Hit with Your Head Some Mental Aspects of Hitting, Part I

By Coach Jack Dunn

I. POSITIVE MENTAL APPROACH VS. NEGATIVE MENTAL APPROACH:

If you were to ask the average hitter what he is thinking while at bat and the pitcher is delivering the ball, his answer surely would be, "I'm going to hit this pitch if it's in there!"

This negative mental approach is common to many hitters and leads to indecisiveness and usually a late swing. It limits the hitter's aggressiveness at the plate and greatly decreases his chances of getting a base hit.

A negative mental approach is the result of two factors:

1. The Coach's Instruction: For generations coaches have yelled, "GET A GOOD PITCH TO HIT," "MAKE SURE IT'S A STRIKE," "DON'T SWING AT ANY BAD ONES."

2. THE HITTER'S FEAR OF BEING HIT BY THE BASEBALL. This fear over rides all other aspects of hitting and must be overcome if any degree of success is to be achieved.

II. NEGATIVE MENTAL APPROACH:

The negative mental approach goes something like this... "I'm going to hit this pitch if it's in there!" The mind now must analyze the pitch, send a message to the body to "get ready" and then tell the body to "swing the bat!"

Too much valuable time has been consumed and the end-result is often a swing and a miss or a pop fly, which results from a late swing.

It takes a fifth of a second for the ball to travel from pitcher to catcher. It has been estimated that the baseball is in the contact zone for only one fiftieth of a second-not much time.

III. POSITIVE MENTAL APPROACH:

Because the mind triggers the body into action, the hitter must start with a positive rather than a negative mental approach to the task of hitting the baseball.

This simple adjustment in thinking will dramatically improve a hitter's chances for success.

As the pitcher begins his windup, the hitter says to himself - "I'm going to hit this pitch!"

The hitter is now physically (bat in launching position) and mentally (I'm going to hit this pitch.) ready to hit the pitch. No valuable time is lost when the pitch is to his liking and he decides to swing the bat.

If the pitch is a ball, the hitter simply "takes" the pitch.

When using the Positive Mental Approach the "gun is cocked" and it is just a matter of "pulling the trigger"- QUICK! AGGRESSIVE! AND DECISIVE!
Conversely, when using the Negative Mental Approach the "gun" must be cocked before the trigger can be pulled!...
SLOW! TIME CONSUMING AND INDECISIVE!

IV. FEAR OF BEING HIT BY THE BASEBALL

The Negative Mental Approach to hitting is not only the result of the coach’s admonition to the player to "get a good ball to hit," but also to the player’s fear of being hit by the baseball.

Fear of being hit by the baseball results in the hitter making certain the pitch is not going to hit him before getting mentally and physically ready to swing the bat.

Fear manifests itself in a slow/late swing often accompanied by "stepping in the bucket."

OVERCOMING FEAR:

1. No one wants to be hit by the baseball. This is normal. All hitters are fearful to varying degrees. So, it behooves us as coaches to teach our hitters how to protect themselves—How to get out of the way of the baseball.

2. Teaching the hitter’s "The Defensive Roll" will give the hitters a simple and effective method to protect themselves against errant pitches and will make them more aggressive at bat.

3. For a more detailed discussion on "The Defensive Roll", see JUGS Newsletter #11.

SUMMARY:

The hitter must be thinking, "I'm going to hit this pitch!"

If the pitch is a ball "simply lay-off the pitch."

This "thought process" will dramatically improve the hitter’s success.

CONCLUSION:

Dr. Norman Vicent Peale wrote a book entitled “The Power of Positive Thinking.” In this text, Dr. Pearle stated, "people become really quite remarkable when they start thinking that they can do things. When they believe in themselves they have the first secret of success.”

Good Luck!