

Baseball Hitting Tips and Mechanics

What does it take to be a great hitter?

It's obvious Edgar Martinez, Tony Gwynn, and George Brett have all discovered the answer.

What about the rest of us? How do we maximize our potential and become great hitters?

Be Willing To Try Things Out

Since you love playing baseball, your goal is to become a better hitter. Everyone has an opinion, and everyone will give you advice and hitting tips. Whether qualified or not many people believe they are qualified to provide hitting instruction. Your job is to take all the advice and weed out everything that doesn't fit your hitting style. How do you know what to weed out? There are certain fundamentals common to all good hitters. Use those fundamentals as your building blocks, then be open to other advice. Try out different ways of hitting, different stances, different approaches, different hitting drills. If something works for you, keep it; if it doesn't, throw it out. Analyze your strengths and weaknesses, incorporate these into how you practice, and how you approach each at bat. If you want to be a great hitter, there's no substitute for desire and hard work, both mentally and physically. Don't be satisfied with a certain average or other statistics. There's always something that can be improved.

Hitting Instruction

As a coach, one of your jobs is to improve the hitting on your team.

It's said that hitting a baseball is the most difficult skill in all sports; not surprisingly, giving hitting instruction is also one of the most difficult skills a coach has to learn. Teaching baseball hitting is difficult because every player is different in the many combination of skills required to hit a baseball. While teaching infield or outfield skills, you can run the same drills and teach everyone uniformly. However, with hitting, each player will require his own set of instructions and hitting drills to maximize his/her understanding and potential. Like hitting itself, teaching hitting will require a lot of hard work and study. Too many coaches want to apply a cookie cutter approach to hitting instruction. That approach will not work since every player has his own style at the plate. Watch a single Major League Baseball game and you'll see a wide variety of hitting styles and approaches. As a coach you're going to have to be able to differentiate the aspects of hitting for each player and apply changes to help that particular aspect of the swing.

The first piece of advice would be to avoid drastic changes in a player's hitting style until you know what that player can and can't do. Except for very young players, they're hitting the way they are for a reason. If you change them right away, you won't know why they had adopted the style they had.

For example: I saw a coach who in the first practice noticed that a player was hitting with a very open stance. The player was struggling during batting practice to make contact. The coach believed that a square or slightly closed stance was better. Immediately he changed the player's stance. What he didn't know and didn't take time to find out was the player's dominant eye was his right eye. He had developed an open stance over time in order to be able to see the ball better. Now there are many great players at all levels that hit with an open stance, but for some reason this coach wanted to mold everyone into the stance he believed to be the best. This particular hitter couldn't hit well with that stance and struggled for the early part of the season before he finally abandoned the coach's instructions and went back to an open stance.

So what are the morals of the story? Here are a few.

Be Open Minded When You Work on Hitting With a Player

Why would a player like that stance? Not sure, ask him.

Take Your Time As You Work On Hitting With A Player

Many times coaches feel like they have to have the answer immediately. When a player struggles, the coach may feel the need to correct the problem. It can't always be done; actually, it almost never can be done as quickly as the coach would like. Analyze the problem. Assume that what you perceive as the problem isn't the problem. What else is the player doing that could cause the problem? In the example above, the player may not have been tracking the ball, may have been too far away from the plate, may have been just too rusty.

This is a good time to talk about video taping your hitters. If you don't videotape your hitters, you're missing out on one of the best ways to figure out how to turn them into good hitters. Tape hitters, analyze the tapes, and

then review the tape with the player. Often players can't feel that they are doing something wrong. You may tell them that they are dropping their hands below the waist before the swing, but they won't feel it. Videotapes don't lie. You can show them exactly what their swing looks like and come up with some drills to make modifications.

Before you get worried that you have to come up with different strategies for each hitter, there is some good news. There are certain fundamentals that are shared by good hitters. A coach often falls into the trap of being too concerned with what a hitter is doing before the ball is even pitched and not enough attention to what the hitter is doing after the ball is released from the pitchers hand.

When you learn the fundamentals that are shared by good hitters, you'll be able to take that videotape of your hitters and make very small changes necessary to turn a hitter around. Don't try to change everything at once. Make small adjustments and have the player practice that new skill until it's natural. Then move on.

In the next few pages, we'll cover the fundamentals of good hitting. Often we'll give a variety of different methods. Hopefully this will provide you with the necessary information to help you help your players.

Baseball Hitting Drills

There are many good hitting drills that you can use in our [HYPERLINK "http://www.qcbaseball.com/drills/baseball_drills1.aspx"](http://www.qcbaseball.com/drills/baseball_drills1.aspx) [baseball drills](#) section.

Baseball Hitting - Selecting a Bat

Try Different Brands and Sizes of Bats

When you select a bat, make sure you select one you can handle with confidence. During one of the first practices, many players will grab a bat that initially feels good or that some other player likes and will use that bat the entire year. However, players should hit with a number of different bats during practice to determine what bat gives them the correct feel.

Length, Weight, Bat Drop

Many charts, used to determine proper bat size, use player weight and height to determine the proper bat length. While these two factors are important, other characteristics are missing. The bat length, weight, grip, brand, and whether the player likes to choke up on the bat are all important factors when determining whether a bat has a good feel in the players hand.

Bat drop is the difference between the length and weight of the bat. A 30"/18oz. bat has a bat drop of -12. A 30"/23oz. bat has a bat drop of -7. The higher the bat drop the easier it is to swing and the more you will pay for the bat. When purchasing a bat it can be an important factor in determining the size to purchase. A player may not be able to use a 30"/23oz., but may be fine with a 30"/18oz. If you are going to purchase a lower drop, be aware that the player may need a shorter bat.

Choking up will also have an effect on the bat size you will want to purchase. A player that chokes up an inch will be able to handle a longer bat than a player that doesn't.

The table below will give you a general idea based on height and weight of what size bat would work. In addition you must take into account the other information described above in picking out a bat.

Here are a couple of examples to give you an idea (chart is colored in to show where the range would fall):

Age: 10

Height: **4'9"**

Weight: **74 pounds** Age: 7

Height: **4'2"**

Weight: **59 pounds**

For the 10 year old, the chart shows that he could probably handle a 30" bat. If he chokes up and has a bat with a big bat drop, -12 for example, he might be more comfortable with a 31" bat. I would error on the side of going with the smaller bat if in doubt. If you were looking at a -7 drop and he didn't choke up you may want to

move down to a 29" inch bat.

For the 7 year old, the chart shows that a 29" bat would be the correct size, but most people don't want to spend a lot of money for a bat for a 7 year old. This means the bat drop will most likely be lower and you may want to move to a 28" bat.

Determine Your Bat Length by Weight and Height

height3'-3'4"3'5"-3'9"3'10"-4'4'1"-4'4'4'5"-4'8"4'9"-5'5'1"-5'4"5'5"-5'8"5'9"-6'6'1"+weight

Bat length			
< 6026"27"	29"61-7027"27"	30"30"71-8028"28"	81-9028"29"29"30"30"31"32"91-10028"29"30"30"31"31"32"101-11029"29"30"30"31"31"32"111-12029"29"30"30"31"31"32"121-13029"29"30"30"31"32"33"33"131-14029"30"30"31"31"32"33"33"141-15030"30"31"31"32"33"33"151-16030"31"31"32"32"33"33"161-17031"31"32"32"33"33"34"171-18032"33"33"34"34"180+33"33"34"34"

Aluminum Or Wood?

If you coach a youth team, this may not be an issue as many youth leagues no longer allow wood bats to be used.

Older players often believe that wood bats can give them an edge; (they watch major league players hit home runs with wood bats). With all bat characteristics being equal (except for type), aluminum bats do provide more power than wood bats. But, even though I wouldn't stock wood bats in the team bag each year, I also wouldn't discourage players from using a wood bat if they like them.

Should Players Wear Batting Gloves When Hitting?

As with the selection of a bat, all players are different. Some will like the feeling of the glove(s) and some will prefer the feel of the bat without the gloves. As a coach, I would encourage rather than discourage the use of batting gloves. The simple reason is one of comfort. Hitters may develop blisters on their hands from constant motion and swinging; wearing batting gloves can protect against the development or continued irritation of blisters.

Hitting Approach

Know Yourself

How do you step in the box?

Many players don't get prepared for an at bat until they slip on a helmet. Getting ready to hit at any at bat must first start during practice. We're not talking about the mechanics of the swing (which will be discussed later), but as a hitter, you must know your strengths and weaknesses.

Possible Strengths/Weaknesses:

Quick or slow bat?

Tough time handling the inside heat?

Tough time with breaking pitches?

Uncertain about personal strike zone?

When you know your strengths and weaknesses, you can incorporate them into your approach at the plate.

This process is not only important during practice but it's essential to recognize during each at bat in order to be successful.

Know Your Opponent

Players should study the opposing pitcher prior to the game, during between inning warmups, and while he is pitching to other hitters.

Things to look for:

What pitches is he throwing?

How is his control?

What pitches is he throwing for strikes?

What pitches does he seem to struggle?

What type of delivery does he have?

What are his strengths?

Strategy

Apply what you observe and develop a plan for this particular pitcher. For instance, perhaps he primarily throws fastballs; while you hit fastballs well, he throws hard and you have difficulty getting around on a hard inside fastball. Knowing this, your plan may be to look for a fastball middle or away, trying to drive it up the middle or take it the other way. If he throws a fastball inside, take the pitch until you have two strikes. By doing this you will swing at fastballs that you know you can handle, and you won't be striding too early because you're worried about getting around on the inside heat. This also has the added bonus of allowing you to adjust to his off-speed pitches.

Don't be afraid of going deep into the count or of striking out.

Know The Situation

Great players (notice we didn't say hitters) always know the game situation and what they need to do to help their team in a particular situation. It really comes down to your willingness to sacrifice stats for the team when the situation dictates. This may entail laying down a sacrifice bunt or moving a runner forward by hitting behind him or taking a strike so a baserunner can try to get into scoring position by stealing second.

The game situation may fit with your strategy that you are using against this pitcher or it may dictate that you try something else. Make sure you have taken everything into account when you approach the plate. Each team gets a limited number of outs during a game; don't waste this one.

Be A Tough Out

No matter what the strategy, situation, or the pitcher, always strive to be a tough out. This means you battle when you are at the plate. You don't swing at bad pitches. You foul off tough pitches. To be a tough out, you need to take a different approach when you have two strikes on you. The main thing you want to do is shorten your swing slightly. It doesn't mean that you won't swing hard, but it does mean that your swing is taken down a notch. This allows you to wait a split second longer before committing.

Gripping The Bat

Loosen Up

Tension is your worst enemy when it comes to a fluid swing. Tension throughout the body is often the direct result of gripping the bat incorrectly. A player with a relaxed grip on the bat will be able to react faster and wait longer on a pitch than a player with a death grip on the bat. You want to be relaxed in the box; this starts when you pick up the bat.

Pick It Up Like An Ax

Many players will hold the bat back in their hands. Doing this causes a couple of problems.

A decrease in flexibility.

A tendency to tighten your grip. When you hold the bat in the palm of your hands and tighten your grip, your entire body can tighten up. The end result is a negative effect on your swing.

The proper way to hold the bat is out on the fingers. Pick the bat up like an ax. Once you get the bat in your hands, keep it in your fingers. Your middle knuckles will naturally line up when you pick up the bat this way. Some players leave their knuckles in this alignment and some will close their knuckles slightly. Make sure you don't close the knuckles too far; you could lose the ability to use your wrists during your swing. Closing your knuckles also may increase the likelihood that bat will end up in the palm of your hands and not in your fingers.

Keep Loose

Once you are in your stance, make sure you don't tighten up your grip. If this is difficult, you may want to do something to help yourself to keep your grip loose. For instance, you can lay the bat back slightly but keep it out in your fingers. To do this, you have to have a loose grip on the bat. You can also move your fingers on and off the bat.

Whatever mechanism you use to keep your hands relaxed, make sure it is comfortable and does not disrupt your concentration on the pitcher. If you're worried about throwing the bat or losing your grip, don't. Once you start your swing, your hands will naturally tighten up on the bat and you will be in control.

Hitting Stance

Stepping Into The Batters Box

Comfort, confidence, and balance! You need all three of these characteristics when you step into the box to hit.

Confidence begins when you step into the box. Do it with a sense of purpose; dig your back foot in and let the opposing pitcher that you're there to battle.

Comfort and balance depend on your stance and how you prepare to hit the ball. If you're not comfortable, you won't be relaxed. When working on your stance, strive for a position that comfortably puts you in a balanced position to hit.

Location In The Batters Box

The first priority when getting into your stance is to make sure you have good plate coverage. Have a method for determining this for each at bat. During practice, have someone watch you take some practice swings from in front of the mound. Simulate swinging at an outside pitch. Is your bat covering the outside corner? Adjust your distance to the plate so you have the correct distance.

Create a method for measuring that distance. Many players tap the plate with their bat the same way each time they get into the box. If the bat hits the same part of the plate each time, then they know the distance is correct.

Depth

While every player wants good plate coverage, the depth you stand in the box is more a matter of preference. If you stand deep in the box (towards the catcher), you may have more time to wait on a fastball, but you may find it more difficult to hit breaking pitches. By standing forward in the box, you may be able to catch the breaking pitch early but it will be more difficult to get around on a good fastball.

What's the right position for you? Analyze your strengths and weaknesses to help you decide. But, wherever you stand make sure you feel confident in that position. Most big league hitters tend to stand toward the back of the box. You, like most of them, may find the extra time to react is important.

Open, Closed Or Square Batting Stance

Most hitting coaches claim that the best stance for hitting is a square stance -- where your feet are parallel to the plate. This stance puts your body in the best position to coil, stride, and swing.

However, there are other stances and you have to decide what works best for you. Try to avoid radical stances at the plate, experiment with stances that give you the ability to make a smooth coil (discussed later) to get into the launching position.

Weight and Hands

When you get into your stance, your weight should be slightly back, but not completely on the back leg. Have your hands near the top of the strike zone. Many players prefer to have their hands slightly off the back shoulder. Since you want to swing the bat on a slightly downward plane, having your hands off your shoulder puts them in the best position for swinging the bat.

The Pitch

Picking Up The Ball

Coaches always tell their players to watch the ball all the way to the bat. But, where should you pick up the ball as it comes in? If you don't pick the ball up as soon as it leaves the pitcher's hand, then you reduce the time you have to react and may miss early indicators of the type of pitch being thrown.

There are a number of ways to pick the pitch up out of the pitcher's hand.

You can follow the throwing arm of the pitcher all the way through the motion.

Draw an imaginary box around the delivery area. Focus on the box rather than the pitching motion and pick up the ball as it enters the box.

Pick a spot on the pitcher's body and focus on the location of the delivery of the ball. For some pitchers, this location may be the bill of the cap. Focus on that spot until the pitcher's hand comes into the imaginary box discussed above and then switch your eyes over to the ball. This method allows you to keep your eyes focused at the same distance as the mound.

Pitch Recognition

As a hitter, you can gain an advantage if you can correctly predict which pitch the pitcher plans on throwing. You can often determine what the pitch is by the way the ball comes out of the pitcher's hand.

For example, a fastball comes straight out of the pitcher's hand where a curveball pops out above the hand. To determine these pitches, stand behind a backstop and concentrate on the pitcher's release point. While this takes practice to perfect, you will become a more patient hitter who can better predict the pitches thrown your direction.

Arm position can also determine the pitch, especially a pitcher who has a three-quarter arm motion. For these pitchers, they need to get on top of their curveball and often throw pitches with their arm in a higher position than when they throw a fastball.

Let's go back to the imaginary box example. If you focus in on the box and you know the fastball comes from the middle of the box and the curve comes from the top of the box, you will recognize right away when a curveball is being thrown.

Stride

Coil

Timing and good weight transfer are essential to good hitting. One mechanism to help achieve both is the coil. As the pitcher starts his delivery, you will want to move your weight back on to the back leg, closing your shoulder, hips, and knee. This is also the point when you want to move the bat into the launching position. When the coil is complete you are in the correct position to stride.

Stride

One of the most common mistakes made by hitters at all levels is having the stride be part of the swing. In fact, hitters should perform the stride before the swing.

During the stride, you shouldn't transfer your weight from the back leg to the front. Hitters that transfer their weight have a difficult time handling off-speed pitches. (Looks like lunging at the pitch.)

You may notice that a number of big league players do have the stride as part of their swing. The key for these hitters is the big leg kick, which acts as a timing device and doesn't result in the transfer of weight. Instead of picking their foot up and moving it forward, they're picking up their foot and holding it until they recognize the pitch. If they read fastball, they drop their leg quickly and swing. If they read off-speed pitch, they simply hold it there a little longer before putting it down.

How Do You Stride While Keeping Your Weight Back?

The key is to stride out with the inside portion of your front foot. One way to think of it is to act like your striding onto a dozen eggs and you don't want to break those eggs. By doing that you will keep your weight back. Make sure you stride with your front foot closed. If you open up your front foot towards the pitcher, you will also open up your hips which will cause a loss of power when you do swing.

Swing

The pitch is on the way, you've coiled and taken your stride and now you're ready to swing. The first thing to realize is that your swing should not be driven by your arms, but by your legs and hips. We'll take a look at each area of your body and follow it through the swing.

Legs

As your weight moves forward from your back leg to your front leg, your back foot will pivot towards the pitcher

and your knee will turn in. The front foot will not pivot and you will want to keep that leg stiff. It's not necessary to keep it completely straight, but you don't want to flex it as you transfer your weight. (This can cause your head to drop as you tracking the ball.)

Hips

While you pivot on your back foot, you also will open up your hips. The degree to which you open your hips depends on the location of the pitch. On inside pitches, you need to completely open the hips to get your hands through right next to your body. On outside pitches, you have to keep your hips more closed to get your hands out and drive the ball the other direction. An important point on feel for the player: It should feel as if the back hip is driving the hips open, not the front hip pulling the hips open. It may seem like a subtle difference, but a player that is pulling open will often start by pulling his front shoulder open. This can cause all types of problems.

Your legs and hips are going to drive your swing and provide power. Work hard on both of these and you will see a difference in the batting cage and on the field.

Arms And Hands

When you begin your swing, you want your hands to be at the top of the strike zone. Any lower and you will be swinging up at a high strike. This most likely will result in a fly ball or pop-up.

To have a quick bat, you must start your swing by bringing your hands through close to your body. On inside pitches, your hands stay closer to your body longer than on outside pitches. Remember to extend the bat towards the ball just before contact. If you extend the bat too soon, you will slow down your swing. As you make contact with the ball, your bottom hand should be palm down and your upper hand should be palm up. This means that you haven't yet rolled your wrists over. Rolling your wrists happens naturally after hitting the ball. Concentrate on driving through the baseball. Sometimes players are in such a hurry to start running that they actually start slowing down their swing before contact. Hit the ball hard first, then run. As your hands continue forward and your wrists roll over, it's natural to let you top hand come off the bat. This allows you to continue with a good follow through on your swing.