

Why You Should Hit Line Drive & Grounders

by: Todd Williams

Do you have players that have an upper cut swing and fly out a lot of the time? I remember that first year my oldest son played tee-ball. He was about five-years-old, and he thought it was good to hit the ball up in the air, and consequently he began developing an upper-cut swing. We'd try to work with him to level off his swing, but he'd always return to the upper-cut. He'd hit the ball pretty far, but unfortunately it was mostly up, and then down. And to top it off, when the ball landed, it stayed pretty much right where it came down (generally close to the short-stop).

He'd argue with me and tell me that those high hits go far. So, I told him that we'd do an experiment. I'd let him hit the ball his way, and we'd measure how far it went; then he'd hit the ball my way, and we'd measure it. After we did that, we'd compare the results to see which way was better.

Needless to say, his way resulted in a fly to about the short-stop position, where it took a couple of big bounces and then stopped, still in the infield. My way, which was to hit the ball squarely with a level swing, resulted in the ball bouncing through the infield, into the outfield, and clear to the fence in the gap between left and center field.

His eyes got big, and he stopped swinging with an upper cut from that very minute. The results convinced him, and he went on to have a very successful season helping drive in runs for his team.

Now, in tee-ball, just hitting the ball solidly means you've got a pretty good chance of getting on base. But what about in the older leagues, where the defense is markedly better?

Here's some data that might surprise you. Most NCAA Division 1 studies indicate something near the following:

- * 30% of all grounders are base hits and over 40% of the time result in the batter getting on base,
- * a whopping 80% of all line drives are base hits resulting in the batter getting on base 80% of the time;
- * only 20% all fly balls, including home runs, are base hits, resulting in the batter getting on base just under 30% of the time.

There's just something about forcing one player to cleanly field a ground ball, make an accurate throw to another player who then has to make a clean catch. More things can go wrong for the defense, and right for you! Even better, if you can get your batter hitting line drives, you've got it made.

Fly balls, on the other hand, are just easier for defenses to track down, get underneath, and catch.

So, the next time one of your players tells you they like the long ball or they have an upper cut swing, give them a few reasons why grounders and especially line drives are the way to go.

High on-base percentages followed by hits are what win ball games.