

THE 5 AREAS OF HITTING

STANCE: BALANCED. Legs should be a little wider than shoulder-width apart, feet *slightly* pigeon-toed. You want the knees flexed with the weight centered on the insides of the feet. The knees will slightly bend in toward each other, actually knock-kneed. **GOOD ATHLETIC BALANCE** is the primary objective.

GRIP: "Standard" grip recommended with middle (knocking) knuckles of both hands aligned on bat. Lay the bat down in the fingers across the callus line, not back in the palms. The goal of the standard grip is to achieve greater quickness and bat speed, thus "throwing the head of the bat at the ball."

HAND PLACEMENT & BAT ANGLE: Hands should be aligned so that the top hand on the bat sits at the same height as the rear shoulder, approximately 3-6 inches from same rear shoulder. Rear elbow should be down at a natural 45-degree angle**. The front elbow should also be down, pretty much even with the back elbow. The bat should sit at a 45-degree angle also, with the knob of the bat pointing at the opposite batter's box. This is where all proper swings originate from (*launch position*) regardless of their starting position, with the bat lying in the same plane as the pitched ball. Starting here eliminates unnecessary movement needed to get here during the swing.

** NOTE: ELBOWS SHOULD NOT BE UP!!! When the rear elbow starts up, it must come down in order to hit the ball, creating an uppercut. The swing then tends to get underneath the ball, creating a pop-up or complete miss. When a hitter has an uppercut, the bat is not in the strike zone for very long.

INWARD TURN & STRIDE: Begin the swing by actually moving back, gaining strength *walking away from the hands*, before going forward. Tuck the front shoulder, hip and knee in, about 3 inches. Hitter gains strength, speed and quickness, along with the opportunity to time the pitch. This also forces the hitter to keep the front shoulder "tucked" for a longer period of time while coiling; seeing the ball better before uncoiling through the ball. Stride should be only about 3-6 inches, at a 45-degree angle toward the plate, with the batter landing lightly on the inside of the big toe, with body weight still balanced through the middle of the body, not leaning forward or backward. Overstriding is very undesirable. *"Slow feet create fast hands, while quick feet disrupt balance and slow the hands down!"*

THE SWING: Head completely turned toward pitcher, square to the ground with both eyes level and focused on the release point of the

pitcher. The swing begins from the waist down. After completion of stride, the heel of the front foot touches the ground, officially starting the swing. The hips begin their release with the hitter rolling up onto the ball of the back foot and rotating the back foot toward the pitcher ("squishing the bug"). The back hip rotates toward the ball so that eventually the rear knee, the waist and the belly button are ALL facing the pitcher. The hips should rotate, not move up and out. You are now ready to swing the bat in a downward plane through the strike zone leading with the bottom hand. Lead with the knob of the bat, pointing toward the ball, with the barrel up higher than the hands (*bat angle*), keeping the hands inside of the ball. Avoid early arm extension (*sweeping or casting*). Keep the head DOWN. Hitter's chin rests on front shoulder, while looking at pitcher, prior to initiating swing. Head stays there during the swing, down on the ball, with shoulders rotating around head, until chin ultimately ends up on rear shoulder at completion of swing. The final part of the swing concerns the follow-through. Hitter wants to be accelerating as much as possible at point of impact with top arm forming an "L" with palm facing up, driving the barrel THROUGH the ball with both hands on the bat, extending arms AFTER point of impact, with hands ending up behind the lead shoulder. At this point, both the knees and the belly button should be directly facing the pitcher.

DRILLS

HIP TWISTS: Hitter places bat (stick, broomhandle, etc.) behind back on waistline. With hands gripping the bat from behind, get in stance. Take inward turn, stride and stop. Then take top hand (i.e., right hand for RH hitter) and forcefully pull bat around waist, rolling up on back foot (squishing the bug) with head down, toward imaginary ball. Knees and belly button should then be facing the "pitcher." Go back to normal stance and repeat. Doing this 10 20 times a day programs young hitters to get that lower body working correctly without conscious thought (Muscle Memory).

FENCE DRILL: (Designed for hitters who extend their arms and hands too early in their swing {casting}, sweeping at the ball.)

Have hitter take batting stance with the outside of the rear end against a fence or wall. The object is to have the hitter take a normal swing without making contact with the fence or wall. Start in slow motion, for obvious reasons. Improper swing and bat angle will provide immediate negative feedback. The key here is to keep the barrel above the rear shoulder at the proper bat angle (good launch position) and swing through the ball. If a hitter does this with hands in close to the body (inside the ball), allowing back foot to begin first, they will complete the drill properly. If hitter takes a stride, rotates back foot

and hips, keeping the bat head above the hands, hands inside the ball, and opens up away from the fence, they can swing down and through the ball without hitting the fence. Full arm extension does not take place until immediately after contact.

WIFFLE GOLF BALL SOFT TOSS: Do this in groups of 3 or 4, with the coach soft-tossing; one player batting and the rest fielding the balls and returning them to the bucket. Have the hitter take their normal stance, inward turn, and stride, and then hit the wiffle golf balls as you toss them. You can make it more challenging by having your hitters use a 1.5 foot broom handle instead of a bat. This forces the hitter to really "SEE" the ball, by keeping their head (both eyes) down on the ball, in order to make contact. Really emphasize the "head down" aspect by making them keep their heads down, even after completion of a proper follow-through.

CHAIR DRILL: (Good drill for Uppercutters.)

Place a batting tee on home plate, with a folding chair behind the tee, with the seat part closest to the tee. Make sure that the tee is just slightly lower than the back of the chair so that the hitter must swing with a slightly downward angle through the ball. If the hitter uppercuts, they will only hit the back of the chair (again, providing instant feedback). Metal chairs seem to be very effective in teaching the proper bat angle during the swing. This drill can be taught relatively easily and is excellent for developing the necessary "line drive" stroke.

ARM ISOLATION DRILL: (Used to develop equal strength in both top and bottom arms.)

Have batter, using only one arm at a time, take stance, inward turn, stride and full cut at balls off of a tee. Emphasize "staying back" on the ball. Batter will need to choke up a lot, and initially need to place the unused hand under the armpit of the swinging arm for additional support. Take about 20 cuts at a time with each arm, making sure to keep the barrel higher than the hands, and follow through. At first, most players will find their top arm to be stronger; therefore, requiring more reps with the bottom arm. The objective is to reduce the gap between the ability of each arm, ideally becoming equally adept with both. (*Many players suffer from a weak lead hand!*) You can soft toss to older players.