

T-Ball - Important Time in a Young Players Development

by Lar Gilligan

For a young player, T-Ball is the first step in organized baseball. Most towns supply the players with hats and shirts that give the player a sense of being on a team. While players are getting ready to hit their first single, coaches are dusting off their old gloves and clip-boards.

T-ball is the building block of the future of your Little League and high school teams. Teaching the proper mechanics will give a child confidence on the field and off the field. As a coach and as parent, you are responsible to pass as much good information as possible.

Tee's are for babies.....why don't you say that to a Major League Player?

I often refer to the tee as a hitter's best friend. When I was in higher levels of play (college and pro ball) working off a tee each day was mandatory. As a young player my father made sure I worked off a tee. Although I wasn't convinced until my freshman year at the University of Tennessee. It was at UT when I met one of the greatest hitters of baseball, Don Mattingly. Don worked out with me and shared the importance of hitting off a Tee. Mattingly told me how each day before a game he would hit off the tee for two hours.

Batting Mechanics:

In order to use the batting tee correctly, a player or coach must know the proper mechanics. I will go over two key steps to focus on.

Step 1

Have you ever heard the phrase, "Keep your eye or head on the ball?" Well it's a true statement, but do coaches really instruct or just say it? During practice have the young player swing off the tee. The batter will swing and after contact the player's head should be resting near the back shoulder staring down at the tee he just struck the ball. This will teach a player what is referred to in professional baseball as Head Discipline.

Step 2.

Swinging Down (not level) - Young hitters love to try to hit fly balls. Lifting the ball off the tee is especially bad for young hitters learning to swing the bat. A Major League hitter swings down at the ball. He does this because it gets him to the ball faster. When a ball is pitched, a downward swing creates back-spin. Depending on where you hit the ball, a hitter will hit hard line drives, singles, doubles and homers. Look at big league hitters on deck. They are constantly swinging downward.

Since a ball on a tee has no movement, the proper mechanics of swinging down on a tee should produce low line drives and hard hit ground balls. You may find this type of T-Ball not as entertaining as hitting high pop-ups. Remember, allowing students to continue incorrect mechanics will expose a player later in Little League and discourage him or her to play to the next level.

Always remember the idea of T-Ball is for young players to have fun, learn, and prepare for the next level of play.

Article by Lar Gilligan - two-time All-American and former Chicago White Sox and St. Louis Cardinals organization player.