



I hope that your practices are starting to become more fruitful and you're having fun and engaging with your players. The season is long and there will be a lot of time for some new items/drills.

Most coaches are aware of the game strategy and need for position players etc, and at times, need help with developing player's skill sets. I set a goal for this year to focus on a few key items that would raise the level of play and provide more opportunities for strategy to be deployed.

Goal 2. Runs must be scored by hits.

Hard goal since many runs are scored by past balls, steals, etc than hits. Developing catchers as early as pitchers is a necessity. We've already had one training at Hardtke and there are more plans on the way.

If you want help in training your catchers, please contact me. While training catchers is not my forte, I have documented the Hardtke training and will try and get it up on the website. Gary H. (ex minor league catcher) has also filmed it and we're trying to get that up on the website as well. I have studied catchers from throwing to how they handle a run down and can assist as well.

An easy way to train catchers is have them catch bullpen and as much as possible. Work with them on getting into a stance and then move, not dive, to block the ball by falling on their knees with their glove between their legs and most importantly, head down watching the ball.

Catching involves not only blocking balls and preventing runners from stealing, it also has to do with calming the pitcher down, calling time out on the field when things are getting out of control such as overthrown balls and being the field general. That's why catchers are so valued in the MLB.

The other half of that goal is hitting. We have the best of the best equipment: Iron mikes, tee's, whiffle balls, swingaways, insiderbat you name it. I'd like to see our hitting improve. We need to better utilize the equipment we have to teach our players how to pick up the ball sooner, how to swing quicker and body movements that facilitate these.

We have two new items for hitting, SwingAway and the Insiderbat and hopefully everyone has had a chance to play with them and see what they bring to the training. There is also training for each of these and hopefully you've seen these websites and spent a few minutes on them.

Granted you might know a lot about hitting and maybe even been a great hitter but even the best hitters practice, practice and never stop learning. Always be open to new things and how to best utilize them.

Here are some drills from the Swingaway website that you could incorporate into your hitting station.

<http://www.swingawayblog.com/2008/12/10/swingaway-success-guaranteed-workout®/>

DRILLS

Drill 1 - Middle pitch, thigh-high location. This pitch is hit perfectly should hit dead center on the target. It should be the first one you master, but will take much practice.

Drill 2 – Inside pitch, knee-high location. This is a pitch that can be driven. You will not want your arms extended at contact. Extend through the pitch. This will keep your hands quick and keep the ball from drawing foul.

Drill 3 – Inside pitch chest-high location. This is an overemphasis drill. Set the ball as high as it can go. Your hands will have to stay well inside the ball and very quick to get to this pitch and still have the ball hit the target.

Drill 4 – Inside pitch, waist-high location.

Drill 5 – Outside pitch chest-high location. This is a pitch that can typically be driven to the opposite field and is considered by many hitters as a very good pitch to hit. Mastering this pitch can be exceptionally helpful to your hitting success. Most defense shade players to pull the ball.

Drill 6 – Outside pitch knee-high location. For most, this is the most difficult pitch to master. Be very careful on this drill that your feet stride straight forward. Let your hands make the adjustment.

Drill 7 – Middle pitch, thigh-high location. Hit from opposite side. You are not trying to become a switch hitter. This develops your non-dominant side, increasing strength and body control. It also requires increased concentration – a key element for hitting success.

For the InsiderBat, go to <http://www.insiderbat.com/a4jumbotron.html> and watch the videos.. they really great and informative.

You might have seen that I started with Goal 2. Well actually I've already provided you with Goal 1. Improve throwing and fielding!

Remember to try the 'flip' wrist action in your throwing drills. Look at the agenda I put out for spring training that is also on the website for how to do this. Start with the flip and work out to throwing from one knee, back a bit further and throw from the waist up with feet fixed etc. There are all kinds of drills and contact me if you want some ideas.

For fielding, try having the players catch grounders with their hands behind their back, knees bent and have them catch the ball by letting the ball go between their legs and sit on the ball as it goes under them. Give them points on how many they do catch.

This forces them to use their feet 1st, knees 2nd. I have some other training aids we can use to learn the rest of it, but moving their feet first works for any position, outfield / infield. Got to learn how to move!!!

I'll provide my other goals later in on and try and really improve the quality of your practices. Number and length of practices only goes so far.. quality of practices will endure and are a lot more fun.

Remember, if your players are having fun playing baseball, you're having fun coaching!