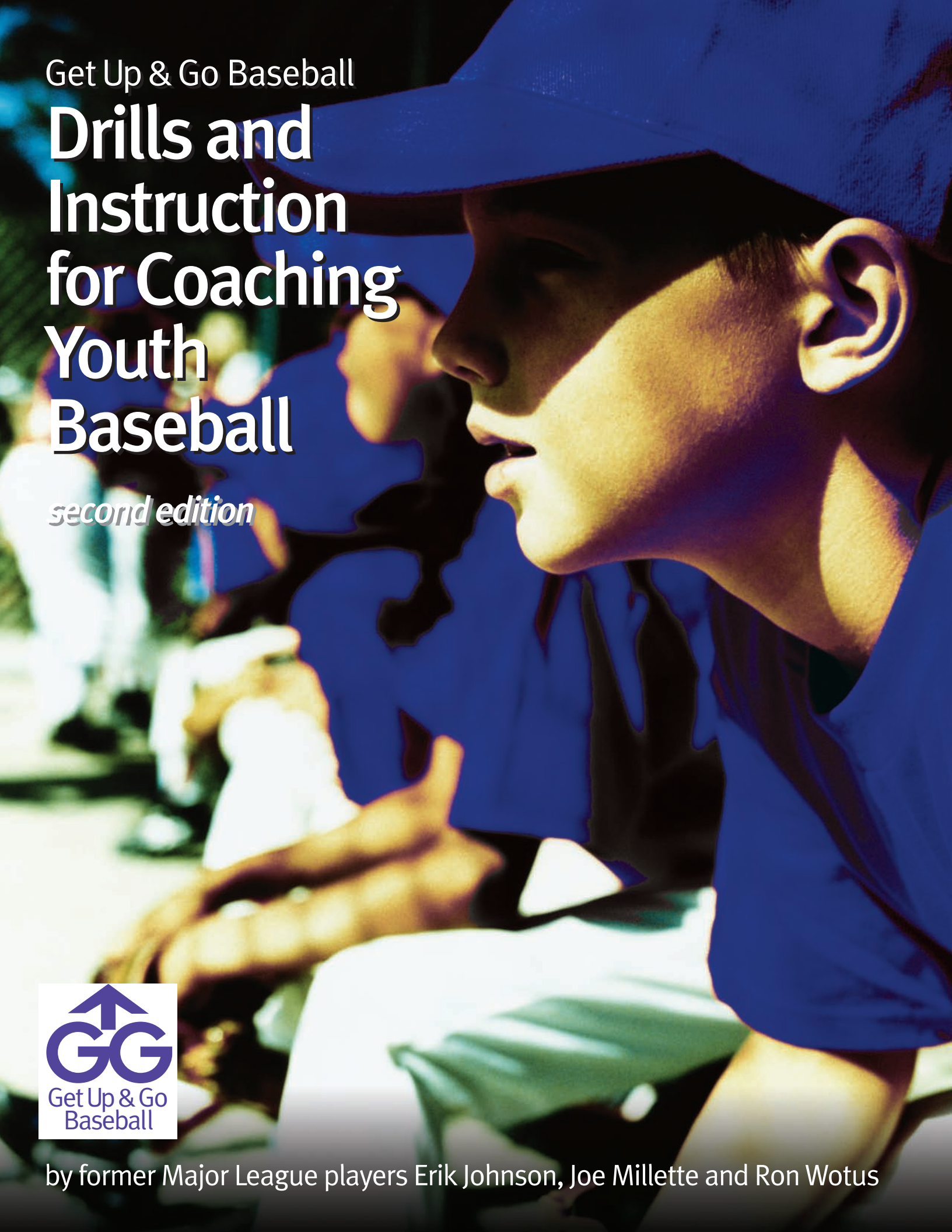

Get Up & Go Baseball

Drills and Instruction for Coaching Youth Baseball

second edition

Get Up & Go Baseball

by former Major League players Erik Johnson, Joe Millette and Ron Wotus

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This is a partial sample of the Hitting segment of Get Up and Go Baseball's Drills and Instruction for Coaching Youth Baseball Program. Please feel free to read and use the valuable knowlegde to teach and educate your children, coach or yourself. Please visit WWW.GETUPANDGOBASEBALL.COM to purchase your FULL copy of this book or

Include mailing address, email address, credit card information or enclose a check for $20.95 ($17.95 + $3.00 for shipping & handling). California residents please add 8.50% sales tax.

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Introduction

Managers, coaches and players, Get Up & Go Baseball would like to welcome you to our instructional program. Preseason and in-season training has become an integral part of youth baseball, and we are honored to help you provide that experience for your players. Since the late 1980s, our staff has worked closely with numerous youth leagues to make the game of baseball an enjoyable and educational experience.

In addition to more than 50 years of combined professional experience, we bring to our program a deep love of the game and a keen desire to improve the experience for all youth participants. Our goal is to educate and refresh your knowledge of the game. Our philosophy is to motivate and build players' self-esteem and character while developing their skills in a positive environment.

This manual is designed to guide you at practice and enhance your knowledge. It is also intended to give you a simplified and fun way to teach. The manual is organized to be user-friendly. Each specific subject includes an introduction, basic fundamentals, drills and games. The fundamentals are the foundation for skill development, while the drills are designed to reinforce those fundamentals, and are the life-blood of any practice routine. Games are included to help you teach in an effective and motivational manner.

Being aware of the proper fundamentals is a key component of the process. However, we believe learning how to instruct and how to communicate with the player is a critical asset. We have given you our expertise on how you can effectively communicate and instruct the baseball skills necessary for player development. Our goal is to help give you all the tools necessary to help you coach and teach the game of baseball in an encouraging way so all players can enjoy their baseball experience to the fullest. We believe this is the true essence and spirit of baseball. Thank you for participating in our program.

Get Up & Go Baseball Staff

A Brief Background of Get Up & Go Baseball

Get Up & Go Baseball has been providing player and coaching clinics since the late 1980s. After providing clinics just for Erik Johnson's hometown Little League, San Ramon Valley, Get Up & Go is now conducting coaching clinics throughout Northern California. Not only has our staff all played Major League Baseball, they have taught the game at almost every level. Ron Wotus is an experienced Major League coach. Erik Johnson is a professional Youth League coach, if you will. And Joe Millette is a former college coach. Through many years of research from player clinics, coaching clinics and private instruction with youth players and coaches, Get Up & Go has blended their professional experience with Youth League experience and has created a program that is designed specifically to teach those who are involved with players between the ages of 6 through 16 We believe we provide a unique instructional program and hope you enjoy your experience with Get Up & Go Baseball.

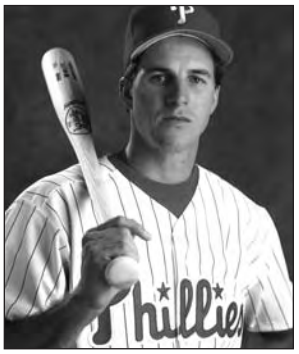
To purchase Drills and Instruction for Coaching Success, call (925) 296-0628 or order on line at www.getupandgobaseball.com.

Authors

ERIK JOHNSON

Erik is one of the original founders of Get Up & Go Baseball and has been an active member of the organization since the late 1980s. Erik grew up in Northern California and played Little League baseball in the San Ramon Valley area where his teams qualified for the Little League and Senior League World Series. His teams reached the championship game both times. Erik attended De La Salle High School in Concord where he lettered in basketball and baseball. He received an athletic scholarship to UC Santa Barbara and was named to All Pacific Coast Athletic Association baseball team his last three seasons and a preseason All-American his junior and senior years. Erik was an 18th-round pick of the San Francisco Giants in 1987 and played professionally for 10 years, including two seasons with the Giants in 1993-94. In 1995, Erik played in the Triple-A All-Star Game and started at shortstop. Erik was inducted into the UC Santa Barbara Intercollegiate Athletics Hall of Fame in 1998, into the Tri-Valley Hall Of Fame in 2002 and into the De La Salle High School Hall of Fame in 2007. He is currently the President and Director of Baseball Instruction for EJ Sports, LLC. He also the general manager for all of the traveling teams in EJ SPORTS. The Pacific Coast Stars, Titans and the Warriors. His teams play internationally and domestically. Erik resides in the San Francisco Bay Area.

JOE MILLETTE



Joe is one of the original founders of Get Up & Go Baseball and has been an active member of the organization since the late 1980s. Joe grew up in Lafayette, Calif., and he played in Lafayette Little League and continued through Pony, Colt and American Legion. He attended Acalanes High School where he played baseball, basketball, soccer and football. Joe attended Diablo Valley College where he was an all-conference player and part of the most successful baseball team in school history. He received an athletic scholarship to St. Mary's College of California, where he finished his collegiate career. Joe was elected captain as a senior and received the Bill Fischer Award for overall commitment and dedication to St. Mary's baseball. He graduated with a degree in Business Administration. After college, Joe signed a free-agent contract with the Philadelphia Phillies in 1988 and played professionally for 10 years. He played shortstop in the major leagues in 1992-93 with the '93 team losing to the Toronto Blue Jays in the World Series. Joe played with four other organizations — the Florida Marlins, Pittsburgh Pirates, Seattle Mariners and Chicago Cubs. He retired in 1998 after shoulder surgery. In 1998-2000, Joe served as an assistant baseball coach at his alma mater. Joe resides in the San Francisco Bay area with his wife Jennifer, daughter Lauren and sons Jack and Will.

RON WOTUS

Ron has been a member of Get Up & Go Baseball since the late 1980s. Beginning in 1979, Ron played professionally for 11 years, spending parts of the 1983-85 seasons as in infielder with the Pittsburgh Pirates. After retiring, he became a manager in the San Francisco Giants minor-league system. In seven years, Ron's teams finished 555-411 for a .575 winning percentage. During the 1991-92 seasons, Ron managed at Single-A San Jose, and his 1991 club posted a 92-44 record, the best in all of professional baseball. He was voted California League Manager of the Year and Baseball America's Class-A Manager of the Year. From 1993-95, Ron managed at Double-A Shreveport and led the team to three consecutive playoff berths. The 1995 team won the Texas League championship with an 88-47 record, the best in all of minor-league baseball. In 1996-97, Ron managed the Triple-A Phoenix club, and the team won back-to-back Pacific Coast League Southern Division titles. The 1997 team finished 88-55, the best record in Triple-A baseball, and Ron was voted Best Manager Prospect by his peers. In 1998, Ron was the San Francisco Giants' third-base coach. Ron currently is the bench coach and infield coach for the Giants, a position he has held since 1999. During Ron's 10 years coaching in the Major Leagues he has been involved in the postseason three times and a World Series in 2002. As a bench coach he has served three of the top managers in baseball, Dusty Baker, Felipe Alou and Bruce Bochy. Ron resides in the San Francisco Bay area with his wife Laurie.

Get Up & Go Baseball
Drills & Instruction for Coaching Youth Baseball

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With more than 50 years of combined professional experience and more than 20 years of Youth League experience, Get Up & Go Baseball has blended this knowledge into a unique instructional program. If you are a parent, player or youth league coach, this book is a must! Learn how to communicate and teach the game of baseball with a positive approach to build players' confidence and self-esteem.

Coaches will learn how to organize practices and choose from more than 150 drills designed to teach players the proper fundamentals. Pick from unique games to maintain player focus and keep practice enjoyable. Hear what these professionals have to say about teaching your kids the game of baseball.

Get exclusive tips from across the Major Leagues:

Dusty Baker, three-time manager of the year, on handling players:
"You have to care about the player. Be honest, firm but fair.
Players are looking for love and discipline, but love is discipline."

J.T. Snow, first baseman and six-time Gold Glove winner, on fielding:
"Always ask yourself before every play, what do I do if the ball is hit to me?"

Joe Lefebvre, longtime Major League hitting coach, on hitting approach:
"The best hitters 'hit to take.' They start their swing mentally by
anticipating their pitch in their zone on every pitch."

Russ Ortiz, veteran starting pitcher and a 20-game winner, on pitching:
"Don't worry about throwing too hard or having a curveball. Location is the key."

Mike Lieberthal, Gold Glove-winning catcher and two-time All-Star, on catching:
"Always let the ball come to you, so your legs stay under you and you can maintain balance while receiving."

Rich Aurilia, All-Star shortstop and Silver Slugger winner, on hitting:
"In our everyday lives we need good balance to function correctly.
The same goes for hitting. Balance is the key."

Tony Womack, three-time National League stolen base champion, on base running:
"The decision-making ability and the mindset of the players will allow
them to take advantage of weaknesses of the opposition."

*"We have just completed a year where we won our league's championship, and the previous year we came in dead last, winning only three games. We attribute a great deal of our success to Get Up & Go's book , Drills and Instruction for Coaching Youth Baseball. Every member of our coaching staff had a copy. We relied on just about every aspect of it to assist us in bringing the game to our players. It allowed us to have practices that were extremely effective, productive and most of all fun!
Just follow the book to a tee. …There is absolutely no reason to do it any different."*

— Kevin Sweeney, San Ramon Valley Little League

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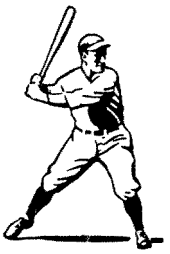


HITTING

Everybody's favorite activity in baseball is hitting. Players can't wait to hit in practice. You will hear more than once, "When are we going to hit?" The highlight of the game usually revolves around an at-bat and often players are judged by parents, coaches and themselves based on how they performed at the plate.

Many ingredients go into being a successful hitter. Some players are naturals, but most are a work in progress. Hitting takes dedication, hard work, confidence, proper swing mechanics, rhythm and timing.

Remember, hitting a pitched baseball is one of the hardest single feats to do in sports. It can be a painstaking skill to develop. As stated in the coaching philosophy section, "More success is obtained through praise than by criticism." That really rings true when developing hitters. If you can help the hitter create a good mental picture of themselves at the plate, it will go long way in helping them hit successfully.

Be patient, understanding and instill confidence in each hitter. Be positive with your hitters at all times. Negative thoughts can destroy a player's psyche and confidence. It takes years and years for players to fulfill their talents as hitters.

Proper swing fundamentals are something all hitters constantly strive to perfect. Once a swing can be repeated without much thought, a player can maintain all concentration on the pitched ball. Solid swing mechanics can be developed through a number of drills. Practicing correctly – whether that means dry swings, tee work, short toss or live hitting – is crucial. Quality repetitions are essential because muscle memory is being developed with every swing. In order to help players perform the correct fundamental swing, you should encourage them to hone their swing outside of team practices. Let them know what they need to improve on and give players drills they can work on at home.

Teaching hitting will be easier with a good understanding of swing fundamentals. Good swing fundamentals start and end with balance. Balance is a key to athletics and all skills on the baseball field. A hitter should maintain balance in the swing from start to finish to be most effective.

STANCE AND STRIDE POSITION

Players actually hit from their stride position, not their stance. The stride's purpose is to create separation between the upper body (including hands) from the lower body. This puts the hitter in the strongest position to strike the ball. We call this completed stride position the "Launch Position." Begin by getting your players into a comfortable, balanced athletic stance. Starting a hitter in a sound stance can make his transition into the launch position simpler and easier. This is why a proper stance is so important. Professional hitters have many different styles and stances, but they all transition into strong launch position no matter how they begin their stance. Professional players have the athleticism and unique ability to get to the launch position from stance alignments that are not always simple. Encourage your players to develop a stance that will help them get the most out of their ability.

TIMING THE PITCH

Getting from the stance to the launch position—with rhythm and timed properly to the pitch—often is the difference between a good hitter and average one. Hitting is rhythm and timing, and if you do not have rhythm you will not have good timing. Hitting involves a load (or trigger) which initiates the stride. A load is simply a move away from the pitcher before the hitter makes his move forward to swing. There are guidelines for when to start the stride but how efficiently a hitter loads, strides and times his swings is unique to each individual. This is why teaching young players how to load and stride can be more difficult than teaching proper swing mechanics.

WEIGHT TRANSFER

From the launch position, the hitter makes his move toward the ball to swing. The first movement is a linear move toward the ball. Make sure you understand the "Transferring into the Ball" fundamental H. Often we see hitters spinning to hit by first pivoting on the back foot without returning their weight to center before they pivot and begin their swing rotation. By doing so, the bat is in and out of the hitting zone very quickly without the benefits of the weight transfer into the ball. The pivot can be a very helpful part of a young hitter's swing, but the accompanying weight transfer into the ball is often incorrect for optimal performance. Another common flaw seen with proper weight transfer into the ball is the opposite of spinning, which is lunging to hit. This is when hitters push off their back foot and their weight transfers forward too much onto the front side. Golfers should understand this delicate first move to the ball and weight transfer, because the golf swing starts forward with a very similar linear transfer. There is a fine line when transferring weight into the ball and, if done correctly it, can enhance the player's hitting ability.

SEEING THE BALL

No matter how good the swing fundamentals are, a player will not hit if he does not see the ball well. Teach your hitters about a pitcher's release point and tracking the ball to contact with the bat. It will be useful to teach them the technique of soft focus and fine focus, which will show them how to use their eyes to effectively recognize and track pitches. Keeping the head in position throughout the swing will be critical to making contact. As most of us have seen, pulling the head on a swing is a common problem with hitting. During at-bats, players should not think about mechanics. You cannot concentrate fully on a moving ball while also thinking about your stride, pivot or swing. Once the pitcher has taken the rubber to throw the pitch, all concentration and focus should be on seeing the ball. As players mature, their ability to recognize different pitches and velocity will improve. Helping your players use the eyes correctly and keeping their head on the ball will improve contact, even with some flaws in their swing fundamentals.

Expert Advice on Making Better Contact

The batter's head should be looking down at the ball and behind the barrel of the bat at contact. Remind your players to keep their head in this position at contact. Regardless of their swing, if they do not watch the ball to contact, there will be more swings and misses.

SWING THE BAT

Most good hitters have "aggressive patience," which means they are aggressive in their hitting zone but are able to lay off pitches out of their zone. Aggressive hitters anticipate every ball coming down the middle of the plate and they are ready to hit every pitch. A player's pitch recognition and plate discipline take time to develop and will improve with years of experience. Teach players to be aggressive when hitting; there has not been one great hitter who has developed by looking for a walk.

When you are at hitting, you are on offense. You should not be on the defensive. It's more difficult to hit if you posses a timid approach. The important point is for hitters to attack the ball and not let the ball attack them. Make contact out front and on the sweet spot of the bat.

BAT SELECTION

Monitor the bats your players use. The bat should be relative to the hitter's size and strength. If the bat is too long or heavy it can hinder performance. When choosing bats, players should find one they can swing comfortably. Bat speed produces power in a swing, not bat size. The bat should be a size the player can handle and control easily. This will promote better contact and bat speed. Often bats are purchased too big for the player with the thought they will be able to use it for a few years. If a bat is too long, encourage the player to choke up.

PRESSURE WHEN HITTING

Coaches and parents should keep in mind that many players experience anxiety during games, especially while at the plate. Anxiety can hinder focus and concentration, so it's a coach's job to decrease anxiety by finding a way to help players relax. Many times it is as simple as downplaying the expectation and alleviating the pressure to succeed. Fear of failure is a common reason many hitters experience anxiety. Players need to learn how to relax when on-deck and bring that relaxed, confident mentality into the batter's box. It is much more difficult to hit when tense.

All-Star Rich Aurilia on Becoming a Good Hitter:
"The first, and probably the most important thing, is to be open to learning new things. Not all theories are going to work for each player. Each individual should take what he thinks can help him and work with that. It may not happen right away. That is why this game is so hard. Secondly, there is the area of balance. In our everyday lives we need good balance to function correctly. The same goes for hitting. Balance is the key."

FUNDAMENTALS

A. Grip: The bat is gripped in the calloused part of the hand, not in the palms. The grip is relaxed but firm. Grip the bat as if holding a bird. (If you squeeze too tight, you hurt the bird. If too loose, the bird will fly away.) The middle digits of the fingers are lined up, or the knuckles can be lined up as shown in the picture. Notice how the top hand's small knuckles are lined up between the bottom hand's big knuckles and small knuckles. This promotes better hand action. If the grip is within these areas, it is a sound grip. If it is not, it can hinder a player's bat speed and bat path to the ball. **(picture 6-1)**

6-1: Grip

B. Stance and Set-up: Balance, Balance, Balance. A simple set up with the body relaxed, comfortable and balanced is what you want to start with. Weight should be distributed evenly between the legs and on the balls of the feet with the feet at least shoulders' width apart. The knees are flexed and best positioned inside the feet. The weight is strong on the inside of the back leg. The feet and shoulders are squared to the pitcher, with the hips and shoulders relatively level. The hands are relaxed and start in a comfortable position somewhere near the back-ear helmet flap. The arms are flexed with the lead elbow never fully extended. The elbows are down, which must happen before the bat can have a proper path to the ball on the swing. The head is level and turned toward the pitcher with both eyes focused on the pitcher. The waist is slightly bent forward in a balanced athletic position. We call this the "Stance Position." A player should not stand frozen in the batter's box waiting for the pitcher to deliver the ball. Players who can find some rhythm in the legs and in their stance will benefit with their load and stride in hitting. **(pictures 6-2 & 6-3)**

6-2: Stance

6-3: Stance (side view)

C. Bat Position: The bat should start somewhere around the back shoulder, in line with the back leg with the hands placed even with or slightly above the shoulder. The arms are relaxed and tension free with the elbows down. An easy reference point: Grip the bat correctly and rest it on the back shoulder. Lift the hands straight up and back to the back shoulder near ear height. **(pictures 6-4 & 6-5)**

6-4: Rest bat on shoulder

6-5: Lift hands up and back

D. Loading (getting ready to hit): A load is quite simply a slight movement away from the pitcher before the stride and the swing. The player is shifting some weight onto the back side settling inside and against the back leg. The hands pull back ever so slightly, getting the hands into a strong position to strike the ball. The load and stride work together. You may have heard the term separation, which is referring to separating the upper body from the lower body. In essence this is what we are doing to get into a strong launch position. Most hitters move instinctively as the ball is being pitched, but are not moving properly to enhance their swing. As the pitcher goes into the wind-up, a hitter must prepare to swing. All good hitters have some type of trigger or load which initiates the stride. This loading ideally should be a smooth movement that will bring rhythm into the swing. The body, weight and hands works together to set into your load and the stride. Subtle and controlled is better than mechanical and big movements. Successful hitters have rhythm and can time their load and stride to the pitcher. The hitter gets ready sometime when the pitcher breaks his hands to throw and starts forward with his arm. Depending on the velocity of the pitcher, the load is started between these movements. **(pictures 6-6 & 6-7)**

6-6: Stance

6-7: Load

E. The stride: There are a few different ways a hitter can stride. The most conventional stride is with a controlled short step forward. Distributing the weight properly while striding forward is important. If the player just steps straight out, often too much of his weight will follow—especially with young players. To avoid this we recommend the player adjust their stride. Instead of stepping out, pick up the foot slightly while tucking the knee in and back toward the back leg. The foot should not come high of the ground. That would make timing the stride and pitch more difficult. Keep the stride foot low to the ground on the movement. The stride foot is placed right back down a few inches forward from where it started, or in the same location. The hitter strides to balance. The distance will vary with the individual. The step is for balance, and to create separation of the hands and upper body from the lower body. The majority of the hitter's weight remains back as the hitter completes his stride. The weight that comes with the leg is minimal and distributed on the inside of the stride foot. The stride foot must be down before the hitter transfers the weight and hands forward to swing. The stride direction is straight forward at the pitcher and consistent on all pitches. The stride foot lands as squarely as it started. Remember, the stride foot should land before the swing starts forward so the hitter has something to hit against.

Expert Advice on Understanding a Load and Stride

One of the more difficult areas to teach is an effectively timed load and stride, which sets up the body into a strong launch position. Hitters who are termed "natural" usually posses a rhythmic type of load and can time their stride effectively, which means shifting their weight and hands back as the front leg strides forward.

E1. No-Stride Option: There are coaches teaching a no-stride hitting approach to promote more contact. This is effective but if taught without rhythm, load or separation, the result is going to be limiting and will not help the hitter develop to his potential. The no-stride approach recommended here can accomplish every aspect of a sound hitting approach, while simplifying the conventional load and stride. It also can be used throughout the player's baseball career, as many Major League players utilize this hitting technique.

6-8: Stance

Place the player in their stance, spreading their feet slightly farther apart to account for a no-stride approach **(picture 6-8)**. This is not extreme; just make sure the feet are wide enough to create leverage. In place of the load and stride, the player is going to push back and up onto the front leg's big toe. The hitter must push the front knee in and back as well **(pictures 6-9).** On this movement the hitter should not raise up. This movement pushes some weight back onto the back leg and initiates the upper body's movement for loading as well. The weight that is pushed back should never cause the back knee to travel past the back foot. Keep the weight toward the inside of the back leg like any normal load and stride. The front foot never leaves contact with the ground, and is pushed back into the ground as the player addresses the pitch to start their swing. This same thing happens on a check swing. Example: The hitter's weight returns to center, when the front foot is pushed back down and the hitter makes their move toward the ball to swing, but then stops because it is a bad pitch. **(picture 6-10)**

6-9: Push back and up on toe

6-10: Foot returns to ground

Major league Hitting Coach Joe Lefebvre on When to Start Your Stride:
"In general, hitters get started as the pitcher cocks his arm up toward release. The hitter anticipating the ball to follow starts his hands back as he lifts his front foot up to stride, separating the hands from the front foot. When the front foot lands, the bat is back and ready to fire forward upon the planting of the front foot."

F. Launch position: Hitters hit from their launch position, not their stance. This is a position with absolute rules if you want your players hitting from their strongest position. The hitter's stride foot is down, as the stride has been completed. Hands are loaded at least as far back as the back foot when the pitcher's foot has landed and the pitch is being delivered. The hands are within shoulders' height or just above. The arms remained flexed, never fully extending the lead elbow. The hitter's hands should not drop and the bat should not be wrapped around the hitters' head pointing towards the pitcher. The weight that has moved back on the load should never cause the back knee to travel past the back foot. The weight is settled toward the inside of the back leg with the back hip inside the back foot. The hitter has remained balanced with eyes level and head still. This hitter is fully loaded and ready to explode forward, creating force into the baseball. **(picture 6-11)**

6-11: Launch position

G. Addressing the Pitch: Every hitter should learn to address each pitch as if it is coming down the middle. From the "Launch Position" the hitter addresses the pitch by starting their linear move toward the ball as if they are going to swing. During this movement the hitter's weight returns to the center of their body by transferring into and against the inside of the stride leg. Basically, it is practicing a check swing. The ball has been addressed consistently every time, with the hitter expecting to swing the bat. If players are taking pitches from the launch position, they are not expecting to swing at that pitch.
(pictures 6-12 & 6-13)

6-12: Loading to launch position

6-13: Addressing the pitch

H. Transfer Into the Ball and Swing Rotation: The start of the swing is the hitter's weight from the back side transferring forward up against the inside of the lead leg. This returns the weight to center as he makes a move toward the ball to swing. This is the same as "Addressing the Pitch." The hands bring the weight but do not fire at the ball until the hitter has committed to swing. The back knee drives forward, initiating this linear move toward the ball. After the initial move forward to the ball, the hitter's transferring weight firms up against the front leg and begins the rotation of the hips and back foot. This happens fast. The hands, wrist and forearms control the action of the bat. The hands continue forward toward the ball as the hitter is into rotation, firing the hips and shoulder open as the hands continue forward to contact. During this rotation the hips should rotate in a level plane, with the back hip pushing the front hip open. The shoulders do the same with the back shoulder forcing the front shoulder to open. The back foot is pivoted forward on the ball of the foot and finishes pointing toward the pitcher to complete rotation. This rotation helps the speed of the swing and needs to be timed properly with the weight transfer into the ball. If done prematurely, the hitter opens too soon. If done late, the hitter is jammed. The pivot and the forward-and-down action of the hands should be explosive movements. This creates better bat speed. Once into the swing rotation there is no head movement. This all occurs with the player maintaining his balance. **(picture 6-14)**

6-14: Transfer into the ball and swing rotation

I. Bat path: The bat should move forward and down, from the launch position to the leveling-off area in the contact zone. This is the quickest and most direct line to the ball. Envision a straight line from the bat head to the ball. The bat head and the hands should not drop between launch position and swing rotation. Keep the hands above the path off the ball. The hands' path is not down and forward or out and forward but forward and down to level. If the hands move out first this is referred to as casting the bat and it will slow down the swing and be weaker at contact. Swinging out first leaves players vulnerable to the fast inside pitch. Dropping of the hands is common as well, and breaks our first rule of keeping the hands above the path of the ball. These swings result in upper-cuts or players only being able to handle the low pitches because the barrel is dropped into the flight of the pitch. To fix these common flaws, keep the hands' path forward inside the line of the ball, as is explained in the drill "Hands Inside the Ball." **(picture 6-15)**

6-15: Hands continue toward the ball

Silver Slugger Award Recipient Rich Aurilia on Swing Plane:
"One of the keys to a good swing is to keep the bat in the hitting zone for as long as possible. In other words, try to have a nice, level swing. Not all players are built to hit home runs. A whole bunch of line drives with a level swing will do just fine."

J. Contact point: The hands, wrist and forearms control the action of the bat. The head should be down and behind the barrel of the bat during contact, with the head still and eyes focused on the ball. Head position in reference to the body is in the middle of the back leg. This ensures that weight has not shifted forward too much. Often, the head position is not in a sound position at contact. Often, the head is turned prematurely with the swing or early rotation of the hips. As contact is being made, the back foot should be into its rotational pivot position. At contact, the hands are near a palm-up and palm-down position, with arms slightly bent. The ball should be struck somewhere in line to with or in front of the stride leg depending on the location of the pitch. The ball is caught out front more on an inside pitch, and is hit deeper toward the body on an outside pitch. **(picture 6-16)**

6-16: Contact point

K. Finish: Once the ball is struck, the bat head continues forward through the ball. This allows the hitter to properly extend. The wrists are rolled after full extension, as the bat head comes up to the follow-through position. The top hand rotates or folds over the bottom hand after contact. The head remains still and the eyes stay focused on the hitting area until the ball leaves the bat. Maintain two hands on the bat to ensure hitting through the ball. The bat should continue through the ball in the direction the ball is intended to go. The back foot has completed its pivot rotation with the toe facing the pitcher on most pitch locations. Hitters should maintain balance and control from the beginning of the swing to the completion. If players start balanced remain on the balls of their feet as they execute the swing they should end with balance. In general, if this is accomplished, many proper fundamentals are being touched throughout the swing. **(pictures 6-17 & 6-18)**

6-17: Hands are released

6-18: Finish with balance

HITTING SEQUENCE (Front View)

Stance

Load and stride

Address the pitch

Swing rotation

Contact point

Hands released

Finish

HITTING PLAN FOR SUCCESS

Know Your Hitting Zone

As players develop their swing over the years, they will eventually know where they hit the ball the best. They may be a low-ball hitter or a high-ball hitter. They may best hit the ball in the middle-to-away portion of the plate. Or maybe they are best at hitting the ball when it is in the middle-to-inside portion of the plate. The best approach is to expect the ball down the middle of the plate. Any pitch that is in the center or two-thirds middle of the plate is a pitch you want to swing at. The hitter's hands and timing have easy adjustments from this approach if the ball is slightly inside or slightly outside. These are the easiest pitches to hit consistently. This will also give the hitter an aggressive mentality. The worst thing you can do as a hitter is take three strikes without lifting the bat off your shoulder. That gives you no chance for a hit. The second worst thing you can do is take strikes that are in the middle of the plate, leaving yourself one swing to hit a pitcher's pitch. You hear coaches talking about zoning a pitch. That means swinging if the pitch is in a specific location. That takes time to develop because young hitters are still developing their pitch recognition. Well, youth league hitters who are trying to develop their zone, down the middle should be their zone. Any pitch that is on the corners should be a more difficult pitch to hit. So those are the pitches that are out of your "zone." Your "hitting zone" is the middle two-thirds of the plate.

Expert Advice on Your Hitting Approach

The worst thing you can do as a hitter is go to home plate and take three strikes without lifting the bat off your shoulder. Attempt to hit the ball back up the middle with a line drive or a hard ground ball.

Hitting The Ball Back Up The Middle

What is your hitting approach? Even at a young age, hitters should have a plan for where they want to hit the ball. Ideally, we want to hit the ball where it is thrown on the plate. Inside pitch, we pull. A ball down the middle, we hit back up the middle. An outside pitch, we hit to the opposite field. This is a well known fact but not an easy feat to accomplish, especially for most hitters under 12 years of age. Hitting the ball where it's pitched takes years for hitters to accomplish, and very few hitters perfect this approach. But, there is one approach that all hitters should strive to perfect before they are ready or able to hit the ball consistently where it is pitched. That approach is to hit the ball back up the middle. Doing so will help the hitter's alignments, balance and swing path to the ball. It goes hand in hand with where we want the baseball. In general, hitters who constantly pull are very susceptible to the pitch away, and hitters who only hit the ball to the opposite field are susceptible to the inside pitch.

As well as trying to hit the ball back up the middle, all hitters should attempt to hit line drives and hard ground balls. It is well documented that line drives give you the best chance for a hit, followed by hard ground balls and then fly balls.

Batter's Thought Process

A hitter's mentality should be hit, hit, hit not take, take, take. Anticipate every pitch to be a strike and be prepared to swing at every pitch. Learn to stop on pitches outside the strike zone. That way, a hitter is always prepared to swing the bat. Expect to hit that first pitch in your zone. Taking a strike in your zone just to do so will only put the hitter in the hole. Prepare to swing, and address the pitched ball. If it's a bad pitch, take it. A good hitter should maintain an aggressive approach, especially when ahead in the count 2-0 or 3-1. This is the time the hitter has an advantage because the pitcher needs to throw a strike. Expect to hit those pitches in your zone and don't look for a walk.

Major League Hitting Coach Joe Lefebvre on Better Strike Zone Discipline:
"Go to your zone up until two strikes. Not the strike zone, your zone, which is where you make the most consistently hard contact. No matter where you see the ball in space go to your zone first then react off of it." The best hitters "hit to take." They start their swing mentally by anticipating their pitch in their zone on every pitch while addressing the ball physically with their weight shift and their hands stopping their swing on balls."

Watch The Opposing Pitcher

This is where players first prepare to hit. They need to watch the opposing pitcher as much as possible. Watch him warm up before the game in the bullpen. Watch his warm-up pitches before each inning. Ideally, hitters should attempt to watch every pitch in the game. At the very least, the on-deck batter should be observing the pitcher's release point. Also recognizing the pitchers speed, control and what types of pitchers are being thrown. Figure out what pitches are being thrown for strikes and decide on a plan against that particular pitcher.

On-Deck Preparation

This is where a hitter gets prepared both mentally and physically. Once on deck, focused concentration begins. The player must believe he can hit the pitcher and look forward to getting into the batter's box. Make sure the muscles are warm and ready to swing the bat. Take some swings on deck as if they were actually facing the pitcher. After the hitter feels ready physically, players should concentrate on timing the pitcher's fastball. Work on timing the load and stride to the delivery of the pitch. Find your rhythm versus that pitcher to create timing. If there is not an on-deck circle, the same preparation can be done without a bat near the dugout. Leave the on-deck circle confident, relaxed and be prepared to hit the first pitch.

San Francisco Giant Rich Aurilia on Mental Preparation:
"The moment right before I get into the batter's box is a very important time for me. I try to envision the situation I will be in and try to come up with a way to either get on base, move a runner over, drive in a run from third, and a number of other things. This is the time to prepare for your at bat. I also try to remember how the pitcher on the mound pitched me in the previous at bats. Odds are if a pitcher has had a certain way with you, he will continue that way until you beat him."

At The Plate

Before stepping into the box, most hitters develop some type of routine that mentally finalizes their preparation. Taking a deep breath can help relax the muscles and help decrease anxiety, which can hinder concentration and focus. Anxiety is something many players feel while hitting, especially players who have a difficult time hitting, and may stem from fear of failure. So, at this point, do not yell instruction to your hitters. Encouragement and praise will help them more and also let them concentrate on the ball during their at-bat.

Grip the bat correctly, take a deep breath and step into to box. Plant your back foot in a level area of the batter's box. The back foot is the foundation of your legs while hitting. After the back foot is positioned firmly, step in with the lead leg in proper alignment. Do not go into your stance position too soon because this will cause you to stand for a long period and the arms and body will get tense. The muscles will not fire as quickly when you are tense. Stay loose and stand relaxed, with feet planted. If the pitcher is not ready to throw, keep some movement with the hands and bat or body and legs until the pitcher begins the windup or takes his sign reading to come into the set position. Then get into your stance unrushed and in time to load, stride and time the pitch. Hitters have many routines from this point on. Do I step out of box after every pitch or do I stay in the box? Once that back foot has its toehold, we recommend keeping it there after a pitched ball, even if that means turning for a sign by moving the lead leg out of the box. This will help you maintain your eye for the strike zone and stay focused on tracking the baseball. A good time to step out of the box is when you need to regroup. That might be after a poor swing or when you feel you need to take a deep breath and start over again.

Tracking The Ball

Once a hitter is in the batter's box, all thoughts about fundamental positions should take a back seat to focus and concentration on the baseball. The longer a hitter watches the ball, the better chance he has to hit it. A hitter should focus on the pitcher's release point to pick up the pitch. The release point is where the ball leaves the pitcher's hand. Do not take this for granted. Release points can vary. Some pitchers throw from over the top, others three-quarters while others throw side-armed. While the pitcher is in the stretch or starting his delivery, the hitter should start with a soft focus (looking in a general area) of the pitcher's chest area. When the pitcher breaks his hands to throw, the eyes shift to a fine focus (looking at a specific point) of the release point to pick up the ball. Make sure the players understand what a release point is and when and how to focus on it. From there, track the ball all the way while maintaining concentration on the ball until contact is made.

Joe Lefebvre on Using the Eyes Correctly:

"Visually, as the pitcher is getting ready to start his delivery, the hitter has a resting spot for his eyes on the pitcher's upper body, close to release point. As the pitcher cocks his arm upward toward release, the hitter anticipating the ball switches from the resting spot on the pitcher's body to his release point to view the incoming pitch."

Adjusting In The Batter's Box

The distance from the plate and the depth within the box should be consistent per at-bat. Adjustments should be made at times depending on the speed and type of the pitcher. The hitter's initial stance should be close enough to home plate to allow total plate coverage when the hitter strides. Many young hitters do not address the plate close enough to cover the outside corner properly. Sometimes, it is a fear issue and sometimes they are just a little more comfortable away from the plate. How deep a hitter stands in the box can be determined by the pitcher. A normal depth position is where the front foot is in line with the front to middle of the plate. When a pitcher is throwing extremely hard, and the hitter is late on his swing from the normal depth position, he should move to the back of the box to allow more reaction time. Other adjustments a hitter can make versus a hard-thrower is to choke up on the bat or to start their load and stride earlier. When a pitcher isn't throwing hard and the hitter is having a difficult time waiting on the pitch, he should move up in the batter's box. **(pictures 6-19 to 6-21)**

6-19: Normal depth

6-20: Hard thrower

6-21: Soft thrower

Choking Up On The Bat

Choking up on the bat will make the bat head easier to control and lighten the bat on the swing. It can improve the bat speed as well. Choking up allows the hitter to wait longer before committing to the swing, which means he can watch the flight of the ball longer. Choking up is commonly used by players at all levels when hitters want to shorten their swings and put the ball in play. This is used most often when hitters get two strikes on them, and is referred to as a two-strike approach. When players swing and miss often, have them choke up and see if the results improve.

6-22

Even players who have purchased their own bat may need to choke up. Often, new bats are purchased with the thought the player will have the bat for a few years. Sometimes the bat is actually too long or heavy for the player when it is new. With this in mind, check the bats being used to help determine if the bat size is contributing to the player's lack of bat speed or success. **(picture 6-22)**

Two-Strike Approach

The two-strike approach is a philosophy and an adjustment the hitter makes when he gets two strikes on him. Whether it's 0-2 or 2-2, the hitter's swing zone now moves from "his hitting zone" to the total strike zone, along with not letting the umpire decide the at-bat with a called strike three. So the first adjustment made by the hitter is to swing at any pitch that may be called a strike. The second recommendation is to choke up for more bat control. The last slight adjustment is to move slightly closer to the plate because choking up might limit bat coverage on the outside corner of the plate.

DRY HITTING DRILLS

The dry drills can be done together as a team, in smaller groups or with an individual. They can be utilized for specific areas your players need corrections with. Perform these drills in sequence for an overall proper mental picture and understanding of the swing. These drills will allow the player to feel the proper positions needed for a successful hitter. While performing the dry drills, players can put their fielding gloves down to represent home plate. The drills are recommended for ages 6-16, but ages 6-12 will need them more.

1. **Stance:** With hands on hips, hitters get into their stance displaying the correct "Stance Position." Go around and lightly push players to see if they are balanced and have the weight distributed properly on the insides of the legs and on the balls of the feet. They should have a sturdy foundation and should not fall off balance on your push. Once stances are corrected, coach says *relax* and players relax. On verbal command, *stance position,* players repeat this position. **Repeat 5 times or until all players stances look good. (picture 6-23)**
2. **Stride:** With hands on hips, on coach's verbal command, *stride*, players stride straight forward to a balanced position. The distance is unique to each individual. The stride foot lands closed as it started. Minimal weight transfers with the step and is distributed on the inside of the stride leg. The majority of the weight is back with the back hip inside the back foot. The head should be steady and still. Players hold stride position for coach's critique. **Repeat 5 times or until players are performing stride correctly. This drill can be performed with the "No-Stride Option" as well. (picture 6-24)**
3. **Pivot:** Players begin this drill in the post-stride position with their hands on their hips. On coach's verbal command, *pivot*, players transfer their weight forward up against their lead leg while pivoting on the ball of their back foot. In essence, you want players to drive their back hip forward and open their belly button to the pitcher. The back foot's toe should be facing the pitcher while head and shoulders remain behind the lead knee. Players hold pivot position for coach's critique. **Repeat 5 times or until players are performing pivot correctly. (picture 6-25)**

6-23: Stance position

6-24: Stride

6-25: Pivot

4. **Stride and Pivot:** Players begin in their stance position with their hands on their hips. Now combine the two above drills. On coach's verbal command, *stride*, players stride. Once the stride foot is down, coach yells, *pivot*, and players fire their hips forward and open while pivoting the back foot correctly. The pivot should be explosive with players maintaining balance on the balls of the feet, as coach checks for proper positions. **Repeat 5 times or until players are performing stride and pivot correctly.**
5. **Load and Stride:** Once the players understand how the legs and feet work, it is time to bring in the load. Starting in their batting stance, on coach's verbal command, *load and stride*, players make their slight movement back, shifting some weight onto the back side and getting the hands into a strong position to strike the ball as they stride straight to a balanced position. Players hold stride position for coach's critique. **Repeat 5 times or until players are performing the load and stride correctly. (picture 6-24)**
6. **Forward and Down to Level:** Start players in their batting stance. On coach's verbal command, *swing*, players go through their load, stride, swing and pivot. Coach watches for correct swing path of hands moving forward and down then finishing all the way around near their back shoulder. Encourage players to keep two hands on the bat to completion of the swing. **Repeat 5 times or until players are performing the swing path correctly and hands are completing their finish. (pictures 6-26 to 6-28)**

6-26: Stance

6-27: Forward and down to level

6-28: Finish with balance

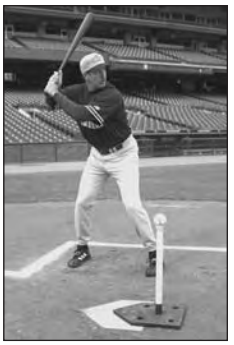
7. **Shoulder to shoulder:** Start players in their batting stance. Focus on a proper head position with two eyes on the pitcher with head and eyes level. Player takes a full swing, keeping the head still and focused on the contact area as the shoulders rotate around the head until the back shoulder is near the chin. This drill focuses on keeping your head in position when hitting. **Too often players' heads move around their body with their swings, taking their eyes off the ball.**
8. **Balance:** We finish up the dry drills with the coach simulating a pitcher throwing an imaginary pitch to the hitters. With the coach out in front, all hitters start in their stance, aligning as if the coach is the pitcher. The coach goes through a windup and simulates the throw. Players begin their load and stride as the pitcher cocks the arm back. Once the coach's arm extends forward to release the imaginary ball, each hitter's stride foot is down and the hitter takes a full swing to completion at game speed. Once the swing is completed, the player is to hold their finish position for 5 seconds. You can also go around and push them lightly to see if they can hold their balance against you. If players are not balanced, that means they aren't using their feet correctly and need to stay on the balls of their feet. Players should be able to hold and maintain their balance after they complete their swing in this drill. **Repeat until players can maintain their balance for 5 seconds.**

THE BATTING TEE

The batting tee is not just a tool for T-ball players. It is a very effective non-reaction drill for swing mechanics. Because the ball is stationary, it gives the player a better chance to repeat a good swing consistently. It will allow players an opportunity to work on hitting by themselves and should be utilized at home as well as during practice. For advanced players, it's a good place to work on hitting different pitch locations, as you can easily adjust to the tee to make a pitch an inside or outside location. Not only will it help the player, it is an easier place for a coach to analyze a swing. To improve your hitting stations at practice, ask your players to bring their batting tees to practice. Now you can have more players active at once.

Use the tee to work to improve any fundamental position. Have the player swing and focus on correcting one fundamental at a time. In our progression of teaching, dry drills are the easiest to perform correctly, followed by hitting off a tee, soft toss, then live batting practice. Use the tee to give players more repetitions of a fundamentally sound swing so they can build the muscle memory for sound swing mechanics.

A. **Basic Tee Position. Position the hitter in his stance.** The tee's stem height should be between the hitter's mid-thigh and waist. The hitter is positioned behind the tee where the lead foot is just behind the stem of the tee. The ball is placed on the stem out in front of the body. To determine how close a player should stand to the tee, simulate a swing stopping at contact point. Remember, the hands are not fully extended at contact, and the ball should be struck on the sweet spot of the barrel. This will determine the correct distance from the hitting tee. Position the tee accordingly **(pictures 6-29 & 6-30)**. **After each swing allow time for players to get their feet and stance set in the correct position.**



6-29: Tee out

6-24: Simulate a swing

DRILLS

1. **Line Drive Drill:** Position the batter to the tee so the ball simulates a pitch down the middle. Player attempts to hit balls directly forward into the net at the same height as the tee stem. Player repeats swings to see how many line drives he can hit in a row. This drill will develop a swing for a line drive right back up the middle.

   Recommended for ages 6-16.

2. **Forward and Down to Level:** Place two tees together in a straight line roughly 12 to 18 inches apart. Have both stems at the same height. Place the ball on the forward tee stem. The hitter attempts to strike the ball without hitting the back tee. If the player hits the back tee, the swing plane has a slight uppercut, which is very common. This drill can be done another way if two tees are not available. Place a bucket behind the tee stem with a small construction cone on top of the bucket. Place the tee stem in front at the same height as the cone. Place the ball on the tee in front of the bucket approximately 12 to 18 inches away from the top of the cone. **This drill will promote a forward and down swing, which is the quickest and most direct line to the ball. (pictures 6-25 & 6-26)**

6-25

6-26

   Recommended for ages 6-16.

3. **Inside Pitch:** Place the hitter at the tee as if the ball is coming down the middle **(picture 6-27)**. Now have the player move the tee to the inside corner by placing the tee more toward the pitcher and putting it in line with the inside corner **(picture 6-28).** The size of the player will determine how far in front they move the batting tee. Moving the ball farther out front simulates where an inside pitch must be struck. The player works on hitting the ball by striding the same as if the pitch was down the middle. The swing path to the ball must now bring the hands in closer along the body more to get the sweet spot of the bat on the ball. **The adjustment to hit the inside pitch is made by the hands and by hitting the ball out in front of the hitting zone more than on a pitch down the middle.**

6-27: Down the middle

6-28: Inside pitch

   Recommended ages 11-16.

4. **Outside Pitch:** Place the hitter at the tee as if the ball is coming down the middle. Now have the player move the tee to the outside corner by placing the tee back on home plate more and in line with the outside corner **(picture 6-29)**. The size of the player will determine how far back they place the tee. But remember the ball is still struck off the front leg, not behind it. By moving the batting tee deeper back, this will position the ball as if it is an outside pitch. The player works on hitting the ball with the same stride as if the pitch was down the middle. But now the ball is deeper in the hitting zone and that is where the outside pitch is hit. The hitter should finish with this weight more over the plate opposed to falling off away from the plate. As he is attempting to drive through the ball in the direction he is hitting it. **The adjustment to hit the outside pitch is made by waiting longer on the pitch and hitting the ball deeper in the zone, the opposite of hitting the inside pitch.**

6-29: Outside pitch

   Recommended ages 11-16.

Rich Aurilia on Practicing Off the Tee and Taking Soft Toss:
"Being at the Major League level now, I still think some of the most important work I do takes place hitting off a tee or taking some soft toss. I like these drills because they slow things down. You don't have to worry about the pitch coming toward you at a decent speed. You can just work at your own pace and break your swing down step by step."

SOFT TOSS

Soft toss is one of the best drills available to players at any level, from Little League to the Major Leagues. This controlled reaction drill has numerous benefits. It allows players to work on swing mechanics but also brings in timing and tracking a moving baseball. It has all the elements of live batting practice but in an environment where a player should be able to repeat their swing much easier. Similar to the batting tee, soft toss is an easier place for a coach to analyze a player's swing. Players will have an easier time making adjustments in their swing in a soft-toss drill than they will during live batting practice. This is a great drill to use daily and should serve as a substitute when live batting practice is not available. Not much space is needed to set up the drill and hitters will be able to get many repetitions in a short period of time. When a hitting net is not available, use wiffle balls to hit into a fence or into the open field. Be careful when working with young players or any player who does not control the bat effectively. In those cases, we recommend you toss from behind a screen.

Two concepts that should be explained to the hitter during soft toss are "loading" and "tracking the ball to contact." As stated below in "setting up soft toss," the coach should show the player the ball, then start the toss with a deliberate arm movement back and then forward to release of the ball. This is when a player should focus to track the ball and time the arm movement to start loading accordingly. Loading, which initiates a hitter's stride, is done before the ball is released. This is identical to how players should time a pitcher in batting practice and in a game. Soft toss is an excellent drill to work on load and stride development. Soft toss can also be used to work on any fundamental position a player needs to improve upon. Remember to work on only one area for improvement at a time.

Hitting Coach Joe Lefebvre on Grip:
"A proper grip drops both elbows down while setting the bat between the head and back shoulder, with the barrel up. The shoulders are more relaxed allowing the batter to be more tension free."

Setting Up Soft Toss

A. The player positions himself 7 to 8 feet from the hitting net and at a 45-degree angle from the coach tossing ball.

B. The coach takes a knee or sits on a bucket and tosses the ball one-handed at the player's belt buckle for a pitch down the middle. The coach tosses the ball at the player's front hip for an inside pitch and the back leg for an outside pitch. **(Caution: Do not work on the outside pitch with a hard ball unless the tosser is behind a net because the ball could be hit near him.)**

C. **The toss should be made as follows**: Show the hitter the ball, then in a deliberate manner start the arm back and then forward to the release. The ball should be tossed smoothly on a straight plane, where the hitter has time to react. This is a standard toss. **(pictures 6-30 & 6-31)**

6-30: Show ball then move arm back

6-31: Arm comes forward

DRILLS

1. **Line Drive Drill:** Toss balls at the player's belt buckle to simulate a pitch down the middle. Player attempts to hit the ball on a line into the middle of the net. See how many pitches the batter can hit on a line. Keep the tosses standard and consistent. This drill will develop a swing for a line drive back up the middle. **This drill should be used the majority of the time until players can repeat a fundamentally sound swing consistently.**

   Recommended ages 8-16.

2. **Fake Toss Drill:** While performing the Line Drive Drill fake a toss every third or fifth pitch. The hitter should maintain balance with the majority of the weight back. If the hitter's weight transfers more than against the lead leg and onto the front leg, he is shifting too much weight forward and is most likely geared for one speed pitch, the fastball. The hitter should load and stride but read the pitch, swing or take the pitch against his front side. This lunging to hit happens frequently with live batting practice or in games when a slower pitch is thrown and the hitter can not keep weight back and ends up on the front side. **This drill will teach players to read the pitch before committing to the ball and how to take a pitch properly.**

   Recommended ages 10-16.

Expert Advice on the Line Drive Game

This drill will develop a swing for a line drive back up the middle. Work on this drill every day when soft tossing. This drill should be used the majority of the time until players can repeat a fundamentally sound swing consistently.

3. **Change of Speed Drill:** After players have been able to understand and perform correctly the Fake Toss Drill, this drill will help batters hit pitches of different speeds. While performing the Line Drive Drill, change the toss speed at times. Every three or four tosses, mix in a slower toss. Mix in back-to-back slower tosses. Do not use faster tosses while in close proximity to the hitter because they will not have time to react. Keep the majority of tosses at the standard speed. The desired result for the hitter is to load properly and stride to hit but also be able to wait on the speed of the pitch before committing the hands and going into swing rotation. **This is what hitters need to do when hitting a changeup or a curveball. This drill will help hitters learn how to hit off-speed pitches.**

   Recommended ages 10-16.

4. **Location Drill:** In this drill, start off by throwing 5 pitches down the middle. Then toss 5 pitches on the outside corner and remind players to wait and watch the ball longer on the outside pitch. Lastly, toss 5 pitches on the inside and remind players to get their hand through the hitting zone quicker and hit the ball out in front of them more. On the inside pitch, the hitter should also fire his hips open with a good quick pivot when recognizing the ball coming to the inside part of the hitting zone. The next step to this drill should only be done when players can hit the pitch where it's pitched after being told first. The next step is toss balls to different locations at random without letting the hitter know. Remember, the coach needs to have a screen in front of him when tossing to the outside part of the hitting zone. **This drill reinforces the proper approach to hitting inside and outside pitches. It gives the hitters a chance to work on it with a moving ball. It is very difficult to accomplish this during live batting practice.**

   Recommended ages 10-16.

5. **Swing Plane Drill:** Hitters set up to the plate taking one knee. Right-handed hitters drop to the right knee with the left foot out for balance. Left-handers drop the left knee on the ground. The batters square up to the plate as in a normal stance. Toss the ball to the hitter as the batter takes his normal swing from that position. Hitter should attempt to hit hard ground balls and line drives. This drill isolates the hands, arms and upper-body action of the swing. **It is a very effective drill for hitters who drop their hands and bat head during the swing. If they do it in this drill, they will hit the ground. (picture 6-32)**

   Recommended ages 10-16.

6-32

Expert Advice on the Stride for Different Pitch Locations

A hitter's stride lands in the same spot. The hands adjust to the pitch inside and outside, not the stride. Hitters should go to their zone where they like and want the ball. Recognize the pitch location and time it accordingly. The hands will adjust.

SHORT TOSS

This drill can only be done with a screen, which the coach throws behind. It is very similar to Soft Toss, except the toss comes from directly in front of the hitter, just as a live pitch does. The protective screen is moved in about two-thirds of the way to the plate. The coach can continue to toss underhand on a line the same as in Soft Toss, or he can use an overhand toss for older players. More room is needed to run this drill because the balls are hit into a field and not into a net or fence. Both hard balls and wiffle balls can be used. This drill is very productive because the tosses are coming in at the same angle as a real pitch and the pitcher can control and locate his pitches easier. The pitcher will be able to throw more pitches before fatigue sets in, and the hitters will get more quality repetitions.

Recommended ages 6-16.

DRILLS

Short Toss Drills: All the same drills should be used as Soft Toss. Just like Soft Toss, the Line Drive Drill should be utilized the majority of the time until players can repeat a fundamentally sound swing consistently.

PITCHING MACHINE HITTING

When using pitching machines in practice or in games, remember these points. It is much more difficult to time the machine's pitch because there is no arm action from which the hitter can time their load and stride. To help the player time the pitch, hold the ball up for the player to see then insert the ball into the machine with a consistent tempo. Also, place a four-seam grip into the machine; how the seams hit the machine can affect the pitches movement and consistency.

BATTING PRACTICE FROM COACH

Regardless of the player's skill level and mechanics, every player needs to participate in batting practice thrown by the coach. This is when players need to focus on seeing the ball, timing the pitch, learning the strike zone and being aggressive in the strike zone. It is much more difficult and confusing for the player to work on both mechanics and timing issues during live hitting. Do not teach too much about mechanics at this time; there are plenty of other drills for that. Live batting practice allows the players to track the ball and time the pitch. No matter how good a player's mechanics are, if he doesn't train his eyes to watch the baseball and learn the strike zone, he will not make consistent contact. **(picture 6-33)**

6-33

Former San Francisco Giants Hitting Coach Joe Lefebvre on Batting Practice:
"The purpose of batting practice is about developing your hitting stroke and seeing how many balls you can hit on the barrel on a line with out lifting it. Focus on a gap-to-gap approach and hitting hard ground balls and line drives at the infield/outfield dirt line. If you miss, miss down not up. Remember home run derby at batting practice speed most of the time becomes a foul ball, pop up, or a swing and a miss at game speed."

BATTING PRACTICE AGAINST LIVE PITCHERS

One of a young hitter's biggest fears can be getting hit by a pitch. At the same time, young pitchers also fear hitting the batter. This is why it is a good idea to let hitters face live pitching in pre-season practices and at times throughout the season. It helps both the batter and pitcher get more comfortable with game action. In addition, it helps hitters learn the strike zone and gives them more experience competing against their peers. This should definitely be done at least a couple of times before the first game.

Major League Veteran Rich Aurilia on Taking Batting Practice:
"When taking batting practice, I try to work on things that I feel I am not doing too well at that particular time. The important thing is to take your practice seriously. If you take a careless batting practice, you most likely carry it over into the game."

ADDITIONAL HITTING DRILLS

1. **Grip Drill:** Grab the bat loosely in both hands. Lift the bat directly in front of the body and slightly over the head. With fingers relaxed but firm, hold onto the bat and throw bat and arms straight down in front of the body. Do not let the bat hit the ground. Where the bat ends up in the hands is a proper grip on the bat when hitting. **This drill shows players where the bat is gripped in the hands.**

   Recommended ages 8-16.

2. **Stride and Pivot Drill:** The player gets into a solid stance position with a bat behind his back as shown in the photo **(picture 6-33)**. The player works on striding and pivoting while the bat is in this position. **This drill is very effective in getting players to feel the proper use of the legs during the stride and pivot, by isolating the lower body. Remind players to fire the back hip through while pivoting on the ball of the back foot. (picture 6-34)**

   Recommended ages 8-16.

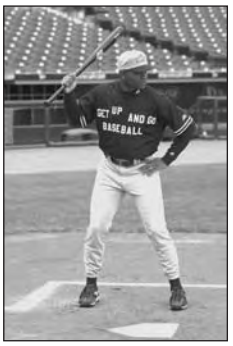
6-33: Set up

6-34: Stride and pivot

3. **Shadow Swinging with Eyes Closed:** Get the player into his stance with a bat in his hands facing the coach (acting as the pitcher). On coach's verbal command, *eyes*, player shuts his eyes. On command, *swing*, player takes a full swing with his eyes closed. At the completion of the swing the hitter should hold his finish position for 3 seconds. **Excellent drill to teach the hitter balance throughout the swing. The hitter will have to use his feet properly to maintain balance.**

   Recommended ages 10-16.

4. **Top-Hand Swing:** This drill can be done off a batting tee or in soft toss. Our preference is to utilize the drill during soft toss. Give the player an extremely small bat for his size. The hitter chokes up on the bat so he can easily control the bat with one arm. Player starts in his normal stance with two hands on the bat. Remove the bottom hand and let it hang naturally down to the side. Soft toss balls to the hitter. Hitter attempts to hit line drives and ground balls with the top hand only. To do this well, the hitter should time the pitch and go back with his hand some before he swings forward. Basically loading with one hand. This will give the hitter some momentum to help swing the bat. It will be very difficult to swing from a dead stop. **This drill teaches players to time the pitch with a load with the hands, and helps the player feel the proper path for the top hand.**
(pictures 6-35 to 6-38)
Recommended ages 10-16.


6-35: Stance

6-36: Load and stride

6-37: Swing

6-38: Finish

5. **Bottom-Hand Swing:** Follow the same set up and procedure for the Top-Hand Swing. **This drill has the same benefits as the previous drill except now they are for the bottom hand. (pictures 6-39 to 6-42)**
Recommended ages 10-16.

6-39: Stance

6-40: Load and stride

6-41: Swing

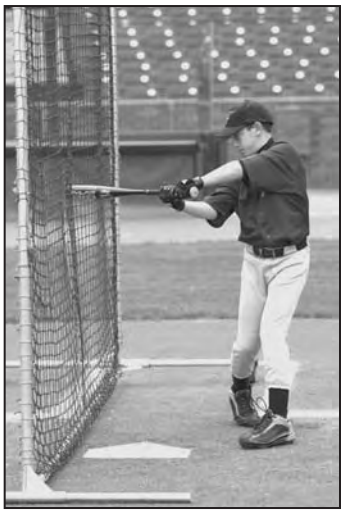
6-42: Finish

6. **Hands Inside The Ball Drill:** Position a hitter in his stance, facing a fence or net. Player places the knob of his bat to his belly button and the end of the bat so it is just touching the fence. Player then gets into his hitting stance at this distance away from the fence. Still facing the fence, the hitter picks a spot on the fence at waist level and even with his front leg. This spot is the hitter's imaginary reference point for a pitched ball. The player swings at the spot on the fence without hitting the fence. To swing properly, the hitter's hands must go forward and down, keeping the hands and bat head inside the fence. A poor swing is made when the player hits the fence on the swing. **This drill forces the player to use the proper swing path to the ball. (pictures 6-43 to 6-45)**

   Recommended ages 12-16.

6-43: Setup

6-44: Hands inside and forward



6-45: Hands outside the line

HITTING GAMES

1. **Line Drive Game:** This game can be played during Soft Toss or Batting Practice. The player is told to hit line drives and ground balls or he will lose his turn at bat. The player hits until he hits a fly ball, pop up or swings and misses. When he does, the next hitter takes his turn. Set a limit for the maximum number of swings in one round so your good hitters do not stay at bat all day. This drill forces the hitter to concentrate on hitting the ball on a line, which is a swing plane all hitters should develop. **It is a good drill for players who uppercut and hit a lot of fly balls.**

   Recommended ages 8-16.

Expert Advice on the Line Drive Game

The Line Drive Game will help players to stay on top of the baseball. This is a fun and effective way to help develop the hitters' proper swing plane.

2. **Contact Game:** During batting practice the hitter is told he can stay at bat as long as he does not swing and miss or foul a ball off. You may want to set a maximum number of swings per round to make sure everyone gets a turn at bat. This is a fun game to help players concentrate on seeing the ball. **The game adds the same pressure hitters feel when they have 2 strikes on them, but makes it even tougher since they cannot even foul a ball off.**

   Recommended ages 8-16.

3. **Situation Hitting Game:** During batting practice the coach calls out four different situations for the hitter to execute. The hitter gets an added free swing for every situation he executes correctly. The four situations are: sacrifice bunt (batter must get the bunt down on that pitch), Hit-and-Run play (player must hit a ground ball on that pitch), move the runner to third (player is to hit a ground ball to the right side of second base) and man on third with the infield in and less than 2 outs (the hitter must hit a fly ball to the outfield.) **This game teaches players how to execute when these situations arise in the game. Also, it's a very good routine to use for players during their second round of batting practice.**
   Recommended ages 12-16.
4. **Base-Hit Game:** During batting practice, make the hitter's last swing in each round a base-hit swing. This means the hitter gets to stay up at bat for another swing if he gets a base hit. The coach throwing BP is the judge. If it is ruled a hit, the player gets another base-hit swing and keeps hitting until he does not hit a ball ruled to be a hit. **This is a fun drill for players to compete with one another to see who can stay up the longest.**
   Recommended ages 10-16.

5. **Focus Game:** Coach stands in front of players in a position where all players can see him. The coach extends his left arm palm-up straight out in front of his body. He then extends his right arm palm-down out to his right side. The object of the game is for the players to watch the coach's right arm and hand, and clap when it passes over the top of the left hand's palm. The coach is to do anything he wants to try and get the players to clap when he doesn't cross the bottom hand. Examples: He can move his right hand fast. He can start his right hand and stop it before he crosses the left palm. He can go fast back and forth. If the players clap when the coach did not cross the left hand with the right they sit down and are out of the competition. Coach continues to play until he has a winner. **This is a fun drill that teaches players to concentrate and focus their eyes on a target.**

   Recommended ages 8-12.

GUIDELINE WHEN TEACHING HITTING

Many coaches and parents have asked us over the years, "Where do I begin when teaching the fundamentals of hitting?" So, here are some thoughts to keep in mind when helping players learn to hit. Remember, there are no absolutes on what to teach first or last, but below is a general order or checklist to follow.

1. Before making changes with a hitter, make sure you have seen him hit enough. Do not make evaluations on a few swings. Once you are sure of the consistent flaws, it is usually best to start from the ground up.
2. Start off by checking the bat. Make sure it is a size and weight the player can control and handle.
3. Check the player's grip.
4. Get the player into a fundamentally sound stance, with the hitter comfortable and balanced. Everyone needs a sturdy foundation, so make sure the legs and feet are correct in the stance.
5. Check to make sure the hitter is using his feet properly by focusing on the stride and pivot. Many problems can be corrected by fixing the feet. The feet control the stride, the pivot and the balance throughout the swing.
6. Check the hitter's head position. Make sure the head is staying in the hitting zone during the swing and, most importantly, in a good position at contact.
7. One of the more difficult areas to correct can be the swing itself. Look to fix the swing path to the ball. Keep in mind most player's ages 6-8 will drop the bat head and hands some due to lack of strength. Many players drop their hands and hit underneath the ball or the hands start out instead of starting forward. These are issues that are common throughout player's careers.
8. Loading and a proper weight transfer into the ball is another trouble area for some players. If the hitter has no rhythm, this will be something you will want to continue to nurture.

BAT SIZE

There is no specific bat weight or bat length for a particular age group. The player should be using a bat they can control. If you are unsure what size bat a player should use, it is usually better to go lighter and smaller as opposed to bigger and heavier. If only bigger bats are available, make sure the hitter chokes up on the bat.

GUIDELINE FOR BAT LENGTH TO BAT WEIGHT

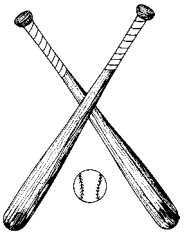
Ages 6-8	26 inch - 16oz 27 inch - 17oz
Ages 8-10	28 inch - 16oz 29 inch - 17oz or 18oz
Ages 10-11	29 inch - 17oz or 18oz 30 inch - 18oz or 19oz
Ages 12-13	30 inch - 19oz or 20oz 31 inch - 19oz or 20oz
Ages 13-14	31 inch - 23oz to 26oz 32 inch - 24oz to 27oz
Ages 15-16	32 inch - 29oz 33 inch - 30oz

Batting Order

Knowing the team's make-up is important when making a batting order. Which players can run? Which players hit consistently? Who can handle pressure? Who can cope with failure? Who likes to hit? Who doesn't like to hit? For coaches teaching 6-to-12-year-olds, letting players hit in different spots in the batting order is healthy for team morale. This gives all players a chance to feel good about themselves and understand what it is like to hit in different spots in the order. Also, this is a way to let players know that one player is not bigger than the team.

Characteristics of batting order positions:

1. **Leadoff hitter:** Fast, good contact hitter, gets on base frequently, runs bases aggressively without hesitation. Will take a walk and is not afraid to steal at any time.
2. **Second hitter:** Good contact hitter, above-average speed, good hitter, gets on base frequently, can bunt and steal.
3. **Third hitter:** Best hitter on the team, can hit for average. Clutch hitter who can drive in runs.
4. **Fourth hitter:** Good hitter who can drive in runs, hit for power and be a run producer.
5. **Fifth hitter:** Your second-best hitter. Can hit for average. Same characteristics as third hitter but may lack one characteristic. Good RBI man.
6. **Sixth hitter:** Good hitter, picks up the RBIs that are missed by the heart of the order. Surprise clutch hitter.
7. **Seventh hitter:** Least efficient hitter, patient hitter who uses whatever skills they have.
8. **Eighth hitter:** Your second clean-up hitter who can surprise the other team. Not a consistent hitter, but someone who is streaky.
9. **Ninth hitter:** Second-best leadoff hitter, similar characteristics as the leadoff hitter. Has to be a good hitter who can keep an inning alive. Fast, bunts, aggressive player, a good clutch hitter, two-out hitter.



BUNTING

Bunting is an area that often is overlooked by Youth League coaches because run manufacturing via the bunt doesn't come into play as often until higher levels of competition. However, proper time should be spent on this aspect of the game early in a player's baseball development. Teach all players the proper fundamentals of bunting regardless of where they bat in the batting order.

Teaching the concept of bunting early in a player's development will also help improve hand-eye coordination, demonstrate the concept of tracking the ball and bolster self-confidence. Bunting forces a player to track the ball all the way to the bat. Simply by concentrating on the incoming ball, the player enhances hand-eye coordination and gains confidence by making contact. For these reasons, in addition to developing bunting skills, a player should bunt the first few pitches of every batting practice before swinging away.

To ensure more success, have the player square around early enough to get into proper bunting position. Whether sacrificing to advance a runner or attempting to bunt for a base hit, it is necessary to have enough time to get into the proper bunting position. This preparation, along with ball placement after contact, are two keys to being a good bunter.

FUNDAMENTALS

Sacrifice Bunt:

This bunt is used to advance a runner to second base, or multiple runners to second and third base. The purpose is to move the runners into scoring position for the following batters to drive in. It's most commonly done with no outs and in a close game. There are two acceptable ways to sacrifice: the squaring-around method, and the pivot method. Regardless of which approach is used, the batter should be forward in the batter's box to improve the percentage of a fair bunt. The squaring or pivot action generally begins when the pitcher breaks his hands to start his throwing motion.

7-1: Squaring to bunt

A. Turning to Bunt

1. **Square-around method:** First, step back roughly 12 inches with the front foot. Then, bring the back foot forward beyond the front foot. The initial step clears space, allowing the back foot to come forward without stepping on home plate. Stepping on home plate is an automatic out. More weight should be distributed on the leg closest to the plate with a slight lean toward the plate. This will give the player total plate coverage and balance. **(picture 7-1)**
2. **Pivot method:** Set up close to the plate to assure plate coverage on the pivot. This method is nothing more than rotating the back foot as if a swing has already occurred. This rotation allows for the hips and shoulders to face the pitcher and still maintain balance throughout the body. **(picture 7-2)**

7-2: Pivoting to bunt

B. Balance and Weight Distribution: Feet should be shoulder width or wider, and knees should be bent and ready to flex. The legs are very important in bunting. Adjust to the height of the pitch by bending the knees. This way, the bunter keeps body control, proper bat position and form while adjusting to different pitches.

C. Grip: Keep the bottom hand on the bat choked up slightly, and slide the top hand up the barrel just past halfway. The top hand must pinch the bat at this point. To do this, the player should make a fist with the thumb extended and pinch the bat between the thumb and index finger. Make sure no fingers are exposed to the bunting surface. **(picture 7-3)**

7-3: Grip

D. Arms: The arms should be extended in front of the body, and the bat should cover home plate, at least to the outside black. The elbows should be pointing in with a slight bend to maintain proper athletic positioning. Very seldom is an athlete in a good reaction position when a joint is fully extended.

E. Barrel Above the Knob (top of strike zone): The bat should be angled slightly upward, keeping the barrel above the knob. This will allow for the bunted ball to travel downward – and hopefully fair. The bat starts at the top of the strike zone where the bunter has vision of both the bat and the incoming ball. The eyes should be almost on the same plane as bat, focusing on the pitch. To maintain proper bat position and vision, the bunter must bend at the knees to adjust to lower strikes. This will allow the eyes and the bat to stay at the same level and the barrel to stay above the knob.

F. Bat Angle: Pre-setting the bat angle toward first or third base will eliminate unnecessary bat movement when the pitch is in flight. Ideally, bunt toward first base with a runner only on first; bunt toward third base with runners on first and second. **(picture 7-4)**

7-4: Sacrificing bunt to 1B

Tony Womack on the Sacrifice Bunt:
"First of all, the player should know the strike zone.
Remember guys, you're not bunting for a base hit.
That means, you need to square around and give yourself up early.
The bat should be at eye level, going eye level down not up.
You should choke up to insure better bat control.
In the end, letting the ball hit the bat without poking at it,
will give you the best chance of being successful."

Bunting for a Base Hit

The fundamentals don't change much between a sacrifice bunt and bunting for a base hit. A batter wants to use the element of surprise, however proper time still must be allowed to get into bunting position. Good placement of the ball is just as important as the element of surprise.

A. Right-handed Drag: Take a short jab step back with the right leg. Drop the knob of the bat toward the left hip while bringing the barrel over the top of the strike zone and in front of the plate. In this process, create a bat angle toward the third-base line. Try to keep the ball just fair, and if it goes foul, the only harm is a strike. **(pictures 7-5 to 7-7)**

7-5: Jab step back

7-6: Barrel over the top

7-7: Contact position

B. Right-handed Push: A stride is taken just as if swinging, but the bat is brought around with the hands in bunting position. Bunt the ball with both hands pushing the bat toward the second baseman. The object is to just get the ball past the pitcher and have the first baseman commit to the ball. Don't bunt it too hard, allowing the second baseman a chance to make the play. This is attempted more frequently with left-handed pitchers since their follow-through takes them towards third base. **(picture 7-8)**

C. Left-handed Push: First, take a short jab step toward home plate with the left foot. This creates balance and a better direction line to bunt. Bunt the ball down the third-base line. **(picture 7-9)**

7-8: Right-handed push bunt

7-9: Left-handed push bunt

D. Left-handed drag: The bat leads the way with the hands in bunting position and aim between the first and the second baseman. Bunt the ball while bringing the left leg up into a crossover step, initiating the run to first base. **This is a good offensive weapon against left-handed pitchers since their follow-through takes them toward third base. (pictures 7-10 & 7-11)**

7-10: Bring bat out front

7-11: Crossover step to bunt

Tony Womack on Left Hand Hitters Bunting for a Hit:
"Once again one should know the strike zone.
Once it's established the bat angle is the next step.
The bat should be angled out in front of the plate to insure that you are in the hitting zone.
You should bunt the ball before running, but that doesn't mean
you shouldn't have any momentum getting out of the box.
Momentum should come in the form of either a jab step or
a crossover step towards the pitcher.
Last but not least, know which direction your bunting the ball and let the ball hit the bat.
Never poke at the ball."

Squeeze Bunt: The element of surprise makes the squeeze bunt an effective tool. If executed properly, the defense will not have enough time to tag the runner at home plate. As the pitcher releases the ball, the batter turns to bunt and the runner on third base breaks toward home. The ball is bunted anywhere on the field. Most importantly, the batter must do whatever it takes to at least make contact with the ball, otherwise the runner will be an easy out.

Slash: A slash is when a batter fakes as if he's going to bunt, then pulls the bat back and takes a compact swing. The batter is attempting to hit a ground ball and is not worried about power. This is done when defenders are charging hard or to create movement in the defense. **This play will typically open holes in the defense because players should react to the bunt.**

BUNTING DRY DRILLS

These dry drills can be done with or without a bat. Allow plenty of space between players if bats are used. Repeat all drills 5 times or until all players can perform correctly.

1. **Stance to Turning to Bunt:** Players line up and face the coach. On the command, *Hitting stance*, players get into their batting stance. On the command, *Pivot* or *Square* (depending on the method being taught), players turn to bunt. Make sure players are in the proper bunting position as spelled out in the fundamentals. Physically make adjustments where needed.
2. **Low Pitch and High Pitch:** From the squared or pivot position, the next commands are, *Low pitch* or *Take a high pitch*. On *Low pitch*, the players bend their knees to lower the bat. On *Take a high pitch*, players remove the bat from the strike zone. The coach should vary the commands to get the players familiar with the fundamentals of bunting and to make the necessary adjustments.
3. **When to Turn:** Finally, the coach should simulate a pitcher throwing from the stretch (or a full wind-up) and tell the players to turn to bunt when he breaks his hands to start his throwing motion.

DRILLS

1. **Bunting to Targets:** Place bats as targets about one-third of the way down each baseline. With the coach pitching from a close distance, have players (one at a time) bunt toward the bats. Each player bunts three times down each foul line. The rest of the players fan out to pick up the bunted balls and wait their turn. This drill is for a sacrifice bunt, and players should turn to bunt when the coach breaks hands to start the pitch. The coach should throw mostly strikes, but mix in a ball or two to see if the player pulls the bat back correctly.

   Recommended ages 8-16.

2. **Fair or Foul:** Place a bat parallel to the third-base line about three feet into fair territory. The goal is to bunt balls between the bat and baseline. Emphasize if the player misses the mark, it should be into foul territory and not to the right of the bat, because that's an easy play for the pitcher in a real game. This drill emphasizes the importance of placing the bunted ball very close to the foul line when bunting for a base hit toward third base. Since batters are trying to reach base safely, they should turn to bunt later than a sacrifice, but still soon enough to get into proper position.

   Recommended ages 8-16.

Expert Advice on Bunting to Targets

The "Bunting to Targets" drill is for a sacrifice bunt, and players should turn to bunt when the coach breaks hands to start the pitch.

3. **Bunt Hit Between Pitcher and First Base:** Place a bat in no man's land between first and second base on the infield grass. Have right-handed hitters work on their push bunt and lefties on their drag. Again, batters are trying to reach base safely, so they should turn to bunt later than a sacrifice, but still soon enough to get into proper position.

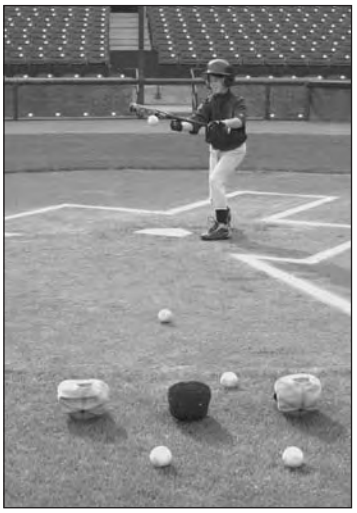
   Recommended ages 8-16.

4. **Squeeze Bunt:** Incorporate the squeeze bunt into Drill 1. At any time during the bunting drill, the coach will call out *Squeeze bunt*. On that pitch, the player should turn to bunt later than they would for a sacrifice and can bunt the ball anywhere on the field. When working on the squeeze, the coach should vary pitch locations to simulate what can happen in a game. The player must still bunt a bad pitch.

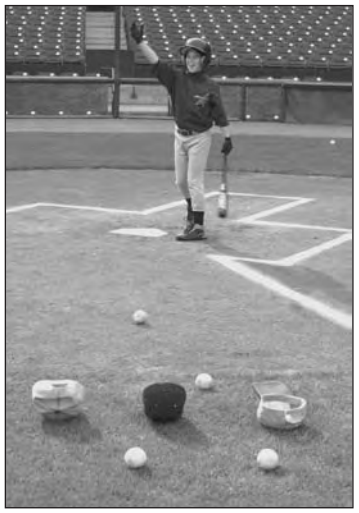
   Recommended ages 13-16.

GAMES

1. **Hats as Target.** Have players fan out from the pitching mound to the foul lines. Set three hats upside down with brims facing home plate as targets. Place them one-third of the way down each foul line. Each player gets six bunts, three in each direction. Award 10 points for a ball that rolls up the brim and stays in the hat, five for contact with the hat and one for a near miss. Have the players rotate around two times each and see who gets the most points. **(pictures 7-12 & 7-13)**



7-12: Hats as targets



7-13: 10 points

2. **Bats as Targets.** Follow the same set up in Game 1, but use one bat near each foul line. Pick two captains to choose teams. Each player on each team gets four bunts. Award 100 points for every bunt that hits a bat. Award 25 points for balls that bounce over the bats. The winning team's players get five extra swings during batting practice. Or play the best-of-five bunting world series by continuing the game at the next four practices. Whichever team wins three bunting competitions first is the world champion of "Bats as Targets."

3. **Bunt for Swings**. During batting practice, have players bunt the first three pitches they see. For every quality bunt the player gets down, an additional swing will be given. This will help them concentrate on bunting by giving them a reward for a bunt successfully executed.