

# Teach Your Players to Think at the Plate

This is a scrimmage game outline that helps your players really think while they are hitting. We can never be sure if players can adapt to different situations and strategies on the field unless we practice it and talk about it.

It is easy to tell them during the game to look around the outfield or infield and hit it where they are not positioned. But not easy to do unless they have practiced it and that they can actually see it in their mind how to do it. The defense and the pitcher especially have to play like there is a fielder in the vacant area. The pitcher needs to throw a normal game to each hitter. Let's see if the hitter can be ready to pick out and hit or bunt the pitch needed to go to that open area.

## Process:

1-Take out your right fielder-this will show if especially your right-handed hitters can effectively hit to the opposite field. It will show if your lefties can effectively pull the ball.

2. Take out your left fielder to see if your hitter can now pull if right-handed or go to the opposite field if a leftie.

3- Take out the centerfielder, can the hitter take the ball up the middle?

4-Take out the 3B or 1B, check if the hitters can take the pitch on the ground down the 3B line and better yet-can they BUNT the ball down the line. Bunting for a base hit down the lines is very effective when the fielders are not playing close enough to the plate or if they are flat footed. You can tell they are flat footed if their toes are pointed outward. That puts the defensive player on their heels which makes them slow to react.

Unless the players are playing the top level of softball, most will have a tough time fielding a bunt down the lines especially if they have to backhand a “bunt for a base hit” type bunt. A “bunt for a base hit” type bunt is one where the hitter is on the run when they bunt the ball. That is another skill that has to be practiced a lot to perfect but is so effective. A lot think that a hitter bunts and then runs. That is not a bunt for a base hit. The hitter runs and then bunts the ball on their way to first. Has to be practiced a lot to perfect it but VERY effective even in colleges and anything age group below college.

In this age of softball, it seems that the emphasis is on the long ball not the strategy of the bunt for a base hit. How many players can actually hit the ball out of the park consistently. But if players can get on base with a bunt, that puts a lot of pressure on the defense.

5-Take out the SS or 2B-the hitter now has to hit the ball between the 3B or 1B and the pitcher.

I believe if you try this with your hitters, they will learn to read the defense better and read the pitches better. They also need to learn to take that pitch that is a little outside the plate and slap it over to the infielder’s head to the opposite field. Or pull the pitch a little inside to pull the ball down the line.

Coaching point: Pitches that are off the plate are some of the best pitches to hit. Those a little high or low are also some of the best pitches to hit if you take them the way they are thrown-outside take it outside, inside-pull it that way. Those pitches could go straight down the line for extras bases.

When a player has two strikes, the pitcher will make them fish and swing at a pitch out of the zone. If they are confident

in hitting a pitch out of the zone and have practiced it many times, they will have that confidence and knowledge to slap that outside pitch into the outfield easily for a hit. Practice it along with bunting most days of practice. It will pay off.