



HITTING COACH



CONTEXTS:

- INSTRUCTOR BEGINNER
- MODULE: HITTING



Coach:

The National Coaching Certification Program is a collaborative program of the Government of Canada, provincial/territorial governments, national/provincial/territorial sport organizations, and the Coaching Association of Canada.

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How to be a better coach



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- track your progress through the NCCP;
- update your coaching profile;
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1

COACHING IS TEACHING



They call it coaching but it is teaching. You do not just tell them... you show them the reasons. VINCE LOMBARDI

Teaching a baseball skill, in this case hitting skills, is much like putting a puzzle together. Visualize the picture, analyze the pieces, and then put the pieces in place. Coaches (teachers) must be able to see the picture (the quality baseball swing) in order to work the individual player's movements (or puzzle piece) into the proper execution of the swing. When put together, the result or goal is a skill, an achievement.

2

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE TEACHING COACH

- Be familiar and fundamentally sound with the skills you teach, and the components
Recognize the pieces that don't fit properly
Develop the individual (individualized) piece(s), one at a time, so that it does make a clear picture
Plan to work on a skill or an instructional goal
Plan future work based on previous results
Breakdown the goal into simple movements - based on ability
Challenge the player to accept, work, improve
Review past skills with players
Compliment whenever possible
Add new skills and make it fun
Practice under game-like conditions
Be honest



Notes:

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3

TEACHING THE MECHANICS OF THE BASEBALL SWING

The objective of the **Instruction Stream** is to assist coaches who are specialists in specific aspects of the game. You are a coach looking for more detailed information for working with a group of skilled kids who have played the game for years.



We start at the beginning ! Why ?

- To get a handle on the terminology - not only do you need a good grasp of the basics of hitting, but you also have to be comfortable enough with them to be able to explain all the movements, terms, and mechanics to your players.
- To understand and have knowledge of the science and the art of hitting and more importantly, the ability and passion to communicate it.
- To be able to get to the cause/effect relationship in what is a very difficult motor skill to teach. Being able to spot areas and skills which players need to work in order to improve, and to identify and explain the work (drills) that need to be done to address the areas of concern is a significant part of teaching hitting.
- To be able to take a very raw talent and build a hitter is the essence of hitting instruction. Every player has strengths that can be developed.
- To avoid the pitfalls of providing incomplete instruction, bad or too much advice which often leads to confusion and misunderstanding in young athletes.
- To continue to encourage individuals to become students of the game in order to make the game grow.





- There is a definite need in Canada for the right kind of coaching.
- To realize and understand that games are won at practice, and appreciate the value of work, application, dedication and discipline.
- To build confidence and, moreover, fun in the game with success by achieving the goal of developing and improving hitting skills.
- To build strong, sound hitters which in turn contributes to mental toughness of hitters and baseball players in general.
- To offer young athletes future possibilities and open doors for hitters by contributing to their development.
- You do not have to have been an advanced player to teach baseball skills. We are looking for coaches who have a love of the game, a particular interest in teaching hitting, and who want to learn and improve their skills as hitting coaches. We will teach from beginning to advanced skills and coaches will be able to progress at their own pace.



Teaching the Mechanics
of a Baseball Swing

Notes:

4 SUMMARY OF OBJECTIVES OF HITTING

- 1 A strong, athletic base
- 2 Rear foot pivots and pushes against a firm, closed front side
- 3 Power position - hands 90° to the barrel of the bat at contact
- 4 Focus up-the-middle
- 5 Timing
- 6 Thinking



Summary of Objectives of hitting

>> Specifics:

1 A strong, athletic base

- Upper body and the head are **centered** between the feet and knees
- Knees bent, weight toward toes (able to jump)
- After stride, weight is slightly over back leg, but between the knees
- To utilize the hips and upper body to the low pitch means the feet must be far apart - athletic

2 Rear foot pivots and pushes against a firm, closed front side

- Pivoting action is on toes with heel pushing forward to open body, **the linear force**
- Utilizing the entire body, including the hips and shoulders to generate and apply more power, **the rotational force**
- To allow the hands to pull the bat to a point in front of the body

Notes:

3 Power Position – hands 90° to barrel of the bat

- Baseball swing is really a "stroke" action, not concerned with "swinging" the bat
- Shortest **direction or bat path**, not concerned with "bat speed"
- Both hands used in harmony, pull with the lead (or bottom) hand, pull with the top hand
- At point of contact, the barrel is even or slightly behind the hands to apply maximum force to the ball

4 Focus up-the-middle

- Path of the hands inside the ball, downward plane until arriving in front of the body
- Knob of the bat leads the barrel by the "inside" part of the ball
- Handle of the bat and first 12 to 18 inches of bat "inside" the ball, avoiding path of pitch

5 Timing

- Being ready and in time to hit every pitch
- Timing changes according to pitcher's velocity and hitter's mechanics
- Time fastball – the pitcher's fastest pitch

6 Thinking

- Belief in concepts, willingness to accept information and change
- Discipline to continue despite failures or setbacks
- Practice: is time to **work** on mechanics
- Game: is time to get ready to hit – "see the ball, hit the ball"
- Confidence to take good swings
- Mind is clear, focus is on pitched ball

Notes:

5 WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

➤➤ *Ted Williams' THREE RULES TO HIT BY* – Science of Hitting

- 1 Get a good ball to hit
- 2 Proper thinking
- 3 Be quick with the bat

➤➤ *Charlie Lau's TEN ABSOLUTES OF HITTING* – The Art of Hitting .300

- 1 A balanced, workable stance
- 2 Rhythm and movement in the stance
- 3 A good weight shift from a firm, rigid backside forward to hit from a firm rigid frontside
- 4 Striding with the front toe closed
- 5 Having the bat in the launch position at the moment the front foot touches down
- 6 Making a positive, aggressive motion back toward the pitcher
- 7 A tension-free swing
- 8 Putting your head down when you swing
- 9 Using the whole field to hit in
- 10 Hit through the ball

➤➤ *Jim Lefebvre's FIVE PHASES OF HITTING* – The Making of a Hitter

- 1 **SETUP** – The initial position and stance assumed by the hitter
- 2 **POWER POSITION** – The stride, a rearward weight shift, and a rearward cocking of the hips and upper body to prepare the hitter for forward movement
- 3 **APPROACH** – The hitter's initial forward movement toward the ball
- 4 **RELEASE** – The hitter's position at the point of impact with the ball
- 5 **FOLLOW THROUGH** – The hitter's continuing post-contact motion

What the expert says

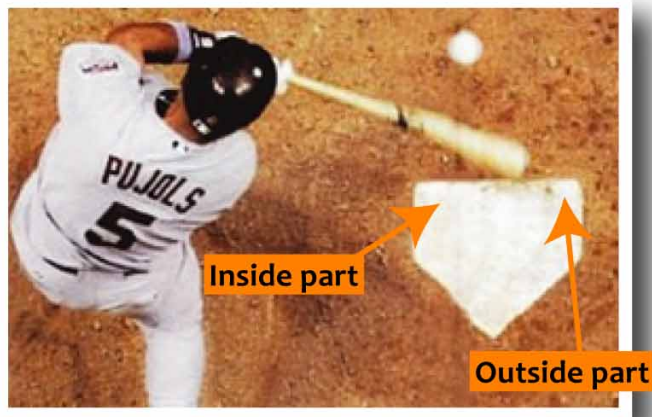
6 INSIDE THE BALL - *Theory behind the teaching*



Defined:

"Inside the ball" is a term that has been used for a number of years by hitting coaches. It seems to be the most accurate description of the baseball swing. All outstanding hitters approach hitting the baseball from the inside! How is "inside the ball" defined ?

If we could observe a hitting situation from above; that is, the hitter, pitcher and the path of the ball being pitched from the "sky-view camera;" the part of the baseball closest to the hitter would be the "inside" part, and the part furthest from the hitter would be called the "outside" part.



The object for the hitter is to contact the ball with the barrel of the bat.

For the hitter to do this, he must be able to take the knob, the handle of the bat and the first 12 to 18 inches that he holds by the "inside" part of the ball, avoiding the path of the pitch.

◀ If the handle were to come across the path of the pitch... jammed!

Or, worse! ▶



Inside the Ball



▶ Hitters fear the inside pitch for two reasons:

- getting hit
- getting jammed

Getting hit by a pitched ball hurts, but this is secondary to getting jammed. Hitters do not want to get beat by the inside pitch.

Therefore, it is imperative that the handle (up to the label) not cross the path of the pitch. With both hands used in the swinging action, it becomes more of a pulling action. In tennis it is a "stroke." In baseball we say a hitter has a nice "stroke," so why not call the baseball swing what it is, a stroke.

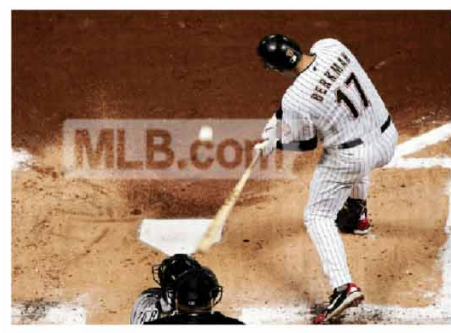
As the hands pass inside the path of the pitch, the body must turn and allow the hands to then pass in front of the body. This exposes the barrel of the bat to the path of the pitched ball. ▶



This view shows how the hands are in front of the body. In order for the barrel of the bat to contact the pitch to the middle of the plate, in and to hit the ball in fair territory, the hands must be in front of the body as illustrated. ▶



Contacting the ball on the "inside" part will direct it one way, usually to the middle or opposite field. ▶



Hitting the "outside" of the ball will tend to "pull" the pitch in a different direction. ▶



◀ The swing is a "pulling action". Both hands are used in harmony. You pull with the lead (or bottom) hand. And, the top hand pulls as well. The closer the barrel can remain by the rear shoulder, the more inside the hitter will be, AND the more plate coverage a hitter will have.

The knob of the bat leads the barrel by the "inside" part of the ball. The upper body now becomes a factor as a pushing action comes from the back hip and back shoulder.

Notes:

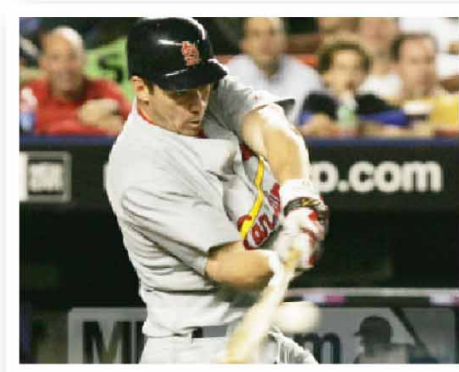
The pulling action continues to a point out in front of the body. ▶



◀ At the point of contact, it would be ideal for the barrel to be even with or slightly behind the hands. Ted Williams said the best contact is made “when the swing brings it (the bat) into contact at 90 degrees from the direction of the pitch.”

The arms are still bent, as they are in the act of extending. In other words, the hands and arms are not *swinging* the bat.

The pulling action of the hands and arms and the turning of the body allow the barrel of the bat to arrive at the contact zone and maximizes contact with the ball. ▶



Notes:

Inside the Ball

The stroke action or "staying inside" is not concerned with getting the barrel to the ball; for if the hitter understands that the hands must pull to a spot out in front of the body, the barrel will follow. It absolutely will follow the hands! Since the barrel is attached to the handle and knob of the bat, it (the barrel) will go where the knob goes if the hitter stays inside.



Inside the Ball



After contacting the ball the wrists begin to "roll" one over the other, and the barrel "swings" past the hands. This is known as the follow through. The follow through occurs as a result of the momentum created in the swing action, along with the aggressive forward motion and body turn. The hands continue around the body where they eventually stop and the batter becomes a runner (towards first base).

Some hitters will follow through with both hands remaining on the bat, some with one hand. This is based on individual preference and habit. Either way, it is important to emphasize that the body, arms and hands must follow through as a means of decelerating the stroke before the hitter drops the bat and starts to run. Although the follow through happens after contacting the ball, the hitter will not maximize his/her stroke if they aren't allowing the follow through to decelerate the stroke.

Notes:

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7

THE TURN



To turn means to pivot the rear foot from its original position pointing toward home plate, to where the heel is raised and the foot ultimately points toward the pitcher. The pivoting action is on the toes with the heel pushing forward.



Turning the rear foot allows the hitter to turn the entire backside; through the hips to the shoulders. Turning the rear foot allows the hips to be used in the swing.



The two reasons why you turn your backside:

- To open the body and more easily pull the hands to the point in front of the body where they must go in order for the barrel of the bat to arrive in the contact area.
- To generate and apply more power to the pitch by utilizing the entire body in hitting.

Notes:

To reiterate a point, in order to hit the pitch on the inside part of the plate, the hitter must pull the hands toward left field (for the right handed hitter). To do this, the hitter must "turn." ▶



The Turn

◀ I prefer to talk "turn." It is more easily taught and the hitter can feel the turning or pivoting action better. The "turn" is on the toes, the heel is up and forward.

The hips and the shoulders are involved with the "turning" action. Note the upper body and the head are centered between the feet and knees. This is a very powerful hitting position as it includes the rotational force and the weight shift force exerted by the entire body. ▶



Notes:

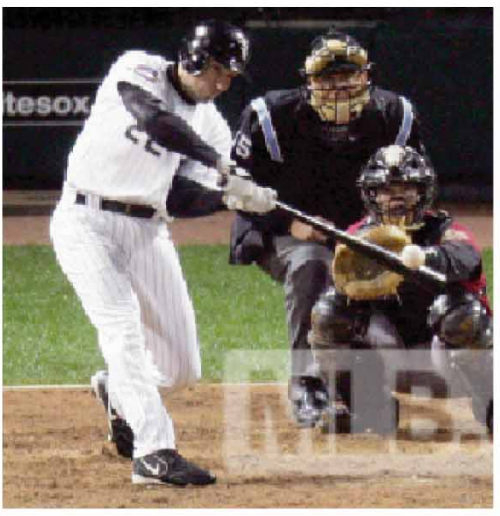


◀ When we talk weight shift instead of "turn", we may end up with hitters too far forward. Emphasis on forward may lead to an ineffective or a weak hitting position. (In essence, a lunging position).

Both pivots can accomplish the same thing; opening the body for the hands to come across, and generating power.

In fact, if you watch hitters closely, you'll see many successful hitters shift forward with the toes down. Many have their rear foot in the air at contact. However, there may be a tendency for the hitter to shift the weight too far forward in order to point the toes to the ground. Even Lau admitted that the degree to which one comes up on the toes is hard to determine. ▶

So, I prefer to call it a "turn" or pivot, rather than say "toes down". I like to see hitters move aggressively toward the ball, and turn around the front side. They can feel this better.



◀ As the rear foot turns, the hips and the upper body open toward the pitcher. This allows the hands to come in front of the body with the (trailing) barrel of the bat arriving in the contact area.

The front foot, however, remains in a "closed" position. That is, it remains relatively pointing towards home plate.

The front foot remains "closed" for the main reason that it would cause the hips and upper body to open prematurely. Now this may seem contradictory because it is important to open up on an inside pitch. However, "opening up" comes from the back-side, dictated by the rear foot, not the front side and front foot.



The following series of pictures illustrate the action of the hands and arms; their path. The other body parts, the feet, legs, hips and upper body, are operating in "symphony". In other words, the upper part of the body works well when the lower half is in synch.



◀ Observe the turning action and the pulling versus swinging of the bat.

This maximizes contact. If a hitter could contact the ball with the barrel of the bat every at-bat, he/she would increase his/her chance of a safe hit.

Notes:

8

HIPS AND SHOULDERS

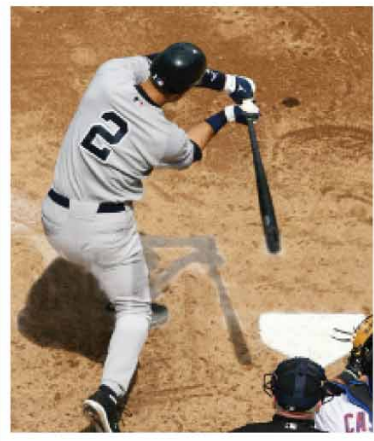
The body's power parts are in the hips and lower body. These are the parts of the body where the strongest muscles are located. However, the most underrated power producers are the muscles of the upper body.

"Hips lead the way", the "hips provide the punch." It is in truth the hips and upper body working together that generates maximum power to the pitched ball.

TED WILLIAMS



As the hitter starts the hands in the swing, the entire body moves aggressively toward the pitched ball, **a linear force.**



The pulling action from the hands, the eventual pushing from the top hand, and the turning action of the body (shoulders and hips), **a rotational force.**

Notes:

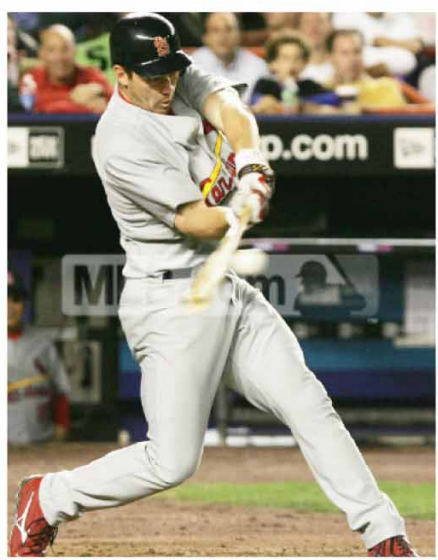


Where do pitchers learn to pitch? **AT THE KNEES.**

It is therefore logical for hitters to learn to hit the pitch at the knees, and learn to hit that pitch on a line drive.

Bringing the power center, the hips and shoulders closer to the low pitch contributes to being able to drive the pitch near the knees. How close one can get to the ball means the closer the powerful hips and upper body can play a role in hitting.

The turning of the hips provides two functions. The hips supply the power from the lower half of the body. This is one principle agreed on by all hitting instructors. Charlie Lau said in his book, *The Art of Hitting .300*, "true power comes from the lower half of your body."



The hips must, also, be in the process of "opening", or turning toward the pitcher, before the hands can cross in front of the body. Ted Williams in *The Science of Hitting* says "you can't get the proper action without the hips clearing the way."

Notes:

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9

SUMMARY

»» Build from the feet – up:

- A strong, athletic base, feet are apart, weight is toward the toes, knees slightly bent. After the stride, the front foot is closed; the rear foot is initiating the turn.
- The rear foot turns, the hips will naturally follow. The hips can't function unless the rear foot pivots. Therefore an important stage along the path to learning to hit would be to work on the hips. This is done through the rear foot action.
- It is important that the hips drive in a positive, aggressive action as they pivot. This action enables the hands to come directly in front of the body. This will provide the quickness and power in the stroke!
- Stay inside the ball! Insist the hitter works on mechanics that provide the shortest, quickest stroke, and possibly the least amount of time for the barrel to get to the hitting zone. In The Mike Schmidt Study, bat speed is described as a "result of the push of the rear arm and the pull of the front arm."
- The hands initiate the swing on a downward path. Quickness comes from direction, speed being a secondary factor. The barrel of the bat remains close to the rear shoulder. The closest distance between two points is a straight line. Taking the shortest distance is the quickest way!
- Pulling the hands down and then out in front of the body will integrate the upper body in the swing action. This allows just the barrel of the bat to enter the hitting zone.
- The pivoting action of the rear foot, to the legs, hips and upper body allows the hands to take a more direct path inside the ball, and bringing the barrel of the bat into the hitting zone more quickly.
- The result: more contact with the barrel, more often.

