

Training Hitting

Batting

Are you thinking? “Finally, the real techniques of the game!” The reason I devoted the first part of the book to the mental aspects and physical conditioning was so that the player and coach would be prepared properly (have the foundation) to learn and perform the specific techniques unique to Fastpitch. A positive mental attitude and a well-conditioned body are the basic foundation blocks for learning and perfecting the technical skills.

Having a strong foundation is necessary for becoming a complete ballplayer. It will give the coach the well-balanced players necessary to produce a winning team. This team will learn and use the skills necessary to successfully play the game. One of the necessary skills of Fastpitch is batting.

Reality Check

Batting is probably talked about and practiced more than any other part of softball. It is generally considered the most enjoyable part of softball. “It is what wins games.” However, it is only successful when it is understood for what it is and practiced as part of a team’s overall offensive strategy.

From a purely psychological perspective, *batting is the toughest and realistically the most negative part of the game.* Let me put it another way. Batters will strike out, pop up, hit into double plays and leave runners on base with two outs. Nearly every ballplayer’s batting average will be under .500. That means they are successful less than half their time at bat. Batters can easily slip into a negative attitude about their hitting. Don’t let it happen.

Even the best batters occasionally will jump on a riser when the coach just said, “Do not swing at any pitch above the waist!” It will happen. So accept it, respect it and be encouraged to do better the next time. A positive mental attitude



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like Jack Nicklaus' (referred to earlier) will help you deal with less than perfect batting averages.

Keep in mind that a typical all-star batting .333 is only successful one-third of the time. This realization offers an enlightened respect for hitting. It will significantly help the mental game of hitting and expose it for what it is. It takes hard work to become a great batter. With this awareness, develop your own individual offensive strategy and look forward to achieving personal success.

The Offense

As stated in the first chapter, "I believe in an offense that attacks the defense with contact and location hitting". For most teams, home run power in every batting position is not realistic. The last time I checked, one team must score more runs than the other team to win the game. It is in all the rulebooks. It is the object of the game. So, combine power with contact and enjoy wins.

There are some **common concepts** of my batting philosophy before proceeding with hitting technique. These include: knowledge of the strike zones, contact points, positioning in the batter's box, and batting from the right or left when necessary.

The Zones

I teach **four strike zones for the batter to understand**. This is essential in order to be disciplined and successful at the plate. These are the batter's strike zone, the umpire's strike zone, the pitcher's strike zone and the batter's performance strike zone. Each of these zones can be learned and used by the batter to give them an offensive advantage.

The batter's strike zone is where they are most productive

For example, depending on the count and outs the batter must recognize whether to only swing in her strike zone or the umpire's zone. The batter's strike zone is where she can contact the ball effectively the majority of the time. This is not necessarily the entire strike zone. However, it is in a location that the batter is comfortable enough to know that she can definitely hit it hard somewhere.

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The umpire's strike zone is where they call strikes

Every batter must be able to recognize where the umpire will call strikes (umpire's strike zone). This varies from umpire to umpire and from game to game. If the ball is off the plate and outside but the umpire is calling them strikes, with two strikes, you must protect the at-bat and make contact to hit or foul off such pitches. This holds true for low, high and inside pitches as well. The umpire is an "uncontrollable" as we talk in our mental training and should be dealt with as such.

The pitcher's strike zone is her most productive pitch

The **pitcher's strike zone** is learned through scouting and observed during pre-game warm ups and recorded each inning. For example, a curve drop that hits the low outside corner might be the pitcher's best strike zone pitch. However, perhaps this is the batter's worst zone to hit it. Although this might be a called strike, the batter might choose to give up those areas around the plate when they have less than two strikes. This is because the ball cannot be hit with maximum power in the best location. Most of the time the ball will be an infield ground ball for an easy out. However, with two strikes the batter should foul off these pitches if possible.

The batter's performance strike zone is their favorite pitch

The **batter's performance strike zone** is that very specific pitch and location where the batter has total confidence and believes that she will drive the pitch out of the ballpark. Batters must practice in game-like situations by hitting against pitches in the various strike zones to determine this pitch and location. When this pitch is thrown, she should have complete confidence to hit this pitch with a full power swing. Even with a 3-0 count, she should be given the green light to rip the ball.

The mental approach to every at bat is one of "I want to hit" and "yes-yes". My hitters are not waiting for the right pitch every time. They are looking at every pitch as opportunities to drive it hard somewhere. I agree there are situations with

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base runners that dictate more discipline or position hitting (call this situational hitting). My hitters are disciplined but do not wait only for the right pitch to hit. Look at each pitch as an opportunity to drive the ball. The coaches and team in the dugout should learn to congratulate the batter that drives the ball even if the shortstop makes a great play and it is a caught out. The batter did a great job. Just keep hitting the ball hard. I promise it will eventually gain eyes for the holes.

Contact Points and Hitting Angle

It is part of my teaching philosophy to **focus** on the **contact point and train the hitting angle**. The contact point is the precise location where the bat meets the ball with an *almost* full arm extension, and *almost* full wrist extension, and an approximate 80 percent hip pop in their power contact zone. The contact point is located within the vertical plane of the proper zone to hit the pitch whether it is inside, down the middle, or outside; or, high, waist, or low. Mentally we look for a power zone that we own to drive the ball. For example, one batter hits for power best on waist to knees and middle to in pitches. The batter should look for balls in this zone when ahead in the count.

Understanding the Hitting Angle and Contact Point is of major importance. The contact point is not the same for all pitches. As discussed, hit the pitch where it wants to go. Where do you contact these different location pitches for full power?

The contact point for a down the middle pitch regardless of vertical location is in front of the batter's front hip toward the pitcher and not over the plate (unless you are standing in the back of the box). What do you do if the pitch is outside or inside? Experienced coaches refer to a batting angle that starts with contact of an inside pitch a couple feet in front of the front hip (varies by individual). A down the middle location is still in front. When the pitch is outside, contact the ball when the ball is across from the inside thigh or even with the belly button. Then, drive it to the opposite field. This creates a batting angle with unlimited possibilities of pitches between zones, but one where the ball can be hit with power. A great hitter must train to hit to the opposite field. In my training, we work outside pitches before we progress to inside. This keeps our hitters inside the ball.

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Trying to hit an outside pitch with a contact point like an inside location three feet out in front of the body results in a missed ball. Do not resist the hitting angle. Use it to your advantage and watch your on-base percentage improve. Hitting to an opposite field makes a batter great.

A last comment about “contact points” is when an inside pitch is contacted properly. The hitter’s belly button should face her pull side field, i.e. a right handed hitter on an inside pitch, her belly button should face left field on contact and on an outside pitch for a right handed hitter the belly button faces right field upon contact.

(See chart for hitting angle and contact points in Chapter 11)

Batter’s discipline and the take sign

Focusing (scanning) on the ball especially at the pitcher’s release point to contact point creates a well-disciplined batter. Learning the best contact point requires a batter to have “strike zone discipline,” visual acuity and eye to brain function quickness.

The contact point as stated is not where the catcher receives the pitch. So why are youngsters taught to track the ball into the catcher’s mitt instead of acquiring strike zone discipline? A batter can develop strike zone discipline by mentally and physically focusing on the pitch from the release point to the proper contact point only. The brain will develop patterns and store them in the memory to recall when needed. This visual technique alone will improve your on-base percentage and team offense. Forget about following the ball into the catcher’s mitt. Proper head and eye positioning to see the ball clearly and big at release and contact and **not with peripheral vision** is done without any head movement. The eyes only scan and converge.

The discipline involved in the batter’s performance strike zone, as discussed before under contact points, and the contact point lead to that exciting opportunity to drive the ball for a home run with a 3 and 0 count. I hope every player gets this opportunity. As an aside, to consistently give the take sign in this 3 and 0 situation is strategically a mistake for any successful team and is a deterrent to exciting

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winning softball. The coach and ballplayer must have confidence and discipline to rip the ball in this unique opportunity.

This confidence is gained through practice and repetition of strikes in the batter's performance zone only. This performance zone the batter can sense is that special fatty pitch. If the batter sees this kind of pitch and has the confidence to crunch it, the player and coach must be comfortable to take the chance and hit away. In certain situations, however, I understand a take sign can be a strategic tool.

There are special situations, although very few in my mind, where a take sign needs to be discussed with the batter. For example, in the bottom of the seventh, the score tied bases loaded and no outs, the pitcher visibly upset having just thrown 12 balls in a row, the batter should work the pitcher perhaps for the walk. This could continue until the winning run walks home or until the batter gets two strikes.

Discipline at the plate also means patience and intelligence. For example, it is good strategy with less than two strikes not to swing at a junk strike when that strike is in the pitchers or umpires strike zones but not in the batters performance strike zone. Patience for a better pitch often times creates a better-hit opportunity. I am not suggesting that hitters wait and "look for great pitches every at bat". If the first pitch is a great pitch drive it.

The idea of seeing a better strike zone pitch or any one that the hitter can drive will improve on-base percentage and the team's offensive production significantly. But don't let me confuse you, again I do not mean that you should sit back and wait on pitches. I believe in a "yes-yes" mentality to hit every pitch. Every pitch should be looked upon as an opportunity to hit until the eyes see differently and the brain triggers off. As part of the team's offensive strategy with runners on base the game changes to concern for location hitting too.

The Batter's Box

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Another issue is proper positioning in the batter's box. This location is relative to the pitcher's ability, bat speed and the game's offensive strategy. Normally the most common starting position is even with the middle of the plate and close enough to cover the entire umpire's strike zone. Remember the umpire's strike zone is not necessarily the plate. However, if your best vision and confidence position is in the back of the box, be there.

Adjustments up and back and in and out are at the coach's or player's discretion. Consideration must also be given to the batter's running speed, vision on the ball, bat speed and ability to get out of the box quickly. These adjustments are an area that requires more practice time and synchronized minds of batter and coach.



Switch Hitting

A batter in Fastpitch today, unless she is clearly that designated power hitter, should possess some batting skills from the right and left sides. Why not? This added dimension to the game allows a weaker team to be more competitive with any stronger ball club. Granted, this will occur more in younger travel ball than at the collegiate or Olympic level, but it is a fun and possible useful method of

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training. In training, batting from the opposite side in cage or practice often causes more focus by the batter on technique which is a good thing. It balances the body out too by working both sides of the muscles. Also, in an intentional walk situation switching from one side of the box to the other each pitch might just create a hitting opportunity or pitcher's mistake.

Consequently, knowledge of the four strike zones, the contact point (along with the batting angle which will be discussed more later), batters box positioning and special opportunities batting right and left will create a well-disciplined high on-base percentage batter. With these concepts in mind, a more in-depth discussion of batting technique follows.

Words to Hit By

All that a player needs to know about hitting the ball boils down to about *19 words*. A quick reference progression if you will. Memorize these bolded words below, feel their intent (purpose) and train their associated meaning:

(Stance / Stride/ Swing) (Finger grip) (Stride-Slide-Hip-Flip) (Chin shoulder to shoulder) (See the ball; rip the ball)

These 19 overview words plus the upper body progression shoulder-elbow-knob-wrist encompasses the basics of the entire batting technique.

Stance

The first of the three "S's" is **Stance**. A proper stance provides a strong, well-balanced and stable platform from which to generate the power and discipline of a swing. Weight should be on the balls of the feet, more specifically slightly on the inside of the foot over the two big toes, the entire foot touching the ground (heels not off the ground at this point but only paper thin between ground and heel). Legs slightly flexed at the knees, which are



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positioned slightly inside the toes. Place the feet slightly wider than the shoulders, hips and knees, as a rule of thumb, but realize each player's stability varies and it should be checked before beginning hitting techniques. The toes of both feet to start should point directly to the opposite box. The upper torso is almost erect but slightly toward home plate allowing the body to stay relaxed; no locked joints. This will also keep you from leaning backward and putting weight on your heels.

Your hands should be positioned approximately at the level of the back shoulder or armpit. The elbows angled down in a quasi inverted "V" shape like an Indian tee-pee. More specifically, the back elbow a little more vertical and the front arm inclined down-ward guiding the path to the ball. Does this mean the back elbow cannot be pointed up? No. It will make an adjustment on the way to the ball. The bottom of the bat or knob is pointed 90 degrees away from the body or slightly towards the pitcher or inward but not back (away from the pitcher). The hands and elbows should be a comfortable distance from the body not tight to the body. Keep them compact but not too close and not too far. This hand position allows the incline of the bat to be about 30-45 degrees from level with the wrist cocked back.

A more vertical bat is not a problem except an adjustment cocking the wrist back on the approach to the ball is necessary but a waste of time. The front elbow should be bent at 90 degrees or less. The bat should be in an area between the top of the ear and the top of the shoulder.

Head and Eye Positioning

To start with, the chin is turned closer to the front shoulder keeping in mind the vision concept of scanning and converging. Keep your face more in line with the pitcher, both vertically and horizontally. Don't tilt your head or turn away from the pitcher. Eyes must be on a parallel plane to see the ball more clearly



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with less distortion.

There is another issue, about the eyes, that needs to be discussed. Which is your best eye to use to focus on the pitch? Typically, one eye is stronger than the other is. If that is the case, a slight adjustment in head position is recommended. It is helpful to know which eye is dominant and take advantage of that knowledge so you can see the ball better. Or, is this the best approach?

A more important and advanced concept for better vision today is to **scan and coverage**. The head needs to be in a position to see the pitch clearly with each eye equally and individually scanning and converging on the ball at contact without using peripheral vision or any head movement at release and contact. Realizing one eye probably is stronger, **work hard to train the weak eye**. You could accomplish this by patching over the better eye and make the weak eye get stronger. Do not favor the strong eye. Practice working the eyes from release to contact rapidly and you will realize how tough it is. You will realize the eyes have muscles that need to be trained just like the major body groups. Train the eyes and it will pay huge dividends.

In any case, the eyes should be focused on the pitcher when she is ready to start (this is called a *soft focus*) and not drifting around the stadium or field. Then, as the pitcher gets ready to release, the batter should shift focus specifically and deliberately to the release hip and ball (this is a *hard focus*).

The Batter's Pre-motion

One other suggestion is to have a minimal but deliberate body movement prior to the pitch. This rhythm helps maintain mind focus and body readiness. It relaxes the body too. You know it is harder for a car to get started after a complete stop at a stop sign versus a "California roll" which is gliding through the stop sign. It can get up to speed much easier if it never quite stops. The same concept is Einstein's "a body in motion stays in motion." The same thing applies to a batter's swing. A little pre-motion will help the batter get up to full power much easier and quicker.

A simple but important technique to be mentally prepared to hit when the batter steps into the box is to have the *same consistent routine*. For example, a

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batter will be able to more easily focus their mind and body on the pitch by stepping up to the plate with the bat rested on their back shoulder as an example. After scanning their body for tension and proper stance, the batter quickly, but in a relaxed way, lifts the bat into position between the ear and shoulder to “switch the light on” that she is ready.

To be an effective power hitter however, in addition to the batter's pre-motion, you need a trigger. To cock the trigger, begin with a slight front foot and knee turn/movement along with a hip and hands movement backward. (There are many ways to achieve a good trigger but I am a fan of less movement is more.) The weight is put on the back foot and inside back thigh. Then turn the hip and back knee slightly forward along with the elbow jab as the weight shifts to the middle with the start of the swing or approach back to the ball. I call this combined movement a “complete trigger.” This motion synchronized with proper timing on the stride and jab, hip thrust or pop, wrist snap and a good extension of the swing creates the ultimate power swing. As an added note, the complete trigger prepares the body and the mind to hit any pitch. Without this movement the swing appears to be not aggressive or ready for all pitches from fastball to change-ups.

Stride



The second “S”, **Stride** (or a timing mechanism) is common to all traditional hitting techniques. There are four characteristics of the stride: it moves in the direction to the pitcher, short in distance, closed foot, and lightweight on touchdown.

The front foot should stay closed (not fully open) and move in the direction of the pitcher. To move in the direction of the pitch is realistic only if the pitch location is known in advance and the pitch is actually thrown in that location. To stay closed means to keep the toes pointed toward the opposite box and not pointing them to the pitcher. Do not be concerned with slight

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opening of the front foot. Avoid the toes pointing to the pitcher. Usually this step is long enough to generate a positive “step into the pitch” movement. The movement starts with the front heel lifting transferring weight to the back leg (inside thigh) and not shifting back to the front side too early. Too long of a stride (loss of stability) breaks down proper mechanics and reduces power. It also is difficult to get out of the box quickly.

On the other hand, a batter who takes a stride that maintains stability will still have enough power to drive the ball even if they mistakenly get ahead of the pitcher. Sometimes this is what occurs on a change-up pitch. After the stride, which are the toes touching the ground, by staying to the middle of the body and not stopping the remaining body movements (much like a car making a California roll) and using correct technique gives the batter a better chance of hitting the best change up.

The stride should be relatively closed at the start to the contact of the swing (toes pointing toward the other box or slightly open). This means that the front knee and hip and shoulder stays closed until the contact movement. If the foot opens too early and totally so will the knee, hip, then the front shoulder, and then the head. This is a formula for disaster. Understand with the rotation of the lower body to contact the front toes do open at that point. This is hitting against a firm front side.



The stride foot on the step (if you step) should be on the ball of the foot over the big toe and the heel up enough to pop it down when hitting. There should be no loss of stability and the toe is not a ballerina looking toe pose either. Put just enough weight on the front foot to maintain stability. You should not transfer your weight to the stride foot before the contact movement. As the front heel touches the ground, the backside drives forward. You should not look like the Leaning

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Tower of Pisa either to start. There should be no leaning towards or away from the pitcher to start. This loses stability and causes tension on the leg muscles supporting the overload of weight until the pitch is delivered. The techniques used in the stance and stride, two of the 3 S's (Stance/ Stride/ Swing), are applicable to nearly all types of hitting. The exception is for left side running hits.

Stride to A Hitting Position

A most important comment about the stride is also an essential phrase that deals with timing. "Stride to a power hitting or launching position; never step and swing at the same time." This might imply starting to load the body to the backside



as the stride goes forward. However, this is not true. You may load the body in the trigger action but if you stride at the same time the body separates the hands and upper torso from the foot and lower legs. This is unproductive and an inefficient way to swing. It lacks aggressiveness too. They would move in a progression of movements loading then striding or setting then loading, but not at the same time. This is not what we want to

do. I prefer to load the body then stride. An absolute of hitting through the decades has been to land the stride foot prior to launching the bat. This is early enough to help recognize the pitch and maintain stability. This movement is critical for power, rhythm, and timing. It is great timing. It is an aggressive movement forward as if ready to throw a punch.

However, if the young player is struggling with timing it would not hurt to stride a little early or not at all. An earlier stride will improve vision and the decision on the pitch. A no stride could be the starting point to teaching the swing to young hitters. Once this is mastered, come back to timing with the stride. Remember, loading the body is still important in a no stride. Moving the body backwards then forward is more important than the stride. It puts the body in a position to react and hit properly for power. It also gives the batter a better view

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on the ball. Too often you see a batter step and hit at the same time. I call this "spasm hitting" because it results in the player having zero discipline and/or proper timing.

Trigger Action

To be an effective power hitter, in addition to the batter's pre-motion, you need a trigger to load the body. To cock the trigger, begin with a slight front knee turn/movement along with a front hip and shoulder movement backward (away from the pitcher). This will raise the front heel as the body pivots slightly or moves backwards and prevents the body from swaying beyond the back foot. Moving the body backwards without rotation is okay. Swaying to me is defined when the hips go outside the foot. It slightly tucks the shoulder softly down and under the chin. Too often the front shoulder is pumped up like a balloon or pillow adding tension. The weight is transferred to the back foot (under the ball of the foot and more specifically inside under the big toe) and the inside back thigh. In one fluid motion, continue by turning the backside in good rhythm with the elbow jab (or slide or pull) as the weight moves to the middle to drive forward. This slide or pull of the elbows is very small at this point and is critical to keeping the front side from not opening too early. The front elbow movement is just enough movement to unlock the front shoulder joint. The back elbow tucks down initiating movement to the ball. These are the mechanics that will enable a hitter to just see the ball and rip the ball without any more thought to mechanics when (most often after) the pitch is released. Just trust the swing at this point. This is what is referred to above as the combined movement of a "complete trigger." These movements, when synchronized with proper timing on the stride, leg extension, hip pop, wrist snap and a good long extension of the swing creates the ultimate power swing. This complete trigger is the proper timing on every pitch helping to make the decision to



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swing easier. This timing is very important and should be discussed more at this point.

A *complete trigger* movement is a phrase I would prefer to use when describing the movement from the start of the loading to a launching point. Simply the front knee, hip, and shoulder slightly rotating backwards before the stride movement is important. But these movements are only half of the complete trigger movement. Completing the trigger includes the backside –back elbow, hip, and



knee slightly rotating towards the pitch. The back heel is low to the ground. *Do not over rotate the back ankle or heel.* The weight is moving towards center of gravity. The hands remain at this point of the swing still and located by the starting location. They do not move forward with the lower body, although the body moving forward sometimes makes it look like the hands are

moving.

Since the decision to swing the bat is the toughest part of hitting, this complete trigger helps the decision and puts the body in a great position to be disciplined and strong. The front side slightly rotates by the knee turning inward into the body a little and the front heel lifts off the ground. This shifts the weight from equally balanced to the inside of the back leg. Then the backside pivots or turns back towards the ball. The pivot does not lift the heel of the back foot high yet. It stays low to the ground. This pivot if any is minimal! It is not a full turn or over-rotation (see picture above) of the back foot as in “squishing the bug”.

Timing the pitch

As a starting point to help a hitter achieve great timing, I use the following rule of thumb with hitters. The batter should start her loading or trigger movement as the pitcher starts her forward-upward movement or called her windmill loading. The body is loading with a movement that matches in time the pitcher’s windmill movement with tempo and rhythm. Match your timing of movements with the pitcher’s movements is a key concept. Upon release of the pitch, the body

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completes the trigger by starting from the backside and rotating slightly in the direction of the pitcher. The body continues to move until the decision to swing.

More simply stated, when the pitcher starts, you start. The time it takes her to load, you load with tempo (slow to fast). Tempo is slow, minimal and methodic like a golf back swing then it becomes explosive. When the pitcher releases, you stride then complete the trigger movement starting to the ball as if to throw a ball or skip a rock. The body is now

physically and mentally prepared to hit. I believe in assuming every pitch is the pitcher's fastest pitch. The in-between ball speed is the variable of timing. The body matches the timing of the pitcher's windmill movement. An additional note on the above, it does not hurt if the batter's movements, especially the stride, happen early if desired, but never late or with weight transfer forward too early!

I could describe this timing by math terms. There are two fixed points and two variable points. When the pitcher loads and gets to in front of the head on the windmill the batter starts her loading. The time it takes the pitcher to load is a variable and the batter must match the timing. When the pitcher gets to release point and releases this is another fixed point and the batter completes the trigger action. The time it takes for the ball to arrive at the plate is another variable in timing.

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The Grip

Before going into detail about the Swing (the third S), there is one other important detail that needs to be addressed. Namely, how to hold the bat. It is preferable to have the correct **Finger grip** on the bat for control and quickness. When lightly gripping the bat the knocking knuckles of both hands should be in alignment. Once the grip is obtained you can check the alignment by pointing the two index fingers out straight and see if they are not crossed but pointing straight up to the sky, as they should be. The bat should never rest in the palms of the hands. The wrist should maintain a relaxed but cocked and ready position. Remember that good technique never goes to extremes. With a comfortable stance and a proper grip, a batter has the bat ready for explosion through the ball.



The Swing

The third "S" is the **Swing**. It is probably the most complicated part of the group, but it can be characterized by the general words **Stride-Slide-Hip-Flip**.



Although these four words imply separate actions, in essence, these actions are one fluid motion. The stride-slide and the hip-flip work together in one continuous sequence of events.

▲ The stride refers to the timing step.

The stride-slide is the movement of the elbows (not the hands) in a minimal sliding (pulling) elbow jab (both elbows) to the pitch in sync with the stride and complete trigger as mentioned earlier. The hands do not move out away from



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the chest but slide across the chest to the pitcher keeping the front shoulder closed until it is unlocked. Please note that this movement is very minimal (unlike the picture to the right which is incorrect), perhaps a quarter of an inch in total length, just enough to unlock the front shoulder joint. The forward slide movement with the elbows is all that is necessary for a compact power swing. Please do not misinterpret this. These movements are described like long movements, but they are not! They are very minimal movements solely to keep the body and bat position proper and the swing compact but bio-mechanically productive. So when I refer to the slide, picture a bottom hand on the bat with its thumb out pointing to the back shoulder. The slide is a minimal $\frac{1}{4}$ " to $\frac{1}{2}$ " scratch of the body by the thumb from the back shoulder forward. The back elbow pulls down toward the hip and to the ball.

A four-word description of the upper body mechanics helps to better understand this progression to the ball. These words are Shoulder-Elbow-Knob-Wrist. When we isolate training on the upper body, we focus on the front shoulder turning softly back towards the chin as part of our triggering movement (along with the front knee and hip). This is followed by the elbows pulling, followed by the knob of the bat, hands then a full wrist flip to the ball. Note, even though we are discussing only the upper body mechanics that the hip rotation follows the elbow jab.

The hands move inside the ball at a downward angle initiating the slide move similar to a hammer hitting a nail into a post at approximately a 15 up to 45 degrees downward angle. This action is like a karate chop because it is abrupt and



sharp with power. Please make sure that this downward angle does not continue after contact. The downward angle just gets the bat to the plane of the ball in the

strike zone behind the ball but not too early before contact. This is why I have referred to a "handshake"



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approach to the ball. Without the handshake the hitter radiates her wrists and drops her bat head to the plane of the ball too early (too far behind body).

This is primarily why I do not start my teaching using the phase “palm up and down” although I believe in a palm up and down position to hit. Young athletes take us too literally. Palm up and down to start the swing causes the bat head to drop. Teach proper movements to the plane of the ball then discuss palm up and down to contact the ball. Palm up and down has a connotation of a flat swing too early which is not the visual I want my hitters to have. At the point of contact, the palms are up and down. There are always exceptions so upon contacting a hit and run pitch over the head I think the palm of the top hand faces more towards the ball when it is in an up location like this. This will enable the batter to roll to the top side of the ball hitting a position that is top to middle on the ball countering any spins. This is like a tomahawk approach to the ball. This will ensure the bat not going flat too soon and maintain productivity on this out of the zone must hit ball. The hands always stay inside the ball. Typically upon contact, the elbows will be above the hands and the hands above the barrel. The front shoulder does move upward compared to the back shoulder and the elbows to upper arm create a “V” pointing away from the back shoulder.

Power as discussed in weight training and strengthening comes from the core of the body with a stable ground connection. In hitting, the rotational movement of the hip initiated by the back elbow pulling continues the swing to a hip-flip. There are three body movements to look for in power that you can see in the hitter: low back heel becomes a high heel, the back leg straightens (not completely locked up), and the hip pops (pelvis opens). The bat is sharply flipped by the cocked wrists and topside of the forearms to the ball at the contact point. Note the cocked wrists start in an upward position not a radiated down position. The top hand is instrumental in quickness to the ball and proper contact.

Since the batter should maintain stability throughout the swing, the knee and hip thrust transfer the power to the upper body just prior to contact. This action puts the weight, which was inside back leg forward onto the front leg. At the moment of contact, the wrists maintain no roll until through the ball then finish around to the tip of the front shoulder. When the stride-slide-hip-flip is

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synchronized (timed to the pitch) as one motion and the ball is contacted with almost full arm extension it creates the most power and best technique a batter can attain.

After the complete trigger is accomplished, and the knee and hip being a part



of the complete trigger starts back towards the ball, the back heel at this point is low to the ground and pivoted slightly (more or less depending on the location of the pitch. Once the decision to swing is made by the eyes, the back heel will end up forward to the ball (which I refer to as low heel to high heel; see pictures).



The back leg is elongated forward outward and front leg. The movement to the cocked that the hips The hands



and the hips pop (pelvis opens) upward against the remaining discuss is the flip of wrists. It is true do lead the hands.

when ahead of the hips or back elbow to start the swing, causes many problems. Note again the pull (slide) of the elbows is minimal and not elongated. The bat is then sharply flipped by the cocked wrists and the topside of the forearms to the ball at the contact point. The top hand is instrumental in bat explosion, leverage and quickness to the ball at proper contact.

When the stride-slide-hip-flip is synchronized (timed to the pitch) as one progressive series of movements and the ball is contacted with slightly flexed elbows and full wrist-flip it creates power and the best efficiency a batter can attain. Remember the most important concept of hitting is still getting the bat efficiently down to the plane of the ball prior to contact (but definitely not too early) and extending level through the ball. On a down pitch we do swing to a middle down location on the ball (bottom half of the ball) and bring the bat up a little on the extension. This is the only exception to a level extension.

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Chin shoulder to shoulder is another essential aspect of the swing technique. This eliminates pulling the head off the ball. These words mean this: Keep the head still and focused on the ball, from the release all the way to the contact point. As the swing starts, the chin is located close to the front shoulder and

ideally does not move until the back shoulder rotates and meets it. Included as part of the trigger, the front shoulder turns back towards the chin as the body coils back slightly. This is often referred to as “keeping the head (eyes) on the ball” and “not pulling the head”.

Continuing the swing technique, the batter snaps to the ball with acceleration and intensity upon contact with a full-bat flip extension. All of the above movements work in harmony as the entire body rotates around like the earth rotating on its axis keeping the shoulders somewhat parallel to the ground until connection with the ball. A batter can hit high or low pitches by keeping the elbows above the hands and the hands above the barrel and simply taking the knob of the bat to the inside of the ball and snapping to the level of the ball and contact.

Remember the Fastpitch swing is not a “swing level pattern” but a swing with downward movement to the plane of the ball and a level extension through the ball with the hands typically above the ball and not rolling at all.

In summary, the words **(Stance / Stride/ Swing) (Finger grip) (Stride-Slide-Hip-Flip) (Chin shoulder to shoulder)** when memorized, internalized and practiced are all that a batter needs to technically make contact and hit with power. The goal is to make these movements automatic (muscle memory) through



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repetition. This will free the batter's mind for focusing on her plan of hitting the ball by seeing the pitcher's release, reading the pitch, and preparing to explode through the ball. I refer to this as *see-read-explode*.

The balance of the words ***See the ball - rip the ball*** is a mental technique. Ideally, once the batter steps into the box she must ignore additional comments from the coaches, mom, dad, boyfriend, crowd, etc and mentally focus on the job at hand. That job, simply put, is to see the ball as big as possible. You put in the practice so now you can trust your muscle memory to give you the ability to rip the ball. A batter should not "think and hit" or think negatively at any time while they are in the box. Meditating on these key words, "See the ball - rip the ball", will help keep your mind focused properly.

These key words and illustrations used to describe proper batting techniques have helped players of all ages learn proper fundamentals. These techniques have helped them recognize bad habits and correct them. For example, when I am working with a batter who pulls her head or swings too quickly around her body, she is reminded about chin-shoulder-to-shoulder. She then keeps her head still in proper position and makes good contact. These simple words also eliminate the obtrusive distraction of a coach or parent yelling at a player to keep your head still. She hears the words "chin shoulder to shoulder" and in a relaxed mode knows what to do.

There are excellent drills listed at the end of the chapter and in the appendices, which will help properly train the batter. Through study and implementation of these techniques, anyone can become a constructive coach.

Contact Hitting

There is an alternative to the traditional hitting technique. This is an abbreviated version of the full batting technique discussed above. Let's say you are instructing very young girls, novices, high school or even collegiate players who are about to face an intimidating or superior pitcher. After all else fails, a switch in strategy for putting the ball in play is in order. I suggest using what I call the compact contact method. This strategy is a good idea with two strikes also.

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This eliminates the need to move the foot and hence cuts out one element of the swing and saves time. This swing is shorter since the hands are more forward. For very young girls the step is one more thing to think about instead of gaining



confidence through
hands to ball and

contact. There is no need to include it until they understand the advanced swing technique.

The slide and flip is shortened by moving the hands slightly forward from the back shoulder so that the hands, which are now choked up more than normal on the barrel, can more quickly get through the pitch. As an alternative, it is entirely possible for the batter not to choke up on the barrel but rather change to a lighter weight bat. She will have more bat speed with a lighter bat.

This hitting technique shortens the hand movement by moving forward in a Starting position prior to the pitch and eliminating the stride movement (a no step hit). Since the stride is a timing mechanism, which enhances the swing technique, the batter can start with her stance already into the stride.

The rest of a condensed compact swing is seeing, reading, and exploding through the pitch. The big finish associated with a power hitter is unnecessary since the intent is to put the ball in play. This is why it's called the compact contact method of hitting. To be successful at the different levels in Fastpitch players must recognize both the traditional and the contact hitting techniques as distinct and

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different methods to combat a variety of teams, pitchers and situations. Batters who can make adjustments when facing different pitchers are what make the game competitive and exciting.

All the techniques and methods in this book are based on solid fundamentals through proven methods for the player desirous of good form and performance. These fundamentals of hitting can also be used as a basis for and adapted to the short game of Fastpitch including bunts, drags, slaps, slashes, pushes, etc.

Training Hitting

My Favorite Drills

Hitting

MULTIPLE LOCATION SOFT TOSS

Objective

Work on contact zones and points.

Explanation

Have the tosser at a 45 degree angle in front of the hitter, at 90 degrees across from her, from directly in front at about 10-20 feet and behind the hitter on one knee or seated on a bucket. Have the tosser toss the balls into different contact zones. Toss in a controlled fashion presenting the ball allowing her to trigger, then a easy toss into the zone you are working (for example: Across from the hitter at 90 degrees or a little more behind her to the outside contact zone.

Hitters will develop their technical skills quicker.

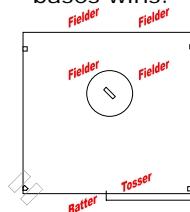
OVER THE LINE

Objective

An oldie, but a goodie! Use this game to bring out the aggression, rhythm and intensity in the hitter. Having fun is a great way to relax and just go for it! Try to use live pitching to simulate game situation or just toss to yourself.

Explanation

In the field there are four fielders, 2 infielders, 2 outfielders. Positioned at the baseline and outfield. The batter has one chance to hit the ball. If she does not hit it fair which is between the 3rd base foul line and an imaginary baseline from 1st to 2nd base and beyond, she is out. If the ball lands in foul territory, the batter is out. If the ball is fielded by either of the two infielders (in the air or on the ground) cleanly, the batter is out. If an out fielder catches the ball in the air, the batter is also out. Now if the ball is bobbled or rolls past the infielders, the batter gets a single (Batter does not actually run, but mentally notes there is a runner now on first). If the ball is hit over the infielders, but in front of the outfielders, the batter gets a double and the previous runners on base move accordingly. If the ball rolls past the outfielders, it's a triple and if the ball lands past the outfielders on a fly, it's a homerun! The team with the most total bases wins.



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CAGE CONTACTS

Objective

To work on making contact and building hand eye coordination.

Explanation

While using the pitching machine in the cage or on the field, challenge each hitter to make contact with every pitch. She misses a pitch she is out and next batter goes in. Don't keep any records, but tell your player the record is 147 contacts in a row so they have something to shoot for or pick a number that is more realistic at your level.

TEE TEE TEE

Objective

Muscle memory

Explanation

Forgotten about, but still the best hitting drill around. Use the basic tee to work technique, hitting angle, different height pitches etc. for muscle memory. The Instructo Swing has been the best development in path to the ball in tees.

HIT STIX FUNDAMENTALS

Objective

Proper repetition of fundamental technique movements

Explanation

Use the underload bat, the audible contact points bat, the short-ee one arm isolation bat, or sliik stik for a trigger trainer. A stride checker to control the lower body. The Hit Stix includes special colored balls for a variety of drills.

FENCE EXTENSIONS

Objective

Extension through the zone to hit

Explanation

Face a fence, extend the bat from your belly button to the fence so that you are one bat length away from the fence. Swing the bag, slow to start progressing to full speed swings, following the fence as far as you can without rolling the wrists. Enhance this drill by starting to swing with another fence to the right side of a right handed hitter or opposite for lefty. Now a fence controls the casting or sweeping action of the bat in addition to the long path through the ball. Toss plastic balls along fence to add another dimension.

Check out the latest circuit training drills from GM Sports in the Appendices.

Training Hitting