

How to Generate Bat Speed Without Over-Swinging ©

September 2012 – Art Eversole

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We've all observed a batter who is obviously over-swinging in an attempt to generate what they believe will result in maximum bat-speed. Over-swinging is a common problem that typically manifests itself in poor swing mechanics. Poor mechanics are counter-productive in maximizing bat speed. Many of our seniors generate bat speed with just their arms, without a deep wrist set, little contribution from hips, little or no shoulder wind and an ineffective weight transfer. Arms alone can only generate limited bat speed.

As a result some seniors will be restricted to keeping the ball in the park on fields where fences are 300ft or more, no matter how hard they swing. Singles hitters can also gain an advantage from swinging with proper mechanics as the ball will travel through the infield with greater velocity, making it much more difficult for infielders to make plays on hard hit balls.

A common technique employed by seniors is to accelerate the bat-head by "pushing" the bat around with the top hand which is commonly referred to as a "top hand hitter." These hitters may appear to be chopping or hacking at the ball; not unlike swinging a machete at some tall ferns. When a batter "pushes" or "forces" the bat at the handle with the top hand to strike the ball, the bat-head will reach its maximum velocity point well before contact. In addition, the hitter's follow-through will be incomplete or appear truncated as the top hand action will force the bat into the batter's body.

To the observer, the batter may appear to have intentionally stopped his or her swing just in front of their body when forcing the top hand over the

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bottom before contact. The top hand method of bat acceleration is shared by many of our senior softball players. This method is inefficient in generating good bat speed as it kills bat lag which is so essential for power. This method is a swing flaw where the top-hand rolls up-and-over the bottom hand before contact and typically results in easy ground balls to infielders.

A more effective technique in generating bat speed (without over-swinging) is for the hitter to instead of “pushing” the bat is to “pull” the bat around their body using their lead arm and bottom hand. The all-important “bat-lag” is easily created by employing this “pulling” action on the bat which is crucial for increasing power. There should be little or no tension in your shoulder muscles, arms and hands if you want to maximize your bat speed. The wrists must also delay from releasing until the last possible moment creating bat lag. Using front-side swing mechanics in creating bat speed will also facilitate the bat in rotating around a firmly planted stride leg.

The bottom hand at contact should turn under a quarter turn from the flat position displaying the four large knuckles of the hand to the ball. This turn under of the bottom hand also helps insure solid contact by flipping the bat-head into the ball which is bat-speed. The front-side swing is very similar to the one arm back-hand in tennis. On the follow-through the bat should start out actually pointing upwards allowing proper under-spin to be imparted to the incoming ball. Another way to visualize this front-side lead arm swing mechanic is it being similar to “thumbing a ride”; as the lead arm thumb should be pointing to the sky.

Using the front-side dominance in the swing will maximize bat-speed and will produce a fluid follow-through by letting go of the top hand immediately

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after contact. Understand that the rear hip also plays a major role in driving the front hip/side open during this swing action; the backside and front-side provide a synergistic effect that produces excellent rotational mechanics.

The dominant hand for most batters is naturally their top hand and must be trained NOT to “push” the bat handle before impact as this takes the all-important lag out of the swing reducing power. The dominant hand should be loose on the handle even with the ten fingered grip. Many batters have gone to the overlap-grip for more power as it also reduces the number of fingers on the handle thereby, limiting its dominance. The more fingers overlapped on the bottom hand (overlap grip) the better to stop your top hand from taking over the swing.

Bat speed is more easily attained by creating what is called a deep wrist set and having a late release of the hands and wrists when striking the ball. A full deep set of the wrists will also automatically place the barrel of the bat in a good lag position over your back shoulder. This technique will produce a bat that literally whips through the impact area with seemingly very little effort on the batter’s part and without over-swinging (see photo).

Because we all have a very strong tendency to revert to what feels "natural," we must learn this lead arm swing by over exaggeration by controlling the stick with the lead hand ONLY—so as to prevent the top hand from doing the major portion of the work. I would practice taking swings with the lead arm only to train your muscle memory in controlling the bat with the bottom hand.

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So, if you would like to have a freewheeling swing that produces maximum bat-speed for your physique without getting over-extended; learn to control the bat using front-side swing mechanics (i.e. bottom hand, lead arm, front-side muscle groups). Remember that during the swing the top hand should only be “along for the ride!” The goal here is to have a simple repeatable swing without a lot of moving parts that will deliver maximum force to the ball with minimal effort and avoid over-swinging that can have catastrophic results.

