

***TEACHING
THE BASIC SWING***

The focus of this section is on teaching the basic swing. In it we will review the important movement principles involved, as well as a useful teaching sequence to use with players just starting to learn softball skills.

There is also a swing checklist for the coach to use as an on-sight guide. The illustrations can be found in the Fundamentals Manual. This will provide useful feedback for players during practice. Finally, there is an outline of the key check points for coaches to analyse swing technique, make corrections and assess player progress.

This material should be used in conjunction with one or more suitable instructional videos available, some of which are listed at the end of the unit.

HITTING PRINCIPLES

These three principles of motion provide the foundation for sound hitting mechanics. For maximum results, players and coaches should take the time to learn and understand their importance to the swing, as a base for identifying and correcting hitting faults.

***SUMMATION
OF LEVERS***

This first principle states that when body levers are applied in sequence, the total force produced is equal to the sum of all the individual levers. Body levers are the arms and legs, and their respective joints. To generate maximum force, batters must use these levers in their correct sequence.

To apply this principle to the swing then, the actions of the ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, arms and wrists, must occur *in that order*. When a lever is applied out of sequence, it neutralizes the force accumulated by all the levers preceding it.

***STRAIGHT
AND STRONG***

The message of this principle is that straight levers (limbs) are stronger than bent ones. In applying this principle to the swing, the batter must ensure that ***AT THE POINT OF IMPACT*** with the ball, the critical parts of the body involved

in the swing are straight. These critical elements are the front side, the front arm and the upper body.

FRONT SIDE

The front leg is the brace or fulcrum around which the body pivots. If it bends, the front side collapses, and the body weight shifts forward, destroying balance and the rotational mechanics necessary for maximum power. The front leg must be firmly planted and braced, before contact with the ball.

FRONT ARM

Once the hands have reached maximum extension and the bat is in the contact position, the front arm should be straight. From that point on, the hands and wrists take over to complete the swing.

PROBLEM

A very common problem with young hitters is the tendency to straighten the front arm too soon, causing the hands and arms to make a circular motion to the ball. This results in a slow bat action referred to as dragging the bat.

THE BODY The upper body should be erect at the point of contact, with the head

centered over the base of support. This means the head is aligned with the back hip which has now rotated forward. When viewed from the side, there should be a vertical alignment of the head, hip and back knee.

***LONG
AND FAST***

The longer the lever, the greater the speed at its farthest point. This is why pitchers with long arms tend to throw faster than those with shorter arms. In hitting, the bat becomes an extension of the arms, which dictate the length of that lever. If the arms bend, the lever is shortened, reducing bat speed. By fully extending the arms at the point of contact, the batter produces maximum potential bat speed.

THESE PRINCIPLES ARE BASED ON

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND APPLY TO

ALL MOVEMENTS IN ALL SPORTS INVOLVING

SPEED FORCE AND POWER.

THEIR APPLICATION TO SOFTBALL HITTING

IS TOTALLY RELEVANT IN TODAY'S POWER GAME.

COACHING CHECK POINTS

Use these six basic check points to verify the application of sound hitting mechanics. They will help you determine if players are executing the swing with maximum power.

Players should also use these check points to monitor their own swing from time to time. These checks apply *at the point of contact*.

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| FRONT FOOT | Should be pointing in, towards the ball or opposite base line. |
| FRONT LEG | Must be braced, firm and straight, but not necessarily rigid. |
| FRONT ARM | Must be straight and fully extended at point of contact. |
| HEAD POSITION | Must be aligned with the back hip and knee. |
| BACK KNEE | Should be bent to form a slight "L" shape. Batters hit off the "L". |
| BACK FOOT | Heel raised, toe pointing forward, pushing forward against a strong |

FOR MORE DETAILED INFORMATION ON TEACHING HITTERS, SEE, "GOLD MEDAL HITTING - PART 1.

HITTING CHECKLIST

1. ***Establish a comfortable stance.*** For shorter stride and better balance, start with the feet spread several inches wider than the shoulders.
2. ***Keep the hands up.*** They should be placed comfortably near the back shoulder, for a downward path to the ball. The back is straight and the weight forward, on the front part of the foot.
3. ***Hips level, front shoulder down.*** Keeping the head down and in prevents the batter from pulling off the ball.
4. ***Batter "sets" with weight shift back.*** Weight shifts to back leg with slight counter rotation of upper body.
5. ***Stride is short and soft.*** Stride is towards pitcher's belt buckle. Stride toe points in. Eyes remain level.
6. ***Hands and weight stay back.*** In coil position until the swing starts.
7. ***Spin from the ground up.*** The knees and hips pivot first, followed in rapid succession by shoulders, arms, hands and finally the wrists. Eyes, hips and shoulders must stay level.
8. ***Front leg straightens and back foot pivots as bat approaches contact.*** Use both legs to spin. This accelerates the pivot for maximum power.
9. ***Track the ball right to the bat.*** Head must remain still and eyes steady.
10. ***Full arm extension at contact.*** Wrists snap to produce maximum bat speed. Like throwing the bat at the ball.
11. ***Follow through.*** Allow the bat, hands and arms to complete the arc to a point well behind the body.

TEACHING SEQUENCE***ADAPT TO
THE PLAYER***

Because of the complexities of the swing, the teaching process needs to be adapted to the age and ability of the player. Very young beginners require a simple sequence that can be applied quickly with some sense of immediate success. Older players will be able to handle a more technical and detailed approach.

***TALKING ISN'T
TEACHING***

Regardless of age, the key to success is getting the players to swing the bat as soon and as often as possible. Ball players, like all athletes, prefer action to listening, so keep the talk to a minimum; make the key points then get them swinging.

***DO IT RIGHT
HAVE A PLAN***

Unless you are experienced at teaching this skill, create your own teaching plan to use. This will help organize your thoughts and ideas and minimize confusion with the players. It will also force you to learn the techniques more thoroughly, which is the real key to success.

***ALWAYS USE A LESSON PLAN
WHEN TEACHING NEW SKILLS***

TEACHING SEQUENCE

This is a suitable teaching sequence for beginning hitters or very young players, with limited attention span. Follow the suggested steps but use your own words to explain the details.

STEP 1. ESTABLISH BASIC POWER POSITION.

EXPLAIN AND DEMONSTRATE THE BASIC POWER POSITION FOR SPORTS.

ACTION Have the players stand facing a partner with their feet parallel and hand raised in front of their chest. They try to resist being pushed back without moving their feet.

EXPLAIN DRAW ATTENTION TO THE FEATURES OF THIS STRENGTH POSITION:

- A) FEET SPREAD (TO WIDEN BASE OF SUPPORT)
- B) KNEES BENT (TO LOWER CENTER OF GRAVITY)
- C) WEIGHT ON FRONT OF FOOT (FOR BALANCE)
- D) BENT AT WAIST (TO KEEP WEIGHT FORWARD)
- E) BACK STRAIGHT (FOR STRENGTH)
- F) EYES, SHOULDERS, HIPS STAY LEVEL

ACTION Demonstrate and have all player take this natural position of strength. Check each player for strength and stability.

EXPLAIN THIS IS ALSO THE BEST POSITION FOR BATTING BECAUSE IT IS STRONG AND PROVIDES GOOD BALANCE FOR SWINGING A BAT.

STEP 2. TEACH SWING RHYTHM.

EXPLAIN AND DEMONSTRATE THE THREE STEP RHYTHM OF A SWING.

1. STEP (SHORT & SOFT)
2. SPIN (BELLY BUTTON TO THE PITCHER)
3. SWING (HANDS STRAIGHT TO THE BALL)

ACTION Have players stand in strength position with hands on hips. (This will emphasize the feeling of full rotation)

EXPLAIN EMPHASIZE NEED TO BE RELAXED AND NATURAL

ACTION Teach the stride only. Check to ensure a short, soft step. Do 20 repetitions.

ACTION Add the hip pivot to the stride. Check for complete rotation of knees and hips. Back heel should lift off the ground and spin outward. Practice, Step and Spin - 20 reps.

ACTION Add the swing. Players pretend to hold a bat and simulate a swing after the pivot. Check for a short hand path and complete follow-through. Practice, Step, Spin & Swing - 20 repetitions.

EXPLAIN ASK FOR QUESTIONS AND CLARIFY CONCERNS.

STEP 3. SWING THE BAT.

EXPLAIN THE NEED FOR SAFETY WHILE SWINGING.

ACTION Have players swing an actual bat using the sequence just learned. Circulate, observe and provide one on one assistance. Have all players take 25 to 30 swings.

STEP 4. HIT BALLS OFF TEE OR SOFT TOSS.

EXPLAIN IMPORTANCE OF REPETITIONS AND NEED FOR SAFETY WHENEVER SWINGING A BAT.

ACTION Set up several tees or soft toss stations and practice hitting balls.

END OF SESSION

USEFUL VIDEOS

Most of the following video tapes are available at the local library or through a softball or baseball office. They have been selected for their proven teaching effectiveness, and are listed in order of the author's preference, but all are useful.

VIDEO TAPES

- A) HITTING BASICS; BRAGG STOCTON.
- B) THE FUNDAMENTALS OF HITTING; JIM LEFEBVRE.
- C) THE ART OF HITTING 300; CHARLIE LAU.
- D) GARVEY'S SYSTEM OF HITTING; STEVE GARVEY.
- E) CYBERVISION WITH ROD CAREW.
- F) DEVELOPING THE HITTER - JIM LEFEBVRE **

** The last tape listed, "Developing the Hitter", is for more skilled players who already have an effective basic swing, and are looking for more advanced ideas and instruction.

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