally different light. He is excited about the challenge to win the game. He anticipates success and practices the proper thought process to guarantee him the best opportunity to succeed. He creates an inner environment that puts him at ease. Everyone has the choice to do the same, they can choose to fear the situation or accept it as a challenge. The winning player has that inner control of his thoughts and emotions.

The winning player may step up to the plate in the above situation and immediately fall behind in the count, 0-2. By stepping out of the box and gathering himself mentally, he still believes he can succeed. A deep breath, positive thought and self-statement; "focus on the ball, hit it hard somewhere", can go a long way toward success.

A good practice to get into for a hitter is to find a "safe zone" to focus on, when the challenge gets greater. This "safe zone" should be something that will always be there, your bat for instance. Nomar Garciaparra uses his batting gloves. He loosens and tightens them repeatedly as he gathers himself mentally. Most hitters step out of the box, take a deep breath and focus on the barrel of the bat as they regroup their positive thoughts. Whatever the action, the purpose is the same; to reinforce the belief that they will be successful.

In conclusion,

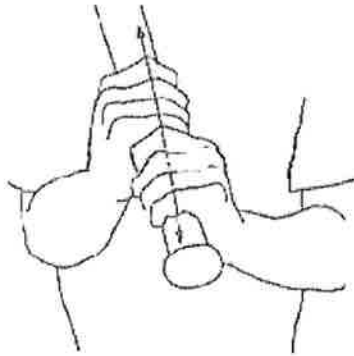
Remember that you create your own tension by choosing to place pressure on yourself.
Fear of failure is the number one reason for this pressure.

You make the choice to "fear".

You can just as easily choose to enjoy the challenge of the same situation. Practice the proper breathing and positive self-talk,
develop a "safe zone" to focus on
and you will be well on your way to the winning player that wins the game more often than not.

GRIP

The grip on the bat should be comfortable in the hand, ideally the middle knuckles on each hand would line up. This helps in executing the proper swing. The grip should be fairly loose up until you 'load' particularly with your top hand. Don't choke the bat with such a tight grip that it tenses up all the muscles in your arms and shoulders.



THE GRIP

LOOSEN UP

Tension is your worst enemy when it comes to a fluid swing. Tension throughout the body is often the direct result of gripping the bat incorrectly. A player with a relaxed grip on the bat will be able to react faster and wait longer on a pitch than a player with a death grip on the bat. You want to be relaxed in the box; this starts when you pick up the bat.

PICK IT UP LIKE AN AX



Many players will hold the bat back in their hands. Doing this causes a couples of problems.

A decrease in flexibility.

A tendency to tighten your grip.

When you hold the bat in the palm of your hands and tighten your grip, your entire body can tighten up. The end result is a negative effect on your swing.

The proper way to hold the bat is out on the fingers. Pick the bat up like an ax.

Once you get the bat in your hands, keep it in your fingers. Your middle knuckles will naturally line up when you pick up the bat this way. Some players leave their knuckles in this alignment and some will close their knuckles slightly. Make sure you don't close the knuckles too far; you could lose the ability to use your wrists during your swing. Closing your knuckles also may increase the likelihood that bat will end up in the palm of your hands and not in your fingers.

KEEP LOOSE

Once you are in your stance, make sure you don't tighten up your grip. If this is difficult, you may want to do something to help yourself to keep your grip loose. For instance, you can lay the bat back slightly but keep it out in your fingers. To do this, you have to have a loose grip on the bat. You can also move your fingers on and off the bat.

Whatever mechanism you use to keep your hands relaxed, make sure it is comfortable and does not disrupt your concentration on the pitcher. If you're worried about throwing the bat or losing your grip, don't. Once you start your swing, your hands will naturally tighten up on the bat and you will be in control.

The bat actually rests across the middle of the fingers, not in the palm of the hand.

Hold the bat like you would hold a live bird in your hands. Don't worry, the hands will automatically tighten around the bat as you swing

STANCE

The term "*batting stance*" refers to the position of the body and bat while awaiting a pitch.

Step into the batter's box with your body facing home plate. Usually for younger players the Parallel or Squared stance is recommended. This means that the batter has both feet equal distance from home plate.

The batter's feet should start a little more than shoulder width apart.



The batter should be close enough to the plate that he can comfortably reach down and touch the outside edge of the plate with his bat. This will insure that he can reach the outside pitch as well.

At this point weight should be equally balanced between the front and back legs.

- Both hips and shoulders should be parallel to the ground.
- Batter should have a slight bend in the knees.
- Hands should be just off the back shoulder with the bat angled at about 45 degrees.



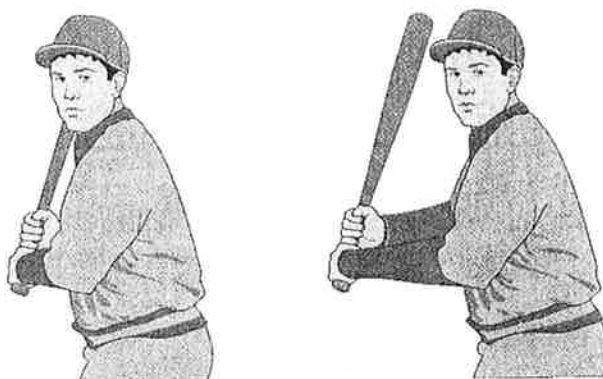
Bat & Body Position

Let comfort dictate your choice, but the bat should be no less than 5 inches and no more than 7 inches from your torso.

Holding your hands near your body keeps you on the inside of the ball. If you hold the bat out farther than that, your swing has too large an arc; you'll lose leverage and find it difficult to coordinate your hip and arm into your swing.

If you bring the bat in too close, you restrict your movement and lose bat speed; your swing has a large loop, and it requires a long push to get your bat into the hitting zone. By the time you get the bat where you need it, that fastball is already past you.

(see below)



Hold your hands somewhere between the letters on your uniform front and your shoulders.

Your elbows should be away from your body
(as shown below).

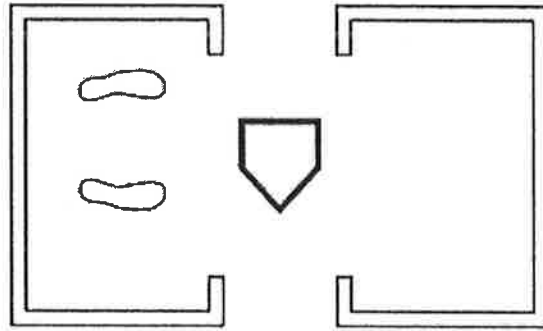


Taking Your Stance in the Batter's Box

When you come up to home plate to hit in the game of baseball, the first thing you must decide is where to stand in the batter's box. This is a matter of personal preference, and any number of combinations is possible. To discover what serves you best, hit from various positions in the box against live pitching.

THE BENEFITS OF BEING UP FRONT

When you stand at the front of the box (see below), your stride brings you in front of home plate. Anything you hit in front of the plate has a better chance of staying fair. Standing in front also helps you against sinkerball and breaking ball pitchers; you can hit the ball before it drops below your swing.



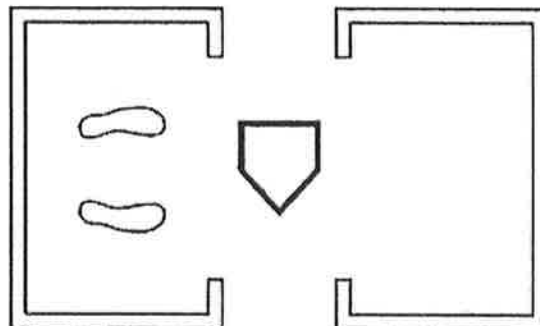
Standing at the front of the box also enables you to hit the curveball before it fully breaks. Even knuckleballs are easier to hit from this location; they have less time to dance.

Fastballs provide your up-front stance with its ultimate test. The closer you are to the pitching mound, the faster pitches reach you at the plate. If you can't handle fastballs from the front of the batter's box, you need to step back.

To develop bat speed and strength, Joe Morgan swung a lead bat only with his front (right) arm. This exercise strengthens your front side, which pulls the bat through the hitting zone. He did this 50 times a day during the off-season and 10 times before a game. Your daily regimen should also include 25 full swings with a bat that's heavier than the one you normally use in a game.

STUCK IN THE MIDDLE

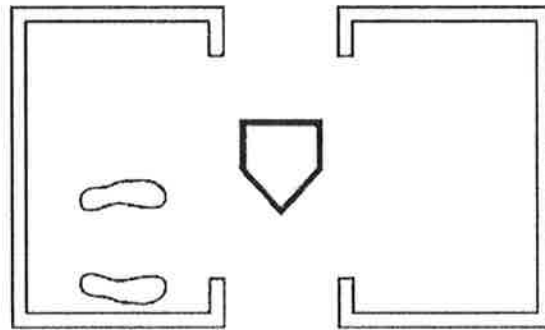
Some batters take their swing from the middle of the box (see below). Hitting from the middle gives you a little more time to catch up with the fastball — but curveballs, sinkers, and knucklers also have more time to break. If you have only medium bat speed (something a coach can tell you), this is the place for you (at least until you develop a faster bat).



TALES FROM THE DEEP

Obviously, standing deep in the box allows you the maximum time to cope with the fastball. But you have to be a great breaking ball hitter to consistently succeed in this location; you're giving the curve, sinker, and knuckler their best opportunity to work their magic.

Because you'll be hitting balls on the plate and the angle of your bat is toward foul territory, their trajectory may carry more of them into foul territory. If you stand deep in the box and far from the plate, you may find it difficult to hit outside pitches (see below).



Positioning your body

The knees must be slightly bent. The amount of bend in the knees can vary according to the batter's preference.

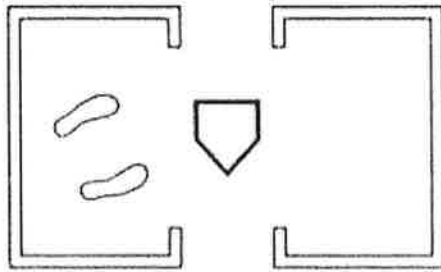
The hitter should be positioned so that there is a slight bend at the waist.

The toughest pitch to hit is the ball out and away from you. After getting in the batter's box, swing your bat to make sure you have full plate coverage. Stand close enough to home to reach pitches 4 inches off the outside corner.

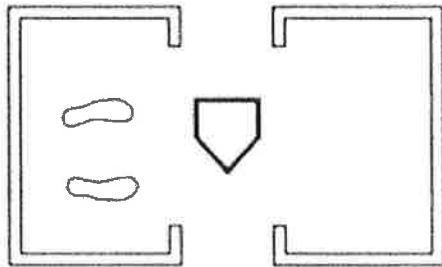
When you're close to the plate, the outside part of it becomes your middle, and you take away strength from the pitcher. Sure, the pitcher can throw even farther outside, but if you're a disciplined batter you can take those pitches for balls.

HITTERS CAN CHOOSE FROM THREE BASIC STANCES:

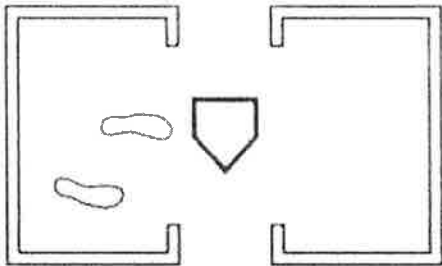
- **The open stance:** Your back foot is closer to the plate than your front foot.



- **The even or square stance:** Both feet are equal distant from the plate.



- **The closed stance:** Your front foot is closer to the plate than your back foot.



Only hitters who can't rotate their hips out of the way properly need a somewhat open stance. (Your coach can tell you whether you have the right hip action.)

Here are the two reasons why:

- The open stance frees your upper torso and automatically opens your hips, allowing you to drive your body and hands through the hitting zone while generating bat speed.
- The open stance also lets you turn your head so that it faces the pitcher, which enables you to use both eyes simultaneously.

Everybody rotates away from the ball in order to hit. Open-stance hitters are already a half step away from the plate. They must, therefore, remind themselves not to pull off the

pitch or they won't be able to hit the ball with any authority.
For that reason, most major leaguers choose the closed stance or square stance.

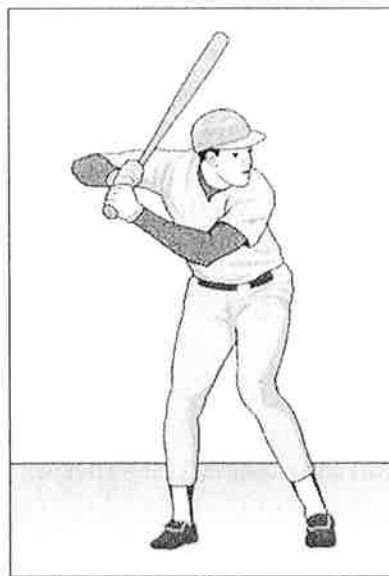
Novice hitters should start with an even stance. It helps you keep your weight distributed evenly on the balls of both feet. (Now you know how the stance got its name.) As you gradually develop balance, reduce your stance an inch at a time until you find the closed stance that generates the most power.

Your shoulders are slightly closed in a closed stance and more squared in the even or open versions. No matter which stance you choose, point your face toward the pitcher's mound so that you can see the pitcher with both eyes.

Young hitters often make the mistake of looking out of only one eye. Sometimes they slightly cock their heads to the side so that one eye is closer to the pitcher than the other. This stance alters your depth perception. You need both eyes on a parallel plane if you are going to read the ball's spin and speed as quickly as possible. Tucking your chin behind your shoulder also limits your vision.

Keep your head square and still throughout your stride and swing. You may hear broadcasters discuss how a hitter keeps his head down throughout his swing. That's always good policy. Keeping your head down keeps your eyes on the ball. Move your head, and your body follows - and your swing suffers.

When taking your stance, bend your knees slightly to allow greater freedom of movement. An erect stance restricts your lower body's maneuverability. How far you spread your legs apart is a matter of personal preference.
(see below).



"Batting stances vary widely, and all players develop their own styles. Combine these basic elements with what feels comfortable for you."

STANCE

DIG IN

Comfort, confidence, and balance! You need all three of these characteristics when you step into the box to hit.

Confidence begins when you step into the box. Do it with a sense of purpose; dig your back foot in and let the opposing pitcher know that you're there to battle.

Comfort and balance depend on your stance and how you prepare to hit the ball. If you're not comfortable, you won't be relaxed. When working on your stance, strive for a position that comfortably puts you in a balanced position to hit.

WEIGHT AND HANDS



When you get into your stance, your weight should be slightly back, but not completely on the back leg. Have your hands near the top of the strike zone. Many players prefer to have their hands slightly off the back shoulder. Since you want to swing the bat on a slightly downward plane, having your hands off your shoulder puts them in the best position for swinging the bat

LOCATION IN THE BOX

The first priority when getting into your stance is to make sure you have good plate coverage. Have a method for determining this for each at bat. During practice, have someone watch you take some practice swings from in front of the mound. Simulate swinging at an outside pitch. Is your bat covering the outside corner? Adjust your distance to the plate so you have the correct distance.

Create a method for measuring that distance. Many players tap the plate with their bat the same way each time they get into the box. If the bat hits the same part of the plate each time, then they know the distance is correct.

DEPTH

While every player wants good plate coverage, the depth you stand in the box is more a matter of preference. If you stand deep in the box (towards the catcher), you may have more time to wait on a fastball, but you may find it more difficult to hit breaking pitches. By standing forward in the box, you may be able to catch the breaking pitch early but it will be more difficult to get around on a good fastball.

What's the right position for you? Analyze your strengths and weaknesses to help you decide. But, wherever you stand make sure you feel confident in that position. Most big league hitters tend to stand toward the back of the box. You, like most of them, may find the extra time to react is important.

OPEN, CLOSED, OR SQUARE?

Most hitting coaches claim that the best stance for hitting is a square stance -- where your feet are parallel to the plate. This stance puts your body in the best position to coil, stride, and swing.

However, there are other stances and you have decide what works best for you.

Try to avoid radical stances at the plate, experiment with stances that give you the ability to make a smooth coil (*discussed later*) to get into the launching position.

LOAD & STRIDE

Loading Phase

Many young hitters swing the bat after the ball is past them, and many times this happens because they don't get into the load position in time. Load position refers to the position that the body and bat need to be in just prior to the swing. The loading phase refers to striding and the positioning of the bat. This phase is important because, if done properly, it can help the hitter make solid contact with the baseball on a more consistent basis.

Positioning The Bat

Once the pitcher begins his movement forward with the pitch, the batter should then 'load'. What this involves is a slight movement inward and backwards (about 2 inches) of the batters hands, shoulders, hips and knees. The batter's weight shifts from a 50/50 to a 40/60 front to back ratio. During this load it is important to not move the head and to keep your eyes on the ball.



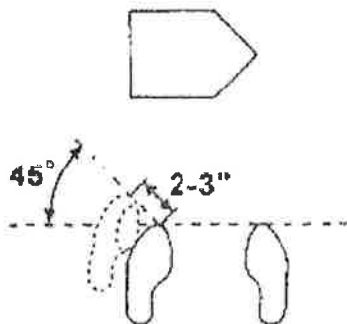
Notice how weight is about 60/40.

The stride consists of a short (5-7 inches) step with the front foot either directly towards the pitcher or at a slight angle towards home plate. You want to lead with heel and land on the ball of your foot. You still want to keep your front shoulder in and your hands and weight back during your stride. Picture it as stepping on thin ice. It is important to not swing until your front foot has landed, as you want to hit against a firm front leg.

Striding

- Stride refers to the movement of the front foot during the loading phase.
- Around the time that the pitcher lifts the knee, the batter should lift the front knee up and back towards the catcher (Knee height varies from hitter to hitter). The body weight should be shifted towards the back leg.
- About the time that the pitcher releases the ball, the batter should be striding towards the pitcher and transferring the body weight forward.
- The stride of the front foot needs to be short in length, no longer than 6 inches.
- The hitter should have the stride foot (front foot) down well before the ball gets to homeplate.

Four Keys to a Correct Stride



1. The batter's stride should be short, no more than two or three inches.
2. The stride should be at a 45 degree angle towards home plate.
3. The batter should land softly on his front foot as if he were stepping on an egg.
4. The batter should stride and land on the big toe or inside of his front foot.

Want to LEARN MORE

STRIDE

COIL



Stance



Coil

Timing and good weight transfer are essential to good hitting. One mechanism to help achieve both is the coil. As the pitcher starts his delivery, you will want to move your weight back on to the back leg, closing your shoulder, hips, and knee. This is also the point when you want to move the bat into the launching position. When the coil is complete you are in the correct position to stride.

STRIDE

One of the most common mistakes made by hitters at all levels is having the stride be part of the swing. In fact, hitters should perform the stride before the swing.

During the stride, you shouldn't transfer your weight from the back leg to the front. Hitters that transfer their weight have a difficult time handling off-speed pitches. (Looks like lunging at the pitch.)

You may notice that a number of big league players do have the stride as part of their swing. The key for these hitters is the big leg kick, which acts as a timing device and doesn't result in the transfer of weight. Instead of picking their foot up and moving it forward, they're picking up their foot and holding it until they recognize the pitch. If they read fastball, they drop their leg quickly and swing. If they read off-speed pitch, they simply hold it there a little longer before putting it down.

SO HOW DO YOU STRIDE WHILE KEEPING YOUR WEIGHT BACK?

The key is to stride out with the inside portion of your front foot. One way to think of it is to act like your striding onto a dozen eggs and you don't want to break those eggs. By doing that you will keep your weight back. Make sure you stride with your front foot closed. If you open up your front foot towards the pitcher, you will also open up your hips which will cause a loss of power when you do swing.

COMMON PROBLEM

HITCH

One of the most common problems that players develop is a hitch. This usually results in the player dropping the hands prior to swinging. This not only can cause problems with your timing but also will make it difficult to have a quick efficient swing. This can be hard for you as a hitter to notice. You may want to have a coach or other player watch you swing to see if you drop your hands prior to swinging.

Troubleshooting Your Batting

You must understand that there is much more to hitting than just mechanics, but in order to be a consistent hitter, you must develop sound hitting mechanics as it is critical to your advancement.

You can work on specific problems during batting practice. Here are some common hitting flaws that often lead to slumps and some suggestions for correcting them.

Hitting off your heels

If you have your weight back on your heels, your body and bat move away from the plate as you swing. Outside pitches and off-speed stuff will give you trouble. You won't be able to hit with any power.

Remedy: Concentrate on keeping your weight on the balls of your feet while striding toward the pitcher.

Chopping

Slumping, novice hitters will often chop down at the ball just to make contact. Swinging in this manner decreases your hitting area. It is also impossible to drive the ball with this swing; you'll hit a lot of grounders (mostly for outs).

Remedy: Make sure that you transfer your weight properly. When you transfer your weight to your front foot, your bat remains level. Keep your weight on your back foot, drop your rear shoulder (you can't chop with your shoulder down), and take your usual swing.

Extreme uppercutting

When you uppercut the ball, you raise your front shoulder while dropping your rear shoulder and dipping your back knee. Batters who uppercut tend to strike out a lot. You can also forget about hitting high pitches with any authority. Raising your front shoulder moves your head out of its level plain, which prevents you from seeing the ball well.

Remedy: Uppercutters keep their weight on their back foot too long; level your shoulder and make sure you transfer your weight from front to back. As I noted before, you should finish your swing with a slightly upward arc -- but avoid any exaggerated uppercutting.

Hitching

If you have a hitch, you are dropping your hands just before you swing. A hitch is okay, as long as you can get your hands in good hitting position before the ball arrives. Frank Robinson had a hitch; he dropped his hands below his belt but he always got them back in time to hit. The last time I checked, his plaque was in the Hall of Fame. Unfortunately, too many hitters compensate for their hitches with rushed, upward swings. This hitch produces the same poor results as an extreme uppercut.

Remedy: Keep your hands level and still.

"Hitch" In The Swing

Batters that have a "hitch" in their swing often have difficulty hitting the fastball. They often get "jammed" and are often late on medium speed pitches. The batter is not "triggering" correctly. The batter is dropping the hands before taking them to the "power position" or what is often called the "launch position". This lowering of the hands causes the batter to be late to the strike zone.

Remedy: Take the hands slightly up and then back rather than dropping them.

Locking the front hip

Locking your front hip makes it impossible to transfer the weight from your rear foot to your front foot during your swing. You can't pivot properly. This fault significantly decreases your power.

Remedy: Open your stance and concentrate on stepping toward the pitcher.

Lunging

Batters who lunge at the ball have stepped into the pitch too early. This misstep throws off your timing, power, and bat control. Hank Aaron would occasionally lunge with his upper body, but he could drive the ball because he always kept his hands back.

Remedy: Be patient. Wait until you've read the pitch before swinging. Make sure your stride is no longer than your original stance. Keep your hands back.

Bobbing your head

If you bob or turn your head, you lose sight of the ball for a second. When you pick the ball up again (if you pick it up again), it is either almost past you or appears to be jumping at you.

Remedy: Keep your head level and still throughout your stance, stride, and swing. If your stride is making your head bob, shorten it. Remember, your stride should be no longer than your stance.

Stepping in the bucket

Stepping in the bucket is another way of saying you are striding away from the pitch. The uneven weight distribution results in a loss of power. Because you're moving away from the plate, you can't hit the outside pitch.

Remedy: Close your stance and concentrate on striding toward the pitcher.

Improper Stance Width

The batter's stance is too wide or too narrow. A stance too wide causes a loss of power and prevents hip involvement during the swing. A stance with the feet too close often causes the batter to stride too far or long. This causes the head and eyes to drop during the stride. This makes the hitters success ratio drop tremendously. It is hard enough to hit with a "quiet" head or with no movement. Overstriding makes it even more difficult to see the ball, identify the speed and type or pitch and to hit the ball where it is pitched.

Remedy: Have the batter assume a stance with the feet shoulder width apart. Have the batter take a short stride of no more than 6 inches. If the stance is slightly wider than the shoulders, simply picking the front foot straight up only an inch or two and putting it down may be all the stride the batter needs.

"Wrapping" The Bat

The batter has the bad habit of "wrapping" or cocking the bat behind the head. The batter's bat speed is decreased because the batter now has to bring the bat farther to get to the ball.

Remedy: The bat should be held at a 45 degree angle to vertical. Refer to the perfect swing page of this site for more details on proper bat angle.

Looking At Your Nose

The batter does not have the head turned far enough toward the pitcher. This prevents both eyes from picking up the ball and the batter has difficulty seeing the ball. The back eye is blocked from seeing the ball by the batter's nose, thus the batter is "looking at his nose". The batter is basically hitting "one eyed". This is another reason for batter failure.

Remedy: The batter simply turns the head toward the pitcher until the batters face is facing the pitcher and both eyes are seeing the pitcher fully. A good saying often used is "show the pitcher both of your ears". This will always make sure the head is in the correct position.

Poor Grip

Improper grip reduces bat speed and bat control. Two simple grip mistakes cause this problem. The batter's hands are slowed by a grip that is too "tense" or too tight or the batter is gripping the bat with the palms rather than the fingers.

Remedy: The batter should strive to stay loose with the hands. Effort should be made to reduce tensions and use a relaxed grip. Slight movement of the fingers may serve to keep the "grip stress" down. The batter should hold the bat in the fingers away from the palms. This grip allows maximum hand speed and bat control.

Overstriding

Overstriding is a common mistake. Batters that often get "jammed" may be in fact causing their own problems by overstriding. Overstriding causes the batter's head and eyes to drop often causing the batter to "loose" the ball during the swing. Tracking the ball visually is made very difficult. The batter's overstriding can also cause the swing to be long. A batter's wide feet that are too wide tend to prevent hip involvement during the swing.

Remedy: Batters should use a short or a "no stride" approach. A short stride of 3 to 6 inches is often enough. In fact simply picking the front foot up and putting it back down is all the stride that is needed.

"Locking" The Front Arm

The batter "locks" or straightens out the front arm when the hands and bat are taken back to the "power" or "trigger" position. This flaw causes the batter to be late starting the swing. It also causes the bat speed to be too slow and increases the bat's distance to the ball. Locking the front arm also often causes premature wrist roll.

Remedy: Keep a bend in the front elbow. Keep the hands together and working together. Keep the hands close to the body and do not take them back so far that front arm flex is lost.

Opening Up Too Soon

The front side is opening too soon causing the batter's "whole body" including head and eyes to pull off the pitch. This flaw often causes the barrel to lag and a reduction in bat speed. Much less plate coverage is allowed. Another result of dropping the hands is an increase in flyballs.

Remedy: Have the batter strive to keep the "knob to belly button" relationship during the swing. The belly button rotates with the knob of the bat. On inside pitches the batter will still "open" but the timing will be perfect. On middle and away pitches the batter will not open or rotate so much. "The belly button to knob" relationship maintains correct timing mechanics.

TROUBLE SHOOTING COMMON HITTING FLAWS

Failure to reach a good launch position

In order to fix this problem, it is essential that everyone understands the concept of a launch position. When a hitter digs in the box and gets ready for the pitch he is in his "stance." The batter should assume his launch position once the pitcher winds up and is about to release the ball. This position allows the hitter to "launch" his swing.

Let's compare this position to that of a boxer. As a boxer dances around the ring, he maintains his "stance." When he is ready to throw a punch he will take a step and draw his hand back into position to throw a punch, which is his

"launch" position. Could you imagine a boxer trying to knock someone out without loading up to punch? It is essential that hitters establish a launch position that is strong and balanced.

As the pitcher winds up and is about to release the ball the batter should take a short, soft, stride forward with his lead foot. Meanwhile his hands go straight back anywhere from 3-5 inches. He should keep his weight on his back leg. This is the launch position. A good "launch" position should allow a hitter to keep his weight back properly, and to "load" energy that when released during his swing, will increase his ability to drive the ball.

Many hitters never reach a good "launch" position and their swing is doomed to fail right from the start. Some of the problems are:

 **Weight comes forward too much, hitter dives in.**

 **Hands don't load back and the hitter, therefore, cannot generate any power.**

 **Hands drop instead of going straight back, hitter therefore swings up on everything, has a long looping swing and hits pop ups.**

 **Hitter takes too long of a stride.**

*** HOW DO YOU CORRECT THIS PROBLEM? ***

Mirror Drill - In front of a mirror, repeat the stride and load motions as mentioned above. Perform several repetitions, making sure to stride without your weight coming forward, and with your hands getting back 3-5 inches. Your front foot should land on the inside palm of your foot.

Stride and load soft toss - Soft toss either from the side or the front, but do not allow the feeder to toss the ball until you stride and load. The ball should be fed only after you have demonstrated a successful stride/load and have held the final position for a moment.

Pole Drill - With an old wiffleball bat get into your "stance" facing a pole. Stride and load into your "launch" position and hold that position for 3 seconds. Check yourself to make sure your weight is back and your hands are loaded into a strong position. Next take your swing and hit the pole. You should hit the pole in a normal contact position as if it was a baseball. You can put tape on the pole at different heights to simulate the height of different pitches. Make sure that in your stance the pole is even with your front foot.

The mirror drill and the pole drill allow you to work on this skill without needing a ball or anyone else to help you.

Staying Closed Before the Swing

Prematurely opening of the hips and shoulders robs hitters of power. This problem is most common among younger players who begin to drift open while waiting for the ball to approach the plate. In some cases this can be corrected by striding later (if the stride is in fact too early). This can also occur when the batter's head isn't picking up the ball.

Opening up helps the head to turn to get a better view. Thus, getting the head in proper position in the stance and maintaining it through the stride might correct this problem. For many other hitters, drifting open is a result of wanting to pull the ball regardless of where it is pitched.

Hitters need to realize that they will get more power on the inside pitch they can pull if they stay closed until they swing and that pitches on the outside part of the plate shouldn't be pulled anyway. Telling a hitter to point his front shoulder at the ball when tracking it to the plate appears to work for some players in correcting this problem.

Stepping Out on the Pitch

This generally begins because of fear of the ball and may continue later simply because of habit. To help correct this habit, place a ball glove or something flat to the left of the hitter's stride area (for right-handers), so they know when they are stepping out. If they realize they are stepping out and continue doing it, they may have a balance problem. Have them lift their front heel off the ground during their stance and stride. This will help them keep their weight forward toward the plate.

Stepping out may also be due to the desire to pull the ball. Discourage strict pull-hitting. The hitter should develop the mental image of hitting the ball straight back at the pitcher and hitting to all fields.

If fear is a factor, it is important to convince the player that he is safer when striding straight at the pitcher than when bailing out. The proper movement of the batter when a ball is thrown at him is to turn inward toward the plate and then toward the catcher (while dropping his head if the pitch is high). This protects his head and chest (the two dangerous places to get hit). Bailing out opens the hitter up and usually results in exposing the chest and head to the ball. Also, I know several young players who have overcome their fear through on-deck prayer.

The Level Swing

There is a lot of controversy concerning the angle of the bat when hitting a pitched ball. Based on watching film of great hitters and what has proved successful for the kids I work with (and in line with Ted Williams' approach to hitting), a level swing is not swinging the bat level with the ground. A level swing also only refers to the path of the bat head through the hitting zone, not the initial part of the swing involving the hands coming down to the ball or the follow through after contact.

A level swing involves swinging the bat level with the path of the pitch. This is a slightly upward swing (the degree to which depends on the pitcher). This increases the likelihood of hitting the ball squarely, even if contact is a little too late or too early. When hitting down on the ball (which is popular among many coaches), the hardest hit balls will be grounders. Lines drives will flutter and only occur when slightly undercutting the ball. Weak line drives are also produced by big uppercuts and the only hard hit balls will be high fly balls (which are easier to catch than low fly balls).

Correcting for uppercuts and undercuts begins with the position of the hands when the stride foot is planted (launch position). Aside from the hands being over the rear foot at this point, their height is also important. Upper cutting (more than what is required by the path of the pitch) often occurs because the hands start too low and often by the ribs. Undercutters generally start their hands too high, somewhere above their shoulder. Ideally, the hands should be close to shoulder height. From the rear shoulder, the hands should bring the bat head down into the hitting zone and then up at the ball. When the bat head flies forward, it should go through the contact area level with the path of the ball.

SWING

The pitch is on the way, you've coiled and taken your stride and now you're ready to swing. The first thing to realize is that your swing should not be driven by your arms, but by your legs and hips. We'll take a look at each area of your body and follow it through the swing.

LEGS

As your weight moves forward from your back leg to your front leg, your back foot will pivot towards the pitcher and your knee will turn in. The front foot will not pivot and you will want to keep that leg stiff. It's not necessary to keep

it completely straight, but you don't want to flex it as you transfer your weight.
(This can cause your head to drop as you tracking the ball.)

HIPS

While you pivot on your back foot, you also will open up your hips. The degree to which you open your hips depends on the location of the pitch. On inside pitches, you need to completely open the hips to get your hands through right next to your body. On outside pitches, you have to keep your hips more closed to get your hands out and drive the ball the other direction.

Your legs and hips are going to drive your swing and provide power. Work hard on both of these and you will see a difference in the batting cage and on the field.

ARMS AND HANDS

When you begin your swing, you want your hands to be at the top of the strike zone. This will allow you to swing down on the ball.

To have a quick bat, you must start your swing by bringing your hands through close to your body. On inside pitches, your hands stay closer to your body longer than on outside pitches. Remember to extent the bat towards the ball just before contact. If you extend the bat too soon, you will slow down your swing. As you make contact with the ball, your bottom hand should be palm down and your upper hand should be palm up. This means that you haven't yet rolled your wrists over. Rolling your wrists happens naturally after hitting the ball. Concentrate on driving through the baseball. Sometimes players are in such a hurry to start running that they actually start slowing down their swing before contact. Hit the ball hard first, then run. As your hands continue forward and your wrists roll over, it's natural to let you top hand come off the bat. This allows you to continue with a good follow through on your swing.

HEAD

It's essential that you track the ball from the start of the pitch to the bat. Often hitters want to see where they hit the ball before contact. Concentrate on watching the ball all the way through contact and look at the contact spot for a split second after you hit the ball. This ensures that you have tracked the ball the entire way.

Another way to think about tracking the ball is shoulder to shoulder. Start your chin near your front shoulder; after you swing, your chin should end up on your back shoulder. If it doesn't, then you're leaving your head out in front of the plate and not watching the ball all the way in.

SWING

Getting The Barrel To The Ball

The batter should swing the barrel of the bat directly at the ball and should try to hit the ball with the sweet spot on the bat. The sweet spot is generally the area between 2 and 6 inches from the top end of the bat.

The batter's arms should be extended right before contact is made with the baseball.

- The bat should be on the same plane as the baseball when contact is made.

Turning The Hips

If lower body strength and bat speed are to be maximized, it is essential that the hips be turned during the swing.

In order to turn the hips during the swing, the hitter should pivot on the ball of the back foot.

Keeping The Eyes On The Ball

Hitters should keep their eyes on the baseball until contact is made.

The hitter's head should not follow the body when it turns.



The batter should turn his head enough that he can see the ball with both eyes. The "**IKE** to **MIKE**" method should be taught. The batter's front shoulder, toward the pitcher, is "**IKE**", and his back shoulder is "**MIKE**". The batter should start with his chin on "**IKE**". During the swing the head does not move. The body rotates and the shoulders switch places with the head finishing on "**MIKE**". The batter should keep his eyes on the ball and should be taught to "track" the ball from the pitcher's hand to the bat.

Following Through

After contact is made with the ball, the barrel of the bat should maintain a smooth, slightly upward path, which ends with the hands rolling over.

The handle of the bat should stop around the left shoulder for a right-handed batter and around the right shoulder for a left-handed batter.

- The barrel of the bat should wrap around the upper back.
- The hitter's chin should be over the shoulder area at the completion of the swing.

After the batter has completed his load and stride, and upon picking up the pitcher's release point and picking up the ball and has concluded that the pitch coming at him is a strike, the batter then initiates his swing. The swing involves rotating up on the ball of your back foot (this is known as squishing the bug). The hips begin to rotate and the hands (bat knob) go towards the ball (As shown below in this Derek Jeter Photo)



You want to avoid an upper cut swing by swinging down on the ball. As you start your swing you'll want to keep your hands above the ball and the fat part of the bat above your hands. Your head should remain still with your chin going from your front shoulder to your back shoulder when finished with your swing. At time of contact you want to have your bottom hand palm facing down and your top hand palm facing up. This will increase the chances of a line drive, which provides you with the best chance of reaching base. As you come in contact with the ball your arms will form a V with the bat to which you should be looking down through to the ball hitting the bat. Swing through the ball as if you're hitting more than one ball and follow through after contact.



Mark McGwire's swing.

Notice the stiff front leg.

Hands above the ball.

Bottom hand palm down, top hand palm up.

Eyes looking at ball down the V formed by the arms.

Chin near back shoulder.

LEARN MORE

Special Situations

When facing a very fast pitcher, you may want to place your stance further back in the batter's box to give you more reaction time. You may also want to start your load and stride a little earlier than usual. It is important to learn to hit to all fields, for against a very fast pitcher, you will probably be looking to hit balls to center and right fields.

Hitting the Curve, firstly involves recognizing that it is a curve. Study the pitcher when he warms up and when he faces other batters to see if he has one and if so, does he throw it any differently than his fastball (lower arm slot, cocked wrist, etc.) The curve ball has a different spin than a fastball; so the earlier you pick up the spin of the ball the better. If you keep your hands and weight back properly you should still be in a good position to hit the curve. Also, quite often at the younger age, it is very difficult for the younger pitcher to throw the curve for a strike, so you may want to lay off of it until you fall behind in the count.

LEARN MORE

Bunting

Bunting has become a lost art. At each level up the ladder, runs become harder and harder to generate and sometimes teams must 'manufacture' runs. Bunting is a great tool in manufacturing runs. Sometimes you may want to bunt for a hit, sacrifice a runner over into scoring position or 'squeeze' a run in through bunting. When bunting, you will want to move up in the batter's box towards the pitcher. This will keep your bat in fair territory and also assist you in bunting any breaking balls before they break. Generally when bunting for either a sacrifice or Squeeze lay you will want to square around. This means turning your feet and shoulders so that you are facing the pitcher. Don't step on the plate or you'll be called out if you get the bunt down. The top hand should slide down the bat somewhere around the mid point and 'cradle the bat' with your thumb on the top with the

fingers underneath. To protect your fingers from getting hit, don't wrap your top hand fingers around the bat. You want to hold your bat at the top of the strike zone with the bat angled up and out in front of you. You want to have your arms extended with a slight bend at the elbows. Since your bat is already at the top of the strike zone, if the pitch is higher than your bat, let it go (unless it is a squeeze play). If the pitch is lower, then bend at the knees to bunt the ball and try to avoid dipping the bat head as this will increase the chances for a popup and could result in a double play. The batter simply wants to 'catch' the ball with the bat and wants to avoid slapping at it.

The best bunts are those down the lines about 20-30 feet.

BUNTING

Whether you hit for power, hit for average, or have trouble hitting, you can always help your team in critical situations by laying down a successful bunt. Many players, both novice and experienced, have difficulty laying down a good bunt. If you want to be a complete hitter that can help his team in any situation, you need to spend the time necessary to become a good bunter. Good technique and practice is all that's required to become a quality bunter. You never know when you may be asked to lay down a sacrifice bunt for the team or when a good drag bunt will provide an easy base hit. Prepare yourself during practice as if you are going to be asked to bunt in a critical situation in the next game either for a base hit or to help the team. It really comes down to desire, if you want to become a complete ball player than you will want to work at becoming a good bunter.

SACRIFICE BUNT

WHAT TECHNIQUE IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

The purpose of the sacrifice bunt is to move a runner into scoring position. It's often used in late innings and critical situations. So why is it that so many players are not very skilled at laying down a sacrifice bunt? The primary reason is poor technique.

There are basically two methods of laying down a sacrifice bunt, either pivoting or squaring around towards the mound. The most important thing is balance, comfort, and confidence. Experiment with both methods to see which technique works best for you.

No matter which method you use, the way you grip the bat will be the same.

GRIP

Most younger players are taught to grip the bat with the upper hand by sliding the hand up the barrel towards the trademark and gripping the bat between the index finger and thumb. This keeps the fingers behind the bat and reduces the chance of the fingers being hit. The negative part of this grip is the loss of control over the bat. As you get older you will want to change your grip to one that puts the bat in the palm of your upper hand. Your fingers and thumb will be wrapped around the bat and you will have greater bat control but your fingers will be exposed to being hit by the ball. Once you become a confident bunter you won't worry about your fingers being hit by the ball.

EXPERIMENT WITH THE BOTTOM HAND

Many times players will leave their bottom hand on the knob of the bat. While this may work for you, experiment with sliding the back hand up on the grip 5 or 6 inches. You may find that this will increase your bat control and with it your ability to have the bunt go where you want it to go.

PIVOT



Pivot

With the pivot method, you will pivot on the foot closest to the mound and take a small jab step towards the plate with the back foot. At the same time you must get the bat in the proper position to bunt (Barrel of the bat higher than the grip, top of the strike zone, not too close to the body). One method of getting the bat in the proper position is to swing the bat forward from your back shoulder like you were using an ax. It's a small movement that will get the bat out in front of your body at approximately the right angle and at the top of the strike zone.

SQUARE-AROUND



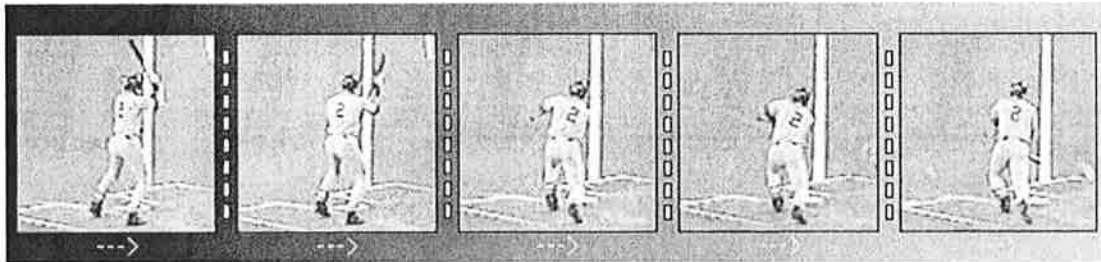
With the square-around method, you will want to again pivot on the front foot but instead of using a jab step with the back foot, you will move the back foot forward, even or slightly forward of your pivot foot. This will square-up your shoulders toward the pitcher.

The advantage to using this method is that it's easier to bunt the inside pitch. The disadvantages are that it takes longer to get in position and you must be careful not to step out of the batters box or worse on the plate.

STANCE

Whether you square-around or pivot, you want to make sure you are in a comfortable and athletic position to bunt the ball. Your knees should be bent and your bat should be held out in front of your body. The barrel of the bat should be at the same height as your eyes and at the top of the strike zone.

As the ball approaches use your knees to adjust to the height of the pitch. Many people believe it's difficult to bunt a high pitch. In actuality, the opposite is true. If you remember not to bunt any ball that is higher than the bat, then you are in great position to bunt the high strike. The lower pitch on the other hand requires you to drop down to be able to bunt it. To keep the barrel of the bat higher than the grip of the bat, you must use your knees to adjust to the low pitch. Never drop the bat head to bunt the ball. Use your knees and both arms to put the bat in the proper position to bunt the low pitch.



As you can see in the sequence above, Jeter drops his back foot to lay down the bunt. While a left-handed hitter may find it more comfortable to jab forward with the back foot, the right-handed hitter may find it more comfortable to drop the back foot. Again the most important thing is comfort and balance.

MAKING CONTACT

Focus on the top half of the ball as it approaches. Many people will talk about deadening the ball with bat as you make contact. All this means is that you will allow your arms to act as shock absorbers as contact is made. This is something to work on as you become more confident, but is secondary to being able to lay the bunt down in the direction you want. Determine the direction of the bunt with your lower hand. This keeps the location of the barrel of the bat in the same approximate location, no matter where you are going to bunt. This will help for consistency. If you're a right-handed hitter and you want the bunt to go towards third base, then pull your lower hand in towards you to provide the proper angle. For first base, push your lower hand out towards the mound to give the bat the proper angle.

Finally, be sure to always bunt the ball first and then run. When a sacrifice bunt is called, your job is to move the runner not to get a base hit. Lay down a good bunt and then run.

KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL SACRIFICE BUNTING

1. Move up slightly in the batters box. This will give you more fair territory to work with.
2. Start your bat at the top of the strike zone. Take any pitch that is higher than your bat.
3. Angle your bat so the barrel is higher than the grip. That way any foul will be fouled off to the side and not straight back towards the catcher.
4. Bend your knees to adjust to the height of the pitch, don't drop your bat head to meet the ball. The barrel of the bat should always be kept higher than the grip even when bunting a pitch lower in the strike zone.
5. Bunt the ball out in front of your body.
6. Only bunt strikes.

COACHING TIP

Why do many players have trouble bunting?

Maybe it's lack of coaching and practice.

How many times do you see a batting practice where a player squares to bunt a couple of times and whether he lays the pitches down successfully, fouls them off, or flat out misses them, he then proceeds to start swinging the bat. Rarely will you see a coach correct poor bunting technique and many times those two attempts are the only bunting practice that player gets during practice.

Want your players to become good bunters? For each bunt they don't lay down take away a swing. So if you require each player to lay down two bunts during batting practice before they get ten swings, just subtract the from twelve swings the number of times it takes the player to lay down two successful bunts. If you consistently do this, it won't take long before your players will understand the importance you place on their ability to bunt.

DRAG AND PUSH BUNT

DRAG BUNT

The purpose of the drag bunt is to get a base hit. This bunt brings the third baseman in to defend the drag bunt, and gives you a better chance of hitting the ball by him. Often, faster players use the drag bunt, but a well-placed drag bunt provides a base hit for even slower players, especially at the high school level and below. Let's say you successfully laid down 5 drag bunts out of 10 during the course of a 20 game season. Those 5 bunts

could turn a .300 batting average into a .325 batting average. 5 out of 10 is a conservative number; most good bunters would be closer to 8 or 9 out 10.

WHEN

Defense dictates the opportunity to drag bunt. If you have a drag bunt in your offensive arsenal, pay attention to both the third baseman and the pitcher during the pre-game infield and ask yourself these questions:

How well does he field and throw the ball?

Can he charge the ball and throw well on the run?

Is the pitcher a good athlete that can field his position well?

Does he fall off the mound toward the third base or first base side of the mound?

Is he in a good fielding position when the ball crosses the hitting zone?

All of these questions can help you decide if this is a good day to lay down a bunt.

During the game, study the position of the defense. If you are a right-handed hitter, look to drag the ball down the third base line and check the position of the third baseman. If you are a left handed hitter, look to drag down the first base line or directly toward the second baseman and check the positions of both the pitcher and first baseman. If the first baseman is playing deep and the pitcher falls off the mound towards third, then placing the bunt down the first base line may give the best opportunity of success. If the pitcher doesn't fall off the mound toward third or the first baseman is playing close, then bunting it hard past the pitcher and toward the second baseman may be the best way to get a hit.

HOW

The successful drag bunt depends on the element of surprise. Do not give away your intentions until the very last moment. With that in mind, enter the box with the same routine you always use. The only subtle change you make is to move up in the box a little. Bunting the ball with your bat in front of the plate increases the chance of it being a fair bunt.

LOOK FOR THE RIGHT PITCH

The most common mistakes when bunting are:

- (1) trying to bunt a ball that is either not a strike;
- (2) a pitch that is difficult to bunt successfully.

Apply the same philosophy you do when you're ahead of the count; shrink the strike zone and look for a pitch in the zone that you are comfortable bunting. If it's not in that zone, don't bunt. Pull the bat back and take the pitch, even if it's a strike.

RIGHT-HANDED HITTER

When attempting to drag bunt, pull your right foot back and move your right hand up the bat. Place the bat in front of the body and the barrel pointed towards first base. This provides the proper angle to bunt the ball down the third base line. By placing the bat in front of your body, you increase the chances of bunting it fair. A common mistake in drag bunting is attempting to deaden the ball as you do in a sacrifice bunt. With a drag bunt, it's much more important to be accurate by bunting the ball down the line.

Once in position to bunt, make sure you have a good pitch to bunt, otherwise pull back. Do not bunt any pitch inside of your current bat position. That pitch forces you to lean back and prevents you from getting a good jump. Take any pitch that is higher than your current bat position. The best pitch for a drag bunt is from the middle to the outside part of the plate.

LEFT-HANDED HITTER

The drag bunt for the left-handed hitter is done stepping with your right foot toward the pitcher while moving your left hand up the bat and bringing the bat forward. Point the barrel of the bat toward third base and be out in front of your body on contact. Look for a pitch from the middle of the plate in to bunt.

A common mistake is to cross-over and try to get a great jump while bunting the ball.

Again, bunting the ball accurately is more important than getting a great jump.

PUSH BUNT

The purpose of the push bunt, like the drag bunt, is to get a base hit. For right-handed hitters, look for the same situation that left-handed hitters look for when performing a drag bunt. Look to push the bunt past the pitcher toward the second baseman.

For left-handed hitters, look for the same situation right-handed hitters look for when laying down a drag bunt. Push the bunt down the third base line.

COACHING TIP

The push bunt is generally more difficult for a player to master than a drag bunt. Make sure the player is not only a good sacrifice bunter but also a good drag bunter before having them work on the push bunt. For the left-handed hitter, the push bunt is difficult because the instinct is to run during the bunt. This works much better with a drag bunt than with a push bunt. Emphasize laying down the bunt before running. For the right-handed hitter, the push bunt requires the hitter to move the bat towards the ball on contact to provide enough force to push it past the pitcher. A common error is to try and hit the ball too hard.

SQUEEZE BUNT

PURPOSE

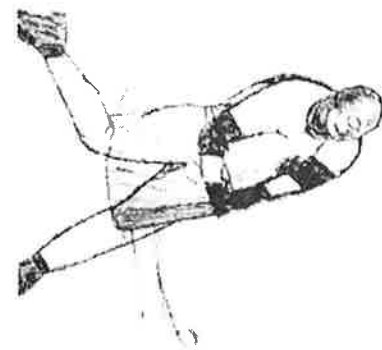
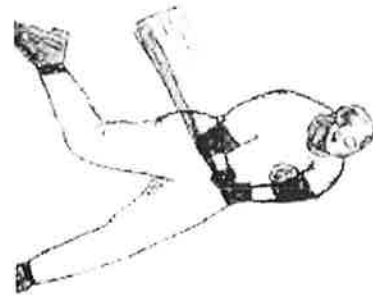
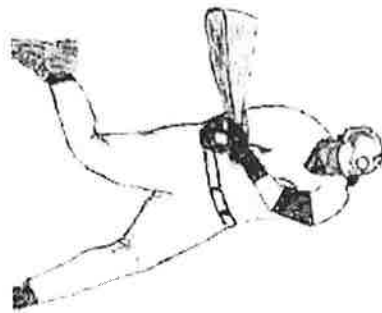
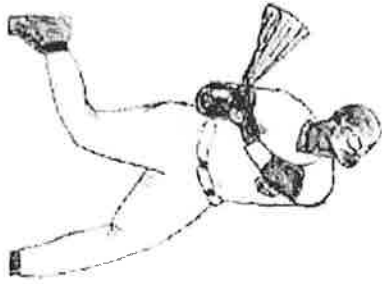
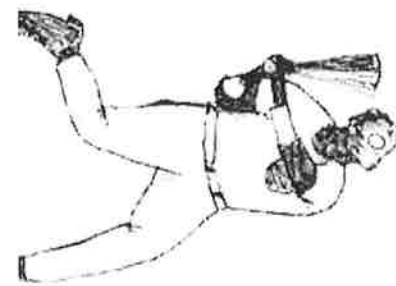
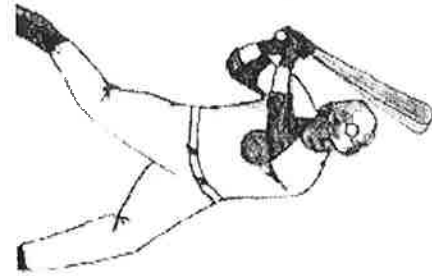
Use the squeeze bunt in a close game to score a tying, go ahead, or insurance run. The squeeze bunt places more pressure on the hitter than any other play in baseball. There are two types of squeeze bunts: the safety squeeze and the suicide squeeze.

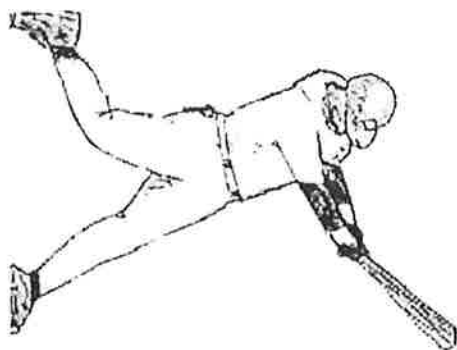
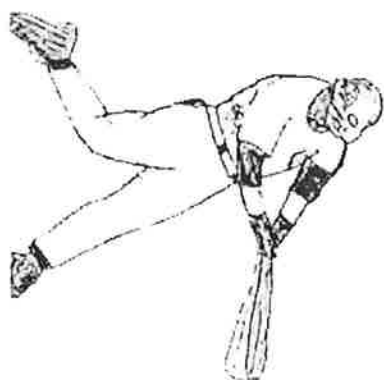
SAFETY SQUEEZE

With the safety squeeze, the runner on third does not break for home unless he sees the bunt successfully laid down. While this takes the pressure off the batter to successfully bunt a ball, it puts more pressure on you to make a good bunt that the pitcher cannot field. Either pivot or take a small jab step in order to quickly get into position to bunt. Do not show your intentions to bunt until the pitcher's arm comes forward and he cannot change the direction he is throwing. Since the runner is waiting for a successful bunt, don't be afraid to take the pitch. Bunt the pitch either down the first or third base line. You may find that you want to go with the pitch or whatever side you are most confident bunting. Make sure you don't try to get a good jump out of the box. Your job is to lay down a good bunt to score the man from third, not to get a base hit.

SUICIDE SQUEEZE

For the hitter, the suicide squeeze is much like the safety squeeze in that you must wait until the pitcher cannot change the direction of the pitch before you pivot to bunt. It's much more difficult in that the runner is not waiting to see if you have bunted the ball successfully before breaking from third. The assumption is you will bunt the ball no matter where it is pitched. The runner from third must wait until the pitcher's arm is coming forward before making his break for home. Unlike the safety squeeze where the location of the bunt is of primary concern, in a suicide squeeze, you want to make sure you bunt the ball fairly. It's very difficult for this play to be defended if the ball is bunted.





Hitting

To begin our discussion on hitting issues, let's take a simple test to evaluate your understanding of hitting mechanics. The following test includes common pieces of coaching advice given from Little League to the Big Leagues.

Read each item carefully, and then ask yourself two questions:

- **Have you ever heard a coach give this advice?**
- **Are you following this piece of advice?**

Just check whether you view the coaching items as good advice or poor advice.

Good Advice	Poor Advice	Common Coaching and Hitting Advice
☐	☐	Get your back elbow up.
☐	☐	Your top hand should roll over at contact.
☐	☐	Your stride goes to where the ball is pitched.
☐	☐	The lead arm is more important than the rear arm.
☐	☐	A hitch in your swing is always bad.
☐	☐	Don't move until you see the ball.
☐	☐	You get better rotation with your hips when you push off your rear leg.
☐	☐	You should get "100%" of your body into the swing.
☐	☐	A long swing will generate more power.
☐	☐	Hit with your weight on your back leg.
☐	☐	Hit with your weight on your front leg.
☐	☐	A long stride generates more power.
☐	☐	An aluminum bat is the best bat with which to practice.
☐	☐	Extension is reached just before contact.

It may surprise you, but the correct answer to every one of the items is...

False!

Fallacies -- Baseball Fairy Tales!
Exactly The Wrong Thing To Do!

All Dead Wrong!!!

Now that we realize there have been flaws in coaching over the years,
Hopefully, throughout this site, we can fix and improve batting skills to the future ball
players of the world!

*Click the appropriate link below to read about
Bad Advice or Move on to Drills & Tips . . .*

Worst Advice
"Get Your Back Elbow Up!" I cringe every time I hear these words

DRILLS

TIPS

The Box Drill - they'll love it

Great, fun hitting drill: get a few medium sized cardboard boxes, draw a baseball on them & let the kids whack at them. Be sure they use proper stance and that the 'ball' is at the right height. Three pluses: 1) they gain wrist power by hitting the box (follow through), 2) they learn and practice keeping their 'head in' and looking at the ball, and 3) the kids absolutely LOVE bashing a box until it is shredded. We were taught this as early teens and it certainly worked well.

"Half-Time"

Teaches Players To Use The WHOLE FIELD!

This is a drill used to teach young hitters to "go with the pitch", "hit behind the runner", and to "use the whole field". The drill uses only 1/2 of the field. Normally we use it for right-handed dominated teams, so we use the right side of the diamond.

The drill teaches players to hit to the right side. The players compete against each other. They get one run when they safely reach first-base on a hit or error. They get two runs if they hit a double, which is the best you can do with one swing of the bat. They are out if they fail to reach safely. Any ball hit to the left side of second-base is an out.

A coach pitches and players play the right side positions. The coach pitches into a screen. No catcher is necessary. After the batter reaches 1B or 2B safely and the play is over, the batter comes back to the dugout. Players should keep up with everyone's score and outs. All players play defense and bat.

Each batter is allowed three outs before they go to play defense. When a batter makes his third out he goes to play right field and the defensive players rotate. Gloves are left against the fence behind 1B when the batters come in to hit. The position rotation is from 9 to 8 to 4 to 3. The first-baseman comes to bat when a player goes out to play defense. The drill can also be set up with teams competing. When a left-hander comes to the plate, the ball must be "pulled" to score. Batters are allowed to take until they get a pitch in a location that they know can be hit to the right side. This teaches them to read a pitch before reacting. You may add your own rules or "twist" to make it even better. It is a great drill and players love it!

Batting Stance Drill

Purpose: To improve the hitter's batting stance

Procedure: The hitter assumes the regular batting stance with the coach checking the placement of the feet, knees, hips, shoulders, head, and eyes.

Hip Turner Drill

Purpose: Development of quicker hips and the relationship of hip speed to the entire swing.

Procedure: Place a bat behind the waist, horizontal to the ground, and use a glove as home plate. While holding the ends of the bat in the hands, assume a normal batting stance and watch an imaginary pitch being delivered. Execute a stride and quick turn using the bat to help turn the hips faster. Finish in the proper contact point position.

Stride Drill

Purpose: To practice the proper stride for hitting.

Procedure: The hitter assumes the regular batting stance and isolates the stride by taking a low, quick and soft stride forward. The coach should make sure the hitter is not moving the weight too far forward during the stride because this causes the hips to be thrown forward.

Wrist Roller Drill

Purpose: To enhance bat speed and control by facilitating the maximum efficiency in "throwing" the bat at the ball.

Procedure: Players place themselves in the contact position, and then roll the bat forward and backward causing the bat to touch each shoulder as it completes a full arc. Players should use only their wrists and forearms to rotate the bat. You should be able to do about 60-80 wrist rollers in 1 minute.

Lead and Follow Hand Swings Drill

Purpose: The lead hand swings allow a hitter to establish proper timing and power with the lead side of the body, giving the hitter proper contact with the ball. The follow hand swings establish the feeling of throwing the bat at the ball.

Procedure: Hit off a tee, imaginary ball, or soft-toss. When executing swings with the lead hand, you should concentrate on keep the hand above the plane of the ball. If the lead hand drops under a pop out, strike out, or fly out will usually occur. The hitter must also turn the hips quickly for proper timing and power. The lead elbow should not extend fully before contact with the ball, since that will promote a slow bat due to an excess of arm arc in the swing.

By concentrating on keeping the lead hand on top of the ball and turning the hips quickly, a hitter can establish proper timing and power with the lead side of the body. The lead hand/follow hand action creates timing and power. Both hands should snap straight into the ball precisely the same instant. This will help you establish proper bat speed and control.

Hitting Off A Tee

Purpose: To develop the mechanics of players' swings using a stationary ball.

Procedure: Alternate between one handed, (Lead & follow hand drills), and two handed swings to establish proper timing and relationship between bottom part of body and the hands. Develop a feel for striding with the hands and hips cocked, and then turning the hands and hips together as a unit during the swing.

Eye Contact Drill

Purpose: To improve eye contact with the ball.

Procedure: There are three players to a group, a hitter, thrower, and catcher. The hitter stands 30-40 feet away from the thrower, and the catcher is in a catching position behind the hitter. The thrower throws the ball to the catcher and the hitter watches the ball in from the release of the pitch to the hitter's contact point. The catcher does not need to wear catching gear because the hitter doesn't swing at the ball.

Soft Toss Drill

Purpose: To increase the number of practice swings a hitter can perform using the correct technique.

Procedure: The hitter stands 12-15 feet away from a screen or fence. The tosser kneels on one knee 12 feet in front and to the side of the hitter and tosses the ball softly underhanded into the hitter's strike zone so the hitter can take a full swing.

One Knee Hitting Drill

Purpose: 1. To improve bat velocity. 2. To increase the number of practice swings a hitter can perform using the correct technique.

Procedure: The hitter kneels 12-15 feet away from a screen or fence. The hitter's right knee is on a towel and the left knee is bent at approximately a 90 degree angle. the tosser kneels on one knee 12 feet in front and to the side of the hitter and tosses balls underhanded into the hitter's strike zone, so the hitter can take a full swing.

Quick Hit Drill

Purpose: 1. To increase the strength and quickness of the hands for hitting. 2. To increase the number of practice swings a hitter can perform using the correct technique.

Procedure: The hitter stands 12-15 feet away from a screen or fence. The tosser kneels on one knee 12 feet in front and to the side of the hitter and tosses the ball underhanded at a fast rate into the hitter's strike zone, so the hitter can take a full swing. The hitter swings hard at the ball, and after each swing, the bat is rapidly returned to the ready position.

Wall Drill

Purpose: To help players develop a short, quick swing that takes the bat directly to the ball. This is a great drill for a hitter to do while on deck.

Procedure: Place knob of bat into stomach and extend the bat so that the top of it touches the net or screen. The hitter should set up in his stance and take an "inside-outside" swing, with the end of the bat just barely hitting the net. If the player swings with arms, he will create a long, looping swing and will hit the net or screen, keeping him from finishing his swing.

Bunting Drill

I make a game out of bunting practice by setting areas that a good bunt should fall into. Two teams are made up and everybody goes through the order. Each ball that stays within the marked area is a run for that team. I later add fielding to the mix to work our fielders on defense. The players are taught to "catch" the ball with the bat instead of swinging and hitting.

Basic Bunting Drill

Purpose: To learn different types of bunts.

Procedure: Drill has one hitter and one tosser. The tosser is 25 feet from the hitter and kneels on one knee. The tosser throws the hitter ten balls, while the hitter practices on one type of bunt. After the hitter hits ten bunts, the hitter and tosser rotate. The drill may be repeated as many times as desired practicing the different types of bunts.

Bunting Accuracy Drill

Purpose: To improve the player's accuracy in bunting to a specific area.

Procedure: A rope is placed 15 feet from home plate and in a semicircle stretching from one sideline to another. The pitcher and catcher are in their defensive positions. The pitcher has a full ball bucket, and the catcher has an empty ball bucket. All hitters are at home plate. Each hitter bunts the ball and tries to keep it inside the rope. The hitter gets two chances to contact the bunt. If the first or second ball is bunted, the hitter runs to first base. If the hitter misses both balls, the hitter runs all the bases before returning to the end of the line.

Bunting Technique Drill

Purpose: To improve players bunting technique.

Procedure: A protective screen is in the middle of the pitching area. The drill has two pitchers and two catchers. Pitcher one is in front of the protective screen and throws to home plate. Pitcher two is behind the protective screen and throws to second base. Each pitcher has a bucket of baseballs and each catcher has an empty bucket. The hitters are divided into two groups, with one group at home plate and the second group at second base.

Hitter 1 bunts a specific bunt and runs to first base, while at the same time, hitter 2 bunts a specific bunt and runs to third base. Then the hitters jog to the ends of the opposite lines. For time efficiency, the balls not contacted by the hitter are placed in the catcher's ball bucket, thereby allowing the pitcher to prepare for the next pitch.

4 Station Bunt Drill

Purpose: To improve players bunting technique.

Procedure: Use first base, second base, and third base as well as home plate as bunting stations.

The drill should have 6 to a group that include a 3 shaggers, catcher, pitcher, and bunter. The pitchers should be around the mound area.

Players will bunt two down each line and rotate positions.

Players should not talk during drill.

Intra-squad Games Special Situations

Purpose: 1. To practice specific game situations. 2. To improve player's concentration during specific game situations.

Procedure: The team is divided into two squads. Various games include:

Three-Two Count Game: Each player goes to plate with 3-2 count. Players must be selective but also protect the plate with a 3-2 count.

Hit & Run Game: Runners are placed on the different bases prior to each inning. The teams play an intra-squad game with each batter going to the plate in hit & run situation. The defensive and the offensive teams play the hit and run game with the same rules that they would play a regulation game.

Nine Outs Game: The teams play an intra-squad game with the defensive team staying on the field for nine outs, instead of three. The bases are cleared after a new inning is started after three outs.

Two Strike Game: Players go to the plate with a two strike count. With a two strike count players must choke up and shorten their swings protecting their at bat and battle with the pitcher until a pitch comes down the "pipe". You can add runners on base if you like.

Batting Practice--Multi-Phase Offensive Drill

First Round

Begin round with runner on 1st base.

Have defensive players at each position.

Runner on 1st base will take his best lead.

Pitcher will stretch and play on runner at 1st base one time, then he will throw to the 1st hitter.

The first hitter will bunt one, (the runner on 1st base will advance to 2nd base on the bunt and then will go to defensive position or end of hitting line). On hit two, the batter will run the second hit out and stay there. The pitcher will play on the runner one time and throw to the second hitter in round one. This procedure should be followed through all of the hitters.

Second Round

Begin round one with runner on 2nd base.

Pitcher will play on runner one time, using middle infielders.

Hitter will bunt two, (sacrifice runner to 3rd and then squeeze the runner home). Hit two, run the second hit out to 2nd base and stay there. Continue this procedure through all hitters in second round.

Third Round

Begin round with runner on 1st base.

The runner on 1st base breaks on the first pitch to the hitter and goes all the way to 3rd base.

The hitters try to take the first pitch to right field. If they execute the hit and run successfully, they should be rewarded with an extra hit. After they hit two or three, they run out the last hit and stay on 1st base.

21 Outs Drill

Purpose of Drill

To make your defense handle the ball to get outs.

To convince your pitching staff that a fast ball thrown for a strike will be hit at someone most of the time.

Drill Rules

No base on balls.

No strike outs.

No curve balls. Pitchers should work on fast balls "down the pipe."

No bunting.

No stealing. Runners may advance on passed balls and wild pitches.

No sliding.

The eight defensive starters stay on defense for all 21 Outs.

Runners left on base will come off after each "inning."

The catcher will keep track of the outs and innings.

Advantage of 21 Outs Drill

It gives the coach a drill for coaching team defense.

It can serve as batting practice for those not on defense.

Good conditioner for pitchers.

Develops pride on defense.

Important Notes

1. The coach and the players must treat this drill with the utmost game-like seriousness.
2. The pitching staff could and should chart pitches. A good 21 Outs Drill should require only 50 to 75 pitches.
3. This drill should not take longer than 30-40 minutes. (Record is 27 minutes.)

All Championship Teams Begin On Defense!

LINEAR SWING

The swing is essentially a three-part motion. First, shift your weight back. Then, begin your stride and shift your weight forward, gearing up for the swing. Swing smoothly through the ball and keep your head steady. Swing using your hands, arms, and body to drive the bat level across the plate.

"Hitting is a very personal part of the game. Swing naturally, making sure you tailor your motion to what works best for you."

Step 1

- Start in the batting stance
- Shift your weight toward your back foot
- Keep your knees bent and flexible
- Move your hands back



Step 2

- Turn your front shoulder toward the plate
- Move your hands back to prepare for the swing
- Step forward 2 to 6 inches toward the pitcher
- Keep your stride foot (the foot closest to the pitcher) between 0 and 45° to the plate



Step 3

- Shift your weight forward to your front foot
- Rotate your body toward the pitcher
- Rotate your hips and hands
- Keep your head still
- Keep your eyes on the ball



Step 4

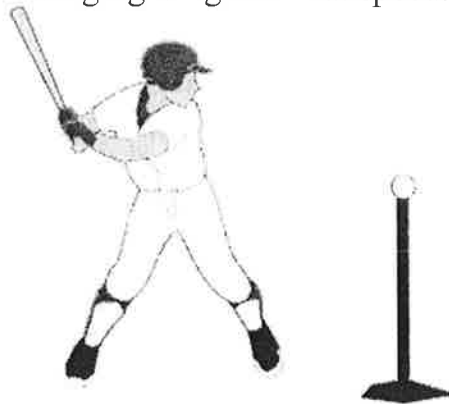
- Drive the bat forward to meet the ball
- Keep your bottom hand facing down
- Keep your top hand facing up
- Swing all the way through the ball for maximum extension
- Keep your eyes as level as possible



SKILLS DRILLS

Batting tee

Practicing with a batting tee allows you to break down the motions. Once you get the feel for the perfect swing, progress to full speed swinging until you are swinging at "game" bat speed.



Batting cage

Practicing at a batting cage is a great way to take batting practice. You can swing over and over again without any distractions. Take 6 to 8 cuts, rest and then continue.

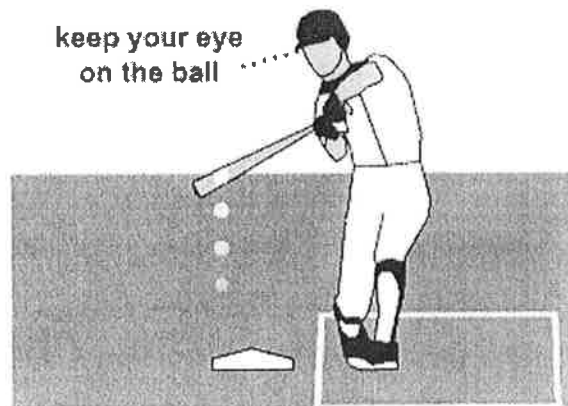
Mirror drill

Watching yourself in a mirror while you swing helps. Slow it down to see each part of the motion. Always concentrate on the mechanics of your swing...and stand far back from the mirror!

Troubleshooting Tips

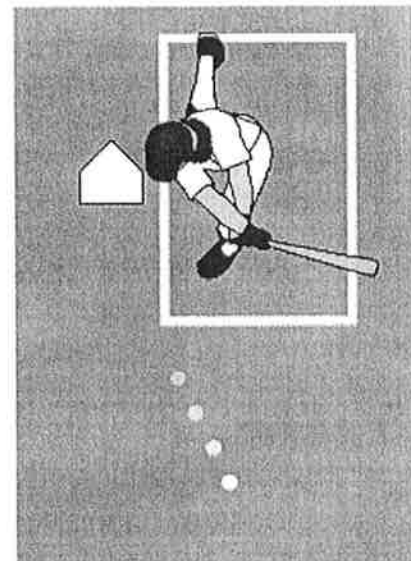
Keep Your Eye on the Ball

If you have trouble making contact, make sure your eyes are on the ball from the moment it is released.



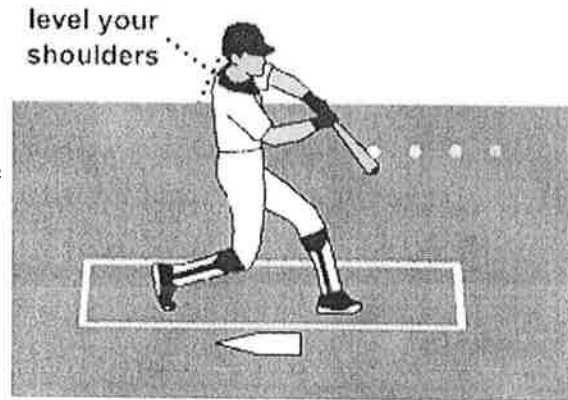
Sweeping

Avoid sweeping at the ball. Swing through the pitch with a smooth and level, or slightly upward, stroke. Your motion should be powerful, yet under control.



Level Your Shoulders

If you pop up the ball often, you may be dropping your back shoulder, causing an uppercut. Keep your shoulders level.



Step Toward the Pitcher

Avoid striding away from the plate; step toward the pitcher when you swing.

Overstriding

Avoid overstriding. It throws off your balance, making you hit off your front foot.

ROTATIONAL SWING

The rotational swing is a three-part motion. First you shift your weight back, then stride, then swing. Transfer your weight back as you rotate your front hip in toward the plate. Then stride toward the pitcher and swing. Extend your arms as you swing through the contact zone.

"Rotate your front hip toward the plate to build up energy, then let that energy translate into a powerful swing."

Step 1

- Start in the batting stance
- Shift your weight toward your back foot
- Turn your front shoulder toward the plate
- Bring the bat back to prepare for the swing
- Rotate your front hip in toward the plate
- Keep your knees bent and flexible



Step 2

- Bring your arms back
- Step forward 2 to 6 inches toward the pitcher
- Angle your stride foot between 0 and 45° to the plate
- Open your stride foot in the direction of the field as you step forward



Step 3

- Shift your weight forward to your front foot
- Rotate your body toward the pitcher
- Rotate your hips and your hands
- Keep your head still
- Keep your eyes on the ball throughout the swing



Step 4

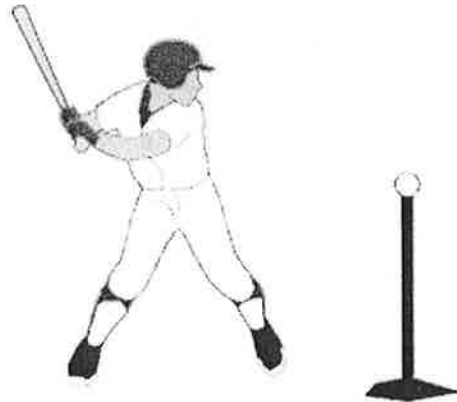
- Extend your arms
- Drive the bat forward to meet the ball
- Keep your bottom hand facing down
- Keep your top hand facing up
- Swing all the way through the ball for maximum extension
- Keep your eyes and shoulders level



SKILLS DRILLS

Batting tee

Practice with a batting tee to break down the motions of the swing. Bring your swing up to full game speed as you become comfortable with the motion.



Batting cage

Practicing at a batting cage is a great way to hone your skills. You can swing over and over again without distraction.

Motion experiment

Experiment with different motions to get a feel for what works best for you. Learn the basics, then concentrate on what is effective and natural.

Mirror drill

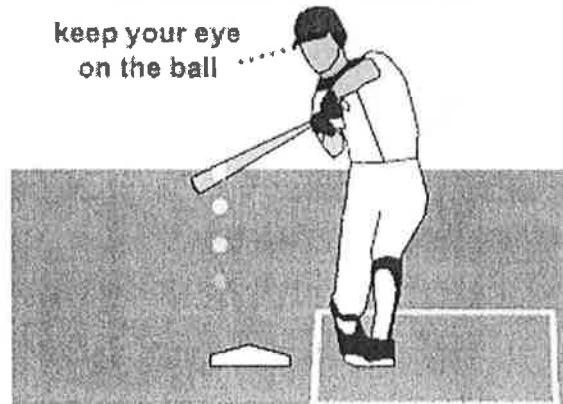
Watch yourself in a mirror while you swing. Slow it down to see each part of the motion. Focus on your mechanics. Don't stand too close to the mirror!



TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS

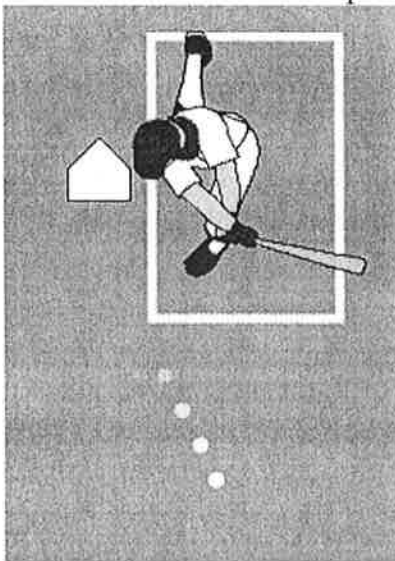
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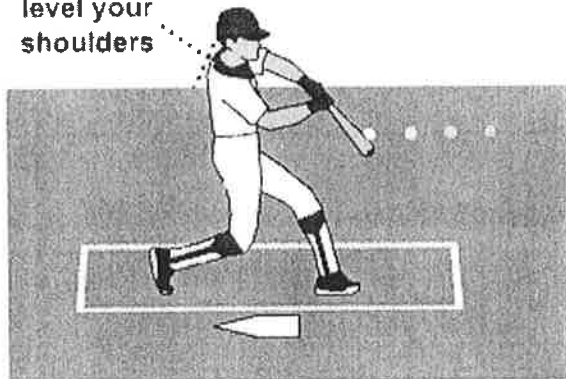
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**level your
shoulders**



Step Toward the Pitcher

Avoid striding away from the plate; step toward the pitcher when you swing.

Overstriding

Avoid overstriding. It throws off your balance, making you hit off your front foot.

LUNGING AND OVER STRIDING

Lunging forward during stride

Many young players fail to keep their weight and hands back when striding toward the pitcher. A simple way to work on this is to have players take (not swing at) pitches during batting practice and freeze until you have time to look at the position of their hands. Also, striding from their ready position (or stance) over and over will help remove the lunge from their swinging habit.

Over Striding

Over striding is a serious problem for many hitters, leading to movement of their head and loss of balance. Often, widening their stance can help correct this problem (they simply can't stride as far). In addition, placing their ball glove six inches in front of their lead foot during batting practice can help them from striding too far. Some hitters reduce their stride by trying to simply pick up their front foot and placing it back down (it will still go forward when they are hitting).

POOR TIMING

Swinging late is often a problem with young players. One reason for swinging late involves the hitter not knowing where he is suppose to make contact with the ball. Many want to make contact over the plate instead of in front of it.

Carrying the ball to the plate and having the hitter swing slowly, indicating where they want the bat to make contact with the ball, is a good way to show them to hit the ball out in front. Also, they should be taught that the point of contact needs to be further out in front of the plate when the ball is pitched inside and closer to the plate when the ball is pitched outside.

Players also need to understand that they must swing at a smaller ball against a fast pitcher. They have to make the decision to swing a bit earlier and fire the hands at the ball when it is further from the plate than they are used to (the ball looks smaller further away from the plate).

The most important thing for good timing, however, is to teach hitters to make adjustments with their stride foot. If they are swinging late, they need to lift the front foot and begin the stride earlier. If they are swinging early, they need to lift the front foot and begin the stride later.

Correcting a Weak Swing

A swing that is slow in relation to a player's physical ability reflects a problem in thinking. Often a player slows down his swing in an effort to "just make contact." Making contact is not hitting. This is very poor advice to give a player in most situations. If a player takes a good swing, he will generally make better contact than if he just tries to get the bat on the ball.

Mental focusing on bat speed often corrects a weak swing. One good way of creating this focus is to define the position of the hands in the launch position (right before the swing starts) as point A. Also, define the hands above the lead shoulder after the follow-through is complete as point B. Then have the player concentrate on getting from point A to point B as quickly as possible (without losing his balance or pulling his head). Make sure the hands extends fully forward in getting to point B. Emphasizing "A to B" during batting practice will help to develop a faster swing.

SEEING THE BALL

We have all seen the swing where the hitter turns his head half way around during his follow through. Some kids try to hit with their whole body, including their head. While keeping their head down when making contact with the ball is essential, there is more to seeing the ball than simply having the head in the proper position.

When my oldest was on an 18-game hitting streak, his teammates were using his bat and eating the same thing he was for lunch. Many asked him why he was hitting so well. He told them he was keeping his head still during the swing. He concentrates on his head being still. He tries to swing as hard as he can without significant movement of his head. This allows him to see the ball clearly.

Obviously the head does move somewhat during the swing. There is forward movement during the stride. A short stride with the weight back minimizes this kind of movement. The head must also turn down toward the bat at contact. This turn should be smooth.

Someone once wrote that 90% of pro players who are experiencing slumps say they simply are not seeing the ball very well. Young players who have nice swings but consistently hit a little above or below the ball might benefit from concentrating on their head during the swing.

FLAT-SNAP HITTING

Contrary to popular opinion, you should not roll your hands or wrists at contact of the bat with the ball. Rolling your wrists at contact will reduce the hitter's ability to power through the ball. Another version of this is to look down at the V (made by your arms) at contact. Instead, wrists should roll after contact. **The hitter's palms should be flat at contact** (one up and one down). The hands "flat snap" through the ball and then the wrists roll. Wrist roll and full extension of the arms with locked elbows ideally occurs when the bat is pointing straight at the pitcher (during the follow through after contact with the ball).

A related problem is the hitter who stiffens and locks his top arm before beginning his swing. This makes it hard to get a flat snap into the ball. This also slows the bat down because the hands are too far from the body during the initial part of the swing. Ted Williams has argued that swinging a bat should be like swinging an ax. You will have a tough time cutting down a tree if your wrists roll on the ax at contact.

PLATE COVERAGE AND FORWARD EXTENSION

Many young hitters have trouble with outside pitches, particularly low ones. While striding away from the plate (or stepping out) is one obvious reason for this, there are other reasons as well. To understand these reasons, we must first consider the path of the bat head during the swing. The bat head comes down and trails the hands to the hitting zone. Depending on where the ball is, the hands snap the bat head around (with the palms facing up and down).

If the hands stop at the point of snapping the bat head around, the bat will enter and exit the hitting zone too quickly (although such "rotational" swinging is taught by some people). Instead, the hands should continue in a forward direction toward the pitcher and the arms should fully extend forward after contact. The wrists should then roll and the follow-through should be high (above the shoulder for those following through with both hands on the bat).

Lack of proper forward extension can also occur when striding too late and beginning the swing before the front foot is planted. Swinging prematurely leads to landing on a stride foot that is pointed straight at the pitcher (instead of being closed or half closed). The hips open up before the front leg is firm. This tends to result in full forward extension to the left of the pitcher (for RH batters). Often the symptom of pulling the front shoulder out is observed when this occurs, but this isn't the problem that needs to be corrected (try telling kids to keep their shoulder in there and it doesn't work because their shoulders are following their hips). Rather, the stride must begin and end earlier and the hitter should be conscious of fully extending his arms toward the pitcher after hitting the ball.

It is difficult to diagnose this problem with the aid of a video camera. Filming directly behind a hitter can show where the bat is pointing at full extension or if full extension even occurs. A side view of the hitter can show if the stride is completed before the swing starts. An easy way of determining this, is to compare the strides when hitting the ball and taking the pitch. If the front foot stays close when taking the pitch yet pointed straight when swinging, the swing is premature.

THE **K** FACTOR

Some players accept striking out as part of the game. Others find it humiliating. Some take weak swings trying to just make contact or swing at something they can't drive early in the count so they aren't faced with the possibility of striking out.

Developing patience at the plate and reducing the fear of striking out can be facilitated by having confidence that one can still have a successful at bat with two strikes in the count. If this confidence is lacking (or if a player simply needs to reduce his number of strike outs), a player should consider developing a two-strike swing.

While a lot of players shorten their stride and their swing with two strikes (which is good), sometimes a more radical approach is needed. One thing I would suggest, especially for younger players, is to avoid the stride altogether with two strikes. When faced with two strikes, take your stance in the batter's box. Before the pitcher delivers the pitch, take your stride and hold it with the weight back a bit and your hands over the rear foot. Then simply take your swing from this position.

I've seen hitters do this over a course of a year and actually end up hitting better with two strikes on them than early in the count. Makes you wonder if you even need a stride (actually you do to reach your potential as a hitter). Once a player has confidence in his two-strike swing, he should show more patience and take better swings early in the count.

