

Baseball as Means of Keeping the Doctor Away

How the Expert Batter Needs the Vigor and Sharpened Senses of Perfect Health—A Little Psychology on the Side

RECENTLY, as baseball annals go, a good batter suddenly had a severe "slump." He dropped so far in his batting average that the fickle fans, at first worried, began to yell for his release. This batter was originally a college man, so he decided to consult a psychologist. Examination showed that he had control, excellent eyesight, intelligence, and was a "parallel" batsman. This meant that he was naturally a batter who did not "hit the ball in the air" or chop it downward, but lined out his balls by an even, steady, horizontal stroke, which was parallel to the ground. This is one of the excellent equipments of a good batter.

An examination and experimental tests of memory, muscles, eyes, color, and co-ordination of thought and action disclosed him to be above the average even



Ty Cobb.

it that "there are three doctors who do not deceive themselves—merriment, mild exercise, and modest fare."

The Summer months should be days when health is courted to be stored up as a physical bank account for future use, and, in achieving this, outdoor sports which make for "merriment, mild exercise, and modest victuals" are then more to be desired than great riches. Of all such muscular amusements the bat and ball, as used in the national American game, seem best suited to "slam the door on the doctor's nose." It is not necessary to decry other kinds of outdoor athletics to prove the worth of baseball. Practice at the beginning of the season should be gradual; one must not be impatient to swing a bat before his sluggish, lethargic muscles have been insensibly brought by a week or more of training into a state of mercurial nimbleness and power.

To bat a pitched baseball just where you wish it to go means that your muscles are sensitive as well as strong. It indicates that your arm, hand, and other muscles bow to your will, your judgment, and your resolute intellect. Moreover, when boy or man hit "for a safety" as he intended, it is a sign that the intellect, the muscles, and the sense of motion, sight, and touch are all alert and intertwined co-ordinately the one with the other.

The very fact that the batter met the emergency of the pitcher with his ever-available and harlequin changeableness of delivery indicates the swift, wireless messages sent by the eye to the senses of touch and motion, and muscular control. Ordinary, laggard processes of school desk, professor-like thinking must be done away with at bat as on the firing line. Vision must be keen, the will clean, the judgment quick and the mus-

cles "at bat" as swift as a Tartar's arrow.

To become a good batter, it is not necessary to be born so to have the "batting eye" and swing muscles as birthrights or instincts. A few born Willie Keelers, "Buck" Herzogs and Cobbs there may be, but the majority of good batters, like most poets, playwrights, inventors, and financiers, are made by study and practice, not born. To hit the skillfully pitched ball safely is more than to merely practice a hit-and-miss swing, a trial-and-error problem. It is a matter of correcting all eye troubles, skin affections and physical disabilities as well. There can be no "intuitive batting" if you are color blind, astigmatic, or near sighted; if the sensations of heat and cold, motion and rest are at fault.

Once these are healed and corrected, there is more than a chance that you may discipline and control your sensations and your muscles to such harmonious deeds that what seemed at first impossible, to wit, mastery of the bat, may become something wonderful to behold. Just as the tennis player prefers a particular racquet of fourteen, fifteen, or even eleven ounces, as a golfer clings more to one driver than another, or an

his reaction time will be reduced to a minimum. A batter's reaction time is that interval of delay which is necessary, like a tiger, to crouch or contract his muscles to be prepared to spring at or to receive the enemy—the baseball. It is also called by psycho-physiologists "the latent period."

If the expectant batter's "reaction time" or "latent period" is too slow, he will hit more fouls, more "easy outs," and "punch outs" oftener than another whose muscles are on the qui vive. The best batter, it must be plain, is he whose reaction time is as swift as the flight of light itself. Whenever you see the catcher signal for and the pitcher "shooting a quick one over" when the batter is "sort o' off guard," you may set it down in your notebook that the "latent period" of that batsman is very long and his opponents half consciously perceive it. Unless a player can train down his reaction time—that is to say, shorten it—he will be among the poor batsmen. He will be the more likely to strike out when the pitcher is fresh, deliberate, and with a good assortment of "bingle snuffers."

After you have your pet bat, stainless, knotless, paintless, smooth, sound, and straight grained, have several duplicates at hand in case of accident. The bat should be so balanced in your particular hands that it feels light, solid, and secure. In fine, it ought to give you the confidence of reaching out and pushing the ball exactly where you wish it to drop.

The place hitter, of course, has a larger "meadow," so to speak, but this is more than neutralized by the fact that he must meet an intentionally deceptive oncoming rocket in motion. He must receive, swing at or otherwise as his swift judgment and controlled muscles allow, meet the onrush of the gyrating, gyroscopic, cometlike sphere. One of the early steps which make for good batting is practice, practice, practice, and then more practice. Hit the ball, not hard, but with intelligence, whenever and as often as possible. It may be merely a lobbed ball by a smaller boy, or it may be another Christie Mathewson or a Johnson sending "you all he's got."

The point is to discipline the eyes, muscles, and other concerned structures, to practice quick recovery and preparedness for the next ball. Get the bat back, be smooth and unemotional in meeting the ball and do not half finish the swing when you have missed your intended action. Meeting the ball half way means to a batter that he has recognized whether the pitched ball has been a swift one or a slow one and has with judgment allowed the former to bat the bat instead of him wrongly swinging at it and has met the slow ball well in front at the finish of the stroke.

To "choke" a bat a little is to hold it not entirely down at the end of the handle. Individual habits and preferences may decide whether you should keep the hands right at the end or a little way up. It is better, as a general thing, to acquire no peculiarities. Pitchers and others who study different batsmen take advantage of such things at a price to the batter's average. Bats held loosely or with the hands too far apart limit the ability of the batter. The bat is to be best held firmly, with the palms one above the other and in line exactly opposite each other. A bat held loosely makes a hit ball an easy one to catch.

To hit a ball which comes at you like a shot is no easy matter until your eyes and other fibres have practiced equal eagerness to meet it. It is, after all, as in most things, all a question of will to learn, time to practice, and persistency to conquer it. A heavy bat, held a little



Underwood & Underwood.
Charley Herzog.

of professional baseball players. So it was determined to watch him a few weeks in the game. Then the discovery was made. The habit of many seasons had become somehow altered. He no longer swung with ease in a parallel to the ground. Instead he popped flies and hacked the ball toward the ground. The points found, it was necessary to discover what made the change.

On examination again, it was brought out that a few enlarged glands in the neck, from some poor teeth, would become a little sore only when his bat was swung as he had originally trained, namely, on the horizontal. It was not much of a pain, but unconsciously for a month he had avoided that important movement. A batting "slump" was the result. Once the diagnosis was made, despite some delay in the removal of the cause, he resumed the horizontal swing and his restored batting average became apparent.

There is a French proverb which has



Paul Thompson.
Willie Keeler.

aviator to one style of monoplane or biplane, so the embryo, prospective batsman must learn to prefer one style and weight of bat to another.

While it may be true that a good workman, a great artist, or an inventive genius disregards any special instrument, he has more leisure in which to adapt himself and to mold his tissues to "any sort of a club" given into his hands. Not so the batter. His eyes, muscles, skin, and whole anatomy must already be attuned to every nook and cranny of "the stick" he likes best. Then he may with confidence "step up to the plate" ready and primed to meet the greatest pitcher at his best. Then

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short and not swung more than is merely necessary to meet it, if solid enough, will cause a rebound of a fast ball that will send it over the infield for a safe bingle. The ball should barely be stopped; as if you were only pushing the bat in front of it. Perhaps that is why some fat, not very strong, catchers and infielders hit fast balls better than slow curves.

While on occasions and in close games, it may be wise now and then to try once in a long while to "outguess" a pitcher, the pitcher usually has the advantage of any such procedure, and it is better to train yourself for skill. The pitcher knows many a batter's habits, but the pitcher may change his at will, because he has the initiative always on his side. A batter may once in a while know the pitcher's preferred style, and pretend, by fouling it, to like it also. Or he may "foozle" or "fan" one he likes, in order to entice the pitcher to send the same kind again, and to be ready to swat it when it comes. There are various ways of beating pitcher-devil around the bush.

Once you have appeared to make a gleeful fan at an inshoot, you may nor-

mally expect the next one or two to be of that calibre, and prepare accordingly.

If you intend to bunt, you step rapidly forward to meet the ball and allow your outer hand to slip out on the bat as you loosen the other fingers and thumb somewhat at the handle. If it is to be a "safe bunt" guide it to fall short on the third base lines, for the "squeeze" and "sacrifice bunt" the first base line is preferable. To "place" a ball as you hit it with the bat is not restricted to born batters or geniuses. It, too, is a matter of practice, of discipline, and of alert thought. The boy or man who goes to the bat and merely swings to hit safely, is an automaton, removed but a little from the circus sea lions that play baseball with their snouts.

If you will study a little geometry or physics and learn how a ball that strikes a bat makes an angle that is equal to the angle it makes as it leaves the bat, and a few similar simple laws, you too can become a place hitter. Other things equal, if the bat is held straight and the straight ball hits it like the long line of the letter T, it will go to centre field. If it is an inshoot it will go to right field, and if an outshoot to left.

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