

You Have to Tie Before You Can Win

I have a problem understanding why some coaches do not play for the tie before they play for the win. When watching baseball and softball games, it seems that, when some teams get a runner on first with no outs, they do not try to bunt the runner over into scoring position. Instead, they play for the big hit and, more times than not, they do not score.

Here is an example of what I saw during a professional **baseball** game the other night. I have seen this time and time again.

In the seventh inning, the lead-off hitter drew a walk. The next batter was the number-nine hitter in the line up (not a pitcher). The score was 3-2 at the time, with the hitting (home) team losing. Instead of the hitter bunting the runner into scoring position with no outs, he hit and popped up to third base. The top of the order was up with one away, and the lead-off hitter singled to right which would have scored the tying run easily *IF* the runner would have been bunted over to second. Now after the base hit, the team had runners on first and third with one out. The next two hitters struck out. So instead of a tie game, the score remained 3-2. The other team not only was still winning but now had the mental edge. They proceeded to score two more runs in the eighth and went on to win 5-2.

I understand that sometimes your best hitter will come up to bat with a runner on first and no outs. It's hard to take the bat out of the hands of your best hitter by having them bunt. Maybe this would be a good time to steal if the runner had any speed. Of course, then they will walk your best hitter. In this case, it might be wiser to leave the runner on first and let the hitter do his job.

But that's only one situation out of many. When the teams are close, every run counts - **especially** in the later innings. I like to get the first score whenever possible. So in the early innings, we will bunt the runner over with no outs and a runner on first or first and second. Sometimes even with a runner just on second with no outs, depending on the speed of the runner - a fast runner will score from second on a base hit, but a slower one will not. We really work on base running and quickness so we are able to steal a lot. A lot can be done with a fast team or a smart team on the bases.

As the innings go on in a close game, one extra run really puts the pressure on the losing team. Play for one more run every chance you get, when you are only a run or two ahead. If you are successful even twice, you are ahead by three now instead of just one run. Mentally, that is a huge difference.

The sacrifice bunt is nothing fancy. Everyone, especially in softball, should know that the bunt is coming. I like the player to pivot versus squaring around. Even though on a definite sacrifice situation, the player should just put the ball down in fair territory, the defense still is thinking that the player from that stance could still pull back and swing away. The more doubt you put into the opponent's head, the more it will distract those players.

The bat needs to be at a very high strike position so that the hitter only goes down on the pitch instead of up where they could easily pop the ball up (never go up on a ball during a sacrifice bunt). I like the players to lean forward a little, bat at a very high strike position, bat level versus angled (angle the bat and our pitcher throws a drop curve, and the hitter will foul the pitch off)- bottom hand and elbow are down toward the ground (this keeps the back level and gives more stability to the bat) and keep the top hand behind the bat versus under the bat (under gives the bat backspin which will result in a foul ball). Bunt only strikes-let the balls go by and take the walk.

If you are behind one run, like in the baseball game, play for the one run to tie the game. Then when you are tied, play to be one run ahead and go from there. Playing for the big inning works only a small percentage of times. I like to coach a very aggressive game, but I don't take a lot of chances when we are one run behind. We go for the tie-and then the win.

Look for Celeste's article next month.