

DEVELOPING PRODUCTIVE HITTERS (by Mike Candrea)

Stance

The stance, although cosmetic, can either help or hinder the hitter's ability to see the softball. No matter how well the hitter performs the mechanics, if her eyes are relaying bad information to her brain, her chance of success decreases.

The stance shows the greatest amount of variety from hitter to hitter. Great hitters have hit from every foot and hand position imaginable. **The primary purpose of the stance is to allow the hitter to see the ball with both eyes and to allow her to arrive in a position that creates balance and proper plate coverage.** Whether the hitter's stance is open, closed, or square, successful hitters stride to a square position to get maximum coverage. Depending on the hitter's dominant eye, the proper stance can enhance her ability to see the ball with the greatest amount of clarity.

Two other common characteristics in the stance of effective hitters are flexibility and rhythm. A key element to any athletic movement is balance. Without flexibility in the ankles and knees, **it is impossible to create a balanced and powerful base from which to hit. It is important for the hitter to keep her weight on the balls of her feet and not have her weight falling to her heels.** This flexibility explains why you see many hitters in their pre-pitch routines bend at the waist and touch the outside portion of the plate with the bat in their bottom hand only. This routine is helpful in creating a balanced base and also ensures that the hitter has proper plate coverage.

Rhythm is another key to hitters with high batting averages. **The ability of a hitter to create rhythm in her stance helps her execute the stride. It allows the hitter to keep her body and hands tension-free.** Tension is a hitter's worst enemy. The tighter she is, the slower her reaction is. The locking of any body parts before contact causes extreme problems in the execution of the swing.

Rhythm is much easier to demonstrate than to describe. Simply put, a hitter who has rhythm can control her movements in preparation and execution of the swing. **The ability to control movement and allow proper sequencing is the key to maximizing power and efficiency.** Rhythm is noticeable in great hitters. Any movements made with the lower body or hands must be minimal and controlled. The more movement a hitter has when preparing to swing, the easier it is for the pitcher to disrupt her timing. The hitter should match her own movement with the pitcher's movement. As the pitcher moves toward the plate, **the hitter must get into launch position and secure her base for the execution of the swing. This movement should be smooth and controlled.** Many young hitters wait too late to execute the loading phase; therefore, they come in late and out of control.

The main purpose of effective pitchers is to throw off the timing and rhythm of a hitter. The rhythm displayed by hitters is slightly visible in the lower body and hands. The head, of course, should always stay as quiet (still) as possible during the initial stance.

Although a hitter does not hit from the stance, a solid stance makes a huge difference in how she sees the ball, the plate coverage she achieves, and the preparation of her body and hands to attack the pitch.

Stride

Most of your coaching and teaching probably centers around the next phase of hitting, the stride. **The stride is nothing more than a small movement that allows the hitter to achieve a strong, powerful position to initiate the swing.** There are many terms used to describe this movement including stride, trigger, load, and so on. **The important fact of this movement is that the hitter places her lower and upper body in a position that allows her to generate a swing on time and on the proper plane of the pitch, with maximum bat speed while managing some degree of balance.**

Many hitters make this move too late and create a base that inhibits their ability to use their legs properly. A hitter can never stride too early! The key to this movement is to understand the proper sequence and the foundation the hitter is trying to achieve.

As the heel lifts and the knee rolls slightly inward to initiate the stride, the hands slightly move into the position from which the batter launches the bat. Contact with the ground is made with the inside of the foot.

The stride is completed by executing a short, soft step toward the pitcher, maintaining a degree of closure with the front foot (45 to 90 degrees in relationship to the plate). Contact with the ground is made with the inside of the foot.

The lower body has maintained flexibility, the head is perfectly still, and the hands are prepared to initiate the swing.

Common flaws that exist in the stride occur when the hitter over strides to a point that her weight must move

forward, causing her head to have excess movement. When the hitter attempts to load her hands as she strides, it creates a separation of her power base (hands and weight, moving in opposite directions at the same time). Therefore, **it is very important to load the hands before moving the stride foot.**

The final point regarding the stride foot is that the heel must get down to the ground to allow a firm base (front side) to hit against as the hitter begins the explosive movement of the swing. Many hitters do not actually move their stride foot forward but rather pick it up and put it down, or they just execute the loading phase and then hit. This type of hitter usually spreads her initial stance to achieve a balanced and powerful position. **Hitters should either stride or move into a strong hitting position, or start in that position.**

Swing

After the hitter has achieved a good base from which to hit, it is time to execute the swing. The swing is initiated by a sequential unlocking of body parts. **Powerful hitters unwind from the bottom up with a combination of linear and rotational movement. The back side rotates against a firm front side.** The word firm is important: If the hitter locks the front side, her weight actually moves back as she executes the swing. This movement does not allow the hitter to create a positive weight shift that delivers her energy toward the contact point. When locking occurs, you can use the term “negative movement” (hitter’s weight is moving away from the contact point).

If we divide the body down the middle from the head through the belly button, the front side of the body supplies the direction while the back side provides power. This principle is the same when you are teaching proper throwing mechanics. Let the back side knock the front side out versus using the front side to pull the back side through.

A key element of generating the proper leg and hip action is the position of the back (pivot) foot. **By watching the pivot foot on contact, you can tell what kind of weight shift occurred by the position of the heel of the pivot foot.** Another key is the position of the back leg: L-shape versus straight leg. We like a hitter to have her heel up at contact. This tells me that she has achieved a positive weight shift. The closer the heel is to the ground, the more weight remains on the back side and is not transferred to the contact point. Some hitters actually finish on the toe of the pivot foot. This habit is common for hitters who hit off their front foot—for example, Laura Espinoza. Front foot hitters need to be strong in the upper body and gifted with great hand-eye coordination. Obviously, Laura has both, as she is the NCAA leader in home runs. As long as the hitter can achieve a positive movement to the contact point, the pivot foot takes care of itself. Some young hitters who have worked so hard on pivoting may actually over rotate, forcing their front sides to fly open and create a long swing.

Now that we understand that the legs lead the swing (unwind from the bottom up), it is time to discuss some key elements of the hand action to the contact point.

The bottom hand (the pull hand) sets the plane of the swing; the top hand (the throwing hand) finishes the swing. Both hands work together and have equal importance. Successful hitters keep their hands relatively close to their bodies and have a knack for controlling the barrel of the bat.

“Throw your hands inside the ball”. If the hitter is going to deliver the barrel to the ball, her hands must be inside the ball. Hitters who always try to hit the outside of the ball often have poor results. The only pitch hit on the back of the ball is the inside pitch. All other pitches are contacted on the inside half of the ball.

Some common attributes of the upper body in good hitters are:

- Hands are held in a strong position to throw the bat head (barrel).
- Hands are at the top of the strike zone. I like the bottom hand at the top of the strike zone.
- Bat is held at 45-degree angle. Stay away from extremes, like the bat positioned perpendicular, flat, or wrapped behind the head.
- Elbows are down.
- Lead arm forms an L.
- Both arms form an upside down V.
- Front side is soft.
- Front shoulder is slightly lower than back shoulder.
- Wrists are in an active or cocked position to allow a throwing motion.

One of the easiest ways to describe the proper hand action that results in a short, compact swing is to isolate the bottom hand. When the batter holds her bottom hand in the hitting position, her lead arm has three joints: shoulder, elbow, and wrist. **When the hitter unlocks in the proper sequence, the first joint to move is the shoulder, then the elbow, and finally the wrist.** Another cue is to ask the hitter to imagine she is **drawing a line through her chest with her bottom hand, then executing a karate chop to the contact point.**

This skill is easier to demonstrate than to describe. If you watch a successful hitter from the pitcher's circle, you notice the first movement is her elbow, then the knob of the bat, and the last thing to arrive is the barrel. Proper sequencing of the lower and upper body produces a key ingredient of great hitters known as bat lag. **The barrel of the bat stays very close to the hitter's back shoulder as the hands are delivered toward the contact point.** If the bottom hand does its job properly, the top hand takes care of itself.

As the bat head arrives at the contact point, the arms maintain flexion, contact is made, and the hitter extends through the ball. A common flaw is when hitters reach extension before contact, therefore losing bat speed. **A hitter's hand position at contact is usually from palm-up/palm-down in the lower position of the strike zone to backhand-of-the-bottom-hand/palm-of- the-top-hand in the upper portion of the strike zone.** The rolling of the wrist is a follow-through motion where the wrist itself should not be over-emphasized.

Contact points vary depending on the location of the pitch. You can put three balls on the ground that signify the proper contact points for the inside, middle, and outside pitch. A key coaching point for proper contact is the following:

- For an inside pitch, the barrel is in front of the hands.
- For a middle pitch, the barrel is even with the hands.
- For an outside pitch, the barrel is behind the hands.

As the hitter completes the swing, her hands should finish somewhere around her front shoulder. Hitters vary with the location of their follow-throughs, either above the shoulder or at the shoulder. The follow-through should allow the hitter to maintain balance and assure a quality head position.

HITTING DRILLS

Top-Hand Strength Drill

The top hand on the grip is the hand that takes the bat to the ball. It is important to develop strength and skill with this hand. To do this we do a one-handed isolation drill. The batter uses just the top hand. Gripping the bat at the top of the grip and using the bat like a tomahawk, the batter tries to get over the top of the ball and hit it into the ground. The batter has a coach or player soft toss the ball above the waist. The batter hits the ball from the top and drives it straight into the ground. The Hit-n-Stick and Bataction Machine may be used for this drill. Suggested - 25 Swings - 3 Times a week.

Bottom-Hand Strength Drill

A hitter's power comes from the bottom or pull hand. This drill develops bottom hand strength. The hitter uses only the bottom hand in its regular position near the knob of the bat. The hitter hits a ball into a screen, hits a Bataction Machine, Hit2win Trainer, or HitnStick. The coach must make sure that the ball is above the batter's waist. It is best for the ball to be numbers high. The batter steps into the ball and hits it one-handed. Suggested - 25 Swings - 3 Times a week.

Multiple Location Contact Drill

The hitter is given three pitch locations to practice hitting; inside, away and middle. The ball may be presented to the batter using soft toss, batting tee, Hit2win Trainer, HitnStick, or Bataction Machine. On the inside location, the batter must learn to involve the hips and turn on the pitch, pulling it. On the middle pitch the batter hits the ball dead up the middle. On the away pitch, the batter makes sure to take the ball to the opposite field. The coach may want to put spots on the ground showing where the batter attacks each pitch location. The inside pitch is attacked on a spot located in front of the plate. The middle pitch is attacked on a spot located just behind the instep of the hitter's front foot. The away strike is attacked on a spot located just inside of the hitter's back foot. Suggested - 20 At Each Location - 3 Times Weekly.

Two Ball Soft Toss

The hitter learns to concentrate and keep the weight back. The coach tosses two balls. The coach calls top or bottom after the balls are released. The hitter hits the called ball into the fence or screen. This drill can be done from different locations. The coach should also fake toss and change the release points as well as vary the speed of the balls.

Long Toss Batting Practice

One of the best misconceptions in baseball is that to benefit from batting practice the pitcher must be at regular distance and throw game speed. Much more can be accomplished when the pitcher throws from half the regular distance. At this distance the pitcher has better control and more work is accomplished. The ball is thrown at a steady appropriate speed. The speed at this distance should make the batter develop a quicker bat and great skill. The

coach should never do this drill without a L-screen in front. This drill can also be performed with regular or golf-ball sized wiffle balls.

Bring-By Drill

The purpose of this drill is to increase bat speed. It is best performed with soft toss, Hit2win Trainer, HitnStick or the BatAction Machine. The batter hits a ball that is coming from behind him going toward the pitcher. The hitter must see the ball and catch-up with it before it gets by him. The speed of the ball is increased to challenge the hitter more and more. When performing this drill with a BatAction Hitting machine, it is recommended that you remove the machines power bands to increase your swing counts and to vary the balls come by speeds.

Coach Nick's Closed Eye Drill

With Coach Nick's Hit2win Trainer

The hitter assumes a comfortable and correct stance each time. Then the hitter closes the eyes. The coach or batting stick holder will change the strike height and location each time. A verbal command is given, the hitter opens the eyes and hits the ball correctly wherever it is located. The batter must use the correct swing to hit inside, middle, and away pitches. The holder will also locate the ball out of the strike zone. Any ball above the hands (shoulder height) or on the ground is a ball and should not be hit. Suggested - 15 Swings - 3 Times a week.

Backside Barrier Drill

This drill is used to shorten-up a hitters swing. If the batter is too long to the ball or has that A to B to C swing that is considered a slow-pitch softball swing, drills can be used to make the hitter shorten up - go quicker to the ball. The batter sets up with his hands 8 to 10 inches from the fence with the fence behind the batter. The fence should run parallel with the batters back foot. If the batter casts the hands backwards or loops the bat, he will hit the fence or barrier. An old or indoor practice bat should be used – not a good one.

"Step In & Hit Drill"

One of the most common faults with young hitters is stepping out. This drill is used to combat that bad habit. The coach may use a BatAction Machine, Coach Nick's Hit2win Trainer, HitnStick or Tee. The hitter sets up to start the drill one step behind where he should be when he hits the ball. The hitter will step toward the plate with the back foot first then the front foot. When the front foot hits the ground the batter will attack the ball. There should be no hesitation. Step, step, HIT! The hitter will develop the habit of stepping into the ball when he attacks it. His momentum is going toward the plate during this drill so it is very difficult for the hitter to step out or away from the plate.

Bunt Pepper

This is a great drill to develop bunting skills. The drill involves 5 players in each group. The players may use the pivot or square around bunt technique. The batter must bunt the ball to each of the four fielders. The hitter bunts one to each and then takes the place of the fielder on the left (facing the batter). The right fielder then comes to bat and the others move over one place. The coach should emphasize that the batters bunt the ball softly to the fielders. The bat should be keep at a 45 degree angle and the batter should change height of the bat by bending the knees. Fielders should catch the soft ground balls, bare-handed, out front, then square the feet around and throw the next underhand strike to the hitter. This makes a great warm up drill for the beginning of practice. Defensive skills should also be stressed.

Hit2win Trainer Bat Speed Drill

The drill begins with the batting stick ball on the ground. The holder will raise the ball to the batters numbers. The batter will hit the ball when it gets to certain called spots, eg. knee, belt, numbers. The speed that the ball is raised is varied to make the batter wait sometimes and react quickly at other times. The drill is great for developing concentration, bat speed, and patience.

Streak Drill With BatAction "Pitch Simulator"

This is a BatAction Machine drill. The machine should be set at a height suitable for all players participating in the drill for that day. The machine is set with a one-band setting that allows it to rotate multiple times on contact. The players compete against each other. In the drill the goal is to make good contact as many times as one can without fouling out. Good contact is a swing and contact that makes the machine rotate at least once. The hitter that has the longest streak that day is the champ.

The "GUT BUSTER" Drill

The Gut Buster Drill is a great drill that forces the hitter to take the correct bat path to the ball.

Procedure: Batter grips the bat at the base of the barrel half-way up the bat. The batter will execute all swings using this grip.

Method: The batter will swing the bat half- speed at first to get the "feel" of the correct "short and compact" swing. Gripping the bat at the half- way point forces the batter to drive the bat knob toward the ball to clear the body during

the swing.

Coaching Tips: This is a great method to teach a short and compact swing. Use this grip for 10 or 12 reps daily during the Hit2win hitting stick drills or during soft-toss.

Caution your players to take half-speed swings at first. They can swing full-speed after they have the correct motion mastered. The drill's name "Gut Buster" come from a batter's failure to "clear" the knob. Improper swing technique by the batter will drive the knob of the bat into the gut.

HITTING PROBLEMS AND CORRECTIONS

A "Coach Nick" Coaching Tip:

Teach young hitters to discipline themselves during three different phases of the hitting process. Say the "KEY TERM" and the hitter will know immediately what you mean.

The phases, terms and phrases are:

"SEE IT OUT!" - "This phrase refers to seeing the ball out of the pitcher's hand. Find the release point. See the ball as it leaves the pitcher's hand!" We want to visually "pick the ball up" as soon as possible.

"SEE IT IN" - "This phrase refers to a hitter tracking the ball into and through the strike zone. The batter should track the ball onto her back or into the catcher's mitt. The batter must keep her head down with her eyes focused on the ball. "

"SEE IT OFF" - "This refers to the completion of the swing. The batter should keep her head down until the ball leaves the bat. The batter should "See The Ball Come Off Her Bat"! The batter should "See the Ball Go Flat" as it hits the bat!

FLAW: "HEAD CASE"

The batter's poor head position or head movement is causing problems.

SYMPTOMS:

- 1] The hitter's head moves or travels forward during the stride too much.
- 2] The hitter's head pulls out during or prior to the swing.
- 3] The hitter tilts the head before or during the swing causing vision problems.
- 4] The batter's head drops or changes "planes" during the swing causing increased difficulty in tracking the ball.
- 5] The batter does not turn the head so that both eyes are on the pitcher. The result is that the batter is looking at the backside of her "nose" with the back eye. This greatly impairs vision.

CORRECTION:

- 1] The batter should start with the head straight and keep it that way throughout the swing.
- 2] The hitter must turn the head so that both eyes focus on the pitcher.
- 3] The batter should make sure that the head does not "travel" during the swing!
- 4] The batter should keep the head down. Stride short and stride soft to prevent head bounce.

FLAW: "SLOW BAT"

Batter's confidence is low from strikeouts, a weak swing or a lot of foul balls. Check to make sure that the following are not causing the problem.

SYMPTOMS:

- 1] Upper- Arm Dominate Swing - Batter swings with the arms and does not let quick wrist and forearm action execute the swing. The bat must be thrown quickly.
- 2] Bat Too Heavy
- 3] Batter is OVERSTRIDING - Head is dropping and batter is losing sight of the ball.
- 4] Front elbow is locking or straightening out before contact is made.
- 5] Batter is not disciplining her/himself to watch and track the ball!

CORRECTIONS:

- 1] The batter should track at least 3 pitches from the release to the mitt before swinging at the first pitch.
- 2] Batter should carefully observe pre- swing and "freeze" after the swing to assess her finish position. She must check to see a proper stance, stride and proper strong contact.
- 3] Batter needs to take more swings in practice. 100 or more swings a day for younger players and 200 to 300 swings a day for advanced players!

FLAW: "FLYBALL FLU"

The batter is getting out with pop-ups, fly balls and pop-up fouls.

SYMPTOMS:

- 1] Dropping of the hands.
- 2] FRONT SIDE OF BODY FLYS OPEN pulling the batter off the pitch.
- 3] Dropping the back shoulder.
- 4] OVERSTRIDING - Head drops and the bat gets under the ball!

CORRECTIONS:

- 1] If the batter is dropping her hands, have her start with the hands lower. The batter may need to use a lighter bat.
- 2] Have her practice "FRONT-SIDE CLOSURE" Practice a stride and swing with the front shoulder down, front side in, and knee facing the plate.
- 3] Batter should practice turning the back foot quickly with little downward pressure. Make sure she involves the hips and lower body to execute a smooth stride, swing and follow through. The Hip-Turner BatAction Drill is a great drill to work all of these skills and techniques. The BatAction makes a hitter keep the "front-side in". It is impossible to make the machine rotate without proper swing and body mechanics!

The ProZip cords are a perfect SWING GUIDE and SWING TRAINER to keep your hitter "above or through" the ball! The batter's swing is not hampered by the strings. In fact, the batter uses the cords to stay above and perfect a PERFECT LEVEL SWING!

FLAW: FRONT SIDE OUT TOO EARLY

The batter prematurely pulls the front shoulder out. This causes a "domino effect" of other flaws. The front shoulder will tilt upward, the hands then drop, and the barrel drags to create a "Undesirable Long Swing". Coaches need to quickly spot this flaw and "coach" the hitter to correct it immediately.

CORRECTIONS:

- 1] The hitter's front side and hands must first move in the direction of the ball.
- 2] Your shoulder moves or rotates during the swing, not before, not after.
Make sure you maintain proper balance before, during and after the swing.
- 3] You must rotate at the proper time to generate power and to execute the proper swing for each pitch location.

Every pitch location requires some degree of shoulder rotation. But young and older hitters must learn that pitches on the inside 2/3rds of the plate require a greater degree of rotation. The inside strike requires maximum shoulder rotation in order to "Pull" this pitch.

FLAW: "PULLING OFF"

Hitting a strike on the outside 3rd of the plate involves much less or minimum shoulder and hip rotation than hitting a pitch on the inside 2/3 of the plate. It should be a "Punch" swing. Spot and eliminate this flaw as early as possible.

CORRECTIONS:

- 1] Curing it is teaching every hitter on your team including the "power" hitter and the "contact" hitters to "GO WITH THE PITCH". Hit the ball where it is! Do not try to "MAN/WOMAN HANDLE" everything. You can't "Pull What You Have To Punch" and you can't "Punch What You Have To Pull".

BATTER'S SELF DEFENCE DRILLS

Prepare the batter for wild inside pitches during the game. Teaching/training the players to react is the ONLY way to reduce injuries.

When a coach pitches batting practice, throw from a bucket of balls. The bucket can be at the side, sitting on a chair. Mixed in with the softballs are 2 softball sized wiffle balls. When the coach grabs another ball secret it into the glove so the batter does not know what type of ball is coming. At random, pull out a wiffle ball and intentionally throw RIGHT AT the batter. Make it a big surprise and force them to react and deal with the self-defence situation. This is the exact same situation they will face in the game.

Do this as a test to make sure they react as taught and to make sure they react PERIOD. Do it to give them a chance to experience dealing with a wild inside pitch.

To start this training for very young and beginning batters; Stand, or sit on a bucket, about 15 feet in front of them and pitch wiffle balls to them at about half the normal pitching speed. (Half the speed at half the distance equals roughly the same amount of time to react). Throw strikes, balls and throw right at them, mix these up constantly. Tell them to swing at strikes, do not swing at balls and react when they know the ball is coming at them. This will get them used to realizing they MUST quickly identify and react to the self-defence situation.

As a side note on this subject; batters get hit because it seemed they could not decide what to do with their bat. Some batters may react fairly well and in time, however, the ball still hits the bat and then hits the batter in the face. The

advice is DROP THE BAT, LET GO OF IT, FORGET ABOUT IT! It would be much better to have a bat drop on the batter's foot than to have a ball hit them in the face that has ricocheted off their bat.

Evaluate every player. You might be very surprised at how poorly or how late some of your players react. You might get very worried to see how many of your players do not react AT ALL. A trip to the ER takes all the fun out of the game. Let's keep the game safe AND fun!

HITTING GAMES

WALL BALL GAME

This is a great off-season skill building activity. It develops both offensive and defensive skills. The game is played with 3 players on a team. On defence: one pitches and two play defense. The object of the game is to be the first team to score 21. You score by hitting a line drive or by hitting a fly ball that hits the wall in a designated or target area. The target area is normally a 6x12 rectangle that is attached to the wall or fence. The target may be larger if space so allows.

The rules for the game are as follows:

- Each team gets three outs per inning. Outs are hit balls caught before they hit the wall, floor or ground. Foul tips, foul balls, and a swing without contact are considered an out. Each player gets one swing of the bat. Something must happen on the swing, if the ball is a strike. The batter decides if a ball is a strike.
- Ground balls are not outs – they are a safe hit that only serve to keep the inning alive. You do not get a run for a ground ball. Fly balls that go above the target are outs. Balls may be knocked down by defenders to prevent a run – but are not an out unless the ball is caught. However, batted balls that touch the target before they touch the floor are scored as a run.
- The winning team must win by two. A tournament bracket is drawn and teams play for the championship. Coaches and parents are encouraged to play on teams. Each team may use only one bat. The bat never touches the ground or floor until the inning is over.

FULL COUNT GAME

This is a great game simulation drill that teaches hitters to be aggressive and to hit under pressure. Two teams face off in a 7 inning game with each batter coming into the box with a full count. Action is quick and players must be alert both offensively and defensively. The count may also be changed to 2-2 and each team can be given one out to start the inning.

THUNDERBALL

This game has been played ever since the start of time. It is played with 2 teams. One team is at bat with a tee or soft-toss, the other team has two or more fielders (one on third base, one on first base, one outfielder etc). The batter hits the ball off the tee, or from a soft-toss, or a pitch as hard as she can and runs as many bases as she can until all fielders have received the ball. The last to receive the ball shouts "Thunderball". Keep score by counting bases reached before "Thunderball" is called. After all batters have batted, switch sides.

More Hitting Tips:

- Start taking ALL of your batting practice with a wood bat or an indoor specific bat, instead of an aluminium bat. Why? Because the "sweet spot" on an aluminium bat is much larger than that of wood. This is one key reason young players learn incorrect batting technique and develop bad habits - aluminium is much more forgiving if you don't hit a ball just right. Practicing with wood or practice and indoor bats will train you to refine your swing and develop proper "muscle memory" of that act. Then, come game time, use aluminium and watch your average and power improve from this practice alone. And for those of you who aspire to a pro baseball career, you'd better start now to get used to the feel and performance of wood.
- Emphasize quality not quantity when it comes to practice swings.
- A great team drill is to have the players line-up in lines at distances safely separating themselves. As if they were doing exercises. The team will then do dry swings together. The coach will be the pitcher. Each player will visualize the ball being released and coming into the strike zone. Different locations are hit and the coach may use verbal commands such as ready, trigger, find, see, hit, finish or freeze.
- The freeze command should be used to freeze the players at the finish position. Check to see if the front foot is correct and slightly closed and the back foot has turned or squashed the bug.
- The players should learn to use general visual focusing when finding a pitcher's release point. What this means is that the hitter visually concentrates on an object or spot on the pitcher's body such as the letter on his cap. When the pitcher's arm comes forward the hitter moves his focus to the arm and finds the ball and release point.

