

# *Steps to the Swing*

These are terms that many of you may not have heard but they are all movements that you have done. We all need to be on the same page with the terminology so we can relate information to each other quicker and easier. As hitters it is important that all of you understand your swing and what you want to get out of it. The more that you hear about and talk about hitting, the better hitter you will become. Also, many of you have eliminated these steps for one reason or another. Many times they were eliminated to quick fix something else in our swing, but you should not put band aides on your swing. Rather we will find the root of the problem and adjust as we need to from there. The bottom line is that all of the following steps need to be in place to have an effective swing. Every good hitter, whether it is softball or baseball has these elements in their swing, from Babe Ruth to Barry Bonds to Lisa Fernandez.

**Stance:** Cosmetic only. Good starting point would be to have feet at shoulder width apart and the hands off the back shoulder. Both arms should have a bend in them and should not be straight. You also want to have our weight evenly distributed among the front and back feet. There are many different variations to the stance such as open, closed or neutral. All of them are okay, as long as you get into a good hitting position before positive movement. If you could start standing on your head and get to a good hitting position that would even be fine. You just need to find a place that is comfortable for you. Remember though that the more movement you have in your swing, the harder you are making hitting for yourself.

**Negative Movement:** This stage has been called trigger and load in the past, but now we will refer to it as negative movement. It is the process of moving weight to the back side. The weight is shifted to the backside and you should feel the weight on the inside of the back foot. If the weight gets to the backside of the back foot you have shifted your weight too far. This is the first stage of the swing. In every other sport such as golf, tennis, volleyball, shuffleboard, or even throwing a ball you have a negative movement before you strike the ball. If in all of these sports you need negative movement to get the best results, why not in softball?

**Positive Movement:** After negative movement you need to take the weight forward. There is no pause from negative movement to when you have positive movement. This is a continuous motion. If you pause your swing will start to break down. This is when the stride happens, if you have a stride in your swing, the stride is optional. This is when you go to toe touch. Toe touch is when you stride and the weight is coming forward. Even if you do not stride you will still be on the toe of the front foot. The weight should be on the inside of the front foot. If you get on the outside of the front foot this means that you transferred too much weight forward. Do not get this confused with the notion of front end loading because your weight is being transferred in a controlled motion. We are trying to hit the ball forward, so therefore you do not want any weight going away from where you are trying to hit it. Rotation is not ready to begin at this point; rotation does not start until heel lock.

**Heel Lock:** After the positive movement and toe touch the heel lands, and at this point positive movement is done. Minimal weight at this point should be transferred forward. At this point the rotation may begin. The heel lock gives your swing leverage and allows you to drive through the ball, instead of around it. If the heel does not get down and only the toe is on the ground the hitter is unable to drive through the ball, and they spin off the ball. Many of the problems in your swing is that our heel never gets down and you become spinners. Our goal is simply to stay on the ball as long as you can, and the heel lock allows you to do this.

**Rotation:** Once the heel strikes rotation can begin, however if you read a changeup, rotation can be delayed. This is why you use a controlled weight transfer. Rotation begins with the lead elbow and the beginning of the hip rotation. The lead elbow remains bent and not straight. You want the elbow to be

above the hands and hands in front of the barrel of the bat. The hips are not rotated around the ball, the back hip drives forward. Rotation is not a spinning motion it is a motion that is forward.

**Connection:** This is where the hands and the hips are lined up with the line of the pants. The arms are not extended and there is a bow in the front elbow. A major mistake hitters make at this point is have the front elbow barred out. If you bar the front arm we end up sweeping the bat across the zone. At this point the bat faces straight back towards the catcher. The top hand is ready to be thrown, (released) at this point.

**Contact:** The bat is making contact with the ball. The top hand is being released. The hands are in front of the barrel of the bat. The top hand will be below the bottom hand. Even at this point our lead arm should not be totally straight. Contact should be made in front of the belly button, keeping in mind that contact may depend on pitch location. You would also rather be late on a pitch than early. Remember you are taking a ball moving 60 MPH and bringing it to a dead stop and sending it in the opposite direction. To do this effectively you want the ball to stick on the bat and bounce off. If you do not stay on plane the ball will just make contact, and then will bounce off the bat, which takes away the amount of power that we can generate.

**Follow Through:** One of the biggest mistakes young hitters make is to start their follow through too early. This makes them roll their wrists over at contact which leads to weak ground balls to the pull side. Also, young hitters want to follow through using their shoulders instead of finishing the swing with their hands. It is very similar to throwing because you bring your weight to where you are throwing to, just like when you hit you throw the weight to where you are hitting it. The weight should still be on the inside of the front foot. You do not want the weight to be on the backside, you want to be on the back foot. You should be on the toe of the back foot to stop reverse pivot.

**Looking Inside Adjusting Outside:** If you lead with the front elbow it is very easy to adjust out from in, which is illustrated best in the hammer drill. It is very difficult to throw the elbow and adjust in and not drive through it. When you look out and adjust in and they throw in you end up wrapping around the ball, which only leaves us with half of the plate to be able to drive the ball, when you want to be able drive the ball if it is thrown inside or outside. It is more natural for you to adjust out more than it is to adjust in.

**Squash the Bug (out):** Squashing the bug is out. You all have heard the concept of squashing the bug to remind us about hip rotation. The back foot does not rotate your hips; the hips make the back foot rotate. If we use the foot to rotate the hips it makes your hips just spin. Spinning the hips does not give the power that you want. The hips are a driving force and a spinning force. They drive forward through the ball, not spin around the ball. To stay on the plane of the ball the hips need to drive through, not spin around. If done the right way you will end up on the back toe, on a perfect swing your back foot may even come off the ground.

**Lead with Elbow:** In the past we have talked about leading with hands, which if done properly, the elbow will actually be in front. We have changed the emphasis on the leading with the elbow. For one, this will put you on the plane of the ball sooner and allow us to stay on plane longer. This does not make our swing long because you never bar out the front arm. The front elbow will be above the hands, while the swing is an upwards motion. The old theory of chopping wood should only be used with very young hitters that you are trying to get from shortening their swing. At the upper levels of softball the swing is not a down motion.

**Top Hand:** The top hand is thrown just like you were skipping a rock on a lake. The top hand is not the dominant hand and the bottom hand is the work horse in our swing. When the top hand becomes the

dominant hand we roll over the ball. You cannot stay on plane of the ball with the top hand when it is dominant. The top hand is thrown when you get to connection. The top hand can be released from the bat after contact. For some hitters it is actually easier to stay on plane of the ball longer by releasing the top hand. The reason why some do not like the top hand released is because some hitters release too early. When this happens you are actually just hitting with one hand.

**Reverse Pivot:** This is when at you end up with too much weight on the backside at the end of the swing. When you are done swinging and we collapse on the backside and your head is even or close to even with the back foot, reverse pivot has occurred. .