

HITTING DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Philosophy

The Diamondbacks minor league hitting program is designed to build on previous successes and to strengthen weaknesses in all of our hitters. As a development group, we strive to build a program that produces functional hitters, not careless hackers. The key component in the program is to get a good pitch to hit while working within the hitters' strengths. Having selectivity while maintaining aggressiveness is the most important balancing task a hitter is challenged with. This ability can be accomplished with a program that emphasizes better control of the strike zone, a calm two-strike approach, mental preparation, unwavering confidence, and fundamentally sound swing mechanics.

Control of the Strike Zone

In its most simplistic form, the strike zone represents baseball's answer to football's line of scrimmage. Our organizational philosophy can best be summed up with the idea that if we control the line of scrimmage (the strike zone), we give ourselves the best opportunity to control the pace and outcome of the game.

Within this philosophy, one of the most critical and unique aspects of baseball is the pitcher-hitter confrontation. It is in that battle that the balance of an at-bat can shift from hitter to pitcher or vice versa. Consequently, the balance of a game can shift from one team to another. Generally speaking, the side that controls the count has a better chance of succeeding in any particular at-bat. The more hitter friendly counts our hitters can get themselves into, the better chance they have of succeeding.

Over the course of the last few years, an appreciation for the value of on-base percentage has grown. More so than batting average or slugging percentage, on-base percentage correlates to run-scoring and winning. Line-ups full of quality hitters who get on base have a relentless nature and are consistently able to create scoring opportunities.

At the major league level, elite teams possess hitters with on-base proficiency and pitchers with on-base prevention skills. On offense, over the course of the season more scoring opportunities lead to a positive run differential (score more runs than we allow). The teams that exhibit positive run differential put themselves in position to win more often and advance to the post-season.

At the minor league level, it is important to teach philosophy and approach in addition to mechanics. Players that control the count lead to a team that controls the strike zone. Teams that control the strike zone win more games than they lose. Identifying and developing these skills requires a clear understanding of its philosophy and a commitment to its core.

GAME REPORT: Quality Plate Appearance %

Count Management

Getting a good pitch to hit can occur at any given time in any given count. A hitter's ability to make adjustments within an at-bat is critical to taking advantage of hitters' count and battling during tough pitcher's

counts. Our approach must be to maintain aggressiveness while being selective in the pitch type and location in hitter friendly counts. Strike zone discipline will allow us to win the battle between the hitter and pitcher.

- First Pitch, Ahead, or Even in the Count
 - The approach on the first pitch or when ahead should be to anticipate one pitch being in one zone. If the hitter gets his pitch, he should aggressively attack the ball while staying under control.
 - Most of the time the hitter should look to get a fastball he can handle in hitter's counts. If the hitter is a good off-speed hitter and there is reason to believe the pitcher will throw him that pitch, then he should look for it and be aggressive in the strike zone.
 - Overall, the hitter should know himself, his strengths and weaknesses, and pick a zone that he hits hard consistently.
 - If the hitter doesn't get his pitch in his location, he should TAKE the pitch.
 - Maximize Team Offense: Use our 27 outs to maximize our opportunities and stress the pitcher.
- Behind in the Count
 - The hitter must become relentless in his desire to battle through the rest of the at-bat.
 - Falling behind in the count is no cause for panic.
 - The hitter should not lose his aggressiveness and still concentrate on putting a good swing on the ball.

GAME REPORT: 0-0 Success/Failure

Two Strike Approach

As home runs have increased in baseball, so have strikeout percentages. This trend has caused the strikeout to become overlooked and almost acceptable. As a result, we are seeing a more "all or nothing" type of approach. Conceding that power is not without sacrifice does not discount the fact that a fundamentally sound two strike approach will improve hitters' overall run production. A young hitter must be aware of the importance of hitting with two strikes and be held accountable for his own personal two strike approach.

Our goal is not to create a defensive, protect the plate, type of mind set. Hitters should maintain an aggressive, determined, and confident approach without fear of striking out or being beaten. An aggressive mind set will lead to better plate discipline and eliminate indecisive swings. This type of approach instills confidence and clear headedness, enabling the hitter to identify strikes from balls early and with conviction. However, hitters must understand that a sacrifice needs to be made during two-strike hitting. In order to identify pitch and location, a hitter must allow the ball to travel, especially with two strikes. Therefore, relaxation and trust with two strikes is imperative. A hitter should make physical and mental adjustments with two strikes such as choking up and/or spreading out. This will allow the hitter to stay back and allow for the ball to travel a long time before he must commit to swing. Managers and hitting coaches should remind hitters to make this physical adjustment when the hitter gets two strikes on him.

The objective of instilling a good two strike approach is to develop confidence in the hitter's approach through mental determination and fearlessness. A good two strike hitter takes pride in the quality of his at-bats and his ability to have success in many situations. Overall, having a quality two strike approach will improve a hitter's offensive game in every run producing category in baseball. Developing this in all of our minor league hitters will improve personal advancement and team success in the organization.

GAME REPORT: 0-2/1-2 Recovery

Mental Aspects of Hitting

A hitter's success at the plate can largely be affected by his preparation and confidence level on any given day. The more information a hitter has before he goes to bat can often lead to an improved confidence level to do the task at hand. A key part of developing confidence as a hitter is learning the proper routine to prepare for a given game, at-bat, or even pitch by pitch. Developing consistent preparation plans and confidence levels will vary among players. The more natural these techniques become, the more the player will rely on them to have success. Work hard.....Try easy.

▪ *Preparation*

- Establish a Good Pre-Game Routine
 - Hitters should be encouraged to get their work in before the game. Tee, short toss, side toss, and disciplined batting practice work establish good work habits.
 - Hitters should mentally prepare for the day's game.
 - Who is pitching?
 - What are his strengths and weaknesses?
 - Have I faced him recently?
 - What am I trying to accomplish today?
 - Have I done everything to prepare for today's game?
- Establish a Good Pre-At-Bat Routine
 - Having a good pre-at-bat routine will help reduce wasted, give-away at-bats.
 - A good hitter maintains a familiar routine before every at bat regardless of the importance within the game.
 - Hitters should use the on deck circle to find rhythm and timing by watching the pitcher.
 - Developing consistent pitch by pitch routines help maintain composure and proper breathing throughout the at bat.
 - Having a game plan is critical.
 - What is the situation in the game?
 - What am I trying to do in this at-bat?
 - Have I put myself in position to have success (in mind and mechanics)?
 - Am I relaxed?
- Know Yourself
 - Understanding yourself as a hitter makes formulating plans and adjustments easier.
 - Hitters should have a couple check points to refer to during at-bats. These quick adjustments will allow hitters to refocus their efforts and get back in proper positions.
 - Having conviction in yourself and your preparation pays off in the long run.
 - Advance scout yourself: How would you pitch to yourself?
- Keep Your Approach
 - The hitter should maintain a positive, consistent approach regardless of whether or not he is having success. (Approach remains the same whether the hitter is 0 for 4 or 4 for 4)
 - The hitter must commit to being relentless in his approach at the plate.
 - Have *faith* to believe in the approach.
 - Have the *commitment* to be the best hitter possible through hot and cold streaks.
 - Have the *discipline* to work everyday.

- Keep Your Journal
 - Hitters should keep a journal with mental thought processes and physical keys for their success.
 - Hitters should keep notes on opposing pitchers they have faced for future reference.

- **Confidence**

Having confidence while in the batter's box is not a given. It takes a lot of fundamental work and game success to have the confidence that every time a hitter gets in the box, he feels like he is going to get a hit. Invariably, all hitters will go through times when they don't get many hits. It is then that a hitter begins to stop *believing* in himself and starts *hoping* to get hits. Confident hitters with stable approaches can keep these times from turning into long-lasting slumps. As instructors, we must recognize the warning signs of a hitter going into a slump and redirect his thought process back to positive mental and physical routines. Simply put, a slump equals poor quality ABs and poor contact. Grinding out tough ABs consistently yet failing to get hits can be considered not all that bad. (i.e. 0 for 8 with 4 walks in a three game series)

- The Hitting Cycle From *Confident* to *Unconfident*

1. Hitter creates his plan. (Fundamental approach and mechanics)
 2. Hitter establishes success. (Good ABs, consistent approach, hard hits)
 3. Hitter becomes unconscious. (Hitting/hot streaks, game is easy)
 4. Hitter begins to question how long it will last. (Has a couple bad ABs or defense toughens; hitter changes approach to try to get more hits; mechanical change confuses hitter)
 5. Hitter becomes conscious. (evaluations of oneself change; selectivity and aggressiveness declines; hitter swings at first pitch the next AB after striking out in the game; hitter panics more with every out; self-doubt)
 6. Hitter searches for quick fix. (Takes in too much advice from too many people)
 7. Hitter bottoms out and reestablishes foundation of plan and approach.
- The most consistent hitters realize faster that they can eliminate numbers 4 through 7 by controlling their mental approach and routine.

Swing Mechanics

In the Arizona Diamondbacks organization, we place an emphasis on the proper mental and physical approaches to hitting. While each hitter is an individual and will have his own style and strengths; having quality swing mechanics plays a significant part in a hitter's development into a major league caliber hitter. The following mechanical standards are to be used as a guideline, not as an answer. Each hitter will have his own style, but invariably all hitters have similarities in the basics. The progression remains consistent.

- **GRIP**

- The hitter's grip on the bat should be loose and tension free. The grip should be just firm enough not to let the bat slip through the hands. The grip will tighten naturally in the contact zone.

- **LOWER HALF**

- A hitter needs to have a consistent approach every at-bat with a solid lower half.

- The hitter should use a slow, early, and easy set up with balance at all times.
- Avoid diving or rushing to the ball.
- The less activity a hitter has the easier his timing can be.
- Rhythm, power, and a consistent swing path all start with the lower half.

▪ **LOAD**

- Hitters need to have a load to have some rhythm to get into the power position.
- Each individual hitter will have a different load. Some common load types are:
 - Weight shift to the back side
 - Shoulder tuck
 - Front knee cock
 - Stride and hand separation
 - Leg kick

▪ **STRIDE and BALANCE**

- A hitter's timing varies among quality hitters, but he must begin his stride at or slightly before release.
- The stride should begin with the legs. During the early part of the stride, the upper body will move away from the pitcher. As the upper body comes forward, the head should not go beyond the mid-line of the body upon completion of the stride.
- A hitter should direct his stride directly at the pitcher, not towards 1st or 3rd Base.
- Some hitters will land with a partially open stride foot. Up to a 45 degree angle is acceptable.
- When the stride is completed, the front leg should remain flexed. The flexed front leg allows the hips to move with greater force during the swing. The front leg will straighten at contact.
- The key is to maintain balance during and after the completion of the stride. There is some body movement towards the pitcher. IF the front foot lands softly, with the weight remaining on the balls of the feet, and the body remains balanced, then the length of the stride will not be a problem.
- Staying connected using the lower body creates maximum leverage and torque.

▪ **SWING PATH**

- A short to long swing is a quality swing (short to the ball, long through the hitting zone).
- The quickest, most direct path to the ball is achieved with a downward approach.
- The hands should stay inside the ball during the approach.
- Back spinning the ball increases the flight of the ball. (Hooking and carving the ball indicate that the batter did not hit through the ball.)

▪ **CONTACT**

- The head should be locked on the contact point.
- The hands should be in a "palm up, palm down" position at contact.
- The lower body should have a firm front leg and L position back leg.
- The weight transfer may differ among hitters, but the upper body should be behind the ball.

▪ **FINISH**

- The *weight transfer* is now complete.
- The *front leg* is firm while the rear leg finishes in an L position.
- The *rear foot* position is raised on the toe for full backside finish.
- The *hands* should finish near the front shoulder. The key concept is to establish the position that will allow the head to remain stable during the finish.
- The *head* stays stable and locked on contact until the swing is completely finished.

Batting Practice Routine

A professional atmosphere should be created for batting practice through a consistent routine that maintains a predetermined time schedule and concentrated work environment. A well-organized pre-game batting practice routine will encourage a professional approach and better prepare the hitters for the game. Each hitter's purpose is to prepare the swing and mental focus for game competitions while working to gain rhythm, timing, and feel. Hitters should be encouraged to make necessary adjustments, but mechanical instruction should be kept to a minimum.

The following will be a daily batting practice guideline for the season. Managers and hitting coaches are expected to follow the routine daily, weather permitting. Modifying the program must be discussed with the Field Coordinator and Minor League Hitting Coordinator.

In keeping with our organizational emphasis on selective aggressiveness, we will stress the following during all batting practice sessions:

- Hitters should get good pitches to hit during batting practice. An emphasis should be placed on laying off bad pitches during BP.
- Situational rounds should be taken seriously during BP. Home run derby will not be tolerated.
 - **Round 1:** *Warm up*
 2 sac bunts and 8 swings (up the middle and opposite field are preferred)
 - **Round 2:** *Situations*
 2 Hit and Run
 2 Move the Runner Over
 1 Runner on 3rd Base, Infield In
 1 Runner on 3rd Base, Infield Back
 2 Two Strike Approach
 - **Round 3:** *Establish Proper Swing Path*
 5 swings up the middle and opposite field
 - **Round 4/5:** *Individual Focus*
 Varying # of swings to finish the round

Situational Hitting

A hitter's ability to perform and succeed in many different situations within the game will enhance his overall value to the team and the organization. We must commit to developing complete hitters up and down the batting order. Middle of the order hitters in the minor leagues may bat at the end of the line-up in the major leagues. Therefore, all minor league hitters should work on virtually every aspect of situational hitting. Being a good situational hitter takes confidence, grit, and extreme concentration.

- ***Hit and Run***
 - The batter must try to hit the ball hard with a downward swing path.
 - Our preference should be a hard groundball, but the hitter should not swing passively.
 - The hitter should avoid the middle of the diamond.

- **Runner on 2nd Base With No Outs**

- The hitter should only attempt to move the runner over if the manager directs him to.
- The hitter should maintain a selective aggressive approach and drive the runner over to 3rd Base.

- **Runners in Scoring Position with 2 outs**

- The hitter needs to focus and battle through the at-bat.
- Mental toughness and consistent approach will enhance the chance of succeeding.
- Have a feel for the pitcher on whether or not you may be challenged in any given count.
- The clutch hitter that delivers in this situation has extreme value to the club.

GAME REPORT: 2 Out RBIs

- **Infield In/Back**

- When the infield is playing in, the hitter should get a good pitch to hit and drive it through the drawn in infield or get a pitch to drive to the outfield.
 - Sacrifice flies generally occur when the hitter takes the approach to hit the ball to the opposite field in the air.
 - Again, the hitter should not sacrifice his aggressiveness or take a passive swing.
- When the infield is playing back, the defense is conceding the run. The hitter should stay aggressive and drive the run home.
 - Driving the run in is considered a success, but the hitter should maintain the approach of trying to continue the rally.
 - The hitter should adjust his approach with two strikes and do whatever it takes to get the run in from 3rd Base.

GAME REPORT: Goal of 60% + Success Rate

- **Bunting**

- The hitter must have a total commitment to do the job by being positive.
 - The hitter should always make the pitch be a strike.
 - The hitter should see the ball on the ground before he runs.
 - The hitter should always be relaxed and balanced when bunting. Tension and rigidity causes the hitter to jab at the ball and lose his touch.
- **Sacrifice Bunt**
 - As the pitcher strides forward with his lead leg from the stretch, the hitter should square around to bunt. While it is better to square around early rather than late, hitters should strive to not give the play away until the pitcher has committed to the plate.
 - To be an effective bunter, a hitter needs to be in position to cover both the inside and outside parts of the plate.
 - The hitter's knees should always remain slightly bent.
 - The hitter should always work high to low.
 - **Two Methods**
 - **Square Around:** The hitter should square around by moving the back foot away from the plate and square his shoulders to face the pitcher.
 - **Pivot:** The hitter should pivot on the heels of his front foot and the toe on his back foot. The hitter's chest should be square to a spot in between the pitcher and the second baseman.
 - **Bat Position**
 - The bat should be out in front of the hitter so he can track the ball. If the batter can look through the back of both hands, then the bat is in the correct position.
 - The arms should be extended (although slightly bent) out to the pitcher with the top hand at the top of the strike zone and the bottom hand approximately a foot lower. (45 degree angle)

- The bat angle should not change; if the pitch is high or low, the hitter should keep his eyes on the same plane of the ball by bending his knees.
- On bunts down the 1st Base line, a right-handed hitter points the knob of the bat toward 3rd Base while a left-handed hitter points the barrel at 3rd Base.
- On bunts down the 3rd Base line, a right-handed hitter points the barrel of the bat towards 1st Base while a left-handed hitter points the knob of the bat at 1st Base.

○ **Base Hit Bunt**

- Hitter should take a quick look before the pitcher starts his delivery to see the depth of the infielder.
- The ball should be approached with the barrel slightly above the hands.
- A critical key of the technique is to have a still head.
- **BUNTS TO 1ST BASE**
 - Right handed hitters must concentrate on catching the ball out front of the plate
 - Hitter should catch the ball on the barrel.
 - Focus on getting the ball past the pitcher in between the 1st and 2nd Basemen.
 - The hitter should focus on getting a pitch on the outer half of the plate.
 - Left handed hitters should use a cross-over step toward the pitcher with his left foot and simultaneously get the bat out in front of the body.
 - The hitter should focus on staying in the box and not falling toward 1st Base.
 - The hitter should try to get a pitch down the middle or inside part of the plate.
 - The location of the bunt is more important than the additional step bunters try to achieve so often.
- **BUNTS TO 3RD BASE**
 - Right handed hitters should use the drop step away from home plate while simultaneously getting the bat out front of the body at the proper angle.
 - The hitter should be cautious not to transfer too much weight over the left foot too early. Sacrifice one step toward first base for accurate placement of the ball.
 - Left handed hitters should make sure to stay in box, bunt the ball, and then run.
 - Skilled bunters can show late and still execute a good bunt.
 - The hitter should look to get a pitch over the middle to outside part of the plate
 - Hitters should adhere to the philosophy of *hit or foul ball* in most cases.

▪ **Picher's Hitting**

- Pitchers will hit during Spring Training and the Regular Season.
 - Class A-AAA will have starters and select relievers bunt and hit everyday at home.
 - On the road starters will hit extra the day before their start and in a BP group on the day they pitch.
- Pitchers should strive to become adequate handlers of the bat through preparation and work.
 - Situational Batting Practice
 - Round 1: 4 sacrifice bunts (2 to 3rd Base, 2 to 1st Base)
4 hit and run
 - Round 2: 4 sacrifice bunts (all to 3rd Base)
4 slash (on the ground)
 - Round 3: 4 sacrifice bunts (all to 1st Base)
4 move the runner to 3rd Base
 - Round 4: 5 hard contact

***Managers, roving coordinators, and coaches must communicate with the hitting coach and hitting coordinator about any suggestions for hitters. We must communicate through the proper channels so we do not confuse the hitter with too much information. We are all in this for the same reason; to make our hitters better. Proper communication with the hitting coach is necessary for consistent cohesive instruction.**