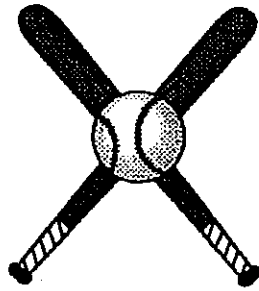


HITTING



LET'S TEACH AND HAVE FUN!!

Hitting

If you are coaching t-ball, hitting won't be quite as difficult as it will be if your team is hitting off "live" pitching. With live pitching, hand-eye coordination and timing come in to play, as does the fear of being hit by a pitched ball. If your players are afraid of getting hit by the ball, use safety balls or tennis balls in your practices to remove fear of the ball.

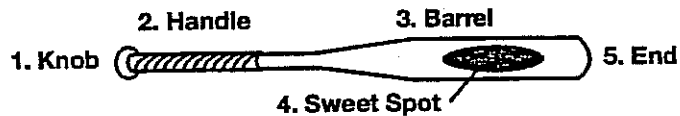
ABOUT BATS

Even though it is extremely important that your players have a solid, fundamentally sound swing, it is just as important that they use the proper size and weight bat. Therefore, it is important to go over some bat basics.

There are two types of bats: a Barrel Bat and a Bottle Bat. A Barrel Bat is the shape of a traditional baseball bat, while a Bottle Bat is the more traditional softball bat. While both types are used by elite level softball players, your players will probably have more success with a bottle bat because it has an enlarged hitting area.



In addition to knowing the different types of bats, it's a good idea for you to become familiar with the various parts of the bat:



1. **Knob:** The knob is designed to help keep a player's hands from slipping off the end of the bat. When players are told to "choke up" it refers to moving their hands further away from the knob.
2. **Handle:** Where the players' hands go. That's why it's called the hand-le.
3. **Barrel:** The "fat" part of the bat. The barrel is the part of the bat actually designed to hit the ball. It's size will vary depending on the type of bat used.
4. **Sweet Spot:** The ideal part of the barrel for hitting the ball. While each bat has a "scientific" sweet spot, it is usually a few inches from the end of the bat.
5. **End:** Just what it says, the end of the bat. It isn't designed for hitting the ball, but occasionally your players will swing too early and hit the ball off the end of the bat. As you can imagine, when this happens the ball doesn't go very far.

Use a bat that's light enough for the player to easily control.

Now, the simple basics of hitting:

I. STANCE

A. Grip:

1. Hold the bat in your hand where fingers meet the palm. (Figure 1)
2. Line up door-knocking knuckles or "split." (Figure 2 & 3) Adjust slightly for whatever is comfortable for the player.
3. Hands and wrist are relaxed in the stance; the grip on the bat will tighten slightly as the swing starts.



****Coaching Tip****

Verbal/physical cues for a proper grip:

- ✓ Like you would grip an axe handle, and use the same grip on your bat. (Figure 4a)
- ✓ Pretend you are pounding a stake into the ground from over head.
- ✓ Pretend you are pounding a nail with a hammer.
- ✓ Hold a bat horizontally out in front of you and pretend you are "shaking hands" with the bat. (Figure 4b)

Turbo Slot gloves are recommended as a tool for achieving a proper grip.



Figure 4a



Figure 4b

B. Lower Body Position:

1. Feet in good athletic position (like guarding someone in basketball).
2. Feet are slightly outside the hips, wider than shoulder width apart.
3. Toes are pointed "slightly" out and are equal distance from home plate (Figure 5), pointed towards home plate.
4. Weight is on inside balls of feet.
5. Knees are inside of the feet. (Figure 5)
6. Flexion in ankles and knees.
7. Slight bend at the waist ("head over toes" or "slight" bow toward the plate). (Figure 5)
8. To make sure you are in a position to achieve full plate coverage, reach out and tap the outside corner of the plate with only the bottom hand on the bat. (Figure 6)
9. Stand even with the center of home plate or with your belly-button lined up with the front edge of the plate. (Figure 7)

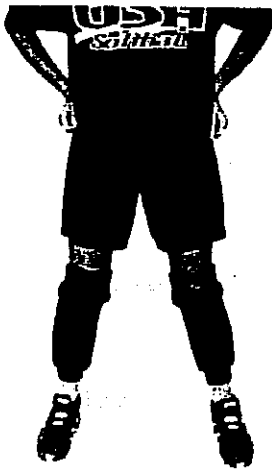


Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

10. Weight stays centered (balanced) in the stance (evenly distributed on front side and back side - 50/50).

C. Upper Body Position

1. The bottom hand should be held at least at the top of the strike zone. Better to have hands too high than too low.
 2. Elbows are down and relaxed.
- > Drill: With a short, light bat, have the hitter hold the bat with their top hand only and hit one-handed. The hitter will automatically bring the top hand elbow down into the strongest natural position. (Figure 8)
 - > Drill: With the hitter in their stance, put a ball in the hitter's top hand and have them throw the ball at contact point. Top hand makes a "V"; Bottom hand makes an "L". The front shoulder is slightly lower than the back shoulder. (Figure 9)
 - > Drill: Give the hitter a bat and have her get in the ready position. Then, lay another bat in her arms (across the crook of her elbows). If the hitter has proper arm and shoulder position, the bat will point slightly down toward pitcher. (Figure 10)



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10

3. Shoulders are square to the plate.
4. Hands are close enough to the body that the hitter's top hand forearm can "squeeze" her bicep.
5. Hands are even with hitters back foot.
6. Knob of bat should point straight out from hitter's hands.
7. Wrists are cocked.
8. Keep head level ("eyes on horizontal plane," "eyebrows level").
9. Look at the pitcher with both eyes.

D. Keys for whole body

1. Good vertical alignment - shoulders over hips, hips over knees.
2. Big rhythm early in stance to small rhythm just prior to pitchers motion.

II. STRIDE

- a. Stride is a timing mechanism.
- b. Stride begins with a slight downward movement with the front shoulder and a simultaneous slight backward movement with the hands to get the bat started (slight)!
Key: Maintain 45 degree angle in bat position and knob pointed toward the plate.
Key: Keep shoulders square to plate.
- c. Stride must be short and controlled, closed and soft - like onto thin ice (terrible too's - early, far, open).
- d. Better to stride early than late!
- e. Stride is toward the pitcher.
- f. Weight on inside of front foot.
- g. Heel of stride foot must be down before you can hit. Stride foot should be down before the pitcher releases the ball.
- h. When stride foot heel is down, weight is slightly more on back side than front side (60-40 distribution).
- i. Think of the stride as a downward movement.
- j. Stride should be no longer than the length of the bat (Key: Make sure the hitter is balanced after the stride.)

III. SWING

- a. Unwind from the bottom up:
First: Knee and ankle turn in toward front side. (Figure 11)
Second: Hand action begins by unlocking joints in following sequence:
 1. Shoulder
 2. Elbow
 3. Wrist
- b. Hands stay close to the body.
- c. Hands stay inside the ball.
- d. Draw line through chest with bottom hand.
- e. Lead elbow (bottom hand elbow) must stay down.
- f. During path of swing, keep bat head above ball.
- g. Eyes stay focused on the ball.



Figure 11

- h. Position of bat head at contact:
 - Middle pitch: barrel even with the hands. (Figure 12)
 - Inside pitch: barrel ahead of the hands. (Figure 13)
 - Outside pitch: barrel behind the hands. (Figure 14)
- i. As the ball comes toward the plate, the player's hands go directly toward the ball. Position of hands at contact:
 - Middle height pitch: top hand in "handshake" position/back hand facing pitcher
 - Low pitch: top hand palm up/bottom hand palm down
 - High pitch: top hand palm down/bottom hand palm up
- j. Hands are even with front side or front foot on contact (player hits the ball out in front of home plate).
- k. Extension occurs after contact to allow the hitter to stay through the ball (imagine hitting through 3 balls!).
- l. Throw the bat at contact point.
- m. During the follow-through, hands should finish close to the front shoulder.
- n. Finish with both hands on the bat.
- o. At the finish, the belly-button should be pointed toward the contact point (amount of rotation depends on whether pitch is inside, middle, or outside).
- p. To keep head down, emphasize chin moving from front shoulder to back shoulder at finish.
- q. Back heel is up at finish.



Figure 12



Figure 13



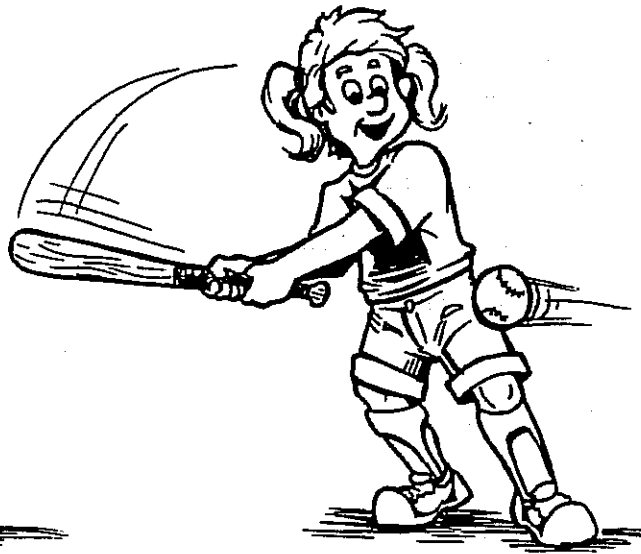
Figure 14

IV. MENTAL ASPECTS OF HITTING

- Use funnel approach (broad to narrow thoughts going from dugout to box): **Dugout:** Gather information about pitcher, situation, etc. What am I going to be called upon to execute (ex. bunt, slap etc.). **On Deck Circle:** Time the pitcher, positive self-talk. **Batter's Box:** See the ball - hit the ball!
- Relaxation: Control breathing (i.e. deep breath as hitter steps into box).
- Positive thoughts (focus on "what I want to do" rather than "what I don't want to do").
- Coach needs to know what verbal cues work for individual hitters.
- Avoid too much coaching just before an at-bat or between pitches.
- Challenge for coaches and hitters is dealing with the 7 out of 10 "failures" at the plate.
- Keep a "well-hit" average, as opposed to batting average.
- Evaluate at-bat on something other than outcome ("did you see the pitch?" "were you relaxed and in control?" etc.). Focus on having good at-bats.
- Batting practice is the time for the coach to give hitters confidence, make them feel good about their performance.
- Confidence is big key - preparation builds confidence.
- Visualize success - encourage hitters to keep a VCR tape in their head to play back good at-bats in their minds.

Video Information:

For more information on hitting, including numerous hitting drills, view the ASA training videos, "Fast Pitch Hitting," "Circuit Training with Ralph Weekly" and "Fundamentals for Future Champions." These videos can be purchased by calling 1-800-277-0071, or via the ASA website at www.softball.org or usasoftball.org.



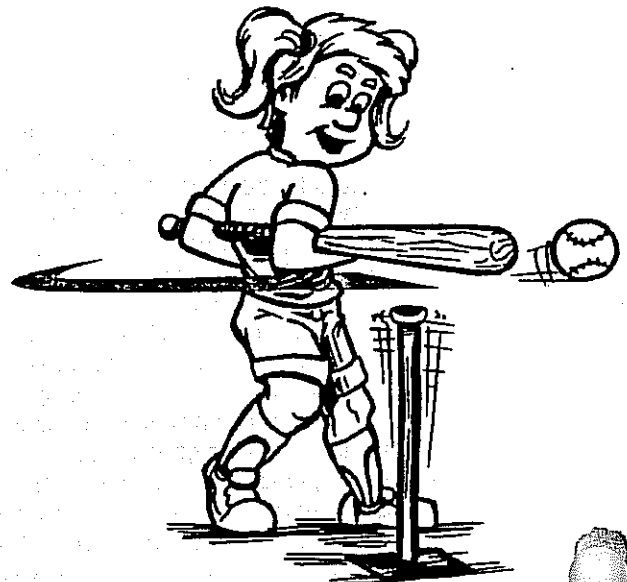
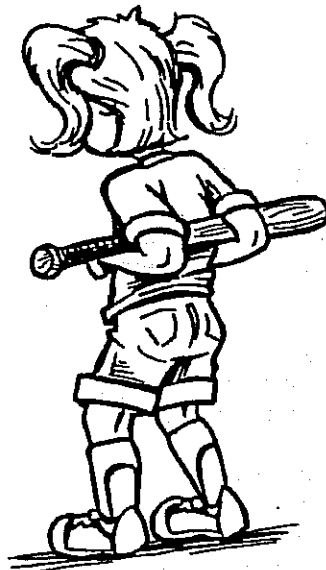
Hitting Drills

Three drills that will help your players improve their hitting skills are:

1. Bat Behind the Back
2. Hand Extensions
3. Line Drills

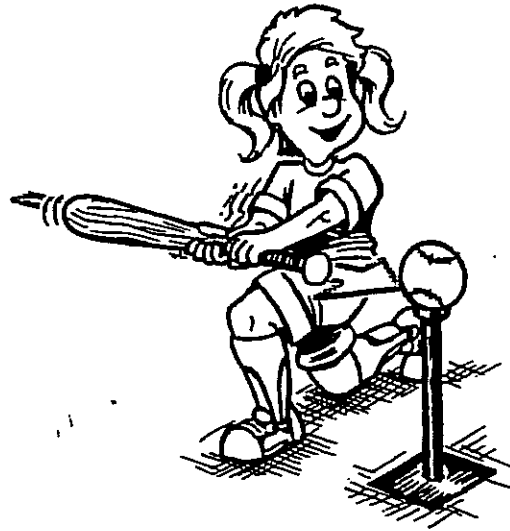
1. Drill Name: Bat Behind Back
Drill Focus: Back Foot (& Hip) Turn

1. Place a ball on a tee and put the tee in line with the player's belly button.
2. Hold the bat with both hands behind the back (against the player's rear end or their lower back).
3. Player turns on their back foot and when they do so the back hip turns bringing the bat to the tee and knocking the ball off the tee.



2. Drill Name: Hand Extensions
Drill Focus: Proper Path of Hands to the Ball

1. Place the tee out in front of the body, player kneels on their back knee.
2. Have the player choke up almost half way up the bat.
3. Player straightens arms directly toward the ball (in a straight line) knocking the ball off the tee with the knob of the bat (the part of the bat where the hands usually go).
4. Train the front arm to extend in a direct line to the ball instead of out toward home plate and then toward the ball. This is called a loop.



3. Drill Name: Line Drill
Drill Focus: Hitting the Ball Out in Front

1. Put your hitter in the batter's box.
2. Using the bat, have them draw a line in the dirt about 6-8 inches in front of home plate.
3. Coach stands about 8 feet in front of the hitter and slowly tosses tennis or whiffle balls over home plate so the hitter can practice hitting the ball when it gets over the line.

