



Free Hitting

Objective

To let players hit free from coaching or instruction, allowing them to put all of the pieces of the swing together after drill work; this is the same as regular batting practice

Setup

Bucket of balls, coach or pitcher to throw or to feed a pitching machine

Execution

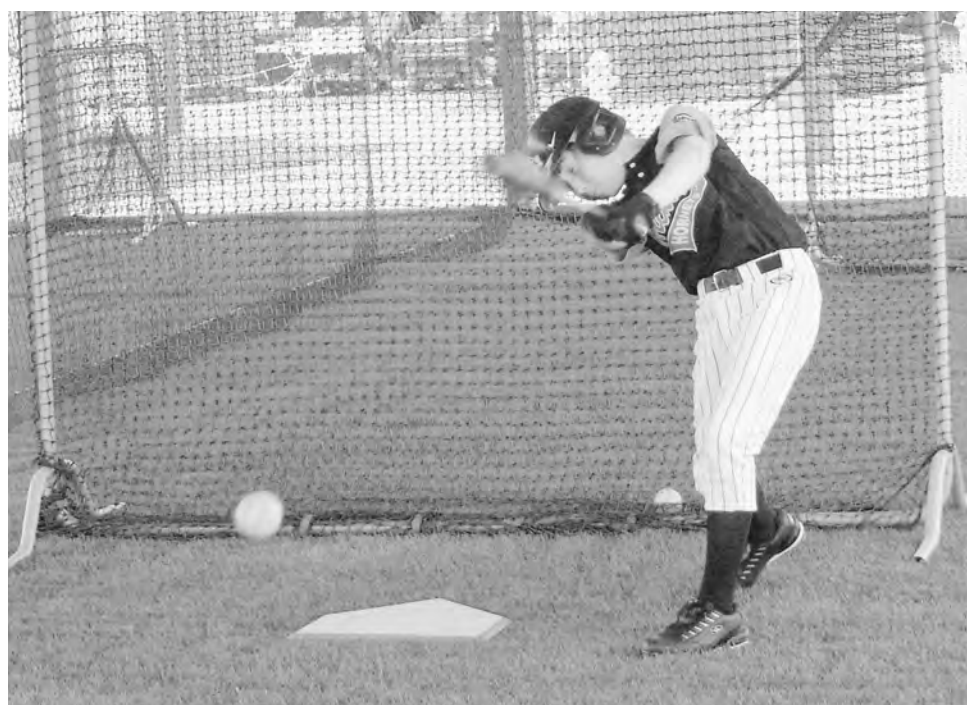
This is what we call regular batting practice or live hitting in the cage. Let players hit and have fun. Resist the urge to coach. Coaching and tinkering are for drill work. As players get older it's okay to have them work on bunting, hit and runs, and moving runners over during free hitting or batting practice. Hitting is supposed to be fun, so let the kids have at it. Note when corrections are needed and work on them during drill sessions.

Make It Fun

If you have two pitching machines indoors or in side-by-side cages or two capable batting practice pitchers, you can play a hitting game. Create two line-ups and have the batters alternate swings for five pitches each. Develop a point system. For example, award one point for a hard ground ball, two points for a line drive off either side of the cage or one of the side walls, three points for a line drive up the middle, and five points for a line drive off the back of the cage or the back wall of the gym. Do not reward foul balls, pop-ups, weak ground balls, or balls that hit the top of the cage or the ceiling. Have batters go head-to-head and keep team scores.

Make It Fun, Part 2

Taking the same game one step further, you can work on hitting the opposite way, hit-and-runs, and moving runners over by creating a point system that only rewards hitters for executing those skills correctly.



Adapted, by permission, from Ripken, 2007, *Coaching Youth Baseball the Ripken Way* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics).



Goalie Game

Objective

To work on hitting the ball where it's pitched, developing bat control, and creating a short swing to improve contact

Setup

Home plate in front of a hockey or lacrosse goal, pitching machine or tennis ball machine, bucket of balls

Execution

Set up a hockey or lacrosse goal as a backstop with a home plate in front of the net. Use a pitching machine that throws softer balls or use a tennis ball machine to throw balls toward the goal. The batter tries to keep balls from going into the goal by swinging at the pitches. The coach can throw harder than normal if machines are not available.

Make It Fun

Form two or more teams and keep track of how many goals are scored against each team. The team with the fewest goals allowed wins. A point can be deducted any time a team fields one of the hit balls cleanly.



Knock Out the Catcher

Objective

To work on hitting the ball hard up the middle by keeping the front shoulder in and striding toward the pitcher

Setup

A coach, catcher's gear, a bucket of soft or sponge rubber balls, a stool or bucket to sit on

Execution

A coach dresses in full catcher's gear and sits on a chair 10 to 15 feet from home plate. The coach tosses the ball and tells the hitter to knock him off the chair. Without really knowing it, players are working on hitting the ball hard up the middle.

Make It Fun

Form several teams and award points for different body parts. For example, one point for the feet, two for the shins, three for the stomach, four for the chest, and five for the face. Keep score and determine a winner. This can be an individual contest, too.



Coaching Keys

Because this drill is intended for younger players, you don't want to get too technical here. However, if players are really struggling to hit the ball up the middle and are pulling weak ground balls, they are probably "pulling off" the ball. This means that they are likely stepping and taking the front shoulder away from the pitcher. To correct this, you can toss the ball more to the outside part of the plate and force the stride and shoulder to come more toward the pitcher.



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Line Drive Home Run Derby

Objective

To work on keeping the head, eyes, and shoulders as level as possible throughout the swing; hitting line drives

Setup

Bucket of soft or sponge rubber baseballs, home plate, hitting net for a backstop, pitching machine (optional)

Execution

Use soft or sponge rubber baseballs and set up in the outfield, hitting toward the fence. Pitch overhand or toss balls underhand to players and award points for hard ground balls and line drives. Home runs count 5 points if they are line drives. High fly balls are outs, even if they travel beyond the fence. Swings and misses, pop-ups, and foul balls are outs. Give each player 3 outs and see who scores the most points. This drill can be done just as well with a pitching machine. The scoring sheet below will help you keep track of individual, group, and team scores. Analyze your team's progress by comparing results throughout the season.

Make It Fun

See which team can score the most points and which team can hit the most line drive home runs. Teams also can be awarded points for fielding batted balls cleanly. This can be an individual contest as well.

Player/group	Round 1	Round 2	Total
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
Group 1 total	_____	Group 3 total	_____
Group 2 total	_____	Team total	_____



Tee Hitting for Distance

Objective

To show how a good weight shift can generate power and that a level or slightly downward swing is best for driving the ball farther

Setup

Batting tee, bucket of balls, players in the field (optional), cones, markers, or stakes (optional)

Execution

Players use proper fundamentals to see how far they can hit a ball off of a tee from home plate. Use weight shift (“go back to go forward”), winding up almost like a pitcher to take the weight to the back side before exploding forward. The head should stay on the ball. The front shoulder and stride should go directly toward the pitcher until contact is made. Batters who drop the back shoulder and try to intentionally hit the ball high are eliminated. Line drives are best, but hard ground balls count. Have players run out and stand next to their best hits or mark them with stakes.

Make It Fun

Instead of simply hitting for distance, a point system can be developed for hard ground balls, line drives, etc. Teams can be created and points awarded based on the scoring system. This can also be an individual contest. If there are fielders, the defensive team can earn points by fielding batted balls cleanly (not if distance is a criteria, however).



Coaching Keys

Any time young players hit off a tee, especially if you tell them that they’re hitting for distance, they’ll tend to drop the back shoulder and swing with a visible uppercut. If players are hitting under the ball and getting a chunk of the tee with their swings or topping ground balls, the back shoulder dropping is likely the cause. Explain to them that the high fly balls they hit by doing this are really just pop-ups, not home runs, and that by swinging down and taking that barrel of the bat straight to the ball they will hit harder line drives and fly balls that will turn into home runs as they get bigger and stronger.

(continued)



Tee Hitting for Distance *(continued)*



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Hitting

KEY POINTS

1. The bat should be gripped loosely in the fingers with the middle or “door knocking” knuckles aligned. This allows the wrists to unlock, creating more bat speed.
2. The stance is just a starting point. There are hundreds of stances; the key is for the player to be comfortable.
3. Any stance must provide good vision of the pitcher, balance, and plate coverage.
4. Having the feet about shoulder-width apart with a slight bend in the knees should provide proper balance.
5. Make sure you can see the pitcher clearly with both eyes.
6. Stand so that the bat head can reach the outside of home plate.
7. A good starting point for the hands is about even with the back shoulder.
8. Every good swing incorporates some sort of a weight shift: “You have to go back to go forward.”
9. A short, soft stride allows your head and eyes to stay on the same plane, providing better vision.
10. The ideal swing is short and quick, utilizing the hands, wrists, and forearms.
11. A level swing is best. With the hands starting at the top of the shoulder, this will seem like a slightly downward swing to the ball.
12. The follow-through can be one-handed or two-handed. If the other aspects of the swing are in place, the follow-through occurs automatically.
13. If the follow-through is not complete, the bat is slowing down as it enters the hitting zone.