

Most Common Hitting Flaws - #3

By Matt Schilling, Director of On-Field Instruction at Baseball Factory, professional scout and former college coach

Keeping your hands inside the ball - In the prior articles I covered the first two most common hitting flaws that we see in young hitters: "failure to reach a good launch position" and "wrapping the bat." In this article we will discuss the third flaw, "failure to keep your hands inside the ball." Keeping your hands inside the ball is something that you hear a lot in hitting circles. You will hear announcers talk about it during big league games and you will hear it all the time if you go to a hitting camp of some sorts. But exactly what does it mean?

I was first introduced to this term while I was in college at Coastal Carolina University. Mickey Brantley, a former big leaguer, had played at Coastal and had come back as a favor to our head coach to work with our team for a couple days. Mickey had gone on to become the hitting coach for the New York Mets. I was taking batting practice and he was standing behind the cage watching. After every ball I hit he said, "Keep your hands inside the ball!" After about 12 pitches in a row, I started to get a little angry. I was trying to make adjustments, yet every time he still said it, "Keep your hands inside the ball!" Finally I got out of the cage and asked him, "What the heck do you mean?" The point of the story is that a lot of hitting coaches say this to players, but a lot of players have no clue as to what it really means. Coach Brantley explained it to me, and since then I have learned that you cannot be a successful hitter unless you "keep your hands inside the ball."

When you are hitting it is very important that you allow the ball to travel deep into the hitting zone and avoid reaching out to try to hit the pitch out in front of home plate. In order to do this successfully you must keep your hands in close to your body and then drive them out toward the ball. You always want to hit from "in to out," whether it is an inside pitch or an outside pitch. Ted Williams called it a "push swing." When you are doing this you want to keep your hands between your body and the ball or "hands inside the ball." We are seeing a lot of players getting their hands away from their body and out and around the ball. This causes the hitter to pull outside pitches, roll their wrists over, and hit a lot of weak ground balls or pop ups. See the diagram below for examples of what we are talking about. Without performing this technique properly a player will never be able to hit the ball where it is pitched.

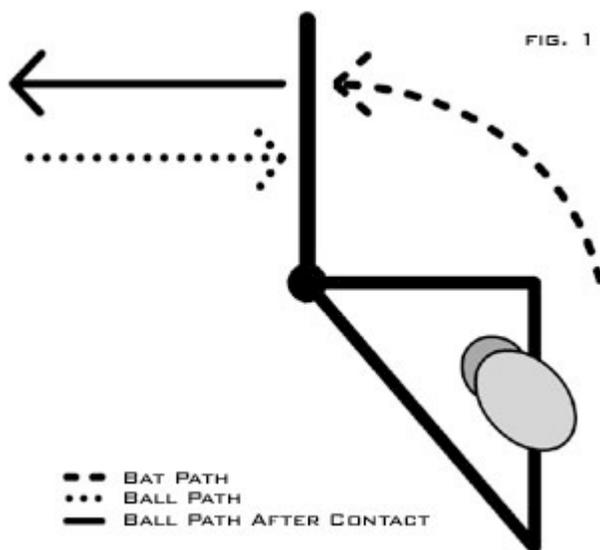


Figure 1

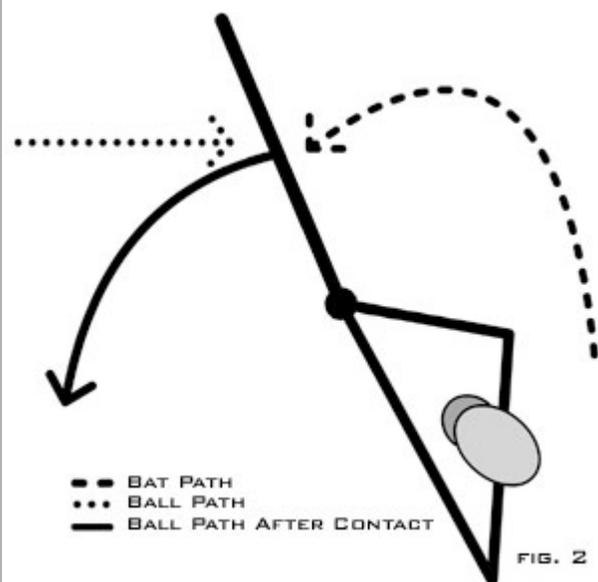


Figure 2

NOTE: In figure #1 the hitter's bat takes a much shorter route to the ball from "in to out," and at contact his bat is at a 90-degree angle with his right arm. This allows him to hit this pitch back up the middle, where it was thrown. In figure #2 the hitter takes a much longer bat path, "out and around the ball," causing him to make contact considerably past 90-degrees and resulting in a rollover ground out. The ideal angle of your bat when making contact is 90-degrees from your back arm. There is a 15-degree margin of error either forward or backward with the bat that still allows for optimal contact. Anything

beyond that will cause negative effects to your contact. Besides "keep your hands inside the ball" there are other phrases or mental images that can help you achieve these mechanics. One in particular that I like is "hit the inside portion of the ball." If you hit the inside portion of the ball, your hands have to be in. See Figure 3 below.

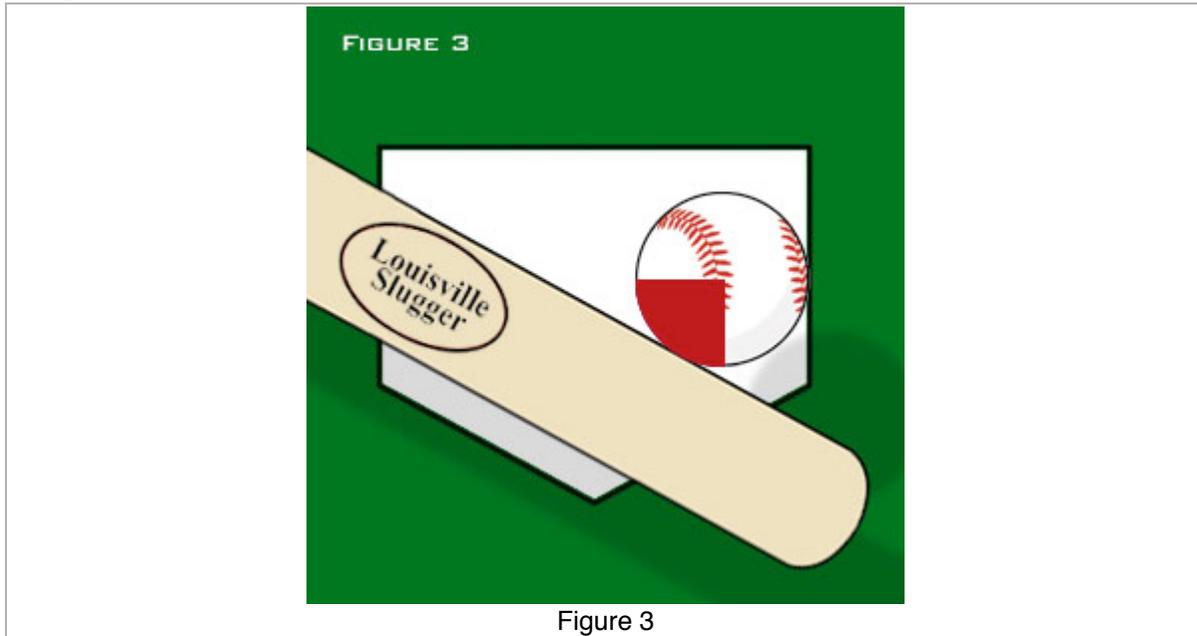
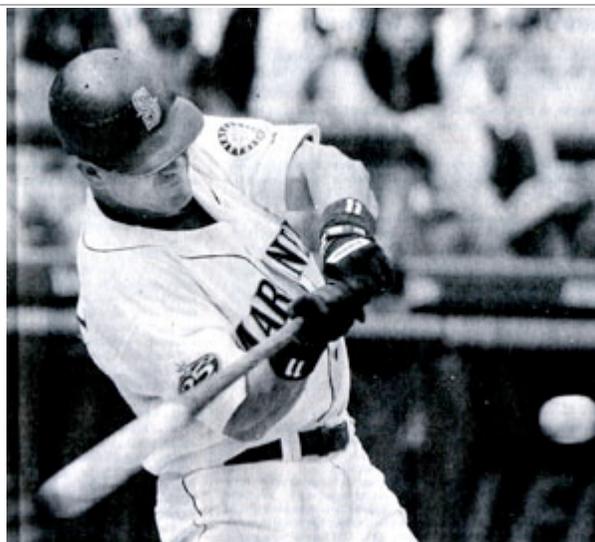


Figure 3

Another mental image or focus that you can make is trying to take your back elbow to your belly button when making contact and then driving your hands out. Yet another example is to lead with your hands to the ball and let the barrel follow. Again, if you perform this correctly, your hands should be "inside the ball." See the photo of Edgar Martinez below. Note that his elbow is tucked into his side, his hands are leading his barrel and when he makes contact his right arm and the bat will form a 90-degree angle. He is doing a perfect job of "keeping his hands inside the ball." If you have ever wondered how Barry Bonds hits homeruns from pitches that are considerably inside, this is how. He keeps his hands inside the ball. If you are a player that pulls a lot of balls foul, you probably get out and around the ball. Work on the drills below to help your swing path.



Edgar Martinez - Seattle Mariners

Drills for "keeping your hands inside the ball":

1. TEE WORK- In a batting cage, hit off the tee the length of the cage. Focus on hitting the ball up the

middle. Your goal should be to hit backspin line drives the length of the cage, straight up the middle. Then try to hit the ball to the opposite field corner of the cage, again focusing on backspin line drives. Most likely you will hit a bunch of balls on the ground to the pull side to start out with, but stay with it and focus on keeping your hands in.

2. CHOKE UP DRILL- Choke up on your bat so that your hands are both above the tape on the handle of your bat. Do side toss and front toss; have the person feeding throw the balls middle and away. This will really force you to keep your hands in and to make contact at a 90-degree angle. If you roll your wrist or come around the ball, it will show up right away.

3. SHORT BAT- Take front and side toss with a 27-inch metal tee ball bat. If you do not let the ball travel deep and keep your hands inside the ball, it will be impossible to make solid contact.

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