



Building A Successful Batting Order

Nothing kills rallies faster than a weak spot in your lineup. Fastpitch coaches that don't have the luxury of bringing 4 or 5 power hitters to the plate every time through the lineup need to come up with a different way to manufacture runs and keep the offense in sync.

Please keep in mind, that EGFA is a big proponent of developing each girl's skills and abilities, so these notes are not intended to replace common sense and logic. When coaching a young "developing" team perhaps the best thing to do will be to switch the line-up constantly, thus giving each girl the opportunity to hit in different places in the line-up. While maximizing your line-up can be an important piece of the puzzle, it should never take the place of promoting equal play at the appropriate age and levels.

Since you may often think of a line-up having 9 players, you may need to significantly adjust your thinking if you will be batting your full roster, which of course is encouraged and often mandatory in many situations with younger teams and league or tournament play.

Please read the following to learn how to identify the strengths and weaknesses of hitters in a lineup, and put together a batting order that will produce runs from top to bottom.

Evaluating the Pieces of Your Lineup

The first step to putting together a batting order is to know who your players are, and what they do or don't do well. This discovery process is a crucial first step to balancing your lineup and improving your fastpitch team's offense. There are a few major categories that every offensive player will fall into, and some of the batters in your lineup might fall into more than one category. If a player on your team does more than one thing well, it is important to determine which of those strengths will benefit the team the most. You also have to stress to the player that the success of the team will require the player to do their part and to do it well.

Power Hitters

Every successful offense needs a power hitter in the lineup. This player is a big threat to hit a home run, or at least an extra base hit if they can make contact. Power hitters generally have higher strikeout totals (or at least more swings and misses), which impacts their batting average and on-base percentage in a negative way. Furthermore, the ability to hit the ball a long ways doesn't usually equate to speed on the basepaths, which can turn into a liability if you need to advance a power hitter once they've reached base.

Contact Hitters

The name says it all. Contact hitters typically have very low strikeout counts along with typically

low power and slugging totals. Contact hitters are very good at putting the bat on the ball, however, so they are extremely useful in hit-and-run or similar situations. Their lack of strikeouts is a benefit in some regards, but putting a contact hitter in the wrong spot in the batting order can actually have a negative effect on your team's offensive production.

Speedsters

There is typically a lot of overlap between the speedsters and the contact hitters, but there is enough of a distinction between the two to treat them separately. Speedsters are very important to have on base, just because they have a profound effect on the opposing pitchers. The constant threat of a speedster to steal a base can put opposing pitchers out of their rhythm and enhance your team's ability to score runs. Again, speedsters must be strategically placed in your fastpitch team's lineup or they will have little to no positive effect.

Sacrifice Specialists

Let's face it; no matter what level you are coaching at, there are some players who are in the lineup simply because they have a defensive skill that you can't live without. These players, when they come up to bat, can be such a risk to kill an inning that you almost don't even want to have them bat. Hopefully your lineup doesn't have too many Sacrifice Specialists, but if used properly, they can be a useful asset to scoring more runs.

Your Lineup Top to Bottom

Now that you've identified which categories each of the nine batters in your lineup will fall into, it is time to start strategically putting together your offensive lineup to produce maximum results.

#1 Hitter

- Possible Candidate: Contact Hitter, Speedster

The first batter in your lineup is known as your leadoff hitter. If you think about this spot in the lineup logically, you want the player on your team with the highest on-base percentage to occupy this spot. Since a fastpitch lineup has to go in order, the leadoff spot typically sees more plate appearances per game than anyone else in the lineup. To put it simply, the player who gets on base at the highest rate should have the most chances to do so. Once the leadoff hitter gets on base, she needs to be able to make some waves, so to speak. Speed in your leadoff spot is key to generating runs at the start of the game.

#2 Hitter

- Possible Candidate: Contact Hitter, Speedster, Sacrifice Specialist

You might think it odd that we would recommend putting a Sacrifice Specialist in this spot, but there is some logic behind it all. If your leadoff hitter reaches first base, you will undoubtedly be looking for a way to get her into scoring position (second or third base). Often times, the best way to do this is by using a sacrifice bunt to move her over. Using a Sacrifice Specialist in the second spot allows you to make a productive out if there is a runner on base. If you don't choose to have someone sacrifice in the second spot, you will at least need someone who can make contact and stay out of the double play (which is where the speed comes in).

#3 Hitter

- Possible Candidate: Contact Hitter, Power Hitter

I have always been taught that your third place hitter should be the best overall hitter in your lineup. They should be able to hit for power as well as average, making them a rare, but powerful asset when building a strong lineup. Supposing that one or even both of your first two hitters reached base safely, the ability to drive them in to score is crucial at this point. Power hitters are typically great at doing that, whether via home run or extra base hit. It is also important that they are good at making contact with the ball, because the last thing you want with a runner on third and less than 2 outs is a strikeout. When building your fastpitch lineup, your best hitter should go in the third spot.

#4 Hitter

- Possible Candidate: Power Hitter

The fourth spot (or cleanup spot) should be reserved for the player on your team with the most pop in their bat. When they swing it's like a hurricane force wind blowing across the field. You don't care if they strikeout 200 times a year, because they are going to crush the ball and drive in runs. It can get a little tricky determining if a player should hit in the 3 or 4 spot, but remember, cleanup hitters should be RBI machines and home run hitters, not much else. Save a more rounded hitter for the third spot in your batting order.

#5 Hitter

- Possible Candidate: Power Hitter, Contact Hitter

The fifth spot in the lineup can be just as important as the third or fourth, for one simple fact. The fifth spot in the lineup is there to provide protection for the power hitters in your lineup. If you remember the days of Barry Bonds when he was intentionally walked at least once a game, the opposing team was able to do this because there was nobody in the lineup who could make them pay for putting Bonds on intentionally. A hitter in the fifth spot is there to basically say, "hey, if you try to pitch around our cleanup hitter, I will be here to make sure she scores." It is OK to have a higher than average strikeout count from your fifth hitter, but they shouldn't be swinging for the fences all the time. In most cases, if your cleanup hitter gets on base, they aren't much of a threat to steal and will need a base hit to move them along.

#6-8 Hitters

- Possible Candidates: Contact Hitter, Speedster, Sacrifice Specialist

I'm lumping the 6-8 spots in the batting order together, because their purpose is typically all the same: DON'T KILL RALLIES. The sixth hitter in your lineup begins what is referred to as "the bottom of the order" signifying the players who can't hit or reach base as well. Your six thru eight hitters probably won't have an outstanding batting average or on base percentage, but they need to be able to be effective enough to A) not kill rallies, and B) start off an inning strong if needed. In my opinion, batters six-eight are just as important as 1, 2, & 3, which I'm sure needs an explanation. I'm not saying that they should be just as talented as your first three hitters, but that they need to be noticeably better than your opponent's 6-8 spots in the lineup. Having 3-4 easy outs in a row basically means that the opposing pitcher gets an inning off and also makes it so that the batters in your lineup who are actually decent at sacrificing runners over, won't have anyone on

base to do that for, rendering them virtually useless. Some managers bite the bullet and put a player who's numbers say they should be batting higher in the lineup and stick them down in the 6-8 spot, just so they can start/sustain rallies later in the game.

#9 Hitter

- Potential Candidates: Sacrifice Specialist

The last spot in your lineup should be reserved for the worst batter on your team. By definition, they will receive the fewest at-bats out of any spot in the lineup, thus mitigating their ineffectiveness quite a bit. Some managers have gotten a bit more creative with their bottom spot in the order. They try to put a better hitter in that spot in an effort to potentially have someone on base when the lineup flips around and your leadoff spot comes up. We don't see this often enough to really gauge its effectiveness, but in theory it makes sense. You could almost see your 8 and 9 spot hitters as interchangeable which leaves you more flexibility as a manager.

Hopefully these tips on putting together a batting order will help you get to know your lineup's strengths and weaknesses a little better. The end result will be more runs and offensive production from your players and more wins from your team. Don't be afraid to experiment either. Fastpitch lineups are all about chemistry and finding something that works (even if unorthodox) is ultimately going to make your coaching job a little easier. The order is dynamic and will change as batters become more and more skilled.