

Let's Get These Kids Swinging the Bat!

Much has been written about hitting mechanics and drills to develop a good swing, - from the stance to the follow through, from on the bench through to the batters box. Far less has been said about how to develop a player with a good aggressive hitting mentality, especially from a very young age.

From the first meeting or practice, the coach can begin to deliver her/his message very clearly. "On THIS team, we develop AGGRESSIVE HITTERS! We take walks ONLY when we have to. In fact we hate walks. We want you early in the count to look for your pitch and when you see it, hit it HARD. Swing a bat is an act of aggression. You need to be intense, without being tense. We want all our players to go into the batter's box EXPECTING to hit, knowing they can hit, and swinging the bat so they will hit."

The key words (or the three C's) that we will use all year long are:

1. CONFIDENCE

We will select the right bat for you, and teach you the proper mechanics but most of all, we will give you the right mental attitude so that you will believe in your heart that you are a good hitter.

2. CONCENTRATION

We will teach you how to relax; to concentrate and focus your eyes so that you may pick up the ball and track it.

3. CONTACT

We will instruct you on how to contact the middle of the ball, in front of the plate and accelerate the sweet part of the bat through the ball.

You may consider asking your batters to make two strike adjustments, but all players will be expected to hit the ball.

Now for the hard part: walking the talk. IF you agree with the above hitting philosophy, then you have to be prepared to back up your words with actions and strategies. You will need a scorekeeper and statistician to monitor each at bat so you know how many 1st strikes each player took, how many second strikes they took, and most importantly how many 3rd strikes they took, - the dreaded backwards K! This will be tracked ONLY to help each player understand what it is going to take to become a good, aggressive, confident hitter.

To further support this philosophy and to give it even more credence, you might

consider:

1. NEVER giving the take signal (really, not even having one to give!; with the only possible exception of the Qualifiers or Provincials)
2. Promise to NEVER criticize a batter for swinging and missing a pitch, or striking out.
3. Strive at all practices and pre-games to devote 50% or more of the time to the offensive side of the game.
4. At Mite, Squirt and even Novice/Pee-Wee, you might consider a Continuous Batting Order and using it all year, so that if No. 7 in the order was the last out of a Game, the 8th position would lead off the next game, and so on. I can't think of a better way to get the message across that you believe that ALL of the players can become good hitters.

Again, let's consider what message the players receive when they hear the following from the bench or the stands:

"Good eye"

"Make her throw strikes"

"Don't swing at the bad ones"

"Way 'da take one for the team"

"A walk is as good as a hit" (most of the time not correct anyway)

"Watch it right into the catcher's glove"

"Don't worry, that wasn't a strike, the umpire must be blind!"

"Choke up"

"Move back in the box"

What if we banned the above and said the following instead:

"You're a good hitter, be a Big Stick, RBI time"

"Hey Clutch Hitter, lets see you Deliver" (even rhymes!)

"Nice Swing, Good Rip, Way 'da hack at it"

"Keep swinging, you'll get it next time"

"That's only 2, you got the big one left; that's why they give you 3"

"Nothing gets by you now"

"Don't let Blue Decide, if it's in or it's out"

"Battle Hard, Win the Battle"

"Too bad you had to take a walk, hitting is more fun"

"You'll get a hit next time"

Please understand something, I wasn't born yesterday, and I've been around the game a long time. I KNOW if you get your shortest batter, (hopefully who bats from the left side), and you instruct her to get in a "crouched stance" at the plate, and never to swing until she has a 2 strike count, she might get a lot of

walks. But what is the point? I know that kids who become good hitters develop a passion for the game, and can't wait till their next at bat, and the challenge of facing a good pitcher and coming through with a clutch hit or an RBI. I also know that kids who walk, often walk right over to the soccer registration line next year. It has been said that winning at all costs, might come at a cost you cannot afford. We as coaches of kids can't coach like Joe Torre, this isn't the major leagues; yes it's rep, but who cares; we need the right hitting philosophy to help our players develop to become strong, confident, aggressive hitters.

Then we need to back up our words with our actions.

We've got a great game and it can get a lot better if we "get these kids swinging the bat!"