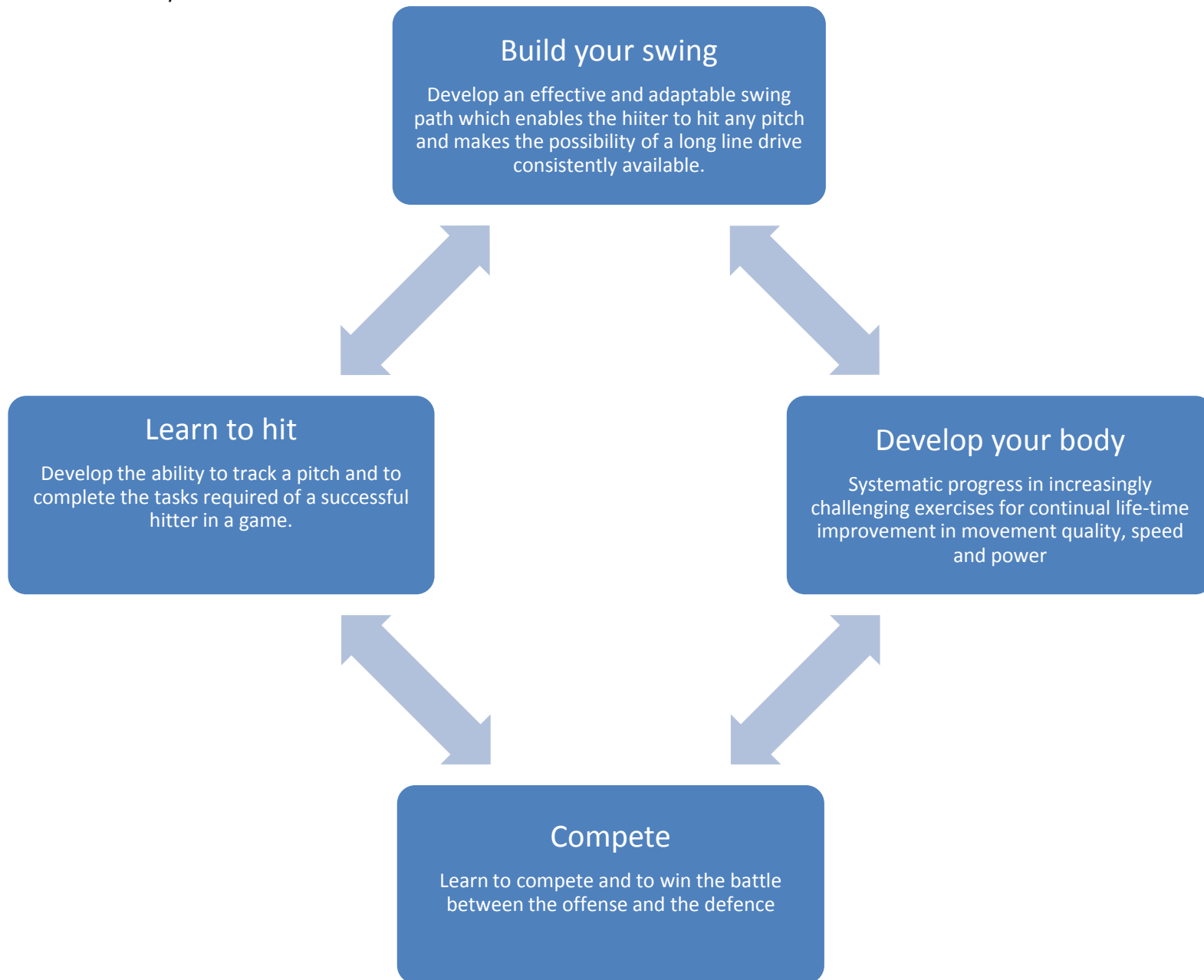


Notes on a process for developing hitters

Modified from material assembled by David Nilsson



Build your swing

1. The trajectory of the ball is the best indicator of swing mechanics – ball should travel on an upward plane (5-45° above horizontal) with backspin. In order to achieve this consistently, hitters need to find a way to release the barrel through the ball on any pitch. It takes a lot of time, repetition and patience to develop.
2. Load and Release: no other instruction on mechanics – encourage hitters to learn the skill self-adjustment right from the start
 - a. 15 metre tee drills: The tee must be far enough from the screen for the trajectory to be observable.
 - b. Flips: front toss by coach (well protected by a good screen) to work on achieving the same objectives – good trajectory with backspin
2. Expand the Contact Zone: up and down, in and out, forward and back.
 - a. 15 metre tee drills: place the tee in all locations while retaining the same setup. Learn to get good release through the ball in any location.
 - b. Flips: as above, but with the ball flipped in varying locations, including well outside the strike zone. The hitter must hit everything: this way he expands his zone and learns what he can and can't handle well.

Learn to hit

1. Live batting practice
2. Other hitting challenges: stick ball, rag ball, mini-wiffles, coloured dots, racquet sports etc
3. Visual replay and mental rehearsal
4. Learn to drag bunt

Stage 1

Develop your body

1. The fundamental qualities of movement: stability, range of motion, control, strength.
2. Appropriate on-field general coordination exercises in each of the 7 Streams:
 - i. Double leg
 - ii. Single leg
 - iii. Jumping
 - iv. Pulling
 - v. Pushing
 - vi. Shoulder rotation
 - vii. Core

Compete

1. On-deck preparation
 - a. Physical: i. develop your own routine to get loose
ii. rehearse your pitch preparation, your load & your game swing
 - b. Mental i. What is his release point? How hard is he throwing? Is he up in the zone, or down?
ii. practise hard and soft focus?
2. During the At Bat:
 - a. It's a contest between you and the ball: "Know your enemy!"
 - b. track the ball intently
 - c. replay each pitch in your head
3. Self Assessment:
 - a. was I ready for the pitch?
 - b. did I see the ball?
 - c. did I put a good swing on it?
 - d. did I swing at something I can hit?

Build your swing

1. A swing path is the pathway of the bat, from load, all the way to, and through, contact. While working to develop a consistent (long) swing path, individuals will find keys & checkpoints, and will make individual adjustments.
2. The load must be lateral, rather than rotational.
3. The first movements of the hands from the position of toe touch is where a compact or short swing is created...It is also where a bad swing path begins.
4. The contact zone is different for each individual. Each person has a strong part of their contact zone to build on. A small contact zone reduces the chance of success.
5. Work on the 3 areas of tracking the ball, different swing paths, to create a better ball trajectory with all pitches, on releasing the barrel through the direction of the swing, on body rhythm and body control with all pitches by varying speeds and locations of pitches.

Learn to hit

1. Hitters should use live BP to expand their contact zone:
 - a. See every pitch – learn the three phases of tracking a ball: i. the release zone; ii. The decision zone; iii. The contact zone
 - b. Swing at every pitch: know where you are positioned in the box; work on trajectory of the ball off the bat; work on body control; try different swing paths; try different contact points; try different contact zones; repeat successful swing paths
 - c. Learn from every pitch: learn successful swing paths; learn rhythm; learn your contact zone; learn body control; learn what you can and cannot handle
2. Peer BP: seated or standing BP with no step is safer – make sure throwers learn to look through the screen.
3. Face variations of speed, spin & location. Don't get frustrated if the ball is not in the same perfect location every time. This represents the constant adjustments needed in a game.
4. Hit ball hard to all fields
5. Stand in on bullpens: put more pitches in the database.
6. Learn to push bunt.

Develop your body

(see ABF Long Term Athletic Development program)

Stage 2

Compete

1. Game Plan
 - a. Scouting: Left- or right-hander? Pitches? Arm angle? Best pitch? Does he have control? command?
 - b. Environmental conditions: particulars of this field (shadows, sun, backdrop etc)? Weather?
 - c. Every inning is a new game: watch the warmup and learn
2. On deck: Plan for this AB: what is the game situation? What am I going to look for? Should I adjust the level of aggression? 2-strike approach?
3. During the AB:
 - a. Track any pitch you take all the way into the catcher's glove
 - b. Between pitches: Is it now a hitter's count or a pitcher's count? What is he likely to do here? What can I eliminate? What if he does something unexpected? What is my plan?
4. Review:
 - a. How effective was my plan?
 - b. Make sure you store good results in the database for later visual rehearsal.

Build your swing

1. Keep refining the swing path and the contact zone.
 - a. A small contact zone limits development and creates bad habits.
 - b. The further out in front of the contact zone the ball is (whether in or out), the greater the need to pull the ball.
 - c. The deeper in the contact zone the ball is (whether in or out), the greater the need to hit the ball to the opposite field.
 - d. The opposition will look for, then attack, a weak part of an individual's contact zone.
 - e. Creating a long swing path does not mean a hitter cannot have a compact and explosive swing, or that he will not be short to the ball. The first part of the swing path must be compact and direct. The swing path should be long through the ball
2. Consistent body control comes from having control of your upper torso, body core and legs from the load to toe touch, and through contact.
3. Having a body rhythm to and through contact can greatly assist in body control
4. Understanding balance when it comes to hitting a baseball can be difficult for a few reasons.
 - Its complex: lateral movement occurs, then releases into rotational force.
 - It is not a stationary position
 - Hitters have different body shapes and sizes.
 - Different approaches for different types of hitters.
 - Difficult hitting surface.

Learn to hit

1. On-field batting practice: the main objective is to find different swings that will achieve success in all game situations on that day. Get the best out of it:
 - a. On deck: be ready (pine tar, batting gloves, physically loose, know the routine); mentally and physically prepare for different swings.
 - b. In the box: have an objective for every pitch; be consistently positioned; ask, "Where was that pitch?" not, "Was that a strike?" - the strike zone changes from game to game.
 - c. After each round:
 - i. Review: learn from your round; discuss with coaches or teammates
 - ii. Regroup: know what adjustments you will make and be prepared for next round.
 - iii. Relax: enjoy your teammates and the environment - hitting is fun
2. Learn and practice the full execution round, incl. Sac bunt.
3. Use an execution score sheet

Stage 3

Develop your body

Hitting is one of the most difficult tasks in sports, and requires great coordination. Maintain the development of athletic coordination by focusing on all four qualities of movement in each of the seven streams.

Compete

1. It takes a competitive spirit to be a successful hitter. Hoping will not get it done: you need a fierce determination to make it happen.
2. Hitting is difficult: pitchers are mixing up their pitches to keep you off balance, so the speed of the target can be 10-15 mph different from pitch to pitch, and the height of the target can be 40-50 cms different from pitch to pitch.
3. Swing practice + game practice + game plan = game ready!
4. On-deck preparation:
 - a. When does he throw his CB? What does he throw on different counts?
 - b. Baserunning considerations: is he bouncing the ball? Good pickoff? Time to plate? Outfield depth?
 - c. What is the game situation? What does the team need me to do here? Prepare to execute.
5. After the AB: what did I learn? What can I share with team-mates? Be a good teammate, and get yourself ready for your next AB.