

Most Common Hitting Flaws - #4

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Improper Use of the Lower Half - Over the past few weeks, I have been describing the most common hitting flaws that we see at Baseball Factory. I have noted the problems that result from the "failure to reach a good launch position," "wrapping the bat," and the "failure to keep your hands inside the ball." This week I will address "poor or improper use of the lower half." How often have you been told, "If you would use your lower half, you would hit with a lot more power?" I have heard it and I have said it about a thousand times, this year, to players that I instruct. As a player, you may know that you need to use your lower half more effectively, but you may not have any idea of what changes you need to make to maximize your lower half.

First, I think that it is important to note that the strongest and largest muscles in your body are at your "core"--your mid-section and upper legs. This set of muscles is significantly larger and stronger than the muscles in your arms, shoulders, and chest. Therefore, it only makes sense that you develop your swing in a fashion that maximizes the use of your largest muscles. Many of you have aspirations of playing professional baseball. In order to do so, you must be able to drive the ball with a wooden bat. To be successful, you must use your largest and strongest muscles.

When hitting, it is very important that your hips lead your hands. Many of you have been told that your hands should lead. This is true; your hands should lead the barrel through the zone, not the hips. How do you determine if your hips are leading your hands? Most of you should have a video of yourself hitting from the side angle.

Take a look at the video -- if your hands are even with the back of your body or somewhere in the middle of your body, and your belly button or the laces of your back shoe are pointing towards the camera, your hips are late and you are not using your lower half well (See photos 1&2).

So how should you be using your lower half? When you load and stride, you should land softly on the inside portion of your front big toe. This will leave your front heel off the ground (Photo 3).

Your swing is initiated when your front heel drops. When your front heel drops, your back heel and hip should "pop" and turn (Photo 4).

This action with the heels is similar to driving a stick shift. As one foot pushes down, the other foot comes up. The only thing missing is the turn. This action will get your hips open and your swing started. While this is happening, your hands should still be back, slightly behind your back shoulder. Your lower body is starting to open and your upper body is still closed. This action basically twists your body up a bit. Your swing is a result of your body unraveling. It is this unraveling of the muscles that cause your hands to slingshot through the hitting zone with greater velocity, bat speed and power. As your hands are moving forward, you should lock out your front leg hard to create even more torque (Photo 5).

Again, if you are watching a video of yourself, your belly button and back shoelaces should be facing the mound slightly before contact (Photo 6). If you are doing this already, you are using your lower half correctly. If you are not, you've got work to do. The good news is you still have more power potential from you swing.

See the drills below to help maximize use of your lower half.

1. Load/Stride/drop-pop/swing - This is an isolation drill. Get into your stance then load and stride. Your hands should be back and you should be on the inside portion of your lead big toe. Hold that position for a count or two. Next, drop your front heel and "pop" your back heel and hip and give a slight turn. While you do that action-**DO NOT LET YOUR HANDS COME FORWARD**. You should be in a position with your front heel down, back heel up and your body slightly turned towards the mound with your hips opening. Your upper body should still be closed. Hold this position for a count or two, and then swing. Perform this drill "dry" -- without a ball -- to start with.

2. Load/stride/drop-pop/swing - This time use a tee. Once you have dropped and popped, hold that position for a count, then hit off of a tee. As always, try to hit a line drive up the middle. This will be tough at first, but your hands should make the adjustment. Once you are comfortable with that, have someone feed you side toss or front toss.

3. Load/stride/swing - Simply load and stride to the launch position, hold it for a count, then swing. You can do this drill off the tee, side toss, and front toss. This drill eliminates the "drop-pop" step of the other drills as it is designed to get you to perform that on your own.

Once you feel that you are getting comfortable with these actions, start putting the whole thing together. Have your swing videotaped, if possible, to see if you are correctly performing these movements.



WHEN SWINGING, DO NOT TRY TO LEAD WITH YOUR HIPS!!! This is very important. Work your heels correctly and the hips will follow. If you force your hips to start first, you will do this incorrectly. Think about using your feet, pop those heels correctly and your hips will take care of themselves. See the series of photos below for the whole sequence!



For more information on hitting or other related topics, please send emails to newsletter@baseballfactory.com or to speak with a Baseball Factory Representative call 800.641.4487.