

## **IFCA Instructional Corner**

# **Developing a Tee Swing for Consistent Performance**

*By Tony Rogers, Co-Owner and Founder,  
Millennium Softball Training Center (CA)*

For those who have attended one of my clinics, or visited our Training Center, you've heard me say, "Hitting is a simple process. It combines the natural God-given talents of good eye-hand coordination, reaction time and speed, with the developed disciplines of stance, relaxation, extension, follow-through and confidence." Over the years I've labeled this approach to hitting my "Million Dollar" lesson. That's because any player who learns and understands these basic principles can earn a scholarship to a four-year university and beyond. I tell all of my students that hitting should be fun! It's the one part of the game that every player is in control of. You pick the pitch and then apply what you've practiced. It can't get any simpler!

### **What is a Tee Swing?**

A Tee Swing is the swing you develop after hours. It's weeks, months and years of practicing one thing over and over again. It's that perfect feeling you get when you make contact with the ball and just send it. The swing you want to make on the tee, in the cage, most of all, at the plate. But why a Tee Swing and not a game swing, you might be asking. It's simple — a tee you develop consistency. There are no variables when you practice on a tee. It's just you, the tee, and the ball. Whereas in the cage or at the plate, there are many variables, including speed, movement of the ball and location. It's hard to develop consistency this way. What you want is to develop a consistent swing, then apply it to game situations.

### **How Do You Develop a Tee Swing?**

Well, this is just as simple as it sounds. You begin with a bat, tee and ball. We've all used tees in our

regular practice routines. They are usually one of many stations used during a typical batting practice. However, I believe the tee should be the first and most important station of any batting practice. The tee provides us with a very controlled situation. With no variables, you have the opportunity to measure a player's execution and consistency. Let me explain. We've all seen a player who regularly hits pop ups, pounds the ball into the dirt, or hits slow rollers off the end of their bat. Each of these is the result of the player's execution at the plate. A tee will not only expose this in a swing, but will allow you to make adjustments and correct it.

### **How Do You Begin?**

First, when hitting off the tee, you want to apply all the same disciplines of stance, relaxation, extension, follow-through and confidence you would apply at the plate. Experience has shown me that you will not perform a feat in a game that you have not already performed in practice. In other words, don't expect blistering shots through the infield or extra base hits in the game unless that is what you are practicing. The player begins by setting up on the tee, just as she would in a game. Make sure you have a proper stance in relation to the tee and ball (i.e. working inside, outside, up, or down in the strike zone). Second, I like to use baseball sized whiffle balls for this drill. The smaller ball demands more concentration to achieve the desired results. However, a softball sized whiffle ball, or regular softball can be used as well. The player begins to take her swings, remembering to set up after each swing before taking the next swing. (Just a note, this drill is not a race to see how fast you can finish and move on to the next station. This one drill can teach you more about your swing than any other drill you will practice.)

### **What Do You Look for When You Practice on a Tee?**

With most players I've trained, we start at the beginning. Not because they may not already be a good hitter or that my way is any better than anyone else. It's because I can learn what their strengths and weaknesses are. Remember, the goal is not to change a player's swing, but improve her consistency. I regularly videotape a player hitting off the tee. Not only does this give me a record of the player's progress, but sometimes "seeing is believing." I've had many players tell me that what they were doing felt good, but their performance and results left something to be desired. The tape helps us to see and evaluate areas in their swing that can be improved.

As the player begins to swing, I look at seven fundamental areas of their swing. They are:

1. A Relaxed Swing.
2. Hands and Hips Working Together.
3. Good Extension at the Point of Contact.
4. Point of Contact Relative to the Batter.
5. Position of Head and Body.
6. Follow-through on the Swing.

### **7. Path of the Ball:**

Each area seems simple enough, but when combined, they determine the quality of a player's swing. Here are just a few of the things to look for when practicing:

#### **A Relaxed Swing**

I encourage players to swing fast, not hard. Bat speed is the secret to hitting the ball hard. Many players believe that the harder they swing, the harder the ball will go. The truth is swinging hard causes you to tense and tighten up your muscles. This results in a decrease in reaction time, poor extension at the point of contact, a poor follow-through and a loss in power.

#### **Hands and Hips Working Together**

Are the player's hands and hips working together or are the hands leading the hips? I always start by looking at a player's feet first and work my way up their swing. I find that many times, a player will lean in her shoulder or having a tendency to pull the ball as the result of late or lack of use of her hips.

#### **Good Extension at the Point of Contact**

This is also known as hitting with your hands. Many players who come to me are still trying to make contact with everything out in front. As a result, they tend to extend at the same point regardless of pitch and point of contact. Players must understand and use mechanical leverage the bat's power and the body's momentum, they should be fully extended at the point of contact.

#### **Point of Contact Relative to the Batter**

Hand in hand with "good extension" is the timing of the ball to the batter. Making contact early in your swing takes the ball out of your strike zone. I teach hitting along an arc to my students. Hitting on the inside of the plate and working away from the batter learns to hit the ball along an arc. This results in maximum bat speed and power through the ball at the point of contact.

#### **Position of Head and Body**

If a batter is taking a great swing, but only a small piece of the ball, it's usually because of one or two things. First, many players have developed the bad habit of looking to follow the flight of their ball. When they lift their head early to admire their handy work, it causes them to dip their shoulder. Second, batters who lean over the plate will dip the end of the bat head, which will move the location of the bat's sweet spot off the ball. Both are simple adjustments that will increase a batter's consistency.

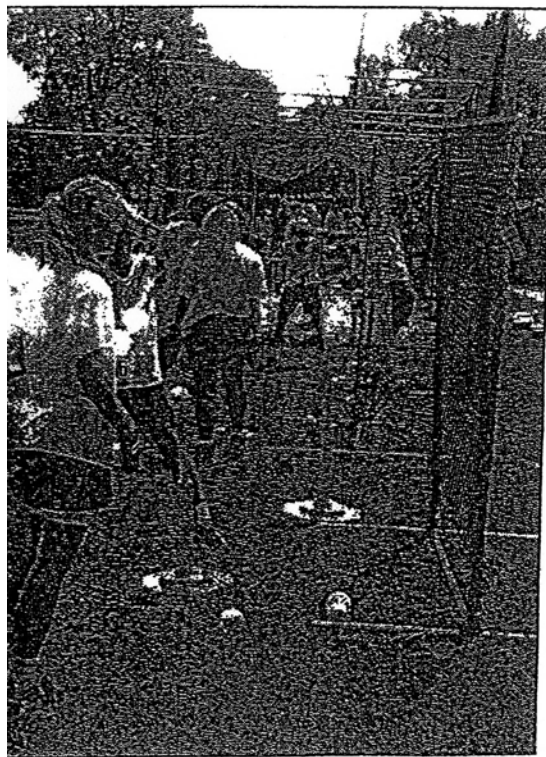
#### **Follow-Through on the Swing**

The swing does not end when you make contact with the ball. It's at this point that I tell players, "This is where the fun begins." Don't cheat yourself by finishing the swing. Power through the ball and finish with BOTH hands on the bat.

#### **Path of the Ball**

I have a slightly different approach to how I teach hitting. I teach players to cut the ball in half and hit it straight into the net. Consider this: A ball hit into the net may result in a ground out. Likewise, a ball hit up into the net may result in a fly out. I lo

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## **HITTING PROGRAM**

### **WRIST SNAPS**

1. Assume a hitting stance and place bat into the hitting zone.  
Break wrists back and forth for 20 secs. Repeat 3 times

### **HIP TURNS**

1. Assume batting stance, place bat behind back
2. Without moving feet, whip hips open
3. Pivot on ball of rear foot  
20 reps.

### **BREAKDOWNS**

1. Assume batting stance at tee, perform breakdowns to ball

### **NET SWINGS**

1. Measure distance away from a net with bat to comfortably swing and barely miss net
2. Assume batting stance, perform swings using normal stride  
Swing Series: Two Hands Standing 10 swings  
Lead Arm Only Standing 10 swings  
Repeat 2 times

### **TEE DRILLS      SOFT TOSS DRILLS      VARIATIONS-SEE ATTACHED SHEET**

Work soft toss and variations for bunting also

Pitching Machines and hitting off a pitcher: as much as possible

## Tee Swings

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players to hit line drives as they have a greater chance of getting out of the infield and finding their way into a gap. As for slappers, the rules are somewhat different.

These are just a few of the points practicing on a tee will show you about your swing. The tee also allows you to look at many other elements of a swing as well. They include a player's stance, her bat position, her hands, stride, pivot and hip rotation, and much more. Under these controlled conditions, there is little that a tee will not expose about one's swing. Maybe now you're beginning to see the benefits of developing a Tee Swing.

A tee will also provide you with one other benefit. It can detect changes in a player's swing. Over the course of a season, a player may experience an injury or muscle strain that causes her to change her swing. These changes are the result of a player's attempt to find a more comfortable way of swinging as the injury heals. If left unchecked, the change will soon become a habit that feels totally natural to the player. However, when a player and her coach have worked together on developing a Tee Swing, such changes can be identified and corrected before they become a problem.

### **Will Developing a Tee Swing Make You a Better Hitter?**

Yes, but I must add a word of caution. The secret of a Tee Swing is not to become the best hitter off the tee, but to apply what you've practiced and learned to your game. The goal is to develop a habit that you can consistently apply. That consistency will translate into a more consistent performance at the plate.

Now you have it. My "Million Dollar" lesson, or "The Secret to Consistent Performance at the Plate." So will a Tee Swing work for you? I believe it can and I encourage players and coaches to take advantage of this simple but effective and time proven tool. Over the years, I've seen this approach to hitting help first-time players and college athletes alike. What you get out of developing a Tee Swing will depend upon what you put into it.

I'd like to close with just a few pointers on how I run a typical batting practice. First, always remember to warm-up before any practice. A good warm-up is more important than many of the drills you will practice. Second, I like to practice batting when a player is fresh. Practicing tired or fatigued only leads to bad habits. Remember, a Tee Swing should be your best swing. Finally, I like to focus on only one or two elements of the swing at a time. I've learned there is a fine line between coaching and overwhelming. I want a player's next at-bat to be one of confidence, believing she is better equipped and not doubting herself.

*Tony Rogers is Co-Owner and Founder of Millennium Softball Training Center. He has coached youth sports for more than 20 years, and has coached or assisted girls' fastpitch softball players and teams, at the park and recreation, high school and travel ball levels. The training center's corporate motto is: "Helping to Make your Goals and Dreams a Reality." To learn more about Millennium Softball and its other services, visit its Website at: <[www.m-softball.com](http://www.m-softball.com)>.*