

8A Heads UP Heads DOWN

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The purpose of this document is to describe body positions and leverage power with heads UP and heads DOWN. So far in the other TeamsWin Fastpitch documents we have described Heads UP and Heads DOWN positions in each strategy: running, fielding, throwing, hitting and pitching. The head position is the easiest place to start in describing technique for improving leverage power. Like learning how to start running with the head down and finish with the head up, I believe players need be able to use both techniques in the other disciplines: hitting, fielding, throwing and pitching. This document examines the heads up and heads down leverage and benefits for each discipline.

Leverage and Power Running

When running we start with the head down and finish with the head up. When starting to run, there is more power and quickness when pushing with the legs. However when we are up to speed, there is more leverage when pulling with the legs. For all the disciplines, head down is for pushing and head up is for pulling, and an inside out push is quicker than an outside in pull.

Common Pulling Leverage

When pulling the head is all the way up and back, the chest is all the way out and forward, the hips are all the way out and forward and the feet like the head are all the way down and back.

Common Pushing Leverage

When pushing the head is all the way down and forward, the chest is all the way in and back (making the back all the way out and forward), the hips are all the way in and back and the feet like the head are all the way down and forward.

Leverage and Power Throwing

Throwing on the Run

When throwing on the run use your hips by pushing and pulling. In other words push off the back foot with the common pushing leverage to get going and release the ball with common pulling leverage off the front foot.

Throwing in Place

When there is no time to throw on the run, throw off the back foot; and use your hips by turning and pushing. In other words, set your back foot at right angle to your target (before you even look at our target), and throw off the back foot getting your hip leverage from pushing and turning back those 90%.

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Leverage and Power Fielding

Fielding on the Run Forward

When fielding on the run coming forward, decelerate down to the ball like a landing airplane (not a helicopter), transitioning from common pulling leverage to common pushing leverage, and setting yourself up to throw off the run.

Fielding on the Run Backward

When fielding on the run going back from home plate, catch the ball with your head up using common pulling leverage so you can easily transition to throwing off your back foot using common pushing leverage with your head down.

Fielding in place

Sometimes the most important thing is just to knock the ball down. So, like a catcher blocking a ball with his head up, chest out and hands down, just make sure the ball does not get beyond you. This is the bowlegged position with the weight on the outside of the feet that you see many third and first basemen take because they can quickly move forward and turn back. The shortstop's knock kneed stance with weight on the inside of the feet helps him be quick to take two or more steps sideways. Conversely, the wide stance for fielding in place makes it easier to turn and make that first half step.

Leverage and Power Hitting

When hitting it is easier to see the ball with your head down closer to the ball. Plus, the pushing inside out swing is more powerful and natural using that common pushing leverage. To see the ball and hit the ball we have to shape or position our eyes to the pitch mostly by turning (but sometimes by rocking back on our heels to go inside out with the head up). It is also easier to turn on the front of your feet, and quicker to transition from head down to head up than from head up to head down. Practice power hitting by seeing how much distance you can get hitting flies to an outfielder. You will find more power with a short stroke off the back foot right out of the catcher's mitt (if he (he or she) were there) to right field. There is more power that way because you are going away from your body, lining your power, bones and weight behind the contact. Practice hitting on both sides of the ball (both left hander's and right hander swings) so you know where they will go, and so you can shape your body for all types of pitches. After you find that short stroke leverage, then practice turning on your toe to hit inside pitches. Hit them the same way, inside out, pushing, and on both sides of the ball.

Leverage and Power Pitching

Leverage and power pitching and throwing are the same, but here I will talk about the advantages of using both feet to expand the strike zone and change the batter's timing. To begin with, if you are able to throw off both feet you should be able to pitch off both feet. In other words, if you can throw properly to a relay man and a second baseman from the outfield, then you should be able to change the batter's timing and

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expand the strike zone when pitching. If you can throw properly overhand, then you should be able to throw properly underhand.

Power Pitching means thumb off the ball

We throw with our thumb on the ball when we are flipping the ball or throwing off speed.

When throwing (or hitting) for power, our thumb separates from our fingers in the process, and our fingers go inside out causing the ball to shoot out at a right angle to our arm motion. In other words, the ball sails when we are throwing for power and it tumbles when flipping off speed. The principle is the same for underhand and overhand. Power pitching means thumb off the ball.

Common Pushing and Pulling Leverage

Throwing off the front foot uses pulling leverage with the head finishing up and throwing off the back foot uses pushing leverage with the head finishing down. The reason I make this differentiation is to take advantage of apparent movement. I have seen many pitchers throw with power with their head up off the back foot and with their head down off the front foot, but they were easier to hit because the ball seemed to break early. By the way, when throwing from the outfield we do it this way so we do not throw our arm out by trying to thumb the ball too hard. When you thumb the ball, you throw your arm in the direction of your target and stab your front foot. So, remember to use common pulling and pushing leverage.

Expand the strike zone

A good hitter hits strikes, but does not try to contact the ball in the strike zone. A good hitter shapes his body to hit every pitch with that short stroke off the back foot. The only decision he makes is to stop his swing. So until he checks his swing he is attacking or shaping to every pitch. If he gets an off speed pitch, he naturally mirrors the pitcher by stabbing his front foot, hitting off the front foot. The reason we hit off the back foot is to save the front foot for thumbers. Everything is the same, we just hit in back of the front foot shaping our body to the pitch. If a pitcher is always throwing out of the same release point, at the same speed, it is easy to shape the body to his pitches. Pitching off both feet and at different speeds expands the strike zone.

High and low release points

Changing feet changes release points, high release points off the back foot and low release points off the front foot. For example: to the hitter a pitch head down off the back foot looks like head up off the front foot with just a different release point. But, when pushing the ball tends to break a little right and when pulling the ball it tends to break left a little expanding the strike zone. A good strategy is to make the hitter hit the first pitch strike, and you want that pitch to make him swing at balls or the umpire to call balls strikes after that. This is done by combining high with low release points. If you are going to throw a strike, make it hard to hit out of the park. If you are going to throw a ball early, make it look like a strike to the umpire. Drops off the front foot appear to come up then go back down (looking good to the umpire). Low rise balls or fastballs off the front foot seem to go down and come back up (looking very low to the

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hitter). Since they have backspin to hit against that spin you have to hit down at them; so, they are the hardest strikes to hit out of the park. Those fastballs or low rise balls set up those low drops off the front foot and high drops off the back foot in the dirt or down through the top of the strike zone. Also, using common heads up pulling leverage with the thumb off the ball, they are easy to throw. If you can throw overhand correctly, you should be able to pitch a softball underhand or pitch a baseball correctly.

Summary: 8 Heads UP Heads DOWN

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