

## Speed Up That Bat

Throughout my years of coaching, I found that some of our best years were the years when I really emphasize bat speed. Some players naturally attack pitches with excellent bat speed (the ability to swing the bat quickly and correctly through the hitting zone). Other players have to be taught to attack the pitch. Their bat lags slowly through the zone resulting in very little “pop” to the swing.

There are various ways of doing this but my favorite, and the one that worked the best for my teams, was a simple thing called “quick hits.” All it takes is a lightweight bat or a wooden dowel rod (which is what I prefer), two players and a bucket of whiffle balls. Now don’t get me wrong, there is an art to doing this drill. When players would come in as freshmen, it was very difficult for them to master this during our fall scrimmage season. But if we worked on it through our winter practices, by the spring, it was very impressive to watch them do the drill. Plus, the players felt a real sense of accomplishment when they could do the drill quickly and correctly. They were always eager to do this drill and I think sometimes they were “showing off” a little to the other teams during pre-game warm-ups.

The hitter is about three to four feet from a screen, the tosser is on the open side of the hitter. The tosser has a bucket’s worth of whiffle balls sitting in front of her, usually just gathered on the ground in front of her. The tosser quickly tosses ball after ball to a spot a little in front of the hitter. The hitter quickly hits each one into the screen. Sounds easy but it takes a coordinated effort between the two players to hit each ball and toss each ball correctly. This is not done slowly—it goes very quickly. The tosser should pick a ball up with her left hand and switch it to the right hand before tossing. The left hand picks it up off of the ground. This goes very quickly.

Hitters can pull the bat back in a couple of different ways:

1. After they hit the ball, they make a circle around their heads and hit the next. We usually have around 25 to 30 balls that they hit in one session—so that can get pretty tiring when it goes so quickly—bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing and so on.
2. Another way is to hit the ball and bring the bat straight back and hit again. This makes the forearms really work hard. Again it is bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing, bing and so on.

I think the difference between the two is that the first way of swinging teaches a little more quickness and the second way teaches quickness but also strengthens the forearms. Strong forearms help tremendously when the pitcher is quicker than the hitter’s ability. Strong forearms provide the hitter the ability to wrist the ball out of the infield when fooled on a pitch. It allows the hitter to be able to handle the bat easier, also.

Adapt this drill to the team that you have or do it both ways. Please do this drill everyday if you have bat-speed problems. It does not take a long time to go through three or four rounds with a bucket of balls each. It helps if you have three players working as a team: a hitter, a tosser and a shagger. Then they just rotate to complete their three or four rounds. This drill does not take up a lot of room, either. In order to save time in the gym for infield or outfield practice, we used to do drills like the quick-hit one, ball drops, our box drill, etc., in the lobby of the gym. For quick hits, we just pulled a protective screen out there or used a corner to do the drill.

During the game, to remind the players to attack, I would give them that exact same verbal command. “Attack, attack the ball.” I said that constantly to some players and it really does work.

Good luck, and please bunt everyday and do your quick hits everyday.