

Softball Hitting - Attack Mentality at the Plate

While good mechanics are mandatory, hitting is more about mental readiness than physical mechanics. Hitting requires confidence and a willingness to risk failure. The ability to successfully hit the ball with consistency and power is a special talent with special emotional demands.

While many players may display false confidence, few are truly gifted with innate confidence. The manner in which confidence develops and manifests itself will determine whether a player becomes a reliable hitter, and whether she will rely on finesse (a product of discipline), or power (a product of aggression).

A child who is overly emotional at the plate will frequently fail, creating serious confidence problems and, inevitably, more hitting difficulty.

A hitter, approaches the plate encouraged to crush softball into outer space. It's one time when a kid can be extremely violent. For a hitter to dominate, she must develop an ATTACK MENTALITY (AM).

An enemy to an Attack mentality is anxiety. When the hitter is nervous, she becomes less confident, and decreases her chances of hitting the ball. When a hitter experiences either anger or fear, she is frequently overwhelmed by negative thoughts and images which create a personal belief that success is impossible - she assumes something bad will happen.

As a weaker hitter's skills improve, her confidence level can increase and peak performance will eventually be achieved. This hitter that combines confidence and mechanics has entered the peak mental hitting zone. A player who can find the zone can develop an ATTACK MENTALITY (AM).

In evaluating hitters, there are a few characteristics of a good Attack Mentality (AM) hitter a coach may look to find, or try to develop in his/her hitters.

(1) The Attack Mentality hitter knows when to use AM. This is the most important characteristic for any girl with AM potential. Any AM hitter must be able to turn on her AM when she approaches the plate and not carry a bad attitude around like a scar. A good AM hitter cannot give into rage, cannot allow herself to pout or sulk, and cannot have a temper tantrum. AM is short lived and task specific. She should have AM at the plate, but she shouldn't take it home to the dinner table. An AM hitter must enjoy winning, but cannot agonize over losing.

(2) Negative emotions. She wants to hit. Good AM power hitters thrive on the challenge at the plate. For the AM hitter, she always wants to be THE HITTER when the game is on the line. Pressure situations should simply help her concentrate. There is a fire of competition that burns

brighter the greater the challenge she faces. She never says "I can't", and if she can't, she merely believes she is not able to "yet."

(3) She is a good contact hitter. AM hitters need to be able to find a reachable ball with the bat wherever it is pitched. The AM hitter stalks the pitcher's best offering, relishes pitching mistakes, and pounces on every opportunity.

(4) She can focus. AM power hitters concentrate less on game situations and more on the proper execution that hitting demands. She has a task to perform and must be able to singularly direct her attention to that task. An AM hitter will see the opportunity to bat as a contest between her and the ball, and she can tune out any and all other concerns. When she focuses her AM she knows that at the moment the pitch arrives, hitting the ball has to be the most important thing in the world.

(5) She is always aggressive. AM hitters must always be consistently aggressive at the plate - not foolish - aggressive. She cannot be frustrated by the walk, and must create an atmosphere where any pitch close to her reach is in danger of being crushed. She must believe that if it is hittable, she can handle it. AM lets the hitter take control of the plate fiercely and aggressively, instead of merely waiting out the pitcher to make a mistake.

(6) The AM power hitter must be a swinger. AM power hitters usually strike out rather than walk. You don't want her to be stupid about chasing bad balls, but she can't be afraid to strike out, and she must not want to get even one called strike.

(7) She must be willing to protect the plate. She must know the strike zone. The AM hitter must be willing to defend her strike zone and not let the pitcher sneak a pitch in for a strike. When she encounters an ump with a moving strike zone, or calling bad strikes, she must not give into frustration and must focus on the **hittable** pitch - not the strike. **The AM hitter must be able to focus her intensity on the instant of contact - the attack.**

(8) She must be willing to practice. An AM hitter must enjoy practicing with and without a ball, with live pitching, and with a machine, self-soft toss, off a tee, dry swings, mental swings, to refine the mechanics of the swing.

(9) She must take instruction. AM power hitting requires good hitting technique. One must be willing to correct swing errors without complaint. Conversely, she should also be willing to advise her coach of legitimate concerns regarding swing discomfort or loss of control or vision by swing changes. Some aspects of the swing are intimate and only the hitter knows exactly how it feels for her to swing. **A proper swing can have many variations without being a bad swing.** She should not be fearful of telling her coach what will make her swing more comfortable.

(10) **She must care.** A good hitter is a team player. She is not a gladiator, contesting alone. A good hitter will use the team as a support base to help her focus better - a mutual goal is incentive to accomplish the individual task.