

PROPER HITTING TECHNIQUE

1,2,3 STRIKES YOU'RE OUT! SOUND FAMILIAR? IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THAT WAY. BECOME THE POWERFUL HITTER YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO BE. REVIEW THESE MAJOR LEAGUE TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR HITTING GAME, AND MAKE THE OPPOSING PITCHING STAFF WISH THEY HAD SIGNED UP FOR BOWLING THIS SUMMER !!

THE GRIP

To ensure proper grip of the bat, line up your knocking knuckles. This will help you hold the bat in your fingers, instead of your palms. You can check to see if you have done it correctly by pointing your index fingers while gripping the bat. If the fingers line up, you are correctly lining up your knocking knuckles

THE STANCE

Some of the most successful batters of all time have used unusual stances while getting good results. Carl Yastremski, Rod Carew, and Gene Woodling to name a few in the major leagues. At amateur levels, I suggest using a proper and effective stance. You should be in an athletic position. You can get a good idea of this by standing outside the batter's box, and jumping in. The way you land should be balanced and very athletic, with the knees slightly flexed, and the weight on the balls of your feet, with the toes pointing toward the other batters box. In order to get movement before the swing, you should use rhythm to get a start to your swing. Rhythm is a slight rocking movement forward and backward, toward the pitcher, then toward the backstop. This will help you stay relaxed, and get some momentum going prior to the swing. Remember to "dig in". This is also known as "squishing the bug". The batter should pretend a bug is under his back foot, and squish it. Keep your head level. This allows your eyes to be in a normal viewing position. Your brain cannot calculate bat location when your head is tilted beyond "real world" position.

THE LAUNCH

The launch or load position occurs, when as the pitcher shows you his hip pocket, you show them yours. In the load position, your hands and weight should move backwards in order to load. All major league hitters get to this position before they swing, no matter how they start. Hand position in the swing is very important. The hands should start out roughly near the backside armpit. This will enable you to start the swing from a strong position. A common problem: Wrapping the bat is a problem created by incorrect hand positioning. Many players twist the bat back behind their heads, which slows the bat speed of the hitter by making it take longer to swing the bat. A great way to learn not to wrap the bat is by pointing the knob of the bat at home plate, in the load position, prior to the swing. This way the bat will be on an angle conducive to a compact swing. Another common problem: Nervous bat caused by excessive bat waving. Excessive bat waving causes each swing to start in a different launch position. This inconsistency will show up in your hitting performance. Some major league batters (such as Fred Griffey Jr or Gary Sheffield), after studying pitchers for many of hours, use bat waving to improve their swing timing. Again at the amateur level, I recommend you keep bat waving to a minimum. Have your bat in the load & launch position. This will improve your opportunity to make consistently good, hard contact with each pitch.

THE SWING

Keeping your hands inside the flight of the ball on the swing is tremendously important. The hands must come down and forward simultaneously while staying inside the ball. Step with the lead foot while shifting your weight back to front. When hitting the ball, you hit the inside pitch in front of the plate, the middle pitch at the front of the plate, and the outside pitch as it is crossing the plate. When hitting an outside pitch, your back knee should be pointing toward Right Field upon completion of the swing. (Right handed hitter) when hitting an inside pitch, your back knee should be pointing toward Left Center Field upon completion of the swing. (Right handed hitter) When hitting a pitch down the middle, your back knee should be pointing toward Center Field upon completion of the swing. (Right handed hitter). Squishing the bug with your back foot is a very important part of the swing. The hands start the swing, then the lower body interacts (this action is nearly simultaneous). Squishing the bug causes a circular action to be done on the ball of the foot and will turn the back knee toward the pitcher and the shoelaces on the back foot pointing toward the ground. The hands should finish high in the swing with the knob of the bat pointing to the outfield upon completion of the swing. A great way to think about hitting is SHORT to LONG. This means that the arms take a SHORT approach to the ball and after contact take a LONG follow through. A good hitter must take the bat directly to the ball. A lot of hitters cast when swinging the bat. Casting is getting the arms extended prior to contact with the ball. Contact should be made just PRIOR to extension. Your head movement during the swing should be minimal. To practice this, get in your stance with your back to the sun. Find your shadow, and lay your hat down on your head in the shadow. Proceed to take a dry swing. The shadow of your head should still be on the hat when the swing is finished. The bat should be swung level and directly to the ball. After all, the shortest distance between 2 points is a straight line.

USE THE SWEET SPOT

I cannot over emphasize this. The mechanics and design of the bat allow maximum power transfer when the ball makes contact with the sweet spot of the bat. For most bats, this is the section of the barrel from where the label starts to about 2 inches from the end. Make sure you point the label up when you grip your bat. If you do not, plan on replacing many broken bats this season. If you find yourself making powerless contact with the ball, even if you swing like Paul Bunyon, you are not using the designed sweet spot of the bat. Move away from the plate a few inches. This will ensure that when you swing at balls in the strike zone, you will deliver a powerful blow to the ball. When you always contact the ball hard, it will increase your chances of getting a hit.

COMMON TRAPS

Clear your mind before you step in to hit. You think and work during practice, but during a game your mechanics should be strictly reactionary. Practice your swing, study the pitcher, and review your techniques before you enter the batter's box. It is a good idea to take a deep breath observing the field and base runners prior to stepping into the box. Check with your coach for signals. If you don't know how many outs there are, now is the time to ask the umpire. If you need additional time to get set, ask the umpire for it. Once inside the box, concentrate on focusing on the ball the whole time while in the box. Your eyes should be glued to the ball. Do not be distracted by glancing around the field.

Make the pitcher pitch to you. Keep him in the hole by making him throw you good pitches. Don't help him out by swinging at a bad pitch. When the pitcher is behind in the count, he is forced to throw a sweet "hitters pitch" (strike down the middle) that improves your chances to make good contact.

Avoid the high heat. The fast ball, high in the zone, looks like a meatball coming to the plate. The problem is that it is nearly impossible to hit. The number one strike out pitch in amateur baseball is the high fast ball. Hitters can't lay off them, and they can't hit them. Learn to develop an eye for this pitch, and practice good discipline by learning to lay off it.

Complete your swing with 2 hands. A common fault among weak hitters is to let go of the bat with the backhand during the swing. Not only is this dangerous because there is a chance that you may lose grip of the bat, but you cannot deliver full power from your body through the bat to the ball by using a 1-hand swing. Get into the practice of keeping a grip on the bat with 2 hands. You will maintain greater control (higher batting average), and produce more power with a full 2 hand cut at the ball.

Golf swings belong on the golf course. Hitters that use a golf style swing believe that they can lift the ball out of the park with this technique. The truth is that frequent contact with the ball is almost impossible with this type of swing. Your bat swing is somewhat like a horizontal circular fan. The ball comes in on the same horizontal plane. There are many points on a good swing where the bat can make contact with the ball. When you use a golf swing, there is only 1 point where the bat and ball can make contact. The window of contact opportunity is very small with the golf swing.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Ted Williams was the last major league hitter to bat .400 avg. He said hitting was 90% mental and 10% physical. I couldn't agree with him more. It truly does take a great deal of strength to hit the ball out of the park, but most hitters are not home run hitters. Most games are won with single & double hits. Slumping hitters take themselves out of their game mentally. You all have the physical attributes to become feared hitters by using proper techniques. You also need to develop a hitter's concentration for the game. Focus on your game mentally as well. If you are in a hitting slump, or if you are not making strong, consistent contact with the ball, you can review these techniques to help pick your batting game up.

I have also found that regular visits to the batting cage can give you the opportunity to practice your hitting. All my past teams have produced big hitters with the help of batting cage practice. Following good hitting techniques can improve your batting average tremendously. This will help you and your team to win more ball games.

1,2,3 strikes works fine for bowling not for batters. Now, do you want that pitcher to wish he had signed up for summer bowling?