

Hitters - To Adjust or Not To Adjust

I just returned from a softball trip to a tournament in another country and wanted to share some things with you. I coached a group of players who were seniors, or had just graduated from colleges and only a couple of them knew each other before landing in Los Angeles for the trip. I knew none of them. This is a fun trip while playing the sport we love, so that means that you can only make suggestions on how to do things like how to hit a pitcher.

We practiced two days for a couple of hours before the tournament and I noticed that some were using an end-loaded bat. As we discussed the tournament, I commented that the end-loaded bat was great if they could swing it against all of the pitchers that we were to face during the games. But, if they were having trouble, I would make suggestions to try to help them be successful. Well, as we began the tournament it was obvious that some had never been taught how to hit different pitchers and they approached each pitcher exactly the same way. Basically, some didn't feel they needed to change their bat or hitting style even though they were not successful against some of the pitchers.

I explained to them that it is difficult to swing an end-loaded bat against a pitcher faster than they were use to seeing during their regular season. Especially against a pitcher who has a rise ball unless, the hitter has very good bat speed or strong forearms and hands. Most were dragging the bat against the faster pitchers and most were striking out or hitting weak grounders.

I brought them together at one point and explained the theory again about needing to get the bat out faster, or looking for an outside pitch and driving it to the opposite field. Some listened and changed to a lighter non-end-loaded bat. Some opted to keep the same bat and hope that the pitcher or catcher would go brain dead and throw them an outside pitch. This did happen to one player and she drilled a triple to the opposite field. For the three who refused to give up their favorite bat though, they struggled and wondered why they could not hit the pitching.

We also had one player who was a slapper/bunter who only could bunt to an area in front of the pitcher, which she called NO MAN'S LAND. I tried to explain to her the benefit of sometimes taking it directly down the lines when the defense shifted. She thought she was too good for that theory and continued to put the ball in front of the pitch no matter where the defense was playing her. She did get on base three times in nine games but they were all on slaps or errors. None were on bunts.

If this were my college team, I would have taught them first that you need to adjust sometimes if you are not successful with some pitchers. Second, I would have removed the bat from the game if the first lesson wasn't convincing enough.

What do you look for in considering if they should change bats or stances?

SPEED AND PITCHES OF THE PITCHER.

SKILL OF YOUR PLAYER

TYPE OF BAT YOUR PLAYER IS USING (END LOADED, TOO LIGHT, TOO HEAVY? ARE THEY DRAGGING THE BAT, DROPPING UNDER THE BALL, AND OR WAY AHEAD OF THE BALL?)

WHAT IS THE STANCE OF YOUR HITTER (CLOSED, EVEN, OPEN?)

WHERE DOES YOUR HITTER HOLD THE BAT (AT THE KNOB OR CHOKED?)

DOES YOUR HITTER TRY TO PULL EVERYTHING, OR GO WITH THE PITCH?

IF THEY ARE DRAGGING THE BAT, TRY THESE THINGS:

USE A LIGHTER BAT.

USE A SHORTER BAT.

USE A NON-END-LOADED BAT.

CHOKER UP (IT MAY LOSE SOME POWER BUT A BASE HIT IS BETTER THAN AN OUT.)

LAY THE BAT BACK TOWARD THE CATCHER (AGAIN THEY MAY LOSE SOME POWER, BUT A HIT IS A HIT AND ONE OVER THE INFIELD IS STILL SCORED A HIT IN THE BOOK WHETHER IT IS A SOFT ONE, A BLOOP, OR A ROCKET)

OPEN THE HIPS UP TOWARDS THE PITCHER (SAME AS THE PREVIOUS TWO POINTS.)

TEACH THEM TO GO WITH THE PITCH, IF IT IS THROWN OUTSIDE THEN HIT TO THE OPPOSITE FIELD. TOO MANY PLAYERS ARE STILL TRYING TO PULL THE BALL ALL OF THE TIME.

IF THE PITCHER IS TOO SLOW AND THE PLAYER IS WAY AHEAD OF THE PITCH, TRY THIS:

IT IS GREAT TO SAY JUST WAIT ON THE PITCH AND DRIVE IT. SOME PLAYERS JUST CANNOT DO THAT. HAVE THEM DO A SLAP BUNT, BUT THEY HAVE TO DO IT AS A PUNCH HIT OVER OR THROUGH THE INFIELD. TOO MANY PLAYERS TRY TO GO BACK INTO A HITTING STANCE AFTER HAVING THE BAT OUT IN A BUNTING STANCE. MOST OF THE TIME WHEN THE HITTER DOES THAT, THEY POP THE BALL UP BECAUSE THEY ARE LATE.

HAVE THEM DO THE FOLLOWING:

START WITH THE BAT OUT FRONT IN A BUNTING STANCE WITH THE FEET JUST PIVOTED.

KEEP THE BAT HIGH AND LEVEL.

THE WEIGHT IS ON THE FRONT FOOT.

WHEN HOLDING THE BAT, THE ELBOW AND WRIST OF THE BOTTOM HAND ARE POINTING DOWN (THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT IN ORDER TO KEEP THE BAT LEVEL.)

AS THEY PULL THE BAT BACK, THE WEIGHT SHIFTS TO THE BACK FOOT AND THE BAT STAYS LEVEL LIKE IT IS ROLLING ON A TABLE. DO NOT ALLOW THE KNOB OF THE BAT TO GO DOWN, KEEP THE BAT ROLLING ON THE TABLE.

ATTACK FORWARD SHIFTING THE WEIGHT BACK TO THE FRONT FOOT AND STING THE BALL ON CONTACT. THE BALL WILL SHOOT OUT OF THE BOX AND THE INFELDERS WILL HAVE TO BE ON THEIR TOES TO CATCH IT.

Practice different types of pitching styles during preseason, explain what the player needs to do to be successful with each style of pitching and practice it. There is a way to beat every hitter and a way to beat every pitcher.

Look for Celeste's article next month.

Good Luck!