

# Hitting Approach, Part 2

By Scott Brosius

In part one of my two part series on hitting approach, we focused on three basic hitting approaches we need to instill in our players. I believe all successful hitters follow these three basic approaches. First, they look fastball and react to off speed. They have to stay fastball ready and adjust to breaking pitches, not the other way around. Second, they look away and react in. Good hitters trust their hands and look out over the plate, knowing they can adjust and hit the pitch inside. Hitters too inside conscience will have all kinds of trouble with the pitch away. And the third basic approach good hitters have is a green-green-red thought process. This is an aggressive mindset where hitters expect every pitch to be a good pitch to hit until their eyes tell them its not. With those three basic thought processes in mind, part two of this series will explain 5 drills we can do with our hitter in practice to help our hitters develop this mindset.

**1. Inside/outside tee.** Jugs Sports makes a great tee for this drill. Using a tee with two hitting stems, set up one pitch on the outside corner and one pitch on the inside corner. Make the pitch away slighter higher in the zone than the pitch in, so the inside ball does not impede the bat as the player tries to hit the pitch away. The tee should have two ball loaded at the same time. The hitter should have a coach or hitting partner with him at the tee, and as soon as the hitter gets loaded to start his swing, the hitting partner says “inside” or “outside”, telling the hitter which ball to hit.

This drill will give great feedback to the hitter, and the coach can even show by hitter example how much easier is to have success by thinking away and reacting in. You can have the hitter look in then watch them struggle to hit the ball away when you say outside. Then have them look away and show how much easier it is to hit both the outside and inside drill. Very simple drill to do, but it gives hitter immediate feedback into how looking away will give them better total plate coverage.

**2. Off-speed soft toss.** Soft toss is a drill that most coaches use, but it can be very effective in teaching guys to look hard and react to soft. Do this drill from about 15-20 in front of the hitter, with the pitcher throwing underhand from behind an L-screen. By throwing underhand it will be very easy for you to change speeds with the ball. Start by having your hitting hit the front toss as you change speeds on the pitches. Then ask them to sit soft and react to hard, throw them a couple slow pitches then throw one hard. They will have no chance to hit that pitch. Now have them sit on hard and react to soft then do the same thing. Throw them a couple hard pitches then mix in a soft. When they get the soft and react to it, this will show them that they can hit both pitches having this approach.

I believe whenever you can use a drill to make a point with a hitter by their experience with it, it will have a greater impact on them and they will make that adjustment sooner. The tee drill shows hitters their only chance of hitting both the away pitch and the inside pitch is by looking away and reacting in, and the toss drill shows the hitter their only hope of hitting both fastballs and off speed pitches is by looking hard and reacting to soft.

**3. Attack hitting.** Not all programs have this luxury, but we have a pitching machine here at Linfield that allows us to program multiple pitches. So we will do a drill with our hitters where we program a middle away fastball belt high, then another fastball just out of the zone, either up or down. We then tell our guys to attack every strike and leave every ball alone. If they take a strike their round is over, but if they swing at a ball they only lose one swing. We want our guys to be in the green-green-red mentality where they expect to swing at every pitch until their eyes tell them no when they read a pitch out of the zone. If you don't have a multiple pitch machine, you can still do this drill with coach pitch or a marginal ball strike pitch with a regular pitching machine.

As a side note to this, as coaches we need to be very careful how we say things to our hitters. We need to give our hitters “do” thoughts and not “don’t” thoughts. For example, if your hitter has a tendency to swing at the pitch up, tell him to “see the ball down” versus “don’t swing at the high pitch”. When we use terms like this the last thing the hitter hears is “high pitch”. We want him to focus and the “do’s” and not the “don’ts”.

**4. Approach hitting.** At Linfield, we very seldom let our guys take any swings, especially on the field, without a specific purpose. In other words, we never tell them “8 swings” then just let them hit. Every swing we take is with a specific situation or purpose in mind. We do a lot of what we call approach hitting. The first round we tell our guys they are not allowed to pull or hook the ball. They must hit everything up the middle and the other way. Then we will really stress getting the proper pitch to do it with, the pitch middle away. The second round we have our guys “drive down”. They

can hit it where it's pitched, but they cannot hit the ball in the air. They must hit hard ground ball or line drives. Again, we stress hitting strikes. And we do these drills with a mix of fastballs and breaking balls. Same goes with our third round where we'll take 2 strike swings.

The focus point for our hitters is that we always want them thinking in terms of getting the proper pitch to get the job done. Our hitters will never stand at the plate and just mindlessly wail away at pitch after pitch. We always want them to hit with a game mentality thought process.

**5. Colored baseballs.** The most important thing in all of hitting and at times the one thing that gets spoken about or worked on the least—seeing the ball. We can talk to our hitters all we want about this other stuff, but if they don't see the ball well they won't be good hitters. Hitting with colored baseballs is a fun and challenging way to teach this.

We take about 4 dozen baseballs and put a ¼ inch stripe around the middle of the whole ball in 4 different colors using Sharpie pens. We then throw the balls across the seams so it looks like one solid line on the baseball. As they hit each ball they have to yell out the color of the line on the ball. It's a fun challenge for them and a great way to teach hitters to track the ball a long time. Any what we always see when we do this drill is their contact is great. Why? Because they are not overthinking mechanics, but instead just seeing the ball well and putting a good swing on it.

I believe every drill, every activity we do in practice should have intentional purpose to what we're asking our players to do in games. Players will never fully understand how to prepare for success in a game if we practice one way and ask them to do something different on game day. We've found these drills to be very useful for us and they have played an integral part in teaching our hitting philosophy here at Linfield.