BASEBALL STRATEGIES

Your guide to the game within the game

American Baseball Coaches Association

Jack Stallings • Bob Bennett, Editors

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Editors

Human Kinetics

We wish to pay tribute to the fine coaches who have contributed chapters to this book and to the coaches and administrators who have made comments and suggestions concerning its contents and writing. In addition, we appreciate the many comments from coaches and players who recognized the need for a book on baseball strategy and urged that such a book be written.

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Bob Bennett
Jack Stallings

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Preface

What? Another book on baseball? And a book on baseball strategy! Why? Because many baseball people who have been involved in the game for a long time say that strategy is the most misunderstood aspect of the game. Books, videotapes, magazine and newspaper articles, and clinic presentations usually focus on the skills and fundamentals of the game. Certainly those aspects of the game are much needed in our efforts to improve the coaching and playing of the game. In recent years, more emphasis has been placed on the psychology of coaching. Many coaches now understand better how to motivate players and develop their mental skills.

But anyone who has seen a coach bring his infield in with a runner on third and a four-run lead in the ninth inning will immediately conclude that a book on baseball strategy is badly needed! This book focuses on the various aspects of baseball strategy and what goes into the thoughts of a coach or player as he makes a strategic decision during a game. Most baseball books are about *doing*—throwing or hitting the curveball, turning the double play, or throwing to the cutoff man. This book is about *thinking;* if you think first, you will know the correct thing to do.

This book is unique in that it addresses every aspect of baseball strategy under one cover. It is written for coaches, players, and fans of baseball, by some of the best coaches in the sport. They share the expertise they have acquired over years of successfully competing and coaching at the highest levels. The writers make up a veritable *Who's Who* in the baseball-coaching world. Their experience and skills in coaching baseball make each uniquely qualified to contribute to this book.

This book is for the ballplayer or coach who is interested in reaching his full potential, and that means sharpening physical and mental skills and developing a good understanding of baseball strategy. This book is written for coaches *and* players because players must understand proper strategy if they are to play the game aggressively and make those split-second decisions needed during a game. Players enhance their instincts and reactions to game situations when they understand the strategy needed at a particular time in the game. Because players know ahead of time what to do, they can act quickly, correctly, and confidently. Some would say they act instinctively, but they really act not on instinct, but through knowledge and understanding of strategy.

What percentage of the time does the average coach spend teaching strategy? What portion of his time does a player devote to thinking about strategy? Is it 10 percent? Is it 5 percent or 3 percent? Whatever the total, it usually isn't much, so players must either guess what to do (and often guess wrong) or rely on signals and instructions from the coach, a process that is

slow and at times confusing. All coaches teach players *what* to do, many also teach them *how* to do it, but the best coaches also teach them *why* they do it, and that means teaching proper strategy.

Baseball Strategies is a book you can read once and then turn back to repeatedly. Read a section or chapter that interests you and come back to it again in a few days or weeks. When something comes up in a game that was confusing and led to some indecision, turn to the appropriate chapter to find out what one of the authors has to say about that particular situation.

The book is divided into four parts. Part I deals with offensive strategy and includes advice on setting the lineup and batting order, scouting the opposition, establishing an effective signaling system, and executing sound hitting and base-running strategies. You will also learn what factors to consider when planning a strategic move and which strategies are most successful in specific offensive situations.

Part II deals with the strategy of pitching and includes shutting down hitters, stopping base runners, the pitcher's role in fielding, working a game, and the all-important handling of pitchers.

Coaching a pitching staff is challenging work. How many pitches should be thrown in practice and in games? How can each pitcher get enough work to be and stay effective? Along with dealing with the pitching staff, the coach has the even greater challenge of managing the game. Ideas and examples that have stood the test of time are carefully brought to light.

The third part deals with baseball defense and includes setting the lineup of the defensive players, positioning defensive players, and defensive tactics. Some coaches and players seem to have a knack for knowing how to play each hitter. Some are uncanny at compiling and putting to use pages of statistics and other details to help defend against their opponents. Some of the greatest defensive minds in college baseball offer their methods and systems of defensive tactics. They will show us regular and special defenses and help us devise our own methods and systems.

The fourth part has to do with fine-tuning your strategy by adjusting it for different levels of competition, adapting the game plan for different situations, and playing the game the right way. The same strategy may not work for all situations. Adjustments may be necessary. Part IV is one of the most valuable parts of the book. Learning how to adapt to different situations is one of the true lessons in life. Baseball is no exception. The authors of these chapters will tell wonderful stories about their experiences. Each of us can gain insight into how this game should be played. We can also gain much from the words concerning how to fine-tune strategy.

Coaches must understand the percentages of baseball; we all know that nothing will be successful all the time, but we want to understand what will be successful *most* of the time in a particular situation. A coach may occasionally make a snap decision that really doesn't make any sense and

have success, but it doesn't happen often. Coaches should make strategy decisions by considering the *percentages,* based on the situation and abilities of the players involved, both their players and their opponent's players. Walter Rabb, the veteran coach at the University of North Carolina, used to say, "You will do OK if you just remember that you don't coach baseball, you coach *baseball players!*" Perhaps the most common mistake coaches make in reaching strategic decisions is failing to think about the most important thing—the abilities of the players involved.

Strategy can be as simple as a basic move in a game of checkers or as involved as the most difficult move in a chess match. Strategy is constant. It is everywhere and in every inning. It involves decision making. Some decisions are easy to make, whereas others are difficult. Decisions made from a background of knowledge produce the best results. When both the coach and the players have knowledge and understanding of the strategy, teamwork blossoms and the likelihood of a successful outcome improves. Pete Beiden, the late Hall of Fame coach from Fresno State, used a simple offensive signal system to teach his players about strategy. His signals were either "Yes" or "No." When he flashed a "Yes" signal, he expected the batter or runner to execute the proper play for that particular situation.

There is more than one way to approach any situation in the game. This book is filled with examples of how coaches may approach a problem in different ways, but they all use sound thinking, based on percentages, to solve the problem. One coach will make no move, while another coach may make several moves in the same set of circumstances. Either may be right or wrong. The important issue is the thought process that went into making the decision. If the strategy used was based on sound fundamental principles and was developed based on percentages that applied to that situation, chances are that a good decision was made.

Setting the Stage for Strategic Baseball

Andy Baylock

"JOE SMITH GOES 4-4 TO LEAD HUSKIES IN ROMP"

"LUIS TORRES HURLS GEM 3-HITTER IN WIN"

*"JASON LINDSTROM'S 9TH-INNING HOMER
IS THE DIFFERENCE AS HUSKIES WIN"*

These three headlines are troublesome to coaches. The lead-ins all focus on one player's performance as the reason for victory rather than the play of the entire team. Like any good headline, however, they introduce an article describing what occurred in a baseball game. That article will have all the particulars of journalism, including the who, what, where, when, and why. But the most important aspect of the outcome of the game, the how, will most likely be forgotten. The how might not matter in the newspaper articles, but it is critical to success in both coaching and playing. The how is strategy, which often goes unnoticed by the casual observer or the newspaper reporter, but without it a coach or player cannot realize his full potential.

A strategy is a vision for success, a plan of attack, a road to your goals. A good coach never loses sight of his vision for success. Whether it be moving the runners over with nobody out, recruiting the left-handed pitcher who could make the difference, or reaching the fund-raising goal, the coach is the point man for what former President George Bush called "the vision thing." And although coaches may choose a certain strategy, achieving success with it requires that players understand it and implement it.

Offensive strategies enhance a team's ability to have batters become base runners and to have base runners advance or be advanced by subsequent batters. Defensive strategies enable a team to stop the advancement of runners. Keep the double play in order; never let second base go uncovered; work fast, throw strikes, change speeds—these dictums are all parts of strategies that coaches apply at all levels of competition.

Keys to Success in Implementation

You can apply strategies that stop your opponent from interfering with what you are going to do by first establishing a sound base of discipline (communication) and respect. The "eternal triangle" (figure I.1) illustrates the qualities you need before you can successfully implement different strategies. You need an acceptable level of talent, concentration, and commitment before you will be capable of making things happen—forcing the action and not just waiting for it to happen. In most situations the difference between teams is not significant. Little mistakes determine wins and losses.

Talent involves the ability to run, throw, field, hit, and hit with power. Concentration is the ability to block out all internal and external distractions while executing a skill, and commitment is a promise to do all in one's power to get the job done. Providing all ingredients are of the highest caliber, your team will be successful. A shortcoming in one or more areas, however, decreases the probability for consistent success.

The key to success in the implementation of strategies is to select your offensive and defensive plan (your vision), live it, adjust and amend it, and have patience with it, because it won't always work to perfection. Understand percentages and trust your system, evaluate your offensive and defensive tendencies, and then install your system.

At the same time, you need to ask the following questions:

- Is your talent capable of executing the tactics and techniques essential to the success of the system?

- Do you have the time, staff, facility, and environment to develop it in practice?
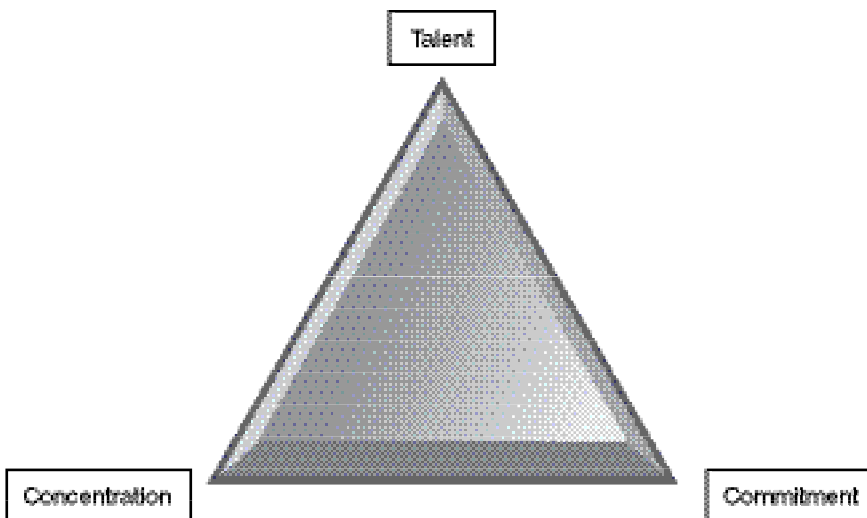
FIGURE I.1   Three qualities essential to the success of a strategy.

- Do your players and staff respect the game by always hustling?
- Do they truly believe that "it ain't over til it's over?"
- Do you have positive leadership by upperclassmen that can show the way in dealing with adversity?

If a team has good communication and respect among coaches and players, you are ready to put in as much strategy as possible and review it whenever you have time and opportunity. You should practice the plan in pressure situations so that on game day everything is second nature.

Fine-Tuning Your Approach

Coaches should consider several important questions when fine-tuning their strategic approach:

- What are the NCAA, NAIA, or high school regulations regarding how much prep time you are allowed (hours per week, number of weeks, and so on)?
- Do you have a veteran team?
- Do you have a committed team?
- Are your players coachable?
- Do you have team cohesion? Do players accept and understand their roles as defined by the coaches?
- Do your players demonstrate poise? How do they react when something bad happens?
- Can they handle failure and make adjustments?
- Do you have commitment and trust from players and staff, and not just when it's convenient?

A coach should believe in and be committed to specific strategies, but must be open to adjustments to those strategies when confronted with variables that could alter the master plan (e.g., not playing for the big three-run home run inning when incapable of producing such).

Effective Practice Methods

Your staff should think through methods for preparing strategies during practice sessions. You must determine the critical position or critical phase of the skill (hit, throw, field) or play (bunt defense, first-and-third defense, and so on). Teach all movements to that point and then let the player finish

it off. A coach who is proficient in teaching the mechanics of the swing, making the pitch, fielding the ground ball, etc., will show players the most efficient ways to get to the point of contact, point of release, ball into glove, etc. At that point, the player is responsible for executing the skill consistently.

Slow down the game so that each pitch is a separate contest. Repeat, reinforce, refine. Build confidence by constantly drilling in gamelike competitive situations. That way, when players face the same situation in competition, they can say, "We've been here, we've practiced it." Don't be afraid to make adjustments against the toughest competition. Baseball is a game of many failures. To enjoy the game and be successful, you must adjust. Therefore, conduct pressure practices. Anyone can play; not all can win. Diligence and faith in your system will earn you "Nice plays" rather than "Nice tries." Your system becomes amendable, leading to consistency and constancy.

Some of the finest baseball coaches to have coached and taught the amateur game have written this text about baseball strategy. Their intent is to stimulate you to apply various strategies to make something happen rather than simply waiting for something to happen.

OFFENSE

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1

Determining the Lineup and Batting Order

Richard "Itch" Jones with Eric Snider

Each year when the University of Illinois baseball players report to the clubhouse for the first day of fall baseball practice, we as a coaching staff watch each player walk through the door. As they pass by, questions fly through our minds. Have our returning players improved from last year? Will our incoming freshmen be able to make the adjustment from the high school game to Division I college baseball? What will be the ideal lineup for the team this year? Will we have team speed? Will we have power? How will we handle the bat? What type of offensive response will our team have?

From that point on, the coaching staff will endlessly debate the lineup for the new season. Our evaluation of fall practice, winter workouts, and the early nonconference schedule is crucial. That assessment will help us weigh the pros and cons of our players' individual abilities and define what our athletes can and cannot do. Once we establish the potential of our players as individuals we can decide on a lineup. Ideally, that lineup will reflect a basic philosophy that we follow as a coaching staff—that a successful offense consists of four qualities:

1. Speed
2. Power

3. Bat control

4. Offensive response

The better teams in baseball have lineups that feature a combination of athletes with those four qualities. Therefore, the first step in establishing the ideal lineup for any season is to determine if the team has one, two, three, or all four of the qualities and to combine the team's strengths from there.

Evaluating Players' Strengths and Weaknesses

To discover how many of these qualities a team possesses each year, the coaching staff must evaluate each athlete's individual abilities. At Illinois this evaluation begins during fall practice and continues until the beginning of the Big Ten season at the end of March. Establishing an offensive strategy is critical during this time. Therefore, in practice during this stretch we do drills during intrasquad games so that they are gamelike in nature. We do this because we want our athletes to feel the so-called pressure during practice. We believe that if they become accustomed to feeling game pressure day in and day out, they will have the ability to respond immediately and correctly when we put them in any situation during a game. At Illinois we have found that daily gamelike practice settings that cover base running, base stealing, hitting the ball in positive-count situations, bat control, situational hitting, and offensive response end up emphasizing our players' strengths while helping to identify their weaknesses. By identifying these strengths and weaknesses in practice, we as a coaching staff are better able to develop our team's offensive strategy, enhance the offensive success of our program, and establish our lineup before the heart of the season begins. This approach affords the team its best opportunity to reach its goals because less guesswork is required during the conference season.

Speed

We define a speed player as an athlete who will not consistently drive the ball deep into the outfield but who, when he does reach base, is a constant threat to steal. The old saying "Speed never slumps" illustrates why this quality is essential to offensive success. We teach base running to each of our players, and each becomes fundamentally sound in his running techniques. After evaluating our team in the speed area, we identify the players who possess good speed. We then take this group and work with them on their base-stealing techniques:

- Stealing second and third
- Reading pitchers and catchers in steal attempts
- Reading pitchouts
- Deciding when to run and when not to run

During our intrasquad games all players work on their base-running techniques in reaction to our hitters, and our base stealers also work on their base-stealing techniques in reaction to our pitchers and catchers. We never neglect the players who lack speed when it comes to base-running drills. Each player works on getting out of the batter's box, running as hard as he can, and cutting each base as efficiently and precisely as possible. The ability to advance a base on a bobbled ball or an overthrow of a cutoff man can make the difference in a close game.

Power

We define a power hitter as a player who makes hard contact and regularly hits doubles, home runs, or deep fly balls but often lacks speed. As a staff we know power when we see it, as do all baseball coaches, and when we have a player who has the ability to hit the ball out of the ballpark, we encourage him to make hard contact. The all-or-nothing approach is not acceptable in the offense we employ. At Illinois we feel that power hitters will accumulate more walks than strikeouts. These players are normally good fastball hitters, and we have them work diligently in getting themselves into a positive hitter's count (3-1, 2-0, and 1-0). During our intrasquad practices we constantly remind our players to get good pitches to hit. We want them to learn to hit the fastball, lay off the change-up, and hammer the breaking ball that starts directly at them waist high or higher.

Bat Control

We define a contact hitter as a player who often puts the ball in play, doesn't strike out much, handles the bat, is a good base runner, and hits for a high average. The ability to bunt for hits, sacrifice, squeeze, slash, hit-and-run, and hit behind runners are some of the key elements in this player's game. Typically, a hitter is either a power hitter or a bat-control hitter, and we evaluate each of our players to determine which type he fits. Those we identify as being strong in bat control work on executing their game during our intrasquad practices. We emphasize to this group that they have one opportunity to perform these bat-control skills and that they must deliver. We even ask our power hitters to perform bat-control skills because we will call on them to do so over the course of a normal game and season. Having both bat control and power is essential to the offensive success of any team and for those players who wish to move on to the next level.

Offensive Response

We define offensive response as the ability of individual players or the team to respond immediately and correctly in every game situation. As a staff we feel that combining team speed, power, and bat-control skills in our daily practices will develop offensive response. Because we incorporate all of our drills into our live intrasquad games, we do offensive-response drills on a daily basis with the hope that they will become second nature to our players. A few of the drills that we incorporate into our intrasquad games follow. These drills develop the four qualities essential to a successful offense and help us determine our ideal lineup. The possible situations are endless.

Base-Running Drill

To develop base-running skills during a live intrasquad game, we have one or two players at each base working on leads, reads, and reacting to live hitters and live defense. These players are not live during the game. The base runners react to the live hitter, as does the defense. To improve our base-running techniques, each player works at each base daily and throughout the entire intrasquad game. If the batter gets a base hit, he becomes live to the defensive team. If he is a base-stealing threat, we tell him that we are down a run and that he must steal second or third to put himself into scoring position. All of our base stealers have the green light, permission to steal on their own. Our base stealers also know that they are responsible for working on stealing second and third throughout the intrasquad game, whether they are live or not. During these intrasquad games we have no base coaches or umpires, and the players must know what inning we are in, what the score is, and the number of outs. They must react and make their own decisions, forcing them to improve their ability to read various game situations.

Power Drill

To develop power, we put our hitters into positive-count situations. We start each inning with the bases loaded and one out with an 0-0, 2-0, or 3-1 count. The hitter's sole goal in this situation is to drive the ball into the outfield, resulting in a run scored while avoiding a rally-killing double-play ground ball.

Bat-Control Drill

To develop bat control, we often use the same situations that we do for power. We start the inning with the bases loaded and one out. The hitter's sole goal in this situation is to squeeze, bunt, or hit to the right side, scoring the run while avoiding the double play. Another situation is to start each inning with a runner on second and no one out. We ask the batter to hit behind the runner to move him over. If the batter is successful in moving the runner, he comes back to home plate immediately and gets another live at-bat with a runner on third base. The batter will then have the opportunity to react to whether the infield is in or back. If the infield is in, we want a fly ball. If the infield is back, we look for a ground ball hit toward short or second, reinforcing to our team that positive outs score runs. If the hitter fails to move the runner on second, we have a situation with a runner on second and one out. The goal for the next hitter becomes getting a hit that scores the game-winning run from second.

Again, we cover all of the aspects of a potent offense (team speed, power, bat control, and offensive response) during these intrasquad games. In doing so we have the opportunity to evaluate our players' strengths and weaknesses every day at practice.

Setting the Lineup

After we have incorporated our offensive strategy and evaluated our team's progress during our fall intrasquad games, winter workouts, and preseason games, we as a staff are ready to put together our ideal lineup for the ballclub. The approach is simple. We put our best hitters at the top of the order, ensuring that these players will get the extra at-bats at the end of the game. With the game on the line, we want our strongest hitters at the plate to give our team the best chance to win.

The following sections describe the specific things we look for when developing an offensive lineup. The batting order would ideally consist of the following traits in each spot of the order.

Leadoff

Over the course of a game and season the leadoff hitter will bat the most. The player in the leadoff slot needs to create havoc and put pressure on the defense and the pitcher, starting with the first pitch of the game. The ideal leadoff batter hits right-handed and left-handed pitching equally well. We look for someone who can consistently make hard contact (power) that produces extra-base hits. The leadoff hitter in our lineup has strong knowledge

of the strike zone and will have the highest on-base percentage on the team. Assuming he makes consistent, hard contact, he will have a low strikeout percentage. The leadoff hitter needs to be patient at the plate and aggressive enough to lay down bunts or produce hits and RBIs. The leadoff hitter should be the best base runner in the lineup with instincts that tell him when to run and when not to run. His aggressiveness allows him to go from first to third on virtually any ball hit into the outfield, and his ability to read pitchers and steal a base when called upon is crucial. Our leadoff hitter is unselfish and willing to take a walk or get on base in any way possible while also being a good RBI guy with two outs. Overall, the leadoff hitter in any lineup needs to have the ability to beat a team with his power, bat control, base running, speed, and knowledge of the game.

Two Hole

Ideally, we look for a left-handed batter in the second spot for two reasons. First, chances are that he will be able to pull the ball through the right side when the first baseman is holding the runner on. Second, a left-handed hitter to some extent blocks the catcher's vision with a runner on first base, giving us a better chance to steal a base. As a rule our left-handed hitter in the two hole is on the plate and has the ability to pull the ball to the right side. He also needs to have the ability to hit the ball through the left side either to beat out a hit with his speed or to execute the hit-and-run. The ability to hit the ball to either side of the infield is crucial. If the hitter is right-handed, we want the batter off the plate, making it easier for him to go the other way. A right-handed batter in the two hole should also have the ability to pull the ball.

Whether the two-hole batter is right-handed or left-handed, he must be patient and selective so that our leadoff hitter can steal bases. Ideally, the number two hitter also hits both right- and left-handed pitching equally well. Outstanding bat control comes into play because this hitter has to move runners over. Good foot speed is important so that he can stay out of the double play. The power we expect out of the two hole is doubles. This hitter will most likely see fastballs because of the base-running skills and speed of the leadoff batter. To have a successful offense, the two-hole hitter must have the ability to handle the fastball, be a good hitter with two strikes, be a good RBI guy with two outs, and be able to get a bunt down consistently. Like the leadoff batter, this hitter will have good base-running skills and the ability to steal a base when the situation dictates.

Three Hole

Our best overall hitter will bat third. The three-hole hitter has power, the lowest strikeout percentage on the team, and hits both right- and left-handed

pitching. His combination of power and bat control over the course of a season will dictate the success of a team. He is the best contact hitter in the lineup, is patient and selective at the plate, and always takes good swings. The three-hole hitter has good knowledge of the strike zone and the ability to hit the fastball, off-speed pitches, and breaking balls to all fields. Because he is the best contact hitter on the team, he hits for a high average. The three-hole hitter will have good base-running skills, and with the heart of the order coming up behind him, he should have enough speed to stay out of an inning-ending double play.

This hitter is aggressive, likes pressure, and wants to drive in runners, especially with two outs. He wants to be at the plate in the toughest situations, and he makes the pitcher come to him. He seldom hits pitcher's pitches.
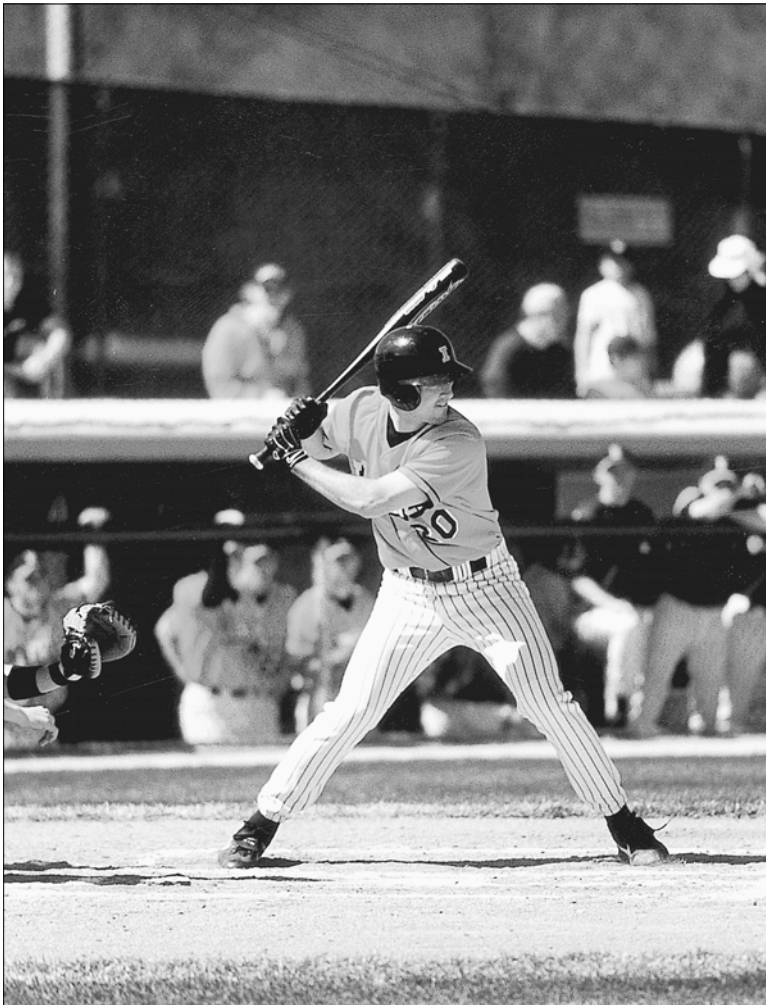

Photo courtesy of University of Illinois

The ideal three-hole hitter has both power and bat control and thrives under pressure.

Instead, this hitter seems to get his pitch more often than the rest of the lineup does, and he usually produces when he gets it. The ideal three-hole hitter seldom chases bad pitches because he can recognize pitches and deliveries. His patience and discipline at the plate make him the toughest out in our lineup. Overall, the three-hole hitter in any lineup needs to have the ability to beat a team with his power, bat control, base running, and knowledge of the game.

Four Hole

The four-hole hitter needs to be a good enough hitter to protect the batter ahead of him. This hitter has power, and he's a good, hard contact hitter. This batter needs to be able to handle both the fastball and off-speed pitches. He has good knowledge of the strike zone, enabling him to collect more walks than strikeouts. We want this hitter to have good base-running skills and enough speed to stay out of the double play. He is an RBI hitter with the ability to drive in runners from second base. The cleanup batter will usually come up with a runner or runners on base, so he must have the knack of either driving in those runners with a single or hitting the ball out of the park.

Five Hole

The number five hitter needs to be a good enough hitter that the opposing team cannot pitch around the cleanup hitter to get to him. The five-hole hitter will have extra-base power, but he is more of a free swinger and more aggressive than the hitters in front of him. The five-hole hitter should be the second- or third-leading RBI guy on the team. He needs to have the ability to handle both the breaking ball and off-speed pitches. The five-hole hitter will have decent base-running skills, along with the mental discipline to hit a fly ball or even strike out rather than hit into an inning-ending double play. Like the two hitters in front of him, the five-hole hitter wants RBIs, and when he makes contact he usually produces runs.

Six Hole

The ideal six-hole hitter has some power and hits for a high average. Because he is hitting behind the team's best hitters, he will have excellent bat-control skills that allow him to hit behind runners. He will handle the fastball and has the ability to hit to all fields. Hitting behind the top offensive threats on the team, the six-hole hitter needs to move a runner or produce a run when he makes contact.

Seven, Eight, and Nine Holes

The bottom part of the batting order can make or break the lineup. If the bottom part of the order can make the pitcher work, put pressure on the defense, get on base by any means possible, move runners, and set the table for the top of the order, a team will always have a chance to win games. On the other hand, if the bottom three hitters are so-called dead outs, the chances of winning are slim. For example, if these hitters are dead outs and each bats three times in a nine-inning game, we will virtually be playing a six-inning, 18-out game against an opponent who is playing a nine-inning, 27-out game. In this scenario our opponent will get 27 chances to score runs compared with our 18 chances to score. The odds of our scoring more runs than our opponent are solidly against us.

Ideally, we want the seven-, eight-, and nine-hole hitters to have the same skills as our top two hitters. Although they will probably lack power and the ability to make consistent, hard contact, these three hitters need to have decent speed and good bat control. Their goals are to get on base in any way possible, make the pitcher work, score runs, move runners, and set the table for the hitters at the top of the order. If a pitcher's pitch count increases appreciably during these players' at-bats, the top of the order has a better chance to do some real damage. The seven-, eight-, and nine-hole hitters need to be able to bunt, hit to the opposite field, and execute the hit-and-run correctly. They are fundamentally sound base runners who have the ability to steal bases when needed. These hitters will consistently move runners or get themselves into scoring position. If these three are able to do their job, the top of the order will have a chance to do theirs, which is to produce runs.

Pinch Hitting

Pinch hitting is one of the most difficult jobs in baseball and it takes a special kind of player to be accomplished at this skill. A good pinch hitter is a player who is mentally prepared to enter the game at any time. He must also have confidence in himself and his ability because he will get only one at-bat, and that one at-bat generally comes at an important time and situation in the game.

There are three categories of pinch hitters that are used in three different types of situations. The first category is the hitter that has a good eye at the plate, makes contact, and has the ability to reach base a good percentage of time. It is essential that this pinch hitter have a high on-base percentage. This hitter needs to be willing to battle the pitcher, making him go deep into the count, in order to increase his chances of getting on base. He can do this because he should also be a good two-strike hitter. He must be able to put

the pressure on the pitcher to throw strikes, but still be able to make contact if the pitcher is finding the strike zone. This person knows his role is to get on base so that the top of the order will have an opportunity to knock him in.

The second category of pinch hitters is an athlete that makes regular contact and has a history of success hitting with runners on base, advancing runners, and collecting RBIs. Usually a line-drive hitter, this player has gap power and hits well under pressure.

The third category is a hitter that has home-run power but has a tendency to strike out more than the contact hitter discussed above. This player is usually called upon in situations where his long ball can tie the score or put his team ahead. He will normally enter the game from the seventh inning through the end of the game. This person is usually a good fastball hitter, as he will be called upon frequently to hit against the opponent's closer. In professional baseball, if a choice had to be made, a right-handed hitter might be preferable in this situation over a left-handed hitter because, as a rule, right-handed hitters hit right-handed pitching better than left-handed hitters hit left-handed pitching.

Right- and left-handed batters are another important consideration to take into account when inserting pinch hitters. As a manager, you would like to have the option of left-handed and right-handed hitters coming off the bench. At the high school and college levels, however, this is often difficult. Normally you will have your best hitters already in the lineup. It is not uncommon to see trades in professional baseball being made that ensure a team's bench has hitters that swing both from the left and right sides of the plate.

Another consideration to take into account when setting a lineup and thinking of possible pinch hitting situations is whether there is a player on the team that hits a certain pitcher consistently. Some managers, when they have such a hitter, will keep that player on the bench until the team gets runners in scoring position. At that point, the manager may insert this person as a pinch hitter for a weak hitter, hoping that he will produce a hit and drive in a few runs to keep a big inning alive.

The point of substituting a pinch hitter into a game is to put him into an important situation where he can make a difference in a ballgame. He is entering the game because he has a better chance of getting on base and driving in runs than the person he is replacing. Pinch hitters are most likely to be used in one of the following scenarios.

The first pinch hitter, the one that makes consistent contact, has good knowledge of the strike zone and is not afraid to take the pitcher deep into the count. By doing this he gives the pitcher a chance to do his work for him, which is reaching base any way he can, if the pitcher cannot throw a strike. He is likely to be used early in the game or when his team needs the tying or winning run on base. As stated in the description of this first category, this pinch hitter is used in an attempt to start a rally.

Pinch hitter number two is the good contact hitter with gap power who hits well under pressure. This player's value is most evident when hitting with runners on base. He has the ability to hit and advance runners, as well as a high percentage of driving runners home. This pinch hitter, often used in game-winning situations, is called upon to keep a rally alive. Although he can and does drive in runs, he makes contact often enough that he won't often strike out. Even if his contact doesn't drive in a run or result in a hit and thus him reaching base, odds are good that his contact will be enough to move a runner over, giving the next hitter in the lineup another chance to drive home an important run.

The third pinch hitter, the one with home-run power who frequently strikes out, usually enters the game late with the score tied or one run behind. His role is to try and get a pitch that he can drive out of the ballpark to tie the score or give his team the lead. This is the hitter who is called on when his one at-bat is the one that can and will shift the momentum of the game to one side or another.

In most close games pinch hitters are needed and will be used. A team that has a few good hitters coming off the bench will see their presence leading to additional wins over the course of a long season. As a coach or manager, when you are selecting your team, consider the last person or two that you keep. Think about whether one of the athletes you are choosing between fits into one of the pinch hitting categories described above. If one does, it may be in your interests to find him a spot on your team.

To create a lineup that gives a program its best chance of being successful, a coaching staff needs to be able to identify the players who are able to produce when called upon. By incorporating the four offensive qualities of an ideal lineup—speed, power, bat control, and offensive response—into everyday practice sessions, we are able to identify each of our players' strengths and weaknesses. We can thus name our top hitters, whom we put at the top of the lineup so that they get the extra at-bats in the later innings, when we hope we will be in a position to win the game. Building a lineup around these four qualities will help develop a team's offensive strategy, enhance the success of a program, and establish a consistent lineup.

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2

Scouting and Studying the Opposition

Chuck Hartman

Having information on your opponent may give your team a better chance of winning a game. Information should be based on previous games, scouting reports, and observations you make both before and during the game.

If you have played your opponent in the last couple of years, information from the charts or the computer can be helpful. Look for pitching patterns or tendencies on certain counts. When pitching patterns are unambiguous, you can use the information as an offensive focus for your team. Tendencies that occur most often come on 0-0, 1-0, 2-0, 3-1, and 3-2 counts. You must analyze these counts with bases empty and with men in scoring position. In preparing the charts, use a regular pencil with no one on base and a colored pen or pencil with men on base.

Figure 2.1 shows that no definite tendency occurs on the first pitch (0-0). Every hitter except English and Bauder received a different pitch during the second time at bat. A couple of tendencies do occur. Nine out of 12 pitches with an 0-1 count were off-speed, seven out of eight 0-2 pitches were fastballs, and all 2-0, 3-1, and 3-2 pitches were fastballs. All 2-2 pitches were breaking balls. The hitter should be aware that against this club (or this pitcher), off-speed pitches are likely on 0-1 and 2-2 counts. Your hitters should be sitting on fastballs on the 2-0, 3-1, and 3-2 pitches.

Figure 2.2 shows that the pitcher's best pitch is obviously the fastball because he threw the fastball 81 times out of the 118 pitches. In addition, he started 21 of the 30 hitters with fastballs. The real tendency in this chart is that the 1-0 pitch was a fastball to 28 of the 30 hitters. With men on base, this pitcher stayed with his best pitch, which was obviously his fastball.

Hitter's Tendency Chart

Hitter	0-0	1-0	0-1	0-2	2-0	1-1	1-2	2-2	2-1	3-1	3-2
Stanton	1,4,4,1	1,1	5			1			1		
Tapwell	4,1,1	2,2	5		1	4			1		
West	1,4,3	1				4	5		1,1		
Torequa	4,1,1		4	1		5	1,5	5			
Bander	4,1,5,1		1	1,1		4			1		
English	1,1,1,5	2,1	2,5	1		4,1,5	1	2	4		
Hatchison	1,4,1,1	1,3,1	1	1	1,1	4	4	5	4		1,1
Harris	4,1,1,1	2,1	4,5			1,1	1,5		1	1	1
Winterfeldt	1,4,1,1		1,5,5	4,1,1				5	1		

FIGURE 2.1 Use the charts to help identify pitching patterns and tendencies on certain counts.
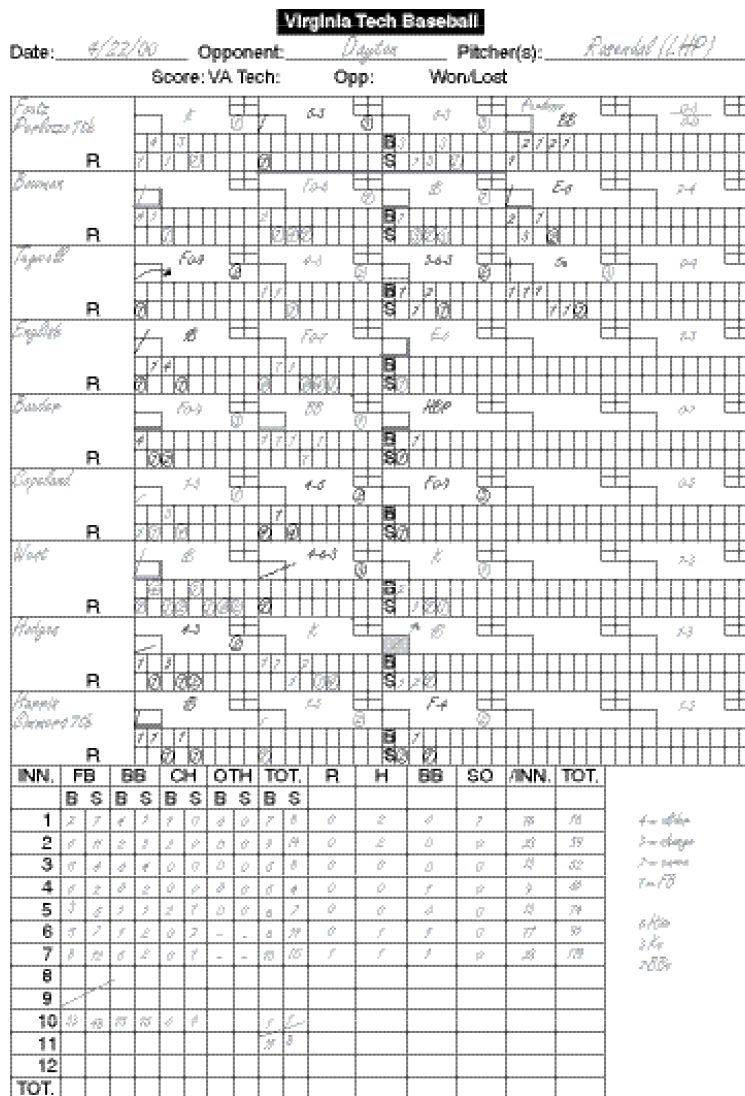
FIGURE 2.2 This chart shows the pitcher's tendency to use the fastball.

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Pitcher's Stuff and Control

One thing to remember about pitchers is that they are creatures of habit. A couple of important factors are his stuff and his control. Questions to be answered here are these:

- What is his best pitch?
- What is his approximate velocity?
- Does his ball move?
- Does he have good off-speed pitches? If so, what type of spin do these off-speed pitches have?

Coaches and players should discuss these questions during the game. Good communication in this area can be helpful to the hitters.

Another key is identifying the pitcher's best pitch. Usually, the pitcher has one pitch that he considers his out pitch, and he will go to it in clutch situations.

Answers to these questions will feed your hitters lots of useful information. If the pitcher is throwing 90 miles per hour or more, the hitters must get the bats started quickly. On the other hand, if the pitcher has good off-speed pitches, the hitters must be able to stay back and hit the ball deeper in the strike zone.

The pitcher's control factor will have a tremendous effect on offensive strategy. If the pitcher averages 4 to 6 walks per game, the coach will probably use the take signal frequently. The coach might want to take a lot of first pitches and pitches on 2-0 and 3-1 counts. This approach enables the team to put runners on base and run up the pitch count. Either result could be enough to win a close game. Sometimes the pitcher cannot throw a certain pitch or pitches for strikes. Hitters can then look for a particular pitch to hit, especially when ahead in the count.

Pitcher's Tendencies and Patterns

Catchers, and even the coaches who call pitches, sometimes have tendencies. The previously discussed charts showed some of the tendencies and patterns. These patterns can be helpful to the coach in developing his offensive strategy. For example, if the first pitch is a strike and the tendency is then to go with an off-speed pitch, breaking ball, or splitter, this becomes a good pitch to start a runner. If the 0-2 pitch tendency is a curve or splitter, this is also a great time to start a runner.

Pitchers often go to their best pitch with runners in scoring position. The first pitch thrown to a hitter with runners in scoring position is often the pitch that the pitcher will use to try to get that hitter out. If the first pitch is

a ball (1-0), many pitchers will not throw off-speed pitches for fear of getting further behind. Of course, if he is an off-speed pitcher, this pattern will be different. Teams can find out early by observing their charts to see if the pitcher will go off-speed on 2-0 or 3-1 counts.

Control of the Running Game

In determining how the pitcher controls the running game, don't forget that he is a creature of habit. One of the first things that all coaches do is determine the pitcher's time in delivering the ball to the plate. If the ball reaches the catcher more than 1.3 seconds after the pitcher first commits to the plate, you can steal bases. You must know your runners. An excellent coaching device is to time your runners from their leads to second base or third base. If the pitcher's release time plus the catcher's time to second base is higher than or equal to your runner's time, you can usually steal the base. For example, if your runner's time is 3.3 seconds to second base, the pitcher's time is 1.4 seconds, and the catcher's time is 2.0, your runner can steal the base.

You must observe the pitcher's moves to first base. How quick is it? Does he move to first while going into the stretch? Does he hold the ball for a time and then go to first? If a pitcher doesn't throw over much, he usually doesn't have a good move. Pitchers with good moves throw to first base often.

The timing or looks of a pitcher often fall into a pattern. He may look only once or twice at a runner. When your first runner gets on base, your players should focus on the pitcher, looking for a pattern, the timing, and the move to first. If one of these players then becomes a base runner, he has a picture of what to look for. He shouldn't have to ask his coach.

Defensive Strengths and Liabilities

One of the more important aspects of the defense is the catcher's throwing ability. His accuracy and arm strength can dictate your offensive strategy. If he throws well, then you should use the bunt, hit-and-run, or run-and-hit strategies. If he throws poorly, the better base runners should be able to steal. You should not have to use the sacrifice bunt against a weak-throwing catcher.

Players and coaches should observe outfield arm strength during pregame. Their strength or weakness can be the determining factor in whether you can take the extra base or not. Players and coaches, through their pregame observations, can make good decisions on running to the next base.

Likewise, players and coaches should watch the third baseman in the pregame and note his agility, arm strength, and ability to make the play on

a slow roller. During the game, they should find answers to several questions about the third baseman's play:

- How does he play the hitters?
- Does he play deep, medium, or short?
- Does he move back after a strike on the hitter?

Your good drag bunters should observe all these factors to help determine when to use that part of the offensive game.

During the game, observation of the defensive alignment can be helpful to the offensive players. The alignment can be one of the best indicators of how the opponent is going to pitch to a hitter. If the opponent is playing the hitter to be late, they are probably going to try to pitch away. Of course, if the opponent is playing the hitter to pull, they may be trying to keep the ball inside.

The play of the middle infielders can offer opportunities to the offense. If neither of the middle infielders moves toward second base after a pitch with a man on first base, the opponent is susceptible to the delayed steal. On the steal or hit-and-run play, do both infielders move before the pitch reaches the plate? If they do, you should try hit-and-run plays because the vacated spots left by the middle infielders are where most ground balls are hit. On the hit-and-run play, does the infielder covering the base leave early? Does he leave before the pitch gets to the plate? If he does, then the vacated space may indicate that the opponent is susceptible to the hit-and-run. The fake steal is a good way to check this out.

Another observation you should make is how well they turn the double play. If they are good, coaching strategy might involve a sacrifice bunt or hit-and-run to avoid being taken out of the inning by the ground ball. On the other hand, if they are not very good and you have a decent runner at the plate, you may want to swing away.

Observations During the Game

Most of the scouting reports and previously discussed items must be observed. How is the pitcher's control? What kind of zone does the umpire have? Is the zone large or small? These three questions must be answered to determine game strategy.

If the umpire has a small zone, the hitter can be patient in waiting for his pitch. On the other hand, if the zone is large, the hitter must open up his strike zone, particularly with two strikes. The type of zone can also dictate coaching strategy. A small zone might suggest using the take signal, and a large zone might call for the hit sign.

As previously discussed, hitters must know the pitcher's tendencies and patterns. Each hitter in the lineup should understand from the scouting

report and his game observations how the opposing team is attempting to get him out. Hitters should observe the 0-2 counts closely because many teams will use the same strategy on every 0-2 count. The hitter should develop a focus for this situation.

How is the opposing pitcher controlling the running game? What are his habits that your team should know? The team and coaches should be observing the types of moves the pitcher uses. Does the right-handed pitcher move early, or does he hold the ball? His move should be timed. Any move over 1.0 seconds indicates to the runner that he can extend the lead. In dealing with left-handed pitchers, several anatomical factors should be considered:

- Position of head when throwing home or throwing to first base. The left-handed pitcher will often look at first base and throw home or look at home and throw to first. Sometimes, the left-hander will tilt his head back when throwing to first base.

- Knee of the front leg. The left-hander will open up his front knee when throwing to first. When throwing home, the knee is straight up and approximately in line with the rear leg.

- Trunk position. Sometimes left-handers will tilt back when throwing to first base. They do this to clear their hips.

Of course, players and coaches must all note the pitcher's time to the plate and the catcher's time throwing to second base.

Hitter's Adjustments

Hitters must be observant and talk to other hitters during the game. They should discuss whether the fastball has movement. If so, what kind of movement? They should talk about the off-speed pitches. What kind of action does the ball have? Is the spin 12 to 6? Can the hitter see the spin on the curveball or slider?

The pitcher on the opposing team will usually have an out pitch. Hitters must understand what this pitch is. They should be observing game charts to see if pitching patterns are developing during the game. Hitters should be aware of the pitches used during various counts, particularly 0-2, 2-0, 3-1, and 3-2. They must develop a two-strike approach against the opposing pitcher.

Most important, the hitter has to understand how the pitcher is attempting to get *him* out. If the pitcher is pitching away with all his pitches, the hitter may have to move closer to the plate or try to hit to the opposite field. If the pitcher is giving him a steady diet of curveballs or off-speed pitches, the hitter might move up in the box and try to hit the ball deeper in the

Before attempting a steal, it's important to know the pitcher's time to the plate plus the catcher's time to second. If it's higher than or equal to the runner's time, you can usually steal the base.

zone. The hitter should realize that the first pitch thrown to him with men in scoring position is most likely the pitch that the opposition feels they can use to get him out.

Finally, the hitter must analyze the game situation. For example, with a runner on second base with no outs, the opposing pitcher will try to prevent the hitter from hitting to the right side of the diamond. The pitcher will throw off-speed pitches or pitch inside to right-handed batters. He will pitch the left-handed hitters away with fastballs or backdoor sliders.