

Coaching from the Coaches Box

As coaches, we want our players to excel at the plate but are we hindering their ability to perform by using the phrases at the plate? We all have heard the sayings: “Get your hands up!”, “Get your back elbow up!”, “Get your foot down early!” “Hands to the ball!” or protect the plate. Then have the question - Why does it look like my player is thinking at the plate? That is a great question but realizing that what you are saying could be the reason why. Below, we will go over the how these sayings can affect your hitter and how to approach them the right way.

“Get your hands up” and “Get your back elbow up!”

These saying are heard when the coach and/or parent believes the player has their hands/elbows to low or dropping their hands before he/she swings. This is something that can ultimately change their timing, swing plane, and ability to hit the ball. When a hitter is at the plate, they should be in a comfortable position. Every hitter has their own unique stance and no one starts exactly the same way. Look at the difference in Bryce Harper – Washington Nationals, Anthony Rizzo – Chicago Cubs, and Dustin Pedroia – Boston Redsox.

It is best to work on mechanics in practice Give them external cues while they are at the plate during the game like – see ball hit ball or drive it up the middle.



“Be loaded on your back hip”, “Hands to the ball” and “Squish the bug”

These three sayings seem to make sense in the grand scheme of things, but they actually are taking some of the power away from the hitting. As your son or daughter starts to play more and get stronger and you get a picture of them at the point of contact, you will notice something if you look close enough at their back foot. It is off the ground. Now, you are probably thinking – “how is that possible?” By driving their momentum from their back hip towards the picture and transferring all their weight into a firm from leg and rotating upper body causes this amazing feat. You will see this in the picture of Albert Pujols below. Also, if you notice in the picture, Pujols is compact and hands close to the body.

The last saying of “squish the bug” is teaching the hitting to spin off the ball or in a circle. This hurts the hitting in the fact that they will be able to hit very well to all fields and their momentum is going around rather than right back at the pitcher. Work on having your hitter drive to the back knee towards the pitcher.

This is very similar to the previous section, where we want the hitters to focus on hitting and not the mechanics of the swing. Giving them external cues versus specific mechanical flaws will help them hit freely at the plate.



“Get your foot down early”

While your son or daughter may be strong and able to hit the ball to the outfield by getting their foot down early. They are actually stopping and trying to get their momentum going again during their swing. As a hitter, you want your foot to land shortly after the pitcher has released the ball to deliver maximum damage to the ball coming in.

Where a hitter can maximize the use of their load and momentum moving towards the picture is on the on-deck circle. The hitting can you this time to work on his load and stride with the picture. This allows the hitter to focus on getting his front foot down on time with the pitcher’s delivery. By working on this before he gets to the plate will help the hitter be able to just focus on seeing ball and hitting it since he/she knows that they have the timing they need to hit this pitcher.

“Protect the plate”

As in many sports, defense is a great thing to be good at except at the plate. Protecting the plate is a defensive phrase, but why would we want to be defensive when we are up to bat? When we are up to bat, we are on offense and want to score runs. The best advice for hitting with two strikes is to hit the ball hard and battle close pitches. A great phrase to use here is to hit the ball hard and battle. This can exuberate the hitter with confidence, but also make sure you have positive body language while saying it. This can be helpful in the sense if the hitter can see and hear the confidence you have in them with two strikes.

Final food for thought

In any sport or job, we do, we want to maximize our potential when we are focusing on one thing at a time. We want to help give our players confidence when they are up to the plate. We can do this by using basic phrases or external cues. A few examples are: drive the ball up the middle, see ball-hit ball, or battle. By using the phrase “see ball, hit ball” as an example, this allows the hitter’s mind to be free from all other thoughts and only focusing hitting the ball. They are not thinking about are my hands in the right position, is my back elbow up, or am I getting my foot down early. They can just be a hitter and hit the ball with authority.

