



15 DRILLS TO INCREASE BAT SPEED

NEVER STOP EVOLVING

Professional baseball players use every drill and tool available to increase bat speed and swing velocity. Exit velocity, launch angles, the point of impact, and bat speed are some of the measurements hitting coaches analyze in modern baseball.

How vital is bat speed to the distance a ball travels? Or does bat speed equal power? Some hitting coaches consider the metric exaggerated. Others feel bat speed at the moment of impact results in higher ball exit velocities. Either way, here are 15 drills and workouts to improve this all-important swing statistic.

The following drills will allude to the proper batting stance: A player must have a balanced swing. Your weight should be on the balls of your feet. The legs should be shoulder width or an inch or two wider. Your knees and waist should be slightly bent. Hands should start near the back shoulder—eyes on the pitcher.

The best hitters in baseball have a starting stance and a loaded stance. To create more bat-speed world-class hitters will hold their elbow up or back. Barrel of the bat should be up, and your front shoulder should be slightly turned in. No batting stance is the same. Every hitter must feel comfortable in each stage of the swing. Many big-league hitters break down their swing into a starting stance, then a loaded stance. The loaded position being the stance from where they swing. All great hitters make use of the same fundamental rotational swing mechanics. Ted Williams, in his book *The Science of Hitting* said; the hips lead the hands. Generate proper rotation and the body loads to create force.

1. MECHANICS WORKOUT

Training your body by reinforcing good swing mechanics will increase bat speed at the plate. Great swings and increased bat speed start from the bottom up. Ankles, knees, hips then shoulders, followed by the head is where great swings start. Grab a lighter than normal bat and assume the proper batting stance. Your objective is to practice your swing from the bottom up and have the power reach your shoulders and head. Take 12 to 15 swings each day and concentrate on the mechanics of torque. First with your ankles, then knees, then hips and shoulders then follow through with the head down. It is important to swing as hard as possible and point the intensity of your swing, starting with the ankles. Practice this drill each day, and you teach the body while building muscle. Switch bat weights each day or week.

2. HIP SEPARATION

A hitter's body must move together to create bat speed hitting coaches and scouts sit up and take notice. A majority of hitters concentrate on keeping the hands separated from the body. The idea with this drill is to build up the hips during the swing to produce more power. Start with an exercise band attached firmly around the ankles. Place a baseball next to your plant foot. The stride foot should be located in front of the baseball. With your chest and shoulders square, load your swing and stride with force towards the pitching mound. The key to this drill is the mechanics of your hips at the point of contact. It is fundamental to maintain the chest and shoulders in the proper swing position, so the hips are creating power.

3. CRUNCHES

The abdominal muscles produce most of the power in a swing. Weighted crunches are great at improving muscle tone and energy to your core. Lie on your back with legs in the air. Bend your knees at a sharp 90-degree angle to the torso. Hold a weight at arm's length above your head. It is best, to begin with a lighter weight and move up from there. Keep your back planted on the floor. Raise your upper torso in the air. Start with three sets between of 20 to 30 a day. Before long, you recognize a boost in bat speed and power.

There are two schools of thought when chatting to a coach about baseball hitters. He will maintain the player is a linear or rotational hitter. If the batter takes a long stride and carries weight forward to produce bat speed, that player is regarded as a linear hitter. Batters that have limited to no stride and rotate their body about a fixed stationary axis are rotational hitters. The lead arm in swing mechanics is one of the primary reason's coaches consider the rotational method best for generating bat speed. The leading arm in linear mechanics reaches out to contact the ball. Rotational hitting has the players entire body coordinated to contact the ball. The lead arm in rotational swings remains steady.

4. STABILITY BALL

This drill is designed to build up core strength and stabilize the swing. Grab a cable pulley and set it at chest height. Hold a stability ball against your chest and wrap the cable around the ball. Stand in the correct batting stance. Line up your left shoulder perpendicular to the cable. Switch your torso in a swinging motion keeping your stomach pulled in. Perform three sets of 10 each day from either side before hitting the batting cage.

5. LANDMINES

This drill looks easy, it is not! Landmines target the obliques which are central to strength and rotation swing mechanics. Place an olympic weight bar against the corner of any wall and start with a weight at the free end. Take a stance similar to a baseball stance, but more upright with your feet wider than your shoulders. Rotate the hips and midsection as you aggressively push the weight back toward the wall. If the weight gets to the body, lessen the load. Keep the arms straight and rotate from one arm to the other forcing the weight back towards the wall. Start with three sets of five reps. This exercise is a strenuous workout and should be implemented at most three times a week.

6. RHYTHM

Increasing bat speed requires precise execution to the exact point of impact with the baseball. The rhythm drill helps to increase bat speed by developing muscles to recognize a proper swing. Use wiffle balls and a training bat for this drill. Assume a proper batting stance. Point the barrel of the bat towards the coach. When the ball is pitched, the hitter should rock back into his stance and attempt to drive the ball. The hitter should focus on a couple of points. Bring the hands back and hit through the ball with proper follow-through. Concentrate on having your weight over the rear foot when you are rocking backward. Keep the elbow down and bat towards the pitcher.

7. MEDICINE BALL

Core exercises should be a part of every player's routine. The medicine ball rotation is a necessary exercise every coach has practiced for eons. It is easy to do this workout wrong or simply just being lazy and not doing it correctly. Sit on the exercise mat with feet planted. Start with a lighter weight ball, 8 to 12 pounds. Using your shoulders move the ball from one side to the other, making certain you are touching the floor on either side. One to two sets of 15 rotations should be a part of your daily routine. The medicine ball rotation is another drill to develop ab strength. Increase the medicine ball weight and rotations each week.

Every hitting coach and player agree on the importance of power to create bat speed through the swing. How important is shoulder rotation in generating that power? Coaches who preach linear hitting technique say letting the shoulder rotate results in casting or hitting around the ball. Every player has heard, "keep your shoulder in there." Rotational batting advocates believe the shoulders must have great rotation to achieve maximum power. The bat is connected at the shoulders (via arms) and not the hips. To achieve maximum bat speed, power must develop from the hips, and then the shoulders.

8. ISOMETRICS

Resistance training for baseball hitters is an outstanding way to home in on precisely the muscles which require development. Rather than working out the full upper torso during a 30-minute exercise, resistance workouts are just as potent. Assume the proper batting stance, have a friend hold the barrel of the bat while you take a slow-motion swing. The object of this drill is to develop resistance through the hitting zone. This is an excellent workout because it is using actual batting movements and gestures. Return the bat to the proper position and repeat. Isometric training has been around forever. The concept is straightforward. Joint angles and muscle length do not vary during the contraction phase. Isometrics are executed in stationary positions.

9. ONE-HANDED

Arm strength is fundamental in producing a powerful swing. The one-handed batting drill has been taught by hitting coaches for decades. This workout can be done with a hitting tee. However, it is more useful with a friend. The hitter needs to be on the ground on one knee, with the bat in the arm watching the pitcher. The other arm needs to be behind the hitters back. The front arm is the guide, and the back arm produces the power. The object of the drill is to develop strength in the forearm and generate power with the back arm. Variations on the exercise; switch hands, both knees down and standing. This drill is great for creating bat speed and power through the strike zone.

10. FUNDAMENTAL TECHNIQUE

Developing fundamental baseball hitting technique is necessary to increased force and ultimately bat speed. This training involves verbal commands from a hitting coach. The hitter should assume the proper batting stance. 1) At the count of one, the hitter loads his swing. The knob of the bat needs to be pointed to the opposite batter's box. 2) Two, the hitter strides. Nose and belt buckle should be aligned with the middle of the feet. 3) On a three count, the hitter listens for the pitch location. The bat head and eyes should be focused on that direction. 4) Four Count and the hitter swings. The rear foot should pivot, and the back shoelace should be facing the pitcher. The hitter needs to make certain the hips went through the swing with good follow-through.

Hitting the ball with power means a player must have optimum rotation of legs, hips, torso, and arms. Proper swing mechanics use each muscle groups collectively to generate energy through the strike zone. There are three principal concepts hitters need to develop while crafting a powerful swing. 1) Power launch position 2) Correct Swing mechanics 3) Swing mechanics must apply each muscle group properly. Great hitters use swing mechanics that generate greater bat speed earlier in the swing than average hitters.

11. WINDSHIELD WIPERS

Strong forearms and wrists are fundamental to creating massive power through the strike zone. Grab your normal weight bat and assume a proper hitting stance. Hold the bat out from the torso with the barrel pointing up. Rotate the bat as far left and far right as possible. Maintain the proper stance throughout the drill. Before long, you will notice results from this simple repetition. Do the windshield wiper every day, about 15 to 20 reps. Increase the bat weight each week.

12. FENCE DRILL

A lot of great hitters, have great hitting coaches in the dugout watching their mechanics. The fence drill helps to develop a strong, quick swing through the strike zone. It also serves to help a batter recognize an inside pitch. The hitter should face the fence about a bat length away. Hitters need to imagine an inside pitch and set up their swing. The player should drag the bat head behind the hands until they are out in front of the body, extending the bat head out toward the imaginary ball. This drill helps to get rid of a loop in the hitter's swing.

13. HIGH/LOW TEE

Every player at every stage of their career hits off a tee. Tee drills always seem so simplistic. This attitude could not be further from the truth. This drill helps a hitter sustain a constant swing path through the strike zone. The preparation requires two tees at varied heights. Place one tee about eight inches higher and 18 inches behind the tee you plan to hit. The objective here is to hold a constant plain and hit the ball on the lower tee. This drill helps the player develop good bat speed through the strike zone on a continuous path. It also serves to eliminate pop-ups.

14. BEHIND THE BACK

Hitters always want to start with the hands. Great hitters have learned to rotate the torso to build up the most power and bat speed. Great power comes from a hitter's lower body. Hitting coaches are always coming up with drills to condition a player to rotate and not lead with their hands. A batter should assume a proper hitting stance. The hitter should have a bat placed behind them, holding onto both ends. The player should go through their normal stance and stride. The batter should rotate their back and hips inward. This motion creates an instinctive move to use the back hand to help them turn harder. Do about 20 reps each day before heading to the batting cage.

15. HEAVY BAG KNOCKDOWN / WIFFLE BAT

Heavy Bag Knockdown: Batters must have good mechanics throughout the swing. This drill works on striding into the strike zone, feeling the point of contact and the follow-through. The player should assume a proper batting stance in front of a tee, without the ball. The tee is the middle of the plate. There should be a heavy punching bag placed in front of the tee. A partner should place the bag in various locations around the tee. The batter should take his practice swings. The player needs to come as close as possible to the top of the tee without hitting it. Each dry swing, the batter needs to concentrate on technique, stance, load, swing, and follow-through.

Wiffle Bat: This drill is simple but effective. It helps the hitter know how fast his bat is moving through the strike zone and how to adjust quickly. The hitter should assume the proper baseball stance. A partner should have a wiffle bat standing in front of the hitter. The batter should start his standard swing mechanics. When the hitter is committed to his swing, the partner should move the bat. The purpose of this drill, the hitter must be quick enough to hit the wiffle bat before it is moved. If the hitter cannot hit the wiffle bat, he is in a hurry. 10 to 15 reps of this drill a day helps the player know how fast he has to move once he has stated his swing.

Great hitters of baseball, both present, and past, have harnessed the rotational force of their bodies to create incredible power and bat speed. Generational hitters such as Aaron and Trout, use the powerful muscles of their legs, hips, and torso. It is crucial for every hitter to realize; they should not direct the first movement of the hands toward the pitcher.

Every good hitting coach preaches, keep the hands back and let the rotation of the body produce the power. Players have an endless number of drills and workouts available, to develop their power and consistency. To hit a baseball with authority, swing mechanics dictate a bottom-up approach.

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