



## **Berlin Youth Baseball – Hitting Mechanics**

- **Goal of this document:** This document can help coaches introduce basic hitting mechanics to youth baseball players. This document will also provide several ideas for hitting drills that can re-enforce these concepts and be used during a practice or before a game.

**Hitting Mechanics:** For young baseball players, it is going to be important to introduce to them a simple “set of instructions” for how to properly swing, something they can easily remember and repeat over and over. Once you establish those steps, then it’s all about repetition. This is where things like using Tees into a net, hitting soft toss into a fence, throwing whiffle/soft balls, or using a pitching machine become critical. If during your practice you chose to do “live pitching”, regardless of if you use a coach or youth pitcher, each youth player on the team will likely only get a handful of swings (perhaps 5 to 10 good hits). While there is a time and place for live pitching and simulating a game, early in the season or anytime you have players struggling with basic fundamental mechanics, a better approach is to use tees, soft toss, or a pitching machine to make sure that each youth is getting 100+ swings instead of a handful during a single practice.

**Phases of a Swing:** One way to teach your youth a proper swing is by introducing to them the following 5 phases. It is advisable at the beginning of the season to have all youth spread out into offset lines, facing you the coach, each with their bat and enough room to safely swing without hitting their teammate, and then you walk through each of these 5 steps, pausing after each step to explain it.

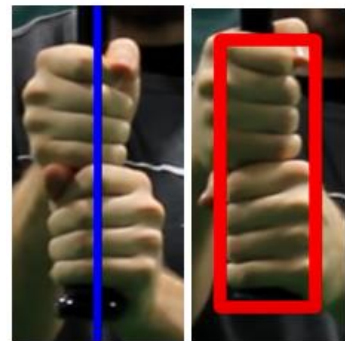
- 1.) Ready
- 2.) Load
- 3.) Step
- 4.) Launch
- 5.) Finish

1.) **“Ready” Phase:** Arguably the most important phase, this is about getting the youth player setup and ready before the pitch even happens. There of course is quite a bit of wiggle room in this phase, so expect each to look unique in their stance, but there are some key points listed below that each player should strive to meet.

Before we do anything else, we need to be standing at the correct spot in the batter’s box. This can be achieved with a quick stance distance check. Hold the bat with your elbows even with your stomach, hands all the way down at the end of the barrel, the bat flat with knob pointing at your belt buckle, then drop the bat. The bat should land so that it’s **just covering the outer edge of the plate**. If the batter is too close, the end of the barrel will be off the plate, and if they’re too far away the end of the barrel will be in the middle of the plate. **Feet are straight & parallel to the batter’s box line.**



Next you need to make sure the youth is gripping the bat correctly. The bottom hand should start near the knob of the bat (if the bat is sized properly). The grip should use the fingers (not the palms) and the hands should be on top of each other (no gap or overlap). The hand alignment can differ, as some youth will line-up their “door knocking” knuckles, and some youth will form more of a “box”. Either way is fine, the youth should just be somewhere between these two setups.



The bat then can be help either straight up or at a 45 degree angle, or somewhere in between.



Now as the youth gets ready for the pitch they, should have their **knees bent**, their weight should be on the front (**balls of the feet**) and not on their heels, their **shoulders should be level**, but having their **back elbow raised up**, and their head is directly between their feet (forming a nice triangle).



2.) **“Load” Phase:** As the pitcher releases the ball, the batter should start their load phase, where they gather their momentum to the backside and prepare for an explosive swing. You can describe this to your youth as pulling back the string on a bow & arrow. You will typically see the youth lifting their front leg and pulling that **front foot backwards a bit**. The youth should strike a balance, as they don’t want to have too high of a leg kick or they will become unbalanced, but if they have no leg lift or movement they aren’t loading their power onto the back leg.



3.) **“Step” Phase:** As the ball is approaching the youth is going to take that momentum they loaded up and **stride forward** with it. This means their front foot will move forward towards the pitcher and land on the ground again. It’s important here that they step directly towards the pitcher and are not stepping in (towards first) or out (towards third). At the same time, their head will be turned towards the pitcher, and their eyes locked on the baseball.



4.) **“Launch” Phase:** The launch phase is where contact happens. As the front foot hits the ground, the **hip rotation** will bring the bat around to make contact with the ball. The **knob of the bat goes to towards the ball**. Their **front leg is locked** in position. Their **back foot is on its toe**, the **heel will rotate**, and the foot itself will not move but only pivot. As the bat makes contact with the ball the youth’s **hands will be in a palm up palm down position**.



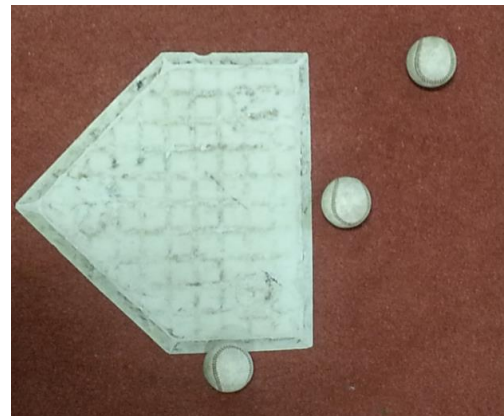
5.) **“Finish” Phase:** Particularly with young youth it is important to stress a strong follow-through swing. The bat should come all the way around nearly touching their back. You can re-enforce this by reminding them that if they only partially swing they’re not getting their full power.



**Where to hit the ball:** With the younger youth, it works best to repeatedly stress that the ideal hit they can get is a **line drive right back up the middle**, past the pitcher, into center field. You can stress this over and over using tees, soft toss, batting cages, or pitching machines. Especially when using a net, if they pop it up, hit it down to the ground, or hit it left or right, remind them those aren’t ideal and they should put their focus into hitting that line drive right back at the middle of the net.



As the youth get older you can start to work into their swing the 3 contact points for a hitter. If the ball is inside, your bat should make contact out in front of the plate and pull it. If the ball is down the middle you should make contact right over the plate and drive it to center. If the ball is outside, your bat should make contact deep over the plate and push it to opposite field. This can be practiced by moving the tee during practice to the different locations.

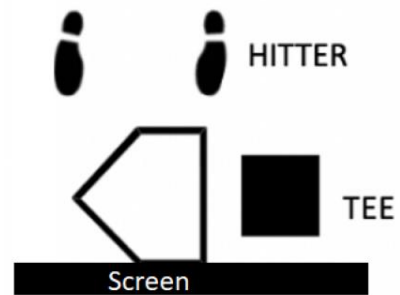


## Hitting Mechanic Drills

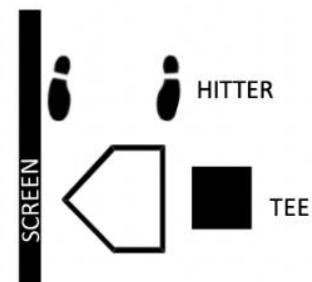
1.) **Barehanded swing-catch:** This first drill allows you to make sure the arm movement is correct for your youth. As the coach, you can line up next to the youth like ready to toss the ball like in standard soft-toss. The youth gets into hitting ready position, but has no bat, only their hands. You toss 1 ball as a normal soft toss pitch, then another right after. On the first ball, the youth uses their front arm, swings it forward (making sure to have palm down), and tries to catch the ball bare-handed with that one front hand. On the second ball, the youth uses their back arm, swings it forward (making sure to have palm up), and tries to catch the ball bare-handed with that back hand.



2.) **Front Constraint swing:** This drill is very easy to do, with or without a tee and ball. The youth takes a bat, puts the knob of the bat on their belly button, and the end of the bat against a wall or screen net. The youth then gets into ready swing position. The idea is for the youth to make a **short compact swing** that is avoiding hitting the wall or screen. This will help ensure the youth has proper plate coverage and also prevent the youth from lunging out at the ball. Be careful not to do this against a solid wall where a bat or the wall may get damaged.



3.) **Back Constraint swing:** A similar drill to the one above involves putting the wall or net directly behind the batters back foot. Again, the youth must make a short compact swing without contacting the wall or screen. This enforces to the youth that the bat should be traveling forward as quickly as possible, and the bat does not move backwards during the “load” phase of the swing.



4.) **Straight stride drill:** A lot of youth players incorrectly “step in the bucket”, which means that their front foot strides away from home plate (towards 3<sup>rd</sup> base for a right handed hitter). You want to stress to your youth to take a



healthy stride directly back towards the pitcher. One simple drill to re-enforce this is putting down 2 straight line objects (such as 2 bats or sticks) on both sides of the batter’s feet. Then they should perform their normal swing, and if they should work on getting their front stride to land in between the 2 lines.

5.) **Ball between the knees:** Some youth have trouble getting their legs into a consistent athletic position. This drill can help, not only with getting their legs into the athletic position but also with again ensuring they are not stepping in the bucket but are going forward towards the pitcher. The drill is simple and can be done using a tee or soft toss. The batter puts a small ball (volleyball, girls basketball, gym ball, etc.) between their legs and must do their full swing without dropping the ball. Then during normal practice later on, if you see the youth in an incorrect stance or stepping in the bucket you can remind them to “squeeze the ball” with their knees.



6.) **Balance Disc Drill:** If you have one of the athletic posture / balance discs available, the following drill is useful. Use this during tee or soft toss practice. The back foot is placed squarely on the center of the balance disc. This will re-enforce balance and stability during a swing. The foot should do it’s normal pivot and heel rotation, but the youth should be able to complete the swing while staying balanced.



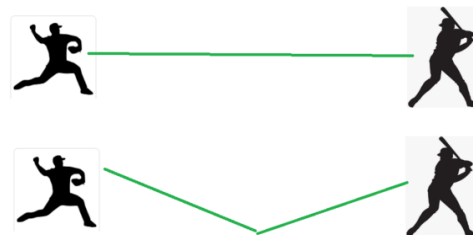
7.) **Stride pause drill:** This drill can re-enforce the phases of the swing. You can do this during soft toss or in the batting cage. Have the player get in ready swing position, load, then step or stride forward ... but then PAUSE. At this moment of the pause, the coach can throw the ball. The youth will then continue the swing with the launch and finish phases. This reminds the youth of each step and gives you the coach a chance, during the “pause”, to critique the youth’s swing mechanics.



8.) **Hip Twist Repeat drill:** This is another drill that can help remind youth of the phases of a swing. This can be done with a tee. The youth gets in the ready position, then loads, then steps/strides, but pauses before making contact with the ball on the tee. Then the youth immediately draws their body back to the ready position and repeats this process 5 times (ready, load, stride, ready, load, stride, ...) and on the 6<sup>th</sup> time they finish the swing with the launch and finish phases, hitting the ball off the tee. Repeat this for every ball placed on the tee.



9.) **Front Toss Optional Bounce:** This drill is especially good indoors on a hard floor. Getting into the more traditional front toss where the coach stands at a pitcher’s mound or behind a protective net, this drill uses tennis balls (or a ball that bounces well) and the batter stands at home plate for normal batting practice. The unique part of this drill though is that the pitcher will randomly switch between normal pitches and pitches that one-hop or bounce up into the strike zone. The batter must be able to adjust their load and launch phases of the swing to be able to handle this change in ball speed and direction.



10.) **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.

