

Become a Lead Arm Swinger and Improve Your Hitting ©

Fall 2011 – Art Eversole

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I've observed for a number of years that it's not necessarily a bat speed problem for seniors as most believe, as it's more a problem of not "squaring-up" the barrel of the bat to the ball at contact to take advantage of the bat speed they do have. Becoming a lead arm swinger will help you take full advantage of your bat speed. Seniors have been led to believe by their coach's since early childhood that the top hand on the bat is the primary power source in the baseball/softball swing. The majority of seniors' today, both men and women, utilize the top hand on the bat to generate bat speed.

The top hand approach is the most common and intuitive hitting mechanic for seniors that I've seen in my 10 years in the senior game as it's what our generation learned playing ball on the playgrounds of America. However, the lead arm hitting technique is used by most if not all of the professional softball players. For example, the members of the famed "Long Haul Bombers" squad that travel to Major League Baseball stadiums and put on home run displays that amaze both fans and Major League ball players use the lead arm swing mechanics. These pro-type hitters all use a pivot-hip drive action to power their swings as the lead arm goes from a slightly bent position to nearly straight at impact. It's not enough to just "pull" the lead arm across your chest you must also "snap open" your hips and drive hard into the ball all at the same time to maximize bat speed. The bat barrel must be "squared-up" to the ball at contact for maximum ball-exit speed.

The top hand method for accelerating the bat is an extremely inefficient way to generate effective bat speed. The hitter ends up "pushing" instead of "pulling" the bat barrel to the ball losing the all-important "bag-lag" needed

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for power. While executing top hand or rear arm dominance during your swing the bottom hand or lead arm is left doing little to help generate bat speed. Another disadvantage of using a top hand swing dominance approach in your swing is that when your rear arm fully extends it appears that you've "stopped" your swing but in actuality your swing stops when the hitter runs out of rear arm length. Using the bottom hand and lead arm pulling actions is a much more efficient way to generate bat speed and provides more leverage. Lead arm swinging will also give the hitter a full-swing around the body for a complete and not an abbreviated follow-through.

For the greater part of my career I too was strictly a top hand swinger while playing baseball in high school and college in the 60's, and then major league fastpitch softball in the '70s and '80s. When introduced to slo-pitch softball in the late '90's I observed that most of the top hitters were bottom hand or lead arm swingers; just the opposite of what I was doing and I found this to be very peculiar at the time. Proof in point that good hitters use lead arm mechanics is those players using the "overlap grip" which places the top hand over the bottom hand on the bat thereby making the bottom hand and lead arm the primary bat swinging lever.

Some lead arm swingers when just learning the technique find that they have an inefficient pivot-hip-drive action resulting from a lead arm that is moving too slowly and are forced to push with the rear arm/top hand to get the bat going. So remember to pull hard with the lead arm and bottom hand to the ball while maintaining a good bat-lag by keeping the wrists cocked until at the last moment turning the bottom hand wrist under hard at contact.

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Please visit the photo slides that accompany this article which provides a visual showing the lead arm pulling the bat barrel to the ball in a “squared-up” fashion. Please note that the top hand remains underneath the bat at contact and beyond and never ever rolls up and over the left hand for a right handed batter and vice a versa for a lefty. If you do roll over your top hand you’ll likely hit a weak grounder or have a miss hit by smothering the ball. Another way of stating the last sentence is that the rear arm/top hand should never “catch-up” to or worse yet “pass” the lead arm/bottom hand during the swing to the ball as the arm and shoulder nearest the pitcher leads the way to the ball.

