

On-field Teaching Outline for Fastpitch Coaching Hitting Video #8

Slapping from the Left-Handed Batter's Box

Teaching the Team

There are a lot of details involved in learning slap hitting. Please break up the following lesson steps into multiple practice sessions to avoid throwing too much at your players at any one session. Give them enough time to build proper habits from the start and they will respond with amazing execution for years to come.

Training Session Setup

- Start each training session by lining up team members with their helmets and bats, where they can see you well;
 - Demonstrate each movement while explaining how to do it properly;
 - Have each batter stand on the left-hander's side of a throw-down home plate;
 - Have each batter draw a line to represent the inside line of the batter's box, six inches from the plate;
 - It works best to provide a tee for each player, using it without a ball on it during the early part of the training.
1. Help your players use the Handshake Grip from my hitting video 3, reversing their hands for left-handed swinging;
 2. Take them through the Stance and Hip Turn Drill from video 1, left-handed;
 3. When they can do decent hip turns, move up to trying the Long Punch Drill;
 4. At the appropriate time, let them know they won't be able to slap from the left side until they have built proper habits;
 5. Optionally ask the players to practice these two drills at home, and/or allocate time from future practices to work with them.

Fundamental Techniques -- Hard Slap for a High Bouncer to 5-6 Hole

Briefly introduce the strategy, focusing first on the hard bouncer to the 5-6 hole so they start getting used to letting the ball ride in farther.

1. Starting with a proper Setup and Load, **start teaching the backstep and run without a tee.**
 1. At Setup, top of the hands should be level with top of the shoulder;
 2. The shoulders should be kept parallel to the edge of the plate from Setup through backstep, then turn to face the 5-6 hole at contact;
 3. Maintain good posture and stay level from Setup through contact;
 4. Teach the drop of the bat in the hands during the Load.
2. When the players can execute the backstep and run, **introduce the tee.**

1. Prepare to practice hitting the ball at a consistent, precise contact point.
 1. Each player gets into her stance;
 2. Mark the positions of her feet with lines in the dirt, or with chalk or pieces of tape;
 3. Have her do the backstep and run, then stop and mark the position of her left heel, then put the tee into position just behind the mark;
 4. Have her execute one or more backsteps and runs, to be sure her front foot is consistently landing where you marked, adjusting the mark and tee if necessary;
 5. Measure the distance with her bat so she can quickly set up the tee for herself at future practices without having to mark the positions.
3. Without a ball on the tee, have her practice executing the **slap in slow motion, stopping the swing at the contact point** (sweet spot at top of tee).
 1. Check her movement fundamentals, including the eyes staying level;
 2. Specify any improvements needed and have her try again;
 3. Check the positions of body parts **while frozen at contact point**;
 1. head and eyes (on the ball),
 2. front shoulder (not pulled up high),
 3. shoulders (facing the 5-6 hole),
 4. elbows (both bent),
 5. handshake grip (2-3 inches up the handle),
 6. right hand (pushing toward the pitcher as much as the left hand),
 7. front foot (pointing to third base), and
 8. torso (maintaining good posture as during Setup).
4. When the players are executing the slow motion slap fairly well, move on to **hitting a ball off the tee at medium-slow speed**, just fast enough to feel like an actual swing, but not yet trying to deliver powerful results.
 1. Stay relaxed but feel mechanical and in control, like when they were using the tee without a ball;
 2. If their technique is breaking down, take them back to that slow-motion execution without a ball. Let them know that proper execution every time is important in order to build good habits so they can succeed in a game.
5. When the players are executing at medium-slow speed fairly well, move on to **hitting a ball off the tee at medium-fast speed, that is, game speed**.
 1. Stay relaxed but feel mechanical and in control, like when they were swinging at medium-slow speed. The whole slap motion will become consistent and smooth in a short time, without you or them trying to make it happen, as long as they stay relaxed and build good habits.
6. Move on to **practicing off front toss, machine pitch, and live pitching**.
 1. Have them slap for about 8-10 pitches once every third batting practice rather

- than 2-3 pitches at every batting practice so you have more time to notice and correct any bad habits that are creeping in;
2. Occasionally reviewing video of the players' swings is a great way for a batting coach to determine the improvements that are most needed for each individual player. See the list in item (3.), above;
 3. Be sure that, from backstep through contact, the shoulders are not pulling the arms and bat. When this happens, you will see the right arm straightened at contact;
 4. Be sure every player is waiting for the pitch to arrive at the contact point they have been practicing, rather than reaching out toward the pitcher to intercept the pitch out front.
7. After your players have practiced slapping a few times, present the following techniques:
1. To slap pitches in the lower half of the strike zone, do the Lean.
 1. The player lets her front hip slide out from under her shoulders just before contact;
 2. Practice this off a tee that is set to hold the ball at or just below the knees, by pulling out the center portion of a two-piece tee, if available;
 3. Be sure the player waits to start the Lean an instant before contact or her posture will be compromised, causing an inconsistent swing and poor results;
 4. The player should keep her elbows bent the usual amount to maintain both power and control. This is very important.
 2. How to swing away after the run -- the fake slap.
 1. Start the run with the load and back step;
 2. Quickly move the left foot forward only a foot or so before planting it, pointing to third base;
 3. Maintain posture so your front shoulder stays down, your shoulders stay squared to plate, and your hips open only half as far as normal;
 4. Do not pause or slow down after planting the left foot, but continue shifting the weight forward into a normal stride, followed by the other regular swing motions.

Fundamental Techniques -- Hard Slap for a Hard Ground Ball

You should not be in a hurry to introduce the hard grounder version of the slap to your players because it uses a different contact point -- in front of the left foot. As with swinging away,

slappers must build proper contact point habits to be consistently successful. Wait at least a few weeks before introducing this, or even a few months or a year. You'll be amazed at the good results.

When you are ready to start working on the hard grounder, stop practicing the high bouncer for a few practices so your players can build the habit of swinging to the new contact point, in front of the left foot after the run. Then consider having all slaps be of the hard grounder variety for a few games.

Prepare to practice hitting the ball at a new contact point, farther out front.

1. Each player gets into her stance;
2. Mark the positions of her feet with lines in the dirt, or with chalk or pieces of tape;
3. Have her do the backstep and run, then stop and mark the position of her left toes; then position the tee just in front of the mark;
4. Have her execute one or more backsteps and runs, to be sure her front foot is consistently landing where you marked, adjusting the mark and tee if necessary;
5. Measure the distance with her bat so she can quickly set up the tee for herself at future practices.

Next, explain the differences between swinging for a high bouncer vs. swinging for a hard grounder. They are:

1. Swing to the new contact point;
2. Fire the hands faster, staying connected, which means the elbows and shoulders will move faster, too;
3. Start right off hitting a ball off the tee at medium speed, taking care not to distort the good habits they worked hard to build for the high bouncer.
4. If a player is getting inadequate results, such as bouncers, line drives or fly balls, go through the fundamentals listed under High Bouncer to determine the likely cause -- often making contact at the wrong contact point, or pulling the front shoulder out. Give her one or two adjustments to work on at medium speed.

When players are ready, move on to practicing off front toss, machine pitch, and live pitching.

Fundamental Techniques -- The Hard Slap, High Bouncer to the 3-4 Hole

A pitch on the inside half of the plate can sometimes be more easily slapped to the 3-4 hole than the 5-6 hole. There are only three differences from the Hard Slap, High Bouncer to the 5-6 hole, all occurring at the point of contact:

1. The contact point is just in front of the left foot, as with the Hard Ground Ball;
2. The shoulders should turn to face the 3-4 hole;
3. The left hand should be pushing toward the pitcher harder than the right hand.

Fundamental Techniques -- The Soft Slap

When all of your players, or a selected group, are consistently executing the Hard Slap Bouncer well, and they have time to practice against front toss, introduce the Soft Slap, beginning with the strategy:

The soft slap should always be a ground ball – just like a bunt. The purpose is to move up any runners as well as beating the throw to first base. It is best directed down the third base line but can be directed between the first and second basemen if the first baseman is right-handed, or down the line if she is left-handed. The purpose is to make her backhand the ball or use more difficult footwork.

The Soft Slap to the Left Side

Introduce the fundamental techniques using front toss. The techniques are the same as the hard slap, high bouncer, especially the contact point, but with the following exceptions:

1. Moving forward a bit slower than with the hard slap, start a medium-slow swing by bending the knees a bit to help bring the hands slightly below the level of the ball so the bat head contacts the ball just above the hands.
2. Catch the ball on the last few inches of the bat head, keeping the elbows bent and yielding.
3. Extend through the ball with the right hand - the bottom hand on the bat - to direct the ball inside the third base line. Do not pull or push the bat with the left hand at contact.
4. Start the swing, hands and bat coming forward, slightly earlier than with the Hard Slap, that is, just before the left foot is planted. Contact should be made when the ball is at the heel of the left foot after it is planted.
5. The right foot should usually be off the ground and coming forward at contact and the hips should be facing third base -- do not let them turn toward first base before contact.

The Soft Slap to the Right Side

Almost everything is the same as the soft slap to the left side. The three differences involve movements an instant before contact:

1. Make contact with the ball in front of the left toes;
2. Pull the knob of the bat in toward the stomach a bit, using the right hand;
3. Hold the left hand still instead of pushing it toward the ball.