



Berlin Youth Baseball – Hitting Focus

- **Goal of this document:** This document can help coaches work with players that are having trouble seeing the ball and have lots of swings and misses during the game.

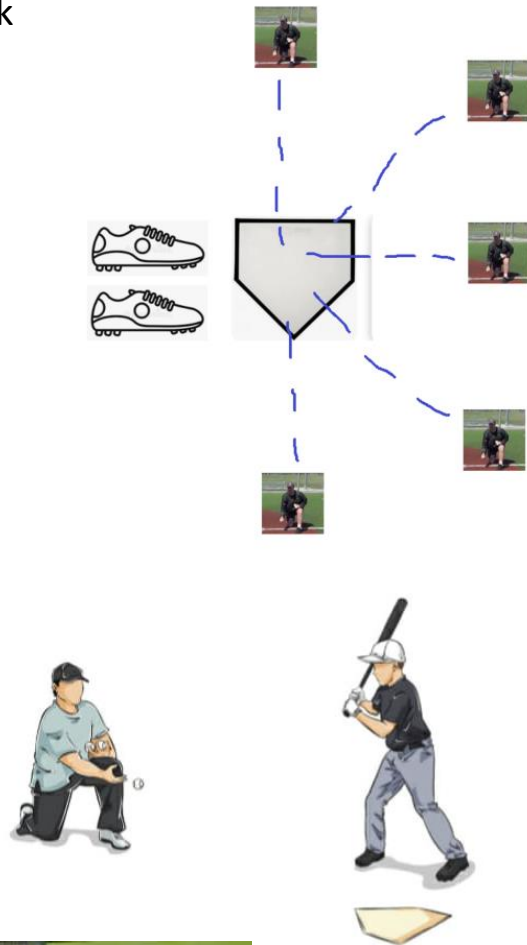
Hitting Mechanics: Before you start on helping a young player see the ball, they first must have sound hitting mechanics, or a simple “set of instructions” for how to properly swing. Take advantage of the drills found in the hitting mechanics clinic to ensure the players understand the 5 phases of the swing 1.) Ready 2.) Load 3.) Step 4.) Launch 5.) Finish. Then practice these phases with lots of repetition on tees, using soft toss, or on a pitching machine to make sure that each youth is gaining muscle memory on how to swing properly.

Hitting Focus Drills

Small Ball Drill: For players having trouble seeing the ball and swinging and missing a lot, one very helpful concept is to have them practice hitting a smaller-than-usual ball, such as a golf-ball sized whiffle ball (e.g. what golfers use to practice indoors). Perform standard soft-toss to your players using these small balls and work on getting them to use strong mechanical swings to make contact with these small balls. The idea is, if a player can see and hit these small balls consistently, when they get into a game with a larger standard baseball, the baseball will look big and be easier to see.



Soft Toss Angles: Another good way to work on getting a young player to see the ball is to ensure you aren't always soft tossing from the front. Try to get them to hit from different angles. This includes soft toss from an angle, both out to the front, off to the side, and from behind, as well as doing soft toss from directly behind the batter. If you have them, these drills work even better if you're soft tossing small golf-ball sized whiffle balls instead of full sized balls, as again it helps to get the batter seeing the ball. Each time the batter should be hitting into a net so that you don't have to retrieve the balls. Some youth will find the angles, especially from behind, to be quite difficult until they truly start seeing the ball, which of course is the goal 😊



Swing Sticks: Another useful tool, if you have one, for hitter focus is a coach holding a swing stick at different spots and angles and having the hitter simply focus on making contact with the end of the stick.



Two ball soft-toss: This drill has multiple variations, all of which are good. In normal soft-toss, the coach lobs a single ball to the youth who hits it into a net. In this drill, a coach tosses two balls at the same time and the youth must hit one. The variations come in play for which ball they must hit. A simple form has the youth just hit the “better ball” (identify what a good pitch it). Another is toss 2 colors and yell out which color to hit. As they get older, yell out “fastball” (for the higher ball) and “change” for the lower ball.



Color front toss: Similar to the two ball soft-toss, another variation for helping see the ball is for a coach standing out front holding two different color balls in their glove. The coach conceals which ball they are throwing as long as possible, then tosses one.

The idea, for example, is if the ball is the color red, don't swing, if the ball is the color blue, then the youth should swing. This causes the player to focus on seeing the ball before swinging. This can be done with different color whiffle balls also during basic soft toss into a net.



Weight balls: Weighted balls can be helpful when you're in a small area and worried about hitting people or things around you as well as having to chase the balls. Weighted balls solve this, as they're generally filled with sand and generally don't go anywhere once contact is made. Any of the prior drills, including especially the soft toss angles drills work very well with these type of weighted balls if you have them at your disposal to use.



Call out the Laces: As the youth get older, you want them to start seeing the laces on the ball and discovering the types of pitches coming in (e.g. fastball, changeup, curve-ball, etc.). One beginning step to getting a youth to see the ball is differentiating between a 2-SEAM and 4-SEAM fastball. One drill you can do is have a coach throw pitches to a batter, the coach randomly chooses to toss a 2-SEAM or 4-SEAM fastball, and the batter as they're swinging should call out loud which pitch the coach through. The key to spotting this is the 2-SEAM fastball looks like "red train tracks" where as a 4-SEAM fastball looks like a solid brown blob where you don't see seams. In it's simplest form, you could do this indoors, without the batter even swinging, if you just have a pitcher and catcher, and a batter in the batter's box and ask the batter to call out what pitch it was as it's thrown.



4-SEAM FASTBALL

FROM THE BOX, THE STRAIGHTEST PITCH IS A REDDISH, BROWNISH SOLID WITHOUT MUCH FORM. BATTERS DON'T REALLY SEE SEAMS.



2-SEAM FASTBALL

THE PITCH'S DOWNWARD SLIDE MAKES THE SEAMS LOOK LIKE BLURRED VERTICAL RAILROAD TRACKS.

4-SEAM FASTBALL



2-SEAM FASTBALL

