

How To Create a Batting Lineup

One of a softball coach's most important responsibilities is putting their players in the best position to succeed. And few places can that be seen more effectively than in their team's batting order.

Put the right batters in the right spots and you can increase your team's chances of scoring runs – and winning games. On the other hand, but the wrong players in the wrong spots and you risk sabotaging big innings before they even get started.

In this short report, we are going to take a look at some concepts to consider to when setting your batting order as well as what qualities to look for in ideal batters for each spot in the lineup.

So let's get started!

The Importance of Batting Order in Youth Softball

A recent sabermetric analysis of batting order that was presented on Fangraphs.com found that an optimized batting order is worth 5 to 15 runs, or 1 to 3 wins, a season for a major league team.

In youth softball, batting order is even more important due to the wide-ranging abilities of the players. Before we discuss what to look for when slotting your hitters into the right batting spots, here are some concepts to keep in mind when filling out your lineup card.

1. **Always consider the age of your players.** It's perfectly fine to move younger players around in the order to give them experience batting at different spots. As players mature, their abilities for certain slots should become more visible – we will talk more about what abilities to look for in just a minute.
2. **Also always keep in mind player confidence.** A lot of young players are going to believe they should be batting in the same spot where their favorite pro player bats. Of course, all players can't hit leadoff or third or fourth. Some players are going to have to hit seventh or eighth. You need to stress to these players the importance of their batting spots, the opportunities they are going to get there

and also that with success will come opportunities to bat in different spots in the order.

3. In youth softball, **selecting your 6, 7, 8 and 9 hitters can be difficult** as these are typically players who are learning and developing and may not be as advanced as your top of the order hitters. If you have several hitters who are similar in skills and success rate you could always rotate their spots in the order to broaden their experience and give them different types of opportunities in which to excel.
4. When setting up your order, you typically want to place **your best power hitters in the 3, 4 and 5 positions**. These are your RBI (Runs Batted In) hitters who will drive in your 1 and 2 hitters and depending on your philosophy maybe even your 9th place hitter (second leadoff!).
5. If you are in a **league that requires teams to bat through the entire lineup**, we would recommend following the below guidelines for your 1-9 (or 1-10) hitters and then using the 7, 8, 9 guidelines to arrange the order of however many remaining batters you have.
6. **Should you be concerned with balancing your order?** In the majors, a lot of thought is given to balancing the lineup with right-handed and left-handed hitters so that pitchers don't get too comfortable pitching to one side of the plate. In youth softball, you shouldn't worry about doing this too much. However, let's say you have two good lefthand hitters – separating them in the lineup and placing them between righthand batters may throw the pitcher off balance just enough to allow your team to score more runs. If you bat them back to back, the pitcher may grow more comfortable and pitch more effectively to the second lefthander. A lot depends on the abilities and experience of the pitcher, of course, but this is something you may want to consider when arranging your lineup.

Ok, now let's take a look at each spot in the order and identify some optimal qualities that batters who succeed in that spot typically have.

Filling Out Your Batting Order

1.

What is looked for in the leadoff spot has changed a lot in recent years – particularly in the major leagues. In the past, this spot was all about speed but with the rise of sabermetrics on-base percentage has become much more important. At the youth level,

optimally you would like to combine these two approaches. In other words, your leadoff hitter should be one of your faster players but she should also be good with the bat and have a good eye for pitches. This is also a great place to put your best slapper. Finding all of these skills in one player might be difficult so you'll probably have to compromise – for example, you may use a player who is fast but not as good with the bat or a player who has a good eye but is not as fast as some other players.

2.

This is an important spot in the order particularly in youth levels that allow base stealing. If your league allows stealing, this position needs to be manned by a batter who is patient, has a great eye and also has good bat control because they will need to be able to take pitches and also to make contact in hit and run and run and hit situations. Also a great spot for your second best slapper and bunter.

3.

This spot is for your best hitter. It allows that hitter to maximize their plate opportunities and also increases their chances of coming to bat with runners on base.

4.

This spot is for your best power hitter unless your 3-spot hitter is your best power hitter then this should be for your next best power hitter. For comparison's sake, this hitter won't hit for as high an average as your 3 hitter but when she makes contact they can hit the ball solidly. Another important characteristic to look for here is confidence. Your cleanup hitter should excel in pressure situations where there are runners on base and a hit is needed to drive them in.

5.

This spot is for a hitter that is similar to your cleanup hitter (the 4 hole hitter) but who doesn't make contact as often and/or who doesn't have quite the same level of power.

6.

Here you can go a few different ways. If your team has a number of power hitters you could put your next best power hitter here. This is also a good spot in youth softball to "reset" the lineup. That means you could put a singles hitter here or a contact hitter who also has good speed to set the table for the bottom half of your lineup.

7.

This spot is good for a player who has a little speed but is still developing her batting skills.

8.

The eighth spot is a good place for a hitter that maybe has a little power but tends to not make contact as often as your earlier hitters in the lineup.

9/10.

Nobody wants to hit last so it's important to stress your ninth place hitter that this is still an important spot in the lineup and they are going to get their opportunities to hit. Another thing to mention is the increasing value the ninth place hitter is garnering on the major league level were some managers see the spot as a sort of secondary leadoff position that can put even more runners on base for the 3, 4 and 5 hitters. To follow this approach yourself, look for a faster player and you also may want to help her work on her bunting skills.

Additional Thoughts on Batting Order

In youth softball in particular it's important not to get too locked in to a set batting order. Young players can surprise you in what they are able to accomplish when given a chance. So don't be afraid to move players around in the order to challenge them and see what they can do.

Remember, above all, softball should be fun! So giving a 7 or 8 place hitter a chance in the 2 hole could be just what they need to build confidence and increase their enjoyment of the game.

Good luck this season!