

Hands below the Ball Continued

The purpose of this document is to expand the definition of hand location when positioning to hit a baseball or softball. The previous document introduced the visibility and gravity benefits of hands below the ball. This one will get into plate coverage benefits that will also explain why the approach is more natural and powerful.

Catching and hitting with eyes close to the ball

We expand the definition by defining plate coverage when hands are below the ball. This will be new for most students of hitting, so bear with me. The first thing to understand is how and why to lean into a pitch. Leaning into a pitch will be new, unless you relate it to catching a ball, and realize you do the same thing when you catch a ball. For example: besides shortening the throw, the first baseman leans into the throw so he (he/she) can catch it lower, stay under the ball, see it better. Likewise, the hitter with low hands leans into a pitch to hit a lower pitch, stay under the ball, see it better, and shrink his strike zone. When leaning, stay on your back heel until you extend (commit the swing). Just like touching your toes, you will find it easier to bend forward when balanced on your heel. The higher the butt and knees, the lower the shoulders, the smaller the strike zone; sounds opposite to everything you have learned. Bear with me.

Plate Coverage with Power

Even though it has never been taught, this approach has been popular with the greatest hitters of all time. I could make a long list but here are a few who were memorable: [Ty Cobb](#), [Babe Ruth](#), [Stan Musial](#), [Ken Griffey Jr.](#), [Vladimir Guerrero](#), [Ichiro](#), and [Edgar Martinez](#). All of these hitters extended inside out swinging off their heels extending off their toes, using gravity, and leaning into the pitch. [Vlad Guerrero](#) is a great example of plate coverage with power. [Ty Cobb](#), [Ichiro](#), [Babe Ruth](#), [Stan Musial](#), [Ken Griffey Jr.](#), [Edgar](#); watch their hands in these highlights.

What about bat speed and power? Gravity

When you set up with hands below the ball, gravity helps you swing the bat, even on the low ones. The longest balls I have ever seen hit were gravity assisted. The reason is gravity helps bat speed. There are many [Ripken Baseball](#) videos of [Cal Ripken Jr.](#) pulling outside pitches to left for home runs that demonstrate using gravity by leaning into the pitch with hands low. Notice how far he leans to reach the low outside pitch. Notice in the same video how [Ivan Rodriguez](#) uses the same leaning swing but out of the catcher's mitt to hit a liner down the first base line. Notice "keeping the shoulder in" is another way to say hands below the ball. So much for low and away, the same swing is used for high and inside. It feels the same, but because we are leaning the other way it looks more like a tomahawk swing. For high and inside, we attack the

Hands Below the Ball Continued

ball with hands low and like a first baseman we lean into the pitch to get down under the ball. Also like a first baseman, we early decide if we need to stretch to keep the ball in our eyes, or just drop our hands from the low position to use our golf swing. Remember we keep our balance on the back heel until we commit the swing by extending the whole body off the back toe. Notice it is a strategic description. It doesn't say how to hit a ball with hands low, you will figure that out yourself. It will be obvious once you extend towards the ball with your whole body. The bat speed and power will also be obvious. You will also notice it is safer the closer you get your eyes to the ball. I do not know why, but with this technique I have never fouled a ball off my body.

Balls down the middle

Balls down the middle can be hit hard with any swing, so it depends on the game situation defensive alignment as to how we set up for balls down the middle. This hands low approach is the only one that leaves no "hole in the swing". However, you have to know what you are going to do with a ball right down the middle. It's like the problem everyone has when they have to decide how to catch a ball (hand under, on the side, or hand over) when it is right down the middle. Unless I have a sacrifice fly situation, I want to hit the ball through the infield towards the outfielders. That way I will hit very few fly balls and easy grounders. In other words, if I miss the ball a little it will be either a high hopper or blooper. So for me I will normally hit fat pitches by leaning into them so I contact them in front of the middle of the plate. In the sacrifice fly situation I will turn on fat pitch either off the back heel or if it is off speed I will counter rotate, turn and extend off the back heel completing the turn and extension on the front heel (and toe).

Hands below the Ball Continued

The purpose of this document is to expand the definition of hand location when positioning to hit a baseball or softball. The previous document introduced the visibility and gravity benefits of hands below the ball. This one got into plate coverage benefits that will also explain why the approach is more natural and powerful. Plate coverage is just like catching a ball, turning and extending toward the ball, turning on our back heel, shrinking the strike zone by leaning into the pitch, extending into the pitch from the low hand position. You have to know each pitch what you are going to do with the ball down the middle, and how to take the low pitches away from the pitcher by dropping the low hands on the ball like Ken Griffey Jr. It's all natural because we can see the ball and it feels just like catching.