

# in the game

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## Know the Count

### The Mental Approach For A Successful Hitter



The game of softball, like most other sports, is one that combines athletic ability with a strong mental focus. Some would agree that the better physically conditioned athletes have the greater advantage, but it is important to not underestimate the power of the mental game.

As I have always said, I would rather have someone with a little bit less athletic ability but has good game sense. A good hitter is always ready to hit not to walk!

Hitting begins with proper practice, mental preparation and understanding the process. A disciplined hitter with a clear concept of the strike zone will be a powerful asset to the offense.

Watching the pitchers warm up before the game will give the batter a pretty good idea of what they are throwing. Scouting the team before you play will help you know what to expect from that team's pitching staff.

My standard for discussion in this article is to assume that the pitcher is a quality pitcher with the ability to place the ball in various locations and has a variety of pitches. The batter is a successful batter. This perspective is from the batter's point of view. Here are a few examples.

#### THE BATTER'S POINT OF VIEW:

**NO COUNT:** On the first pitch the pitcher generally wants to throw a strike to get ahead of the batter. The batter is obviously looking to get ahead of the pitcher. More often than not, the first pitch will be a strike. It is important to be ready to hit the first pitch. If you are a first pitch taker you may always be working from behind in the count. Not good odds to become a consistent hitter. Most likely a pitcher may go with a pitch that will be close to the zone (curve, drop). Unlikely you will see a changeup in this situation.

**0-1:** No need to panic. A good pitcher will try to throw a ball that is not a strike and get you to chase (drop, curve, and rise). It is important to stay disciplined and look for a good pitch. Stay in your zone and remember a pitcher that throws "gas" might just throw hard until someone hits her.

**0-2:** You need to get to work! Pitcher is looking to throw a pitch that is not a strike. If you have looked at two fastballs she may just try to blow another one by you. The pitcher will be careful not to "serve up a good pitch". A change up is probable in this situation. Keep eyes down in the strike zone and stay off the up pitch.

**1-1:** Even low count is hard to predict. Possibly a slight advantage will be to the pitcher. The pitcher will sacrifice a ball to get the batter to chase a pitch close to the zone. Unlikely the batter will see a fastball in this situation. Most like a pitch with movement.

**2-1:** Advantage batter! The pitcher does not want to go 3-1. The pitcher may look to throw her best pitch so in most cases you will see a strike. Be prepared to hit a pitch in your zone

**2-2:** Even counts are tough. Pitcher may be willing to go full count and the hitter still has to be disciplined. Keep eyes down in the strike zone and lay off the up pitch. Change up is possible in the situation. Chances are the pitch won't be a strike.

**1-2:** Pitcher is in the best position here. Unlike the 0-2 pitch where you almost expect a pitch out of the zone, the pitcher may come with the "heat" to catch you off guard. The batter has to show a high level of discipline here and keep eyes down in the strike zone.

**1-0:** A good pitcher won't panic. So you should not expect a pitch down the middle. Pitcher may be willing to go 2-0 just to get the batter to chase a pitch. This would be a good time to look for a curve or drop depending on the pitcher's ability. Look for the mistake and drive it!

**2-0:** Advantage hitter. The pitcher does not want to go 3-0. Unlikely to see a change up. Pitcher is looking to get control of the at bat so again look for a mistake and rip it!

**3-0:** The pitcher is in trouble. 2 schools of thought depending on the situation. You may take a pitch until you get a strike (especially if the bases are loaded and she walked the batter before you). Also, you may be ready to sit and rip the next pitch (especially if your team has a lead).

**3-1:** A good pitcher knows she must throw a good pitch in this situation to tempt the batter. If the pitcher's team is ahead in the game it may not be a strike....especially if you are not the lead off, there are no runners on, and two outs. I would expect a close pitch but one in your zone.

**3-2:** I think advantage batter in this situation. Pitcher does not want to throw a juicy pitch! It will almost have to be a strike. The pitcher will want you to go after whatever she pitches. This is driven by the game situation and the batter's own at bat. i.e. if the first 2 pitches were high fastballs you may expect a rise. If you have a tendency to go after the up pitch keep eyes down in the zone and look for your pitch.

So, in summary: It is important for the hitter to always take a confident approach to the plate with a clear head. Approach each at bat separately. Play one pitch at a time. Practice with a purpose. Happy Hitting!

## product news



"The Synergy Clarity clearly pushes Easton's technological barrier, as well as dominates the market in terms of keeping the game fair for everyone," said Matt Arndt, senior vice president of Easton's baseball/softball division. "These bats also redefine appearance by revealing a patented design, bringing yet another edge to the company's impressive collection."

Easton continues its technologically driven focus by including the following features in its Synergy lines:

- Extended Hitting Area – Patented Extended Flex™ design lengthens the hitting area along the entire barrel by increasing barrel flex toward

the contour and end cap.

- Design and Construction – Patented Integrated Matrix Technology™ (IMX) optimizes the relationship between materials, design and manufacturing process.
- Swing Weight (M.O.I.) – Each bat design has received precision weight loading in both end cap and handle sections to provide optimal swing weights in order maximize bat speed through the hitting zone.
- Vibration Reduction System™ (VRS) – Solid feel and the elimination of vibration combine to give the hitters unmatched comfort at the plate.

Synergy Reveal and Synergy Clarity both meet all 2008 ASA, USSSA, NSA, ISA, SSUSA and ISF regulations. For more on Easton's revolutionary Synergy Reveal and Synergy Clarity lines, visit [www.clearlythefuture.com](http://www.clearlythefuture.com).