

Set Up Your Hitting Practice Like the Pros - Twice as Many Hits in Half the Time.

by Al Herback and Al Price

Wherever Al and I travel around the world, Little League Coaches ask the same question:

“How do I keep hitting practice to 25 – 30 minutes so I have time to work on all of the other important parts of the game?”

For many coaches hitting practice is “two bunts and 10 swings” for each player. A coach stands on the mound with a bucket of balls and pitches to each player, one at a time. The rest of the players spread out and pick up the balls and throw them into the coach. It takes most coaches over an hour to get through the line-up.

Using this old traditional approach, players basically stand around waiting for their turn and are active at the plate for only about five minutes. Hitters get frustrated because very few pitches are actually strikes, fielders get bored standing around and even parents get frustrated because, to them, it looks like there is a lot of wasted time. We know one of the reasons players quit baseball is because many coaches still use old drills like this.

Al and I suggest you modify your hitting practice to make it more fun for players and more effective for you as a coach. The goal is to get every player on your team 20 swings in less than 30 minutes. To do this we need to make sure:

- 95 percent to 100 percent of the balls pitched are “strikes”
- the speed of the ball matches the skill, strength and confidence of each player
- the reaction time for the hitter is the same as what they will face in a game
- the spin on the ball coming into the plate is similar to a pitched ball from the mound
- we eliminate any fear a player may have in the batters box
- the other players in the field are very active chasing down balls and having fun
- the coach is in an excellent position to provide coaching guidance and tips to the hitter

We knew the new approach needed credibility so we copied the Major League Baseball batting practice and just scaled it down for Little League coaches.

The next time you get the chance, watch a professional team take batting practice. The BP pitcher throws from behind an “L” shaped protective screen from about 40-45 feet. This is 15 – 20 feet inside of Major League pitching distance and in fact is even inside Little League distance. The pitcher moves in so he can throw strikes and at the same time simulate the reaction time his hitters will face in the MLB game. (Remember, when a ball is pitched at 70 miles per hour from 46 feet it is about the same reaction time as 90 mph fastball.)

If a Major League BP pitcher can move in front of the mound and provide “million dollar” hitters exactly what they need...why can't we?

Here is what you need to do:



First build your own scaled down “L” shaped screen. Design it so that you are fully protected when you are sitting on your favorite lawn chair. An “L” screen should have a space to pitch the ball through to the hitter and fully protect you once you release the ball. Al and I build our “L” screen using black plumber's pipe and hockey mesh. Make sure the design is sturdy, safe and the mesh should be weather resistant. If you would like our plan for the “L” screen design, email us at Bigal@alandalbaseball.com and we will email it to you.

Al and I sit about six or seven steps out in front of the plate about half the way to the Little League mound. From this distance we sit on the chair and consistently throw strikes. Hitters can see the arm action and the ball at release, so it is easy



to time their swing. The ball is at the correct height and arrives at the hitter in nearly the same reaction time they will face in a game. It is easy to toss it in slower for the weaker players and challenge the better hitters with harder throws. No one is afraid of the ball, "Who would be afraid of a older person sitting on a lawn chair?" Players love this hitting drill because almost every pitch is a strike. Fielders love it because there are so many balls in play and no time to stand around. If Major Leaguers can easily adjust from taking BP at shorter distance to a pitcher on the mound in the game, so can Little Leaguers.

Here is how you should organize the team for hitting:

1. Number your team off 1-12.
2. Have numbers 1 and 2 stay in to hit.
3. Have numbers 3 and 4 go out to deep center field with an empty ball bucket (number 3 stands in front of the bucket facing home plate and protects number 4 from getting hit by a ball, number 4 picks up the balls and tosses them in the bucket).
4. Numbers 5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12 spread out around the outfield (don't have anyone play the infield, it is too dangerous with so many balls in play).
5. Sit on the chair and pitch 5 balls to player 1 then 5 balls to player 2...etc until all the balls you have are gone.
6. Every ball that is hit is fielded and thrown to center field where 3 and 4 are positioned.
7. When you are out of balls...all the balls are in the center field bucket.
8. Call "SWITCH", players 1 and 2 gather up any balls at the screen, bring them to you, and them hustle out to outfield positions.
9. Players 3 and 4 hustle in bringing the balls in from center field and then get ready to hit.
10. Players 5 and 6 now move over to the center field station with the empty ball bucket.
11. Continue through the rotation until everyone has hit.

If you have space you could have half the team hit for 15 minutes and the other half with your assistant coach doing another drill at another station. After 15 minutes, switch.

Give the new approach a try; we know your players will love it!

Al Herback and Al Price, Authors and Instructors of the Little League Education Program developed this approach to hitting practice for Little League Managers and Coaches. The training materials they have developed include hundreds of drills, fun games and activities, progressions to help you teach the fundamental skills along with tips on how to plan a practice for all levels of play in Little League