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LINEAR OR ROTATIONAL HITTING?

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As a fly on the wall, so to speak, for the past 16 years of my coaching career I was fortunate enough to accumulate a lot of information about the art of hitting and baseball in general. Along the way George Brett, Frank White, Kevin Long, Mike Sweeney, Carlos Beltran, Raul Ibanez, John Buck, Tony Gwynn, Nick Swisher, Alex Rodriguez, Derek Jeter, Robinson Cano, Joe Randa and Chad Tracy are among the few that have enriched my knowledge of hitting a baseball. Many of these players and coaches have very different thoughts about hitting along with different terminologies they use. This is what makes discussions about hitting a baseball so very interesting.

Hitting a baseball is such a hard thing to do. There are many different aspects to address as to how people have been successful in the past and present. The mental approach, the mechanical details, understanding the body of each individual that is swinging the bat and how to instill confidence when dealing with a lot of failure are among the few topics of discussions when it comes to hitting a baseball. I am going to address a topic that involves the mechanical aspect of hitting a baseball. The most common mechanical topics are timing, seeing the ball and how can hitters give themselves the best chance to make hard contact consistently. The understanding of how to teach Linear and Rotational Hitting might give your son or daughter the best opportunity to make hard contact more consistently.

The pitcher hasn't changed in over 120 years with regards to throwing the ball from a distance of sixty feet six inches and essentially throwing in a somewhat straight direction. I term this direction as north to south or depending on my mood, south to north. The hitters job is to get "everything" working together to hit the baseball back where the ball came from as hard as he or she can. As everyone knows, the hitter (doesn't matter right handed or left handed hitter) is positioned perpendicular to the pitching rubber and where the ball is coming from. In this position, the hitters job is to aggressively swing the bat as hard as he can to hit the ball that is being thrown to him from "north to south". With this said, the hitters body needs to turn (or what we call rotate) and he or she has to try and stay on the line of where the ball is coming from. The hitter needs to get his bat to stay as much south to north with his direction to combat the ball which is coming from the direction of north to south. This is where the terminology Linear Hitting and Rotational Hitting comes into play. Which one is correct? Which one gives you the better chance to make hard contact more consistently?

Over the past 16 years I have encountered hundreds and hundreds of hitting coaches. Many have put emphasis on either Linear Hitting approach or a Rotational Hitting Approach. From what I have gathered from each of the Linear Hitting style teachings is that they want more barrel of the bat to stay in the hitting zone as long as you can for better contact. Linear means to be pertaining to or representing **lines** or having the form of or resembling a **line**. With this emphasis and style of teaching, many young hitters can take this information

and bad tendencies can be created by accident or subconsciously by getting the hitter to get his weight transfer on their front side prematurely. This is a common flaw that may occur when the concept of Linear Hitting is applied to hitters. Other flaws occur when the weight transfers too much out on the front side which causes even more troubles down the road. For example; when your weight transfers out front too early, your barrel can be late to the hitting zone creating length to your swing. At times the hitter will have to overcompensate to get to the ball due to the barrel being late by flying open with their shoulders to clear space to allow the barrel to get close to the ball. This is a panic position and a survival mode swing. When taught correctly and to the right hitter, Linear Hitting can be beneficial. I will discuss my thoughts on what we teach at Hofstra University after I go over Rotational Hitting Concepts.

During my first three years coaching in professional baseball I heard a lot of the word “rotate” while in and near the hitting cages before and after spring training workouts. Rotation has to happen due to the plain fact of how the hitter is positioned and what actions he or she has to do to make contact with a ball coming from the direction of the mound. In actuality, the hitter has to turn his body with some sort of force to hit the baseball as hard as he or she can. Rotation is the movement or turning around as on an axis. This action is done by turning the back knee, hip and eventually shoulders to allow the bat to get to the hitting zone to make contact with the baseball. This style of hitting can also create some flaws in the swing if not taught correctly. The more young hitters put emphasis on rotating bigger parts of their bodies or bigger muscle groups, the harder it is to control their bodies to do what they need them to do. The more I have seen of young hitters who strictly use the rotational hitting philosophy, the more I see their front shoulder fly open and the bat goes in and out of the zone more frequently. Their swing actions and bat cuts the zone and is in and out of the hitting zone too fast and very quickly. This causes a lower frequency of contact for that type of hitter and is very difficult for success at any level.

Both Linear and Rotational philosophies, when modified and taught correctly to all hitters, are what we believe in and teach at Hofstra University. I have gathered information and taken my philosophies from working with and being around hundreds and hundreds of Major League, Minor League, DI, DII, DIII, JUCO, High School players and coaches. Everyone has their own signature. Everyone has their own learning styles. Everyone has their own teaching styles. The best hitting instructors in the field that I have seen and heard are the ones that get to know each individual hitter. These coaches identify each player’s personality, abilities and body structure.

Once you gather as much of this information as you can, use different types of terminology to put the hitter in a position to be successful. You might have to put more emphasis on rotational hitting with a player who struggles to use his lower body and get his backside through. You might have to over emphasize getting your weight transfer out a little earlier therefore the Linear Hitting style is something that a young hitter needs at that time in his or her development. The point I am making is that the cookie cutter style or the (my way or the highway style) of teaching hitting doesn’t work with a lot of athletes these days. The reason for writing this article is to put our ego aside and be creative to find what works for each hitter individually to allow them to be as successful as their talents will allow them to be.

In finishing, I will throw out some of what we talk to our hitters about during early work, individuals and batting practice times. We talk more about hands and back knee staying together/connected as we get in and through the hitting zone. We try to emphasize keeping our chest or shoulders facing home plate as long as we can to stay on the hitting zone. The emphasis on hitting balls to the middle of the field (gap to gap approach) is a very strong teaching point for our program. We might tell a hitter to drive his back knee and drive his back instead of his foot towards the front part of the batter’s box or towards the pitcher’s mound. This terminology is used to many of our hitters so they can maximize their strength and direction of their swing actions.

There are many key phrases that we use and we are very creative to find out what works for each individual. We do not have all the answers by any means, but getting the player/hitter to feel comfortable and instilling confidence in them is something we strive to do every day. If you can open your minds to being creative and building a library of knowledge so when you are challenged with getting a different type of player better you will be better equipped. I wish you the best of luck and if you have any questions with regards to this article or anything that has to do with baseball or coaching, or any other related topics, please feel free to email me at Patrick.Anderson@hofstra.edu.



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