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 seven-day "slump." He dropped as 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 sight, intelligence, and was a "parallel" base-batter. This meant that he was naturally a better who did not "hit the ball in the air" or chop it downward, but lined 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, muscle, eyes, color, and co-ordination of thought and action disclosed to him to be above the average even 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 somewhat altered. He no longer swung with ease in a parallel to the ground. Instead he pumped flies and checked his 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 entered planks 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 habit of "slumping" 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 "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 like Willie Keeler, "Buck" Herzog and Cobb 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 with any real power is no longer to study 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 "initiative" batters. If you are color-blind, asymmetric, 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, so an

Ty Cobb

Willy Keeler

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

While it may be true that a good workman, a great artist, a good philosopher disregards any special instrument, he has more leisure in which to adapt himself to his tools and in the case of "any sort of a club" given into his hands. So not the batter. His eye, his sense of rhythm, and whole anatomy must already be attuned to every nook and cranny of "the stick" he likes best. Then he may go to such lengths and become the greatest batter on his plate.

His reaction time will be reduced to a minimum. A batter's reaction time is always limited by the length of his arm and the time interval of objects seen, much like a tiger, to contract or extend his muscles to propel his body toward a springing animal or to exert the tension of the body. It is also called by psycho-physiologists "the latent period." If the important batter's "reaction time" or "latent period" is too slow, he will hit more fouls, more "easy outs," and "poor outs," often with muscles on the one side of the light itself. When you see the catcher signal for and the pitcher "shooting" the next pitch, but it is "not off the mark," you may set it down in your notebook that the "latent period" of that pitcher is too long to suit his opponents half consciously perceive it. Unless a player can train down his reaction time by a smaller span, or play, 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 "single mufflers." After you have your pot bat, stainless, keen, unblunted, smooth and straight, you have, several duplicates at hand in case of accident. The bat should be as 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 "meander," so to speak, but this is mere than neutralized by the fact that he must meet an intentionally deceptive on-coming rocket in motion. He must receive, swing at or otherwise as his swift judgment and controlled muscles allow, meet the entrance of the gysting, gyroscopic, revolving ball. One of the early steps which make for good batting is practice, practice, practice, and then you have the ball hit, not hard, or not hard, but with intelligence, whatever and as often as possible. It may be merely a half-year, it may be a season, but you must be another Christie Mathewson or a Johnson sending you all he's got.

The expert batter not only trains his eyes, muscles, and other concerned structures, to practice quick recovery and preparedness for his bite, but he is smooth and unemotional in meeting the ball and do not half finish the swing when he reaches the ball for action. Meeting the ball half ways means to a batter that he has recognized whether the pitched ball has hit a swift one or a slow one and has judgment allowed the former to bat the bat instead of wronging coming at it and has sent the slow ball well in front of the finish of the stroke.

To "choke" a bat a little is to hold it not only open at the end of the handle. Individual habits and preferences may decide whether you should keep the hands on the handle or off. It is better, as a general thing, to acquire no peculiarities. Pictchers and other players may take advantage of such things at a price to the batter's average. Bat held loosely and freely, with the palms of the hands on the handle, allows the greatest possible limit of the ability of the batter. The bat is to be best held firmly, with the palms one on top of the other at right angles to the handle and held against each other. A bat held loosely makes a hit ball an easy one to catch. Moreover, you should never use a bat like a shot is no matter until your eyes and other fibres have practiced equal with others. There is no question of learning all things, a question of will, time to practice, and preservety to conquer it. A heavy bat and a little

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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 “foizzle” 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.

The New York Times
Published: April 7, 1918
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