

On-field Teaching Outline for Fastpitch Coaching Hitting Video #7 Dealing with the Pitch

Preparation before a practice session

Before each practice session that will include batting, prepare in this manner:

- Select a skill from lesson 7, “Dealing with the Pitch”, or from your own list of topics;
- Plan to briefly review the selected skill with the whole team before batting practice begins;
- Plan to then have each team member practice the skill during batting practice.

At the beginning of batting practice:

- Gather the whole team with their bats and helmets;
- Review each skill with them. Have the whole team together try to execute the skill as you introduce it -- the physical parts in slow motion.

During each player’s individual hitting practice:

- Practice the new skills with her, providing feedback and having her gradually speed up to game speed as she becomes competent.

Skill #1 -- Relax and Start the Swing Slowly

Teach your players the following:

- Relax both mentally and physically.
- Relaxing mentally means do not think about a swing fundamental while hitting in a game, unless you need to for success. That is, if you haven’t built a key habit, you might have to use a brief drill, or a mental review, of the good habit between pitches.
- At practice, describe what you want the player to think about during practice swings to improve a swing fundamental, and have her do so with a few practice swings.
- Then ask her to associate a word or short phrase with the desired improvement, and practice it again.
- Then ask her to use the word or phrase to remind herself of it between pitches in the next couple of games, or until the improvement becomes habitual.
- Relaxing physically means relaxing from the time you are in your stance until your hips and hands have fired and your bat is approaching the contact zone.
- All movements prior to firing the hips and hands should feel slow and under control. For example, a quick loading motion is not ideal. Start your Load early enough to allow it to be slow, typically when the pitcher has finished her initial backward motion and starts some motion towards you, meaning an instant before her windmill action begins.

Skill #2 -- Watch the pitcher then time the ball

Teach your players the following:

- Watch the pitcher's upper body and never look her in the eyes.
- Batting is not a competition between the batter and the pitcher.
- The batter's goal should be to bring into the game the swing she has practiced, as well as the mental skills and preparations she has practiced.
- Making eye contact can only distract her from her goal. She should treat the pitcher as she would a pitching machine (that throws a variety of pitches).
- Start your Load after the pitcher has started her wind-up, at the exact time she starts to push her body toward you. At the same time, move your eyes down to her release point and then **allow the ball to control your timing**.
- Stay relaxed and allow your subconscious mind to adjust its timing based on the speed of the pitch.
- Do not try to 'move in time to the pitcher'.

Skill #3 -- Make only one decision

Teach your players the following:

- Be mentally and physically prepared to swing at every pitch. Always decide just before the pitch that you are going to swing.
- Then allow yourself to make only one additional decision: to stop your swing if the pitch doesn't look good.
- Make the "stop" decision only when the ball is most of the way in. If you make a decision to swing or stop too early, you leave yourself time to change that decision, which can hurt the timing of your swing.
- Never check your swing, because that will encourage you to make two decisions as the ball comes in.
- At batting practice, have each batter practice making the "stop" decision in their mind when a bad pitch comes in. Tell them this "stop" decision will eventually become automatic if they work on it carefully -- especially working on relaxing and waiting to make only one decision.

Skill #4 -- Be mentally prepared to hit all kinds of pitches

Teach your players the following:

- For every pitch, be prepared for a fast strike. If the pitch turns out to be slower, react to it by slowing the Lift, thereby delaying the Fire very slightly. Do not "swing slower". Do not consciously time the ball in a game.
- For every pitch, be prepared for a high strike. If the pitch turns out to be a low strike, you will have time to adjust to it and to do the "Lean," if appropriate.
- For every pitch, be prepared for an inside strike. If the pitch turns out to be an outside strike, you will have a split second to adjust because the proper contact point for an outside strike is at least a foot deeper in the strike zone than an inside strike.
- In summary, every time you step into the batter's box, be prepared for a fast, high, inside strike. Visualize such a pitch briefly in order to "reset" your mind from the previous pitch that might have been slower.

Skill #5 -- See the ball well

Teach your players the following:

- When watching the ball come in, your face should be almost straight to the front, but not so straight that it strains the neck or hurts.
- Your eyes should be perfectly level to the ground, just like they are when you are walking around.
- Your chin should be up in the normal position, not raised or lowered.
- The head should turn a little as the ball comes in, with the chin following the ball.
- During contact and a half second after contact, keep the head and the eyes on the contact point.

An easy way for the coach to find out what improvements a hitter needs is to stand behind the pitcher at batting practice and see if the hitter is using the skills properly.

Skill #6 -- Avoid being hit by the pitch

Teach your players the following:

There are two reasons a batter should get out of the way of a pitch that's coming at her -- it hurts when it hits her, and it can injure her. The technique I will describe

- Will reduce the chance of injury,
- Will sometimes reduce the pain,
- Can reduce the fear of being hit, making it easier to swing properly.

First teach them the proper motion to avoid the inside pitch:

- As soon as you decide to bail out, turn your front shoulder in toward the plate and continue it down and around toward the catcher, pulling your whole body around.
- Your front heel should come up as you start the turn and your back foot will point to the catcher.
- Look and bow toward the ground behind you, taking your bat down to the ground where you're looking.
- Move your weight over your back foot, and let the spinning of your body pull the front foot off the ground, back and around your body to catch yourself.
- When you decide to bail out, stop watching the ball.
- Use this motion with every pitch that might hit you, no matter how high or low, or in the dirt.

After your players have practiced the proper motion during a couple of batting practices, have them practice making the decision to bail out.

- Pitch front toss to each player, using safety softballs or other soft practice balls.
- Throw half strikes and half inside pitches.
- If the player is not using the proper motion to avoid the inside pitch, correct her and have her concentrate on using good form.
- If she is using good form, then have her concentrate on making only one decision to bail or not, and making it late in the pitch.
- When she does decide to bail, she should never change her mind.