

PULLING THE BALL

While running my daily bp sessions at our hitting club in SEATAC, WA, I see this phenomena practically every day; just how many seniors can't pull the ball and how it frustrates them immensely. Being able to pull the ball allows the hitter to drive the ball with power. Why is it that seniors have trouble pulling the ball? Well, I believe the primary problem is that many seniors allow the pitch to travel too deep into their stance before swinging. These hitters find themselves fighting the ball off their chest and many times with ugly alligator arms.

Letting the ball get deep into the hitting zone is common amongst seniors and results in less effective hits to the off-field (*unless you swing inside-out*) or worse yet, handle-shots that go nowhere. Hitters that allow the ball to "*beat them*" deep into their stance generally make contact near the center of their body instead of out in front of the strike mat where they can get full extension.

"You need to go out after it", says Brett Kreuger from the 50's Major Plus Northwest DeMarini team, who volunteers as our resident on-site batting expert. By going out to get it means you must start a bit earlier with your swing rotation to the pitch. Now doing what Kreugs recommends means possibly breaking a lifetime habit that is not easily done.

The ideal pitch to pull is the middle-in guy. The middle or middle-out pitch I believe should be hit to center or the off-field while rotating your body to that direction to allow for a full swing. Not to say that really good pull hitters can't pull those middle-out pitches but it's a very advance skill.

After witnessing hitter's frustration during practice, I decided to write this article and to create a simple illustrative chart that I call the "Swing-Arc-Fan" that supports the concepts being discussed (*see the graphic*). Since a proper swing sweeps out area just like a hand-held fan, I thought it to be useful. The more area that is swept out by the hitter's swing the greater the bat-speed that can be generated according to the fundamental laws of basic physics.

The purpose of the graphic is to act as a guide so hitters can visualize what I'm talking about here. It also provides players with a visual of some of the contact points along the bat-path starting at the lag position; and where the ball would go if struck in that location on the curve. This visual aid is not intended to be to actual scale in relation to the layout of the softball diamond. For you lefties, just use a mirror image of the "Swing-Arc-Fan" to visualize the concepts.

Now remembering from a previous article that there are two orders of bat-speed motion to a good hitter's swing. First, is the rotation of the hips and shoulders to the bat-lag position using strong rotational mechanics. Second, is the flipping or sling-shotting of the bat to the ball which is done with fast hands and rolling wrists which is where the graphic picks up in the swing sequence.

The "Swing-Arc-Fan" begins at the second order of this "double-pendulum" swing motion. The proper swing action should be executed by continuous pulling with the bottom hand on the bat allowing the bat to accelerate in a circular path until contact is made just like extending a hand fan. If you use the top hand too early in the swing the bat will be "pushed" around reducing bat-speed and causing a short stunted follow through.

The "Swing-Arc-Fan" begins at 0° on the right hand side of the diagram for a right-handed hitter. This position zero is where bat-lag position has been attained from rotating your body (*hips and shoulders*) into the launch position. The proper launch position should have the hitter's bat barrel pointing back toward the catcher.

Looking at the graphic you'll see making contact early in the swing arc at the 45° marker will yield a hit to dead right field with subpar bat speed. At the 90° marker more bat-speed will be attained with a center field shot. By allowing the bat to rotate around even more before contacting the ball a hit to left center will be the result at the 123° marker and with greater bat speed.

Ideally, if the hitter continues on the swing path accelerating the bat to the 135° marker on the graphic, he or she can reach a point where contact with the ball will be potentially at the greatest bat speed and pulling the ball. Make sure to always square the barrel up to the ball upon contact for the best trampoline effect. If you make contact beyond the 135° marker you run the risk of hitting the ball into foul territory or off the end of the bat.

Thus, if you allow the pitched ball to "travel" too deep into your regular stance to the point where you are pushing the ball to the opposite side you're not allowing yourself to be the best hitter you can be.

Happy Hitting,

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