

Hitting...Beyond the Basics

Improving Team and Individual
Offensive Performance

Mark Watt, July 2023

Offensive Philosophy

Offensive Coaching Philosophy

- Team Offensive Approach- work together to score runs
- Can-do attitude- should be able to score at least 5 runs in every game
- Hitting segment in every practice; daily opportunities for extra individual work
- Coaches work to understand hitting and short game:
 - Understand basic and advanced concepts
 - Recognize what each player is doing well, plus opportunities for improvement
 - Teach a wide variety of possible adjustments
 - Develop drills that fit together and reinforce players' abilities to succeed
 - Positivity- always building players' belief in themselves and the team
 - Everyone has a role, and tries to excel at it

Components of Hitting

Four Parts

- Mental
 - *Plan and Approach*
- Emotional
 - *Breathing and Routine*
- Visual
 - *Vision and Tracking*
- Physical
 - *Fundamentals and Adjustments*

Nebraska Coach

August, 2019

“A Comprehensive Approach to Hitting”

https://www.ncacoach.org/newsletters/fall2019magazine/Fall%202019%20Magazine_WebReady.pdf



Physical Aspects of Hitting

Starting Point: Basic Mechanics

- Stance
- Stride/Load
- Connection
- Contact
- Extension
- Follow-through

Stance

Getting ready to swing

- Balanced, slight forward lean
- Feet can be on or off power line; knees inside of feet
- Basic grip- handle in fingers, knuckles lined up
- Bat on or above shoulder at ~ 45 degrees
- Hands inside of elbows
- Elbows- back elbow parallel or down; both at 45-90 degrees
- Relaxed

Stride and Load

The Stride

- Stride- 3 options:
 - Lift and replace
 - Short Stride (4-6" step)
 - No stride (feet wide)
- Land on flat front foot or with heel slightly elevated
- Knees inside feet
- Feet on power line
- Weight on inner part of each foot

Stride and Load

The Load

- Load: Shift some weight to back hip and leg
 - Stay on power line
 - Keep weight inside of back foot
 - Bat stays above shoulder; does not pass helmet (*i.e., wrap*)
 - Hands separate (shift away from pitcher); independent of shoulders
 - Stay relaxed

The Swing

Connection

- Connection:
 - If heel is elevated, it must land before ...
 - The swing starts with back elbow and knee/hip
 - Elbow must have clearance (*i.e., be able to pass in front of hip*)
 - Back elbow is below top hand as it passes hip
 - Hands stay inside, keeping 90/90 angles (*to allow the barrel to stay inside of the pitch*)
 - Lower body begins to rotate (*felt in the rear glute*)
 - Knees move slightly toward each other
- This is a small movement; elbow does not pass mid-chest

The Swing

Contact

- Barrel whips to the contact point
 - Goal is to hit gap to gap
 - Contact inner or back part of the ball
 - Generally, contact the middle of the ball
 - Elbows should be bent at contact
 - On a middle/middle pitch, barrel should be parallel to the front of home plate

The Swing

Extension

- Barrel follows the same plane it took to reach contact
- Maintain bat speed through contact to attain max exit velocity
- Elbows straighten through follow through
- Hands aim in the direction hitter wants the ball to fly

Completing the Swing

Follow-Through

- After Extension, Follow-through should be:
 - Natural
 - Can be one- or two-handed

Basic Hitting Drills

Lower Body

- Glute-focused Drills (transfer of weight, generating power with glutes [vs. quads])
 - Dry rotations, using a pole for balance, adding resistance (weight on heels)
 - Med Ball Throws
- Stride Drills
 - Feet Together—> Flamingo Drill—> Happy Gilmore

Basic Hitting Drills

Upper/Full Body

Scissors Drill- 5 parts (Tee at front/middle of plate)

- No Stride, feet at 90 degrees—> No Stride, 45 degrees—-> Bat Path (Both feet flat)
—-> Bat Path, add rotation with back leg—> Full swing

Swing Breakdown Drill- Isolation helps to identify mechanical issues

- Stop Bat (Stop at Contact)
- Extension
- Full Swing

Process with Partner

Vision and Timing

Visual Aspects of Hitting

- Vision
 - *Central Focus- eyes lock in on the target (ball)*
 - *Depth Perception- judging the distance the ball is from the hitter*
- Tracking
 - *Head moves while eyes remain focused on the inside part of the ball*
 - *Starts with the ball in the pitcher's hand, continues to contact point*
 - *The hands take the barrel to the point where vision stops*

Effective Tracking

Benefits of Tracking the Ball Well

- Tracking longer allows deeper contact
- Deeper contact allows your contact points to be closer
- When contact points are closer, timing is more consistent
- More consistent timing results in hitting the ball harder

Training Vision

Vision Drills

- Tees: incorporate vision by focusing on a net to start, head down, track to the ball
- Front Toss: Head down at contact, track takes back to screen
 - Use colored or numbered tennis ball or spots on BP balls
- Live: Head down at contact; track takes to catcher's mitt
- Coaching Point: Take note of hitter's vision and tracking during drills

Timing

Getting the Barrel to the Ball at the Right Moment

- Timing is based on the speed of the pitch
- Reaction Time: pitch speed/timing (37.5 feet):
 - A 55 mph pitch takes .7 seconds to reach the plate (the swing takes ~.2 sec.)
 - 60mph ~ = .6 sec.
 - 65 mph ~ = .5 sec.

Basic Timing Approaches

- Based on Contact Points Ball Flight
- Based on Feel or Intuition
- Based on Contact Points

Basic Timing Approaches

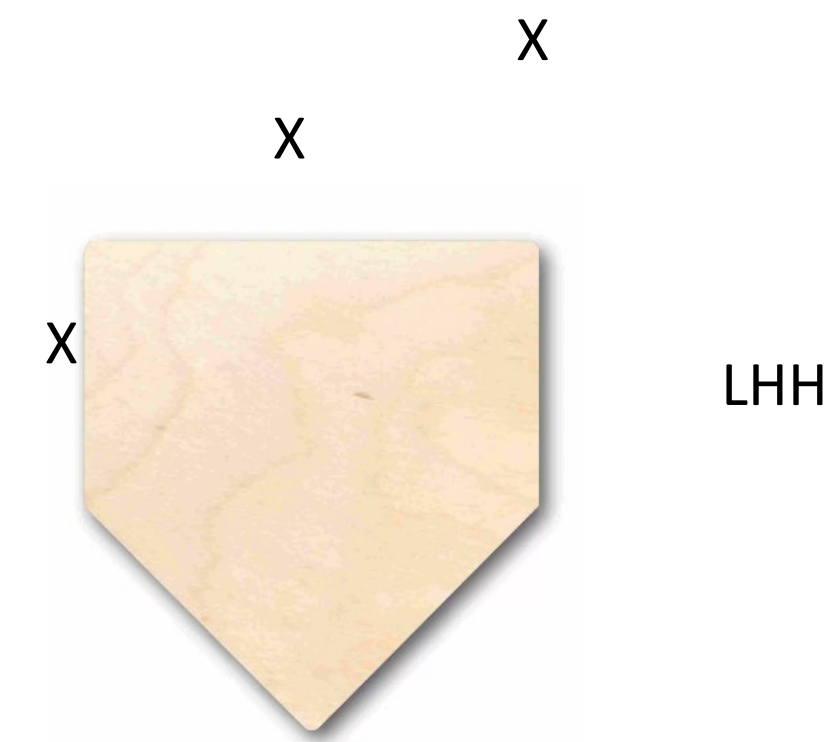
Self-Evaluation

- Self-evaluation: Was I... On Time? Early? Late?
- Basic ways Hitters decide:
 - Based on the Result (*ball flight*), or
 - Based on Intuition
 - *Confirmation: Feedback from coaches or teammates*
 - *Confirmation: Feedback from video*

Basic Timing Approach

Contact Points

- Timing based on pitch location



Systematic Timing Approaches

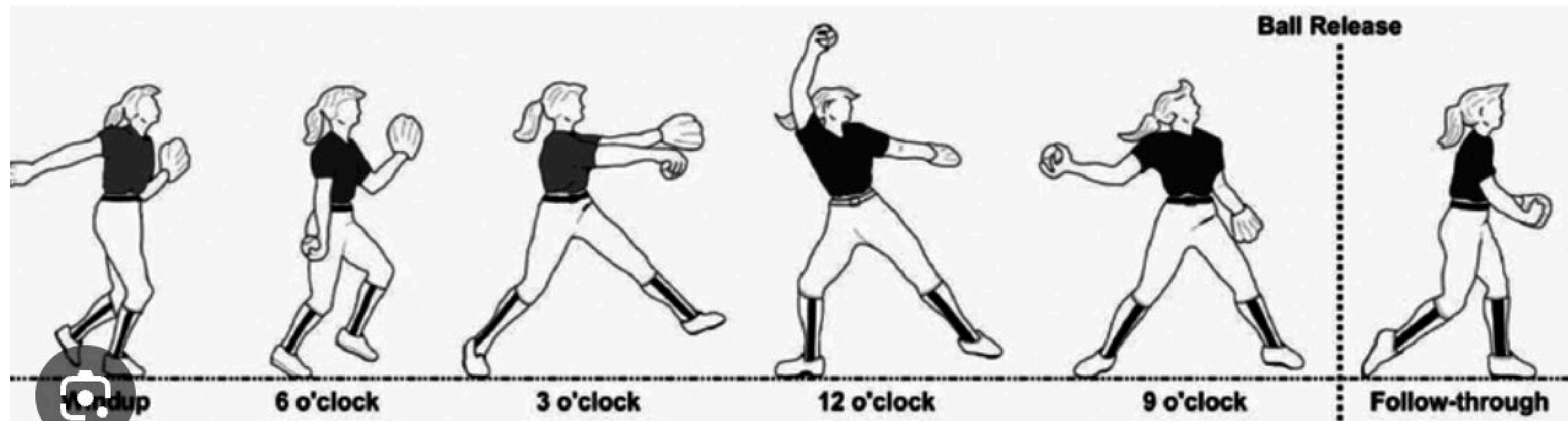
Based on Pitcher's Motion- Clock

Effective Velocity

Timing Mechanism

Clock Dial

- Hitter starts her swing based on points in the pitcher's motion.
- For higher velocities, batter starts swing at release or sooner:



Timing

Pitch Velocity

- Player must choose their timing mechanism
 - *Start of load*
 - *Toe touch*
 - *Start of swing (hands or back elbow/hip)*
- Each swing should be at high intensity (near-max effort) The variable is the start of the swing. Batter adjusts when they start based on velocity
- Timing Preparation: *Starts with the Pre-game Plan, continues in the dugout and on-deck circle*

Timing Drills

- Clock drill- no bat: Timing vs. your pitchers during pitching practice
 - *Batter says “Now” when they should start their swing; tracks ball in flight*
- Pitching Machine Drills- *based on the clock concept*
 - *Markers: Batters identify when they start their swing*
 - *7-Ball Marker (Vertical, or parallel with the side of home plate)*
 - *3 Plate drill- Move up and back to vary timing*
 - *3-3-3 (FB on time; FB late timing; Change up on time)*
 - *Sprinkler Drill- create a particular ball flight by changing timing*

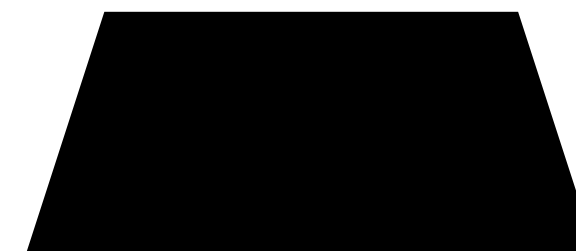
Advanced Timing

Effective Velocity

- Changes in Velocity based on pitch location



4	3	2	1	0
3	2	1	0	-1
2	1	0	-1	-2
1	0	-1	-2	-3
0	-1	-2	-3	-4



Advanced Timing

Planned Faster or Slower Timing

Plan for a pitcher who mainly pitches *Up & In*

X= Plus Timing

Plan for a pitcher who mainly works *Low & Away*

Blank= Minus Timing



X	X	X	X	X
X	X	X	X	
X	X	X		
^	^			



Advanced Timing Drills

- Machine drills
 - Lanes: swerving head on machine- pitches in and away
 - Levels: raise/lower with lever on machine- pitches up and down
- Double machines
 - Fast movement/change to same side of plate
 - Same speed to different sides (swerving head)
 - Double drop

Change Up Adjustments

Covering the Change Up

- Keep weight behind front foot (“Sit”)
 - Pressure on front instep (“Stay in legs”)
 - Keep hands back
 - Shorten swing
 - Make contact with the inside of the ball
 - Middle/oppo ball flight (extend toward target field)
 - Keep composure
 - Foul balls (practice being off-time)
 - Practice off-speed *consistently*

Extreme Timing Adjustments

When Fooled by Change Ups

“Over-Committed Timing

When weight has gotten on front foot or hands have committed:

- Keep weight on Inside of front foot (as well as possible)
- Middle/Oppo ball flight
- Short swing to contact

“Oh Dang” Position Drill: Start in the position above; Tee -> Front Toss -> Live

Process with Partner

Hitting Adjustments

Movement Pitches

Pitchers' Tools for Creating Outs

- Changes in Levels
 - *Rise ball*
 - *Drop Ball*
- Changes in Lanes
 - *Pitches moving away from the hitter (curve or screw)*
 - *Pitches moving toward the hitter (screw or curve)*
 - *Pitches that do Both:*
 - *Crise or Drop Curve*

Movement Pitch Adjustments

Pitches Moving Up in the Zone

- Barrel must contact the ball in front of the hitter
 - Batter must keep 90/90 elbow angles before releasing barrel
- Consider starting with a flat barrel
- Forearm angle must be steep
- Eyes focus on the top of the ball
- Focus on hitting the top of the ball

Movement Pitch Drills

Pitches Up in the Zone

- *Front Toss*
 - Tosser kneeling, throws at sharp up-angle
 - Tosser throws both high strikes and pitches above the zone
- *Machine*
 - Use the machine's adjustment lever to throw strikes and high balls
 - Ball flight targets (Batter aims for GB or targets the back/bottom of net)

Movement Pitch Adjustments

Pitches Moving Down in the Zone

- Consider starting with a vertical barrel
- Eyes on the back/bottom of the ball
 - May need to identify a hump in the pitch
- Contact the bottom of the ball (bottom hand emphasis)
- Maintain 90/90 elbow angles until releasing barrel
- Contact should take place between the feet (“over toes”)
- Extension should be forward, not up (bat path on power line)
 - Top hand emphasis; possibly use split grip

Movement Pitch Drills

Pitches Down in the Zone

- *Front Toss*
 - Tosser kneeling- throw OH low in the zone
 - Tosser alternates low strikes with balls out of the zone
- *Machine*
 - Pitches low in the zone, in and away
 - Ball flight targets- back of net; Tic-Tac-Toe; hoop targets
- Consider alternating either with *change-ups*

Movement Pitch Adjustments

Pitches Moving In (toward the hitter)

- Possible adjustments:
 - See and contact the inside of the ball
 - Move off plate (inside pitches become middle pitches)
 - Start open/stay open (stance/stride)- very effective for L-curve in to RHH
 - Stance: be sure hands are close to chest
- *Contact points:*
 - Levels 2-3: pull/middle (LF line to RC)
 - Level 1: middle/oppo (LC gap to RC gap)

Movement Pitch Adjustments

Pitches Moving Away

- Possible adjustments:
 - Hit the back of the ball
 - Keep front shoulder and hip in
 - Hit middle/oppo (focus on extension)
 - Avoid pull side GBs
- *Closed stance*
 - Shift field (target= LC to RF line)

Movement Pitch Drills

Pitches In and Away

- *Lane drills*
 - Colored plates
 - 7-ball markers (Horizontal)
 - Zoning: use implements to select middle/in or middle/away pitches
- *Machine drills*
 - Lite Flite balls (exaggerated movement)
 - Line drives
 - Target drills

Mental Aspects of Hitting

Hitting Plan and Approach

- PLAN:
 - External factors to consider before the game or prior to the moment
- APPROACH
 - Mental factors regarding hitting performance

Plan

Factors that affect your Plan

- Weather
- Umpire
- The pitcher (her demeanor, grips, tilts, leans, pitch sequences, etc.)
- Situation (count, outs, runners, etc.)
- Experience
- Injury
- Your strengths
- Your confidence level (overall that day and situationally)
- Previous at bats and adjustments

Approach

Factors Affecting a Player's In-game Mentality

- Emotional consistency
- Confidence level in the moment
- Trust in her training
- Relaxation level
- Clear attack as it relates to the Plan
- Knowing herself and what she needs
- Process vs. Results (Growth Mindset)
- Ability to evaluate in the moment

Team Offense

Team Offense

The Basics

- Focus is on scoring runs vs. individual accomplishments
- Small Ball- execute bunts, hit & run, slash & run
- Situational hitting- RISP; moving runners, productive at bats
- Be sure to drill any Team O basics you expect from your players

Team Offense

15 vs. 1 Mentality

- Team Mentality Goal: Take the pitcher out of her comfort zone
 - Requires a clear team goal vs. each pitcher/ pitch caller
 - Forces the Pitcher to be different
 - Forces her to make adjustments in her plan &/or approach
 - Takes away or minimizes a strength
 - Gives the batter and entire offense:
 - Control and power
 - Confidence
 - Better results

Team Offense

Mentality

- Competitive Execution
 - Starts in practice
 - Individual hitting drills
 - Team offensive execution
 - Use competitive drills
 - Rewards for successes
 - Consequences for mental focus or effort issues

Team Offense

Practice Mentality

- Purpose: Prepare for Success
 - High expectations for run output every game
 - Everyone contributes (team success plus individual roles)
- Practice Mentality: How to Prepare for Success
 - All In! *Full investment, regardless of role (everyone contributes)*
 - Practice should be harder than games (30-40% success rate)
 - Make progress every day (*Every Swing Counts!*)

Team Offense

Reading Pitchers

- Mechanics- look for tells in any of the following:
 - Body Lean or Stride on particular types of pitches
 - Grip for different pitches
 - Speed of motion
 - Hands separate or stay together on certain pitches
 - Elbow- straight (long arm) or bent (short arm) on backswing
 - Overhead motion- straight elbows vs. bent on certain pitches

Team Offense

Pitcher's Intention

- Pitcher's Comfort- what is she most comfortable?
 - Level (up or down?)
 - Lane (in or away)
 - Changing speeds
 - Pitcher's tendencies:
 - Where does she tend to tend to throw the first pitch to a batter?
 - Where does she tend to go when ahead in the count?
 - Where does she tend to go when behind in the count?

Scouting Pitchers

- Scouting: how does the pitcher try to get hitters out?
 - Dominant pitch(es)
 - Predictable pattern
 - First pitch
 - Ahead in the count
 - Behind in the count
 - Side of the plate
- Does the pitcher have any tells
- Make hitting plan based on these factors

Controlling Emotion

Controlling Emotion

Use a System to Handle Pressure Situations

- Abdominal Breathing
- Hitting Routine
- Managing Distractions

Abdominal Breathing

Using Breaths to Manage Emotions

Deep Belly Breathing

- Fill lungs from the bottom up
- Relax shoulders and neck muscles
- Lower Center of Gravity

Use Free Breathing Apps

Routine

A Consistent Pattern to Focus on the Present

Use a Consistent Hitting Routine Every Pitch in Every Practice and Game

1. Cleansing Abdominal Breath
2. Focal Point (something far or near)
3. Positive Statement
4. Release: Clear the mind of distractions
5. Positive Image (Mental image or statement)

Managing Distractions

Controlling the Controllables

Players focus on teammates

- Do what's best for the team
- “What Can I do to help my teammates in this situation?”

Coaches

- See the Big Picture- you're there for them!
- Model the behavior you expect from their players, especially under pressure
- Positivity

Process Time
Your Takeaway?

Questions/ Comments?

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