

## Drill of the Month - Swing through It

No hitter is perfect. Every hitter has some area of weakness that a smart pitcher can exploit. Even the most accomplished big league players aren't mechanically perfect every at-bat. That's why even the best pro hitters fail as often as 7 times out of 10.

What the game's best hitters do, however, is fine tune their mechanics to the point that they give themselves the best chance possible to succeed as often as possible. They are consistent in their physical and mental approaches, knowing that if they stick to the basic fundamentals without making radical changes their talent, paired with a little bit of luck, will allow them to be successful on a regular basis.

That is why hitting drills and preparation are so important to big league hitters. The players who get to the ballpark early every day and work on the basic drills that helped them develop their swings to begin with – tee work, soft toss, short toss, etc. – are the ones who are successful for 10, 12 or 14 years. The players who don't approach the game as if it is their livelihood and simply rely on talent generally disappear in relatively short periods of time. If those simple drills are good enough for the best big league hitters, there's no reason why they won't work for EVERY youth baseball player.

Still, when it comes to young hitters, certain mechanical flaws seem to surface more often than others. Many youth players seem to "step in the bucket" or pull off the ball, take their eyes off the ball, lunge or over-stride, and drop their back shoulders or swing with an exaggerated uppercut.

Another common mistake by young players is failure to follow through or let their swings finish properly. If a player's bat stops quickly after contact without wrapping around the front shoulder, the bat actually has to be slowing down as it enters the hitting zone. If all the components of the swing are in place, the bat should speed up as it enters the hitting zone, making it virtually impossible for the player to stop the swing without following through properly. Obviously a bat that is accelerating at the point of contact is going to give a player a distinct advantage over another player whose bat actually decelerates.

Because so many young players seem to struggle with this concept, we've come up with a

simple variation of the tee drill to help players finish their swings. For the sake of argument, we'll call this drill the Swing Through It Drill. We are open to suggestions regarding the name, however.

### **The Set-up**

All that is needed for the Swing Through It Drill is a standard batting tee, a rubber playground ball or kickball (soccer or basketball size), a net or screen to hit into and a bat.

### **The Execution**

A coach or teammate places the rubber ball on the batting tee and backs away. The batter follows the principles of the regular tee drill, taking all the weight to the back foot and then gathering his or her energy before exploding forward and swinging as hard as possible. Just like with the regular tee drill, the weight should go straight back and straight forward, and the swing should be down and directly to the ball. The point of emphasis for this drill is to make sure that the batter swings hard and concentrates on swinging through the ball and following through properly.

### **The Why**

For years coaches have had players swing at tires to help them strengthen their wrists and forearms while also improving their ability to follow through. The spirit behind the Swing Through It Drill is similar. After a player takes 10 swings at a big rubber ball, his or her wrists and forearms should be fatigued, especially if the follow through is executed correctly each time. In order for the bat to wrap around the front shoulder correctly, the batter must really focus on accelerating the bat through the hitting zone and swinging through the ball. After doing this a few times with the big rubber ball, the follow through should come naturally when the player hits a real baseball off of the tee

**By Cal and Bill Ripken**