



SOFTBALL EXCELLENCE

with **Cindy Bristow**

Do You Actually Swing Level?

Is this age old statement “swing level” hitting fact or hitting fiction? It’s important you know the truth when it comes to outscoring your opponents as hitting myths are everywhere. “You’ve got to Swing Level” is one of the 2 biggest misconceptions when it comes to hitting and yet one of the most often repeated pieces of hitting advice. Whether you’re a coach, a parent or a player it’s vital that you learn what really happens during the swing – and whether it really is level.

In a recent issue of the Softball Excellence Insider Newsletter we talked about the #1 hitting misconception which is the notion of, ‘Don’t Drop Your Back Shoulder’ (<http://www.softballexcellence.com/dugout/hitting/why-hitters-must-drop-their-back-shoulder/>). Through the use of pictures I explained how this is not what happens to a hitter’s back shoulder at contact and how hitters must in fact drop their back shoulder when hitting the ball, especially the low pitch.

Simply confronting this long-held notion that hitters must not drop their back shoulder caused quite a stir. I received lots of emails on this subject and the majority of them were positive. People told me they too were taught this same thing and had believed it to be true, but that the pictures I presented helped them see what really happens during the swing. One or two other coaches got really angry and felt I was crazy. I’m OK with this response as it’s hard for us to change what we think is right. It’s often scary to realize you need to learn something new and I also understand that by simply challenging this long-held notion I am also indirectly challenging the people who taught it to us – no doubt a favorite coach or even a parent. But it’s our obligation as coaches to learn all we can that’s available to us now, and as painful as that might be that’s what I am attempting to do through these articles.

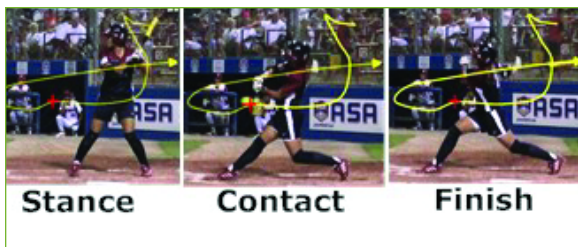
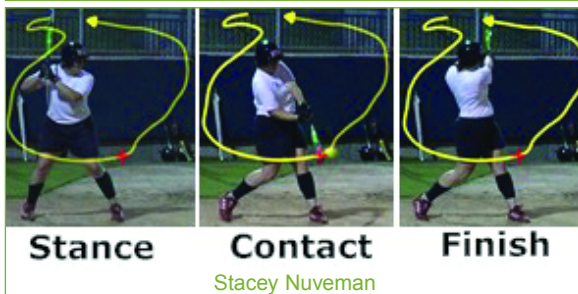
Now let’s tackle the #2 hitting misconception and that’s the idea that you must have a level swing. Just like the whole “don’t drop your back shoulder” thing I have heard forever how hitters must swing level. So as a young coach I said and taught that same thing. I

didn’t give either of these concepts any thought. In fact, I felt if I was taught these things they must be right, so I taught them myself – for years.

That is, until I started studying hitting intensely and tearing the swing apart through the use of Video Analysis (<http://www.softballexcellence.com/Detail.bok?no=135>). Video analysis allowed me to set aside my prior knowledge (or at least I thought it was “knowledge”) and see for myself what really happens during the swing (or during any softball skill for that matter). I have always believed that players work extremely hard to learn the things we as coaches teach them and they spend so much of their time and energy trusting their improvement to our knowledge. As a result I believe it’s our obligation as coaches to know as much as we can and make that knowledge as current as possible. Simply repeating coaching folklore without figuring out whether or not it’s true, either through the use of pictures, video, clinics or simply our logical common sense, is not responsible on our part.

So, how do we tackle the concept of swinging level? Let’s take a look at 3 Olympic softball players; Jessica Mendoza (USA), Stacey Nuveman (USA) and Tanya Harding (AUS) – and see if their swings are level.

We’ll start with Tanya Harding, a 4-time Olympian and former MVP of the Women’s College World Series from Australia. You’ll also see Tanya’s swing in the article on Dropping the Back Shoulder (<http://www.softballexcellence.com/dugout/hitting/why-hitters-must-drop-their-back-shoulder/>).



This first series is a 3 picture sequence of Tanya hitting a ball off a batting T, about thigh-high, and each picture is a different point in her swing: Her Stance, Contact and her Finish. Notice the yellow line in each picture. This is called a Spline Line and is a feature in Dartfish Video Analysis that allows me to click on her bat and highlight it throughout her swing - so the yellow line is the path of her bat barrel throughout her entire swing.

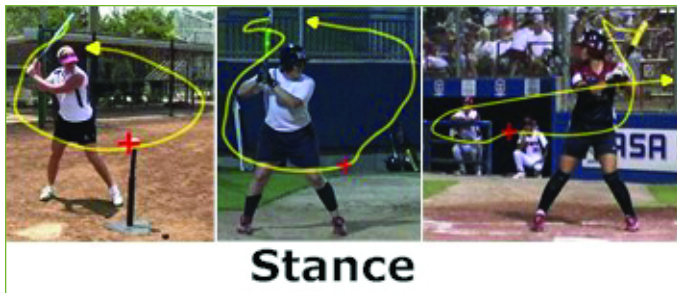
Before we evaluate the swing path let’s look at 2 other Olympians and see what their bat paths, or swings, look like just in case Tanya is doing something unique.

The middle 3 picture sequence is of Stacey Nuveman, a 3-time Olympian and also former UCLA star. Stacey is a right-handed hitter like Tanya but is a noted power hitter. After Stacey we have 2-time Olympian Jessica Mendoza. Jess is a former Stanford star and a left-handed hitter. Jess is regarded as one of the best all-around hitters in the world.

When you look at the yellow bat path on all 3 hitters what do you notice? Remember that the yellow line is the path of the bat barrel and the red X is the point of contact.

Bat Path Observations:

None of the hitters have a straight bat path (or a level swing). Tanya and Stacey have more oval shaped bat paths; Jess and Stacey have active hands at the beginning of their swing (squiggly yellow line at the start of swing); Jess approaches contact with the most level approach. Jess takes a much longer stride than the other two hitters thus lowering her body more on her swing. All three hitters must start their swing by going down since the bat starts high and the pitch they hit is much lower than their hands – thus ruling out the possibility of a level swing. They all contact the ball (red X) slightly in front of their stride leg or body (not necessarily their stride foot).



Two Most Important Observations:

•Look at the picture of all the hitters in the Stance – and notice that their swings are much longer in front of them than they are behind them! This is THE BIGGEST mistake that younger hitters make. They spend too much time with the bat behind them, either dropping their hands too soon, or simply dragging

the bat behind them through the swing. All three of these world-class players quickly get the bat in front of their body heading toward the contact point. This allows them to wait longer on pitches, thus having more time to gather information on the pitch, and then to quickly deliver their hands and the bat to and through the ball.

•And then they CONTINUE that bat path forward after contact as long as they can, instead of simply twisting or wrapping the bat around their chests. This provides power for each of these hitters.

While we can plainly see that none of these hitters have a level swing, they each get the bat head (barrel) lined up with the ball prior to contact. Jess does it much longer on this particular swing than either Tanya or Stacey but Jess has a slightly longer swing than the other two. Each hitter is trying to hit the back of the ball for line drives, the slight bottom if they're trying to lift the ball for homerun power, and the slight top if they are trying to hit the ball on the ground. But all three players are definitely putting more force into their followthroughs in order to hit the ball with as much power as they possibly can.

If you liked this article then you're going to love the great new hitting products we're preparing to release soon. In the next few months look for some fantastic new Hitting Drills (both eDrills as well as a Drill Manual) plus some great new Hitting eClinics on topics ranging from Understanding the Swing to Ways to Improve Your Game Hitting!

To help improve your team's hitting, check out the following hitting aids from our website www.softballexcellence.com: •Hitting Disks; •Zip Balls; •Hitting eDrills; •50 Hitting Drills Manual; •Tee Stackers Kit.

SAVE 10% ON ALL JUGS HITTING PACKAGES



PRACTICE PACKAGE™

(A0200) **\$224¹⁰**

1. Instant Screen®
2. Hitting Tee™
3. 2-Dozen Sting-Free® Softballs



TOSS PACKAGE™

(A0250) **\$439²⁰**

1. Instant Screen®
2. Toss™ Machine
3. Throw-Down Home Plate
4. Toss™ Machine Drill Book
5. 2-Dozen Sting-Free® Softballs



SMALL-BALL® PITCHING MACHINE PACKAGE

(A0060) **\$374³⁶**

1. SMALL-BALL® Pitching Machine
2. SMALL-BALL® Instant Protective Screen
3. Hitting Stick™
4. 4-Dozen SMALL-BALLS (1 Bucket)
5. Throw-Down Home Plate
6. FREE Drill Book



Lite-Flite® MACHINE PACKAGE

(A0004) **\$843³⁰**

1. Lite-Flite® Machine
2. Rechargeable Battery Pack
3. Lite-Flite® Protective Screen
4. 2-Dozen Lite-Flite® Softballs
5. Throw-down Home Plate
6. Lite-Flite® Drill Book
7. Durable Carrying Cases for Machine and Screen



YOUR PRACTICE COMPANY

PRACTICE PRACTICE

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THESE AND OTHER JUGS HITTING PACKAGES, CALL 1-800-547-6843 OR VISIT US ONLINE AT WWW.JUGSPORTS.COM.