

SHEDDING THOSE SCALY ALLIGATOR ARMS

Have you ever walked back to the dugout after making a weak out and you hear a teammate exclaim: “you had alligator arms”! So, what exactly does it mean for a hitter to have alligator arms when swinging the bat (See figure 1)? A good guess might be it has to be a guy with naturally short arms as we know gators are arm-length challenged. But what if you were born with normal or even long arms and you hear those words applied to your previous at bat?

In Italy there is an expression “*braccino corto*”, which loosely translates as having short arms.

Example cases: While in Italy dining with friends the señor whose turn it is to buy the next bottle of house red has conveniently slipped away, you may hear – “*ah, he's a braccino corto*”. Let's say you're at dinner with your teammates in Las Vegas @ the SSUSA Worlds and the check has landed in the center of the table. Strangely none of your teammates can seem to reach the bill and you then blurt out – “*Alright, I'll get it, I can see that all of you guys have alligator arms*”.

Hence, if a person is accused of having alligator arms in the restaurant, it may be an indication that that he or she is a cheapskate. Cheapskate arms are just too short to reach the bill on the table or their wallet in the back-pocket (See figure 2). You can view a current Geico commercial showing alligator arms at dinner using this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-mvKKGyUppE>

Alligator arms in other sports like football mean arms that were not sufficiently extended to catch a pass when the pass receiver heard “footsteps”. In softball/baseball alligator arms means a whole other thing.

Many batters when tackling the middle-in pitch will make an errant adjustment to get the barrel on the ball by bringing their arms in tight to the body and then swinging with the proverbial alligator arms.

The inside pitch or middle-in pitch depending on how close you take your batting stance from the strike mat, is the prime spot where alligator arms usually manifest themselves. Pitches that are middle or middle-out normally allow the arms to be naturally extended.

The lead arm is typically the main culprit in having alligator arms in your swing. It should flex a bit when taking your hitting position and then extend out during the course of your swing to the ball. Make certain not to arm-barred (i.e. locked and straight) the lead arm as this position is a serious mechanics flaw and will impede the maximization of bat speed.

Your backside arm should tuck neatly into the area of the obliques or as many like to say, “in the slot” while taking your swing. An extended lead arm acts as the primary lever in the swing that is essential for providing leverage for creating power.

When going to the ball the lead arm must be extended out when making contact with the incoming pitch. If you don't perform the lead arm extension and keep your lead arm bent at contact, you're more likely to get jammed. Getting jammed usually is a handle or label contact thereby missing the sweet spot and not allowing the best barrel trampoline effect. Check out this link to a YouTube instructional video on this lead arm subject that has some drills to try:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThO5Zy3QUrM>

To make good contact on an inside pitch, I suggest to open up the hips by stepping with the landing foot more toward the foul line. This way the lead arm can be made longer allowing the hands to clear the hips avoiding the jam. This method is not to be confused with “stepping in the bucket”, as that term applies to all pitch locations to a batter who is afraid of the ball.

When the lead arm is too flexed during the swing, leverage is lost and bat speed is diminished resulting in weaker hits (See figure 3).

By taking your hands directly to the pitched ball and then extending the lead arm the barrel should square up nicely at contact (See figure 4). The trick here and it takes some practice, is in keeping the ball in fair territory on the inside pitch with the lead arm extended. The batter should try and keep the barrel of the bat in a direction down the line. It may not be your most powerful hit but good enough to stay fair and with pace on it and not be jammed.

The nearer the pitch is to the inside corner the more you should open up in hitting the ball. Now if you're one of those guys that likes to stand way off the plate then this does not apply to you but you'll have your issues with the middle-out pitches which is another article.

To avoid those ugly alligator arms, I suggest you make a concerted effort to contact the inside pitch further out in front of your body by getting to it early and striding with the front foot more toward the foul line. Remember to always try and maintain a long lead arm lever which will allow for the maximization of bat speed and hitting more balls on the sweet spot.

Happy hitting,

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