**Hit And Run**

*By Coach Jack Dunn*

The **Hit and Run** was originally designed by John McGraw to decrease the possibility of the double play. With a slow runner at bat, the runner at first base attempts to steal second base and the hitter protects the runner by swinging at the pitch regardless of its location. If the ball is hit on the ground, there will be no play at second base even though the ball is fielded cleanly by an infielder. The offensive team has thus avoided the double play and has advanced the base runner into scoring position. If the hitter is successful and drives the ball through the infield for a hit, the runner from first base most likely will advance to third base or score if the hit goes for extra bases.

The **Hit and Run** is a “do or die” play and should not be used indiscriminately. Paul Richards, former Baltimore Orioles manager, considered an excellent strategist, made the following comments relative to the Hit and Run play as an offensive tactic:

"Keep a record as to how many times the play worked as against how many times it failed for any of the following reasons."

1. The batter swings at a bad ball at the wrong time...(3-1, 3 & 2, 2 & 0).
2. Line drive at an infielder.
3. The defensive team calls a pitch-out.
4. Either runner or hitter misses the sign.
5. Infielder moving to cover second base fields a ball that would have been a hit.

Richards’ conclusion was “the **Hit and Run** probably takes you out of more innings than it creates.”

**Don’t Use**

the **Hit and Run**

**Run with:**

1. A high average line drive hitter.
2. A power, long ball hitter.
3. Two outs... you want the extra base hit in this situation.
4. A slow runner on first bases... if the hitter swings and misses the slow runner will be thrown out.
5. A fast runner at bat... chances are the fast runner will not hit into a double play.

The Hit and Run play places the burden on the hitter and many players do not like to have to hit a particular pitch.

Earnshaw Cook in his book *Percentage Baseball* states, "The only defense against the hit and run is the pitch-out, eschewed by most managers and pitchers with the count against them. The play assuredly deserves more serious and frequent attention than it normally receives."

**Advantages:**

1. Avoids the double play if ball is hit on the ground.
2. Allows the runner on first base to advance a minimum of two bases if the hitter hits safely to the outfield.
3. With runners on first and second bases and hitter hits safely to the outfield, the runner on second base will score and the runner on first base will most likely advance to third base. This is a total of four bases advanced!
4. If a team has a non-aggressive hitter who won’t swing the bat, this forces him to “pull the trigger!”
5. A weak hitter advances the runner into scoring position (2B) simply by hitting a ground ball.
6. The Hit and Run play opens holes in the infield as infielders move to cover their base.
7. With runners on first and second bases, two positions are opened.
8. With a runner on first base, either the second base or shortstop position is opened.
9. If successful, the Hit and Run play has a very positive emotional impact upon the offensive team and is a real “bummer” for the defense.
**Mechanics of the Hit and Run:**

**Base Runner on First Base:**

1. Breaks for second base on the pitcher's first move to home plate as in a normal steal attempt.
2. On approximately the third or fourth step toward second base the runner "Looks In." That is, he takes a quick glance toward the hitter as the ball enters the impact zone!
3. The "glance" is chin to left shoulder as ball enters the impact zone and is a very quick look! No staring allowed!
4. Runner does not "Go looking!" as this would jeopardize his chances of stealing second base in the event the hitter swings and misses.
5. Read the ball off the bat as it enters the Impact Zone!
6. Runner reacts to pitch as follows:
   - Swing and Miss - attempt to steal second base (Look-In).
   - Line Drive - to the infield keep going—you're doubled up anyway if the ball is caught.
   - Ground Ball - go hard!
   - Fly Ball - use your judgment, as far as you can get back safely if it looks like it will be caught.

7. Don't be "duped" by the alert infielder who fakes a ground ball when the ball is actually hit in the air. (This results when the runner fails to "Look-In" on the pitch...and has no idea where the ball is.)
8. Theoretically, the right-handed hitter should hit the ball to the second base position, and the left-handed hitter to the shortstop position because these positions will be opened as the infielder evacuates his position to cover second base.

**Hitters Responsibilities:**

1. Hitter must protect the runner by swinging at the pitch regardless of its location - there is No Taking!
2. Exception - If the pitch is thrown at the hitter - Duck!
3. Hit the ball where it's pitched. It is difficult enough for most young players to make contact let alone place the ball to a specific area of the field.
4. Hit the ball on the ground if possible..."tommy hawk" the high pitches this increase the hitters chances of hitting a line drive or ground ball.

**Drills**

**Look In Drill Verbalization:**

**Purpose**
To teach base runner to "Look-In." **Procedure**

1. Pitcher, catcher, runner at first base, coach near home plate and in right-handed batters box.
2. To facilitate drill have two or three runners go at a time.
3. Pitcher throws out of stretch and runners break for second base as they would if stealing.
4. Look-In - after 3 or 4 steps runners take a "quick glance" in toward home looking at the coach who is standing in right hand batters box.
5. Coach points either up or down. Players must verbalize "up!" or "down!"
6. Coach makes necessary suggestions to runners... i.e. "Don't go looking"; "Quick glances only!" Remember you have to steal second base if the hitter swings and misses!

**Hit and Run Drill:**
Purpose

1. To teach hitters that they must swing at the pitch to protect the runner.
2. To teach runners to Look-In and read the ball off the bat and react accordingly.

Procedure

1. Divide squad into 3 groups.
   a. Group 1 - Bats
   b. Group 2 - Runs at First Base
   c. Group 3 - In the Field Shagging
   d. Pitcher on mound throwing/batting practice.

2. Rotate groups after a prescribed number of times at bat.
3. Hitter gets one pitch and one pitch only! - If he takes, he looses that time at bat.
4. Runners at first break for second base, Look-In and react to hit - Read the ball of the bat!

Other Considerations:

A natural Hit and Run occurs with a runner on first base or runners on first and second base, one out and 3 and 2 count on the batter - when the runners on first and second attempt to steal, two infield positions are opened. This is made more effective if the hitter is a "pull hit!" The exception to runners attempting to advance in the one out 3 and 2 count situation would be if the front-runner is very slow or the hitter is an easy strike out.

With runners on first and third bases, no outs, the count 3 and 2 and you have an important run at third base, don't send the runner from first base! Why? You must maximize your chances of scoring the runner from third base. A line drive doubles up the runner and a strike out and throw out is a double play. In both cases, you have lost one opportunity to drive in the run. Instead of three chances to score, you will only have two. If the infield is back and turns the double play on a ground ball, the run scores from third base anyway... think about it!

If you play against a team whose middle infielders both evacuate their positions in a first and third steal situation, the Hit and Run is an excellent play (one out) because both infield positions will be open, greatly increasing the hitter's chances of getting a hit on a ground ball. Well-coached and sophisticated middle infielders may flip/flop their coverage. That is, the shortstop covers second base with a right-handed hitter at bat and the second baseman covers second base with a left-handed hitter at bat when the Hit and Run is employed too often.

Well-coached middle infielders do not evacuate their positions prematurely. Consequently, it is more difficult to hit a ball through their position.

The Hit and Run is a valuable offensive weapon if used intelligently and not indiscriminately!

General Comments:

1. Earnshaw Cook, author of Percentage Baseball stated that "modern baseball strategy is nothing more than tribalistic ritual passed on from generation to generation and can not be held up to scrutiny by the laws of probability."
2. Coaches must realize no offensive or defensive decision will be correct one hundred percent of the time.
3. If strategy decisions are based on logical thinking and percentages, they will be correct a greater percentage of the time than if they are made on a hunch.
4. Don't overlook your "gut feelings" upon occasion.
5. When the pressure is on, score tied, or you are one of two runs behind, it takes courage to make a move.

Good Luck! Next : Situation Hitting