

Hitting

Setup/Alignment

a) Tee Ball

- tee should be adjusted so that ball on the tee will be about waist height, player should be far enough away from the tee so that with arms extended he will hit the ball approximately 2-3 inches from the end of the bat, front foot should be behind the middle of the tee, with a stride the front foot will be approximately even with the ball, i.e. ball is hit in front of the body
- some coaches draw lines in the dirt to show players where to stand, the problem with this is different size players have different reaches

b) Rookie ball

- in general rookie ball machines will pitch the ball straight, therefore have players far enough from the plate that the bat will cover the outside of the plate with straight arms, another way is to have players with slight bend in the legs reach and touch the outside of the plate with the plate, quite often the parent/coach who is running the pitching machine is the best position to judge this, he/she should make sure that the players body/arms will not be in front of the pitch
- if machine is pitching a consistent height then because of the difference in players sizes coaches move players closer or farther away relative to the pitching machine to get a hit-able pitch - it takes too long to adjust the height of the machine for each player

Mechanics

a) Stance

- feet slightly wider than shoulder width, weight equal on the balls of the feet
- knees slightly bent, waist is bent slightly forward
- hands approximately 4 to 6 inches away from the back shoulder with the top hand even with the back shoulder
- front arm is down with the elbow bent at a 90 deg angle, the back elbow is down
- shoulders are level or the front shoulder is down slightly
- head is straight up, should be able to see the pitcher with front eye closed
- barrel of bat is up at 45 deg angle from the ground

b) Load/Coil

- starting from the basic stance the load is a movement back with a slight inward rotational movement in the front side hip or shoulder. The front knee should make a small inward turn and the hands go straight back approximately 3 or 4 inches, hands should not be raised or lowered
- approximately 75% of players weight is transferred to the back leg
- and batter should still be able to see the pitcher with their front eye closed
- the load goes before the stride and should occur just as the pitcher is pre-paring to release the ball

c) Stride

- refers to the batter taking a soft step with their lead foot towards the pitcher, ideally shorter is better, 4 to 6 inches
- it is a slight lift and glide motion rather than an exaggerated lift and step, it should also be in-line with initial foot placement or even slightly towards the plate, stride lands on the big toe
- stride occurs as the pitcher releases the baseball
- hands remain in the load position

d) Swing/Rotation

- batter picks up the ball on release and concentrates on the center of the ball
- start swing looking over the lead shoulder, finish the swing looking over the back shoulder at the spot where the bat made contact
- hip rotation starts the swing, to rotate the back hip forward the batter pivots on the ball of the back foot, the ball of the back foot should remain solidly on the ground, belly button and back knee end up pointing at where the ball is being hit
- path of bat is straight to the ball, the height of the follow through will depend on the height of the pitch, a low pitch will have a higher follow through while a waist or high pitch should have flatter follow through

- transfer of weight from back to front foot begins after the pivot starts, approximately 75% of the weight is transferred to the front foot

Hitting Problems, Solutions

a) bats too heavy/long for player to generate bat speed or level swing

- *use a lighter bat or move hands up the handle 1 to 3 inches, referred to as choking up on the bat*

b) pulling out front foot, ie on stride players front foot moves away from the plate, this effectively means that the player may not be able to reach a ball that is over the outside of the plate

- *draw a line for a player so that they can see where they should step, if persists, place a glove behind where a player should be stepping and then have them practice hitting without stepping on the glove (PS – don't use a bat as they will trip if it rolls)*

c) dropping hands or hitching before swinging, will cause uppercuts

- *review loading with player*

d) being hit by the ball (rookie ball)

- *watch batters set up*

- *teach that on high inside pitches teach players how to rotate front shoulder towards the plate and duck, taking the hit on the back rather than in the front, when approximately thigh to stomach high have players step out rather than bend at the waist*

e) players do not rotate at the hips, swinging only with there arms, means they cannot generate as much power, solution is to have the player hold a bat or broomstick level behind his back, they then take there stance and rotate hips , in Tee Ball they can come closer to the plate and actually hit the ball, in Rookie Ball simply practice the motion

f) swinging with straight arms, i.e. straightening arms at the start of the swing and simply rotating the body, again will loose bat speed and distance, solution – fence/wall drill – use an old bat and a fence or wall, have player setup away from the wall by the distance of the length of the bat plus 3 inches, then have player do a slow swing, if arms straighten out too early they will not be able to swing without hitting the wall, if they rotate properly and there hands lead in their swing they can do a full swing

Additional Drills

a) Soft toss – coach kneels off to the side-slightly in front of the batter and gives the batter underhand pitches

b) Fast swing, cut a broom handle to approximate 3 ½ to 4 feet in length, tape a knob on one end similar to a hockey stick so player will not throw it, start player simply swinging as fast as possible from normal stance, can advance to tossing ping-pong balls in soft toss and then via normal pitch

Comments

- in Tee Ball batters will sometimes be moving their heads watching infielders and jump around at the last minute to hit a gap, tell players to decide where they want to hit the ball and then to concentrate on hitting the ball

-in Tee Ball coaches can save time if they get a set of plastic balls, ball will not travel as far but can see how - do not teach a Tee Ball swing (hard as possible/uppercut/taking eye of the ball when winding up), it will be hard to correct as players advance in divisions

- work on bat speed and level swings

- in Rookie Ball the parent/coach handling the machine should hold the ball up and show the batter that they are about to put the ball into the machine

- in Rookie Ball if at the start of the year half your team is striking out the machine is going to fast, slow it down, as players get better speed can be increased