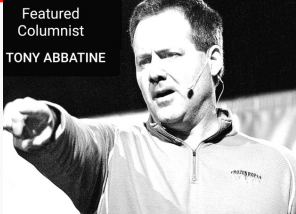


By Tony Abbatine on January 16, 2018



Prospects and big leaguers alike have more information and resources available now than ever before in the never-ending journey to reach and stay in the big leagues for a long time.

Old school versus new school? Perhaps. But it's more about the swing information overload that has seen less pure hitters developed in the minor leagues and swing-and-miss rates jump past 30 percent at the major league level in 2018.

The battle between private sector coaches and MLB coaching staffs continues to rage, and the conflict isn't just confined to the top of the baseball pyramid.

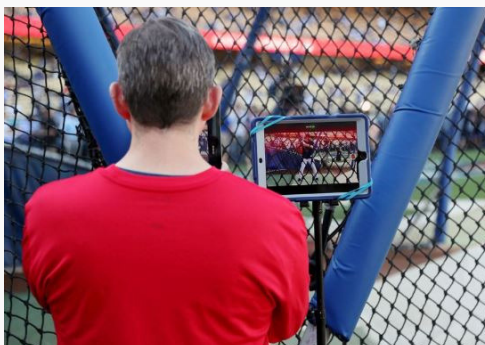
Let's not forget the amateur level, where college coaches battle parents, social media personalities and the new "flavor of the week" hitting terms presented to young, impressionable players. Or the youth level coach that needs permission from a young player's private hitting coach to talk to him about his swing.

As one MLB senior front executive said recently, "It is a major problem with so many teams, (and it) causes players confusion and frustration with the club's coaches."

Armed with data, analytics, and science—which at times is pseudo-science without a consistent testing protocol—the private coaches provide all the "secret sauce." But what looks good in the batting cage during soft toss or on a high-speed video camera doesn't always translate to in-game results.

Both parents and players can fall in love with "cage success," only to realize that the new, mechanical swing has nothing to do with the real issues in hitting, such as pitch recognition, which is the foundation of better timing and rhythm.

The recent trend of some MLB teams hiring "no-name" private hitting coaches in hopes of upgrading their hitting model will be interesting to watch. Will more "swing data" translate to improved offensive production during high-stress at-bats against plus pitching? Only time will tell if the established veterans buy into the swing doctors' metrics and data language.



Below is some friendly advice to the players looking for the "fix" to reach or stay in the majors for an extended period of time.

- Spend more time in the offseason and during the preseason understanding that the timing of your newfound bat speed is only as good as your ability to track the incoming baseball.

- Be able to articulate your visual search strategy from the pitchers' initial move to the end of the ball flight at the "Go Zone," which is the area in the hitters' runway where a decision has to be made.

- Come to terms with "less is more." Work on the "eyes, barrel, ball, body" approach that the best hitters demonstrate.

- Embrace the new technology and the new science of hitting but don't lose "sight" of the end game. Ask yourself, "Do I have the visual habits of a sniper waiting for the right time and target to appear?"

- Never follow the words of others blindly, or you will only take on another's reality. You will only hinder your progress by seeking fool's gold.

And finally, here's some friendly advice to the teams that are frustrated with all of the hitting noise that can potentially derail prospects and sabotage the growth of major league players.

- When the players want to talk about new swing models and data-driven hitting insight, stop and ask them what new techniques and adjustments they've made that will allow them to be better on time and keep their great, new swing from chasing pitches outside the strike zone.

- Take the time to understand the "new wave" hitting lingo so that you can put it into perspective when the players overload on it.

- Arm your coaches with additional teaching cues and more insight on why hitters demonstrate poor strike-zone awareness and swing and miss often.

- Realize that talking about approach and a hitting plan without first addressing each players' visual search strategy is a recipe for frustration for both the player and the team.

- Embrace all of the new information. The key is to keep it in perspective and don't lose "sight" of what really matters once the game starts.