

Batting DRILLS

60 SECOND

One of my favorite drills to improve bat speed is the 60 second drill which was taught to me through my uncle. What you do is, get someone to time the player for 60 seconds and make them swing as many times correctly as possible. While you are timing the player make sure each swing is done correctly.

BARRIER

Front Barrier Drill: Have the batter stand one bat length from a barrier (I prefer a net to prevent damage to the bat, but you can use a fence). Have her take her normal swing. If she hits the barrier, she is unlocking her elbows before her shoulders and getting wide on the swing.

Rear Barrier Drill: Place a barrier directly behind the batter and have her take her normal swing. If the bat hits the barrier, she is dropping her hands. You can use this barrier even when you are using a pitching machine or live pitching for instant feedback to the batter that she is dropping her hands.

BASKETBALL

This is a great drill for teaching follow-through. Get a couple of old basketballs and take most of the air out of them. Place them on one of a batting tee. Have the batter take her normal swing and follow-through right through the basketball. **HAVE THEM WEAR HELMETS!!!** Use regular sized bats for this drill.

BASKETBALL DRILL

Basketball Drill: This drill is great in correcting those players who do not swing "through the ball." If there is a used sporting goods store in your area, find a couple of old basketballs, preferably one that does not hold air and make sure that most of the air is out of it. Place the basketball on top of a batting tee and position it in the contact zone. Have a hitter and a basketball-placer at the station. **MAKE SURE THAT BOTH PLAYERS WEAR HELMETS!!** I want to stress this so I will repeat it. **MAKE SURE BOTH PLAYERS WEAR HELMETS!!**

Have the hitter take her normal batting stance and swing and have her drive the barrel of the bat "through the contact zone" so that the basketball will be knocked off the tee. The reason for the helmets is that if the hitter does not drive through the ball, the bat may bounce off the basketball and come back at the hitter or placer and hit them. **NOTE:** If it sounds like I am speaking from experience, I am. The first time I did this drill, I had a basketball that was about half inflated and did not drive through it and wound up with a nasty bump on my head, so again, **MAKE SURE BOTH PLAYERS WEAR HELMETS!!!** After the basketball has been hit off the tee, the placer positions another basketball atop the tee and the drill continues. I generally have the hitters work in front of a net or fence so that the placer does not have to go far to retrieve the balls.

With all of these drills, try this out in the backyard or with your assistant coaches **BEFORE** going the field so that you can instruct the players in the proper mechanics of the drill.

BATTING BEAM

Here's a drill you may find useful. Construct a batting beam with pieces of 2" x 4"s. The main piece should be about 4' long. Two cross pieces about 18" should be nailed about 16" from each end of main piece. Have player stand on this during soft toss. The player should remain on beam throughout swing.

The beam encourages the batter to be on the balls of the her feet and to maintain a balanced swing. It also helps the batter to take their timing step straight to the pitcher. The players don't like this beam at first, but it does help.

DROP

This drill is the best I have found yet to increase bat speed and decrease the time it takes to get the bat into the contact zone. Once your players get adept at hitting regulation sized softballs, try using tennis balls or even black eyed peas and smaller diameter bats. We use this drill in warm ups before every game and have had some great results.

The drill consists of a dropper (coach or player) and a hitter. The hitter takes her normal batting stance facing a net or fence about 6-8 feet away from the net. The dropper (coach or player) stands about 1 1/2 steps to the plate side of the hitter and 1 1/2 steps in front of the hitter (toward the pitcher) so that the ball will drop directly into the contact zone which is slightly out in front of the hitter. The dropper drops the ball into the contact zone and the hitter must see the ball (she watches the dropper drop the ball) and hit it before it hits the ground with a level swing and proper stride, pivot and hands to the ball mechanics. If the hitter gets wide too early, she will never hit the ball except on an upward swing which must be corrected immediately. I like to start the dropping height as high as the dropper can reach and then as the hitters become more adept at hitting the ball, slowly drop the ball from lower heights until you are dropping the ball from the players shoulder height. If you have very small players, you may want to have them stand on a milk crate to drop the ball. Try this drill with your coaches before you do it in practice to get the droppers position correct. The players always think they are going to get hit by the bat, but I have been doing this drill for a long time and have never had anyone hit by the bat. Try this drill and I am sure it will help your hitting out greatly.

DROP DRILL

My favorite drill for teaching how to hit fast pitching is the "drop drill". This drill will improve your bat speed and reaction time in very little time and is fun to do. The drill is executed as follows:

One player has a bat and is in her hitting position (hitter). Another player or coach stands to the plate side of the hitter (right side for a righty, left side for a lefty) and about 2-3 feet in front of the hitter, just out of reach of the bat. The second player or coach (the dropper) holds a ball up high in the air (if she is small, you may have to use a bucket for her to stand on). The hitter looks at the ball and when the dropper drops the ball, the hitter has to hit it before it hits the ground. Sounds simple doesn't it? Try it!

To make solid contact, the hitter must use proper hitting form and mechanics. This is why I like to use a coach or parent to drop the balls. This way the coach can instruct the hitter and correct any mechanical flaws in her swing. As the hitters get more comfortable and hit every ball dropped, slowly move your hand lower and lower until the ball is being dropped at the hitter's shoulder height. When she can hit from this height, she is ready to

hit off any pitcher.

Another variation I like to use is to get a small diameter bat and drop smaller objects than a softball. I use whiffle golf balls and my favorite is black eyed peas. I try to select a dimly lit section of the field for this drill to make the hitters concentrate on the ball more. If the players are having a problem hitting the black eyed peas, ask them to tell you which direction the black eye is facing. You will see a marked improvement in their ability to hit the pea.

I have explained this drill many times and I always seem to get some response like this. "I cannot understand where the dropper stands for this drill. If he/she stands to the plate side of the hitter and slightly in front of her, she will get hit by the bat." What you coaches or parents must do is to try this drill out in your back yard or anywhere prior to practice to locate the spot where the dropper is to stand. The ball must be dropped into the contact zone. I have been using this drill for many years and have never gotten hit once nor have any of my players.

HAWK-EYE

In order to be a great hitter, it is always important to focus on fundamentals. Regardless of age or skill level, a hitter must learn to keep their eyes on the ball. The Hawk Eye drill can help in training a player's eyes to follow the ball from the pitcher's hand to the contact point where the ball meets the bat. It will serve to solidify the importance of keeping your eye on the ball at any level of play where pitchers are throwing various pitches.

Invite a number of players (who are not pitchers) out for pitching practice and have them bring their helmets. I tell them they will stand in as a live batter, so that they will be unaware of their task at hand. After the pitchers are warmed up and throwing their pitches for accuracy and movement, have a hitter step into the batter's box without a bat, BUT WITH HER HELMET ON. Her only responsibility is to watch the rotation of the ball from the pitcher's hand to my glove. The batter then has to tell me what the rotation of the ball was, what kind of pitch it was (based on the rotation), and if it was a ball or a strike. Each batter can read five pitches, and then move back into the line. If you have multiple pitchers and catchers, more than one batter can practice 'seeing' the ball at the same time, but a coach should be watching each set of players both for safety reasons and to ensure that the hitter's are calling the pitches correctly.

Through this drill, this player has strengthened their vision's muscle memory. Reading these pitches will enable her to watch the flight of the pitch, concentrate on the ball, and focus on the contact point. It can be a big help in developing the subconscious action of viewing and reacting to a quickly pitched ball.

HITTING SPECIFIC STRENGTHENING DRILLS

This will focus on some targeted weight training using a weighted bat or your first baseman's bat (she is generally the biggest player on the team, so she should swing the heaviest bat).

1. Windshield wipers: Have the hitter take a weighted bat or the heaviest one you have on the team and hold it in both her hands with the barrel pointing straight up toward the sky. Now using only the wrists, have her lower the barrel of the bat to her left to about waist high, then to her right and back to her left, etc. Do about 5-25 of these depending on the age of your players.

2. Chopping wood: Take the heavy bat again and have the hitter hold it directly over her head with the barrel pointing up toward the sky. Now, in a chopping motion, have her bring the barrel of the bat first backward until it is pointing down at the ground behind her and the bat has touched her back lightly. Now bring the barrel back up to the start position and continue forward and downward down to lightly touch the ground in front of her (this motion is like chopping wood). Have her raise the bat slowly to about waist high and have her bring it slowly to the ground again, then back up to the start position. This constitutes one rep. Have the player at this station do 5-20 reps depending on the age of your players.

3. Strike zone: This drill again uses a heavy bat. Have the hitter take a normal batting stance and have her swing into the contact zone. As she reaches the far limits of the contact zone, have her use her wrists to wiggle the barrel of the bat back and forth as she counts the wiggles to 5. Then bring the bat back to the normal batting position. This is one rep. Have the hitter do 5-20 reps depending on the age of your players.

4. Circles: The final drill again uses the heavy bat. Have the hitter hold the bat out in front of her with the barrel pointing straight away from her body. Her arms should be straight out with maybe just a slight break in her elbows (I mean very slight break). Now the hitter makes small circles with the barrel of the bat by moving her wrists in a kind of circle. First, have the hitters do 5-15 circles clockwise and then the same number of circles counter clockwise. This will strengthen the wrists and make them quicker. I use these weight-training drills in practice at stations. Most of the time, you may have a couple of players waiting to get into the batting cage or go on live pitching. Since I feel "standing around time" is wasted time, I have these players do these drills instead of talking to their team-mates about class yesterday (yes I do know what they are really talking about and it is not softball or class).

KNEE HITTING DRILL

Set up a net with a mat in front of it. Place a medium size orange cone on the mat. Have the hitter kneel on their back knee. The front leg should be straight out in front towards the net. Place a ball on the cone and have them hit. This allows them to concentrate on the proper hand and arm movement without worrying about the legs.

I have one player hit and the other feed the balls. This allows me to concentrate on the hitter and keeps the players involved.

MILK JUG

Milk jug: This drill again teaches follow through and hitting through the ball, but it also strengthens the muscles needed to do this. Take an empty gallon milk jug or something similar (I used an old punching bag and it worked great) and fill it almost to the top with sand and replace the cap. Hang this jug by a rope through the handle from a branch or any protruding pole that will allow it to hang down and away from the fence or wall (I tied ours to an "On Deck Hitter"). **MAKE SURE THE HITTER WEARS HER HELMET!!!!!!**

Have the hitter take a fairly slow swing and when her bat hits the milk jug, it will stop dead. Now the hitter must force her bat through the contact zone, using her wrists and arms, moving the milk jug with sand until the bat slides under the jug. This drill strengthens the muscles needed to drive through the ball and creating a powerful swing and line drives.

ROPE

It's an old drill...but one I find very effective. You need a softball, some thick garden gloves and some rope about 12 feet long. Drill a hole through the softball and insert the rope. Tie a knot on both sides of the hole.

Put the batter in her regular stance, and stand opposite her. Start swinging the ball on the rope, through her strike zone. Hang on tight cause if they get a hold of it the balls takes off (thus the gloves).

I find this is great because you can vary the speed of the ball and the location. It's especially useful when you've got a variety of kids working on tees, in a cage etc. and there's some one on one time.

SOFT TOSS

Whether your team is just starting a new season or you and a friend want to brush up on your hitting skills, "Soft Toss" is a great tool to ensure proper hitting mechanics are being used, sharpen the hitting eye and have some fun all at the same time. Here's how!

Soft-Toss: A player or coach (I prefer a coach) sits on a bucket slightly in front and to the plate side of the hitter. The coach should be 3-4 feet away from her so as not to get hit by the bat. He/she tosses a ball into the contact with a smart snap. This toss is not one of those "old man, slow pitch, arching things." Instead, it is a smart toss into the contact zone to allow the hitter to hit the ball out in front of the plate. To begin with, I use standard size softballs and standard bats.

When a short warm-up period has been completed (about 5-8 balls), I switch to practice whiffle golf balls. These are harder to hit and the player must concentrate to hit them. A lot of times, the hitters "cheat" and begin their swing as they see may arm go up. To prevent this and add a bit of fun, I take 3 balls in my hands and sort of juggle them in a figure 8 and release one of them at random. The hitter must be alert to hit the ball before it hits the ground. I also stand up a lot when I do soft toss. The reason for this is that the hitters will become accustomed to hitting pitches in a certain location if you sit on a bucket all the time.

After about 10-15 whiffle balls, I switch to a bat I made that has a 1 1/2" diameter and a steel rod through the middle for proper weight. We continue to hit the whiffle balls during this stage. Now the players really have to concentrate to make contact. Finally, I take some black-eyed peas and soft toss those at the hitters. At first, this is difficult, so I ask the players to tell me which direction the "black eye" is pointing. When they do this, they must really focus on the "target" and will generally hit 8 out of 10 peas.

NOTES: The coach or player must always keep an eye on the mechanics of the hitter and make corrections if they break down. I use a portable net when employing these drills. Also, if there is an area that is dimly lit for a night practice, I use this area for my hitting drills. It just makes the hitters concentrate more. I have used these drills for the past 12 years in practice and in pre-game warm-ups and have had some excellent results. Imagine what the regulation sized softball looks like to the hitter after she has just hit 50 or so small objects with a very small diameter bat. Try it!!

SOFT-TOSS2

We rarely use a full size "bat" or a full size "ball" when doing soft-toss. This is done to intensify the drill and the skill being taught. Position your self to the batting side (right for right handed batters) and ahead of the batter. Toss the "ball" at the hip of the batter. You want them to impact the ball in front of their body. This is the "contact point". The toss is important!! You do not want an arching, ugly type of thing, unless you are playing the old man's game of "slo-pitch", if so, you are on the wrong home-page. The toss should be crisp, but not too fast and out in front of the batter. Practice this to get it correct.

We use soft-toss to teach and reinforce the proper mechanics of the swing. Make sure your batters are 1.) pivoting correctly and early enough. 2.) rotating their hips with an explosion toward the ball 3.) unlocking their shoulders, elbows and wrists in sequence while throwing their hands straight to the ball (watch for hands dropping and correct this). 4.) Watching the ball all the way to the "bat" and continuing to watch the "contact point" after the "ball" has been hit.

The proper stance is essential. It should be a balanced stance with 60% of the weight on the back foot, eyes level, bat in launch position (not rapped behind the head), knees slightly bent, and door-knocking knuckles lined up. The stride should be a short, smooth lift and move type of stride. At impact with the ball and at follow-through, the body should be in a slightly curved position toward the ball (inward "c"), this insures that all the weight and power went in to impacting the ball.

We have used many things for "balls" and "bats". To increase concentration on the ball, try using tennis balls, practice whiffle golf balls, coffee can lids (plastic ones like Frisbees), but my favorite (and the players favorite) is to use black-eyes peas. We start hitting them with a full size bat, but quickly move to using a "thunder-stick" or a home-made "bat" I made which is about the same size as a "thunder-stick" but with less weight inserted in the end. I feel we are trying to teach muscle memory and too much weight teaches a slower swing, but others think differently. During warm-ups before games, I always hit the peas and them some LOUD, regular sized softballs. These are the hard ones and they sure turn some heads! The girls love the looks on the opposing teams faces when they hit these loud balls. We hit into a portable backstop so there is no time lost chasing balls.

One of my favorite drills is the "High-Low" drill with the practice golf balls. I hold 2 balls in my hand and toss them into the "contact zone" and call out either "high" or "low". The player must hit the corresponding ball. I tried it once with the black-eyed peas and was quite successful.

If the batters start to "cheat" on soft-toss drills, I hold 1 ball in either hand and rotate them (like juggling) and toss one up. This way they do not know when the ball is coming. They all hate this, but it works!!

STRIDE BOX

Stride Box: This Tip of the Week is a device that I carry around with me in my coach's bag along with a myriad of other gadgets and my 60' tape measure, glasses repair kit, glove restringing kit, rosin, Second Skin for the pitchers' blisters and a lot of other necessary things. There is a variation to the original "stride box" that will be mentioned later.

A "stride box" is merely a couple of 2X4's secured together to form a right angle. The sides are about a foot long each. I stand the 2x4s on end so that if the player does happen to over-stride her foot will be stopped by the front of the stride box and not

allowed to step on the side of the stride box causing a twisted ankle. Have your hitter step into the batter's box and take up her normal stance. Now place the stride box with one side of it at the point where the lead or stride foot should land (no more than 6-8 inches from her normal stance). The other side of the stride box should be near the plate. This forms a figure "7" when viewed from the batter's box looking at the pitcher. I drilled a couple of holes in each side of the stride box and have 4 long bolts to secure it to the ground.

When the player takes her normal swing and stride, the side of the stride box toward the pitcher will prevent her from over striding and will give instant feedback to the hitter. I use this a lot in hitting practice both in machine pitching and also live pitchers. It works great!!

Variation: I have seen some pretty elaborate stride boxes in my time. One that was really useful was mounted on a piece of plywood and had a couple of 1X1's at the back of the "batter's box" where the hitter placed her heels (heels on top of the 1x1s). This made her get up on the balls of her feet, which is the proper position to hit. It also had the 2X4's nailed down to the plywood and the entire thing was placed in the batter's box. I liked this idea a lot, but asked one of my assistants to be in charge of getting it to and from the fields for practices and he quickly declined, so I decided not to make one. It just seemed very bulky and heavy unless you can store your equipment near the field. Make sure you have one of these stride boxes in your equipment bag. You will never regret it!!

TEE

There are many types of Tee Drills, but the ones we use the most are the:

1. Hip turn: Place a ball on the tee at hip height. Have the batter hold a bat behind her hips and take a normal batting stance. Have her pivot and knock the ball off the tee. This teaches proper hip rotation and explosion.
2. Locate the tee at the proper impact point for inside pitches and then outside pitches. Place the balls on the tee and have the batter hit from a normal stance. This teaches the proper technique for hitting these pitches.

TENNIS BALL

We use tennis balls a lot in practice. I toss them from the normal position a lot to make certain the mechanics are correct. I also toss them from behind the batter. This makes the batter watch the ball all the way to impact and teaches a quick, compact swing. I also like to bounce the ball into the "contact zone."

Another drill I like to use is the walking-tossing drill. Using tennis balls, I walk slightly in front and to the side of the batter and bounce a tennis ball into her "contact zone." The batter must load up and swing while walking. I bounce 3 or 4 balls as we walk. This is tough, but the players love it once they can hit the balls. For beginners, I recommend bouncing the tennis balls and hitting them with a regular bat, but then move to a smaller bat.

TENNIS CAN LIDS

Server about 15 feet away flips tennis can lids Frisbee-style. Server varies which edge is up (for curve, screwball). Use regular bat or Thunderstick. Keeps players weight back and encourages snap and eye tracking.

TOSSERS

Although I will post it, be careful with it. Younger players tend to concentrate on hitting every ball tossed and mechanics may break down if used a lot.

Just an enhancement of the traditional soft toss drill. I find that, especially with young hitters, they will get on information overload.

Sometimes you have to force them to use what they have learned...without thinking about it.

Merely put two or even three "tossers" into the mix when doing the soft toss drill. Time the tosses so that the batter has only enough time to pull the hands back, reset their balance and swing. I find that this gives them a true feel for the swing....without getting too bogged down with information.

GAME

BATTING

I'm not sure what this game is called, but it is a lot of fun.

The players arrange on the field (just anywhere) and 1 player bats. If the batter hits a fly ball and if someone catches it then that person who caught it gets to bat, BUT if the batter hits a grounder and a player fields it then the batter lays the bat on the ground, the fielder has to stay in the same spot where they fielded the ball and rolls the ball on the ground and tries to hit the bat. If she hits the bat then she gets to bat.

BUNTING

I am a big proponent for turning every drill into an intra-squad competition. The players forget they're practicing. I also believe in allowing them to take control of a drill. They learn more by coaching each other and have more fun doing it. Coaches should try reversing roles. Let the players tell the coaches what they are doing wrong. It's a great way to reinforce what they have learned. You'll discover real fast how much these kids have learned.

Bunting - Draw sections in the dirt in front of home plate. In each section, write a number representing a point value based on what the coach considers the perfect bunt. For example, a two-foot diameter circle in that no-man's area between the pitcher, catcher and either 1st or 3rd base. Divide the girls up into teams. Each girl takes her turn bunting. She is awarded the point value of the section that the ball stops in (not lands in).

After every player has taken her turn, total up the points and reward the winners. Once or twice in a season we'll hand out a small piece of candy (Tootsie Roll or Starburst) for each point. After the girls have played this game, let them take turns drawing sections in the dirt and assigning point values. Even if they give high point values to what would be considered a bad bunt, they are still learning how to control the bunt and put it where they want it. If you use your own pitchers, they get practice. Caution: the pitching machine balls tend to be more bouncy than real softballs and are more difficult to control. Make the sections larger and explain why to the players.

PROGRAM

EYE ON THE BALL

If your players batting mechanics are good, and they're still not hitting the ball, they are probably not seeing it correctly, or perhaps not following it right to the bat. Here are a few drills that are designed to really keep your eye on the ball

BALLS AND STRIKES DRILL:

Have the pitchers throw pitches and the batters just watch the ball into the glove and call balls and strikes. You'll be amazed at what batters think are balls. The best thing for good eyes are just seeing live pitching...lots of it, even if it is just being a batter while your pitcher is doing a workout. You can learn to read different pitches, and the pitcher gets better practice when there is a batter in the box.

HITTING DIFFERENT OBJECT:

Try golf whiffle balls, small coffee can lids (thrown like Frisbees), pinto beans, etc, anything that has them concentrating on a smaller than usual target and hitting something that moves, rather than moving in a straight line. This will improve their concentration and teach them to follow the ball all the way in.

MISS/MISS/HIT:

Use a series of three pitches to teach them to watch the ball. The first pitch, the batter swings over the ball. The second pitch, swings under the ball. The third pitch the batter hits the ball. Repeat this drill until they can do it every time. After that, you can really fine tune this: Pitch 1- just nick the top of the ball. Pitch 2-Just nick the bottom of the ball. Pitch 3- Hit it right in the middle of the ball.

TWO-BALL SOFT TOSS:

Get two different color whiffle balls (say red & white) or mark half of the balls with a different color dot. Works better with whiffle baseballs or even golf whiffle balls. Its easier to toss smaller balls plus helps hitters in focus and coordination. Toss the two balls at the same time (from same hand) and ask the player to hit one of them, either red or white. This helps players to coordinate, focus and react to hit the correct color ball.

PICK A NUMBER:

Take 3 or 4 balls, write a number on each ball. The players job is to see the ball well enough to tell you which number is on the pitched ball.

STRATEGY

THE SHRINKING/EXPANDING STRIKE ZONE

Sure the strike zone in fastpitch has dimensions. Some are stretched and shrunk by some umpires but the strike zone is still defined from rule book to rule book as being the same. As a batter, you can help yourself tremendously by applying the strike zone "box" vision in your at-bat.

For example, when you first enter the batter's box, the count is 0-0, no balls and no strikes. After the first pitch and you are still there, the count will be either 0-1 or 1-0 on you. Now the strike zone "box" should begin to change for you. As I go on you'll better understand. If, after the second pitch you are still there batting, your count should be either 0-2, 2-0, or 1-1. If the count is 0-2, your vision of the strike zone has made the "box" greater in size because the next pitch can strike you out if you don't swing at it and it's close. If the count was 2-0, then the strike zone has made your "box" much smaller and you should only swing at the pitch if it is thrown in your vision "box", your select spot. If the count was 1-1, then your "box" is back to being a normal size strike zone.

The key points of these examples are that if you have a 2-0 or 3-0 count on you, look at swinging only at a specific pitch you like in a specific small zone or "box". Perhaps only a fastball right down the middle. If your count was 0-1 or 0-2, then the pitcher is in control of the situation and you must expand your vision of the strike zone so as not to be called out on strikes. Be prepared to swing at pitches you may not find as sweet as you prefer.

TIPS

ALL PURPOSE TENNIS BALLS

While practicing at home I found it fun to pitch them tennis balls. You can pitch them very hard, they don't hurt if the batter gets hit, and a solid contact really jumps off the bat. Tennis balls are excellent aids for kids who develop a fear of the ball. I pitch tennis balls to them and about every third or fourth pitch, throw at them. Because they don't fear the tennis ball so much, they stay in better, and also don't seem to have any problem avoiding the ones that come at them. I point out to them that I haven't been able to hit them, and I was actually trying! It's a confidence builder.

A couple of our fields have home run fences set up well inside the regular fences. I set a temporary plate fairly close to the fence, close enough that a decent swing will send the tennis ball over, and let everybody "swing for the fences." Even the timid kids, with a close and reachable target, light up. They beg to play it every practice. Great fun!

FOCUS

Probably ever since you have started batting, you were told to watch the ball all the way through the arm motion, right? Try this test. Focus on an object, any object for 10 seconds. What happens? The object comes in and out of focus, right? Is this what you want to have happen when you are just about to swing at the ball? I do not think so.

I have my batters focus on the shoulder or some other part of the pitchers upper body until the ball has reached the pitcher's hip. Then you focus on the ball as it comes and makes contact with the bat. This way, you will not lose focus on the ball when it is critical that you see it.

If you have a problem picking up the ball at this point, you can pick it up a little earlier, but try not to focus in too early. This should allow you to keep a sharp focus on the ball all the way to the plate.

FOCUS POSITION

I picked this tip up from a Higher Ground hitting video.

The majority of information received by our brains is gathered through our eyes. As a hitter, it is crucial that the head, and therefore the eyes, be in the proper position. With your athletes in a semi-circle around you, and approximately the distance from home plate to the mound away, hold a ball at the release point. Have them point a finger directly at the ball with both eyes open. Holding their finger as steady as possible, alternately close each eye. The opened eye that causes the ball to "move" the least is their strong eye.

Now have your players take a batting stance relative to you as the pitcher. Using only the strong eye, they should rotate their head, keeping it level, to the point where the ball is perfectly focused. This the position their head should be in when batting.

FROM CIRCLE TO BOX

Emphasize to your girls that getting mentally as well as physically prepared to hit must be done not only before the game but before your at-bat as well.

Your at-bat begins when you step into the on-deck circle. Get your intensity level, aggressive attitude and swing mechanics properly prepared in the circle, then carry them with you into the box. Intensity and aggressiveness must be practiced!

HAND POSITION FOR HITTING

I explain and demonstrate to my players that the top hand pretty much controls your swing. If the palm faces up on the swing, chances are you'll under-cut the ball or hit a fly ball. If the palm faces down on the swing, chances are you hit down in front of you and the ball dribbles. And if you sweep or shake hands with the pitcher on the swing, chances are you hit a line drive.

The girls seem to have a good understanding and really respond well.

ON-DECK HITTER

There are several products on the market that do essentially the same thing, they are called "On Deck" hitters. They are basically a ball on a rope, that is tied to a swivel and then secured to a pole or rod and that is mounted to the fence either by bolts (U-bolts to mount to the fence pole) or springs (to mount to the fence directly). The on deck (we use "in the hole hitter") batter goes behind the fence and takes swings at the "on deck" device before she goes to bat. It is a great warm-up tool and we take ours to every game we play. I like to have a coach out there with the batter to make sure she is using proper fundamentals and intensity!!

POINT OF CONTACT

I am certain, by now, all of you have seen a picture of Mark McGwire hitting one of his towering home runs, right? But have you really "seen" it? If you can pull one off the internet, look closely at his eyes. They are focused on the ball. In some pictures, the ball has already left the frame of the picture, but he is still focused on the point of contact. This is what every hitter must do in order to avoid hitting little grounders to the infield. You

must focus on the point of contact even after you have hit the ball. If you lift your eyes to watch where the ball goes, you will lift your shoulders and consequently will hit the ball on the top, resulting in a grounder with little speed on it.

To demonstrate this to yourself, get in front of a mirror and watch your shoulders as you take your normal swing, with eyes looking at the point of contact. (you will have to stop in mid-swing to see this) Now take another swing watching the path of the ball that was just hit. Notice that your lead shoulder has lifted along with your eyes. Your trail shoulder has dropped and your swing has become a "down to up" cut, with your hands way below the ball. This will cause you to swing higher than you want to and you will top the ball. To correct this, watch the impact with the ball even after it has left your bat.

I have found that the best time to check out this flaw is when we are doing "soft-toss drills". Watch their eyes.

Coaches, to reinforce this concept, I used to ask a player that has just singled, "Wow, what a hit. Did you see where it went?" If she answered, "Yeah It was a little blooper to left field". I gave her a lap or two to have her think about watching the point of contact. This usually put an end to this mechanical flaw.

STRIDE BOX

If you are having trouble with players over striding I recommend building stride boxes using 2x4s. the inside of the box should be no longer than their bat as well as the stride should not be longer than the bat. We build a 32 inch, 33 inch and 34 inch stride box and use it during our soft toss station. The front foot hits the front of the box and it causes the players to shorten the stride. Good when hitting in doors.

UNDER-LOADING

My tip for under-loading is:

Take a few large dowels (hardware or building store) and get some pipe insulation (black styrofoam like) and duct tape. Cut the dowels to the appropriate length and put pipe insulation on the hitting end of the dowel, cover the insulation with duct tape. Lastly, put some sort of tape on the end the player will hold.

These "bats" are great with all sizes of whiffle balls...we soft- toss rear and side, and also hit off of tees.

Another tip is to use little league bats for under-loading. You'll be surprised how many are in garages not being used! Make sure you sand the ends!!