

## **Offensive strategies**

Once you have a batting order, you need to determine what to do with it to run an effective offense. Several traditional offensive strategies used in Fastpitch softball to create opportunities are taking a pitch, the sacrifice bunt, the steal and the hit and run.

Proper instruction is important for these offensive plays, but perfect execution is the true secret to success. Players must master the proper execution of every aspect of these plays in practice and then carry them off perfectly in a game situation to make the plays effective.

### **Taking a pitch**

Taking a pitch is simply that, allowing the pitcher to throw the ball with no effort made by the batter to hit.

All batters should be coached to automatically take on a 3-0 count, so that the take sign needn't be given. Rather, the batter would look for the possibility of getting the 'green light' or permission to swing away. Once a take is given to protect a stealing baserunner, a batter will often square to bunt and move the bat in front of the Catcher in an effort to distract or upset both the Pitcher and the Catcher, thus assisting the runner. A take sign should never be given with two strikes on the batter.

### **Batter's instructions**

- The batter should be alerted to the take by being aware of the coach's signs
- The batter *must* allow the pitch to pass without offering a swing at it

### **Sacrifice bunt (RI)**

The sacrifice bunt is used primarily to advance the runner into a scoring position by sacrificing the batter.

The sacrifice bunt is usually called:

- With 0 or 1 out – it is rarely called with 2 out as, unless the batter beat the throw to 1st base, it would result in the 3rd and final out
- In a close game when 1 run is needed in order to move the runner into scoring position
- To force the out at 1st Base and avoid a double play
- To challenge the defence

To successfully execute the sacrifice bunt play the:

#### **Batter should:**

- Check to see where 1st and 3rd base players are fielding – if one is deeper than the other, place the bunt in the direction of the fielder who is deeper
- Turn early to bunt
- Bunt only on strikes

- Bunt the ball on the ground
- Bunt reasonably short
- Bunt towards 1st base if possible

**Runner should:**

- Lead off on the pitch
- Run full speed when the ball hits the ground and slide into 2nd base
- Return to 1st base if ball goes in the air

**Steal (R1)**

The steal is attempted to advance a fast runner into a scoring position without sacrificing the batter. The steal allows a team to create runs by eliminating a force play and putting pressure on the defence. The steal is attempted on the next pitch after coach's signal.

The usual situations for stealing 2nd base are:

- At any time to move a fast runner into scoring position to score a critical run. This can be done with 0, 1 or 2 out
- With a fast, above average baserunner at 1st
- Against a Catcher who has a weak or erratic throwing arm
- When 2nd base is not being covered properly



To execute the steal play successfully the:

**Batter should:**

- Assume a bunt position deep in the batting box and allow the ball to pass untouched, as close as possible under the bat

**Or**

- Swing at the pitch to distract the Catcher and allow the ball to pass untouched, as close as possible under the bat

**Runner should:**

- Get a good jump as soon as the pitch is released
- Run at full speed to 2nd base
- Slide into 2nd base
- Be prepared to advance to 3rd if possible

## **Hit and run**

Perhaps the most difficult offensive play in softball is the hit and run. It requires super concentration, not to mention excellent bat control and hitting ability. It is designed to allow a runner to get a good jump on a hit ball with the hope of advancing more than one base. It should move a runner from first to 3rd Base or from 2nd to home on a single.

Situations for using the hit and run play are:

- Virtually any time in the game when a runner is on 1st or 2nd base and a good contact hitter is at the plate. This is not a good play to call with a batter prone to striking out
- In an effort to stay out of a double play by starting the runner as soon as the pitch is released
- With the count on the batter at 2-0, 3-0 or 3-1, situations where the pitcher is likely to throw a strike
- In a close game to generate some added offence.

### **Batter should:**

- Attempt to get the bat *on any pitch* that the Catcher is going to be able to field in an effort to protect the runner
- Ideally, hit the ball to the right side of the field, preventing any force play on the runner
- Try to hit the ball on the ground, hopefully through the hole created by the 2nd Baseman going to cover the play at 2nd base. If not on the ground, a deep fly ball at least gives the runner time to get back to their base.

### **Runner should:**

- Run hard towards 2nd base, with the pitch. The runner should try to pick up the flight of the batted ball, but should not slow down.
- Be prepared to advance 2 bases
- Be ready to hastily return to 1st base if the ball is in the air
- Run as fast as possible and be prepared to slide should the batter miss the ball

This is a very difficult and high risk play that often results in a double play from a fly ball. It is especially hard to execute at high levels of competition. Successful execution of the play requires a batter who is very adept at least getting the bat on the ball.