



Soft Toss

Objective

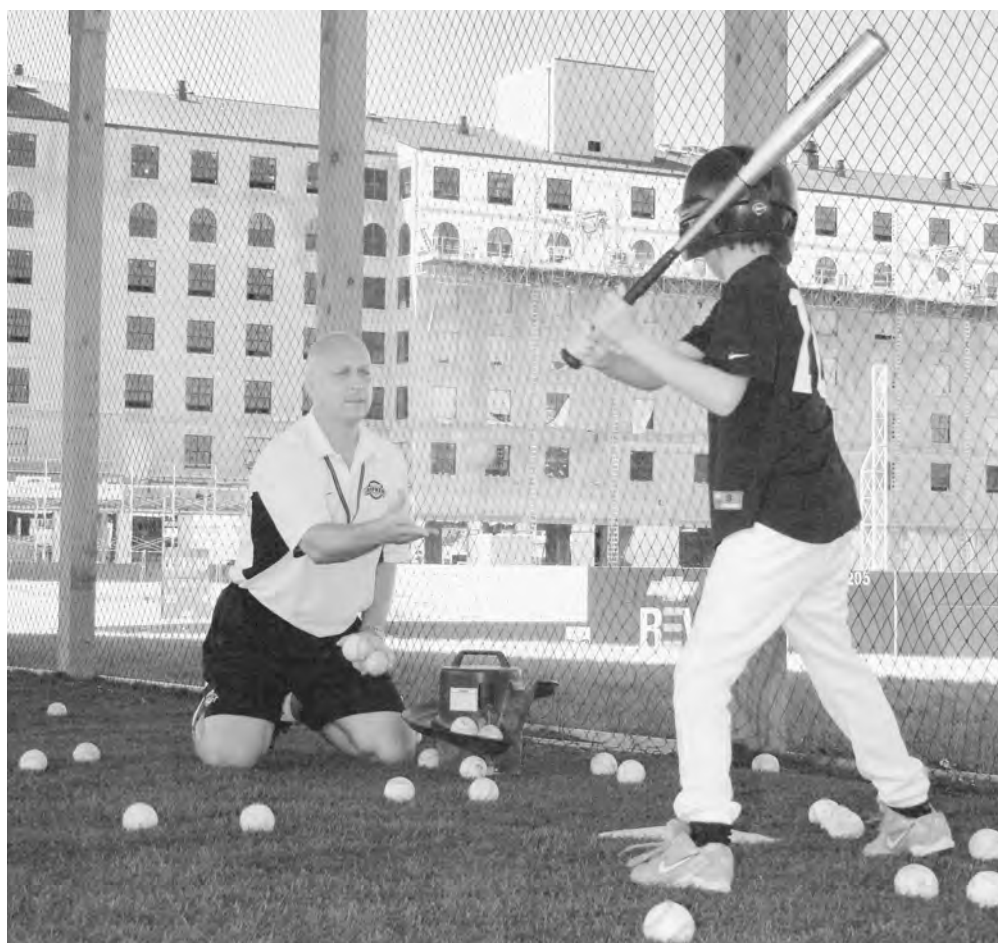
To use a proper grip and understand how that helps improve bat speed; verbal cue: “Loose hands, quick bat”

Setup

Bucket of balls, coach, player or toss machine to toss; net, screen, or fence to hit into

Execution

This is a standard hitting drill that can be done virtually anywhere. Teammates can toss to one another, or a coach can toss to a player. The batter takes his or her stance; the tosser kneels across from the hitter, slightly in front of home plate in foul ground, not in the direction that the ball will be hit. The ball is tossed underhand so the batter can hit it out in front of the plate. The hitter wants to concentrate on having a loose grip in the fingers with the “door knocking” knuckles lined up. This will allow the wrists to unlock, promoting a quicker swing using the hands, wrists, and forearms. Batters should think *loose hands, quick bat*. This drill works best if done into a screen with a target, but it can also be done into a fence if plastic balls, tennis balls, or rubber balls are used. Never hit baseballs into a fence.



(continued)

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



Soft Toss (continued)

Make It Fun

Turn this drill into a game or contest by giving each player a set number of swings and creating a scoring system. You can have two small groups compete against each other or have players keeping score individually. Have the players hit toward a smaller square or circular target (some nets and screens come with these, or you can create one with tape, markers, or paint). Give each player a point for a hard-hit ball in which the proper approach is taken. Give each player a bonus point for each ball that is hit into the actual target. Deduct a point for balls hit over the net or screen.

Make It Fun, Part 2

Another way to make soft toss more fun and interactive is to play a soft toss game. Have one player man each position in the field and the remaining players ready to bat. A coach should serve as the tosser at home plate. Hitters come to the plate one at a time. The coach tosses the ball just like in the soft toss drill, with the fielders and hitters reacting just like a normal game situation. Play using regular baseball rules. No pitcher should be used on defense for safety reasons (except for the youngest age groups). You can rotate three or four groups of players at a time from defense to offense and keep track of which small group scores the most runs. This game provides game action on each pitch, keeps everyone involved, allows the defense to face real game situations, and allows the hitters to do soft toss and run the bases.



Coaching Keys

If players seem to be getting jammed quite a bit, take a look at where the tosses are coming from and are being hit. A lot of coaches try to soft toss from a position directly across from the batter. When the ball is coming directly at the batter, he or she actually has to drag the bat to the ball, hitting it at a location that's not in front of home plate. The toss should come from an angle slightly in front of home plate and be struck slightly in front of the plate. This allows the wrists to unlock and the barrel of the bat to get to the ball.



Tee Work

Objective

To develop proper weight shift; verbal cue: “You have to go back to go forward”

Setup

Batting tee, bucket of balls, net, screen, or fence to hit into

Execution

Players adjust the batting tee to a height that makes them swing down slightly to get the barrel of the bat to the ball. Players hit into the screen or a net with a target. Work strictly on weight shift (“Go back to go forward”). Take all the weight to the back side before exploding forward. Keep the head down and eyes on the ball. Take the front foot and front shoulder directly toward pitcher. Try to hit the ball at the target each time. Avoid an uppercut swing. If you don’t have a net, plastic balls, tennis balls, or soft rubber balls can be hit into a fence. Never hit baseballs into a fence.



(continued)

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Tee Work *(continued)*

Make It Fun

Turn this drill into a game or contest by giving each player a set number of swings and creating a scoring system. You can have two small groups compete against each other or have players keeping score individually. Have the players hit toward a smaller square or circular target (some nets and screens come with these, or you can create one with tape, markers, or paint). Give each player a point for a hard-hit ball in which the proper approach is taken (must go back to go forward). Give each player a bonus point for each ball that is hit into the actual target. Deduct a point for balls hit over the net or screen. No points awarded if there is no weight shift or if back shoulder drops and swing is an upper-cut).



Coaching Keys

To help keep players from dropping the front shoulder, tell them to focus on hitting the ball into a target directly in front of the tee. If they're pulling the ball weakly, remind them to go straight back first before striding straight forward toward the pitcher ("Go straight back, then straight forward"). If they hit the tee, top ground balls, or swing and miss often, have them pick a spot on the ball and focus on that spot until they make contact.



Short Toss From the Front

Objective

To use the big part of the field by keeping the front shoulder in long enough to hit balls tossed to the outside part of the plate up the middle or the opposite way; verbal cue: “use the big part of the field”

Setup

L-screen, stool or bucket for coach to sit on, coach to toss, bucket of balls

Execution

This drill stresses using the big part of the field. Coach sits on a bucket or chair behind a screen about 10 to 12 feet out in front of home plate. Coach tosses pitches underhand, but firmly, to outside part of plate. Batter tries to keep the front shoulder in and drive the ball up the middle or the other way. Some batters naturally will pull the pitches, which is okay if that’s their natural swing and they hit line drives. Weakly pulled ground balls are what we’re trying to avoid.



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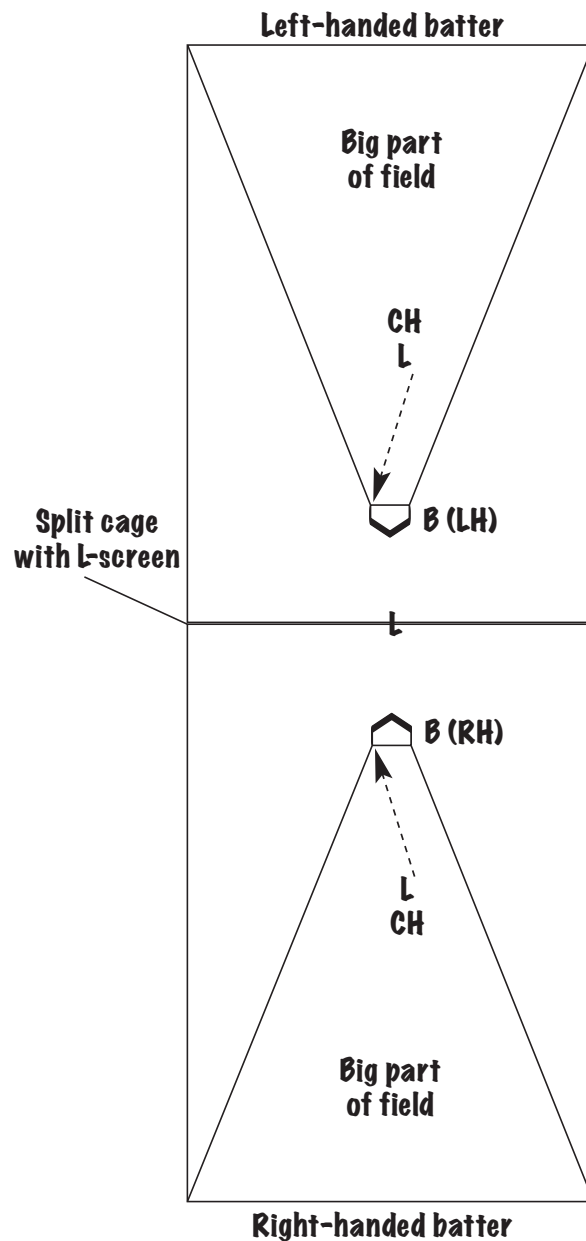
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Short Toss From the Front (continued)

Make It Fun

Turn this drill into a game or contest by giving each player a set number of swings and creating a scoring system. You can have two small groups compete against each other or have players keeping score individually. Award a point for a hard ground ball hit up the middle or the opposite way. Give two points for a line drive off the L-screen. And award three points for a line drive over the L-screen or to the opposite side.





One-Arm Drill

Objective

To develop a quick, short swing that takes the bat head on a direct path to the baseball

Setup

L-screen, coach to pitch, bucket or stool to sit on, bucket of balls

Execution

Can be done by players of almost any age once they can make consistent contact with pitched balls. Coach stands or sits about 8 to 10 feet in front of the batter behind a screen. Coach tosses pitches overhand or underhand. Batter hits first five pitches with two hands, then takes the top hand off the bat for the next five pitches. Use normal game bat. Try not to choke up, if possible. Hitters can tuck the elbow into their side for more leverage, if necessary. After hitting five with one hand, hitter finishes up by hitting five more with two hands. One-hand reps should be difficult. This drill should help batters take the bat on a more direct path to the ball. They should feel a difference when hitting the final set of five.

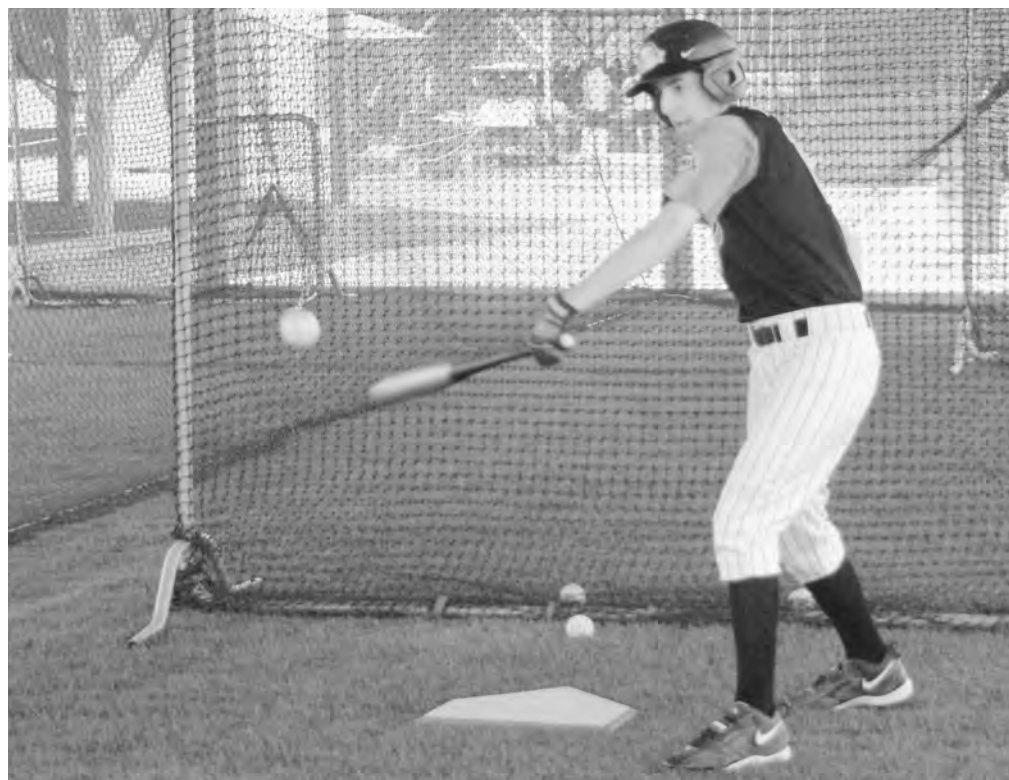
Make It Fun

Turn this drill into a game or contest by giving each player a set number of swings and creating a scoring system. You can have two small groups compete against each other or have players keeping score individually. Award points for one-arm swings: one point for contact, two points for a ground ball, and three points for a line drive.



Coaching Keys

Let batters choke up if they can't control the bat or allow them to tuck the elbow into their side if they're struggling to take the barrel of the bat directly to the ball.



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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.