

easton sports coaches corner

Guest Coach Ritch Price, University of Kansas Baseball Head Coach
Wood Bat Training Drills

Photo credit: Jeff Jacobsen/Kansas Athletics



Most hitting coaches agree that practicing with a wood bat is the single best teaching tool in the game to help a young player improve his swing and become a better hitter. At the University of Kansas we led the Big 12 Conference in hitting in 2004 and broke the KU single season homerun record as well. All of our drill work in the cages is done with Easton Pro Model wood bats. I highly recommend wood bats to every coach who wants to improve his team's ability to hit.

Because the sweet spot on a wood bat is smaller and less forgiving than a metal bat it teaches the hitter to:

- Stay inside the baseball
- Take proper routes to the ball
- Be palm-up and palm-down at contact
- Improve his bat speed
- Shorten his swing
- Let the ball get deep
- Obtain instant feedback about swing mechanics
- Eliminate casting of the hands
- Eliminate hooking the ball
- Eliminate rolling the top hand over

Here are a few wood bat drills that we do almost daily to help our players improve their swing and become better hitters:

•**Tee Drill:** Standard tee work using Easton Pro Model wood bats. Remember, "Quality is more important than quantity." Focus on five perfect swings at a time, moving the tee after each sequence to a different location (zone). For example, start with the tee in the middle of the plate (zone 1), then work on the inside pitch on the black (zone 2), pitch middle-in (zone 3), and conclude your tee work working on handling the outside pitch (zone 4) and the pitch slightly off the plate (zone 5).

Coaching Tip: Stay inside the ball, be palm-up/down at contact and hit through the ball (contact point) to extension on follow through.

•**Double Tee Drill:** Using a swing rite double tee, place the two tees at the same height with one tee slightly in front of the other (2 to 4 inches). Try to hit the first ball and stay in the hitting zone long enough to hit the second ball as you extend through the hitting zone and finish your swing.

Coaching Tip: Many young hitters are in and out of the zone at the point of contact way too fast. This drill teaches the hitter to hit through the ball and keep his barrel in the hitting zone as long as possible as he works to extension on his follow through.

•**Front Toss:** From behind a screen 12-15 feet directly in front of the hitter, a coach/tosser underhand tosses the ball to the hitter. The wood bat will provide instant feedback to the hitter during this drill. If the hitter takes a proper route to the ball (stays inside the baseball) and is in the proper hitting position at the point of contact (palm-up/down) the result will be a line drive. If the hitter rolls over the pitch, he will beat the ball directly into the ground.

Coaching Tip: Use sequences of six and front toss the pitches to the three different zones: away, middle and in. In the second round, work the ball up and down in the strike zone, below the knees, waist-high, and finally, at the top of the strike zone.

•**Angle Front Toss:** The purpose of this drill is to force the hitter to stay inside the baseball, knob-first, and work at letting the ball get deep in the hitting zone. Same drill as front toss except the screen is moved to a 45-degree angle facing first base (when tossing to a right-handed hitter). If tossing to a left-handed hitter, the screen should be moved to a 45-degree angle facing third base. From behind the screen a coach/tosser tries to underhand toss the ball on the outside corner of the plate and work to the middle of the plate. The hitter still sets up and faces the pitcher directly in the batter's box



as he would in a normal hitting position. The wood bat will provide instant feedback to the hitter during this drill. If the hitter takes a proper route to the ball (stays inside the baseball) and is in proper hitting position at the point of contact (palm-up/down), the result will be a line drive to the right side of second base for a right-handed hitter and to the left of second base for a left-handed hitter.

Coaching Tip: This drill is designed to teach the hitter how to let the ball get deep and hit the pitch middle away, which results in the proper route necessary to hit to the opposite field.

•**Ladder Toss:** The purpose of ladder toss is to have the hitter focus on staying inside the baseball and getting on top of the baseball as the ball is elevated in the hitting zone. From the side, in a normal soft toss position, the coach/tosser will underhand toss balls in the following sequence, three times in each position: slightly below the front knee, slightly higher than the hitter's bellybutton, belt-high, thigh-high and slightly below the knee.

Coaching Tip: Slow this drill down and allow the hitter to set up properly prior to each swing.

•**Back Toss:** The purpose of this drill is to teach the hitter to keep his front shoulder closed and stay inside the baseball. Using his hands and keeping his knob inside the ball, the hitter tries to take his barrel from point A (setup position) to point B (point of contact). The coach/tosser sets up a chair five to six feet directly behind home plate. The hitter still sets up and faces the pitcher directly in the batter's box as he would in a normal hitting position. The hitter's only adjustment is to rotate his head so he can look back at the coach/tosser directly behind home plate. The coach/tosser underhand tosses no more than six balls from the middle to the outside of the plate. The hitter tracks the ball from out of the coach/tosser's hand and tries to stay inside the baseball knob-first, palm-up/down at contact.

Coaching Tip: The back toss is a great drill for a young hitter who steps in the bucket or who leaks his front shoulder and pulls his head off the ball.