

Soft Tap

Enlist the help of your father, mother, brother or a friend.

You will need a whiffle ball or other soft ball. Have your training partner toss the ball up softly in front of you.

From a good, fundamentally sound batting stance, try to hit the ball with the knob of your bat. Take the knob of the bat directly at the ball and just tap it. Be sure to incorporate your lower body action into the drill.

Repeat until you are proficient and are using smooth, rhythmic motions to the ball.

If you have a small enough bat available, you can progress in this drill to one handed soft toss. Alternating your top hand drill and bottom hand drill, discussed above,

while incorporating the action of striking a softly tossed ball into the drill. This is an excellent training method and will develop tremendously active hands through the hitting zone as well as improve your hand-eye coordination

The result will be pure striking of the ball at the optimum point of impact. Something every hitter strives for.

Fence Drill



The next logical drill to reinforce the proper hand action is swinging the bat with both hands. Here is a drill that will help you to get the right feel for the proper path of the bat to the hitting zone. Remember, all of the essential fundamentals discussed earlier must be adhered to; grip, stance, pre-swing, rhythm, etc., during these drills. Stand facing a fence, holding your back arm straight out so that the tip of your fingers just touch the fence. Now, with bat in hand and utilizing the proper fundamentals, swing the bat through the hitting zone, concentrating on taking your hands "to the ball". The tip of the bat should not hit the fence. If it does, you will get immediate negative feedback. Hitting the fence is a result of "casting" or

"sweeping" your hands through the hitting zone. Take the hands directly at the ball (an inside path), then be sure to "squash the bug," hit against a stiff front side, and bring the wrist action into the swing. Finish high and over the front shoulder, your belly button facing the imaginary pitcher.

Remember, every time you swing the bat, swing it correctly.

Muscle memory is powerful, use it to your advantage. Make your muscles remember a perfect swing when you practice and come game time, when your muscles are "reacting," your swing will be functional, beautiful to watch, and fundamentally sound. Perfect practice, makes perfect.



Chair Drill



There's one more drill to emphasize the importance of the hands to the ball. This drill can be incorporated with a soft toss, if you choose, but is very effective even without the luxury of hitting a ball during the drill. Find yourself an old plastic chair, or a bucket with a lid, and sit on it. Lock your ankles around the legs of the chair or base of the bucket. This is to anchor yourself into the chair. We want to eliminate the lower body action in this drill. The only thing moving will be from the waist up. Take your bat and get in the hitting position. If you have the luxury of a practice partner, have him toss a ball up into the hitting zone. Take your hands directly at the ball, concentrating on the proper wrist action into and through the hitting zone. Finish high and over the shoulder.

The Soft-Toss Drill



The soft-toss may be used to work on pulling the ball, it can also be used for hitting the opposite way. The "tossler" must be a safe distance to the rear of the hitter. The hitter must not peak. The "tossler" tosses the ball from the inside of the plate diagonally across to the outside. The hitter picks up the ball with his peripheral vision and "tracks" the ball with both his body and his eyes to the hitting zone. As soon as the hitter sees the ball come into his view, he follows it with his body by taking a stride toward the opposite field side of second base. He pushes off with his rear foot but does not squash the bug (Photo to the Left).

When the ball reaches the hitting zone, he swings with a quick bat and "strokes" the ball the other way. Throw your hands at the ball. On the follow through the hitter should drop to his back knee to emphasize the importance of not squashing or rotating the back hip.



Inside-Outside Tee



The use of an "inside-outside" tee is invaluable in learning to hit the ball the opposite way and/or pulling the ball. To properly set up this drill, place the ball on the "inside," approximately 8-10" in front of the plate and the ball on the "outside," right on the outside edge of the front corner.

The "inside" ball should be about 4-5" higher than the outside ball.

The hitter gets in a fundamentally sound batting stance and begins his "pre-swing," cocking his hands and body in preparation to hit the ball wherever it is "pitched." His

training partner then announces "inside" or "outside." The batter attacks the appropriate ball using all of the aforementioned techniques.



For the "inside" ball, the keys would be to hit off a stiff front side and get good rotation of the rear foot with a balanced follow through (Right Photo). For the "outside" pitch, the hitter must concentrate on stepping to the opposite field side of second base, lifting the heel (but not rotating the back side). Taking a smooth, quick swing at the ball with the hands on the inside of the ball, and dropping to the rear knee to emphasize the non-rotation of the hip.

THE ROLLY-POLLY

This simple little drill is an outstanding tool to help the player to make more consistent contact with the baseball. Designed to ingrain the proper path for the lead hand to attack the ball, it also develops proper top hand action. When correctly employed, the drill helps the hitter to understand the role of each hand during the swing. A hands only drill, the drill promotes active hands and wrists in the hitters swing. As you will see, the player also gets instruction on when to hit the pitch in relation to the pitch location; inside, outside or middle. To add even further instruction into one drill, the player gets feedback on where the bat strikes the ball; top, middle or bottom. All in all, this is an outstanding hitting drill and one which is not well known or practiced.

The "pitcher" will need a fence or "L" screen to protect himself for this drill. The player gets on both knees. By being on both knees the lower half of the body is virtually eliminated in the swing. This is important because the hands do need to be separated in drills in order to ingrain the proper muscle memory for their actions. The pitcher situates himself behind the "L" screen approximately 10 feet from the hitter. The pitcher then rolls the ball toward the center of the strike zone. The hitter "takes the knob of the bat directly toward the ball" (bottom hand leads). As the ball reaches the "hitting zone" the hitter then "directs" the head of the bat with the top hand (top hand directs) and strikes the ball. Immediate feedback is generated from each swing. If the bat strikes the ground first this is an indication that the bat-head is leveling out too soon. This is a major cause of pop-ups in real play. The player must make the adjustment with his top hand. If the ball is struck but rolls along the ground, or bounces away, the player has hit too much of the top of the ball. Again, the player must make the top hand adjustment. Ideally, the player will hit the center of the ball and the result will be a line drive slightly off the ground and headed sharply toward the pitcher. As you can see the drill is essentially three components; 1) the bottom hand must lead the bat to the ball 2) the top hand must direct the head of the bat to the ball 3) the player must strike the proper portion of the ball to be successful. Three tremendously important facets of hitting are rolled into one simple drill!

The player can take the drill even further by having the pitcher roll the ball to the outside portion of the plate or to the inside portion. These are outstanding variations of the "NOW" drill seen elsewhere on this site. The player must "wait", "wait", "wait" for the outside ball to roll into the "hitting" zone and then accelerate the hands to strike the ball. Wait, Wait, Wait... Accelerate! This is the proper approach for hitting to the opposite field AND for hitting off-speed pitches and curveballs. On the contrary, the pitch rolled to the inside of the plate requires the player to get started early enough to get the bat-head into the hitting zone. The roly-polly drill has many uses and can assist a hitter with several aspects of the swing. It can help you to BeABetterHitter.

POWER BAT DRILL



The purpose of the Power Bat Drill for a baseball player is much the same as a boxer using a heavy bag to train with. Boxers learn how to develop power in their punch by trying to power through the 120-200lb heavy bag. Baseball players learn to develop power in their swing by hitting through a heavier object than a normal 5oz baseball. The result is the same for both athletes... increased power through the

point of contact! For a boxer, that means more of a chance to knock his opponent out. For a baseball player it means more of a chance to knock the ball out of the park!!



Tools you will need:

- A Batting Tee
- A plunger
- A flat soccer or basketball
- A hitting net
- A bat
- A winning attitude



Here is how the program works:

- Place the plunger handle into the batting tee.
- Place the flat soccer (different sizes for different age groups) or flat basketball (high school and above) onto the plunger.
- Execute your normal swing repeatedly

What you will see is that with the first few swings the barrel of the bat will stutter through the impact zone. By "stutter" I mean that it will decelerate at the point of impact for a fraction of a second before resuming its speed to the finishing position. The goal is for the hitter to strike the much heavier ball without having the bat

decelerate at the impact point. This takes proper technique and explosion at the point of impact to achieve.

Study the sequence of photos. Notice the balanced loading, the knob of the bat directing to the ball, the tucked rear elbow, the top hand "up" and bottom hand "down" at (and through) the point of impact, the acceleration "through" the ball and finally, the balanced finish in the swing. I encourage a finish that is shoulder height or lower which tends to promote a flatter path of the barrel through the zone.



Encourage the player to concentrate on the proper mechanics and not concern himself with launching the ball. Proper mechanics will accelerate the bat head sufficiently to power



through the heavier ball. The flight path of the ball should be level (or very slightly higher than chest high) into the hitting net. A properly struck ball will have "12 to 6" rotation. When this same type of contact is conducted on a 9" and 5oz. baseball, the "12 to 6" rotation will result in rocket line drives that soar over the outfielder's heads in a heart beat!

Power is all about bat speed at impact, not the size of the player. This drill will increase the power at impact if it is

used on a regular basis. When the player looks like he is powering through the ball with too much ease, increase the size and weight of the ball he is striking. Remember to always use a flat ball for this drill.

This Power Bat Drill can transform the lightest of lightweights on your team into big time Heavy Hitters on the ball field. I hope it helps you to BeABetterHitter.



SHADOW DRILL



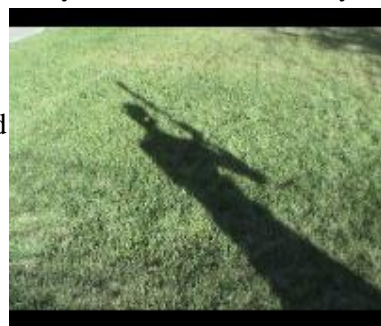
Purpose: To determine the degree of head movement in the baseball swing.

We all know how difficult it is to hit a baseball. Every hitting instructor worth his salt acknowledges the importance of a steady head during the swing. The reason is simple: The eyes are the source of information for the body. The information we see (the approaching pitch) must be as accurate as possible in order for us to put an accurate swing on the pitch. If we have excessive head movement then the information we receive will be distorted and therefore an accurate barrel to the incoming pitch will be nearly

impossible to achieve.

A good analogy for head movement is this; Pretend that your head is a camera, your body is the tripod and your eyes are the lens! Ideally, we 'take pictures' of the pitch as it approaches the plate. If the camera (head) is moving all over the place, the (eyes) will take a blurry picture. Keep a steady head and the body under the head during the swing.

Of course, a key point here is that if the player is over-swinging (swinging with all of his/her might) pitch, more than likely he/she will have excessive movement. It is extremely difficult to control head during a baseball swing if the player is exerting effort on every swing. What I like to emphasize is for the player to put a smooth swing



want to plate. If lens and rotate

constantly at every head movement 100%

(perhaps 85% effort) on the ball, concentrating on rotating the body under a steady head. This smooth swing should result in a much more accurate barrel and decidedly less head movement.



So how do you achieve the necessary muscle memory for you to produce this type of swing on a regular basis? Your shadow knows!

Step out into your backyard and stand so that the sun is directly at your back. Look on the ground and your shadow should be down there looking back at you. Place an XLR8 Practice Baseball (or a golf ball) on the ground. Grab your bat and get in your stance. Position yourself so that the ball is centered in the shadow of your head. Now take a few swings and determine how far your head is moving by watching where the shadow ends up. Ideally, if you were executing a step-by-step swing (see the six steps to a sweet swing drill), the ball should remain in the center of your head's shadow (or very close to it) through the first five steps. As you finish the sixth step (the follow through) the shadow should move in front of the ball slightly. Progress from slow, methodical, step by step swings to a swing resembling a slow motion film.



Continue to increase the speed of the swing until you reach about an 85% effort. These should be powerful, controlled, accurate barrel swings that emphasize the body rotating under the head.

If you are having difficulty in monitoring the position of your shadow during the swing, then enlist the assistance of your father, mother, brother, sister or friend to help keep track of the head movement.

For added difficulty have your assistant soft toss XLR8 Practice Balls to you! Now, it becomes extremely important to have an accurate barrel because the target is smaller than an actual baseball. Keeping the head steady will increase the accuracy of the barrel to the ball. Incidentally, you will find that you will have to exert some effort to get the barrel to the ball before it leaves the 'hitting zone'. Concentrate on that 'sweet swing'. The 'sweet swing' that has some power but is also controlled and accurate. This is the swing you want to groove. The swing you want to take to the batter's box with you in every game. You won't get it by wishing for it. You have to work at it. Consistent use of this drill will transform you into a better hitter. Remember, if you aren't doing your work, your shadow knows!



BASEBALL VISION DRILLS

Hitting Drills

Colored Horseshoe of Baseball

- This drill is used to warm up the eyes for live pitching.
- Color the ball between the inside seams and have the pitcher throw a variety of pitches from the mound or 60 feet 6 inches.
- In this drill, the batter picks up the spin as quickly as possible, calls out the pitch, and watches the ball into the catcher's mitt.
- If the batter has trouble identifying the pitch before he throws it, this helps the batter pick up the type of pitch if they don't recognize it at the release point. (Don't hit the ball, just call it in flight.)

Colored Baseballs

- Use 2-3 colored baseballs:
 - Red = Take
 - White = Hit Away
 - Green = Drag
- The batter must react to the color of the ball as soon as he/she recognizes the color.
- The drill can be used with live pitching or soft toss.

Soft Toss/Self Toss

- Use XLR8 Practice balls and toss the balls to yourself, hitting to all fields.
- The following drills or wrinkles to these drills can be added to make the task of hitting much more difficult and force better concentration by the batter.
 - Use a XLR8 Training Bat, or bat smaller than your regular bat.
 - The tosser calls the field (right, left, center) he/she wants the ball hit as soon as the ball is about to be tossed. If the batter hits the ball to the wrong field or pops the ball up, the players switch positions. The batter can take pitches or the tosser can call for the batter to take a pitch. If the batter swings on a take call, he's out and the players switch.
 - The batter closes his/her eyes and opens them when the tosser calls "open." The batter can take pitches or the tosser can hold the ball. If the player swings and no ball is thrown or pops the ball up the players switch.

Release Drill

-This drill teaches the player to pick up the pitch at the release point and to keep his/her head down on the swing.

- 1. The batter calls out the number of fingers, 1-5, that the pitcher throws at the batter, swings and again calls out the number of fingers that a coach has flashed after the bat passes the plate.

- 2. The coach flashing the numbers stands 5-6 feet in front of the outside corner of the plate.

-The drill can be made more difficult by having the pitcher use a ball and show pitches to the hitter without releasing the ball.

-The hitter would make the visual shift to the plate and hit a ball off a tee after calling out the pitch.

To make the drill even harder, replace the single tee with a double tee, placing the inside tee (higher) about 3-4 feet in front of the inside corner and the second tee (lower) equal to the front point of the outside corner.

-The batter is now forced to see the ball at the release point and react to the pitch (FB, Curve, etc.) If the pitcher show fastball, the batter must turn and pull the ball off the inside tee. If the batter reads off speed pitch, the batter must drive the ball to right field off the outside tee.

(Reverse the tees for a left-handed batter.)

Basic Visual Drills

-Hold a pencil at arm's length. Focus on the pencil's number and move the pencil toward you. When the number begins to blur, extend your arm and begin again. Then, hold one pencil in each hand one as close to your face as possible without the number blurring, and the other at arm's length. Focus first on the near pencil (you may notice the distant pencil blurring into two images). Then stare at the far pencil. Alternate your focus, gradually increasing your speed. Do each exercise for five minutes, rest five minutes and repeat.

-Put press-on letters on a Wiffle ball, then hang the ball by a string in a doorway. Twist the string and, while the ball turns, identify as many letters as possible. Perform for three minutes, rest three minutes and repeat.