

HIGHER GROUND

with Bobby Simpson



Get Mad, Or Adjust?

Make
Excuses,

Long ago, I was blessed to serve for three years as the assistant baseball coach to Jack Stallings at Florida State University. I could not have been pro-

vided a better learning experience. Stallings later retired as about the third or fourth winningest NCAA baseball coach at his time of retirement and he will always be remembered as one of the best teachers in the game. In those long-ago days, he wrote an article about baseball being a game of adjustments and I have used so much of his wisdom from that article and the years that I spent with him since I moved into





the game of softball almost 40 years ago. Let me share a somewhat personalized version of key points he made about adjusting in hitting.

First, realize that hitting in softball or baseball is one of the toughest things to do in the world of sports. If quarterbacks, point guards, or professional golfers hit their receivers, shots, or golf balls at the same percentage that good hitters hit a ball hard, they would not get to play very much, if any. Because of the difficulty in hitting, players must be willing to be consistent, yet, at the same time, also make constant adjustments. Realize that pitchers will find it easier to adjust, since throwing a ball is not as complex a skill as hitting a ball. Finally, the percentages

favor the pitcher, since hitters that hit .500 or higher are extremely rare. All of these items require that successful hitters learn well the art and science of adjusting.

If it's so elementary that hitters need to adjust, then why do so many not do it at all or not do it well. Jack Stallings offered several reasons that hitters do a poor job of adjusting and he bluntly said that one of big ones is "too much ego." They say that they are already doing what they should and they blame their failures on bad breaks, bad calls, and bad luck. They find it easier to play the blame game of excusing than to play the smart game of adjusting. In bold type, he proclaimed, "It is easier to get made and make excuses than it is to work hard and make adjustments!" He wrote those words almost forty years ago, but they are so true today. Yes, in today's microwave, drive thru, quick fix, instantized world, many players choose the anger and excuse approach while they continue to fail.

Ego and/or laziness definitely prevent some players from adjusting. Others lack the emotional control needed for proper adjustments. They get too mad and cannot calm the emotions enough to think clearly in the amount of time that they have between pitches or at-bats. Finally, we have to realize that some players do not have the skill set necessary for the necessary adjustments. They may be at a level where the adjustment is not available to them or they may choose not to hit within their ability level. A classic example is a non-power hitter swinging for the fences instead of staying within her skill set and hitting for the average. Other players may have reached a level of the game that is too difficult for them at this time and simply cannot adjust or compensate to meet that challenge because she does not currently have the skills needed.

So, what should hitters do so that they can properly adjust? First, accept the fact that adjustments are necessary. They can be physical, mental, and/or visual, but they are necessary. Not only are they necessary, but also they are necessary from pitch to pitch, at-bat to at-bat, and game to game. Whether you like it or not, or even whether you know it or not, you are involved in a battle for air space that is located in the World Of Adjusting And Compensating. So, first accept it and work to improve your ability to adjust. Practice smart as well as hard so you can apply what you learn when you get in games. Make practice game-like and include adjusting in your drills.

One area of practice should involve having a count on the pitches. Learn to make adjustments when hitting with no strikes, one strike, or two strikes. Vary locations pitch to pitch when using live pitching, machines, and tees. Alter speeds frequently. Change the situation, strike zone (umpires differ), and conditions under which you practice (time of day, weather, rested or fatigued, etc). Hit when you feel good and hit when you don't feel good. Hit when you are in a good mood and hit when you're having an absolutely horrible bad hair day.

Remember to adjust your approach when needed. Trying harder and hav-



ing more guts often lead to much less success than trying easy and having more smarts. Learn when which is needed for you as an individual. Focus on process instead of results. Focus more on performance than production. As Stallings taught, "It does matter how you do it, because how you perform dictates how well you will produce. In fact, focusing on good performance is the only way to assure consistent production, and hitters need to understand that they cannot completely control production; they can control performance, and that will allow them to make adjustments to the swing."

Instead of getting mad, get controlled. Instead of making excuses, make adjustments. Check yourself mentally, visually, and physically and learn to make proper adjustments so that your performance will become more productive.

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