

Hitting Checklist

General: The following document provides some tips that could be considered as a hitter. The intent was to identify universal principles that are prevalent in all good hitters. Each hitter is unique, the hope is to keep their strengths intact and develop their weaknesses. For each topic there are numerous ways to teach the girls. The objective is to provide options and it is on the girls to decide what works for them.

Checklist

1. Attitude: Be prepared to attack. Each at-bat is a game within a game. Go in with the attitude that you want to win the battle. Coachable: be willing to get out of your comfort zone and try something different.
2. Grip: Previously taught the “knocking knuckles” method. This approach is fine, however, there is a tendency for the girls to get a little tight (forming an upside “V” with arms) and not the best bat control. Recently, there is a preference among coaches to move to an approach that enables a stronger grip (but still holding bat within fingers not palm). Lining up big knuckles of left hand with small knuckles of right hand. At practice, will encourage players to try the new technique or somewhere in the middle as a compromise.
3. Stance:
 - a. Athletic, Athletic, Athletic: Player needs to feel comfortable.
 - b. Location in the box. Usually based on ensuring have plate coverage.
 - c. Closed/Open/Normal: no preference, but many of the girls will likely utilize a normal stance with feet on a straight line. Toes pointing to other batter’s box. Some hitters will be a little more closed where the front shoulder is turned in (name on the back is visible). Also, could slightly lower front shoulder.
 - d. Weight on the balls of your feet. Need to be balanced such that cannot be pushed over.
 - e. Feet spacing: at a minimum shoulder width apart. Recommend an even wider base.
 - f. Knees slightly bent inward to middle of body.
 - g. Posture: spine body position should stay the same throughout the swing. Many girls are too upright and it might be beneficial to “be more over the ball”. **“Quiet body leads to loud contact”**.
 - h. Starting hand position between back shoulder and ear. Knob of the bat pointing to the other batter’s box. This is one point where hitters will differ and this tip is more of a suggestion.
 - i. Do not worry about back elbow. Depending on hand position, grip and load the back elbow will get into the proper location.
 - j. Head should be facing pitcher. Not always clear which eye is dominant so better to have both set of eyes on pitcher.
 - k. Toe-touch vs stride: Traditionally softball players have used the toe-touch method because of the difficulty of timing but power rules and many coaches are teaching the stride approach (similar to baseball).

4. Swing Sequence:
- a. Load (negative movement): Very important but very personal. Difficult to create power from a stand-still and with weight distributed in the center of your body. Basic thought is to transfer weight from middle of body to the back leg. Should feel like squatting on back foot while keeping back knee slightly bent inward. Can also coil the hips to generate more power. General rule, pitcher loads → hitter loads. Some hitters load extremely early and some hitters prefer constant motion. Furthermore, depending on starting position of hands, some hitters will quietly move their hands back too. **Make sure not to re-load as pitch is delivered.**
 - b. Heal Plant: First step in weight transfer forward. Regardless of toe-touch or stride, need to get your front side down. Coaches often suggest front foot placement at 45-60 degrees. This is so important when dealing with off-speed pitches. You might get fooled but as long as you have a good base and your hands back still can put a good swing on the ball. **Keep front knee bent, do not lock leg.**
 - c. Hips/Knee Drive: The last of the lower body movements and the most crucial for generating power. The front hip will go first, along with slightly raised front elbow. Immediately followed by rotating hips which is illustrated by linear back knee drive to the front knee. Keep posture while remaining over the hitting zone. **Do not let your front shoulder fly out. Do not squish the bug. Weight off front foot, more middle of body.**
 - d. "Get Behind the Ball": As your front elbow leads, your front shoulder starts to move forward while your back elbow should slightly drop and sweep past your back armpit. The first movement will be down. **Not hitting down on the ball. Not dropping hands or shoulder first and then swinging.** The bath path resembles the Nike swoosh. It's important to get the bath path into the hitting zone as quickly as possible.
Good videos demonstrating: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sm4ozx_emOE
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOZE5uJnqwk>
 - e. Contact: Shoulders continue to rotate until create a "house" at contact, should not be fully extended. Power hand: palm down. Guide hand: palm up.
 - f. Extension: Arms should form "V". Should look like punching the ball with power hand. **Do not roll wrists.** Stay in the hitting zone as long as possible. **Front leg is now completely extended.**
 - g. Follow-Thru: Roll your wrists, finish your swing up. Bat to your back.

General Comments

1. "Pitcher" – "Load" – "Explode". Tee-work or soft-toss this is our slogan. Head facing forward watching **Pitcher**, then **Load**. Next, bring your eyes to the hitting zone (or tee) and then initiate the remaining steps **Explode**.
2. "Face in the Zone". Term to re-iterate to keep head on the ball thru contact.
3. Hands always at or above the barrel at contact.
4. Hands inside the ball. Do not caste (i.e. shoulder swing).
5. Do not wrap your bat. Wrap – barrel of the bat goes behind your head (or further).
6. Tendency to rotate their upper body to get the bat thru the zone especially when facing faster pitchers.
7. Know the pitch count, know the number of outs, and know where your runners are on base.
8. Expect to swing until decide not to.
9. Do not go down looking. Always give your best swing at that 3rd strike.
10. Be aware of the dropped 3rd strike rule.

Hitting Philosophy

At the younger ages most of the coaches' focus is motivating the girls to "just swing the bat". As the girls get older they need to develop an approach to hitting. Below is one plan of attack.

Pre At-Bat

3rd (in the hole) or 4th next to bat: full concentration on watching the next couple of batters. Things to consider: velocity, delivery motion, type of pitches, accuracy, pitcher's attitude and pitcher's mobility.

On Deck

At this point, the hitter should purely work on timing the pitcher. Pretend the pitcher is delivering to you and swing as the ball approaches the strike zone. Before you enter the box, you need to have 100% confidence that you will have a quality at-bat (discuss later). Confidence doesn't just happen, it takes reps and is only achieved by dedication to learning the proper hitting skills. Timing is everything, the pitcher is trying to throw off your timing.

At-Bat

BE AGGRESSIVE ON YOUR PITCH. The first 2 strikes should be swung at only if they are in the hot zone (defined by hitter). For most, the hot zone should be belt high right down the middle. Remember most pitchers want to get ahead in the count so be ready to hit. Your mindset should be I am swinging at every pitch until I decide not to swing. While balls in play are good, if you are ahead in the count there should not be any defensive swings. With two strikes, many coaches emphasis "protecting" the plate. How about flip it and "be aggressive". Recommend moving closer to the plate to get more plate coverage, plus most pitcher's do not like to pitch inside.

Post At-Bat

What did you learn? If struggled, what can you do better? If successful, can you identify what went well and be prepared to make adjustments. Also, talk with teammates and share your experiences.

Quality At-Bat

There is a standard QAB definition, however this metric should be specific to the individual. Player struggling to make contact, achieving a foul ball could be a QAB. Want at-bats to be productive whether that is getting a hit, reaching base or moving a player over. Working the pitch count is important because believe it or not pitchers do get tired. **DO NOT THROW AWAY AT-BATS.** You only get a minimal number of at-bats per game, make the most of them. In general, an at-bat should qualify as a QAB if she is battling, mentally invested on every pitch and truly care about doing whatever it takes to help the team.

Hitting Philosophy – Advanced Concepts

Objective: Learn how to take control of at-bat and understand that you are not at the pitcher's mercy. Use your time in the dugout to learn about the opposing pitcher.

1. Learn how to tell the difference between the different kinds of pitches – Important part of being a good batter is observing the pitcher.

- Watch the pitch throw and pay close attention to identify her different types of pitches
 - Note where the pitcher's hand is at release – behind, off to the side, in front, etc = hand behind is usually a fast ball / hand spins off to the side usually a rise ball / hand pushes the ball usually a change-up / etc.
 - Note where the pitcher's upper body is positioned when she finishes her pitch. Forward is usually a fastball. Back a bit is usually a rise ball and slight lean forward is usually change-up.
 - Note the spin of the ball – backwards rotation is a rise ball / forward rotation is usually a fastball
 - Note the speed rotation of the ball. Fast rotation is usually a fastpitch. Slow or little rotation is usually a change-up.
 - Get eyes down at the pitcher's release point and use a straight horizontal line as a guide (like a fence pipe) to see what the ball is doing.
 - Play catch with each other when you're sitting around and try to guess the rotation your partner throws the ball to you.

2. Learn the opposing pitcher and catcher patterns. We are creatures of habits and we tend to repeat comfortable behavior.

- We can't predict every pitch, but we can focus on a few things to help us see some patterns in the pitcher's nature
 - Note the different kinds of pitches the pitcher can throw = fast / drop / rise/ change-up / etc.
 - Note what kind of pitch the pitcher opens with on a new batter
 - Note what kind of a pitch the pitcher throws after she gets her first strike
 - Note what kind of a pitch the pitcher throws after she gets two strikes on a player
 - Note the pitcher's favorite pitch or which pitch she throws the most
 - Talk to your team mates about any patterns you identify about the pitcher – help each other

3. Take control of your time at bat – go on the offensive

- Play the game with the opponent's pitcher and catcher – trick them into throwing you the pitch you want.
 - If the pitcher gets you on a couple rise balls – call time move up and dig in = then expect the fast ball
 - If the pitcher gets you on a couple fast balls – call time and put on a show like your really charged up = then expect the change-up – rotation / body position
 - Watching the pitcher's patterns will be very important when trying to do this.

4. Other things to be aware of and to pay attention too.

- Watch the other players to see what they are doing. Not just the pitcher.
 - Watch for a field shift – the good teams will shift when they know their pitcher is going to throw a change-up. They will plan on the batter pulling the ball.
 - Look where the catcher sets up her glove after she calls the pitch right before the pitcher throws the ball – inside, outside, high, low