



Batting Fundamentals

Hitting Program Elements

1. Teach proper Hitting mechanics
 - Batting grip
 - Bat and Plate position
 - Training the batters eyes
 - Proper swing
 - Upper body Mechanics
 - Lower body mechanics
 - Finishing the swing
2. Teach proper Bunting mechanics
 - Bat position and grip
 - Lower and Upper body mechanics
 - Receiving the pitch
3. Provide structured instruction and drills
 - Structured sessions
 - Printed material and training tools provided for classes

Expectations for participants

Get positive, verbal and visual feedback on hitting form and areas needing additional focus

Requirements of participants

1) Practice Hitting drills 3 times a week, once in practice, twice on their own

Batting stance, grip and swing

Stance

Your feet should be spread slightly wider than your shoulders. Your toes should be pointing towards the plate. Your weight should be on the front or balls of your feet not on your heels. To see if you have your weight on the balls of your feet, try lifting your heels up .If you can't then your weight is too far back and you need to shift it forward. Your knees need to be bent slightly, like you are sitting on the back of a chair.

To practice to see if you have a balanced stance: Get in your batting stance, just like you would if you are batting. Close your eyes for a few moments and your body will take itself to a balanced position for batting

Batting Grip

Bending at the waist put the head (barrel) of the bat down across the plate touching the other side of the plate with the bat across it and your hands open. Make sure the handle of the bat is across the bottom part

of your fingers and across the calluses of your hand, (which are right below the fingers). Now close your fingers around the bat and pick it up and rest it on your shoulder. Door knocker knuckles should be aligned (Remember the hand that should wind up on top is the hand on the side of your back foot.). Your thumbs should be folded down along with your fingers not pointing up. The middle knuckles of both hands should be pointing straight out from you. This is known as the standard grip and it will help you with bat speed and turning over your wrists. To make sure your knuckles are aligned after you raise your bat to your shoulder lift up your pointer fingers they should form a "goalpost" on either side of the bat.

The reason you don't grip a bat in your palms is it will slow your swing and keep you from turning your wrist over properly to finish a swing. Also if you don't line up your knuckles (door knocker knuckles) you will limit the amount your wrists can move. **Another thing to remember:** don't squeeze the bat hard in your hands just hold it in your fingers, you want to be loose not tight when you bat.

Hands and arm position

Your hands should be held at a height that is equal to the earhole on your helmet and forward to at least the back of your helmet. Elbows should be pointing down with the arms forming a V shape (roof of the house). There should be no backward movement of the arms prior to swinging the bat. This position helps you see the ball better as the farther you hold the bat back the more you turn the front shoulder and the head away from the ball. It also helps in keeping you from dropping the bat head and hitting popups as many players who raise their back elbow up do as they drop it to the side of their bodies as they swing.

Swing

The swing starts with what is called the inward turn or load. When the pitcher puts her hands together in the set position, you need to tuck in your hip and knee back towards the catcher. The hands and bat stay still straight back and don't wrap behind the hitter. This will help keep your weight back increase your speed, strength and gives you a chance to better time the pitch.

Once the pitcher is completing her pitch and is releasing the ball you should either be taking a small slide step 2-6 inches towards the pitcher with your front foot or dropping your front heel if you do not stride. If you stride need to land your front foot on the big toe/ball of the foot and finishing with the front heel hitting the ground if you drop your heel this accomplishes the same thing transfers your weight forward. In the meantime you are linear and moving your lower body forward while raising your back heel while making your back leg look like an inverted L.

This also turns your hips toward the pitcher so you wind up with your belly button facing her.

The last thing to move in the swing is the hands. In a good swing the hands and the knob of the bat go straight down to the ball, your back elbow goes towards your side and then your arms extend out from your body and the wrists turn over to complete your swing after the bat passes in front of you with the bat behind your head when done. You always hit the ball in front of the plate to ensure you hit with arms extended and for power.

Your head doesn't move during all of this, it starts on the front shoulder and ends up on the back shoulder with you looking down the barrel of the bat when you make contact with the ball.

Training the eyes

First you need to learn to focus on the ball. When a pitcher is on the rubber you should have a soft focus. Your eyes should be on her team name on her shirt (just looking at it). Once she puts her hands together and comes to the set position you need to quickly look at her hip and focus hard (stare, don't even blink) at her hip on the side her pitching hand is on.

This let's you see the ball all the way from the pitcher to the plate and will increase your chances of hitting the ball. Later it will help you tell what type of pitch it is by seeing the rotation of the ball and seams.

H Drill 1– Coach stands on pitching rubber and acts as opposing pitcher, batter(s) get in their batting stance. Practicing the above skill of focusing on name on chest and then hard focus on hip coach pitches without ball instead holding out a different number of fingers each time. Batters must tell the coach how many fingers they are holding out at end of pitch.

Another way to learn to find the ball out of the pitchers hand (release) and improve their ability to recognize strikes is this drill -

H Drill 2- Coach stands on pitching rubber and acts as opposing pitcher, batter(s) get in their batting stance. Coach places both hands behind them and decides whether to show the ball or an empty hand to batters. As coach pitches batters start their stride and look at the release point on the hip. If there is no ball batter continues their stride but keep their hands back. If there is a ball the batters swing though as if they were being pitched to.

Hitting requires that you use both eyes to see the pitch here is a drill to teach you to keep your head in position to use both your front and back eye.

H Drill 3– Batter gets into their batting stance but is wearing an eye patch or scarf to cover their front eye. Batter then does practice swings looking out at coach acting as pitcher. As in the above drill batter must pick up whether the coach is pitching a ball or offering a bare hand and swing or hold back.

Upper Body Mechanics

Hitting can be divided into two areas of the body the upper and lower body we will start with the upper body and drills to improve this part of the total hitting technique. Many of these drills work off a tee, which is done at all levels of the game from Recreational Leagues to Professional players. It allows the batter and coaches to focus on specific areas of the swing without the use of pitcher and can be done as an individual vs. needing other players or coaches once the concept is learned. It also maximizes the number of swings you can take in a day.

In order to perfect the swing and improve bat speed we need to work on keeping the hands inside the pitch and leading with the hands to the ball. This drill works well to cure fully extending arms and a sweeping swing (casting) that leaves the bat outside the pitch on inside pitches resulting in weak balls being hit off the handle of the bat. Also, by keeping the hands closer to the body, bat speed increases.

H Drill 4– Batter gets into position facing a net. The distance from the net is determined by placing the knob of the bat on the belly button and touching the end of the bat to the net in front of them. The batter then gets into their batting stance and takes live swings. If they are not “hands to the ball” and they drop their bat down and take a sweeping swing, the bat will hit the net giving them instant feedback on their swing. Coach should re-enforce the proper technique of keeping the front arm closed (down) and hands in. 15 reps without hitting the net at full speed is the goal.

Another way to get feedback and to correct casting or dipping the bat head down involves the use of an Instructo swing or if you don't have one a folding chair or a tall tee. This will also help with developing a swing down through the strike zone

H Drill 5– Set up a tee on the front of the plate and have the batter assume their batting stance. Place a folding chair with its back on the back of the plate (seat forward). Have the player swing and if they drop their hands or cast they will hit the chair giving them immediate feedback. Continue to work on their stance to correct especially with the front elbow down. The Instructo swing is built to work the same way without as much noise and with a tall tee place a ball on a extended tee and another with a ball on the front of the plate. The result is the same however contact makes the player alter their swing. Take 15 reps without

contact.

Work on keeping the front side of the upper body closed and front elbow down, rather than up and upper-cutting at the ball, which takes the bat out of the strike zone and cause batters to swing over balls. Remember we want to hit down on the ball keeping the bat in the strike zone as long as possible. This drill is a sure way to develop muscle memory to keep the upper body closed.

H Drill 6– Batter gets into their batting stance and small piece of cloth is put under the batters armpit. The batter then swings their normal swing and if they open up the cloth falls to the ground and they start over again you can use a small ball like a tennis ball for this drill too. Have them do 15 reps without a drop at full speed to ensure the muscle memory is implanted.

To get players to keep their hands back try this drill

H Drill 7– Players gets into their batting position and then moves into their stride position with the stride taken and the hips open (belly button to the pitcher) but squished back leg in inverted L but with the hands held back still. The batter then takes practice swings from that position to get the feel of keeping their hands back during the swing. Coaches should talk to proper position of the hands and bat during the swing. Take 15 reps.

To work on proper technique of the upper and lower hand (palm up/palm down) increase hand wrist and arm strength:

H Drill 8- This is done from a position with the back knee down and the front one up in the batters box. A tee is placed on front of home plate (remember the ball is hit at the front of plate) and adjusted for height. The batter assumes their position and using the front hand only (The other hand is across the chest or stomach) using a light bat (or choking up on a bat) the batter swings at the ball on the tee releasing the shoulder, then the elbow and finally the wrist turning it over after the bat goes through the strike zone. Coaches should tell the batter to stay tall don't bend at the waist and keep their shoulders even. 15 reps and then switch to the bottom back hand and do 15 reps. You can also do this drill with two hands to isolate the upper body and swing further.

Another drill to work on proper arm extension is similar to the one arm drill above but is done from a standing batting stance

H Drill 9- - Batter positions themselves in batters box. A tee is placed on front of home plate and adjusted for height. The batter assumes their position and using the front arm only (The other hand is across the chest or stomach) using a light bat (or choking up on a bat) the batter swings at the ball on the tee releasing the shoulder, then the elbow and finally the wrist turning it over. Coaches should watch the batter to see if they extend their arm through the swing and follows through on the swing watching that the wrist is cocked before the swing is started. 15 reps and then switch to the bottom (back) arm and place the free arm behind your back. Do 15 more reps.

Finishing a swing is a problem for younger players who relax when they feel ball contact and older ones that don't finish their swing. Following are two drills to help players to follow through on their swings.

H Drill 10- For this drill you will need two tees. The first is set up on the front middle of the plate with the second in the follow through zone. The player lines up to the plate and swings hitting both balls by finishing their swing. 15 reps with at least 10 double contacts.

This one is for the relax contact swing

H Drill 11– Place a tee in position in front side of plate and use a partially deflated basketball on the tee. Object to get player use to resistance at point of contact and working with them to power through contact

and finish the swing. 15 reps.

Lower Body Mechanics

Lower body mechanics will concentrate on the waist, legs and feet; covering stride, hip snap, and raising back foot (not squishing the bug).

*This drill is to practice the **striding** the right way while hitting*

H Drill 12– Have your player(s) line up 6 inches off the foul line and get into their batting stance. Each player should then practice their striding into a pitch, taking a low fast step forward with their front foot. This is to give them the feel for the stride their weight should still be on the back foot until the front foot lands. Tell them its like they ate stepping down on thin ice don't put your foot down hard.

For players who overstride and get their legs too far apart which takes their hips and legs out of the swing the following drill variation of the above drill will help correct the problem.

H Drill 13 - Using a partly deflated volleyball outside or partially inflated balloons indoors have the player(s) assume their stance and give them a ball (balloon) to place between their legs above the knees and instruct them to squeeze the ball slightly with their legs. Then have them repeat the above drill. If they are overstriding, the ball will drop, telling them to think about shortening up the stride. The coach should focus on form and keeping their weight centered.

Turning the hips and using the muscles in the waist and legs to increase the power in a swing is another area players take time in mastering.

To teach the players to pivot their hips while hitting there are several drills to get the feel for the hip pivot which when done properly is a highly explosive use of the lower body.

H Drill 14– Player assumes batting stance but for this drill the bat stays on the shoulder. The coach says “pitch” and the player does not swing but instead rotates her hips towards the pitcher until her belly button is facing the pitcher. As she is doing this she should be squishing the bug with her back foot rolling up her back foot so her back leg is in an inverted L position. Drill should be done quickly and coaches should watch form to insure the back foot pivot is on the ball of the foot.

To physically re-enforce the hip pivot the next drill uses a bat and tee in a different way.

H Drill 15– Player assumes their batting stance, but instead of holding the bat in their batters stance the bat is placed behind their back at waist level with the head of the bat pointing towards the catcher. The bottom knob of the bat is equal to the front part of the body. The bat is held in the crook of the elbows at hip level. A tee is placed on the plate this time with the ball at hip level and on coaches' command the player rotates their hips and hits the ball during the rotation while again rolling up on the back foot.

Finally to put the hip pivot in practice this drill uses the soft toss as part of the training process.

H Drill 16– Player gets into their normal batting position with soft tosser about 10 ft away and slightly in front of the batter. Tossers throw slow underhand pitches but before the pitch is thrown the batter snaps their hips to the open (belly button to pitcher) position keeping their hands back. This makes the hitter not swing before they open their hips are open. Using all three of these drills in sequence should re-enforce this skill.

Squishing the bug rolling up the back foot on the ball of the foot is another skill that players have some difficulty with the hip pivot drills should help to teach the concept and physical act.

However there is a drill to give visual confirmation

H Drill 17- With the player in their batting stance place softball outside their back heel. If they pivot on the ball of their foot they will knock the ball away when they turn. If they are just striding and hitting with their arms and not their hips and legs the ball will stay in place. Use this drill along with the hip pivot drills to give more feedback to the player.

Soft Toss drills to sharpen batting skills

In order to apply the techniques and further evaluate the players batters eye, batting stance, swing and follow through, soft toss drills allow the maximum number of swings in a short time frame. Drills are done using whiffle balls of various sizes and colors as well as safety balls and softballs. They give both coaches and players a chance to work on batting skills.

H Drill 18 - Player assumes batting position with tosser positioned 10 ft away and astride of and in front of the player. Most of the time a net is used in this drill and the tosser stands aside of it. Tossers start with softball sized whiffle balls tosses 5 while observing batters stance and swing. Batter reloads as soon as they hit to maximize the number of swings taken. After 5 softballs tosser uses 5 baseball size balls for 5 tosses and ends with 5 golf ball size balls.

Another drill to improve concentration keeping hands back and reaction time is this one

H Drill 19 - Player assumes batting position with tosser positioned 10 ft away and astride of and in front of the player. Most of the time a net is used in this drill and the tosser stands aside of it. Tossers tosses two colors of whiffle balls at the same time calling the color the batter is to hit. A variation of this would be to call the live color and only use one ball at a time the batter must load and stride on the dead color opening their hips and keeping their hands back. For the live color they would swing away. Coaches should watch for form and correct mechanics.

To work on reaction time use this soft toss drill.

H Drill 20– Player assumes their batting stance coach places a chair outside the swing zone at front of plate. Coach stands on chair and with arm extended drops the ball. The player must keep their head down chin on shoulder looking for the ball in the strike zone and then hit the ball into the net. Coaches can use various size balls to increase batters concentration. Coaches need to make sure the batter doesn't bend at the hip or knees in excess to give them extra time to catch up to the ball.

To build the players patience to wait on pitches try this drill.

H Drill 21– Player assumes their batting stance tosser stands 6 ft behind the batter and pitches over the plate, the batter starts by watching the tosser and hitting the ball as it crosses the front part of the plate. After 5 pitches the batter must put their head down looking across the plate not at the tosser and wait for the pitch across the plate before swing and hitting the ball using their normal swing. You can use different size balls to increase difficulty and concentration on this drill. Coaches should watch form offering feedback on hands back turning on the ball and driving it.

Bunting

Part of hitting in softball is learning not only to hit the ball on a line, but to softly receive it with a bunt. We will use the bunt as part of our game to advance runners and to get infield hits.

You start the bunt from your batting stance. When the pitcher gets into her set position (both hands together) or starts her windup you get into your bunting stance. There are two stances the first is the square stance and the second is the pivot. You will need to learn both and you can use the one you feel most

comfortable with.

Stances

To square up your stance from your batting stance take a step forward with your back foot as it is even with your front foot along the batters box line nearest to home plate. Your front foot then steps to the side so that you are facing the pitcher, so that you are “squared up” to bunt.

For the pivot position your feet stay in your batter’s stance. When the pitcher sets or starts her windup then you pivot (turn on the ball of your foot) on your back foot keeping your knees bent and your weight centered in your stance. Your front foot will pivot 45 degrees. This will square your shoulders to the pitcher, but you won’t be facing her directly.

Grip and bat position

As you are getting into your bunt stance your bat comes around and your top hand moves up the bat to the part where the bat starts getting fat. But instead of putting your hand around the bat where your fingers are up front you will hold the backside of the bat like you were pinching it. Your bottom hand will then be about 6 inches from the bottom of the bat with your fingers wrapped around it.

Now you are facing the pitcher you have a grip but you also have to have the bat in the right position. The large end of the bat should be facing out and slightly up. Your head should be about 12 inches from the bat looking out towards the pitcher. The bat is held at the top of the strike zone. Now your bat is offered out there but what if the ball is not in the strike zone? You need to pull the bat back to your batters stance over your back shoulder if the ball is low, in the dirt or above your bat that you are holding at the top of the strike zone. If you don’t then you have placed your bat in play and the umpire will call a strike. If the ball is below the bat in the strike zone how do you get it? Always bend your knees to get to the ball, never move your hands and bat. The best balls to bunt are the low ones because the ball will go straight down. High balls have a tendency to be popped up in the air with a better chance of being caught.

Opposite of hitting in bunting you are catching the ball with the end of your bat. Your arms should be extended about 12 inches from your body. Instead of swinging you catch the ball with the bat and let your hands and the bat go back towards you body a little. This cause’s the ball to drop dead just like it would if you were catching it with your glove and it bounced back out. Now we don’t want to bunt the ball straight back to the pitcher, we want to put it close to the first or third base line. So how do we do that? If you push the bottom of the bat out slightly towards the pitcher the ball will go down the first base side. If you’re pushing the top of the bat slightly towards the pitcher then the ball will go down the third base side. The thing about bunting and running to first is that you bunt first make sure you make contact then run as fast as you can to first base. If you try to move towards first too soon you will bunt the ball foul and the defense will have a chance to adjust to your bunt on the next pitch.

H Drill 22 – Get in your stance and have someone soft toss whiffle balls or tennis balls and practice your stance, bat position, bending your knees to get to your pitch and letting the bat go dead on contact.

H Drill 23 - Draw sections in the dirt in front of home plate or use a rope to define the sections. Indoors you can tape off sections. In each section, write a number representing a point value based on what the coach considers the perfect bunt. Either soft toss or pitch to the batter and based on where the ball stops the batter is given the total points from 10 balls and at the end of the drill the girl with the most points is declared the winner.

Troubleshooting Hitting – Make sure the Mechanics are right

1. Stance

- Are the feet no wider then the shoulders? - Does the batter have knees bent slightly? - Is their weight on the balls of their feet?

2. Grip

- Are the batter's knuckles lined up?
- Is the bat on the pad of the hand vs. the palm? -Is the bat being held too tight

3. Bat and arm position

- Are the elbows along a line?
- Are the elbows pointing down?
- Are the hands 6-8 inches from the chest?
- Is the bat at no more then 45-degree angle?

4. Swing

- Is the last thing to move their hands
- Do their hands and bat knob go to the ball or do they cast out or drop down
- Do they keep their palms in proper position - upper down lower up until they turn over?
- Are they opening up their hips to the pitcher?

5. Head position

- Do they soft and hard focus on the pitcher?
- Does their head start on the front shoulder and end on the back?
- Are they looking down the barrel of the bat at the point of contact with the ball?

Troubleshooting Hitting – Coaching solutions

Issue	Resolution	Drill(s)
Chopping at ball	1) Drop rear elbow 2) equal use of top and bottom hand 3) Full arm extension and finish swing	5,8,9,20
Hitching	1) Move hands back in stance	7,19
Late Swing	1) Use lighter bat 2) Pick up ball off pitchers hip 3) Start hands sooner to ball 4) Choke up on bat	1,2,3,4,20
Lunging at ball	1) Keep weight back 2) Less bend in front knee 3) Keep chin on shoulder over toes	2,21
Overstridding	1) Use slide step to shorten slide 2) Practice with rubber tubing between legs to restrict movement 3) Use balloon or partly inflated volleyball held between legs to develop muscle memory	12,13
Stepping in the Bucket	1) Inward turn on pitcher set position 2) Keep weigh on balls of feet 3) Stride towards pitcher	12,18,20,21

Trouble seeing ball	1) Focus on pitchers hip when at set 2) Practice using both eyes 3) Keep head still throughout swing 4) slow stride towards pitcher	1,2,3
Pulling head out	1) Keep weight on balls of feet 2) Practice finishing swing from front to rear shoulder	18,19,20,21
Upper Cutting ball	1) Keep elbows and shoulders level 2) Use more top hand	6,8,9
Weight back on heels	1) Keeps weight on heels by bending knees and slight bend of the waist 2) Place a 1x2 section of board under heels during tee drills	18,19,20,21
Limit use of wrist	1) Check alignment of knuckles	8,9
Casting	1) Check that hands are going to ball	4,5
Not shifting weight from back to front leg	1) Check stance, weight on balls of feet	14,15,16,17
Not finishing swing	1) Check knuckle alignment	8,9, 10,11