

KEEPING YOUR “EYES” ON THE BALL

While holding a recent SeaTac Hitting Club session in Seattle, WA, something a good hitter uttered under his breath struck me... “I didn’t keep my eye on the ball”, he said. I immediately realized that I don’t discuss keeping the batter’s eye on the ball as part of my mechanics instruction. I just considered keeping your eye on the ball to be a “given”.

I then posed the question to myself; “do I actually need to tell a hitter to keep their eye on the ball”? You don’t have to tell a student driver to keep their eyes open while operating a car. As I investigated the topic, I found that “keeping your eye on the ball” is more complex than I ever thought. It should not be overlooked or taken for granted during instruction.

Head movement is what we are trying to eliminate at contact, just as it is in other ball-striking sports. Limiting head movement is usually addressed early in a young player’s swing development. We were told many times as kids to keep our eye on the ball, or don’t move your head when you swing, but were seldom told exactly how to do it. Some seniors have forgotten how to keep their eye on the ball or were never provided with the proper instruction.

To address this head movement problem, I recommend a slightly open stance in the batter’s box to see the ball better. Seeing the ball with both eyes has an advantage over using just one eye, where half of your face is turned away from the pitcher. With an open stance, you use your binocular vision which helps with depth perception.

Your shoulders and trunk must turn independent of your head and neck region keeping the head from moving. You should practice swinging in front of a mirror keeping your head stationary. It’s as if you have an invisible axis that goes down through your head and neck area to the ground. Your swing should rotate around your body like a tether ball around its post, the post being your head and neck region and the tether ball is your swinging motion.

Maintaining good posture during your swing will help limit head movement. Of course, during your stride forward toward the pitcher, your head will travel a bit as you stride and that’s okay, as long as you don’t pull your head off the incoming pitch when swinging. Make sure to follow the pitch from the pitcher’s release point all the way until it drops into your hitting zone. Those of you with a prominent leg timing kick, make sure to train your kick movement so it does not interfere with your eye contact.

Not all miss-hit balls are the results of taking your eye off the ball. Some poorly struck balls can be the result of timing. In senior softball, not every ball is thrown at the same speed or height. Top of the line senior pitchers will deliver the ball while varying heights and speeds in the legal range, some even change distances between 50 & 60 feet. These pitching techniques affect timing as they are intended to do.

Summary list:

- Limit head movement during the swing by employing good swing mechanics,
- Develop independence of arms and shoulders from the neck and head area,
- Don’t pull off the ball if you are a dead-pull hitter by pulling away from the plate,
- Maintain swing tempo preventing over-swinging,
- Hitting the ball middle or off field will force your head to stay on the ball,
- Relaxing your body and eliminating muscle tension will help stop head movement,
- Have your vision checked to make sure you’re seeing the ball the best you can.

Happy hitting,

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