



A few items to talk about...

If you remember back on January 16th, one of the key areas the HS coaches saw for improvement for players that they would like to see was.... wait for it.... the skill of bunting.

I'm sure you've learned or seen it before and perhaps like me have seen it taught many different ways over the past 4 decades. I've provided an approach that I thought was well done, by Bryan Sidensol at the end of this email.. Please take some time and teach your players this as well as how to defend against the bunt...

I continue to see players run up to cover for a bunt with their hands down... Coaches, when you bring your infield in to cover a bunt, you must get them to get their hands above their waist and EYES on the batter NOT the pitcher.. It's easy to assume they know this but remember you still have to remind them to tie their shoelaces at times... this is much more serious if they forget.

The Art of Bunting - The Sacrifice

Bunting is an often overlooked, yet vital skill for the complete hitter. Proper execution of this skill can be critical to a team's success. Advancing runners into scoring position with a sacrifice bunt makes a world of difference in a tight ballgame. So can laying down an unexpected drag bunt single against an especially tough pitcher. Both types of bunts put pressure on the defense and cause reactions that can benefit the offense. The bottom line is that teams that execute the bunt properly will win more of those close 1-run or 2-run games.

Whether your team plays "small ball" or relies heavily on home runs and extra base hits, bunting should be part of every player's daily practice. The reason for this is because you actually are practicing hand-eye coordination at the same time you are practicing your bunting technique. Let's take a look at the proper technique for the sacrifice bunt.

The Sacrifice Bunt

First off, it is a good idea to move up in the box when executing the bunt. This gives you a little more fair territory to work with. Starting in a normal batting stance, the hitter rotates their back foot so that their body is squarely facing the pitcher. At the same time, the top hand should start sliding up the barrel of the bat and moving it into proper position. The top hand should end up about halfway up the barrel, with the bat positioned comfortably between the thumb and index finger. The batter should be in a balanced and comfortable position, with the knees bent. He should also be leaning forward with most of his weight on the front leg.

Bat Angle

The angle and positioning of the bat is critical, and this is where many players' bunting mechanics break down. The bat should be held out in front of the body, with both elbows bent. The barrel of the bat should be positioned pointing upwards at about a 45 degree angle, at the top of the strike zone. The bat should also be slightly angled forward, again at around a 45 degree angle. Having the bat in this position accomplishes several things:

* It makes it much harder to pop the ball up, the cardinal sin of bunting.

* The angle of the bat is geared toward the left side of the infield, where you want the ball to go in most cases.

* By having the bat head at the top of the strike zone, the hitter knows that if he has to go up to reach the pitch, it is not a pitch he should be attempting to bunt.

Let's elaborate a bit on this last point and discuss how the hitter should react to different pitch locations. If you are in the proper bunting stance, you should only have to move the bat up or down (not forward or back) in a straight line. Make sure you never drop the bat head. The angle of the bat and the position of your arms should stay constant, and you'll use your knees to adjust to the height of the pitch. And since we know that moving up means moving out of the strike zone, it is really just a matter of bending the knees to adjust to lower pitches. It is very difficult to bunt the low strike by only dropping the hands and not using the knees.

Common mistakes arise from batters going up in the zone and altering the angle of the bat as they do so. This leads to pop ups, fouled bunts, and misses. Another common mistake that I frequently see is lunging at the pitch. Again, straying from the proper bat angle is problematic. It is much harder to make contact and control where the ball goes when you are reaching for a pitch, and you are much more likely to miss the ball completely. Just be patient and let the ball come to you.

So the keys to a successful sacrifice bunt are: get in the proper position, use your knees to react to pitches down in the zone and keep the bat angle constant, and avoid pitches that don't fit into your well established position.

Just a note: In the description it talks about "rotating the back foot" please let our coaches know that this does not mean to move the back foot around to be next to the plate (Squaring Up) but rather to a position much like a finished swing or for those Catholic's in our league a genuflection. Think of it as taking a knee.

Try teaching the "twist and kneel" where the batter actually touches the ground with his/her knee and then comes up to position. It sets their mind to understand how far they can move up/down with their body not their arms. I also make sure we teach it in the cage with the machine first because the pitches are more consistent and it allows for building confidence.

This way the batter can rotate back out of the bunt posture quickly if the pitch is too high/out of the strike zone.

Bryan Sidensol is the owner of HittingWorld.com. He can be reached at sales@hittingworld.com.