

WARM-UP DRILLS FOR
BIG BATTING
IMPROVEMENT



...WHEN YOU HAVE LIMITED TIME

Warm-Up Drills For BIG Batting Improvement... When You Have Limited Time

Last year, our team was in trouble. We had the best pitching and defense in the league—which gave us a lot of wins. But our batting was the pits.

And I could see, as the season was progressing, the other teams were improving their pitching and their defense. Which meant we were losing our advantage. ***We needed a dramatic improvement in our batting, and fast.*** It wasn't fair to our young pitchers to rely on them, to try to pitch our way to victory, when our bats weren't producing enough runs to win games.

In our league, we get a wide range of players, including some who have never played baseball. We have a total of seven practices before games begin. Once the games start, there are no more practices. So I had to come up with a solution, even though I didn't have a practice to dedicate to it. ***The only time I had was the warm-up time before the games.*** And batting wasn't the only thing we needed to warm up before the games.



So I did two things. First, I asked everybody to come 15 minutes earlier for warm-ups if they possibly could. Second, I put together a series of batting drills that I hoped would improve our batting in a short amount of time. These drills had to be simple, fast, and effective.

Now, another thing about our team is we had a lot of small to medium-sized players, not a lot of bulky guys. Our main rival team was heavy on big guys. They had several players in their line-up who could hit deep into the outfield. With these drills, we overcame that advantage as well, and ended up beating our rival for the championship.

It worked better than I could possibly have imagined.

I noticed an immediate improvement the very first game, and it just kept on getting better. Even a player who had never gotten a single hit the entire season got his first hit. You should have seen the smile on his face! And he kept getting hits. Another player who was near the bottom started hitting with power. Everyone started hitting better.

And what's really great is the players enjoyed these drills! They made batting warm-ups fun and interesting. Over time, the kids developed confidence in their hitting, and felt good about making a contribution to the team. They enjoyed the game more. Who wouldn't? It's fun to play baseball when you're getting hits!

Now, these drills do require some special training equipment. However, the equipment required is pretty affordable. I don't think I could have accomplished what I accomplished, within the limitations of the situation, without this training equipment.

Remember, the program needed to be simple, fast, and effective. There are other teaching methods that can be just as effective, but they take more time, and more individualized coaching. I didn't have the time for those methods, when all I had was the warm-up time, and there were so many other skills to attend to.

I broke it down.... What were the things that most of them weren't doing very well? Various individual players had their issues, but the main problems came down to a few things. They weren't making solid contact, because they weren't picking up the ball very well with their eyes. When they did make contact, they weren't hitting far, because they weren't loading and following through.

So, I needed a way to teach all of them to



see the ball, to make contact, to load and to follow through for power. Plus a way to help them with individual quirks. And that's exactly what these drills accomplish.

The drills require some helpers, either some other parents or the kids themselves. This was easy for us, because there were always parents standing around who loved getting involved. Plus in a short time, the kids caught on, and they could help each other if need be.

OK, here are the drills. We did this in stations, so several players were getting warmed up at the same time.

Station 1: Get Their Eyes Working With Skinny Bats

At this station, the player is using a special training bat that is much narrower than a regular bat. Then, someone tosses a little whiffle ball, which is much smaller in diameter than a baseball, about the size of a golf ball. In order to hit the little ball with the skinny bat, the player has to really focus on the ball and track it with his eyes.

They loved the challenge of it! It was a great way to “wake up” their eyes. Pretty soon we had several moms walking around, looking for little balls in the grass. (We did lose a couple, but they're really cheap.)

And it made a big difference in the game, when they were trained to focus on the ball. They started making contact much more often.

Now, if you want to take advantage of this drill without buying a special bat, you can make one out of a 1” dowel, covered with duct tape. The little balls cost almost nothing. Or if you'd rather buy a skinny bat, see below.

Station 2: Teach Them Load And Follow Through With Total Control Balls™

This is where the power hitting comes from. We use a special ball that is heavy and very soft—almost like a heavy, rubber bean bag. This ball does not travel well. In order to make this ball go even a short distance, the player has to really hit it hard with the-all important follow through. It's

learning the proper follow through that makes this drill work so effectively. When they connected with a real ball, it went farther than they could imagine being able to hit.

This drill helped them all. However, there was one player in particular who was so radically transformed by this drill, I gave him one of these Total Control Balls™ to take home and practice with. He became a new player.

The kids loved this, too. It just gives them a new challenge, something a little different. Once I made some chalk lines, and if they hit past the first line it was a double, etc. When warm-ups are extra fun, they pay attention better, and have a better attitude.

Now, you may be thinking, “Why do I need special balls to teach load and follow through?” If you are already satisfied that your whole line-up is doing great at this, or if you have all the time in the world to teach them, then maybe you don’t.

My own experience is that at any given moment, pretty much my whole line-up could be doing it better. Some already have the idea, and could become more consistent. Or they could do it a little more fully.

Other players may be difficult to get through to at all. It seems like telling them how to do it is just wasting my breath. These very players catch on, very quickly, with the Total Control Balls™.

And, as I mentioned, last year I needed something that could produce very quick results.

Station 3: Hitting a Real Ball

At this station, the player is in the batting cage, with a coach pitching them a real baseball. Here’s where they put it all into action in a “real-life” situation.

At this station, the coach can give individualized tips.

For example, if someone has difficulty laying off the high pitches at their forehead level, the coach can have the player watch a few pitches go by without swinging, and instead, just say out loud whether it was a ball or a strike. Then, after a few of these, they have permission to swing away if it's a strike.

If someone is working on keeping their front leg straight, the coach can tell them he wants to see them do it correctly three times in a row.

You get the idea.

Reminders Started Working Better

Now, another great thing that began to happen once we started using these drills is that it became easier to correct their batting on the spot during the game. If a player wasn't making contact, I could say "Remember to pick up the ball with your eyes as soon as it leaves the pitcher's hand!" And often, they could do it, because they had just been doing it in warm-ups.



Or I could say, "Remember to follow through!" and they could easily make the correction, because their muscles remembered how they had been doing it just a half hour before.

The whole batting line-up just suddenly became more coachable.

Where to get the equipment

If you're ready to try this out, here's a link to our training equipment page:
<http://youthbaseballcoaching.com/batting-training/>

Bonus Drills

It really helps to change around the drills, so the kids stay interested. It keeps them on their toes. Here are a few additional drills I have used, that I find effective. These drills were not part of the batting turn-around last year, but I have found them to be helpful at other times.

Bonus Drill 1

This is useful for when all or most of them need work on their basic mechanics. Line about four of them all up along the fence. Spread them out for safety, and have them wear their batting helmets. You, the coach, stand out in front of them.

Say, "OK, now let's see how you hold the bat." They all do it at once. Make any corrections you need to.

"Now let's see your stance." Again, they all do it at once. Make corrections.

"OK, now let's see you load." Do this a couple of times. Give feedback.

"OK, now I'm going to be the pitcher, and show me when you load." They should already have heard many times, "When the pitcher goes back, you go back." So you pantomime being the pitcher, with a pretend ball, and see if they are all loading when you bring your arm back. Do this several times, if this is something they need to improve.

(Optional) "Alright, now let's see your load and swing." Injury is possible with this drill, if someone lets go of a bat and it hits someone, so use your judgment if you think they're all going to hold onto the bat. If they're far enough apart and they're good at holding onto the bat, it's probably OK.

Bonus Drill 2

This is an eye training drill. Get three cheap balls or some older, used ones and put 2 colored dots on each one. Have one with green dots, one blue, and one red.

Pitch to the batter, who is instructed not to swing. Ask the batter which color that one was.

After a few rounds this way, have the batter swing, and still tell you which color each ball was.

Bonus Drill 3

This is another eye training drill.

Part 1: Instruct the batter to get into their batting stance, but not to swing, and instead, just to tell you if it's a ball or a strike. This is useful for batters that swing at balls out of the strike zone. If this isn't an issue, you can start with Part 2.

Part 2: Have the batter get into their batting stance, but instead of holding a bat, have them wear a glove, holding it in close to their body. Throw a pitch, and have them dart out with their gloved hand to catch the ball in front of them.

Part 3: This time, the batter swings away.

Additional Training Tools

Here are a couple additional training aids for batting I'd like to share with you. Depending on the challenges you're facing, they aren't the highest priority, in my opinion. However, they are helpful, and I do use them.

Soft Toss I personally have used this occasionally with my teams. Where it really has helped a lot is at home, with my son. For those who can afford it, I highly recommend this for home practice. It's a great way to spend a half hour when there's no one to play with. Now my son doesn't have to wait until I'm available to pitch to him, to practice his swing. Plus, he can get a lot more repetitions in a short time with the Soft Toss Machine than with a live pitcher. This doesn't mean it totally replaces a live human pitching or tossing the ball to him. It's a really great supplement, though.

Now that my son's been using the soft toss, it seems like he's hitting more consistently. He used to run hot and cold. Fingers crossed.

If you use the soft toss, one important thing is to pay attention to their form. You want to make sure they're using it with good form, so they aren't teaching themselves bad habits.



Tee Drills Sometimes I include a tee drill station. There are all sorts of tee drills to accomplish a wide range of goals. Basically, it's a great way to work on batting mechanics and on bringing the bat around to make contact at the spot where your eye sees the ball. We just set up a tee along side the batting cage, and have them hit into the netting on the side of the cage.

A variation on the standard tee drill is the double tee drill. For this drill, one tee is placed where home plate would be. A second tee is placed behind the first one (toward where the pitcher would be). The batter's job is to swing through both balls. This teaches the batter to keep the bat level, and to follow through. It's a good drill for developing power hitting.

Home Practice

For my situation, dealing with inexperienced players and very few practices, it is impossible to really teach them how to play baseball during the practice time alone. Whether it's batting, throwing and catching, or pitching, home practice can make all the difference.

My theory is that in our league anyway, the winning team may just be the team where players are the most inspired to practice at home.

So I suggest doing a little pep talk. Ask who all has been practicing, ask them what they did at home, and give them lots of praise, plus a cheap

baseball card as a prize. Give individual suggestions for what they could be working on. We can't make them practice, but hopefully, we can inspire them.

First Steps

Make a plan for your next warm-ups. Decide which drills to do. Again, if you need equipment, please visit our training equipment page:
<http://youthbaseballcoaching.com/batting-training/>

Since we offer a great deal of free information, in order to keep it free, we depend on the small commissions that come our way when you order from companies that we link to. So please remember, the next time you need some equipment, to start out from our equipment page and use our links. It doesn't cost you anything extra, and it helps us keep giving away valuable information for free. Thank you for your support.

Safety

It is important to set up drills in such a way as to minimize the risk of injury. Any time you have kids swinging bats and hitting balls, there is a risk of serious injury and even death. At minimum, batting helmets are recommended for all players and bystanders. Proper spacing between batting stations is important. Sufficient adult supervision is important. All coaching staff need concussion training. Have some ice and other first aid items on hand. I cannot know all the safety factors involved in your situation. So please understand that I am assuming no risk or liability for your use of this information. Use your own discretion, and use at your own risk.

Go Team!

I hope you find this information useful. Best wishes to you and your team!