

Turning Mistakes Into Improvement

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One thing is certain in baseball. Every player and team will make mistakes over the course of every season. Guaranteed. Every game, fans notice mistakes. Coaches sending runners that get thrown out. Coaches pulling pitchers and the change does not make things better. Hitters missing pitches, hitting popups, hitting into double plays. Pitchers walking guys, or missing their location and getting a ball hit hard. Fielders not catching ground balls cleanly or making throwing errors. Outfielders misplaying fly balls or ground balls or missing cut off men. Baserunners getting picked off base or not reacting properly to batted balls. On and on. No one is trying to mess up. Mistakes happen because the game is played by human beings.

So the critical question is what happens as a result of a mistake? Some responses accomplish nothing. Blaming others or making excuses or ignoring your mistakes never result in positive changes. Players and coaches need to own their mistakes. Then, go to work. That work needs to be intentional. It needs to offer adjustments that help correct the mistake and lead to better results in the future. For that to happen, a coach needs to understand the game well enough to use the modern teaching tools at their disposal in a way that can make subtle changes, and then repeat them over and over to develop new muscle memory. Unless this happens, the same mistakes pop up in games under pressure until your season is over.

What are common problems for offensive players? No matter how good a hitter is, some locations give them problems. Some players struggle with a high fast ball. What helps make adjustments? Start with a JUGS T, place it at the top of the zone first outside, then middle, then inside. Hitting into a net, work to hit flat line drives, keeping the barrel from going beneath the ball at all times. Once a feel is developed, use a JUGS Lite-Flite[®] Machine using JUGS Low Impact, Multi-Use, 3.5 oz., orange dimpled baseballs and place it at the top of the zone. Work to hit flat line drives.

Some players struggle with outside pitches. Using both the JUGS T and the JUGS Short T, work from high to mid level to low pitches away. Focus on hitting flat line drives to the opposite field. Contact point must be on the barrel with the hands slightly ahead of the bat. Now, use a Toss[™] Machine and make sure the ball is on the outside corner. Continue to drive the ball to the opposite field. Again, once a feel is developed for going with a pitch, use the Lite-Flite Machine with orange balls and throw on the outer third of the plate moving from high to middle to low.

Some hitters get jammed up on the inside part of the plate. They have to make room for their hands, so the hips must open all the way to the pull field. Tee work first, high to mid to low. Then Toss Machine reps on the inner third of the plate, pulling every pitch.

Finally, Lite-Flite practice with orange balls starting up and in and moving down to get to

the bottom of the zone. Finally, low pitches bother many hitters. Using the JUGS Short T, begin away. Then move it to the middle of the plate low. Then move the tee to the inside corner. Follow up with reps on the Lite-Flite Machine with orange balls starting away and then middle and then inside. Find the holes in your swing, then work to get better.

Most hitters struggle with breaking balls. The problem is lack of reps. When in any practice you had as a player did you get a good breaking ball thrown at you in practice? How many did you ever see? Not many. So in games, a good breaking ball is not recognized well, and the body does not know how to react to it. Bad results follow. How can we help hitters recognize these pitches quickly, and train what the body and swing has to do to hit them squarely?

Using a JUGS Toss Machine, set it up slightly behind the hitter, so the pitch comes from inside out. Place a ball on a JUGS low tee on the outside corner of the plate, and get the machine zeroed in by having it hit the ball on the tee. Now have your hitters take those pitches up the middle and to the opposite field. It will take time to square these balls up properly. Once they do, they have learned how to keep their front side closed and let the ball travel far enough to drive a ball to the opposite field, hands slightly ahead of the barrel at contact.

The next step is the Lite-Flite Machine. Using the Lite-Flite balls, put the setting on either curve ball or slider and dial your machine to an appropriate speed depending on the age of the batters. Make sure the pitches are on the outside third of the plate, the same place the Toss Machine was throwing the ball. They can now see 15 or 20 well shaped breaking balls every day. The more they see, the easier they are to recognize. Have the batters work to hit the ball up the middle or opposite way consistently. Until they can do these drills consistently, they won't have much of a chance hitting a mini3 breaking ball or a good breaking ball from a pitcher. But once they can, the next steps can be accomplished.

Many hitters look bad when speeds change. They land ready for a fastball and their swing falls apart trying to wait for a slower curve or change up. How can we improve this? Start with tee work. Have your players contact the ball using a cadence: "ball-hit". On ball, they load their swing by getting back. On hit, they break the back knee and swing. The first sequence of tee swings is "Ball-hit" said in a fairly quick rhythm. The next sequence is "Ball-and-hit". Same rhythm, but the extra word makes them hold their swing briefly before they trigger the back knee and go. The last sequence is "Ball-and-and Hit". Now they have to hold even longer. What does this accomplish. A hitter that can sit fastball and adjust to off speed. That is the mark of a three hundred hitter. All too often, hitters are guessing with two strikes. Guess breaking ball and a piped fastball jumps goes right past you. Anticipate fastball with training on how to hold your front side and hands long enough to put a decent swing on breaking balls and you don't have guess. You adjust.

Once you've worked on tees, place two Lite-Flite Machines side by side. One is a fastball using orange dimpled balls. The other is the breaking ball of the day with yellow balls, traveling about 10 mph slower. Move back and forth from hard to soft every day. Players with enough reps start to do better and better over the season. Sometimes, have both machines throwing orange balls in the fastball position. One is at max speed. The second is a change up moving much slower. The hitter starts to recognize slower pitches because they do not spin as much and come out differently, just like change-ups in a game.

Eventually, the longer I coached the more I incorporated all these drills into my practices on a regular basis. Every hitter got a chance to learn the pitches they hit best. Look for them early in an at bat and get better and better at hitting them squarely every time they are thrown. Take your weaknesses. As the year goes on, everyone starts getting comfortable with a steadily increasing strike zone. Everyone gets better with breaking balls. Everyone gets better at change of speed. Some hitters can get hits on pitches they used to miss. Some hitters improve enough to foul them off and keep the at bat alive. Either way, you are addressing the things that your kids can't do in a way that leads to their development as better hitters. Mistakes improved by intentional use of modern training aides in a way that maximizes their effectiveness. Moving into a cage with a machine that throws game like pitches and hitting them hard.

Seeing something is easier to understand than words. That's why all the material you have just read can be seen in action by a JUGS video for turning mistakes into Improvement. JUGS is not just interested in selling you good equipment. It is committed to helping you get the most out of our training aides. These videos are free on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/jugssports/>. The goal is better baseball practices. The goal is better players using great equipment.

Essentials of Hitting 1–14: Featuring Coach Dave Gasser:

<https://youtu.be/0aGUTJclGSE?si=guWUakuzeAyocWLx>

EQUIPMENT USED:

JUGS Lite-Flite® Machine

<https://jugssports.com/products/lite-flite-machine.html>

JUGS T

<https://jugssports.com/products/jugs-t.html>

JUGS Short T

<https://jugssports.com/products/jugs-short-t.html>

JUGS Toss™ Machine

<https://jugssports.com/products/toss-machine.html>

Low Impact, Multi-Use Orange Practice Baseballs

<https://jugssports.com/products/low-impact-multi-use-practice-baseballs.html>