

Building a Batting FOUNDATION

Balance is the foundation of any good swing.

By Doug Hix Photo by Doug Hix

I fondly recall the days of summer when I was growing up as a kid, my friends and I heading out to the ball field to just play baseball—no coaching, just enjoying the game we loved. You either could hit a ball or you couldn't, unless you had a dedicated dad that would take you to the backyard and teach you how to swing with a wiffleball bat. Whatever the case, times have changed and learning to hit a baseball has become a work of art, particularly for kids hoping to play on travel ball teams. These days, learning how to properly hit at a young age is very important.

Hitting a baseball has many facets to it, but focus should be the top priority. "It doesn't matter if you're Gary Sheffield, Alex Rodriguez or any great hitter, they all have the same tendency at every level," says former MLB scout and current owner

of Big Fly Athletics, Butch Smith. "Every hitter in the majors will finish balance up and head behind the ball." The top priority for anyone learning to hit or trying to become a better hitter is to always work on foundation. Similar to building a skyscraper, the better the foundation the more stable the structure will be. "I always have my guys working on the bottom half of their hitting," Smith says. "All the energy comes from the ground and out through the hands."

Coach Smith teaches his beginners three techniques to aid balance and leg power. "All the energy comes from the legs," he says. "The younger they learn how to generate power from the legs (hips) and to stay balanced while doing it, the more successful they will be."

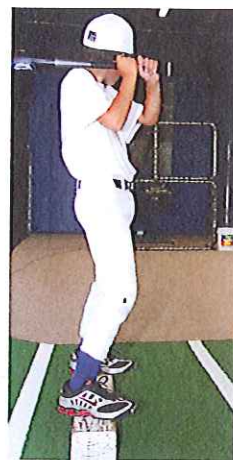


1-LOAD

The first thing you need is a strong balanced base. "This is accomplished by trying to keep as much weight back as possible, about 80 percent," Smith says. A good way to practice keeping the back leg loaded is by putting about 80 percent of the weight onto your back leg, then stepping the front leg forward while still maintaining weight on the back leg. "When you step forward you should pretend like you're just touching the top of water," he says. "Also, as you step forward, your hands should be back loading at the same time. Keep about 20 percent pressure on the front leg. You never want to get out in front of a ball and this helps teach young kids not to lunge at balls." Continually perform a load and tap for approximately 30 seconds. The player should try to keep the back leg loaded every time they step forward in order to "tap" the water top.

2-STEP

Next is the step forward. The player should already have the feeling of how not to lunge forward and keep their weight back from the first drill. So with this step we are going to focus on balance. Coach Smith pulls out a 4'x4' board for the kid to stand on. The kid loads his back leg then strides forward on the



board. "It's just like gymnastics, balance, if they step too hard forward and shift their weight too much they will lose their balance."

Coach Smith's drills are taught primarily for balance. When balanced, hitters will have a good foundation to build on their swing. Once you have a balanced swing, work can begin on generating power. **YFM** You can visit www.youthfitnessmag.com/swing-balance to see video of the drills in action.



**Hall of Famer - Duke Snider says -
"He is truly the best in the business."**

Butch Smith's 27-year career in baseball includes multiple coach of the year honors and numerous championships with travel baseball teams. He has also been apart of Major League Baseball as a scout for multiple teams, including the 2003 World Series champs, the Florida Marlins. Coach Smith has also proven to be a great personal coach, developing more than 30 MLB players.

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"Thanks for making my
dreams a reality!"**

3-FIRE (SPIN)

The coach can't emphasize enough not to lunge forward on the swing that he steps



on his kids foot. "If I put my foot here it keeps them from going forward. I want the kids to simply spin their hips and get their belly button to point to the pitcher." By placing your foot on top of or in front of your kids stride leg, this will prevent them from lunging forward and loosing balance.

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