

## Effective Hitting Instruction

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**The Key to solid hitting is:** *Hitting the ball before it gets to the stride foot – not over the plate! (Except on opposite field hitting – where we let the ball get in on us a little more and over the plate.)*

Getting the bat to this power contact area in time requires:

- Proper Timing (start stride in time)
- Hip Rotation (Power L)
- DIRECT hand path from launch position to contact

**The key components of the swing are:**

Component	Key Focus
– <b>Power L</b>	Turns hips automatically – generates rotational power
– <b>Hand Path</b>	Direct from launch position to contact
– <b>Finish</b>	Hands continue direct path and extend toward mound after contact, back shoulder finishes toward pitcher
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– <b>Timing</b>	Lift foot on pitcher's first foot movement.
– <b>Vision</b>	All mental focus on SEEING the ball out of the hand and on to the bat
– <b>Bravado</b>	The kids have to WANT TO HIT more than they fear BEING HIT
• <b>Your job as a coach is to</b>	
–	Teach and reinforce proper mechanics in practice, then let the kids hit with a clear mind during the games. Keep all instruction @ game time to a minimum.

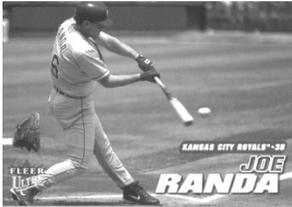
## Overview: Hitting Stages



Ready Position: Bat cocked, athletic and balanced lower-half. Hands by back shoulder



Stride: KEY TO TIMING – must lift stride foot at pitcher's release. Keep weight and hands back- stay stacked



Contact: Power-L! Contact point in front of landing foot. Head on ball.



Extension: Hands continue toward mound after contact.



Finish: Back shoulder to mound to complete trunk rotation.

*Adapted from Windham Hitting Academy Drill Manual*

**Teaching – Keep it simple.** We need to create a framework for the students – one they can put everything they learn into **perspective** with. There are many, many details involved in hitting and the trick is to foster an understanding of the framework (Big Pieces) first. They are:

- Lower Body (Power L)
- Hips (Rotation)
- Hands (Direct path from effective launch position – and extension toward mound for finish)
- Head (Track with your nose)
- Contact Point (in FRONT of Plate – or, more accurately, in front of landing foot)

Once we get this hammered in, we go into more details.

So, always be aware of the context of the drills we're doing – and be very careful to stay within focus.

**How to talk to the kids:** Too much information is counter-productive. Keep it simple – say as little as possible – so when you do instruct, it registers.

**Keep all imagery positive.** Re-word any “Don'ts” into “Do's”. Hitters who are full of positive imagery (they will remember your instruction) are far better off than the kids who are subconsciously trying NOT to do this or that. Strive to create positive imagery. Help the kid believe in him/herself at the conscious and subconscious levels.

*This means, of course, you MUST be patient. They'll pick up on your frustration – which is not the feedback you want to give a child athlete.*

Be entirely positive without being Pollyanna about it – so, keep it real.

## Hitting at Game Time

Hitting is like a three-legged stool. The three critical elements are:

- Proper Mechanics
- Timing
- Positive Mental State and Visual focus

### **Mechanics:**

At game time, Mechanics must be limited to no more than one swing thought. This might be "Power-L" or, "Hands straight to the ball." Ideally, there will be no mechanical thoughts during the swing. All of this work is done in practice, with the goal of swinging from muscle memory @ game time.

### **Timing:**

The ideal contact point is slightly in front of landing foot. Anywhere closer to the back foot robs the hitter of power and contact accuracy.

The hitter's timing mechanism is governed by when his/her stride foot lands.

If the hitter is behind on the pitch, he/she started the stride too late.

The hitter, at game time and in practice, should focus on adjusting his/her stride to time the incoming pitch. IDEAL TIME TO START STRIDE (BY LIFTING STRIDE FOOT) IS AT PITCHER'S RELEASE.

Assuming solid mechanics are established yet the kid is still late, the swing can be quickened by:

- Starting Hand position – Moving closer to point of impact.
- Relaxing grip and increasing fluidity of wrists and arms.
- Elimination of any non-directional hand path (ie, hitches, excessive loading)

### **Mental State and Focus:**

Ideally, the hitter should have 100% of his/her concentration not only on the ball, but on a specific place on the ball. The goal should be to hit the middle of the ball with the middle of the bat – vs. the lazy approach of 'ball to bat'. All focus is on the ball, with no thoughts of pressing to succeed or fear of failure.

The hitter, before going to the plate, should study the pitcher and his/her pitches and exercise positive imagery (of connecting middle of ball to middle of bat). The power of this positive imaging exercise cannot be overstated – hitting happens quickly and the subconscious expectation of the hitter has a profound effect on his/her success at the plate.

**Focus:** The hitter should exercise broad focus while staring down the pitcher (for baseball, focus on the pitcher's head, for softball, the pitcher's hips), then, as the pitcher goes into the windup, the hitter must change to fine focus (for baseball, the pitcher's logo on his hat, for softball, the outside of the throwing arm's hip).

Note: Fine focus can be held for no more than five (5) seconds – which is why we broad focus early in the pitch, then fine focus near point of delivery.

Note: To describe Broad and Fine focus to your players, use this analogy.

"When I look at your face, I have broad focus. When I look at your left pupil, I have fine focus."

**IMPORTANT: The hitter must pick up the ball at the earliest possible moment and TRACK IT WITH 100% FINE FOCUS TO THE BAT OR INTO THE CATCHER'S MITT IF TAKING THE PITCH. It is an excellent habit to hold the head on the contact area for a second AFTER making contact.**

## On The Mental Aspects of Seeing and Hitting Effectively

Why is seeing the ball well so difficult for a batter?

- **Effect of fear, anxiety, tension**
    - Muscular tightness and poor breathing patterns result
      - Concentration is also affected – eyes may react to irrelevant cues
  - **Hitter is forcing himself to hit**
    - "I gotta/I'm gonna" syndrome
    - Causes tension, as referred to above
  - **Divided Attention** – The kid needs to have all his/her focus on SEEING the ball.
    - Kid can't think of mechanics – he should be on auto-pilot.
  - **Improper use of eyes**
    - Good hitters have consistent eye patterns
      - Where they look
        - Near release point (Broad focus)
        - To Release point (fine focus)
      - When they look
        - Broad Focus – Beginning of windup or into the stretch
        - Fine Focus – hand break
      - Type of focus they have
        - Broad Focus -General area of interest (usually logo on cap or pitcher's head)
        - Fine Focus – specific area of interest (always Release point).
  - **Tendency of eyes to move ahead of objects he/she is tracking**
    - Often caused by not seeing the ball out of the pitcher's hand @ release point
  - **Overswinging**
    - Head moves out vs. tracking (with nose) all the way in.
    - If your head doesn't follow the ball from the pitcher's hand into the hitting zone, you're not seeing the ball as long as you can.
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### Coaching Implementation:

- Teach mechanics and burn into muscle memory in practice. Coach AND player focus on mechanics **only** at practice and before games.
- Establish relaxed and confident mentality at the plate
- Bear down on PROPER EYE PATTERN in batters box
  - When doing Strategy/thinking – batter should step out of box.

### Athlete's Implementation:

- Visualize beforehand
  - Get thinking, analyzing, planning out of the way before you get in the batters box
- Let your eyes take control
  - Relax, clear your mind, and put your body on autopilot
- Establish consistent eye patterns
  - Avoid concentrating too soon
  - Go from broad to fine focus – establish rhythm
- See the release
  - Train yourself to see the ball come right out of the pitcher's hand
- Track the ball
  - Zone 1
    - From release point to ½ way to the plate
      - If having trouble in this zone, you're not seeing release
  - Zone 2
    - From ½ way to 6 feet in front of batter
      - Where movement/spin become obvious
  - Zone 3
    - Last 6 feet
      - Keep tracking – and keep head down for an instant after contact

*Simply put, track the ball the whole way from the release to contact.*