

HITTING

Though style will vary from player to player, there are constants or absolutes in the mechanics of a swing that can and should be taught to all players, they are:

Start with a Good Foundation – Start in balance. The Swing should start from the bottom up. Young players must learn to engage their legs to activate their swing. Can spread feet out wider to reduce bouncing and give them a stronger foundation.

Be an Athlete – Stance: Feet wider than shoulders, Knees bent, inside of ankles, toes pointing straight ahead, weight on the balls of your feet, slight chest lean forward, butt sticking out slightly.

2 Eyes on Pitcher – Keeping head and eyes level to the ground

Grip – “Knocking Knuckles” – Grip the bat so as to create the proper WHIP action of the barrel.

Find Your Rhythm – The body must stay fluid and in motion in order to react quickly.

“Trigger” or “Load” – Whichever you call it, the point to remember is that “You must go back before you go forward”. This movement is to build up of stored energy, like stretching a rubber band. The Load is a lower body movement. Do not over exaggerate this movement, weight is still on the inside part of the balls of your feet, back knee should NOT go outside of your back ankle, and hands should NEVER go past the back elbow.

Stride – Step straight towards pitcher. Back side and front side gain ground together. Stride length depends of stance and height of batter. “Stretch the rubber band”. MUST keep hands back and at shoulder level or you lose all stored up energy (power).

Landing – Body should be balanced when the stride foot lands. Foot should land still closed. Think perfect basketball defensive position. Keep hands back (shoulder level beyond the back shoulder). Knob of bat pointed at the catcher’s feet.

Hands – Take a straight path to and through the ball. Across the chest, or across the numbers, do NOT drop elbow. Hands move first before front shoulder opens. One Palm up, one palm down at contact – “Power position”

Drive - Back Knee and the Hips drive forward to turn the lower body. This will keep you level and let the bat stay on a level plane. This movement is what pulls the back heel of the ground, NOT “Squish the bug”.

Firm Front Side – Stiff front leg. Knee does not bend outward, it must stay inside the ankle, nose stays inside the knee. This creates torque.

Head should stay centered on the body throughout entire swing (over the belly button).

Extension – Follow through, the barrel of the bat should “chase the ball as it is hit. This keeps the energy behind the ball in a straight line, longer. Extend fully after (and only after) contact.

HITTING DRILLS

Tee Drills-

“Simon Says” Drills: Teach “Trigger”/”Load” - Start with a wide base to eliminate stride at this point. Give commands: “Stance” / “Back” / “Swing”, as the kids move through the positions.

Forced Movement Drills:

- > Forced Stride - Teach Importance of Legs: Start with Feet together, step and hit. Forces player to use lower body, and teaches them the importance of using legs.
- > Forced Hand – “Cross Your Heart Drill”: To teach player to move hands back before going forward. Have them start with their hand in the center of their body, touching their chest (across their heart), instead of in their natural position. In order to hit the ball off the Tee, the batter must move there hands back into the trigger position then come forward to hit.

Hi Tee Drill – The most common bad habit that young kids develop is a long looping swing which is created by dropping their hands as they start to swing. The High Tee Drill (where the ball is literally set up high on the tee, about jersey letter height) will force them to keep their hands up in their swing, and teach them to swing straight across their chest and strike down on the ball.

Extended Tee Drill - Teach Full Extension. When hitting up the middle, normally the stride foot would land even with the tee and ball. In this drill, the hitter should move back a few inches so that his stride foot lands 2 inches behind the baseball. The goal of the hitter is to still hit up the middle. This can only be accomplished with proper extension.

Contact Points – The Tee is a great tool to teach a hitter where they should be contacting the ball as it is pitched Middle, Inside or Outside. The important thing to know is that this should all be done in relation to the hitter’s front foot when it lands, NOT in relation to Home Plate (since ever hitter is different). The proper set up is as follows. In each case have the hitter take a normal step, and mark the landing point:

Outside Pitch – Set up the Tee inline with the inside part of the ankle.

This will teach the hitter to “let the ball get deep” on an outside pitch.

Middle Pitch – Set up the Tee even with the foot. This pitch should be driven right back up the middle

Inside Pitch – Set up Tee inline with the Outside part of the foot. Make sure batters do not open up their front shoulder on this type of pitch.

Think hands first.

Soft Toss –

Soft Toss should be done straight on from behind an L Screen if possible.

The Toss should be a straight firm toss, NO LOBS!

Use a “pump fake” to make sure that the hotter is loading properly. Alternate, fake, then toss, fake, then toss.

Live Pitching –

Again, throw firm straight pitches, NO LOBBING!