

Warsaw Tiger Baseball

Spring Training 2020

Take-home Drills

HITTING

Notes

- Always put the ball on the tee with the laces going UP and DOWN and facing back to the catcher. This gives the hitter a good point of reference.
- Have the hitter hit the seam that is closest to them. This is the inside seam.
- Developing skills take time. One player might get the skill in a practice, while it might take other players all season. The goal is to develop talent in each player.
- A great book to read on talent development is 'The Talent Code' by Daniel Coyle. This book breaks down development into 3 phases. Deep Practice, Ignition, and Master Coaching. Indiana University Head Baseball Coach, Jeff Mercer, is an avid promoter of this way of teaching.

Hitting Primer – Relax, Ready, Swing

- **Purpose:** Develop a routine & to promote consistent timing/rhythm. You can run these stages one at a time by calling them out. Pause at each stage. Start slow and then you can speed up the time between each stage.
- **Relax:** This stage is before the pitcher has started his delivery. You get in the batter's box and get comfortable. You as a hitter should have a little movement here. This could be a hip sway & a little movement of the bat. YOU SHOULD NOT BE TOTALLY STILL. In sports you are making it harder on yourself when you try to go from totally still to full speed.
- **Ready:** Ready phase is after your load and your front foot hits the ground. From Relax you move your weight primarily to your back leg and then put your front foot back down (stride). Your hands haven't started swinging yet.
- **Swing:** Now you perform a dry swing while still maintaining balance.

PVC Pipes – Full Swings, Half Swings, Quarter Swings, Rotations

- **Purpose:** Promote Balance & hitting mechanics breakdown
- ½ inch PVC pipe, cut to approximately 5ft. This can vary on size of kid. Older kids may need ¾ inch.
- **Full Swings:** Start from normal stance and swing the pipe as fast as you can while still staying balanced (not falling over because you swung so hard). Goal is to get the pipe up to full speed.

- **Half Swings:** Start from normal stance, but hands are split, approximately 1.5 feet apart. Swing as hard as you can, but stop the pipe when the “barrel” end is pointed at the pitcher. You have to get to full speed before you stop.
- **Quarter Swings:** Same as half swings, but this time you stop the pipe over the plate (at contact point). Make sure hands are split again and that you are at full speed by the time you get to the contact point.
- **Back Shoulder Rotations:** Put the pipe on the back of your shoulders like you are getting ready to do a squat. Start in your normal stance and rotate to the contact point. Maintain good posture with your shoulders pulled back. The angle of your shoulders will match the angle of the pipe.
- **Front Shoulder Rotations:** Put the pipe in front of your shoulders and cross your arms to hold pipe straight across your shoulders. Start in normal stance and then rotate to the contact point. Visualize different height pitches. Remember, the angle of your shoulders need to match the angle of the pipe/bat.

Total Control Baseballs

- **Purpose:** Used in small spaces. Harder to square up and see good flight. Promote a strong follow-through
- You can use them for any drill including tee drills, toss drills, etc.

High Tee

- **Purpose:** Great daily warmup drill to help the hitter develop a positive bat path. The goal here is to hit a low line drive or a ground ball.
- The hitter won't be allowed to dip his back shoulder or collapse his back leg. If he does then he will hit a pop-up.
- The height of the tee should be somewhere between the hitter's belly button and his chest. The more developed the hitter is, the higher the tee can be.
- The hitter should focus on keeping his head in the middle of his body and taking the barrel of the bat directly to the baseball.

Long Tee

- **Purpose:** The hitter can see a true flight of the ball off of the tee.
- This drill can give the hitter immediate feedback about his swing by watching the path of the baseball.
- You can move the tee around to simulate opposite field hitting, or put the tee high or low. There is a lot of variety here.
- Any type of ball can be used

Step Back/Leg Lift Tee

- **Purpose:** To create rhythm and weight transfer to the back leg and then through contact
- A more advanced drill would be doing these with soft toss

- The hitter will get into their normal stance; when they are ready to swing, they will take a step towards the catcher with their back foot, allowing their weight to transfer. Then they will finish their swing.
- A good thing to remember here is the Hitting Primer we discussed earlier. This drill is to help promote that rhythm and weight transfer.
- This same drill can be performed with a high leg lift. The hitter would lift up his front leg like they are pitching; place it back down (stride) and then finish through contact. It may be helpful to have the hitter start with a little wider stance here; then when they lift up their front leg, they should transfer weight to the back leg at the same time.

Knob to Catcher Tee

- **Purpose:** Promote a positive bat path & to help develop bat speed
- This is an advanced drill that take a lot of practice, but it is vital to developing hitters
- This drill can also be advanced to soft toss, front toss, or incorporated into several other drills
- This drill requires the hitter to PAUSE at the READY (Launch, Load) stage of hitting. The hitter will get to READY and pause. At this phase the hitter/coach will check the angle of the hitter's bat. The knob of the bat should be pointing between the catcher's feet or glove. A good analogy is that there is a flashlight on the knob that is lighting up the catcher.
- It is very important that the hitter pauses and checks themselves. After a positive check the hitter goes straight into swing mode. THEY DO NOT TAKE ANOTHER STRIDE as they have already completed their stride.

Oppo Bottom Hand Tee

- **Purpose:** This is a good warmup drill as well as it will promote balance, palm up/palm down, concentration, and keeping the hitter's hands 'inside' the baseball
- The hitter can use a small bat or choke up above the grip of their bat. The tee is placed on the outer 3rd of the plate and about half way between the front and back of the plate.
- The hitter will only grip the bat with his bottom hand and the top hand will be at their side or across their chest.
- When they swing they WON'T LOOK WHERE THE BALL WENT. They will keep their head over the middle of their body and focus on hitting the inside of the baseball; never looking at the ball flight after contact.
- The hitter should be hitting soft line drives.
- You can use baseballs or any other ball to do this drill

High Finish Tee

- **Purpose:** Promote positive bat path with results being hard line drives and extra-base hits. This is an advanced drill that can get a lot of practice to master.
- You will need two (2) tees for this drill. One tee is placed over the plate like normal. The other tee is placed behind the front foot of the hitter approximately 1-2 feet behind their back heel. This 2nd tee is the placed at a height between the hitters lower chest and arm pit.
- The hitter will hit the ball off of the 1st tee and then try NOT to touch the 2nd tee that is behind them.

- The higher the tee the more difficult, but you don't want the tee so high that it causes the hitter to make an unnatural movement.
- This drill could be combined with the Knob to Catcher drill once that level of skill is developed.

Front Toss

- **Purpose:** Creating a controlled environment where the hitter can transfer a skill to a more realistic setting. The tosser can be more accurate and pinpoint exactly where they want to toss the ball. The hitter can get more quality reps and accelerate the skill process. Front toss is widely used in MLB.
- You can use any type of ball. If you are using baseballs or anything hard it's a good idea for the tosser to be behind a screen.
- The tosser always shows the ball to the hitter; swings his arm back; then tosses the ball.
- The tosser doesn't always have to be directly in front. They can move side-to-side to create an angled toss. In this case the hitter should initially focus on hitting the ball back where it came from. Example: If you are a right-handed hitter and the tosser is on the 2nd base side, you should try to hit the ball right back at the tosser.

Batting Practice/Live Hitting

- **You should always have a purpose in batting practice.** The intent can change daily if needed, but DO NOT take batting practice without something specific you are working on.
- Areas to work on can include: Gap-to-Gap, Bunting, Hit & Run, Oppo Hitting, Hitting up the middle, Pull hitting, situational hitting (man on 3rd; trying to score the run), count specific hitting (0-2 approach vs 3-1 approach), Target hitting, etc.

OTHER NOTES

DEFENSE

- A fielder should always PREP STEP every pitch. A prep step is the way a fielder gets into Ready Position. Usually this contains a small hop towards the batter that results in the fielder being in athletic position. Their hop should land right when the baseball is in the hitter's contact zone, or just slightly after. Don't be early, causing you to be completely still.
- A fielder should also always react physically to every pitch. Usually this is seen by taking a couple steps towards where they read/anticipate the ball going. Even on foul balls you should have a physical reaction.
- Our players at the high school practice these skills daily.
- A defender should expect the ball every pitch. They should also always know what to do with the ball when it is hit to them.

PITCHING

- A pitcher's job is to throw an advanced game of catch with the catcher. They are not supposed to strike everybody out or get everyone out themselves.
- A pitcher's rhythm is as important as a hitter's rhythm. It requires work and a great deal of consistency.
- NEVER TELL A PITCHER TO 'JUST THROW STRIKES'. Every pitcher already knows that. It's a lot harder than that, especially when everyone in the ballpark is looking at you.
- A pitcher needs to develop their own rhythm and routine. A solid routine is to get on the rubber, get the sign, take a deep breath & visualize execution, & deliver.
- An overlooked part of pitching is the pitchers grip of the baseball. Make sure you are holding the ball with a 4-seam grip with the middle and index fingers behind the baseball. This also leads to better consistency. Older players can throw a 2-seam grip to allow for added movement to the pitch. You should only be able to fit a pencil between your 2 fingers.
- Develop a change-up. A large majority of our high school pitchers throw a circle change. For kids with a smaller hand, you have a couple options. You can split your fingers wide, throw a 3-finger changeup, or hold the ball really deep in your hand. The key to any off-speed pitch is to throw it with the same intent that you do your fastball. Don't try to make the pitch do something.

COACHES & PARENTS: PRACTICE/GAME/TALENT DEVELOPMENT

- Come to every practice with a plan. We like to post the practice plan in the dugout before practice so all the players know what to expect.
- Don't try to get through everything every practice. Go into practice with specific areas you want to cover. Maybe one practice you only focus on defense and baserunning. Then inside defense and baserunning, break that down to exactly what you want to accomplish.
- Break skills down into their simplest forms and build upon them.
- Make sure the players are staying engaged. This means that your top players are always feeling challenged and your bottom players feel like they belong. This is very hard, but the point is that you must coach to each individual.
- Have a plan also going into game day. Plan for multiple scenarios. Who can pitch today? If I put this player in to pitch what does my defense look like? How many pitches should I plan on throwing this player? How will I get all my subs in the game today?
- For coaches: Don't say, "Man, nobody had to tell me this when I was their age." OR "I can't believe I have to teach these kids this." That is your job and believe it or not somebody taught you that when you were a kid too. You didn't pick it up from thin air. If a player doesn't understand something (either a skill, strategy, etc.) that is your job to figure out how to better teach/communicate.

PLAYERS

- Have a high standard for yourself and others around you
- Have fun and let YOUR personality shine through. Be who you are and have fun.
- Ask questions, be curious, and strive for excellence.

- **Lastly, play multiple sports and get a lot of different experiences. It's also okay to take some time off to recharge physically and mentally.**

"TAKE IT LIKE YOU OWN IT"

"EARN IT TODAY"

"IF YOU WANT TO BE THE BEST, THEN YOU HAVE TO DO THE THINGS THAT THE BEST DO"

"OWNERSHIP, GIVE PRAISE TO OTHERS WHEN YOU SUCCEED AND TAKE THE BLAME WHEN YOU DON'T"

"IT'S OKAY TO FAIL, FAILURE IS ALWAYS IN THE RECIPE FOR GREATNESS"