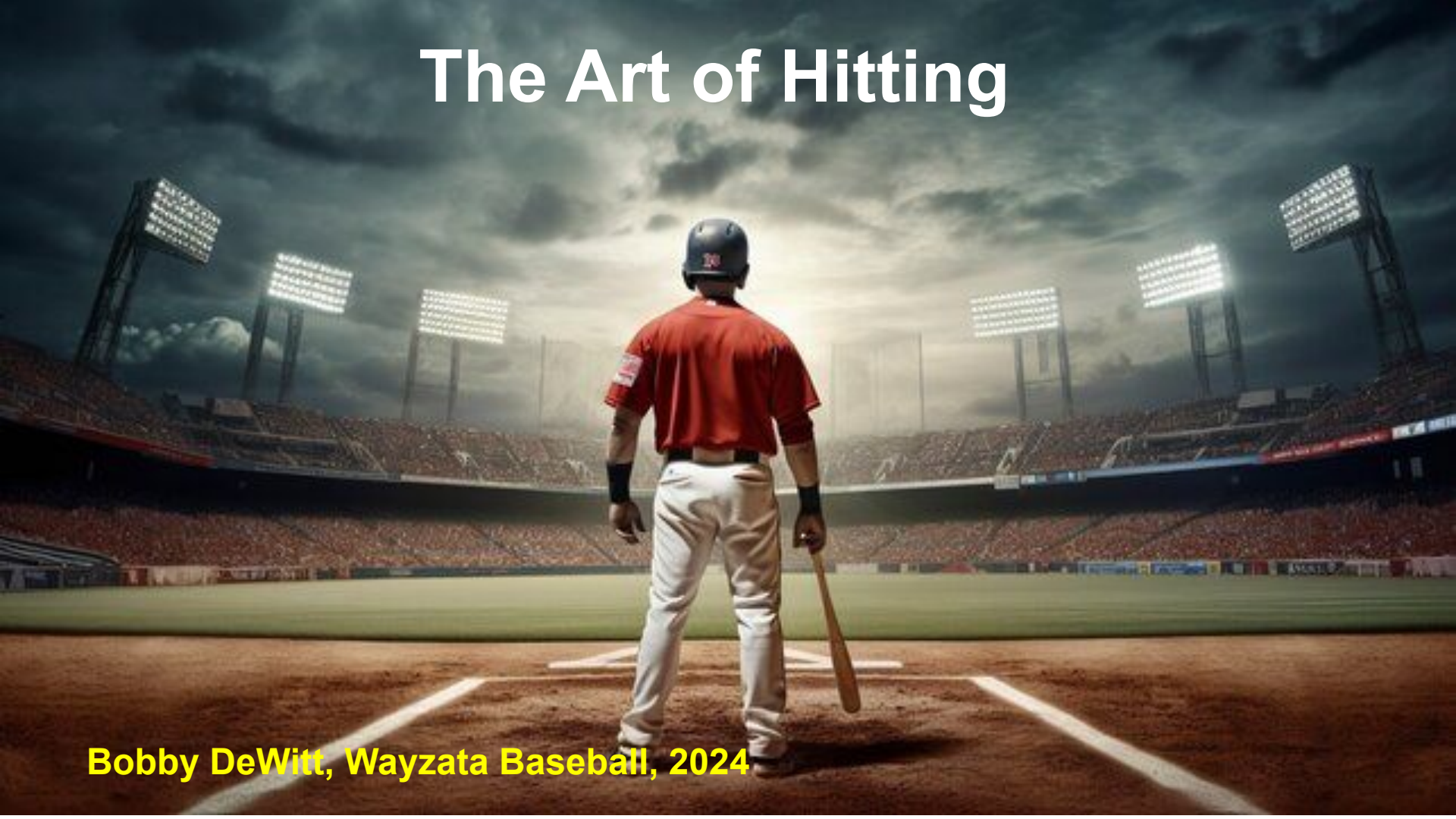


# The Art of Hitting



**Bobby DeWitt, Wayzata Baseball, 2024**

# Quick Note on the Current State of Hitting

## In the past

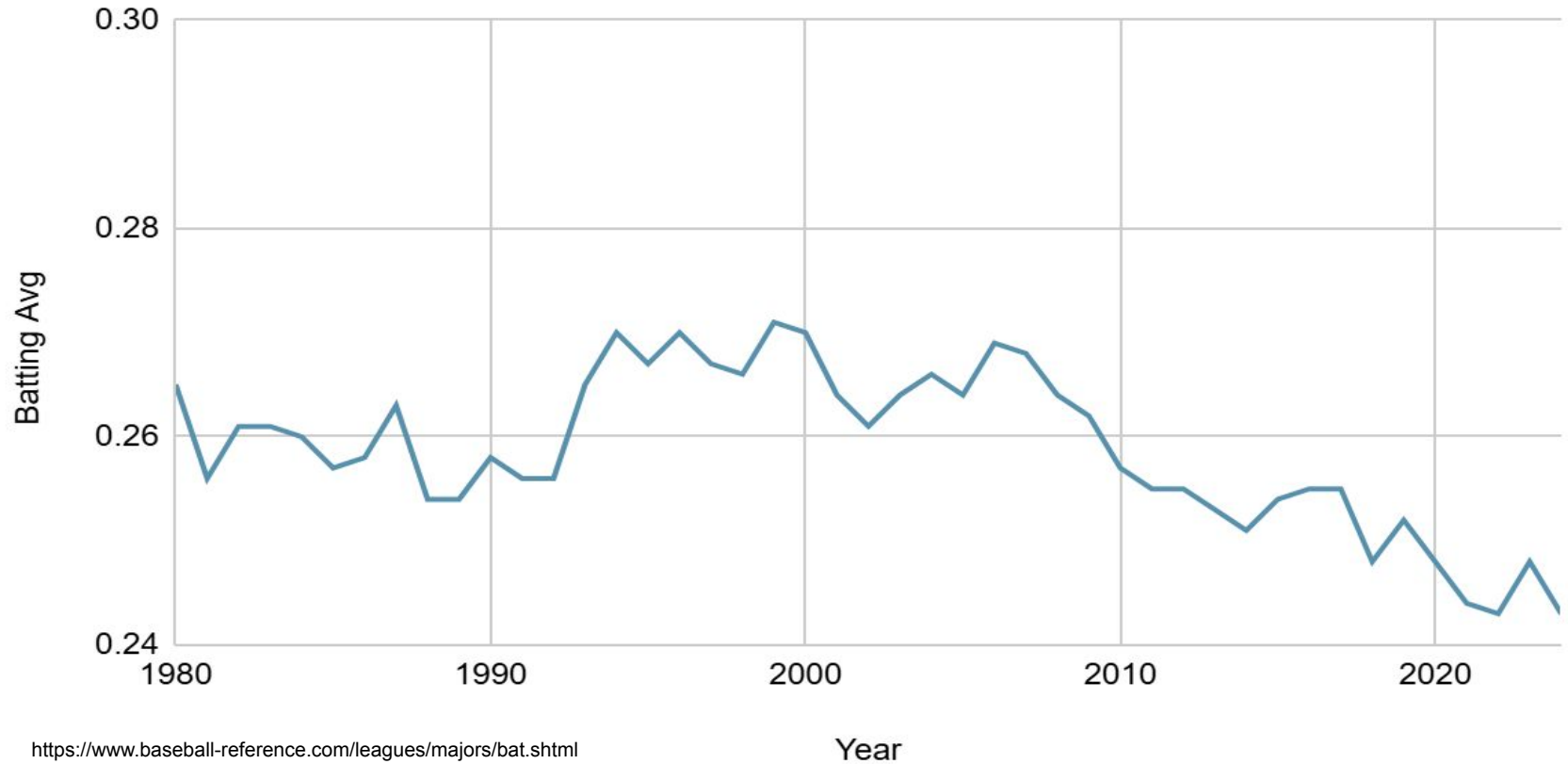
- Focus on what will give you the best chance of success now
- Kept hitting mechanics simple and repeatable
- Focus on gap to gap head-high line drives
- Minimize strikeouts

## What it is now

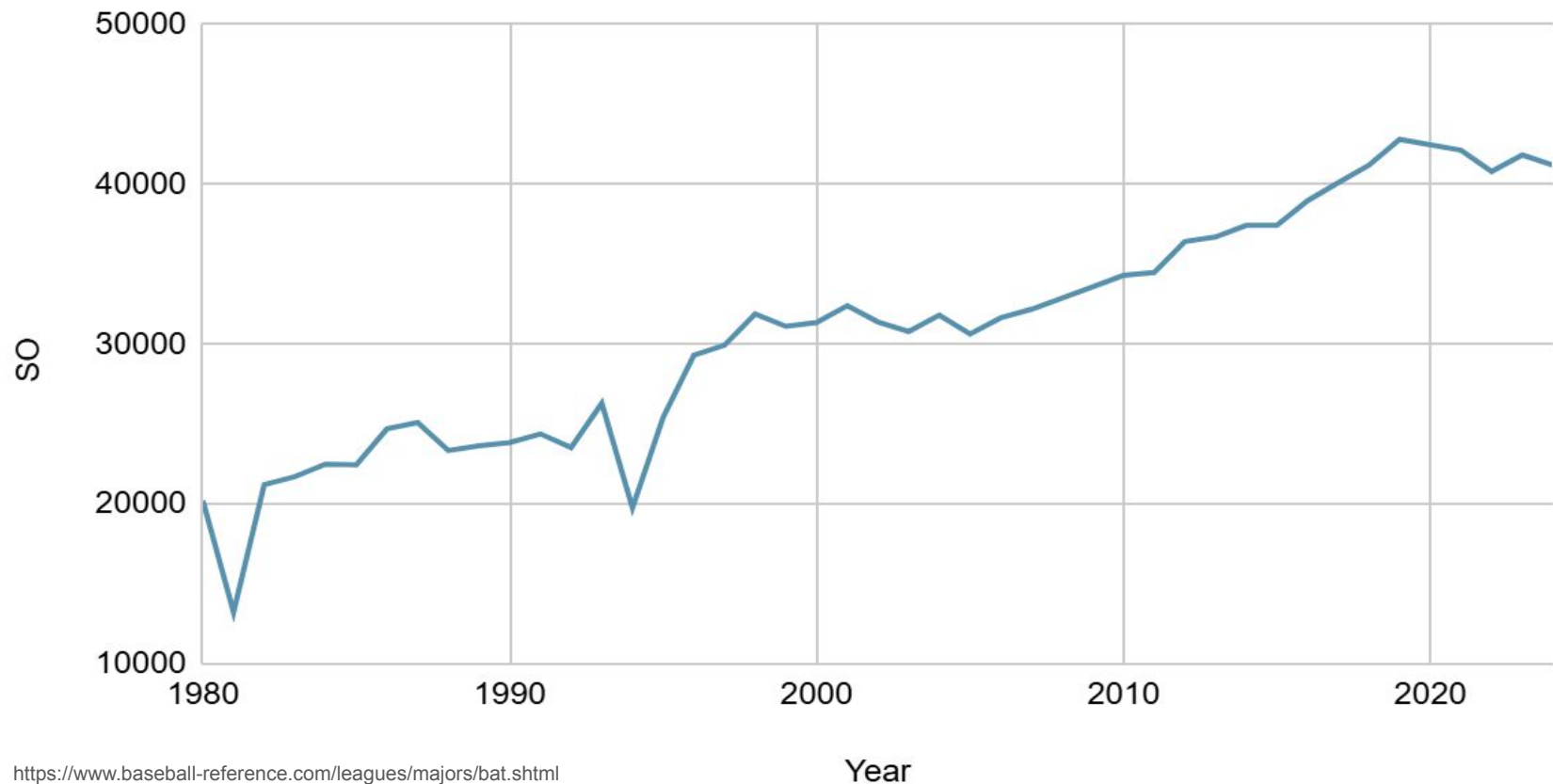
- Focus on future recruiting
- Launch angle and exit velocity
- Hitters are trying to get out front of everything - yank the ball to maximize exit velocity
- Refuse to go the other way
- Strikeouts are tolerated

The result: batting averages have fallen, strikeout rates have dramatically increased - And this is at the MLB level

# MLB Batting Averages by Year



# MLB Strikeouts per Year





**Tony Gwynn**  
**188 K's**  
**In ALL of the**  
**1990s**  
**(4,981 at-bats)**



**Elly De La Cruz**  
**210 K's**  
**In 2024**  
**(618 at-bats)**



**Shohei Ohtani**  
**162 K's**  
**In 2024**  
**(636 at-bats)**

# Wayzata HS Team Batting Average 2013-2024

- 2013: .288
- 2014: .287
- 2015: .294
- 2016: .315
- 2017: .271
- 2018: .270
- 2019: .254
- 2021: .278
- 2022: .228
- 2023: .276
- 2024: .355

First year we  
started hearing  
launch angle  
and exit velo



First year we  
started battling it



# My Beliefs

- Learn the basics correctly
- Simple is easily repeated
- You can always make adjustments later on
- We are trying to have team success NOW
- Top priority is not getting players recruited
- Top priority is winning games and having fun
- “Launch angle” is wrong at this level - learn it later



## Teaching New Mechanics

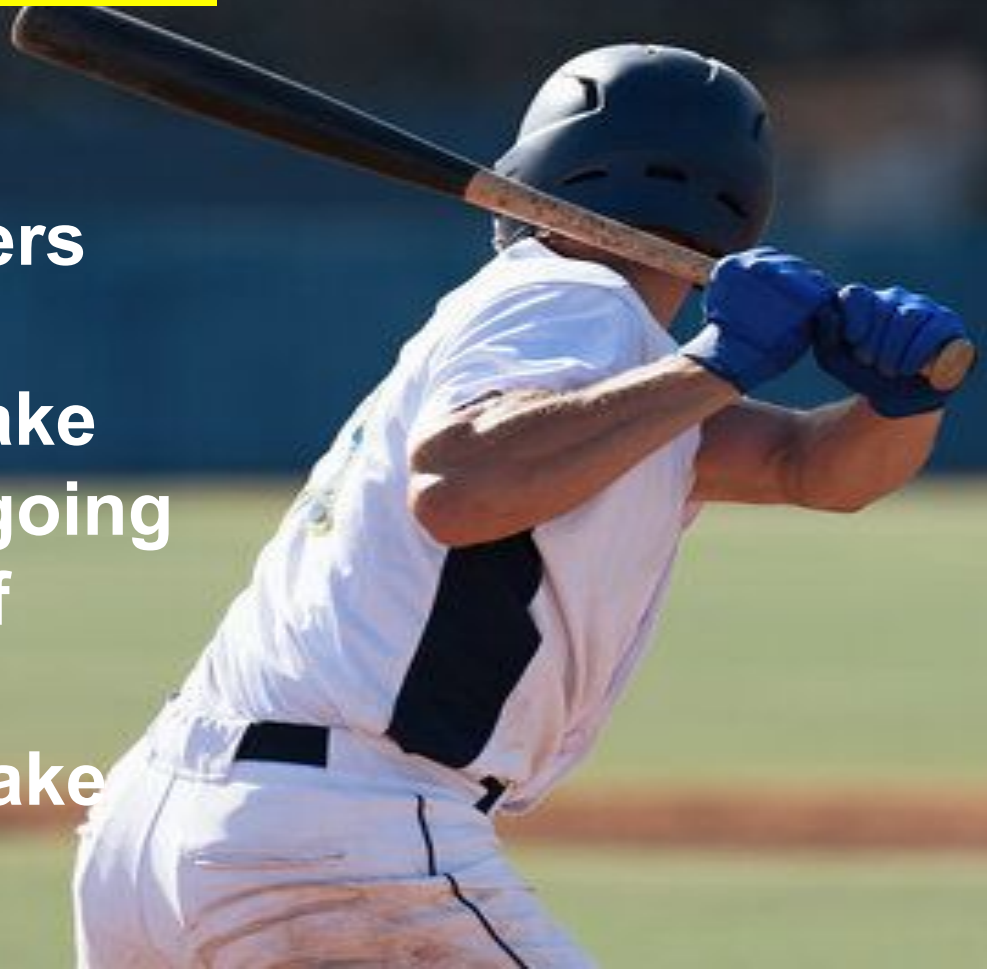
Keep in mind

**AND**

teach your players

Any time you make  
changes, there is going  
to be a time of  
digression

That does not make  
it wrong



## Topics for tonight:



- **Hitting mechanics - based upon my beliefs (stance, stride, pivot, swing, ready-swing)**
- **Drills for teaching those mechanics**
- **Areas of concern and what to do about them**
- **Review of the hitting mindset**

## A quick note on bat selection...

- If I were to play today, I would grab the lightest bat I can get
- Barry Bonds swung a 32" 29 oz. bat
- Light is fast
- Heavy is slow
- Lighter bats help us stay close to the plate - keep swing short and quick
- Heavier bats allow us to move further away from the plate - swings can get longer and thus slower - have to commit earlier
- **I understand the challenge of buying new bats and the cost**
- Is the player swinging the bat or is the bat swinging the player
- Don't watch contact - Do watch bat speed - we want QUICK

# What Comes Next is About....

- **making it as easy as possible to get to contact point on time as consistently as possible**
  - **being prepared or having a plan for all types of pitches**
  - **being able to hit the ball to all fields - still with power**
  - **minimizing strikeouts and putting the ball in play**
  - **increasing and maintaining success rate**
- 
- **Minor adjustments can be made for comfort but the basics need to be maintained**

# Contact Point - the GOAL

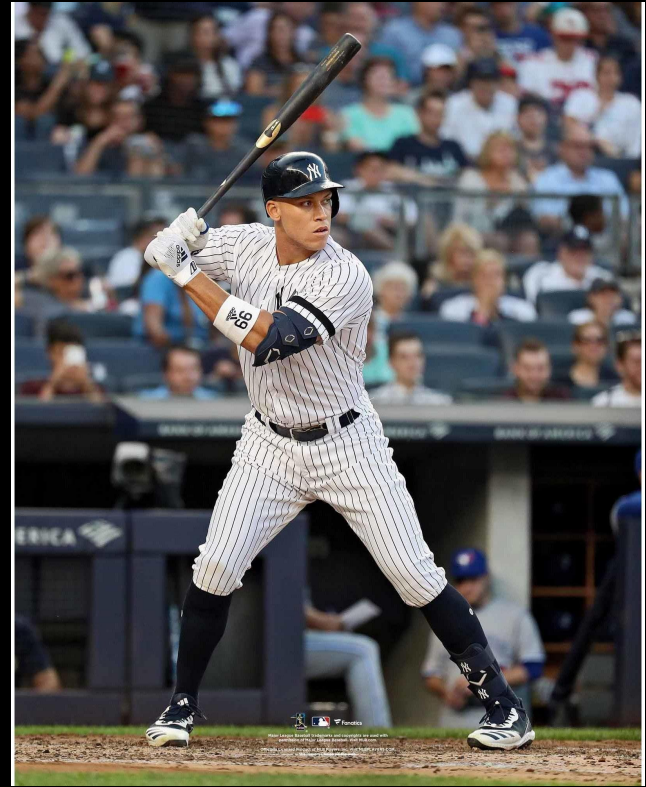


**Bryce Harper**



# Stance

- Stand “close” to the plate to learn to keep bottom arm bent at contact
- Feet are in a straight line to the pitcher
- Feet slightly more than shoulder length apart; toes pointed at the other batter’s box
- Knees slightly bent - “athletic stance”
- Hips are straight to the pitcher
- Shoulders are straight to the pitcher
- Head is level and both eyes on are on the pitcher
- Elbows are generally down - back elbow up was always wrong!
- Hands are at or above the back shoulder and slightly away from the body
- Knuckles that knock on a door are lined up - grip with fingers, not palm
- Knob of bat points to the opposite of batter’s box
- Body weight is either 50/50 front/back or 60/40



**Good Stances**



**“Not Good”  
Stances**

# Stride and Load

- **Front foot SLIDES forward - (PERSONALLY - avoid the big kick)**
- **Lead with the heel - keeps front hip closed as long as possible**
- **Weight stays over back foot - does not shift forward - “Testing the ice”**
- **Land on the balls of feet - should be DONE before pitch is released**
- **As front foot strides, hands load back**
- **Slight shift of the hands backwards - don't drop them**
- **Distance is about 8"-10"**
- **“Pull with top hand” - don't “push with bottom hand” - mindset**
- **Do not wrap the bat around the head - knob continues to point at other batter's box**
- **Some hitters start with their hands further back which is fine, just don't want them to come forward during stride**

Ronald Acuna Jr.



# Pivot

- As the pitch approaches the hitting zone, the back foot will pivot up on the toe
- Heel pointing back to the catcher
- Really want to aim for full rotation
- This will allow hips to fully rotate forward which increases power
- The back leg should finish in a bent “L” or “7” position
- **Watch out for hitters simply collapsing the back leg without pivoting**
- **It can achieve the same leg position...**
- **But because the foot didn't pivot - the hips won't rotate fully - drops power**



Mike Trout Slow Motion Home Run Baseball Swing Hitting Mechanics Highlights



# Swing

- **And.....this is where opinions have evolved over the years**
- **I am not selling the idea of “chopping down”**
- **Every swing has a launch angle - always has**
- **But if our goal is to hit head-high liners from gap to gap.....**
- **Using “launch angle” as a term and a goal will push players in the wrong direction - it’s the wrong mindset**
- **I don’t want the mindset of swing up - we will lose games (<1% HRs)**
- **I have seen players come through our program where the entire focus is on throwing their entire body at the pitch (EXIT VELOCITY) and hitting the ball into the air (LAUNCH ANGLE)**
- **Let the contact be the feedback - where does the ball go?**
- **Pop fly - wrong**
- **Line drive - correct**



**Bat path**



Hand path

# Swing

- **At the same time the foot begins to pivot, the hands will come forward to make contact with the ball - don't drop hands - go straight to the ball**
- **Lead with the knob of the bat - "Throw your hands at the ball"**
- **Keep arms bent - closer to body**
- **Short is fast, long is slow**
- **Avoid casting out - arm bar**
- **Make contact with top hand palm up and bottom hand palm down**
- **Eyes should SEE contact - look down the barrel**
- **Extend through the pitch - power triangle**
- **Finish with a high follow through**
- **Chin goes from front shoulder to back shoulder**
- **Balanced throughout**
- **AND OF COURSE SWING HARD**

**Matt Olson**



**Austin Riley**



# **Stance, Stride, Pivot, Swing, Ready-Swing**

- **There really is no shortcut when you are trying to learn body mechanics**
- **The focus needs to be on what your body is doing - not on hitting a ball**
- **Must remove the need to hit something**
- **Spread players out in a safe space with plenty of room between**
- **Call out STANCE - players get into their stance**
- **Coaches walk around and correct players as needed**
- **I would repeat STANCE 4-5 times**
- **Move on to STANCE, STRIDE**
- **Again coaches walk around and correct as needed - keep hands and weight back during stride!!!**
- **Then add pivot - again keep hands back as you pivot**
- **Then add swing**
- **Then move to ready swing - start in stance, call out ready which is stride and load - then call out swing which is pivot and swing at the same time**



# Ideas for Working on Stride

- **Stance** - have to develop a feel for the body position - requires a coach to visually monitor and correct
- **Stride Requirements:**
  - **Straight to the pitcher**
  - **Lead with the heel**
  - **Hitter strides/loads at the same the pitcher strides towards the plate**
  - **Balanced with weight staying over pivot foot**
- **Striding straight and short**
  - **Draw a line in the dirt for the foot to follow**
  - **Hold their belt loop back to keep them from drifting forward**
- **Staying balanced**
  - **Have them swing and hold their finished position without moving**
  - **Stand on the lower step of bleachers**
  - **Build a simple balance beam out of wood**

# Ideas for Working on Swing

- **Pivot- when isolating pivot as a skill - hands stay back and hips stay closed as much as possible**
- **Tee work is best for cementing swing muscle memory**
- **Allows hitters to focus on their body and not the moving pitch**
- **Focus on quality contact and direction of ball after contact**
- **Keep hitter close to the tee - arms bent at contact - have them start there**
- **Don't have the pitch too low or too high - waist high is good**
- **Focus on keeping hands inside the ball**
- **Contact should be up the middle or even slightly to the opposite field**
- **Pulling is easy - don't need to work on it - it'll just happen naturally**
- **Need to focus on hitting the ball up the middle and away**
- **Pull-only hitters are EASY to get out**

# Ideas on Hitting

- Tees are for working on your swing - where you learn something new
- Allows you to focus on each part one at a time
- Moving in slow motion can also be effective to develop feel
- **Can't learn something NEW during coach bp or front toss - that is for reminding them of something they have already learned/working on**
- Basic tee drills (handout) - remember you can also work on elevation (up/down)
- Two-tee drills - work on in/out
- Add a tee to front toss - set up away
  - Front toss simulates fastball - work on hitting up the middle
  - Fake the front toss - hitter has to stride to be on time - but adjusts to hitting the ball off the tee (offspeed) the opposite way



# “Ready-Swing”

- **When the pitcher’s stride foot hits the ground - we stride and load**
- **As the pitch approaches we start our swing**
- This is what should happen on EVERY pitch
- In our minds, we are swinging on every pitch until we decide that we aren’t
- This gives us time to “see” the pitch and adjust our timing
- If we stride/load and swing at the same time we will not be able to adjust to offspeed pitches
- This makes us a guess hitter - when we guess wrong, we’re in trouble
- Guessing = increased strikeout rate, lower batting average, decreased confidence
- We want to be as ready as possible for any pitch at any time
- **RULE - set up for fastball, adjust to offspeed**
- **Never get surprised by a fastball**

# Ideas for Working on Ready-Swing

- I would do it with wiffle or flight restricted balls (heavy balls???)
- We must separate stride from swing - they are TWO DIFFERENT moves
- Stand about 20-30' away from hitter
- When the pitcher's foot hits the ground - hitter strides and loads
- Practice this a few times without throwing the ball
- Then actually throw the ball
- After about 4-5 "fastball" pitches - lob a few to simulate offspeed
- Hitters still have to get their foot down before pitch release....
- But now they have to wait for the offspeed pitch to get there
- Continue with mixing up quick-throws and lob-throws to simulate fastballs and offspeed timing
- BUT HITTERS MUST HAVE THEIR STRIDE DONE BEFORE PITCH RELEASE
- AND THERE IS ONLY ONE STRIDE - DON'T LET THEM STRIDE TWICE

# **As they get older - need to focus more on skills**

- **Batting practice is just that - PRACTICE**
- **It's not called batting repetition**
- **Need to introduce and practice specific skills**
- **Hitting the ball up the middle**
- **Hitting the ball the other way**
- **Runner on 2B - look to hit the ball behind the runner**
- **Runner on 3B - look for something up in the zone early in the count**
- **Hit-and-Run - get something on the ground**
- **At some point they will need to learn to bunt - even if you aren't doing it in games**
- **At some point they need to start working on a 2-strike approach - WHS has "Get wide, don't stride"**
- **We believe in productive outs - helps the team win - which is our goal**

# Things to watch out for and how to address it

- **Bat wrap around the head:** stand out of their swing zone and hold a bat up against their bat in stance, push their bat to the correct position, let them swing
- **Hands drop during load/swing:** have a 2nd tee? Place it behind a front tee and make it slightly lower, put a ball on it. They should hit the front ball without hitting the back ball
- **Arm bar or long swings:** Tee work, get them closer to the tee, get them into contact position with arms bent, then reset from there and swing
- **Balance issues:** have them start get into post stride/pivot position with hands still back, then have them swing from there and hold finished position
- **Can't stay back:** same as balance issues, have them dry swing WITHOUT a bat and you hold their belt loop while kneeling - don't let them drift forward
- **Not pivoting all the way:** same as balance issues solution

# A few ideas on mental hitting

- **The goal of hitting is to hit the ball hard**
- **Evaluating yourself on getting hits sets you up for failure**
- **Attack the first-pitch fastball strike**
- **Data on 1-0 and 0-1 hitting is astounding**
- **Pitchers want to get ahead**
- **If hitters need to “see a pitch first” - they weren’t ready to hit**
- **PERSONALLY - I am ok with taking first-pitch offspeed**
- **Looking to swing on every pitch until you see the pitch out of the zone**

# 10 Ways Pitchers Get Hitters Out

1. **Hitter chase bad pitches**
2. Hitters are not aggressive and get behind in the count
3. **Pitchers make quality pitches several times in a row**
4. Hitters lack confidence
5. **Hitters do not hit the ball where it is pitched**
6. Pitchers throw fastball hard-in late in the count
7. **Pitchers change speed**
8. Hitters do not adjust to elevation changes of the pitch
9. **Hitters hit the ball at the defense and they make a play**
10. Hitters do not have emotional control before, during, or after an at-bat