



**MAY
2011
EDITION**



**Establishing the bunt changes “Everything”
By: Kevin Huber, Assistant Coach Yale University**

As I search back into my memory, I think about the 1998 National title game between USC and Arizona State at the height of the gorilla ball era. Final score 21-14 ASU could have used then QB Jake Plummer to guide a late inning TD drive. The difference between then and now to me is, in '98, teams got runners on 1st and 2nd with no one out and awaited the soon to come 3-run homer by anyone in the lineup. Now 1st and 2nd, no one out, is bunt time with anyone in the lineup.

In another football reference, we try to establish the bunt to start our offense. Not unlike football teams that establish the run to use the pass. At Yale, we try to ensure that everyone in our line up can bunt the baseball, especially with the new BBCOR bats. Through much of the late fall and early pre-season, the word was out that the new bats do not perform like the bats NCAA players used last year. After reading an article in Baseball America where many high profile coaches voiced their concerns about the bats, Coach Tucker Frawley and I, who are responsible for the hitters at Yale, decided we would use the bunt from top to bottom as a major part of our offense.

The toughest part of installing our new system is having everyone buy in. I am sure right now someone reading this is turning up their nose and not fully buying in either. Our plan of attack was to practice the bunt at nauseum and not just the light-hearted attempt that usually takes place on the 1st 4 pitches in our BP rounds. Like any team from the Northeast, many of our pre-season workouts are indoors. Hitting is done in batting cages. We have a turf area and did work hard to get outside, but the temperature and the SNOW kept us in. The best part of this was players could not see how far they did or didn't hit the ball. Some said the sound was much different some said they felt different. But to that point we were just going on what we heard.

The first week, we took a little time to let the players in our plan and then got after it. The good part about it was the unknown. Our players did not swing any aluminum bats all fall, so they had nothing but printed horror stories to go off of about the new bats. After a few rounds of early BP, they were intrigued and we started our system. The system is not just for sacrifice bunts, but for drag bunts, push bunts, and even a major weapon: the safety squeeze.

The System

The amazing thing about this is what is taken for granted on a player's overall knowledge of the game. Some of our early findings were that our players had no idea where the other team's defense was playing them ever. They just dug in, looked for a pitch to hit, and wailed away. Of course this is most of it I did leave some of the nuances out for the sake of brevity and to keep a little bit of the secret with me.

The first thing in the system was to identify where the opposing team's defense is playing. Not just the corner infielders, but the entire defense we will get back to the importance of this. After this we taught our guys to keep their feet as quiet as possible with some staggered direction so they are not standing on a balance beam

2nd was to understand our angles so as not to waste any bunts by sending them back to the mound. I found that our guys could not bunt velocity as easy as they could manipulate a BP heater. Setting the angle was key to eliminating movement with the bat as the pitch was coming to the plate.

3rd keep the bat flat. Many of our guys came in and had the bat head pointing to the sky and then told me of a coach somewhere that said the upward angle would cause the ball to go down... WRONG most of our guys would then drop the bat head and pop the ball up. Keep the bat flat.

4th Be soft but firm with your hands. Have your hands in a solid position. A major problem I had was many of our player's hands were too close a good point of reference was about 12 inches between your hands. We want to be soft so we can catch the ball and deaden it a little but we want to be firm so we do not lose our angle.

5th Bunt to direction. After you have surveyed the field and understand what the defense is giving you. The ball should be bunted to 1st with a runner on 1st and 3rd with runners on 1st and 2nd. When bunting for hits we used the lines as much as we could, preaching "perfect or foul".

6th Be the best at it! Commit to all the ideals above and become the best at it. If the bunt is well executed you do not have to be the lead-off hitter that runs a 6.6 you can be the catcher (Ryan Brenner) who just put extra time in to make it a huge (9 bunt hits 2011) part of his game.

What I found out was success breeds belief. Our guys that got it embraced it and used the bunt as part of their day to day game. The other thing I found was teams would shorten up on us all the time with guys whose scouting report said they were bunters and with guys whose report said they were not. Everyone shortens up even outfielders so they can move quicker to their backups. This also opens up more holes around the field for our guys to hit into. The epiphany came when I was able to point this out to my hitters and seeing is believing. Even for the smart guys that play in the Ivy League.



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