

Advanced Hitting Drill # 3 One-arm Drill

We appreciate that coaches are always looking for drills and teachings to make their players better. But we always stress that Derek Jeter catches a ground ball and throws it to first the same way that a 10-year-old should. Likewise, there are certain mechanical checkpoints that pitchers of all ages and levels must get to during their deliveries to throw strikes on a consistent basis, and no matter how crazy some big league stances are, most successful hitters at all levels are very similar mechanically once the ball is delivered and the actual swing has begun. If you ever are fortunate enough to stop by a big league batting cage before a game you are going to see guys getting in as many repetitions as possible – hitting off tees, doing soft toss and short toss and taking live batting practice. These are the same drills we have our campers do all summer. There really are no gimmicks, tricks or shortcuts. You become a better hitter by training your muscles over and over again to perform in a certain manner during drill work. Then, after enough repetitions, hopefully everything comes together during batting practice and game situations.

Remember, hitting probably is the most difficult skill to master in all of sports. It's hard enough to hit when a hard ball is flying at you at a high speed and may dip or dart at any time. Don't make hitting too complicated or technical, especially during games and batting practice. Observe your hitters in those situations and then figure out what drills they need to work on to correct any flaws. Save the teaching for practice and one-on-one situations.

The guide or bottom hand is very important to developing a swing that is quick and takes the bat head directly to the baseball. Most of us hit with our stronger hand on top, so we naturally are going to generate bat speed and power through the strength of that hand and arm. If the bottom hand is neglected – if it is not developed and trained – the end result can be a long, looping swing with a lot of holes that pitchers can exploit as they get older and smarter. The one-arm drill

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removes the top hand from the bat and allows the hitter to figure out how to get the bat head to the baseball as quickly as possible. The goal is to create a direct path to the baseball using the lead arm.

We have used this drill with 7- and 8-year-olds at our camps with some pretty good success. Coaches often have younger players use a smaller bat than they are accustomed to for this drill to help them realize more success. We would encourage you to make your players use their game bats, however. This should feel a little bit awkward. The younger batters will have to really work to get the bat head to the ball and will start to get their muscles used to the movements necessary to do so. The only way to get the bat to the ball with the lack of strength created by the one-handed grip is to take a direct path toward it. When they put two hands back on the bat, the swing naturally will be more compact.

To execute this drill the batter starts with his bottom hand on the knob, in its normal position. The top hand is removed. The tosser is stationed in front of the batter (on a stool or bucket or on one knee) behind a Jugs protective screen. Start the drill by tossing the ball softly to the batter, who should take five swings in the traditional manner with two hands on the bat. The top hand is removed for the next five swings before the batter finishes up with five more traditional swings. If the batter still is struggling with the one-handed swing after a few tries it is okay to have him tuck the elbow into his side for increased stability. Choking up a little bit is permitted as well after a few tries with a normal grip. Again, the drill is designed to feel awkward and to force the batter to figure out how to get the bat head directly to the baseball. Keep with this five-five-five pattern even if the hitter swings and misses five times during the one-arm phase.

As the player gets stronger the sets can be increased to 10 or even 15. This will help the batter continue to develop the strength necessary for a short, quick swing that utilizes the wrists, hands and forearms.

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Some players will be able to hit the ball pretty well with one arm, while others will struggle. Either way the hitters should notice a shorter, more compact swing with two hands back on the bat.

By Cal Ripken Jr.