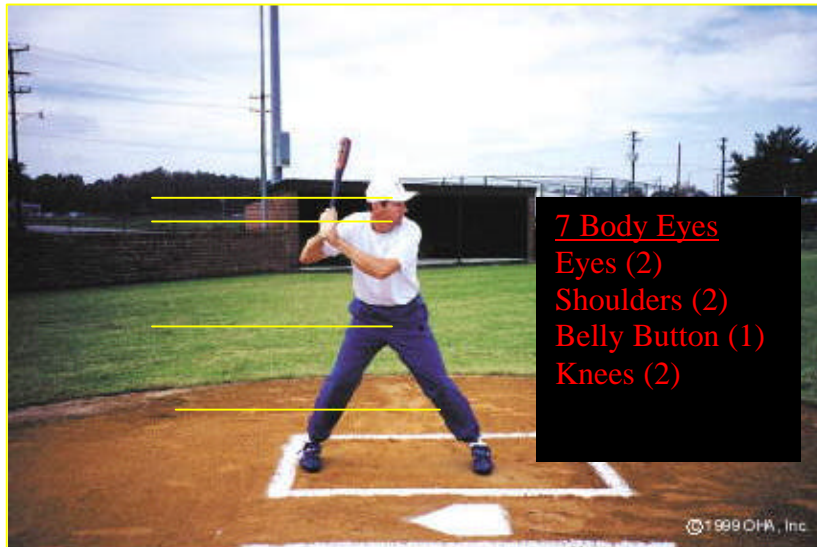


Common Hitting Faults

In teaching hitting mechanics to youth, coaches will find that there are several hitting faults that are very common in youth baseball. Good coaches can quickly recognize a specific fault and provide feedback to the hitter so that he may correct his mechanical problem(s).

I. Stance Problems

Good hitters have stances that provide them balance and plate coverage. It is important that coaches talk about the athletic stance and how it relates to good hitting mechanics. Another method that can be used to reinforce the concept of balance in one's hitters is to speak in terms of "body eyes" There are seven body eyes on a hitter. To have balance as the picture demonstrates, a hitter must have his seven body eyes on one plane.



If any one of a hitter's seven body eyes are not on a parallel plain, the hitter cannot possible be in a good balanced stance. Likewise, for a hitter to have good vision, coaches can also use the body eye concept in instructing young hitters in proper stance position. Using the body eye concept, when a hitter is facing a pitcher, to have good vision and balance in order to hit the approaching pitch, the hitter must have five body eyes facing the pitcher. As the following picture points out, these five body eyes are (both eyes, front shoulder, front hip, and front knee).

A good stance allows the hitter to see the oncoming pitch with both eyes. Notice that the hitter above has both eyes looking at the pitcher. His head is level with his chin in alignment with his front shoulder. Front hip and front knee are also squared off to the pitcher.



Feet are not parallel

The best stance is what is referred to as the “parallel stance” The parallel stance provides the hitter with good plate coverage, vision with both eyes, and balance. Compared to the open or closed stances used by older hitters, a parallel stance helps reinforce the concept of striding always “back” towards the pitcher.



II. Weight shift problems.

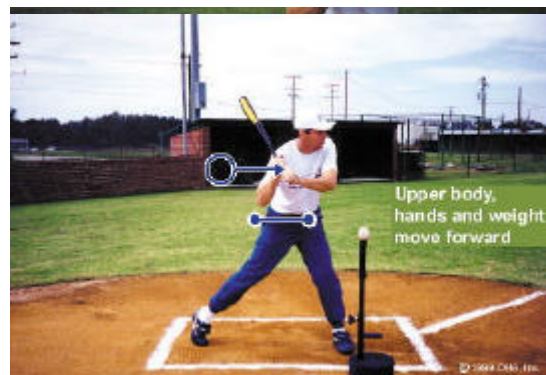
1. Barring the arms as a weight shift or to initiate the swing.



A common problem for hitters who may not be very strong is the action of straightening the front arm to generate sufficient power to swing the bat. This action not only will produce a slower swing since the hitter will be going from extension to extension, but it creates a longer swing due to the wrapping action of the bat around the head. Flexion in the front arm **must** be present during the pre-pitch and load part of the swing. Extension will be demonstrated at the contact segment of the swing where bat meets ball. Good swings go from flexion to extension of the arms!

2. Stepping and hitting.

Most young hitters are instructed by well-meaning adults to simply step “into” the pitch. Stepping into the pitch creates too much head movement and hip drift. In addition, when pitchers begin changing speeds and throwing breaking balls, hitters who step and hit have difficulty with their timing. **Remember:** Good hitting mechanics dictate that there must be a weight shift. A hitter must go back, before he goes forward. Going back allows the hitter to begin storing kinetic energy. Another way of visualizing the weight shift is to think of stretching a rubber band.



2. Stepping and hitting cont.

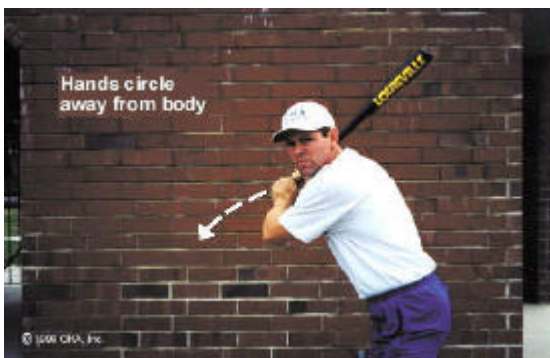


The correct action for a hitter is to **“step to hit”**. Notice the hitter above. Starting from his pre-pitch position (pic. 1), he gets his front foot down in sync with the front foot of the pitcher (pic. 2) . As he initiates this action, his weight will go back and his front foot goes forward (**Stretch the rubber band**). Approximately 60% of his weight will be on his back foot. Notice also how he has cocked his bat. Picture 2 is a classic “load” position. From this position, the hitter is ready to swing if the pitch is good.

III. Swing Problems

Next to weight shift problems, poor swing fundamentals can serve as a major deterrent to productive hitting performance. A good swing is short, compact and in a direct downward plane to the baseball. Key points in good swings are: 1) the barrel stays above the hands; 2) the knob of the bat to the inside of the baseball (inside-out-swing); 3) the hitter uses both his upper and his lower $\frac{1}{2}$ during the swing in a fluid and smooth action; and 4) a hitter’s mechanics should increase his ability see and track the approaching pitch.

Many young hitters “cast” their hands as they initiate their swings. Their hands as the pictures below demonstrate, go away from their body. Casting creates a longer and more rotational swing. Hitters who cast will also tend to jam themselves since the sweet spot of the bat will not stay in the contact zone. They literally sweep the bat through the hitting zone. This approach creates an **“outside-in swing.”**

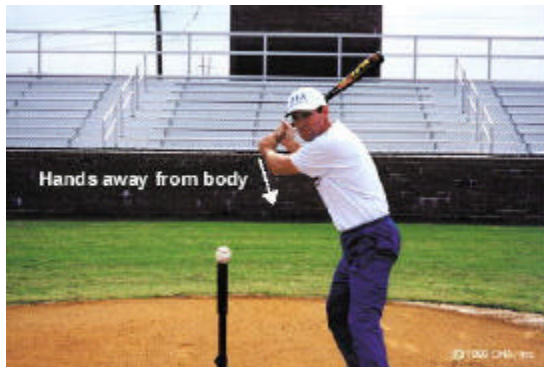


Casting
(Incorrect)



The disadvantages of an outside in swing are as follows:

- bat does not stay in the contact zone very long;
- hitter will often get jammed on pitches on the inner 1/2 of the plate;
- hitter becomes strictly a pull hitter;
- swing speed will be slower;
- minimizes the chance of making consistent contact.

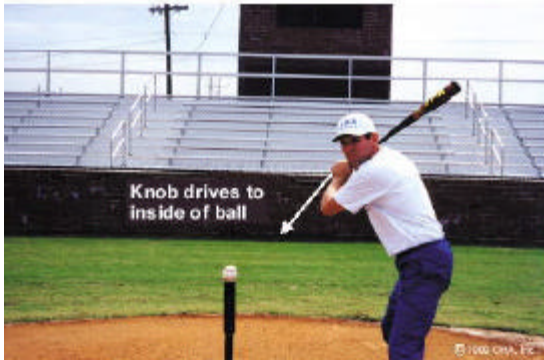


Inside-out swing

Coaches should make every effort to assist their young players in developing what is referred to as the “inside-out” swing. In an inside-out swing, the hitter will strive to take the knob of the bat to the inside of the baseball. Notice in the below pictures between an inside of the ball approach vs. an outside the ball approach.



The Inside-Out Swing

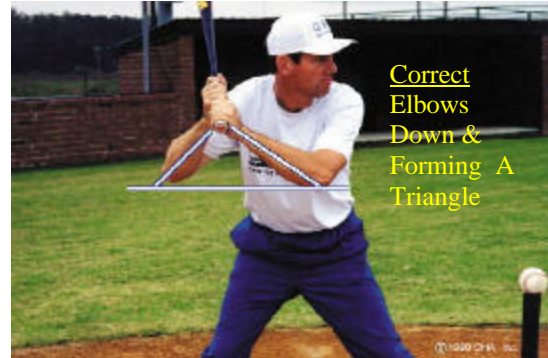


Advantages of the Inside-Out Swing

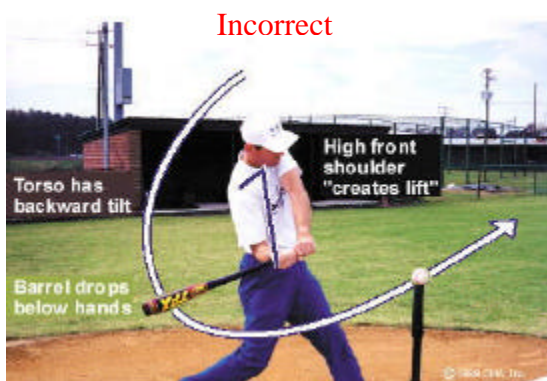
- increase in bat and hand speed;
- reduces early commitment of barrel until hands are extended;
- allows sweet part of the bat to stay in the contact zone longer;
- increases back spin on baseball can produce 25 – 30 % more power;
- maximizes the ability of the hitter to hit a breaking ball;
- increases contact ability/reduces strikeouts;
- increases to drive balls to the opposite field.

Back Elbow Up

Many young hitters are given this advice by adults/coaches who believe that by raising the back elbow a hitter will not drop the barrel, avoiding an uppercut. The opposite is true. With the back elbow up, as the hitter begins his swing, the back elbow will drop near the back hip. By advising a hitter to lift the back elbow, it drops further, and more forcefully down. The higher the back elbow starts, the more forcefully it drops, resulting in the front shoulder lifting higher. Just what parents and coaches were attempting to avoid. Hitters should keep the elbows down and relaxed at approximately the same height from the ground. By assuming this position, a hitter will maximize his ability in keeping the front shoulder down while driving the knob of bat down and to the inside of the approaching baseball. The end result is the barrel stays above the hands eliminating an uppercut.



The Upper Cut/Loop Swing



- Barrel drops back towards catcher
- Abnormal tilt of shoulders
- Barrel underneath hands
- Bat does not stay in hitting zone long
- Increases chance of missing or hitting the bottom of the baseball (flyballs)
- Increases strike outs minimizes contact

The swing path pictured above minimizes the opportunity for hitters to make good consistent contact. Unfortunately, many young hitters display such swings. Coaches should strive to reinforce proper swing mechanics as previously described. **90%** of all swings & misses will be as a result of the hitter being **underneath** the baseball. Hitters must strive to hit the top of the baseball (line drives, ground balls).

How can a coach assist a young man who exhibits this type of swing? Coaches should encourage hitters to make good use of hitting tees. Use a tee will allow hitters to focus on keeping the barrel of the bat above their hands and concentrate on a downward swing approach to the baseball. This is a serious flaw and one that will take many repetitions to correct under the watchful eye of a coach or parent.

Pre-Mature Release of Top Hand

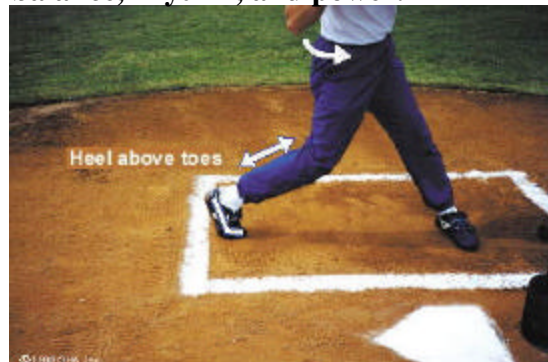
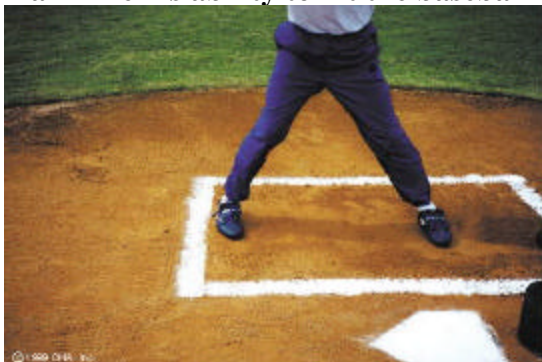
Hitting coaches often preach to hitters to hit through the baseball. Hitting through the baseball calls for an inside-out swing approach and good extension through the contact zone. Early release of the top hand reduces the amount of force that a hitter can generate into the baseball. Swinging one handed as many young hitters often do will reduce their ability to hit the ball hard. The top hand release used by many older college and professional hitters is done well past the contact point, not before.



Poor Hip Rotation

Good hitting mechanics call for a hitter to take a linear path to the baseball. However there are rotational components that must be present in a fundamentally correct swing. The most important rotational component in the swing is the pivot action of the back foot. The back foot must pivot so that the hitter can efficiently utilize the strength of his legs to assist in the swing process.

Many young hitters do not allow their lower body to assist them during the swing. By not pivoting, they exhibit a swing that will be slower and too dependent upon the upper body for power generation. During the swing, coaches should pay attention and stress the action of the back foot. The lower half of the body must be in coordination with the upper body during the swing process in order for the hitter to maximize his ability to hit the baseball with good balance, rhythm, and power.



Head Pulls Off The Ball During The Swing

It is important for hitters to keep their head on the pitch as long as possible. The saying that “you hit what you see” more or less sums up this point. Coaches should stress that hitters keep their head/eyes focused on the ball all the way to the contact point.

