



Hitting coaches and stat analysts agree on some things. If you swing at more strikes than balls you improve your chance of contributing to team offense.

Playoff games magnify the need for hitters to control the strike zone, with big arms being used more often than in regular season play. The best hitters in big situations use three simple visual cues to maximize their chance of attacking strikes and staying off late-moving balls outside the zone. On the other hand, unproductive at-bats start and end with any or all of the three visual triggers not being used.

October baseball brings out the best and worst in hitters. Rest assured, swing data and kinetics take a back seat to visual success and scoring runs in the playoffs.

Arizona head coach Jay Johnson said it best during one of our chats last year.

"If you fix your eyes, you fix your swing," Johnson said.

Stay focused on the three triggers and the swing will magically follow. Let's take a look at the three cues below:

Ready. Trigger #1: Bat tips, see saws, barrel loads, coils, leg kicks, hand pumps. Take your pick on the type of start hitters today deploy to prime their swing. The eyes will tell the hitter when this move will be needed to create more space to give them more time to be on time. I can't emphasize this enough. **Great hitters create more space to give them more time to be on time.** At the high velocity level, a pitcher's hand break or glove flair will trigger the hitter to begin his personal swing start. The elite hitters are able to respond to this first visual trigger consistently and with ease and rhythm as if they were still on the T or in center toss. The great hitters also assess the pitch type and stretch/windup variations that will prompt a different **Ready** trigger.

A word of visual advice for hitters. If your **Ready** trigger is late or inconsistent, be ready for visual challenges later in the runway (the landscape between a pitcher's release and the plate).

Set. Trigger #2: The beginning of a ball's flight should trigger the hitter to calmly set his field of vision slightly in front of the ball so he can see both it and the space in front of it. Front side tracking or funneling the ball is how hitters explain why they are seeing the ball so well in a given series. Sitting on pitches becomes easier to accomplish when funneling happens on the ball's release. Newsflash: High-level catchers exhibit this same visual strategy every time they stick a pitch. Over-focusing on the ball or the pitcher's release point is why so many minor leaguers never develop to play at higher levels.

Consider how many times a young hitter will make mechanical adjustments to his swing during the course of his career compared to visual adjustments that may yield significantly better results. Remember, late movement requires more aggressive front side tracking and focusing more on the space on the front side of the ball. A word of caution: Computer screens, vision training, colored balls and virtual goggles won't help hitters own the three triggers to compete in real dimensional space.

Go. Trigger #3: Good at-bats start with seeing the ball's flight longer. We all know that great at-bats start and finish when the eyes wait until the ball crosses over the 'Go Zone': the line of decision that gives the hitter the longest ball flight time, yet still allows the hitter to deliver the barrel on time. The deeper the Go Zone (which is why the V-Flex sits 10-15 feet in front of the plate) the more intel the hitter's eyes have for telling the hands to fire or hold. Let the ball travel. We know all that. Take it to the next level and be more than a cliché repeater. Give yourself and your hitters these internal markers within their runway as triggers to say "yes" or "no" to swing decisions. The **Go** trigger can change based on what each hitter is hunting for, or who's pitching that day. Later in games, the **GO** triggers should be as deep as possible within the hitter's runway.

Hitters in big at-bats stop trusting their eyes and start playing visual jeopardy (guessing) too often. We see this all the time in high stress at-bats. Hitters will cheat in fear of being late only to make them more vulnerable to late movement and balls outside the zone. Tendencies and video of the pitcher are helpful but not the holy grail.

Stay committed to the three triggers and watch the swing take care of itself.

