

The Modern Swing Hand Path

A great number of today's top of the line hitting coaches in baseball and softball, agree that hands are the primary control mechanism in achieving the ideal bat-path to the ball. Emphasis on the hands is what's being stressed at the major league level today, by hitting coaches in both leagues. It all begins with the hands, as they say. Hence, if your senior softball goal is to become the best possible hitter you can be, then a proper hand-path to the ball is going to be crucial for you in attaining your goal.

Coaches and hitting gurus are known for expounding at hitting clubs, around batting cages, even on television baseball networks about how important a hitter's legs, hips, shoulders are in hitting the ball effectively. Yes, all those things are important. However, I firmly believe that proper usage of your hands is the principal factor in becoming not just a good hitter, but a great hitter.

How does the ideal hand path make you a better hitter? First off, it moves the bat-head on to the hitting plane early in the swing, which increases your prospects for making better contact. Concentrating on your hands is considered by many major league hitters to be the most important aspect in striking a baseball with authority.

I'm now introducing those same baseball hitting concepts to senior softball. I understand that many of you have known this for some time, but for those of us who have not yet been introduced to this approach to hitting, I'm writing this article.

So, how do we achieve this proper hand path scenario? To begin, the bat barrel should tip slightly towards the pitcher at the start which sets and loads your wrists. As the bat rotates around the rear shoulder the lead-hand is pulling hard on the bat-knob which creates the centripetal forces needed to maximize bat-speed (refer to the picture-diagram).

The top-hand pulls the bat backwards towards the catcher at the start. The lead-arm/bottom-hand then begins to pull hard on the bat-knob thus whipping the bat around the torso and into the ball, creating a large force that mashes the ball at contact. The above constitutes what is considered to be the elements of the modern swing.

Make sure to place your hands nearly even with the back shoulder and directly over your rear foot. The back elbow is up about armpit to shoulder height and perpendicular to the ground; bat-head tipped slightly forward cocking the wrists. Note that your front shoulder should be just slightly lower than rear shoulder which produces more swing leverage. The hands will move in an inner orbit to the bat-barrel which is in a parallel outer orbit (refer again to the picture-diagram).

If you fail to take the bat backwards as your first move with your hands and instead move your hands down directly to the pitch, you will not get on plane early. This down to the ball action usually manifests itself in reduced bat-speed along with a short window to make contact. Moving the hands directly to the ball often results in a chopping action at the ball, cutting it weakly resulting in popup-flares to the infield and outfield.

To recap, taking the proper hand-path to the ball puts the bat into the hitting zone early creating more bat-speed, while staying on plane longer in matching up to the incoming pitch angle. The proper hand-path technique will help eliminate chopping down on the pitch, or swinging up at it, which both reduces the likelihood of making squared-up contact.

I received much of my information in putting this piece together from listening to: *Jim Thome: (2017–present) of MLB Tonight-- A prolific power hitter, Thome hit 612 home runs during his career — the eighth-most all time — along with 2,328 hits, 1,699 runs batted in (RBI), and a .276 batting average. He was a member of five All-Star teams and won a Silver Slugger Award in 1996.*

Here's a URL link to an instructional video that illustrates the back-elbow's role in the swing mechanics I've been discussing in this article. It also discusses how the top hand is responsible for pulling the bat back to begin the early acceleration in the swing:

Rotational Swing Mechanics

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98mVxe1IBKU>

Happy hitting,

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