



As the weather is starting to get nicer and practices are happening more often, make sure the players get a break and keep their fluid levels up. It's a marathon of a season and we have to remember to pace ourselves and keep it fun for everyone. I hear lots of encouragement in the practices and positive reinforcement / teaching opportunities and keep piling it on.

We have a number of training aids in the back shed that I would like to make everyone aware of.

We have 2 Swingaways and Bill Gibbs from Swingaway was out at the field on Saturday showing everyone how to use it and setup/takedown. If you're not sure about how to do this you can either send me an email or check it out:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/zmanwa#p/u/12/c0vRCzUuC44>

We have an Insider Bat #6 and we're still trying to locate the #7. These are trainers to teach the right form for hitting. They force the proper grip and swing. Take a look: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEegyrPgVA0>

We have an Instructo Swing, which is the blue U shape item in the shed. It's a bit old but still very useful. You can see the video's on how to use it at : <http://www.instructoswing.com/>.

We have a Atec Soft Toss machine that requires power but could easily be set up by the shed with a portable net. It frees up the coach to coach and instruct rather than get fatigued throwing ball after ball. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09Cz-x3xTww>

And finally, we have a radar gun to gauge your pitchers, measure bat speed improvements. Keep in mind that it is best used as a relative reference and not absolute i.e. it may be off a few mph. Especially in my case where it still reads 50mph and I know I'm throwing easily in the 90's (1990?)

Keep these in mind and use them as a way to prevent 'ruts' in your practices, free up coaches, and keep the players engaged. While the Iron Mikes in the cages are great they can get tiresome. Throwing short pitches from behind the net in the cages is another alternative.

Keep the players guessing as to what to expect at practices and you'll keep them having fun. If you need any help with these aids please contact me and I'll come out to your practice and help you with them.

While all of these are swing oriented, keep in mind the basics of hitting and having the players be aggressive. No WALKS! Hitters don't learn anything by getting a base on balls. Discourage players from looking for a walk.

Work on proper form and less on contact and unless a hitter is really struggling, limit choking up on a bat and stepping too early.... From what I've learned and read, these seldom help and often confuse players. Teach the proper stance of being balanced, taking a minimal step (6-8 inches) loading up the hips and releasing the fury! Of course keep the head upright (not down) and look the ball into the bat.

One other thing that I've noticed is that many players are planting their back foot pointed to the catcher. Try to get them to make it perpendicular to home plate or slightly towards the line base. The back foot needs to power the ball quickly and pointing to the catcher prevents a forward movement to the pitcher.

You don't need all these tools to learn how to swing and hit a ball however I've yet to see a MLB team that doesn't have any of these training aids and those guys making a living from hitting so take a chance and give the training tools a try.