

5 Tips for More Success At the Plate

Most coaches agree, one of the quickest ways to earn playing time is to hit well. However, being a successful hitter does not only involve getting base hits. After all, even "good" hitters will "fail" 6 or 7 times out of 10 at bats.

So what can you do to:

- 1) get more hits and
- 2) be "successful" even if you don't get a hit?

Here are 5 tips to help you become a more successful softball hitter:

Know the Situation

Getting a hit is great, but since 6 or 7 out of 10 times you're not going to get a hit, how can you help your team even if the defense makes a great play and gets you out?

Well, knowing the situation is key. You have to know what your team needs right now.

Does your team need 1 run or 5 runs?

Does your team need you to get on base safely?

Or is it more important for you to advance an existing runner?

How many outs are there?

Does your team need you to score the runner from 3rd even if it means that you get out?

Or do you need to try to score the run while keeping the inning alive?

What is it that will MOST help your team this at bat? Make sure you know what that is so that even if you get out, it's a productive out that helps your team.

Scan the Defense

This is something I always did before stepping into the box. Scan the defense and take a look at where and how they are positioned. Not only does this give you cues as to where to expect the pitch, it also gives you a heads up on where gaps were in case the pitcher missed their spot.

For example, if there is a huge gap because the SS and 3b and the pitcher misses inside, you'll know you don't even need to have the best hit ever to send that pitch through the 5/6 hole, get a hit, and get on base.

It also helped me make decisions on running to first base because I knew if I just hit the ball directly at someone or if the ball was in a gap and I needed to prepare to try for a double.

Sometimes players hit a ground balls and because they know it's a ground ball they just run straight through first. That's the right choice if there is an infield play on the ball and you are trying to beat out a throw. But if you just hit the ball through an infield hole you really should prepare to take a turn and possibly look for 2.

Point is, opportunities are sometimes missed if you have no clue where the defense is playing.

Also, if you're going to bunt or slap, positioning of the infield gives you an idea of how you need to execute the bunt or slap for best results. For example, if you're a slapper and 3b is tight and SS is deep, you know you probably have the best chance of either bouncing it to the SS or hitting is sharp to get it past tight 3b.

Know What Pitch You're Looking For

Just because the pitcher throws the first pitch for a strike doesn't mean you need to swing at it - especially if it's a pitch you know you don't hit well.

It's so important to know what your strengths and weaknesses are against certain pitches. You'll have a better chances of being successful at the plate if you choose to swing at pitches you know you hit well vs swinging at anything near the plate.

However, it's tough to give yourself that advantage if you don't know your softball hitting strengths and weaknesses. Make sure you know what pitches you hit best.

Obviously with 2 strikes, you don't have much choice. You need to open up your zone and protect anything near the plate, but before then, you have more options (especially when you have no strikes and are ahead of the count!).

Carry Yourself with Confidence

Confidence is so important for successful softball hitting. You can have the best swing on your team, but it means very little if you go into the box with a negative attitude that prevents you from executing that great swing!

Even if you don't feel confident, carry yourself into the box with confidence. Act as though you are in control and you know you are about to do something great. You'd be surprised at how the tables will turn throughout an at bat if you just go in there and command your presence well.

Approaching the box looking worried only gives the pitcher more reason to go after you with confidence. Don't give her that edge!

Instead, step into that box and carry yourself with confidence. Act like a batter who has "her number." Look like a batter no one wants to mess with. Carry yourself like you know you're the pitcher's worst nightmare.

Try it. Get into the batter's box like you know you're about to wreak havoc on the defense. It's so fun to see the tables turn in a single at bat. Watch the pitcher go from

"sure of herself" to worried while you feel more and more confident with each pitch of the bat.

Clear Your Mind

Once you've evaluated the situation, scanned the defense, taken your signal, and know what you're trying to accomplish in your at bat, the thinking is done. It's time to see the ball and execute.

When you're IN the box, the ONE and only focus you should have is the ball. One of the toughest things to do in athletics is hitting a moving object with another moving object. You can bet this requires as much focus as possible!

Anything else you think about takes away from the focus you need to successfully hit the ball.

It's not time to think about your hands or hips. It's not time to think about your stride. It's not time to think your shoulder or about what will happen if you don't hit this ball. It's not time to think the advice your dad gave you before the game either.

It's time to focus on: ball, ball, ball, ball, ball. All the thinking and all the hitting practice is done. Relax and let yourself execute.

Written by Stacie Mahoe
Founder of AllAboutFastpitch.com