

The Art of Hitting a Slowpitch
Softball Using

The Three T's of Hitting



By Ed Rose



Here is an example of keeping your eye on the ball, rotation of hips and proper follow through. Batter stepping forward, hands back until after the step and hip rotation. It is critical to get hip action into your swing. Keep your head and eyes on the ball as you strike it, and follow through with your swing.

OVERVIEW:

The art of hitting in slowpitch softball can be broken down into three primary functions:

Technology - Equipment

Technique – Style of hitting; stance; grip; weight distribution

Timing – Mechanics working together; striking the ball for maximum impact

Players who understand these three key skills and master them will perform at their best.

THE ART OF HITTING:

I use the term The “Art of Hitting” because in slow-pitch softball one’s ability to hit effectively is more art than science. In my 50 years of playing the game I have observed various styles and played with some of the best players ever to play the game. I have tried to capture what I have learned from these great players and incorporate it into my 3 T’s of Hitting.

The overlapping grip I use was not developed by me, but by two other players. I credit Jim Washington, a local star on the early 1960’s In Brevard County, Florida, and John Godbolt, a legend in softball from the Gainesville, Florida area. Both players were prolific homerun hitters, even with Jim playing in the wooden bat days.

In my book, *The ACTOR Factor*, I stress that the importance of being successful in anything you do is to learn from those that have been successful in that field, no matter what that field might be.

To that point, I have played on over 65 national championship teams, since 1975 in the 35 and over division to now playing in the 65 and over division. In 1994 I was honored with my induction into the Senior Softball Hall of Fame.

I spent 15 years as a corporate training manager, responsible for developing leadership training programs. In that spirit, I have put my thoughts on paper in the hope of helping those who might want to learn a few pointers from a well-traveled player who himself have learned from many others over the years. I won’t mention any of my teammates by name, because I may leave someone out. My success was only possible because I always associated with the best players I could find.

Remember, as Vince Lombardi said, “The difference between successful people and others is not the lack of knowledge, nor the lack of skill, but the lack of will.”

TECHNOLOGY:

In order to compete effectively, athletes must have technology available to them that is at least as good as their opponents.

Rather than recommend specific equipment, I would suggest that you investigate what someone who is successful at hitting uses, and give it a try. There are numerous products available, and ultimately you must decide what best suits your style of hitting. Products also change regularly.

Please remember that technology alone won't make you a better hitter. For example, let's say that with your current equipment you are barely able to hit the ball over the infield. So you go out and buy yourself a Miken Ultra bat. Your next at bat, the ball carries another 10 or 15 feet, the outfielder catches the ball, and now you're out (versus getting a hit). Technology alone isn't the answer, you also need to address your Technique (swing) or Timing (the point at which you hit the ball).

The point is, to be successful, Technology is important, but it is only one third of your total focus.



TECHNIQUE:

This should be your major focus if you want to be a successful hitter. A softball swing is much different than a baseball swing. I have played with major league baseball players who had a very hard time hitting a softball. I have also played with major leaguers (Jose Conseco comes to mind) who could absolutely crush one. The point here is that you can be successful as a hitter if your own mechanics work for you. The mechanics I will share with you can make you a functionally sound hitter. After you master them, only practice will make you better, and you must practice constantly to become a truly good hitter. This becomes even more important after you move into your 50's and beyond.

Please take what I share with you and do your best to practice these techniques as you incorporate them into your swing. I have played with many very successful players in my career and they all have their own style. Functionally, however, they do many things similar.

TECHNIQUE:

Standard Grip:



Overlap Grip:



TECHNIQUE (Overlap Grip):

I encourage all my friends to try the Overlap Grip as illustrated on the previous page. It will add distance to the balls you hit, facilitating effective breaking your wrists on every swing. I have shared this grip with many friends over the years, and their feedback has convinced me of its ultimate value in hitting. For example, Bruce Meade, the “Home Run King of Softball”, is a very good friend of mine, as is Dave Reed, known in Senior Softball as one of the best hitters in the country. Both of them have adopted my recommended grip. Bruce recently told me that he didn’t know what he would have done with that grip in his heyday. It would be hard to top what he achieved without it.

I share this with you because both of these players were great hitters even before they adopted my grip, and if it was able to improve even their batting averages, just imagine what it can do for your average.

The actions required to change your grip will be mentally difficult, because you will probably be changing a habit that you have had since you were a little boy. Your ability to change such a long-practiced habit will improve your chances for success. Basically, it’s all about how much you want to succeed in hitting.

Please remember that this grip is only a recommendation, and is not mandatory in order to be successful with the 3 T’s of hitting.

Good luck, and remember, “Can’t never did anything”.

TECHNIQUE (Bat and Hand Position):

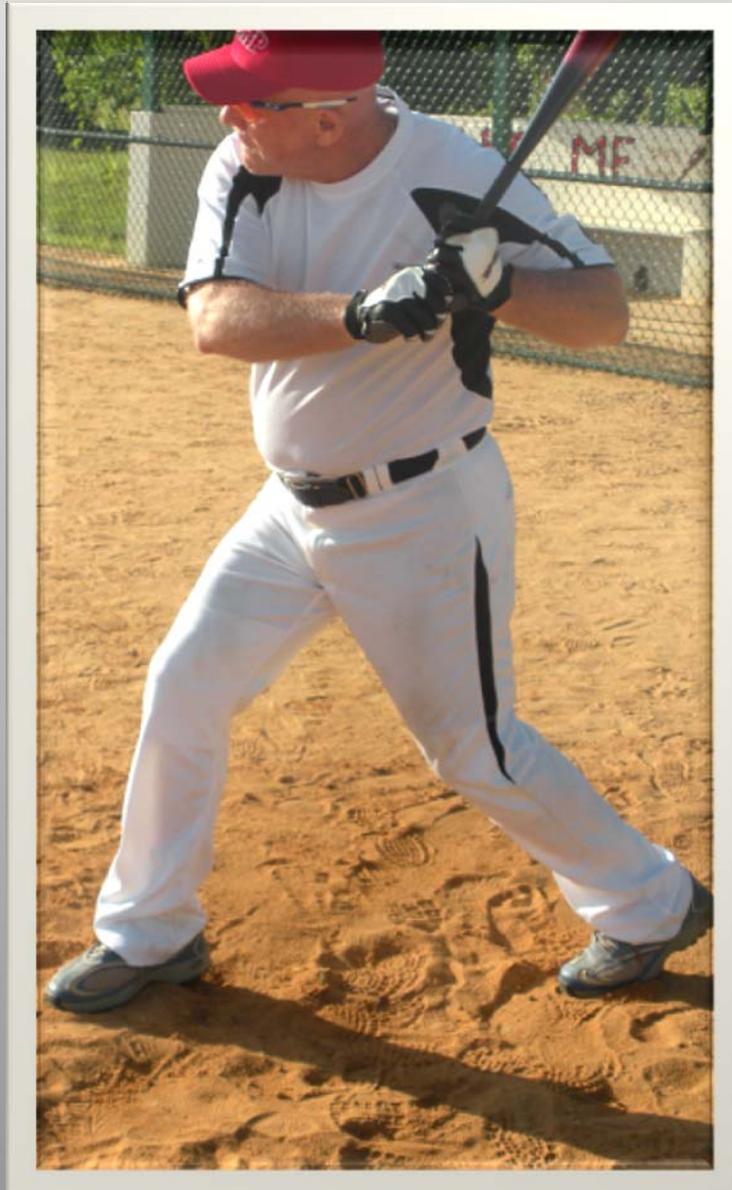
My recommendation: The position of your bat and hands is a personal choice. In softball, to be told by anyone that you must hold your hands a certain way flies in the face of my 50 years of experience. I have seen successful hitters hold their hands in every position you can imagine. The majority of these players were gifted athletes to some degree. Exceptional hand/eye coordination can overcome poor mechanics.

The point I would like to make is that personal strength, bat speed, timing and the techniques you utilize are the most important factors for success, and they will overcome minor mistakes in hand positioning.

I have personally found that allowing the bat to rest on my shoulder and striking the ball in a downward trajectory have improved my game. I started that when I was 35 years old, along with the Overlap Grip. Again, this is a personal choice you must make for yourself.

TECHNIQUE (Keeping your Hands Back as you Stride):

My recommendation: I believe another great tip with your hands is to make sure they stay back on your stepping motion. Get your body moving forward, keep your hands back, and explode through the ball at the last moment.



TECHNIQUE (Foot Position):

NOTE: There are many ways to manage your foot position. The key is to keep your weight back, step towards the ball and rotate your hips on impact to supply power.

The standard batter's stance. Weight is evenly distributed and stance is relaxed in the batter's box:



Some players keep the feet together, then step towards the ball:

TECHNIQUE:

The goal of the stance you select is to remain relaxed, especially your hands. Don't grip the bat too tight waiting on the pitch. Learn to explode on the ball at contact. It is extremely important to follow through with your swing:

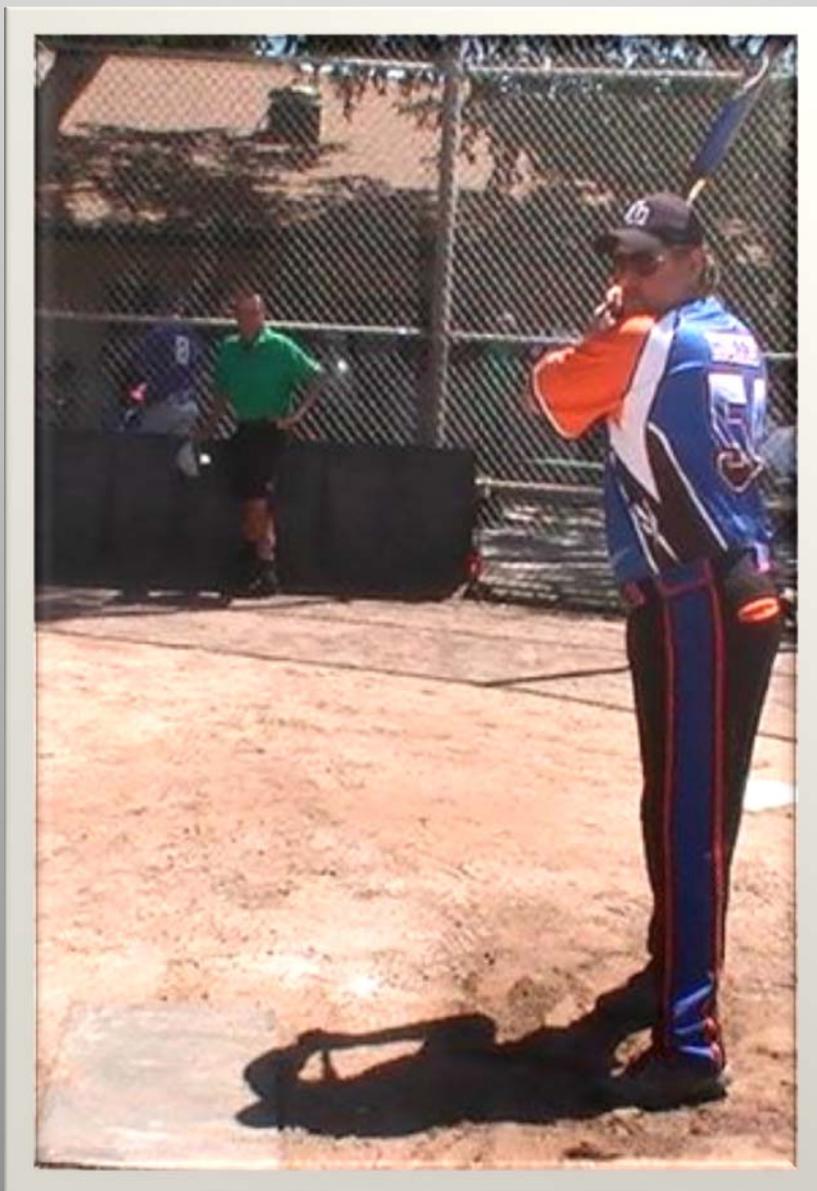


Where you choose to stand at the plate is a personal choice, and must be worked out by knowing what you like to hit. Some power hitters (usually tall players) stand in front of the plate, while others stand even with the plate. In today's game, with pitchers hitting the front of the plate, I recommend standing as close to the front of the plate as you feel comfortable:



TECHNIQUE (When the Plate is a Strike):

NOTE: In today's Senior League softball, with the plate and front of it being called a strike, you should never stand in the back of the batter's box as illustrated below. In my opinion, that's a recipe for hitting fly balls on low pitches that would hit the front of the plate.



TECHNIQUE:

Let's not forget the most important technique of all, in my opinion. In high school I read 'The Art of Hitting' by Ted Williams. He stressed the importance of watching the ball at the point of contact, or "See the ball; hit the ball". Thanks to the lessons I learned from his book, I finished my senior year baseball season with a 500 average. In fact, thanks to instructions from Ted's book, I switched from right to left handed, after many hours of practice in front of the mirror at military school. This is also an effective technique to use as you learn new techniques and change old habits.

Anyway, this was just my long-winded way of stressing the importance of "See the ball; hit the ball", a technique critical to success. You must keep your head/eyes focused on the ball while hitting it.



TECHNIQUE:

The following are tips I have learned over the years that have helped me be a successful hitter most of the time. I usually average over .700 a tournament, and in a really good game I carry an over .800 average. I have also been known to only hit .520 for a weekend. In the game of softball, there is always failure. I really believe you have to experience failures in order to make the successes more enjoyable. Think about that for a minute. I have also come to realize that I am just happy I can still play the game at my age. That said, we must all compete to win, but what does it really matter in the 'Big Picture'? If you are reading this, you must want to improve your own game, and I want to share with you some tips I have learned that helped me:

1. Don't think about your last at-bat.
2. The night before a game, visualize hitting the ball while you are trying to go to sleep.
3. Say to yourself, "See the ball; hit the ball".
4. Practice watching the bat hit the ball.
5. Know your pitch and when to hit it.
6. Don't allow yourself to worry about your average until after the tournament is over.
7. Bat speed is important.
8. Use the lightest bat possible (I recommend a 26 oz).
9. Some players who like to hit to the opposite field use a heavy bat. If that's you, do it, but don't expect bat speed.
10. Make sure your bat can reach the entire plate during your swing. Position yourself accordingly in the batter's box.
11. Stay within yourself. If you are a base hitter, then don't try to hit homeruns.

TIMING:

This is all about hitting the ball at the right time. A player has to have good timing. The way to achieve this is batting practice.

NOTE: I recommend starting your step, keeping your hands back, and exploding at the moment the ball starts down. Hit the ball where it's pitched. Most hitters mess up when they take an outside pitch and try to pull it. The best way to overcome this is to step through the ball, or into it, if you will.

Your timing will depend on the Technology and Technique you choose to incorporate into your hitting style. To develop your timing you must take these functions and practice, practice, practice in order to get your timing down. It's best to relax prior to striking the ball.

Even with the 3 T's and solid mechanics, sometimes we lose focus and just go bad. The best way to break out of a slump is to forget about your last at bat and focus on 'See the ball; Hit the ball'.

Good luck.



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