

4 SECRETS TO BETTER HITTING



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Introduction

What is it that makes some batters so consistent and others so frustrated at the plate? There are four major secrets to better hitting, outlined in this report for your convenience. As a coach, you will spend a large portion of your time working with batters with many different habits they have acquired from different coaches. Remember that consistency is key and that with a few pointers, most batters can improve mightily in a short amount of time.

From picking the right bat to preparing mentally for the rigors of batting, this report details the secrets that professional coaches and players swear by. Some seem simple and you might second-guess their usefulness. However, every tip provided here has been tested by players and coaches and shown to help improve power, aim, concentration, and overall batting ability. Get ready! It's time for the four biggest secrets in hitting.

Pick the Right Bat

Simply choosing the right bat for a player can make a huge difference in how they swing and what kind of results they get. The bat determines the velocity of the swing, the strength of the impact with the ball and how far the ball will go. It also controls the aim of the ball and affects the beginning of the batter's sprint to first base. Because the bat affects so many aspects of the game, having the right bat is essential.

Length

There are two main characteristics to look for with a bat: length and weight. A bat that is too short will not allow the batter to hit all the balls in their strike zone, even if the batter knows they should be able to reach it. It might cause them to reach for the ball, which throws off their stance, rhythm, and ability to get behind the ball with real power.

A bat that is too long is often also too heavy. This will make the swing slower and the motion clumsier. A bat that is too long also puts the batter at danger for hitting the ball with the wrong section of the bat, making the ball go in a different direction than intended.

To pick a bat that is the right length for the player, batters should stand in the middle of the batter's box and place the bat against the inside corner of home plate. The knob of the bat should come to the batter's palm. If the bat is too short, it will only reach to the fingers. If the bat is too long, it will go up to their wrist and beyond.

Weight

A bat's weight is extremely important to the overall swing and success of the bat. For example, think of the past baseball scandals where major league players have been caught with cork in their bats to make them lighter and easier to swing. There is a reason these things are illegal in the game—they give the batter an unfair advantage by giving them a bat light enough to swing extremely hard, which gives the batter a higher chance of hitting a home run because of the added power behind the ball.

Normal bats are 8-10 ounces less in weight than their length in inches. So, for example, a bat that is 30 inches long will probably weight about 20 ounces. A bat that is too heavy will slow down the swing and make it very difficult for batters to maintain proper form during the stance and swing. Starting with improper form only leads to improper form in swinging, which reduces the chances for a well-hit ball that will result in a base hit.

A bat that is too light will cause batters to swing too fast, which also affects rhythm and keeps the batter from doing their job. A light bat also sometimes causes the shoulders to get ahead of the hips. In an effective swing, the hips should lead the rest of the body. If the shoulders get around too quickly, the swing will not have proper power, as much of the batter's power comes from the action of the hips, which lead the lower body.

Aluminum vs. Wood

The composition of the bat is also worth noting and discussing. Depending on league or association rules, your batters may not have a choice in what type of bat they choose. However, for other teams, this will be a matter of serious consideration.

Aluminum bats are the newest technology in hitting and have changed the way many batters do business. They do not require the same kind of perfect mechanics that a wood bat requires because they are lighter and have a different location of balance, which can lead to poor technique if not taught properly.

The main difference between an aluminum bat and a wood one is the weight. Aluminum bats are much lighter than wood bats and can be a big help in letting batters swing faster and hit the ball farther.

Because the aluminum bat is lighter, players can make last minute adjustments to the swing better than they can with a wood bat. Once a wood bat gets going, it is hard to make adjustments, while an aluminum bat allows this freedom. An aluminum bat is also easier to get moving because of its reduced weight, so players can take more time deciding whether or not to swing, and if so, how to swing.

However, a wood bat has the potential to hit the ball farther because of its density and weight. A wood bat moving at the same speed as an aluminum bat will hit the ball harder because of its composition.

For some, aluminum bats are better because they are generally easier to swing. This does not mean they are lighter; while most are lighter, some heavier aluminum bats are easier to swing than their lighter wood counterparts simply because of how the weight is distributed within the bat. The closer the center of mass is to the handle, the easier the bat will be to swing. In general, the center of mass is much higher in aluminum bats than wood bats.

Wood bats also absorb more of the power of the ball, leaving less to be projected forward as the ball leaves the bat. Aluminum bats have what some call the “trampoline effect,” where the ball hits the bat and is thrown back out like a trampoline spring compressing and releasing.

Follow Regulations

With aluminum bats becoming more popular and allowing batters to hit faster, longer balls, many associations and leagues have developed rules regarding the use of aluminum bats. Make sure that you and your players are aware of all rules governing your team’s play so that you do not cause a problem by using the wrong bat.

For most high schools, the length-to-weight ratio determines a bat’s usability. The length-to-weight ratio is determined by taking the length, such as 32 inches, and subtracting the weight, such as 29 ounces. In this example, the length-to-weight ratio is a -3. Negative three is the common accepted ratio for high school play.

Anything with a -4 ratio or higher is simply too light for play in high school or equivalent teams. Batters with the ability to swing that fast and that hard pose a risk to other players. Be sure to know the proper ratio for your players based on their age, height, and weight, so that you can find the proper bat for them.

Try Out Bats

No player is going to know right away which bat is best for them. Comfort is more important than almost anything else when choosing a bat, and both players and coaches should recognize the necessity of trying out several bats before choosing a favorite.

Just as hockey players would not choose just any pair of skates, batters cannot pick up just any bat. It must feel right in weight, size, and during the swing. Players should do whatever they can to simulate a real swing so that they will know what bat they are most comfortable with.

Learn Which Pitches to Hit

The Favorite Pitch

All batters have pitches that are historically better for them to hit than others. An important part of becoming a better hitter is to learn what works for the batter, and coaches play a huge role in working with players to define those pitches.

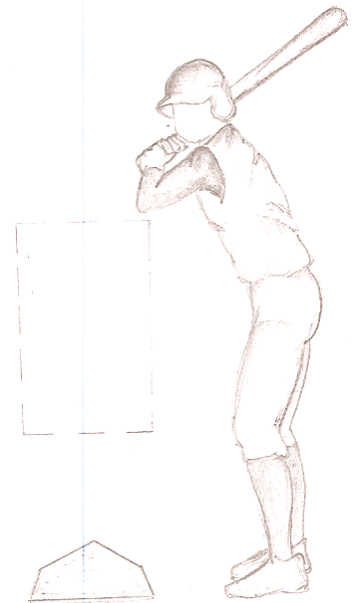
The first way to define what pitches to hit is to figure out what pitches make the batter most comfortable. Some appreciate the straight-forwardness of the fastball. Others appreciate the quickness of the curveball. Rotate players through every pitch so they know what makes them comfortable and what makes them uncomfortable.

Once players have their favorite pitches in mind, work with them to develop the patience necessary to hit those pitches and only those pitches. Learning patience while in the batter's box is extremely hard, because batters naturally want to take a swing at what is coming toward them, even if they know logically it is not the best pitch they are going to get. Instead, prepare players for this reality by drilling them in practice with a variety of pitches until they can recognize and wait for the pitches that really work best for them.

Recognizing Strikes

A broader theme connected to learning what pitches to hit are recognizing strikes when they come and only swinging at those. When players are new to the game or are trying to compensate for some other shortcoming, they will often reach for balls that might be hittable but should be let go. The same idea of patience is important here because without it, players will chase after every pitch that looks good—even when you as a coach know that it is a poor pitch.

The best way for batters to know what pitches to hit at is simply through practice. There should be days when pitchers are told to switch things up and try to confuse the batter, so that they get practice reading pitches and making decisions about which ones to hit. There should also be days where the pitchers strive to only throw strikes, and players must determine which of those strikes are the best ones to hit.



Batting for the Good of the Team

Sometimes, even a strike is not the right pitch to swing at. Depending on what the team needs, a player should or should not swing at balls where they know what the probable outcome will be. If a player knows that he generally hits a long, high ball on a certain pitch, but the team needs a grounder, he should not hit.

This also requires the coach and batter to know how to get the hit they want. Perhaps the perfect pitch will never come, but the batter can compensate by adjusting his hold on the bat. With preparation and help from the coach, batters can know when and how to adjust their swing to get the hit they need.

Read the Pitcher

One of the first things a batter should do before a game begins is to watch the opposing pitcher and get a feel for his pitching style. Because all pitchers are different, your team's opponent may have certain characteristics about him that set him apart from other pitchers. Look for his tendencies, his strengths, his weaknesses, and his habits.

When watching a pitcher, both the coach and batter should search for anything that gives away which pitch the pitcher is going to throw. Watch the way he throws and detect any changes in his stance, grip on the ball, or preparation that might indicate how he is going to throw. Knowing these tiny characteristics about a pitcher is sometimes all it takes to win a game.

Be Prepared for the Good Pitches

The times a batter will have a perfect pitch thrown to them are few and far between. For this reason, a batter must be ready to aggressively go after a ball they believe is perfect for what hit they need and their personal hitting strengths. Aggression is essential in batting because players need to believe that they can successfully hit the ball they are being pitched.

Preparation for the good pitches comes first in practice. Coaches must help develop confidence in their players, which is discussed later in tip 4, Prepare Mentally.

Coaches can help batters prepare for good pitches by building their confidence in practice. If you encourage players to hit the balls they think they can hit, you show them that you trust their judgment. If you congratulate them when they have a good appearance at the plate, you show that you recognize and appreciate their good technique and hard work.

By teaching players when and where to hit a ball, as well as helping build their confidence during practice and in games, you will soon find that your players are ready to jump all over good pitches when they come. Those players with less encouragement and support hesitate more at good pitches and are not prepared to meet the challenge with confidence and the aggression necessary.

Stay Focused in the Box

While in the batter's box, players should be thinking of nothing more than connecting with the ball and doing their job properly. All thoughts of technique and preparation should be gone, because the player has focused on this during practice to the point that all motions come like second nature.

The batter should also keep his focus on the pitcher. Once in place, the batter should look only at the pitcher, so as to better read what pitch is coming and how to hit it. Finding a central focus point like the pitcher also helps batters tune out the noise and other distractions threatening to take the player's focus from the ball.

Perfect the Mechanics

Stance

The beginnings of perfect mechanics are the components of the stance. The following descriptions are the ideals for a batting stance and should be the goal of every batter:

- Weight over the balls of the feet; never over the heels
- Knees bent
- Shoulders level
- Hands a comfortable distance away from the back shoulder; often this is 10-12 inches from the shoulder, though it is up to the batter's preference

Hip Placement and Movement

As the batter begins the swing, the hips come into play for the first time. The lower body, especially the hips, is extremely important in hitting. Though they may not seem connected, the hips play a major role in the power and distance of a hit, because they create the necessary torque to drive the ball.

When the batter starts the swing, the hips should turn in a bit, toward the catcher. The hands pull back toward the back shoulder and start the pre-launch torque that drives the body through the rest of the swing.

As the arms rotate through the swing, the hips should also rotate. Since they have inverted toward the catcher during the pre-swing, they will now more easily lead the body through the swing itself.

By starting the movement at the hips and letting it drive up the body through the arms, batters ensure that they put the most possible power behind the bat. If the hips follow the arms or do not turn at all, the batter will have a much more difficult time producing the kind of hit they desire.



Pre-Swing

There are several important movements that happen during the pre-swing. We have already discussed the inverted movement of the hips. At this point, the following things also need to happen:

- Front shoulder and chin tuck in
- Hands pull back
- Eyes should be toward the pitcher, with the head turned instead of keeping it straight down
- Hold the bat at a 45 degree angle to avoid any unnecessary movement

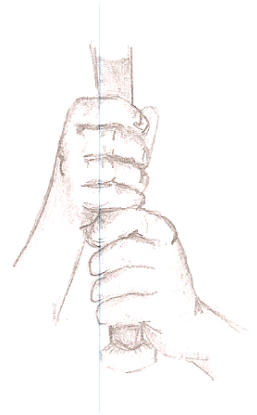
While in the stance, players should stand slightly farther apart than shoulder width. This allows players to keep their weight centered and lower into the ground, giving the player a wider base from which to pull power from the lower body.

Grip

Having a proper grip is essential for maintaining a smooth, consistent swing.

Batters should line up their middle knuckles on the bat so that their hands are in the steadiest position possible.

If the knuckles are not in this stabilizing position, the bat has a tendency to jump in the hands as batters turn their wrists over as they finish the swing.



Stride

Each player has a preference about how big or small of a stride to take on the swing. Batters should do what is most comfortable for them, provided that they do not step on the line of the batter's box, as this will cause them to be called out.

When helping players determine how big of a stride to take, encourage them to experiment. A shorter stride is usually better than a longer one for control purposes, because it keeps the player over their body and does not allow things to get out of rhythm. As speed is a necessary part of batting, a short stride is desirable because it helps batters move to their next element, the swing, sooner.

As the batter is about to bring their hands forward to start the swinging motion, the striding leg should come forward toward the pitcher. The stride should be toward the area in front of home plate to help the batter get into better position.

Swing

During the swing, there are also small adjustments that players can make to ensure that they get the best swing possible. When working on mechanics, even the smallest details count.

Throughout the swing, players should keep their back elbow up and close to the body. This allows the hands and the barrel of the bat to swing through completely. Finally, and perhaps most importantly when going through the swing, is to keep the head still. Keeping the head still ensures that you keep





proper balance throughout the swing, which is otherwise hard to do because the batter is moving nearly every other part to connect with the ball.

Maintaining a still head also helps with creating a rhythm. If the batter's body has one still part that does not move or change during the swing, that batter will have a better idea of what part of their swing needs work or what part is not synchronized with the rest of the body. Whether in practice or in play, keeping a steady head is extremely important.

As the ball is pitched, batters should bring their hands to meet the ball. This mental picture will help players get the bat in contact with the ball in exactly the right place. At the same time that batters are bringing their hands to the ball, they should be keeping those hands level and still, so that the bat slices through the air on an even plane. A swing with any type of loop or wiggle can cause a dangerous pop-up, which can be detrimental to the team.

Run Drills

Just because a batter has been batting for years does not mean that they will maintain good form. In fact, more experience can lead to poor form because players become complacent and pay less attention to their form than when they were first learning it.

Every so often, at the discretion of the coach, players should go back and work on hitting basics. This means starting from a tee, using a whiffle ball. While some players may grumble about starting at such a fundamental level, you must show them the importance of being able to hit a whiffle ball off a tee, perfectly, every time. If players cannot hit a ball where they want it to go when it is sitting right in front of them, how are they going to be able to hit a ball moving toward them at 50 miles an hour or more?

When players hit a whiffle ball correctly from a tee, it acts like a knuckleball. When players hit it incorrectly, it spins uncontrollably and goes awry. Because of the air going through the ball, players will be able to see their mistakes easier and make adjustments as necessary.

After players become comfortable again with hitting from a tee, remove the tee and have them practice with regular pitches again. They will notice a difference in the way they hold themselves and approach the ball, and you will see a difference in their effectiveness.

Prepare Mentally

Patience

Hitting is very much a mental game. Without adequate preparation, even minor errors or changes in routine can severely affect a batter and their ability to deliver a hit.

The most important mental preparation a player can undertake is learning patience. Patience comes into every part of batting. It is required to know which pitches are the best ones to hit. It is required to know at what moment the bat should swing, and it should teach the body to wait until that moment arrives. Patience is also necessary to wear the pitcher down by letting them know that the batter is exactly where they want to be and that they are willing to wait until they get the perfect pitch.

Mental Resilience

Mental resilience is another essential quality. Players can get out of their rhythm easily and need a way to regain their focus and calm while in the batter's box. Encourage players to develop a routine that helps them block out everything but their focus on the ball. Any of these strategies work when helping players develop mental toughness:

- Stepping out of the batter's box
- Deep breathing
- Repeating a positive word or phrase
- Visualizing the perfect hit
- Creating tunnel vision on the pitcher

Regardless of what they choose, all players should have a routine that helps them get back in the game. Give players adequate time to decide what works for them. If you see your batters overthinking their batting or otherwise losing concentration, encourage them to dive into their routine.

Mental preparation is a very private and personal thing and should be developed independently. However, you can help players by creating game-like situations in practice to test players' resilience during tough situations. Set expectations in practice that players are to take it as seriously as a game, and work with them through various scenarios that may arise.

Scope out the Other Team

Mental preparation includes cataloging everything a player can think about the team they are about to face. As the other team warms up, the smart batter will notice:

- Right-handedness or left-handedness of the pitcher and infielders
- Who has a strong arm

- What weaknesses or tendencies the pitcher has
- The quickness of the defense
- The communication between the pitcher and the catcher
- The conditions on the field, including the type of backstop and how it will affect a ball that hits it

All these tendencies of the other team seem small when viewed individually, but together, they provide a valuable picture about the rhythm and function of the team. By gathering all this information, batters can identify weaknesses, find out where is best to aim the ball based on the strengths of the defense, and use their advantages, whether that is speed, ability to read the pitch, or power-hitting.

As a coach, you should teach your team to look for these qualities and any others you can identify in the other team. Mark them yourself and share them with the team as appropriate to help them prepare a mental game against the opponent. Together, you can develop a comprehensive view of the team and how to beat them.

Develop a Plan

Every batter should walk up to the plate with a plan for how they are going to achieve their goal. The goal should be defined before the batter gets up to bat, and it should depend on the situation on the field.

For example, just because a batter can hit with lots of power does not mean that such a hit will be most helpful. If there is a runner on third and less than 2 outs, a fly ball might be helpful. If the player simply needs to get on base, a grounder or other well-placed line drive may be best. This, of course, depends on the situation your team faces and the specific talents of the player coming up to bat.

Once you and your batter have determined what their goal will be in hitting, they should develop a plan for achieving that goal. If a batter walks to the box with no idea of how they need to hit or what type of hit they want, the results can be opposite of what your team needs. To best prepare your players mentally, you should arm them with as much information as possible.

Developing a plan also helps players build confidence, which is the next and final section of preparing mentally. By helping players get a clear vision of their hit, you arm them with the confidence to achieve that goal. Simply having that knowledge of what needs to be done and how to do it will give your players a belief that they can achieve it. Positive thinking, as we will see, goes a long way to successful batting.

Maintain Confidence

To be successful, batters need to walk up to the plate believing that they will be successful. However, this belief begins long before the batter ever sees the batter's box. It starts in practice, continues in the warm-up, and is fully realized in the game.

Confidence is the belief that a player can achieve what they set out to achieve. To help your players develop the necessary confidence to hit only those pitches worth hitting, teach them to follow their instincts in practice and in games. Avoid second-guessing them or cutting them down when an experiment fails.

Also during practice, make an effort to use positive reinforcement and as much positive language as possible. Players need to know that you support them and believe in them, because your opinion as a coach is very important to them. If you show them that you believe in them, their ability to believe in themselves will be greatly increased.

Confidence continues in the warm-up for a game. Part of building confidence is knowing as much about your opponent as possible, so that when a player steps up to bat, they know something about the team and what to expect. While your team will never know its opponent as well as you would like, you can help them learn what to look for and how it affects the other team so that they have an idea of how the team will play.

Also during the warm-up should come more positive language. Help your team think positively, talk positively, and increase their confidence by leading by example. Let every player know that you are counting on them and that you are certain they can deliver, and they will believe it themselves.

Conclusion

Now you know the four secrets to better hitting: pick the right bat, learn the right pitch to hit, perfect the mechanics, and prepare mentally. Through the simple suggestions provided here, you have learned to more effectively prepare your team for competitions. You should now be able to:

- Recognize the proper bat for your players
- Distinguish between the benefits of a wood bat versus an aluminum bat
- Understand the importance of patience in batting
- Teach players to wait for the perfect pitch before swinging
- Identify technique problems and perfect the swing mechanics
- Instill confidence in your players to help them prepare mentally

These tips and the other inside information contained in this report should give you a guide to take back to your team. By watching closely, reacting positively, and working hard, you and your team can improve efficiency, increase consistency, eliminate poor technique, and improve strength and power!



For more help with hitting, including step by step video instructions, softball-specific drills, and coaching strategies check out Sue Enquist's Softball Hitting Bootcamp:

<http://www.softballspot.com/sp/hittingbootcamp.html>

Recommended Resources

The Coaching Essentials:

Softball Drills & Practice Plans - Would you like to have 25 pre-designed practice plans at your fingertips? My ebook, "Softball Drills & Practice Plans" is jam packed with over 50 unique, fun and effective softball drills. The drills are fully organized into clipboard-ready practice plans... so you can prepare for practice in just 5 short minutes. Includes softball tryout plans and my own "Team Selection Matrix". Perfect for the beginner coach looking to get organized, or for the experienced coach looking for fun, innovative ways to teach fundamental softball skills. (\$34.68)

For more information visit:

<http://www.softballspot.com>

Softball Blueprint - Designing your own animated plays and drills can be as easy as 1-2-3. Softball Blueprint software allows you to create stunningly effective animated drills and plays and share them with your team in 3 super easy steps. (from \$49.95)

For more information visit:

<http://www.softballblueprint.com>

Online Clinics:

Underground Hitting Secrets Clinic - Every book, magazine article, and instructional video is just dead wrong about hitting- this clinic reveals 7 simple secrets that will improve your players' skills forever. The focus is on hitting mechanics... the specific "underground" secrets of stance, spine angle, head tilt, hand position and swing path that nobody seems to get right... and nobody ever teaches. Discover the 6 biggest mistakes hitters make and find out how to quickly correct even the most difficult-to-cure bad habits. (\$49.95)

For more information visit:

<http://www.coachkennybuford.com/ar/hitting.html>

Signs and Signals Clinic - Discover the secrets to a mega-effective on-field communication system that will give your team a massive mental edge on the competition. Find out how to make use of verbal, touch, and descriptive hand signals that are simple enough for your team to memorize and recall easily, yet deceptive enough to prevent other teams from "cracking your code". (\$29.95)

For more information visit:

<http://www.coachkennybuford.com/signs/fullstory.html>

Must-Have DVD Packages:

Sue Enquist's Hitting Bootcamp - Discover Sue Enquist's softball coaching secrets that will boost your hitting game to the next level FAST...World's most natural Softball Hitting System will have your players crushing the ball with lightning quick bat speed and titanic power - without even trying! You'll see how she kept her UCLA team on top of the rankings year in and year out. (\$239.99 + S/H)

For more information visit:

<http://www.softballspot.com/sp/hittingbootcamp.html>

Pitching Mastery Program (Featuring Dee Dee Weiman and Sue Enquist) - Discover the best kept coaching secrets behind softballs greatest pitchers. NCAA pitching guru and former All-American Dee Dee Weiman pulls back the curtain on her stunningly effective system for coaching softball pitchers. This is a complete system for coaching your pitchers, including mechanics, drills, mental training and more. (\$159.99 + S/H)

For more information visit:

<http://www.softballspot.com/sp/pitchingmastery.html>

Slap Hitting Mastery (Featuring Darren Mueller, North Dakota State University Head Softball Coach) - Slap Hitting Mastery presents a detailed overview of how to effectively put the ball in play and exert maximum pressure on the defense using slap hitting techniques. All key factors involved in sound slap hitting are covered including footwork, developmental drills, drag bunting, and more (designed for coaches working with beginning and experienced slap hitters). (\$39.99 +S/H)

For more information visit:

<http://www.softballspot.com/sp/slaphitting.html>

Softball Coaching Aids:

Solo Hitting Machine - This is the world's first "Self Contained" hitting machine that allows your batter to swing full speed at a moving target (just like real batting practice)...then get instant feedback on swing accuracy and power. You're batters will get a massive number of swing reps in only 5 minutes. Can be set up inside or outside. (\$249 + S/H)

For more information visit:

<http://www.coachkennybuford.com/ar/solohitting.html>

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