

TIRED OF HITTING GROUND BALL OUTS?

Many of us seniors can recall as kids the advice we were given when first handed a cylindrical bat with a round ball and told: “make sure you square-it-up when you hit the ball”. Not so easily done but there are ways to approach the striking of the softball with purpose rather than just winding up and letting her rip.

I believe that the ground ball is the most troublesome problem senior hitters experience even more so than the pop up or routine fly ball. With so many teams today playing five man infields and three man outfields, or higher age bracket teams that are eligible to play eleven defenders, hitters have found that by hitting the ball on the ground can be disastrous for the batter and their team.

Runners are now being forced out at 2nd base from either a mid-fielder or someone playing a deep shift taking away a sure base hit. This can be extremely frustrating to the hitter as well as killing a promising inning. What was once a base-hit to the outfield is now recorded as a fielder’s choice!

Two questions can be asked:

- 1) Why I’m hitting so many ground balls?
- 2) How can I stop from doing that?

What area you are striking on the ball’s surface is paramount to answering these questions. Rolling up on the top of the softball at contact with your top hand produces “Top-spin” resulting many times in a hot ground ball or a weak bounder. Understanding both ball spin and swing angle can help eliminate the ground ball dilemma.

Let’s first talk about basic ball spin:

- “Over-spin”, applied by hitting above the ball’s equator or the center of the ball,
- “Under-spin” or ‘cutting the ball’, applied by hitting below the ball’s equator,
- “No-spin”, hitting dead in the middle of the ball (see illustration).

Top spin line drives are good for keeping the ball in the park when you’re out of home runs.

Underspin line drives carry over the infielders heads and shoot the gaps quickly. Sometimes the

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big boys will hit underspin line drives that carry out of the park by mistake resulting in DBO's. A good top hand action on the ball can result in some very nice "hump-back" line drives that stay in the park.

Your "Swing Plane" is another determinant of where and how your hit is delivered into the field of play. You can swing directly up at the ball, or swing downwards at the ball, or the preferred method of a level swing, staying on plane to the incoming pitch.

Swinging up at the ball (not recommended) can cause a looping fly if you hit below the equator or a top-spin fly if you strike about the equator. These strikes rarely have enough lift or distance and are typically caught before reaching the warning track. Review my article on the "Magnus effect" which illustrates that hitting with an upswing is not the best way to hit the ball for distance (link found below).

Go ahead on your own and experiment with various combinations of possible spin actions and swing planes using a tee. Review my hitting off the tee article from the last issue of this newspaper and see for yourself how the ball reacts to each combination.

Striking at the ball with purpose allows the hitter to control his or her outcomes and also makes the batter focus more directly on the ball during their at-bat. A good hitter learns how to control the direction and flight of their ball just like a good golfer. Underspin gives the hitter the best control and also for adding distance to your big fly's. Keeping the ball off the ground by hitting safely into the outfield will make you a much more productive and satisfied hitter.

Here's the direct link to my previous senior softball articles for reference->

<http://www.bashbro1nwseniorsoftball.com/id476.html>

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HITTING THE BALL AT EACH ARROW RESULTS IN THE FOLLOWING:



- ← TOO MUCH TOP-SPIN; causing weak ground balls
- ← TOP-SPIN; humpy line-drives good for base hits
- ← NO-SPIN; knuckleballs resulting in truncated distance
- ← UNDER-SPIN; line-drives, shoot the gaps, longer home runs
- ← TOO MUCH UNDER-SPIN; weak pop outs and short fly balls