



## **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 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.