

## Hitting Development

Hitting is hard. Even the very best professional hitters—the Cabreras, Altuves, and Trouts—fail to get hits more than 6 out of 10 times. Teaching hitting is no less difficult because there are so many moving parts to a swing, some of which seem to work against one another. Furthermore, the adjustment of one aspect of a swing, can disrupt another. So, remember that progress is often slow and demands patience from both coach and hitter.

Help players develop a positive mental picture of themselves by praising the good things in their swings. Young players need to build a swing on a foundation of confidence, which is a key tool when trying to calmly execute a swing against a hard object that is being thrown very close to their body. Conversely, a nervous hitter develops all sort of bad habits—from stepping out to raising the front elbow—that are difficult to correct. So, always start coaching with what the kids do great; then, tell them what they can do to be even better; and remind them what they already do great.

Learning proper hitting mechanics depends upon quality repetition. Certain movements and motions of the body have to become automatic, part of muscle memory, when a hitter is concentrating on a pitched ball. Quality repetition that develops muscle memory requires an understanding of proper swing fundamentals and drills that hone them.

There is no shortage of hitting tips if you look on YouTube, but much of it seems contradictory. A survey of hitters in Major League baseball will similarly produce a myriad of styles that our kids will try to copy, which is great and part of the pleasure of baseball. However, there are elements of a swing that are negotiable (in the stance and the stride) and others that are fundamental (launch). So, before breaking down swing mechanics, this guide offers some general principles:

1. Good hitting starts and ends with balance. If kids are falling over the plate or away from it during their swing, then look for things to adjust.
2. Hitting requires rhythm and timing. Hitters will have to match their load and stride to elements of the pitcher's delivery.
3. From the launch position, the hitter generates speed and power from the ground up—from the landing of the stride foot and the pivot of the back foot (“squishing the bug”) to a hard rotation of the hips that pulls torso and shoulders around. The momentum built in this motion is what hitters need to transfer to the head of the bat and get it out hard to the ball.
4. See the ball; hit the ball. Teach hitters where to focus their eyes to pick up the ball from the pitcher's release point and track it all the way to contact. Pitch recognition is crucial and comes from tracking the ball. The effort of the swing sometimes pulls hitters' head up and off the ball. Ask them to try to see the ball hit the bat. Check that their heads are down at contact.
5. Swing the bat. Teach hitters to be on the offence at the plate; a defensive or timid approach makes it difficult to hit. Really, what's needed is “aggressive patience.” Teach hitters to be mistake hitters; that is, every at bat the pitcher is going to make a mistake and throw at least one pitch on the inner two-thirds of the plate and pray the batter doesn't swing—this is the pitch that hitters need to claim as theirs to crush.

## GOAL

Here it is—get kids to hit like Miguel Cabrera. The images below represent the ideal position at the moment of contact. This swing generates speed and power from the legs up through rotating hips and torso. The black line represents an axis of rotation we want to help hitters develop.



The swing is balanced, the head is in the middle of the stride and over back knee, contact is in front of the plate, and the hands and back elbow have stayed close to the body for a short swing path.

The document below aims to help coaches get hitters into this position with balance, speed, power, and efficiency. The discussion is organized in the following sections:

- A. Fundamental Hitting Mechanics
- B. Drills

## Fundamental Hitting Mechanics

### GRIP

Grip the bat with the calloused part of the hand where the fingers join the palm (Figure 1). The middle knuckles of the two hands should more or less align (Figure 2). The grip is firm but relaxed enough to permit some wrist action within the swing.



Figure 1



Figure 2

**PITFALL:** a) Separated hands. Make sure the top and bottom hands are touching.  
b) Strangling the bat. Hitters have to fight the instinct to tense up in the batter's box. A firm but relaxed grip will tighten up at contact, so teach kids loosen or tap their index fingers while they're in their stance waiting for the pitcher to begin a delivery motion.

### **STANCE: Getting into the Batter's Box**

Once the hitter has a comfortable grip on the bat, it can rest on the back shoulder. The arms from elbow to fingers should be relaxed.

A good swing starts and ends with **balance**, which is established from the ground up.

- Start with feet at least shoulders' width apart and perpendicular, or square, to the pitcher. If you draw a line in the dirt across the heels (or toes) of the batter, it should point out to the pitcher.
- Weight should be distributed evenly between the legs (or ever so slightly on the back leg) and on the balls of the feet.
- Knees should have a slight flex and be inside the feet. **\*\*Don't let this action tip hitter too far forward over the plate; a slight bend at waist is fine.**
- Hips and shoulders are level and square to the pitcher.
- Head is level and turned so that **both** eyes are on pitcher.

Don't let kids freeze up in this position waiting for the pitcher to take signs and deliver. Encourage some small movement in shoulders or hips to stay loose and to find rhythm.

- The last action before the load is to lift the bat off the shoulder by moving the hands up and back so that there are somewhere near the back-ear helmet flap. The front elbow should be relaxed, down, and close to the body.



Figure 3. This player has a classic stance. It looks like he is just transitioning into the Load Position, which is initiated with a slight push of the hands back away from the body (but front elbow keeps its bend).

**PITFALLS:**

- a) Straightening the front elbow. Starting with a straight arm will cause the bat to be dragged through zone (slow). If the elbow is straight, bring the hands back closer to the ear. Keep front elbow bent and in to chest.
- b) Pointing the back elbow up. While it is important to keep the hands up, getting the back elbow up too high will cause the bat to wrap around the back of the head, which increases the distance the bat has to travel to get to the ball and makes timing the pitch that much harder. Focus hitters' attention on their hands, not their back elbow.

\*Stances differ from one hitter to the next. The description above is of a classic stance that I would teach to new hitters, but hitters will sometimes need to modify elements to feel more comfortable or to see the ball more clearly in the early stage of the delivery.

***LOADING AND STRIDING: Getting Ready to Hit***

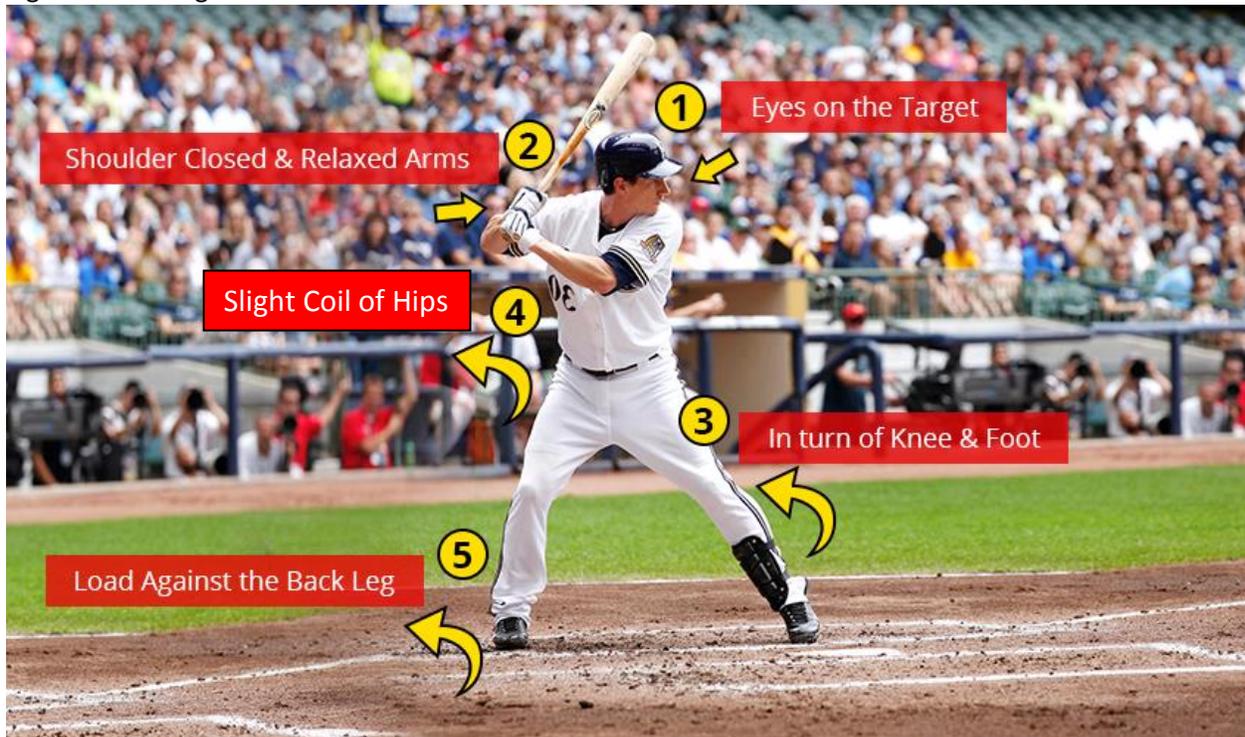
Loading is a subtle movement away from the pitcher that works together with the stride and initiates the swing. This motion begins to add tension to the body like a wound spring that wants uncoil around the axis of the spine. Baseball instructors frequently discuss this motion in terms of "creating separation" of the hands and upper body from the lower body (hips down).

Process:

- a) Shift some weight on to back side, settling inside and against the back leg.
- b) Push the hands back slightly, but not so far that the front elbow straightens.
- c) Take a small stride (mere inches) with the foot low to the ground, while tucking the knee in and back towards the back leg.

KEY: do NOT shift weight onto and out through the front knee or leg. The front foot and leg work as a trigger in the swing and something to hit against when the body's loaded spring begins to uncoil.

Figure 4: Loading



In the depiction of loading in the image above, note some of the action of the load and stride:

- a) Feet are square, and front knee turned in slightly.
- b) Hips and shoulders have turned inward slightly, but remain level.
- c) Bat handle points down and is located just out and away from back shoulder.
- d) Head is turned to pitcher with chin over shoulder.

**PITFALLS:**

- a) Tilting shoulders and hips. In shifting the weight to the back side, hitters sometimes naturally tilt shoulders upwards; however, this posture creates problems such as pulling the head out of position (up) and can lead to an exaggerated upper cut in the swing. So, encourage a slight shift of weight to the back side during the load, but check to make sure the chin is positioned over level shoulders.
- b) Bat wrap. In loading, some hitters wrap the bat around the head so that the barrel is pointed out at the pitcher. Now the bat head will have to travel unnecessarily far to get into the contact zone and will cause a hitter to be late on the swing. This problem is sometimes exacerbated by telling hitters to point their back elbow up; instead, tell hitters to keep their hands high.
- c) Big strides. Some professional hitters—such as Josh Donaldson—lift their stride leg high off the ground. The stride is largely a timing mechanism, so the higher the leg comes, the longer the action that the hitter has to time with the pitch. While each hitter will have to find a stride that creates the right rhythm in his or her swing, it makes most sense to teach a small stride to novice hitters who are acquiring a sense of timing.

- d) Stepping out. A hitter's stride should be towards the pitcher, but nervous hitters will sometimes stride away from the plate. Learning how to get hit by a pitch will help curb this natural instinct and keep players safer (more below).
- e) Landing on an open foot. Some hitters will land on an open foot with toes pointed at the pitcher; in this position, rotating the hips (key) become inefficient. Land stride as squarely as it began in the stance (think of stepping with heel towards pitcher).

## **LAUNCH AND SWING**

The hitter is ready to launch the swing when the front foot lands, the bat is back, and the weight is on the inside of the back leg. Without yet committing to a full swing, certain parts have to be set in motion that will allow power to be transferred up through the body to the bat towards the ball. A lot happens in this moment, and the description below tries to break it down, but you may wish to compare the description with the image sequence in Figure 5 below.

- a) The front foot lands on the ball of the foot. (The heel will plant as the swings starts, an action that firms up the front, creating the hard structure against which the hitter swings).
- b) The back foot drives and pivots on the ball of the foot. Coaches often remind players to "squish the bug" to reinforce this action of the back foot. This action begins the crucial rotation of the hips from which much (most) of a hitter's power derives. Hips should be explosive as the back hip turns hard toward the pitcher.

\*Note: the weight does not transfer onto front foot and uselessly out the foot knee, but up to the hip, and from there into the hands. The head is still over the back knee, as it will be at contact (refer to opening image of Cabrera).

- c) The hands engage as the hips and now shoulders start rotating. To engage the hands, it's useful to focus attention on the butt of the handle. In the load, the handle was pointing down to the ground just in front of the catcher; now, as the swing begins, think of driving the butt of the bat towards the pitch.

\*Note: the hands are still close to the body, and the back elbow gets tucked in to the body.

- d) Now, the hitter either pulls the hands into the chest to abort the swing, or drives the hands forward and puts the bat into the contact zone with the hands leading the way and "staying inside the ball." To get the bat into the zone efficiently, the hands initially have to come forward and down, NOT out and around from the body (casting).
- e) Bat path. To maximize a hitter's chance of contact, it makes most sense that when the bat is in the contact zone that the path of the bat match the path of the ball. So, a slight upward plane, just off level, is probably best. Coaches will sometimes tell kids to "swing down on the ball" to counteract an upper cut or a loop in a swing, but this is probably not the best way to fix the problem. Instead, work on getting the head and shoulders level and getting the hands to the ball more directly (more in drills section).

### **PITFALLS:**

- a) Casting. “Casting” or “dragging” occurs when the bat looks like it is being pulled through the zone behind the body. The action represent a loss of engagement with the rest of the body, which can happen when the hips fail to turn (because of foot work or a soft front knee) or when the hands get too far away from the body. The telltale sign is the appearance of the straight elbow in the early stages of the swing before contact.
- b) Hitching. Dropping the hands near the waist just before the swing. This error also causes hitters to drag the bat.
- c) Pulling off the ball. The head is flying up and off the ball at what should be the moment of contact. Work on keeping the front shoulder in longer. Ask the hitter to try to see the ball make contact with the bat.

### **CONTACT**

Here is the key checkpoint that coaches should attempt to analyze. You can do this by have players freeze their swings just before they make contact with a ball on a tee, or by having them hit against a padded object (e.g., a padded pole or tires). The things to look for are

- a) Head should be down and behind the barrel of the bat.
- b) Relative to the body, the head is over the back knee—that is, the weight should NOT have shifted over the front knee. If it has so shifted, then the hitter has likely dragged the bat through the zone and/or been fooled by an off-speed pitch.
- c) Back foot should have rotated and “squished the bug.”
- d) Arms slightly bent.
- e) Hands are palm-up, palm-down position. If fingers opened, they should be pointing out along the path of the ball.
- f) The bat should strike the ball somewhere out in front of or in line with the stride leg, depending on whether the pitch is over the inside or outside part of the plate. \*\*Encourage aggressive swings: “get the head of the bat out in front of you.”

Figure 5. Contact.



## ***PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER IN AN IMAGE SEQUENCE***

Figure 6. Sequence

Frames 1 to 5 capture the load through the stride; frames 6 to 10 capture the launch, swing, and contact.

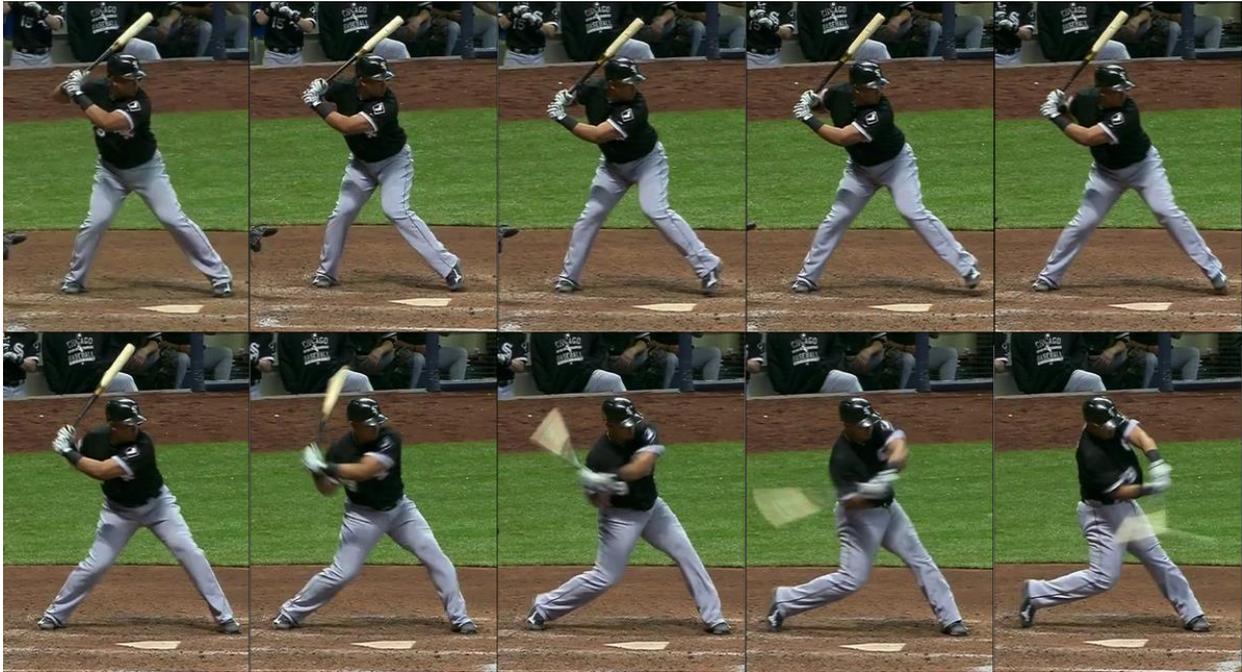


Figure 5

If you want to see it in motion, here is a YouTube clip of Altuve in slow motion: [video](#) (note that he lifts his leg higher than you would normally teach a child)

## ***FINISH***

After contact, the bat head continue through the ball and the top wrist rolls over the bottom hand as the arms extend fully. The hands should finish high over the front shoulder with the bat around behind the head. Things to look for:

- a) Still head. The head remains quiet throughout the swing beyond contact. The eyes should still be in the hitting area until after contact.
- b) Two hands on the bat. Discourage letting the top hand fly off the bat until they pectoral muscles enough to justify such flare. Keeping a firm top hand on the bat help guide through contact.
- c) Back foot pointed at pitcher. The pivot should be complete, with the toes of back foot and back hip pointed at pitcher.
- d) Balance. Hitters should start and finish a swing in a balanced position. If the hitter is falling forward over the plate or backwards away from it in the finish, then some fundamentals need adjusting.

## Hitting Drills

### **DRY DRILLS (NO BATS; NO BALLS)**

The following drills have the advantage of repetition that builds muscle memory, and they can be done in groups or individually. The younger the player the more these drills need to be repeated.

- 1. Stance (legs only).** Line players up (perhaps on a foul line) and tell them to get into their stance with their hands on their hips. Walk around players and check that they are balanced, with their weight distributed properly on the insides of the legs and on the balls of the feet. Once you feel the hitters have solid foundations, tell the players, "Relax." Then, after a brief pause, give a "stance" command and have players repeat the position. **Repeat 5 times.**
- 2. Stride.** From the stance position with hands on hips, players take their stride on the coach's command, "Stride." Strides vary in height and distance from player to player, but new players should be encouraged to keep it small and simple. Very little weight should transfer to the stride leg. The majority of the hitter's weight remains in the back hip inside the back foot. Check that the stride foot has remained closed as it began, and that the head and shoulders are level. Have players hold the completed stride for the coach to inspect. **Repeat 5 times**
- 3. Pivot ("Bug Squish").** For this this drill, players start in the post-stride position with their hands on their hips. On coach's verbal command, "Pivot" or "Squish," players push weight against their lead leg while pivoting on the ball of their back foot (back foot squishes). In essence, you want players to drive their back hip forward and open their belly button to the pitcher. The back foot's toe should be facing the pitcher while head and shoulders remain behind the lead knee (balanced). Players hold pivot position for coach's critique. **Repeat 5 times or until players are performing pivot correctly.**
- 4. Stride and Pivot.** Players begin in their stance position with their hands on their hips. Now combine the two above drills. On coach's verbal command, "Stride," players stride. Once the stride foot is down, coach yells, "Pivot" (or "Squish") and players fire their hips forward and open while pivoting the back foot correctly. The pivot should be explosive with players maintaining balance on the balls of the feet, as coach checks for proper positions. Remember that it is just the back foot the does the pivoting; the front will be pulled slightly by the hip rotation, but it should remain relatively closed. **Repeat 5 times or until players are performing stride and pivot correctly.**
- 5. Load and Stride.** Once the players understand how the legs and feet work, it is time to bring in the load. Starting in their batting stance, on coach's verbal command, "Load and stride," players make their slight movement back, shifting some weight onto the back side and getting the hands into a strong position to strike the ball as they stride straight to a balanced position. Players hold stride position for coach's critique. **Repeat 5 times or until players are performing the load and stride correctly.**

6. **Forward and Down to Level.** Start players in their batting stance (still no bat). On coach's verbal command, "Swing," players go through their load, stride, swing and pivot. Coach watches for correct swing path of hands moving forward and down, then finishing all the way around near their back shoulder—finish high. Encourage players to keep two hands on the bat to completion of the swing. **Repeat 5 times or until players are performing the swing path correctly and hands are completing their finish.**
  
7. **Shoulder to shoulder.** Start players in their batting stance looking out at the pitcher; make sure the chin is tucked in to the front shoulder. Focus on a proper head position with two eyes on the pitcher with head and eyes level. Player takes a full swing at half speed, keeping the head still and focused on the contact area where the pitch has come as the shoulders rotate around the head until the back shoulder is near the chin. This drill focuses on keeping your head in position when hitting. **Too often players' heads move around their body with their swings, taking their eyes off the ball.**
  
8. **Balance.** Finish up the dry drills with the coach simulating a pitcher throwing an imaginary pitch to the hitters. With the coach out in front, all hitters start in their stance, aligning as if the coach is the pitcher. The coach goes through a windup and simulates the throw. Players begin their load and stride as the pitcher cocks the arm back. Once the coach's arm extends forward to release the imaginary ball, each hitter's stride foot is down and the hitter takes a full swing to completion at game speed. Once the swing is completed, the player is to hold their finish position for 5 seconds. You can also go around and push them lightly to see if they can hold their balance against you. If players are not balanced, that means they aren't using their feet correctly and need to stay on the balls of their feet. Players should be able to hold and maintain their balance after they complete their swing in this drill. **Repeat until players can maintain their balance for 5 seconds.**

**Additional:**

**Fence Swings**

With a bat, stand facing a fence exactly the distance of one bat length. To determine the right distance, hold the bat level between you and the fence with the butt of the bat against your belt buckle and move forward until the barrel touches the fence. Back off just an inch or two. Now, assume a batting stance, load, stride, pivot, and swing. If your bat is striking the fence, your swing is too long (you are casting the bat) and you need to keep your hands closer (keep the back elbow in closer to body). This is a great drill for keeping swings short and tight.

**Alignment**

To keep players striding straight towards the pitcher and not bailing or stepping out (common problem), you can place bats in front and behind the feet (or draw lines in the dirt) as you work on the load and stride.

## TEE WORK

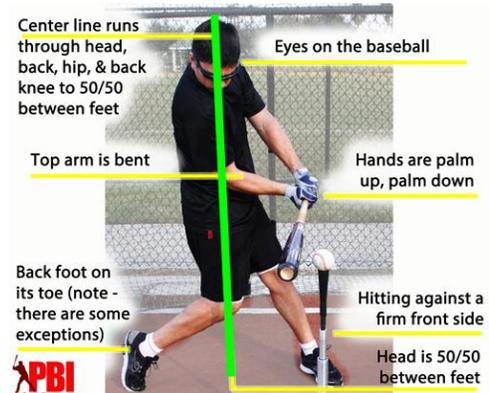
From novice to advanced hitters, the batting tee is best place to work on swing mechanics and to develop a consistently good swing. Against a pitched ball, hitters are so focused on timing that they become almost “uncoachable.” On a tee, where the ball is not moving and timing is taken out of the equation, coaches and players can focus on one fundamental at a time.

A natural progression at practice is to start with the dry drills described above, followed by tee work, soft toss, and finally live batting practice. What follows below are basic batting tee drills.

**Basic Tee Position. Position the hitter in his stance.** The tee’s stem height should be between the hitter’s mid-thigh and waist. The hitter is positioned behind the tee where the lead foot is just behind the stem of the tee. The ball is placed on the stem out in front of the body. To determine how close a player should stand to the tee, simulate a swing stopping at contact point. Remember, the hands are not fully extended at contact, and the ball should be struck on the sweet spot of the barrel. This will determine the correct distance from the hitting tee.

Position the tee accordingly. **After each swing allow time for players to get their feet and stance set in the correct position.**

\*\*The tee can be set up in front of a screen or a fence; baseball or plastic practice balls can be used. If tees are unavailable, construction cones are a workable substitute.



## Drills

1. **Line Drive Drill:** Position the batter to the tee so the ball simulates a pitch down the middle. Have the player hit balls directly forward into the net at the same height as the tee stem. Repeat swings to see how many line drives he can hit in a row. This drill will develop a swing for a line drive right back up the middle.

### Notes and Variations:

- a) Focus is on smooth mechanics, not power (which will come with good mechanics). So, have players swing at 50%-75% speed most of the time.
- b) Freeze! Get hitters to stop their swings just before contact and check their positioning and balance (see image above).
- c) Don't look! Novice players sometime lift their heads off the ball because they want to see where the ball is going to go. Have hitters keep their eyes locked on the tee even after they hit the ball. The idea is to train hitters to keep their heads down and still through their swings.
- d) Get players to hit the ball out in front of their stride foot—you want to instill the aggressive instinct to get the hands out early. **\*\*KEY\*\***
- e) As players get better at hitting off the tee, you can change the location of it to represent pitches in different parts of the strikes zone. Remember the load and stride are the same every time because this action takes place before there can be any pitch recognition.

2. **Line Drive Drill with Fence Swing:** This exercise combines two drills. Assume the position described above in the “Fence Swings” drill, but this time place a tee between the hitter and the fence (a straight fence along an outfield). Now, have the player hit try to hit the ball so that it tracks along the fence in line drive.
  - a. Go to the following Ultimate Baseball YouTube link for a demonstration of this drill:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IC-Obo5miD8>
3. **Two Tees:** Set up two tees at the same height, one in front of the other. The forward tee will carry the ball to be hit; the other is empty. The goal is to make contact with the ball without hitting the dummy tee. The drill helps correct a specific set of problems in the early stages of the swing (collapsing back side, dropping the barrel, and/or dragging the bat) by getting the hands to move forward and down as the swing starts and moves into the contact zone.

Note:

- a) Some instructors place the rear/dummy tee higher than the front. I would argue this is a mistake: you don’t want kids chopping down on the ball any more than you want them swinging up on it.

These two guys seem to have the right idea: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsJCD6NWLMA> and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBjk\\_6iQTZ8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBjk_6iQTZ8)

- b) If you have a player who is chopping down on the ball, then stay away from this drill because it will make things worse. The following YouTube link explains why a higher rear tee drill is always bad for players: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2OjE6cPS\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V2OjE6cPS_Y)

4. **Tee + Infield:** The drill could combine tee work and fielding. In teams of two or four, have one team set up with two tees along the first-base foul line and have the other team take up defensive positions between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> base. The hitters are trying to score points by hitting balls through the infield. Line drives are the fastest way through, but balls hit over the fielders’ heads do not count. Ground balls have to be fielded cleanly or the hitters get a point.

**\*\*There are ways to vary the game:**

- a) Have two games going from both foul lines (perhaps only with older kids who won’t get distracted by the crossing balls in the infield).
- b) Have just one tee going at home plate with a full infield. Five-to-ten swings, with the last swing live— a baserunner that the fielders try to get out.

## ***SOFT TOSS***

Soft toss allows players to work on swing mechanics but also brings in timing and tracking a moving baseball. It has most of the elements of live batting practice but the conditions make it easier for players to repeat consistent swings. Similar to the batting tee, soft toss is a good place for a coach to analyze a player's swing. Players will have an easier time making adjustments in their swing in a soft-toss drill than they will during live batting practice. This is a great drill to use daily and should serve as a substitute when live batting practice is not available. Not much space is needed to set up the drill and hitters will be able to get many repetitions in a short period of time. When a hitting net is not available, use wiffle balls to hit into a fence or into the open field. Be careful when working with young players or any player who does not control the bat effectively. In such cases, you should toss from behind a screen.

Two concepts that should be explained to the hitter during soft toss are "loading" and "tracking the ball to contact." As stated below in "setting up soft toss," the coach should show the player the ball, then start the toss with a deliberate arm movement back and then forward to the release of the ball. During this action, a player should focus on tracking the ball and timing the arm movement as they load and swing. Loading, which initiates a hitter's stride, is done before the ball is released. This is identical to how players should time a pitcher in batting practice and in a game. Soft toss is an excellent drill to work on load and stride development. Soft toss can also be used to work on any fundamental position a player needs to improve upon. Remember to work on only one area for improvement at a time.

### ***Setting up soft toss***

1. The player positions himself 7 to 8 feet from the hitting net and at a 45 -degree angle from the coach tossing ball.
2. The coach takes a knee or sits on a bucket and tosses the ball one-handed at the player's belt buckle for a pitch down the middle. The coach tosses the ball at the player's front hip for an inside pitch and the back leg for an outside pitch. **(Caution: Do not work on the outside pitch with a hard ball unless the tosser is behind a net because the ball could be hit near him.)**
3. **The toss should be made as follows:** Show the hitter the ball; then in a deliberate manner, start the arm back and then forward to the release. The ball should be tossed smoothly on a straight plane, where the hitter has time to react. This is a standard toss.
4. **Fake toss.** Every five or so tosses, fake a toss to check that the hitter is not lunging for pitches. The load and stride should be complete, but the weight should be braced against the front leg, but not shifted onto to it. Check that the majority of the weight is still back, that that head is just inside the back knee, and that the hitter is balanced.

**Notes:** Avoid lobbed tosses with large arc—keep the toss as flat. For novice hitters, you can help them with timing with commands that match your deliberate arm action: "Ready" and "Load." However, telling a player to "Swing" generally doesn't work; help them instead get to the stride and launch position where the swing is initiated.

## **SHORT TOSS**

This drill can only be done with a screen that the coach stands behind to throw. It is very similar to Soft Toss, except the toss comes from directly in front of the hitter, just as a live pitch does. The protective screen is moved in about two-thirds of the way to the plate. The coach can continue to toss underhand on a line the same as in Soft Toss, or he or she can use an overhand toss for older players. More room is needed to run this drill because the balls are hit into a field and not into a net or fence. Both hard balls and wiffle balls can be used.

This drill is very productive because the tosses are coming in at the same angle as a real pitch and the pitcher can control and locate his pitches easier. The pitcher will be able to throw more pitches before fatigue sets in, and the hitters will get more quality repetitions.

### **Notes:**

1. Do **NOT** lob pitches. Doing so, creates horrible hitting habits: children will naturally try to match the plane of the bat to the plane of the ball, so hitting balls on a high arc will create upper cuts and loops in the swing. Furthermore, children who have managed to develop good loads and strides will now have to find a way to slow their swings down to accommodate the slower ball, which will sometimes create long casting-type swing. The point here is to simulate live pitching, so keep tosses flat and firm.
2. Work balls on inner half of the plate to force kids to keep hands close to the body and to develop a short bath to the contact zone.
3. Learning to get hit by a pitch. With soft practice or wiffle balls, teach young players to turn away from a pitch that is going to hit them by turning their backs on the pitcher: load, stride, turn away. The point is to expose only the back to the ball. They should also try to pull their elbows in so that they are protected as well. In fact, the back of the elbow is a particularly painful spot to get hit because there is no muscle or fat covering the bone; some players may feel more confident with an elbow guard. In any case, this drill is good for helping kids get over their fear of being hit because it gives them confidence in their ability to protect themselves.

## **LIVE PITCHING**

**BATTING PRACTICE FROM COACH.** Regardless of skill level and mechanics, every player needs to participate in batting practice thrown by the coach. This is when players need to focus on seeing the ball, timing the pitch, learning the strike zone, and being aggressive in the strike zone. It is much more difficult and confusing for the player to work on both mechanics and timing issues during live hitting. Do not expect to teach too much about mechanics at this time.

Live batting practice allows the players to track the ball and time the pitch. No matter how good a players' mechanics are, if they don't train their eyes to watch the baseball and learn the strike zone, they will not make consistent contact.

### **Notes:**

1. Learning the strike zone. Have players swing only at balls in the strike zone so that they get a sense of pitch recognition. Don't ask them swing at everything. However, if you have a player who seems frozen and cannot swing at all, then by all means get them to swing at every pitch no matter where it is.
2. Do NOT lob the pitches (see note above in "Short Toss" section).
3. "Just one more." Everybody loves hitting, but it is hard to get through a whole live hitting practice efficiently, so give everyone a set number of pitches and move onto the next hitter, who should be on deck and ready to get into the batter's box. Don't give into please of "just one more hit."

### General Principles of Running Hitting Practice

1. Keep everyone—players and coaches—safe. Of course, safety means helmets and teaching kids not to throw bats or even swing them when others are nearby. It also means using screens and/or practice balls, and pitching/tossing from a safe position.
2. Keep players active. Set up stations that can accommodate three to four players so that while some kids are working on the tee, others are engaged in another managed activity (soft toss, fence swings, or fielding drills). A good practice depends on a number of coaches and volunteer parents.

## **THE BASICS**

1. Balance. If a player is off balance through the swing, the problem could be something as simple as a bat that is too heavy—kids often like to swing the "big" bats. If only big bats are available, have the player choke up on the handle.
2. Work from the ground up. Get their feed (stride and pivot) working properly first.
3. Short path to the ball. This is a tough one because younger players often drop the hands and bat head for want of strength. Reinforce high hands and elbows in closer to the body—they are stronger there.
4. Aggressive patience. Teach players to look for their pitch (inner two thirds of plate) and to go after the pitch aggressively. They should be thinking of getting the barrel out to the ball in front of the plate.