

NSWJBL endorses the philosophy contained in:

**General Hitting Philosophy
by American Baseball Coaches Association**

**For your information and knowledge read the following book excerpt
"Baseball Skills & Drills" but keep in mind that when they talk about
ground balls they mean hard hit ground balls.**

John Yard

Baseball Skills & Drills

A solid hitting philosophy includes five basic elements:

- (1). The longer the hitter can wait, the better hitter he will be.
- (2). Line drives and ground balls win games.
- (3). The hitter should have a plan at the plate.
- (4). The hitter should understand the three Ps - patience, persistence, and poise.
- (5). Drills and fundamentals are important.

"The Longer the Hitter Can Wait, the Better Hitter He Will Be."

This statement refers to the hitter's ability to identify the pitch and location before committing to a forward movement of his swing. Research indicates it takes an 80-mile-per-hour pitch approximately four-tenths of a second to travel to home plate. Research also tells us that the hitter requires two-tenths of a second to read the pitch properly. Thus the hitter has two-tenths of a second to deliver the blow to the ball with the bat. Herein lies the centerpiece, the core, the pure essence, of hitting. Most of the problems in hitting a baseball are caused by starting the swing too early, before getting a good read on the ball. Hitters who start too early are fooled on curveballs, change-ups, and pitch location. Their timing is off on the swing.

If we agree that the early start is the initial culprit of most problems in hitting, then why don't hitters wait longer to initiate the forward movement of the swing? There are probably hundreds of reasons why this occurs. Here are a few worth mentioning. (It may be worth noting that this inquiry approach may be a good teaching method: here is the objective, here is the problem. Before correcting a problem, let's find out why we have the problem. This method gives us a better chance to solve the puzzle.)

The hitter has flaws in his swing and requires more than two-tenths of a second to get the bat to the ball.

The hitter is not strong enough or quick enough to get the bat to the ball in the allotted time for success. Perhaps the bat is too heavy.

The hitter believes the age-old misconception that has tempted every hitter: if I take a long, hard, powerful swing at the ball, it will go farther, perhaps even over the fence. Every hitter would like to hit home runs. In an attempt to do so, he creates a long swing that requires an early start.

The hitter brings anxiety to the plate, which creates poor focus. He is not playing in the now, in the moment. He brings garbage to the plate. His concentration is poor, and he doesn't properly pick up the ball as the pitcher releases it. He starts early.

The hitter lacks confidence in his ability to hit. He simply does not trust his stuff. He starts early.

The hitter tries to guess every pitch rather than read the pitch. This is a dangerous trap because the hitter will eventually reach a level of play in which the pitcher's arsenal is so varied that he will be unable to guess correctly. Because most hitters guess fastballs or pitches in, they start early.

The hitter refuses to get beat on the inside fastball; thus his approach to the swing starts early so that he can get the bat head out in front to meet the inside pitch. Getting beat inside with the bat means a possible broken bat, a weak ground ball, or what is referred to as "bees," - a sting of the hands. Although the results are not as damaging with the aluminum bat, the desire to win the battle inside

continues. This has always been the contest, and it always will be. For most hitters, proper contact on the inside pitch will produce a harder hit ball, which increases the chance for a home run. The striving for a home run creeps back in! Most hitters do not have opposite-side power; thus they must sit on the inside pitch. The origin of this problem is twofold: a hitter has a major goal of hitting home runs, and his ego, his manliness, will take precedence over using proper hitting style. Simply put, making outs or poor contact on pitches away from him does not bother him nearly as much as getting jammed and beat on an inside pitch. To be a good hitter, this thinking must be addressed and adjusted because most outs and most pitches occur on the outer half of the plate. Players must move their competitive nature to the next level and learn to play smart baseball.

Other reasons could be the cause for the early start, but those just listed are the most common. Solid observation of the good hitters, the major-league hitters, shows many more late swings or foul balls to the opposite side than early swings or foul balls to the pull side. At lower levels of expertise, we observe the opposite result.

If we are to accept the philosophy that the longer the hitter can wait, the better the hitter he will be, then proper adjustments - physically, emotionally, and mentally - must occur. The hitter must develop a short, compact stroke. He must keep his power base intact throughout the swing. This means that the ankles and knees do not travel beyond his feet as he shifts back and transfers forward. He must adhere to the rule of transferring his weight from back to middle, not from back to front.

"LINE DRIVES AND GROUND BALLS WIN GAMES."

Year-in and year-out, a larger percentage of games will be won by the team with the highest on-base average rather than the team with the highest slugging percentage. Another truism is that a swing that produces line drives and ground balls takes less time than one that hits fly balls. This correlates with our first premise: the hitter must find a swing that does not require an early start.

Many studies have been conducted concerning productivity of ground balls, fly balls, and line drives. Most studies at the NCAA Division I level conclude:

For every 10 ground balls hit, 3 will fall in for base hits. On-base average results are 42 percent.

For every 10 line drives hit, 8 will fall in for base hits. On-base average results are 84 percent.

For every 10 fly balls hit (including all home runs), 2 will fall in for base hits. On-base average results are 29 percent.

Keep in mind that these statistics are for top amateur baseball players playing against highly skilled defenses on playing surfaces that are usually better than other amateur fields. We could certainly argue that batting averages and on-base averages would increase with less-skilled defenses or poorly manicured fields. More base hits would occur on fly balls, but the increase for ground balls and line drives would be even greater. It is simply easier to catch a fly ball than it is to stop a ground ball, throw it accurately to a base, and have a teammate catch it. Likewise, line drives are harder to catch than fly balls; defenses can run down fly balls more easily than they can line drives.

In summary, if you believe on-base average wins more games, then line drives and ground balls are the route to take.

"HAVE A PLAN AT THE PLATE."

As a reference point to ensure understanding, hitters should normally (a) hit the inside pitch to the pull side, (b) hit the outside pitch to the opposite side, and (c) hit the pitch down the middle to the middle of the field. This is an absolute in hitting. Successful hitters rarely deviate from this absolute, although we can find some exceptions among outstanding hitters.

Unless a hitter is in a guess count (3-1, 2-0), his initial thought is to work from a plan that the next pitch will be in the middle of the plate and high in the strike zone. His mental plan will be to hit a line drive up the middle. Although plans do not always work out, the hitter using this plan can more easily make adjustments as the pitch is thrown. If we say that the middle of the plate is five inches wide, then we

must adjust to around six inches for the outer half of the plate and six inches for the inner half. In reality, most hitters, either consciously or unconsciously, work from the premise that the pitch will be more toward the inside. This, of course, goes back to our earlier comment concerning the battle of not getting beat inside. Obviously, in expecting the pitch inside, the hitter must make greater adjustments to the outside pitch in the strike zone, adjustments that are often unsuccessful. In like manner, the hitter will hit fewer pop-ups or foul balls if he has a basic starting plan on a ball up in the zone. It is much easier to adjust down than adjust up, and the results are normally more productive.

Successful hitting requires aggressiveness. The pitcher starts the action; he throws the first blow. The hitter must be prepared to respond aggressively. Aggressiveness will overcome many flaws in a swing.

As stated earlier, the hitter has a short amount of time to decide to swing. A good, aggressive hitter has already made half of that decision when he approaches the plate. Rather than making two decisions, either to swing or not to swing, the aggressive hitter makes only one decision - not to swing. He goes to the plate already planning to swing.

Good hitters primarily use the middle of the field. That is, the balls they hit will travel between the shortstop and second baseman or to the power alleys in the outfield. Again, we can note exceptions, but we find that the hitters with high batting averages do not consistently pull or consistently push. Pitchers have a much easier time beating the pull hitter or push hitter. The tough ones are those who consistently use the middle of the field.

Few hitters, even good hitters, can control both sides of the plate. It simply is too wide an area. Thus they must choose. Most will pick the inside area to just past the midway point of the plate. Unless the hitter is exceptional, this is a poor choice. When we chart and study pitchers, particularly in amateur baseball, we notice that over 70 percent of the pitches in the strike zone are from just inside the midway point of the plate to the outside corner. Many more outs are made on the outside half of the plate. A wise choice when learning to control the width of the plate is to choose an area a little inside the midway point of the plate and toward the outside corner.

The hitter trying to increase the area of the plate that he can control should work from the area he can control toward his poorly controlled area. If he can control the outside half of the plate and wants to enlarge his skill at controlling more of the plate, he does not go to the inside corner. He works on increasing his control from the middle of the plate slightly toward the inner half.

The good hitter will tell you that RBI hits are usually in the middle of the field or to the opposite side. With a runner in scoring position, most pitchers will work the outer half of the plate with fastballs, curveballs, or sliders because that is where they can get the outs. Obviously, we are talking percentage baseball here, but this trend has been around since the game began.

As long as we are mentioning percentage baseball, we must also mention that with few exceptions, the fastball is an easier pitch to hit than the breaking ball. The hitter is wise to make an effort to hit a fastball. Ralph Garr, a former major leaguer who has held many of the Atlanta Braves' offensive records, once made a statement that relates to this premise concerning the fastball: "The best way to hit the curveball is not to miss the fastball!" He made every effort to hit the fastball because he knew he could hit it better than he could the curveball. Early in the count, it is wise to give away both corners of the plate (two to three inches on both sides) and look for a fastball to hit to the middle of the field. Many good hitters make a living doing just that. The hitter can't win every at bat, but he can put the percentages in his favor.

We've discussed some of the thinking that players might use on the walk from the on-deck circle to the batter's box. Having a plan and putting it in a mental picture, visualizing the plan, is critical. But the hitter has no time to think and hit once the ball is released. He must be relaxed and focused enough to let reflexes take over in the mental picture that he has established. Thinking and having a high-percentage plan is critical, and the hitter must rehearse it in mental pictures. He visualizes his plan, his swing, and where the ball will go. If the player wants success, he must first visualize it.