

THE CHANGE UP

By Michele Smith

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What do the best pitchers in the NCAA right now all have in common? Their ability to throw a great change up. If you go back over the history of our sport, the best pitchers have been able to change speeds. As an offensive and defensive player, I knew that as a pitcher using a change up was going to be imperative to my success while in the circle. On the flip side, I knew in order to hit the best pitchers in the game, I would have to be able to ID the change up.

Here are a couple tips and ideas to help you and your team hit a change up pitcher better and more effectively.

The first key is to be able to ID or identify the change up. In other words... see it, not be fooled by it. You need to be able to recognize that a slower pitch is coming—even if the pitcher is hiding it well from you with a form that looks exactly like her other harder thrown pitches.

Working on a perfect swing is useless if you aren't able to ID the pitches. Identifying pitches comes down to simply seeing the ball and making a decision on what type of pitch it is and if it is a strike or a ball, rise or a drop, fast or slow... before you ever start your swing. Did you hear that? Read that correctly... before you ever start your swing!

So many hitters today are guess hitters. They have made up their mind to swing or not before they ever step in the box or even see the pitch. How can you hit at a high level if you don't know what you are swinging at? Simple answer... you can't!

So identifying the pitch needs to be the first thing you do before you start the actual swing. When facing a good change up pitcher and the change up being thrown at you for strikes, there are some movements to be made prior to that decision to put you in a position to be able to capitalize when it is time to swing. Those movements are a load, (or slight negative movement to have energy to go positive) and then getting the front foot down early.

So—weight shift from neutral to slightly negative and then a small short and light stride while the hands are back and loaded. What this does is quiet the eyes and keeps the weight back so you can identify the pitch and not be fooled by it. Knowing what pitch you are swinging at is, to me, the most important part of hitting. If the pitcher can fool you or show you deception of the pitches with movement or speed changes and you can't see or identify that deception or pitch... the pitcher has beat you.

The take away is that I would really push as a hitter or coach is that your kid has to get that front foot down just a tad early. This will help to identify the pitches and then let their swings do the rest. One option is to go to the back of the box to give yourself or your team more time to identify the pitches, but this is a band aid and not a solution to the problem of how to hit the change. Another option is to not swing at the change until you have two strikes, but what happens when the pitcher throws the pitch so well she can throw it during any count and in any situation? You will not be effective, plain and simple. Eventually the pitcher will beat you.

It is easy to make this game hard. Most hitters struggle not because they have terrible swings, but because the pitcher is fooling the hitter or the hitter is not seeing the ball. On almost every swing, even on a home run you can pick out a couple things that aren't perfect in the swing. Perfect swings don't make great hitters... Identifying pitches early so you can swing at strikes does! Early identification is a must, and will make a huge difference. It will keep your hitters from being fooled by the pitcher—I promise and believe me, I have tons of experience on both sides of the plate on this one!

Good Luck and good hitting!