

NOTE FROM USA BASEBALL



On January 1, 2018, young players 14 and under who play in Little League®, Pony, Dixie, Babe Ruth, Cal Ripken, and AABC will have to start swinging bats with a USA-certified logo. These new youth baseball bats have less trampoline (or "pop") and the ball will not come off the barrel as fast as it did with previous bats.

So what can you do to offset this and help make the transition smooth?

Here's a few suggestions:

LEARN PROPER HITTING MECHANICS

With the new rule change, it never hurts to brush up on the fundamentals. Below are the seven things to keep in mind every time you swing the bat, any bat. It's also important to remember that the cage is where you think about these fundamentals, not at the plate. The plate is where you trust that your hard work and repetitions will pay-off. At that point, it's simply "See the ball, hit the ball."

1. FIRM FRONT SIDE

The front leg keeps the rest of your body behind the baseball. It stops forward momentum and starts the axis of rotation that you will be hitting on. This is extremely important. If you lose the firm front side, you lose bat speed and your head movement starts to increase.

2. BACK FOOT ON ITS TOE

When you commit your backside and decide to swing, the force you generate going toward the baseball will be stopped by your firm front side so you can start rotation. What's left is your back toe on the ground.

3. PALM UP, PALM DOWN

On a right-handed hitter, if you took away the bat at contact and had him open his hands, his right hand should be facing straight up and his left hand should be facing down. This is the most fundamentally sound and powerful grip position you can be in at contact.

4. HEAD ON THE BALL

Also known as seeing the ball at its contact point. Knowing how to hit a baseball starts with knowing how to see the baseball. Keep your head still and eliminate unnecessary movement. You can also stand in on bullpens, hit against fast pitching machines

5. BACK KNEE, BACK HIP, AND HEAD IN A STRAIGHT LINE

This keeps you balanced: not too far forward losing power and not too far back for an awkward and/or uphill swing.

6. HEAD IN THE MIDDLE OF YOUR FEET

At the point of contact, if you were to draw three lines between your head and two feet, it should form a triangle. This gives you a strong base for your swing.

7. TOP ARM BENT

When you swing, this is done almost automatically. Just remember, the closer your elbow is to your body, the more power you can create as you spin. The farther your elbow gets as you straighten it, the more power and leverage you are losing.

SPEND MORE TIME IN THE CAGE

Knowing proper swing mechanics is only half the battle. Perfecting them, making them second nature is the other half. That's accomplished through repetition, and the best place to take repeated swings is in the batting cage. It's where great hitters are forged. In addition to honing proper swing mechanics, time in the cage can improve hand-eye coordination, increase bat speed, improve pitch selection, and form strong muscle memory, all of which will help when you step to the plate with a USA-certified bat. If you have trouble getting to a cage, hitting off a [batting tee](#) is also a great way to practice your swing.

SWING A WOOD BAT

You should do this for the same reason you play against your older brother. Sure, it's tough getting your you-know-what handed to you, but he's making you better. At first you don't realize it, but gradually, you're adapting to stiffer competition. Same thing with wood bats. They're hard to hit. They have a smaller sweet spot. They're heavier. But if you keep swinging them, you'll keep improving, and before long, that USA-certified bat you didn't like swinging because it didn't have the same pop, well, it has pop now, but it didn't come from the bat - it came from you! Think about how satisfying it will feel to hit a home run because you did most of the work, not your bat.

BE COACHABLE

Don't be an athlete who doesn't reach his full potential because he thinks he already knows everything. Listen to your coaches. Be willing to choke up and or/shorten your stride with two strikes, especially with a new bat that doesn't reward you for mis-hits. Talk to your coaches about what you're seeing after an at-bat and let them help you adjust your plan at the plate. Make them feel useful. You'll both be better for it.