

DO YOUR HITTERS HAVE A PLAN AT THE PLATE?

There aren't very many hitters that can walk up to the plate and be successful without some idea of what they're looking for in a pitch. And since the rest of us aren't in that select group of players, we better have some idea of what we want to accomplish before we step into the batter's box. We better have a plan.

What should that plan be, you ask? Well, like most things in life, it depends; but here are some general things to consider when putting your plan together. The key is to have an image in your mind when you approach the plate so you can stay relaxed and focused. If you've got the visual image there, your reflexes and instincts will take over; because after all, you won't have any time to think about it when the pitch is delivered.

1) **Plan on being aggressive.** Aggressiveness is a key element to hitting successfully, and it can cover up apparent weaknesses. Besides, the aggressive hitter simply has to decide one thing only at the plate: not to swing. What I mean by that is when you're thinking "swing" as the pitcher delivers the ball, if the pitch isn't hittable, then all you have to decide is not to swing.

2) **Plan on hitting the ball up the middle of the field.** Consistent hitters with high batting averages always tend to use the middle of the field. You can be successful being strictly a push- or a pull-hitter, but you give away some of the advantage to the pitcher, because they can simply pitch to your weaker side

3) **Plan on controlling the outside half of the plate.** Studies have shown that nearly three quarters of all pitches in the strike zone are over the outside half of the plate, especially in youth baseball. Take advantage of that information and control the outer half of the plate. Then, if you need to, gradually work from an area of the strike zone that you can control to an area where you have less control.

4) **Plan on pulling the inside pitch, pushing the outside pitch, and hitting the down-the-middle pitch back up the middle.** Take the pitch where it comes and go with it. If you're thinking "pull" and the pitch is delivered outside, you're going to have a much harder time getting that hit, and you'll probably ground out to a middle infielder. So, pull the inside pitch, push the outside pitch, and crush the down-the-middle pitch back up the middle.

5) **Plan on the next pitch being over the middle of the plate and up in the strike zone.** Then, make adjustments from that basic pitch. It's easier to adjust down than it is up, and you'll hit fewer pop-ups when you adjust down. If you're looking for a ball over the middle of the plate, you won't have as far to adjust if the pitch is inside or outside. However, if you're looking in, then you've got a larger adjustment to make if the pitch is outside.

6) **Plan on hitting the fastball.** Make every effort to hit the fastball, because it's easier to hit than the curveball, and you'll hit it better than you will the curveball anyway.

Hit the Stick Quick Drill

Take an old broom handle and attach about a 3 foot section of an old garden hose the end of it. Then stand at about a 45-degree angle in front of the hitter, point the broom handle into an area of the strike zone, and have the hitter try to hit the tip of the hose.

To develop a short, quick swing you should slowly move the tip of the hose when the hitter swings, making it harder to hit without a short, quick stroke.

Note: Don't make it too difficult to hit the tip of the hose. Simply reinforce the need for a short, quick stroke.