

PEAK ATHLETIC CONSULTING, LLC.

Baseball:

Developing a Routine for Hitting.

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In the sporting world there are many different types of challenges which must be overcome in order to see success during competition. Some of the most difficult to process and deal with are the mental challenges involved in hitting a baseball under game conditions. This mental challenge is so difficult in fact, that the sporting world (baseball) recognizes that a 70% failure rate is not only acceptable, but outstanding. In simplest terms, hitting a baseball is a very difficult thing to do and the sooner you recognize this and accept it the faster you will excel in the game. Reducing it to its simplest form, although not simple at all, putting the bat on the ball is the goal.

The problem with this simple statement is that it does not take into effect all of the uncontrollable variables with which the hitter must navigate in order to hit .300 consistently. Outside influences often determine the success or failure of the hitter to perform and greatly affect the mental development and approach of each individual player. Determining how they will deal with all the scenarios which arise in a baseball game then requires each individual to plan their approach to hitting in a way that is specific to them and their comfort level.

Before a plan can be developed there are some specific steps which a hitter must think through in order to put themselves in the best possible position to successfully hit the baseball under stressful conditions. Getting past the general observable mechanics of the swing and developing a mental approach to the game takes practice just like the physical act of swinging a bat. Each athlete will have their own style to develop and perfect which gets them into the right mental mindset to be successful on the field. Before we get into the specifics of developing a solid mental approach though, you as the hitter must understand that a good mental approach will make you successful only if you have a good physical approach as well. To be a successful athlete you must be physically and mentally tuned in to improving your abilities. A strong mind and a weak body will be no more successful than a player who has a strong body without a mental approach to the game. Both take work!

What Kind of Hitter Are You?

1. Where in the strike zone do you hit the ball the best?
2. Describe yourself as a hitter?
 - What type of hitter are you? (Slap, singles, gaps, power?)
3. When you are hitting well, what are you trying to do with the ball?
 - Hit it up the middle?
 - Hit to opposite field?
 - Stay on top of the ball?
 - Drive through the ball?

Pete Rose (4,256 Big League hits) "See the Ball, Hit the Ball". Pete kept it simple. Have a plan!

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Get in the habit of asking yourself before every at bat:

- What am I going to do at the plate?
 - Know the situation.
- What pitch am I looking for?
 - It will amaze you how many times you will get your pitch if you know what you are looking for.
- Recognize that you must have a plan for each at bat, but also that you must adjust according to the situation. You must feel secure, but be flexible. Every pitch can change your approach.
 - What's the count?
 - Runners in scoring position?
 - Score?
 - Inning?
 - Weather conditions?
 - Strengths of the pitcher?
 - All pitchers are taught to pitch to their strengths in most situations, not your weaknesses. What is his out pitch? Is there a pattern to his pitch selection?
 - Count? 2-1, 3-1, 1-0, 0-2?
 - Use our pitch charts in the 4 spot.
- Think in advance how you will chose to react to any and all of these situations so you are prepared before you step in the box.
 - Practice your plan in "practice", (this makes the game decisions easier).

What determines your plan?

Your plan is made up of pre-determined routines, and reactions to the game conditions. By pre-determining how you will prepare and when this occurs you are setting yourself up to be successful (skilled) rather than hopeful (unprepared). Your answers to the following questions will help you to determine a plan of action that is both comfortable and helpful to you as a hitter. Your plan should contain some basic skills but should not just be a copy of someone else. Make it personal.

1. What am I trying to do at the plate?
2. Where am I trying to hit the ball?
3. What pitch am I looking for? (when?)
4. Where do I want the ball in the strike zone?

Many young hitters, inexperienced, go to the plate with no plan or are trying to do something they are not physically capable of. (Pulling the ball out of the park). Having no idea what you want to accomplish is the same as having bad ideas. Both steal success from you.

The Eyes Are Critical:

If you can't see the ball, you can't hit the ball!

Critical: Become familiar with the pitchers release point.

Many coaches and experienced players imagine a box or window where the pitcher releases the ball. If you watch ESPN baseball coverage you have seen the strike zone super imposed on the screen as an aide for the viewer to see strikes and balls. This is a great example of what you should imagine on the pitcher.

But.....

Do not focus your eyes on this location to early in the pitch. Your eyes will focus on distant objects so if the hand is not in the window your eyes will focus past the outfield on the next object in that area. When this happens your eyes will have a difficult time re-focusing back into the window when the ball is released causing a delay in your ability to pick up the ball on time, therefore your swing will be late.

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Having a plan will also reduce tension and nervousness. Nervous eyes dart from side to side and find it difficult to focus and find the ball. If you are nervous you most likely do not have a plan, or something has affected your ability to focus on your plan. Become comfortable with your approach at the plate prior to stepping into the box in game one of the season. The more you know about yourself the more calm you will be under stressful conditions.

Pre At Bat Routine:

When does your at bat begin?

As a hitter you need to pre-determine your approach, when do you make the change from relaxing on the bench to becoming a hitter?

There is a great amount of flexibility in this, make it personal and stick to your plan:

1. Putting on your batting gloves?
2. Putting on your helmet?
3. 4 spot responsibility?

In The Hole and On Deck:

Funnel your thoughts:

1. Get your body ready to perform.
 - a. Simple stretching, loosely swinging a bat.
2. Study the pitcher/ look at 4 spot chart for tendency on first pitch and pitches delivered with 1-0 count.
 - a. Do not get distracted by teammates or fans close by, focus on your job.
3. Know your plan for hitting. (Keep it the same, and simple)
4. Imagine your at bat as the pitcher delivers a pitch to the hitter in front of you.
5. Final instructions to yourself on mechanical keys.
 - a. Don't go up to the plate thinking about hand position, stance, etc.
6. Breathe deep, check for any tension, nervousness, use deep breaths to slow heart rate. Close your eyes and filter out all distractive noise.
7. Raise your posture. Stand tall, carry yourself confidently.
 - a. No Fear!, No Doubts!

At the Plate:

1. Before you step in, breathe deeply, take a couple of smooth practice swings and silently repeat your plan to yourself, develop a key phrase or word to focus your attention.
 - a. Up the middle
 - b. Opposite field
 - c. Fly ball to score a run
 - d. Discretely check position of all fielders.
2. Do not step in if you are thinking about how bad your last at bat was. Take some time, grab some dirt and squeeze it then throw away the negative thoughts.
3. Step into the box with back foot first, and do it the same way every time. Just like a basketball player has a free throw routine, you need to follow a pre pitch routine.
4. Find your focal point. A good one is to focus on the label of your bat. NO distractions at this point.

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1. Motivational que word or phrase. (Make it personal, something that gets you going)
 - a. "Let's go!", "Bring it!", etc.

Release Mechanism:

This is your way of clearing out any negative circumstances or thoughts that occur during your at bat. How do you re-focus after an umpire's call which you do not agree with? Your team has leadoff hitter on base and he is the tying run, then gets picked off during your at bat, how do you re-focus? You have the bunt sign on to move the winning run into scoring position and you fail to get the ball on the ground, how do you re-focus? Increasing the amount of tension or stress is not the answer, you have to refocus and calm your thoughts.

1. Turn away from home plate, breathe deep.
2. Reset your at bat. (If, in your hitting plan, you have decided that your at bat begins when you put on your gloves in the dugout, step out and readjust your gloves to reset your plan)
3. Don't change your approach, tension often causes players to speed up their routine because of tension in their body.

Most importantly, you have to **become aware** that your focus has been altered and re-focus back on your routine so that your body will relax. Big time games require athletes to stay in control and recognize when things are beginning to spiral out of control. While a team may get jacked up after a big play, or have a heavy let down you have to stay with your pre-determined plan.