

# Hitting Approach

By Scott Brosius

With the start of the upcoming season right around the corner, coaches start to spend a lot of time thinking, and in some cases worrying, about their team's offensive performance. We ask questions such as. "Are we going to hit this year?" and "how can we make these guys better". Hitting is a huge concern for coaches and we dedicate a lot of time to offense in our practices. So what makes good hitters good? What do they do? What do they think? As part one of a two-part series on hitting, this article will focus on basic hitting approaches while part two will focus on drills and practice work we can do to implement our approach.

Why start with approach? Because as coaches we can't put the cart ahead of the horse when it comes to teaching our players. So many times at the start of the season coaches break out the balls and bats, get their players in a circle, give them a little talk on proper hitting mechanics, then send them in the cages to go to work. Guys will take hundreds and hundreds of swings to master these mechanics, but when the games start they have no idea how to take a quality at-bat.

As coaches we need to take a step back and spend some time with our players, before they take their first swing, and provide them with an offensive approach or thought process. And I believe there are 3 simple thoughts all good hitters have in common.

**1. Look fastball and react to off speed.** Hitters need to be fastball ready at all times. They can look fastball and react to off speed, but they cannot do the opposite. If they sit off speed and get fastball, they will not be able to pull the trigger on time. This approach wrings true even at the highest levels. In my first full season in professional baseball, I finished second in the league in hitting with one simple approach. I told myself I wouldn't hit anything but fastballs until 2 strikes. I discovered right away that most of the young professional pitchers did not have good enough off speed command to throw 3 of them for strikes in the same at bat. I knew at some point I was going to get a fastball to hit, and I wanted to be ready to jump on it when I got it. Even at the big league level this remains the foundation to every hitter. In my first spring training with the Yankees, I had the opportunity to have a conversation with long-time Yankee Graig Nettles about his hitting philosophy. He responded by saying "I looked for a fastball until I had two strikes... then I looked for one more". I learned early on that by being fastball ready I was still able to hit mistake-breaking pitches without giving up on the fastball. The same certainly holds true for most high school and college pitchers as well. Our hitters will generally get a fastball to hit every at-bat, and we want to be sure they are ready to attack it when they get it.

**2. Look away and react in.** Our goal is to help our hitters cover as much as the strike zone as they can, so it is absolutely necessary they own this approach. It is impossible for hitters to look in and react away. When hitters become too inside conscience, they are only able to handle one small part of the plate. Their heads, hands, hips and shoulders all pull away from the plate, making it impossible for them to cover the outside pitch. Our hitters need to learn to trust their hands and let the ball travel to them before attacking the pitch. By looking away, they will have outside plate coverage while still being able to react to the inside strike with their hands, giving them coverage of the whole plate. It's important that our hitters don't dive to cover the outside with their stride, but instead look for the pitch middle away and try to use the middle of the field. Along with better plate coverage, this approach will allow them to attack more pitches. I can't tell you how many times I pulled a hanging breaking pitch foul because I was too concerned about the inside pitch and reacted with my hands too early. If we think middle of the field, we'll be able to keep those mistake breaking pitches fair. I'm also a big believer in playing the odds and giving myself the best chance to succeed. I'd like to have the ability to hit a high percentage of pitches, not a low percent. In high school and college baseball, about 80% of the outs are made on the outside part of the plate. Our hitters should learn to make that their strength. Take that pitch away from the pitcher and they own them!

**3. Green-Green-Red.** This is the terminology we use with our hitters to keep them in attack mode. They must have the mentality that their decision at the plate is to stop their swing, not start their swing. Hitters have to anticipate that every pitch will be a pitch they want to hit, then trust their eyes and hold up on a pitch out of the zone. Taking the opposite approach makes hitters defensive and unaggressive at the plate. If their thoughts are "make it a strike before I swing", it will be too late and the ball will be by them. They have to think, "this will be a great pitch to hit", then hold up if it's not. Green light thoughts! Give some thought as to what you'd rather see as a coach. Would you rather have a guy swing at a pitch out of the zone every now and then but be very aggressive and attack all hittable pitches, or would

you rather have a passive hitter who doesn't chase but also doesn't move the bat on good pitches to hit? If my players make a mistake, I want it to be an aggressive one and not passive.

I feel these three thoughts or approaches are a crucial foundation for all of our hitters. These thoughts coupled with great mechanics make for a dangerous hitter. But regardless of how good their mechanics are, if they don't own these thought processes, they will not be consistently effective hitters. So before heading to the cages for rounds after round of BP, spend some time with your hitters and help them to hit with a purpose. In part two of the series I will speak more into the mechanics of a good hitter and drills that we can do to improve our mechanics.