

# STAR HITTING FUNDAMENTALS

---

## PROPER HITTING GOALS

---

The goals of getting a hit (short term) or to hit .300 (long term) sound reasonable at first. But having goals that are not within one's control can lead to frustration, desperation and a lowered probability of success. A line drive caught by the center fielder should be considered more of a success than a bloop single over the short stop.

A more reasonable and useful goal is to have a successful at bat. Successful at bats are under the hitter's control. They don't depend on how good the pitcher is or a great defensive play. They don't necessarily exclude a strike out. They can be monitored by parents or coaches and provide the basis for real improvement (which isn't necessarily the case with batting averages). Such a goal also puts success within every player's reach.



A good at bat first and foremost involves taking a good swing. Players should be taught to take a good swing or not to swing at all. A bad swing single is not a success at the plate. The "just make contact" mentality has hurt a lot of young players. "Good swing" in this context includes proper tracking of the ball to the plate, good weight shift, balance, etc.

The second aspect of a good at bat is swinging at the right pitches. This part of a good at bat will vary by hitter and experience. Generally, this involves swinging only at strikes or, with two strikes, swinging at pitches that are close to being a strike. For more advanced players, this might involve swinging at specific pitches in selected parts of the strike zone early in the count.

The third aspect of a good at bat is making adjustments, especially in relation to timing. Swinging late at the first pitch is fine as long as the swing isn't as late on the next pitch, etc.

A good at bat is a short-term goal. Long term goals will vary by level and experience (and concentration levels for very young players). Batting .500, or having successful at bats 50% of the time, is a reasonable goal for many young players. When a player truly adopts good at bats as their

goal, their batting average will almost always increase and they will get more enjoyment and satisfaction from the game.

---

## PROPER PREPARATION

---

- Have sound practice habits and practice with a purpose. Learn to use the whole field. During the game, go to the plate with a plan. Know the pitcher and the game situation. Once in the batter's box, trust your swing and focus on tracking the ball.
- Bat selection-keep it simple. The bat should be a size and weight that feels comfortable to you and one that you can handle with ease.
- Be positive. This is an absolute key to a successful at-bat. When you believe that you will hit, you will hit!
- Use the bench and on-deck circle! Watch the pitcher very carefully. What is he throwing? What is the release point?
- Many young players waste valuable time waiting for their turn to hit. They stand in the on-deck circle and talk to teammates or take lazy swings with the bat. Poor on-deck preparation reduces their probability for success. Good on-deck preparation should include the following:
  1. Position yourself in the on-deck circle so that the pitcher and home plate are both in view.
  2. Quickly loosen up your muscles by swinging the bat back and forth and over your head.
  3. Take your stance and focus on the pitcher.
  4. When the pitcher releases the ball, stride and swing hard, the same way you plan to swing when getting up to the plate.
  5. Time your swing so that your bat head crosses the plate before the ball does.
  6. Make timing adjustments on the remaining pitches until it's your turn.
  7. When leading off an inning, stand six or eight feet from the batter's box and time your swing.
  8. At least after a swing or two, do not use a bat donut on-deck. This will hrow off your timing (studies have found that the probability of hitting the ball on the first swing is lower for players using a donut on-deck) in the on-deck circle, use your warm ups to get your timing lined up with the pitcher.

---

## HAVE THE PROPER GRIP

---

- The bat should be held in the base of the fingers; not back in the hands.
- Hold the bat loosely and free of tension. Tension is the number one enemy of hitters.
- For most hitters in normal situations, middle knuckles should be close to being in line.

---

## HAVE A BALANCED & COMFORTABLE SET-UP

---



- **BALANCE.** To be a successful and consistent hitter, a player must have excellent balance and be able to make the necessary adjustments in his swing that allows him to hit a change-up or curveball. Hitters who are balanced can make such adjustments to the changing speed of a pitch. Watch Mark Grace of the Chicago Cubs on television for an example of a player who has great balance, who makes adjustments to pitches, and who can often hit the ball to the opposite field.

- **BE COMFORTABLE.** The set up should be whatever is comfortable as long as there is proper balance and plate coverage.

Younger players need to develop a stance that's comfortable and that allows them to reach the proper launch position as they land on their stride foot. As a general rule, the younger the player, the closer he should hold his hands to the launch position when taking his stance. There are a lot of opinions and misinformation about a batter's stance. At the professional level, there are many extreme stances that are often criticized. Julio Franco, for example, begins with his hands and bat over his head. Mickey Tettleton, on the other hand, keeps his hands low with the bat held flat behind him. Eric Davis holds his bat forward in the middle of his body. What many people don't understand is that their swings are very similar. Once their stride foot touches down, each of these players has his hands over his rear foot at a height around the armpit. This is the launch position.



---

### **BAT SELECTION: FINDING THE BEST BAT FOR YOU**

---

Recent technology gives ball players the advantage of strong, lightweight bats that were not available just a few years ago. The new aluminum alloys give you more distance with less weight. It has been proven that bat speed generates the majority of your distance. By decreasing your bat weight, you increase your bat speed.

It is better for a hitter to average .400 with a light 29" bat than average .150 with a heavy 33" bat. And don't forget that a hitter has the proper bat when he can both start and stop the bat effectively!

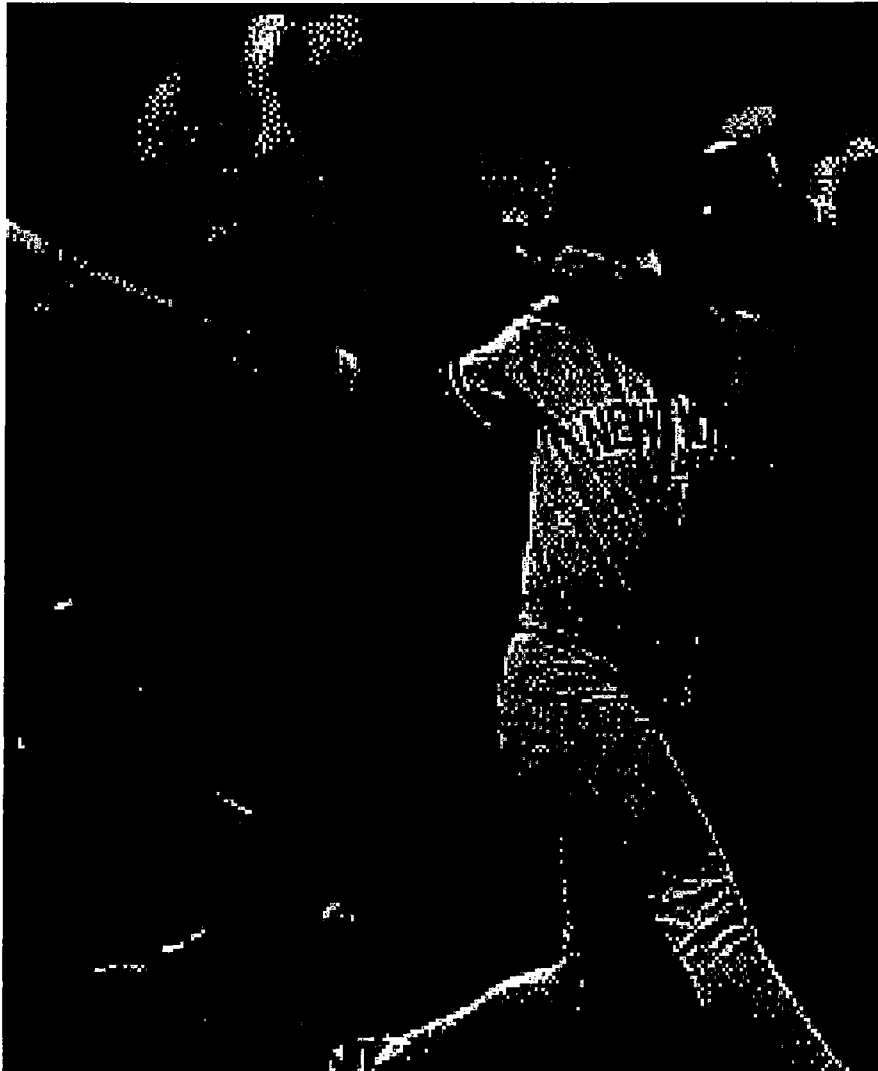
When determining the thickness of your bat handle, the rule is that you should use whatever thickness feels most comfortable to the player. Grip your bat in your dominant hand, all the way down at the end and hold it straight out from your body parallel to the ground—not in front, but on the side. Try to keep your arms completely straight. If you can hold the bat for 25 - 35 seconds without dropping the barrel or noticing a quivering of your arm, then it is probably a bat you can handle.

---

## HITTING IS A CONDITIONED, WELL-TRAINED REACTION.

---

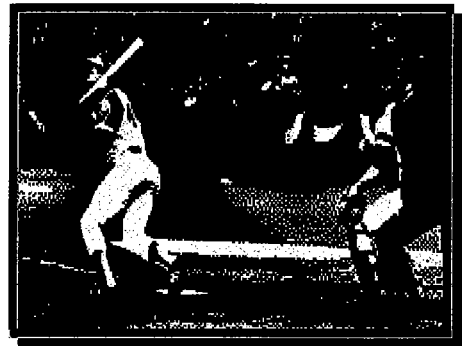
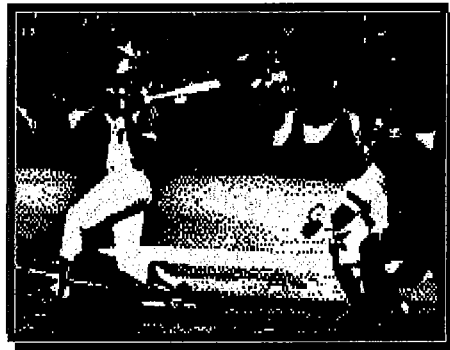
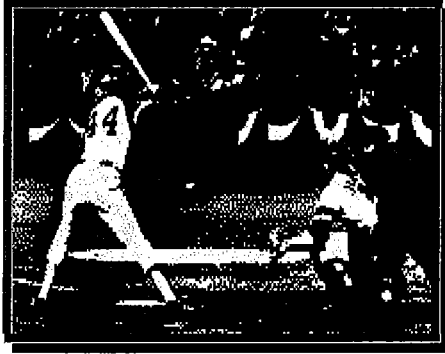
Hitting a baseball is one of the most difficult tasks in all of sports. It involves hitting a round ball rotating in a sporadic flight traveling at different velocities or speeds of up to 98 miles per hour with a round bat. The major league players have only 1/5 of a second to decide if the pitch is a strike or a ball, then react accordingly. Hitting a baseball is the ultimate test of eye-hand coordination, depth perception, quickness, strength, nerves, and attitude. The following fundamentals are a collection of notes I have taken from experts who study the art of hitting, primarily Jim Lefebvre, the former Dodger great and San Francisco minor league coach. I have his hitting tape and it is available to every player to watch the first 60 minutes. It has a lot of instruction, but after watching the tape you will get a great idea of the art of hitting a baseball.



---

## FIVE PHASES OF FUNDAMENTAL HITTING

---



There are five phases of fundamental hitting. They are:

**SET-UP POSITION**

**POWER POSITION**

**APPROACH POSITION**

**RELEASE POSITION**

**FOLLOW THROUGH**

---

## SET-UP POSITION:

---

- Be **relaxed** and ready with proper grip
- Have good balance, weight evenly distributed on the balls of the feet
- Feet slightly outside shoulder width apart
- Knee's bent for ample flexibility
- Knee's remain inside feet
- Belt buckle and toes square to center of home plate
- Hips, shoulders, and eyes level
- Front arm forms a right angle at elbow or "box" with forearm and chest; back elbow is pointed down
- Wrist are "cocked" with hands relaxed
- Bat is back-outside the rear foot

Staying relaxed at the plate will also help the hitter pick up the path of the ball and avoid being hit in an area that could cause serious injury. As hitters get more experience, they can begin trusting their reflexes and their ability to see that a pitch is wild well before the ball reaches them. Fear at the plate may be overcome (at least in part) by knowing what to do when the ball is thrown at a hitter. (See page 18) **Remember that relaxed muscles lead to quick muscles and tense muscle lead to slow muscles.**

---

## POWER POSITION

---

- As pitcher winds up, batter rocks slightly back to “coil” hips and legs
- See the baseball with both eyes from pitchers release point
- With bat back or outside the rear foot, the batter takes short stride upon release of the baseball by the pitcher with the front foot toward baseball. Keep the front toe closed during the stride. Many coaches instruct hitters to point their front toe at the pitcher when striding. Pointing the toe when striding at the pitcher will cause their hips to open before the start of the swing. Opening the hips early (before the swing actually starts) reduces the power of the swing. Premature opening of the hips can also make it difficult to hit an outside pitch. Instead, the toe should be pointing somewhere between closed (in the direction of the plate) and a 45 degree angle (in the direction halfway between the plate and the pitcher). This will allow the hips to explode open when the swing begins. Keeping the front toe closed is one of Charlie Lau's "Ten Absolutes of Good Hitting."
- Knees remain inside the feet

If you keep your front shoulder slightly down during your stride and swing, it can ensure that you make less pop-up and strike outs and if you extend your elbows at the moment of contact with the ball, you will have more bat speed and power!



---

## APPROACH POSITION

---

- Batter drives or “uncoils” into baseball with hips, legs and power from the back leg in a turning action
- Batter pulls the knob or “butt” of the bat with the left hand into hitting zone pivoting on the balls of the feet and with level hips driving toward the ball.

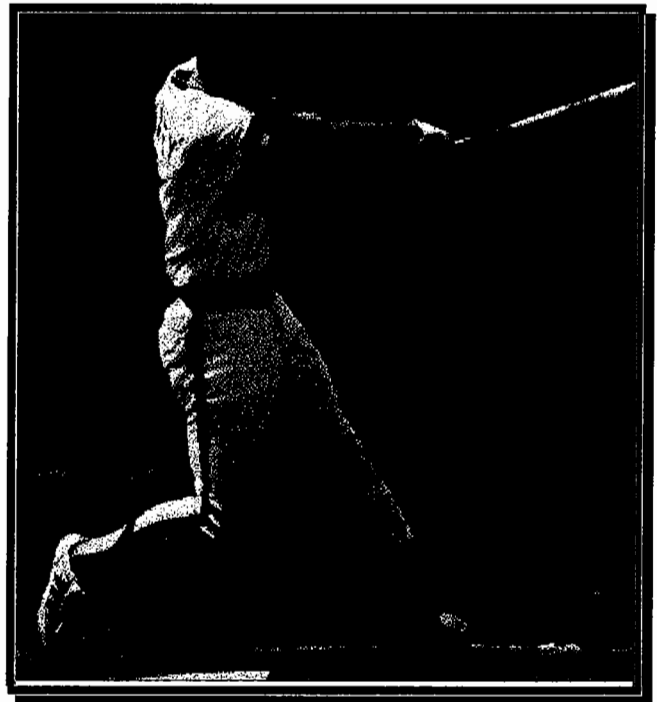


- When you hit, keep your swing similar to the action of a hammer swing. This helps to keep an even consistency of bat control and power, while keeping your backside tall at the point of contact along with your back heel facing upward (you will hear me constantly remind players to squish the bug!). It will ensure that you hit less pop-ups and strikeouts!

---

## RELEASE POSITION

---



- Good extension of arms
- Right wrist elongates bat with quick hands and good bat speed
- Eye's and head are down "on the ball"
- Keep your hands and wrists free of tension so that you can have better bat control and speed, and don't forget to have your nose lined up with the baseball at contact. Doing this will help to increase your visual tracking of the ball!
- Body and arms drive bat through the center of the baseball;

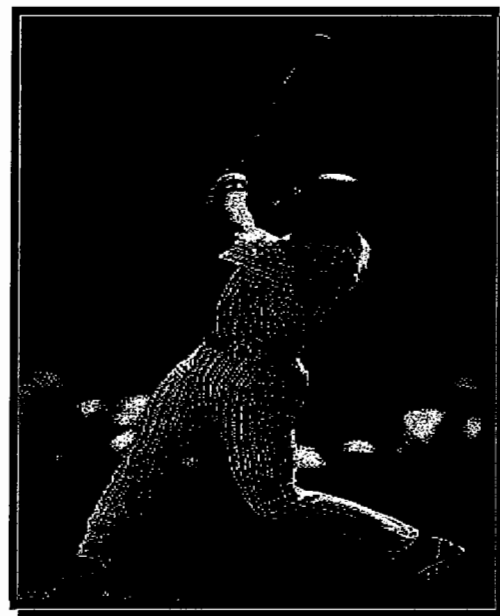
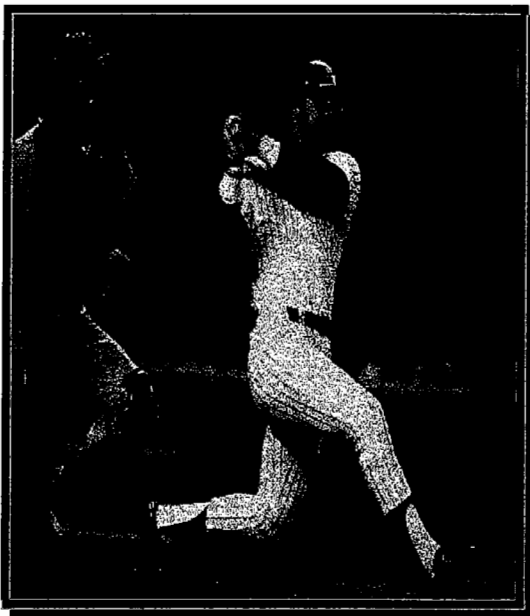
- The hands, arms, and chest form a “Power V” position;
- Heel of back foot should be pointed up and off the ground.
- Rolling your wrists at contact (of bat on ball) will reduce the hitter’s ability to power through the ball. Another version of this is to look down at the V (made by your arms) at contact. Instead, wrists should roll after contact. Palms should be flat at contact (one up and one down).




---

## FOLLOW THROUGH

---



- After contact, bat and hand roll over the top
- Full extension of bat with barrel pointed at pitcher
- Body momentum and bat speed of completed swing brings hands over front shoulder with turning motion
- Rest bat on the ground as batter sprints toward first base

A good follow-through involves your hands finishing up over your lead shoulder. Your head, chest and knees should be facing the pitcher at the end of your swing and you should keep your balance.

---

## WHAT CAUSES POOR TIMING?

---

Swinging late is often a problem with young players. One reason for swinging late involves the hitter not knowing where he is suppose to make contact with the ball. Many want to make contact over the plate instead of in front of it. Carrying the ball to the plate and having the hitter swing slowly, indicating where they want the bat to make contact with the ball, is a good way to show them to hit the ball out in front. Also, the point of contact needs to be further out in front of the plate when the ball is pitched inside and closer to the plate when the ball is pitched outside. Players also need to understand that they must swing at a smaller ball against a fast pitcher. They have to make the decision to swing a bit earlier and fire the hands at the ball when it is further from the plate than they are used to (the ball looks smaller further away from the plate). The most important thing for good timing, however, is to teach hitters to make adjustments with their stride foot. If they are swinging late, they need to lift the front foot and begin the stride earlier. If they are swinging early, they need to lift the front foot and begin the stride later. Use your stride foot to adjust timing. If you are too late, stride earlier. Remember that you have to start your stride before you know where the ball is being pitched.

---

## STEPPING OUT ON THE PITCH

---

Stepping out on the pitch generally begins because of fear of the ball and may continue later simply because of habit. To help correct this habit, place something flat to the left of the hitter's stride area (for right-handers), so you know when you are stepping out. If you are stepping out and continue doing so, will develop a weak backside and a balance problem. Lift your front heel off the ground during your stance and stride. This will help keep your weight forward toward the plate, and strong backside.



If fear is a factor, it is important to understand that a player is safer when striding straight at the pitcher than when bailing out. The proper movement of the batter when a ball is thrown at him is to