

SWING LONGER NOT HARDER FOR MORE POWER

I recall some decades ago the great Jack Nicklaus (a prodigious driver of the golf ball during his era) was being interviewed by golf magazine. A question was asked by the reporter: “Jack, is there a quick tip you can impart to our weekend golfers that want to carry their drives off the tee farther and without totally revamping their swing?”

The reporter, taking copious notes, was expecting Jack to say something like: “swing harder”, “snap your wrists faster at contact” or “be more aggressive” and so on, but that did not happen. Jack’s recommendation was simply to keep the fundamentals of your swing if it’s good technique, but then make your swing bigger. I believe that many of the golf swing concepts are transferable to the softball swing.

How does this longer/bigger swing technique create more power? It’s a matter of basic physics 101. The longer swing applies swing forces over a greater distance, thereby, creating additional bat-speed. Setting the club higher above your head allows gravity to assist in delivering the bat faster to the ball. It’s essential to extend your lead-arm making it long eliminating the dreaded “alligator arms”. This will create a larger swing radius that makes for a bigger swing arc, which in turn adds power through leverage.

We’ve all heard many times on baseball broadcasts over the years, that baseball power hitters are known for getting their arms extended when hitting the baseball. What they are doing when extending their arms is creating a bigger swing arc that increases power with the same effort. When making your lead-arm longer, make sure not to arm-bar as this can kill swing speed.

How to make a bigger/longer swing arc:

(1) Tip the bat barrel toward the pitcher at the start which will set and load your wrists (see figure 1). This motion is like the fly fisherman hurling the fishing line into the water; first with a hand action forward and then pulling back and then forward again, sending the line at high speed out on to the river. This initial action puts your bat into motion and at the same time unweighting it, so it feels lighter for a faster swing.

(2) The bat barrel is rotated around your rear shoulder like a corkscrew in a counterclockwise motion by your hands; this movement generates early bat speed. The lead-arm hand is pulling hard on the bat-knob creating centripetal force with the downward movement of your back-elbow into your side. This movement with the back elbow into the side places the bat into proper launch position, demonstrated here by the great Edgar Martinez of Seattle Mariners fame (see figure 2).

(Edgar Martinez was the quintessential hitter and a member of Major League Baseball Hall of Fame, was a seven-time All-Star and five-time "Silver Slugger Award" winner for Seattle, where he spent his entire 18-year career.)

Note that it's imperative not to stop or slow the angular momentum of your swing at any time; some hitters tend to pause for a moment as the bat reaches the launch position which should be avoided. The swing is designed to be a continuous motion from start to finish otherwise; you will nullify the early bat-speed you've built into your swing that produces top-end bat acceleration.

I do consider Edgar's hands over his head to be an extreme position and difficult for seniors to execute (see figure 1). I personally like to have my hands about rear shoulder height and not up and over my head. I understand, that this swing technique requires flexibility that some seniors may not be able to copy.

Take some time to study the images of Edgar that accompany this article. They are intended to be illustrative of the flow of the bigger swing from the starting position to bat-launch. I've provided below a link to a short instructional video from the internet, featuring Josh Donaldson's swing while with the Toronto Blue Jays that portrays the techniques of a long or big swing. Also pay close attention to Josh's rotational mechanics (shoulders/torso/hips) that spins the bat into the ball.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeMf4d0Ud-Y>

Happy *hitting*...

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