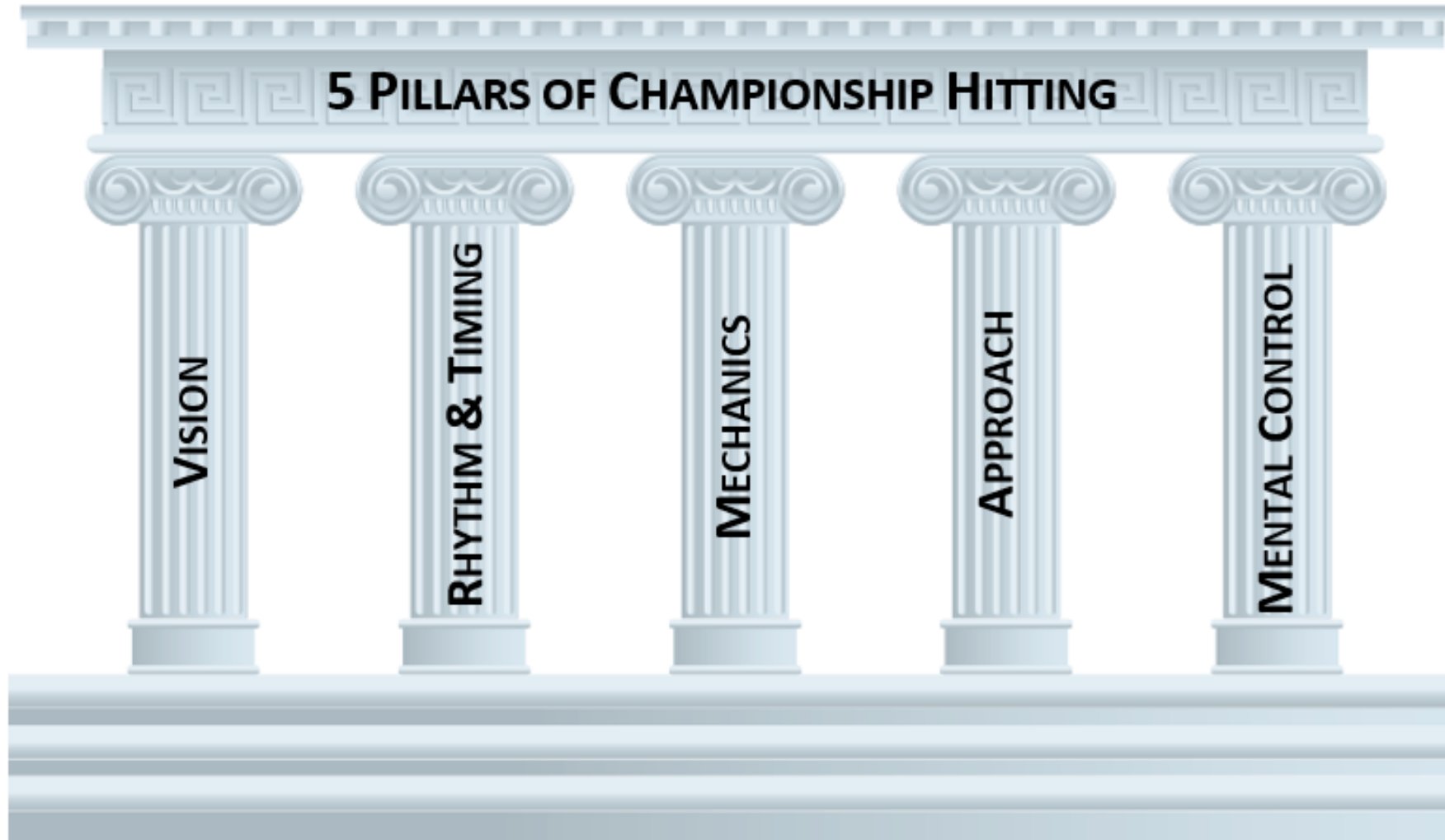


Pillars of Championship Hitting

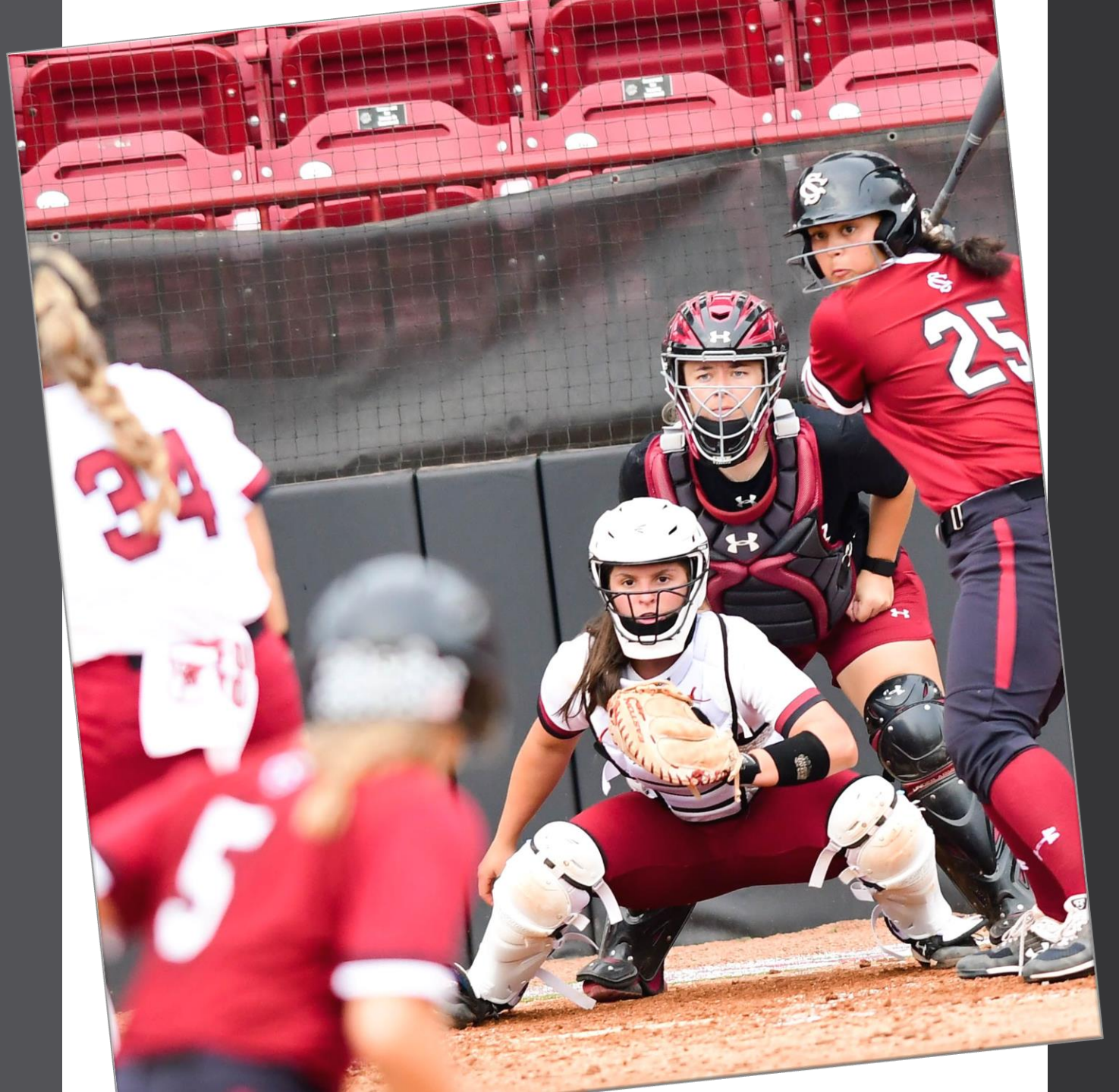
Heather Gelbard, University of South Carolina



What it takes to be successful as a hitter

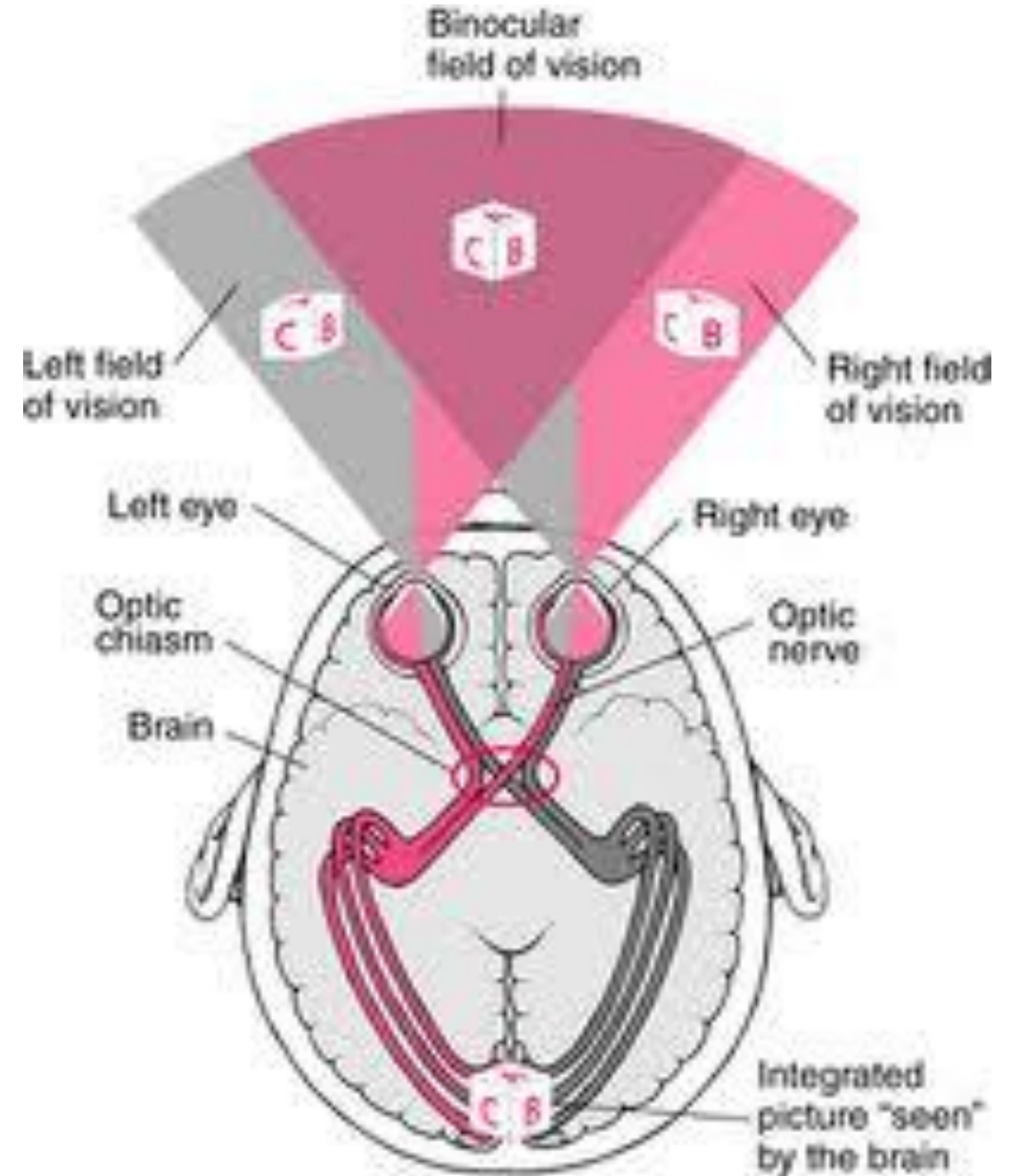


Vision



Vision

- Need binocular vision (both eyes) for depth perception.
 - Hitters should have a stance that allows them to see with both eyes.
 - Level head.



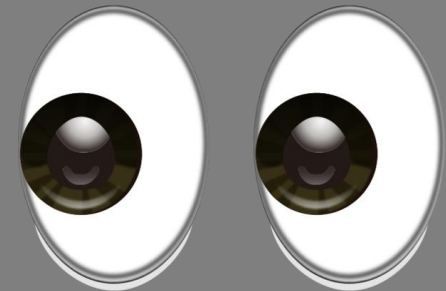


Vision Training

- My goals for vision training:
 - To pick up the flight of the ball as soon as possible out of the pitcher's hand.
 - Track the ball as deep as humanly possible.
= Better swing decisions
- Teach our hitters **HOW** to use their vision.
 - Soft/open focus vs. Hard/fine focus
 - When to use each
- Soft or open focus as pitcher is in motion, shift to hard or fine focus on release.

Vision and Tracking

- The best hitters anticipate more than they react to the pitch.
 - See the ball and anticipate where it is going.
 - Around the halfway mark is when hitter is starting their swing → hitter must make a judgement about where the ball will be when it arrives at home plate.
 - Judgement is based on past visual experience
- Vision is based on learned experiences...pitch recognition
 - Want hitters to track a lot of pitches to build their visual database



Building Vision Training into the Practice Plan

- Every hitting practice should have some type of vision training.
- Hitters standing in on pitcher's bullpens tracking pitches
- Teach hitter's how to hit off a tee (what to look at instead of staring down the ball)
 - Hitter should first turn their head to look at where the pitcher would be
 - Hitter should be using an open focus at this point
 - Hitter should shift to hard focus on the imaginary release point
 - Hitter should take their eyes through exact tracking process they would go through as if a pitch was coming at them, and 'track' that 'pitch' into the contact point of the tee as they swing and hit the ball off the tee.

Rhythm and Timing



What is being on time?

Goal = (on time at contact)



- To be on time at contact, we have to be on time getting our foot down from the stride.
- To get our foot down on time, we have to be on time when we start our movement.
- **The key is when we start our movement!**

When in the pitcher's motion are you starting your movement?

Timing has to be adjustable. Different pitchers = different speeds, different motions...



Manipulating Timing

- **On time**



Manipulating Timing

- **Late Rhythm**
- Starting **LATER** in the pitcher's motion.
- Contact point deeper in the zone.
- Manipulating contact point **NOT** bat angle.
- Thought process of being **ON TIME FOR OFFSPEED.**

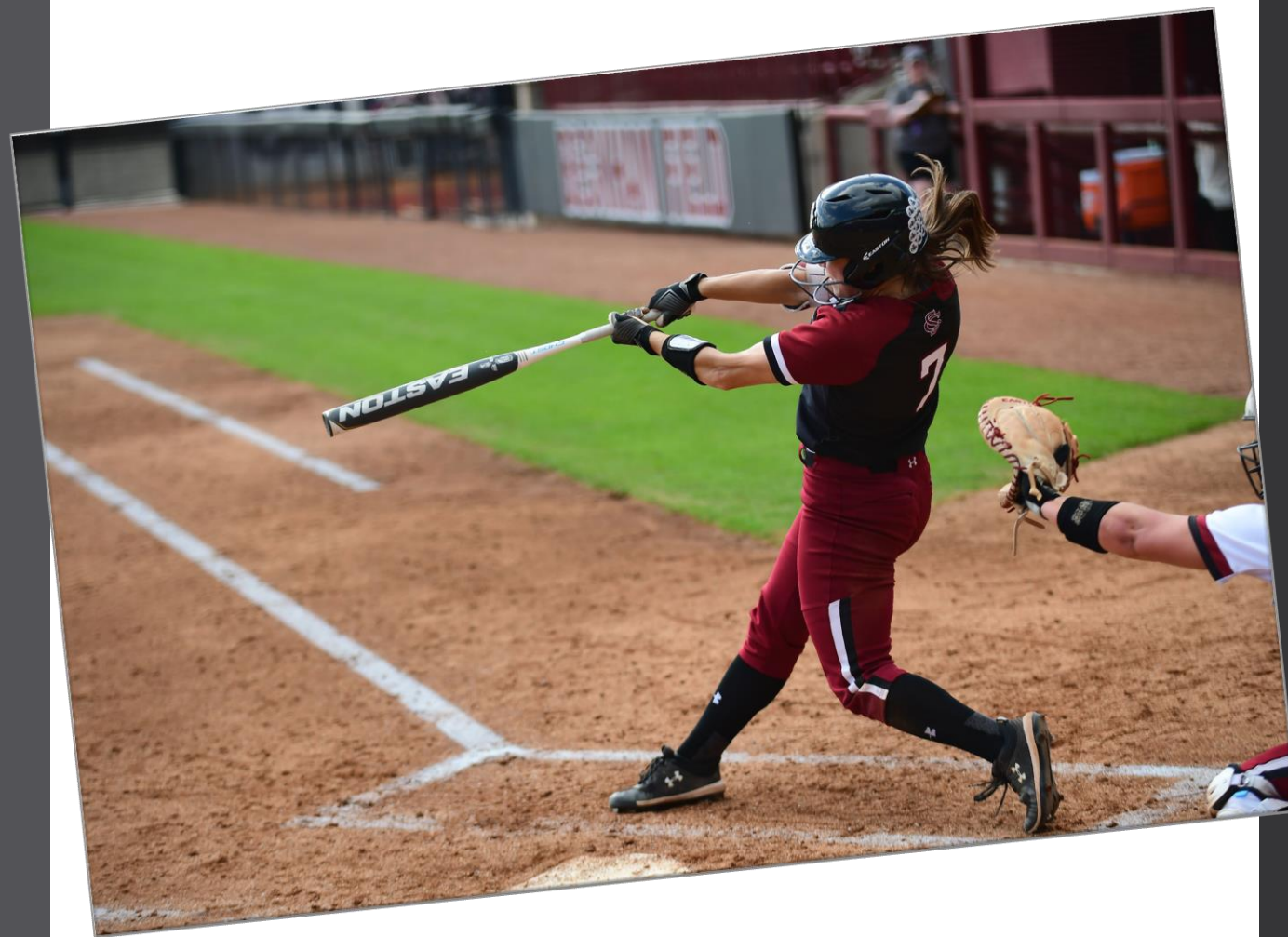


Manipulating Timing

- **Early Rhythm**
- Starting EARLIER in pitcher's motion.
- Contact point more out in front.
- Manipulating contact point NOT bat angle.



Mechanics



Mechanics

- For me, the goal of a mechanically sound swing is to get the hitter to consistently hit pitches in all quadrants of the strike zone.
- The perfect swing does NOT exist 😊
- The perfect swing is the adjustment to each pitch
- Repeatability vs. adjustability

Mechanical points I emphasize when talking about hitting

Balance

Allows for good vision

Load or gather to use the ground

Important for timing

Sequence

Kinetic Chain, important for efficiency

Hinging/posture

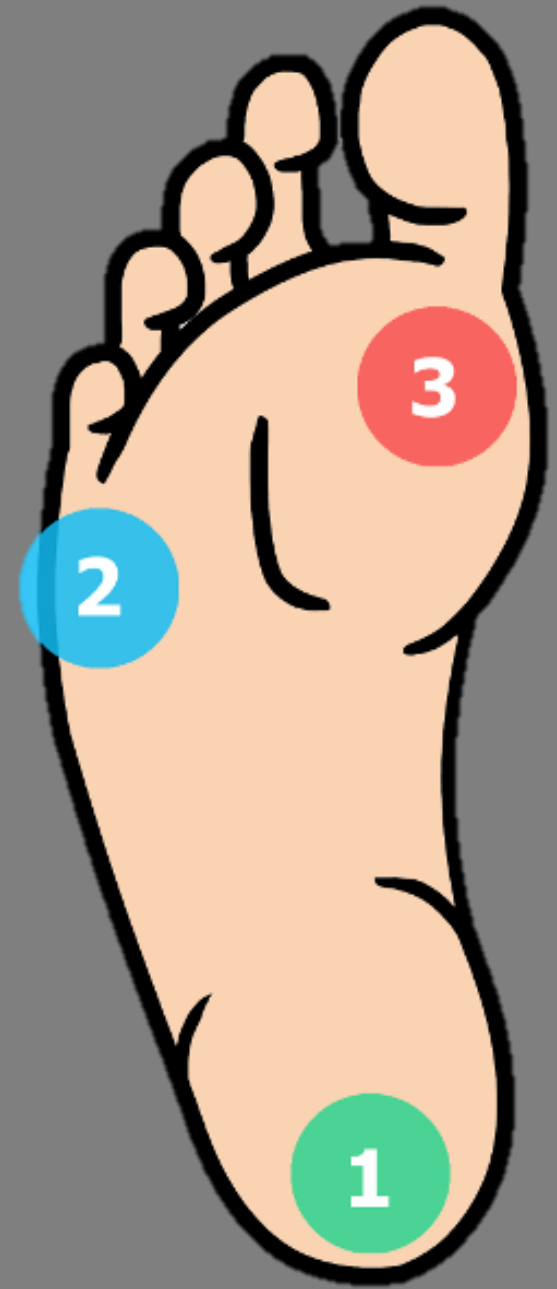
Important for adjustability

Barrel turn/Bat path

Important for hitting through a long zone, being behind the ball

Balance

- Balance while moving = dynamic balance
- Single leg balance



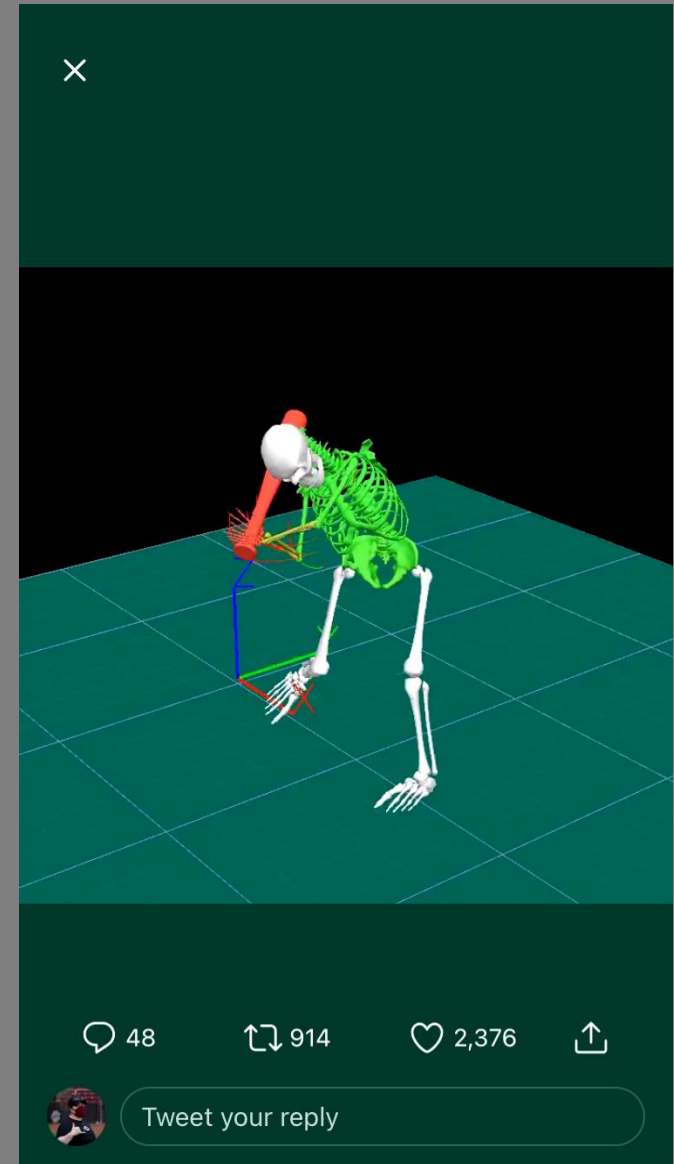
Load to use the ground

- Loading into the back hip (not swaying)
- Back side controls the forward move
 - Full foot on ground allows us to get into back hip (like a squat)
 - What does that mean for the stride?
- Setting up the forward move to 50/50, be at 50/50 when we land



Sequence

- Energy is *sequentially* transferred through the legs, hips, trunk, shoulders, arms, hands, and lastly out into the bat.
- Acceleration and deceleration as energy is transferred up the chain.
- Keep back foot on ground as long possible then back foot ripped off the ground.
- Hip turns, shoulder stays square a moment longer → separation

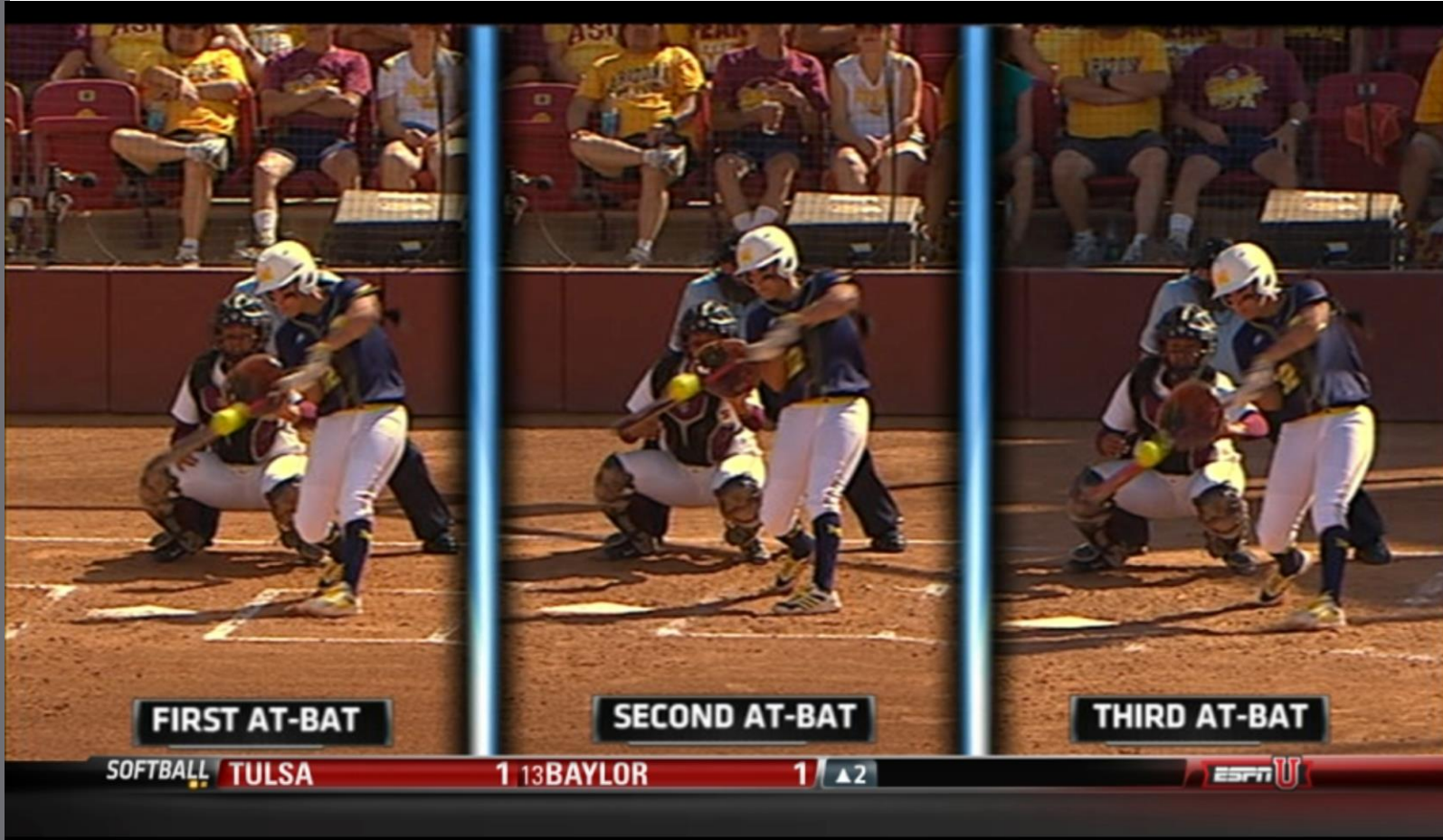


Anthony Brady graphic from Twitter

Hip Hinge/Posture

- Posture important for balance, and allows for adjustability

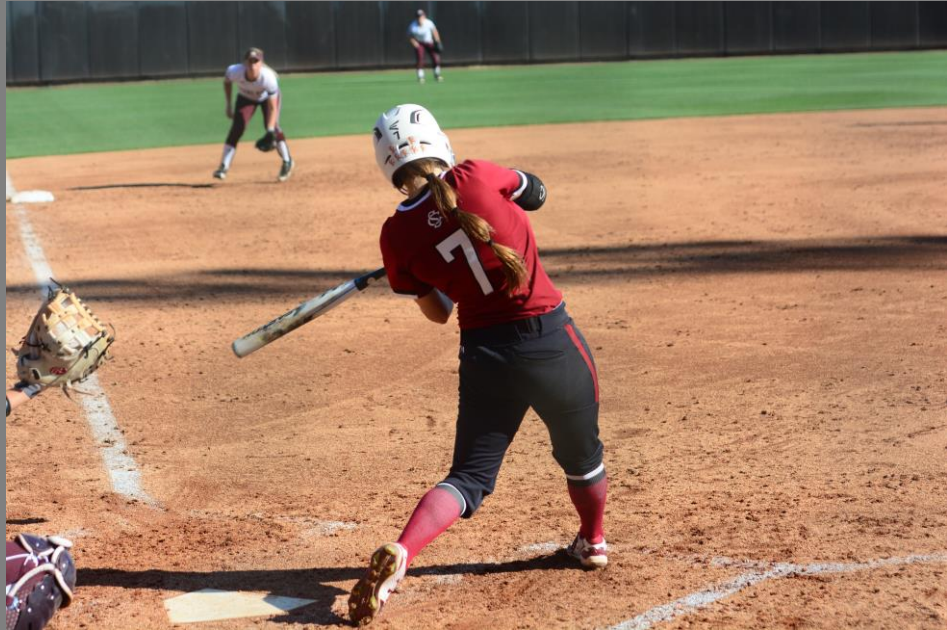




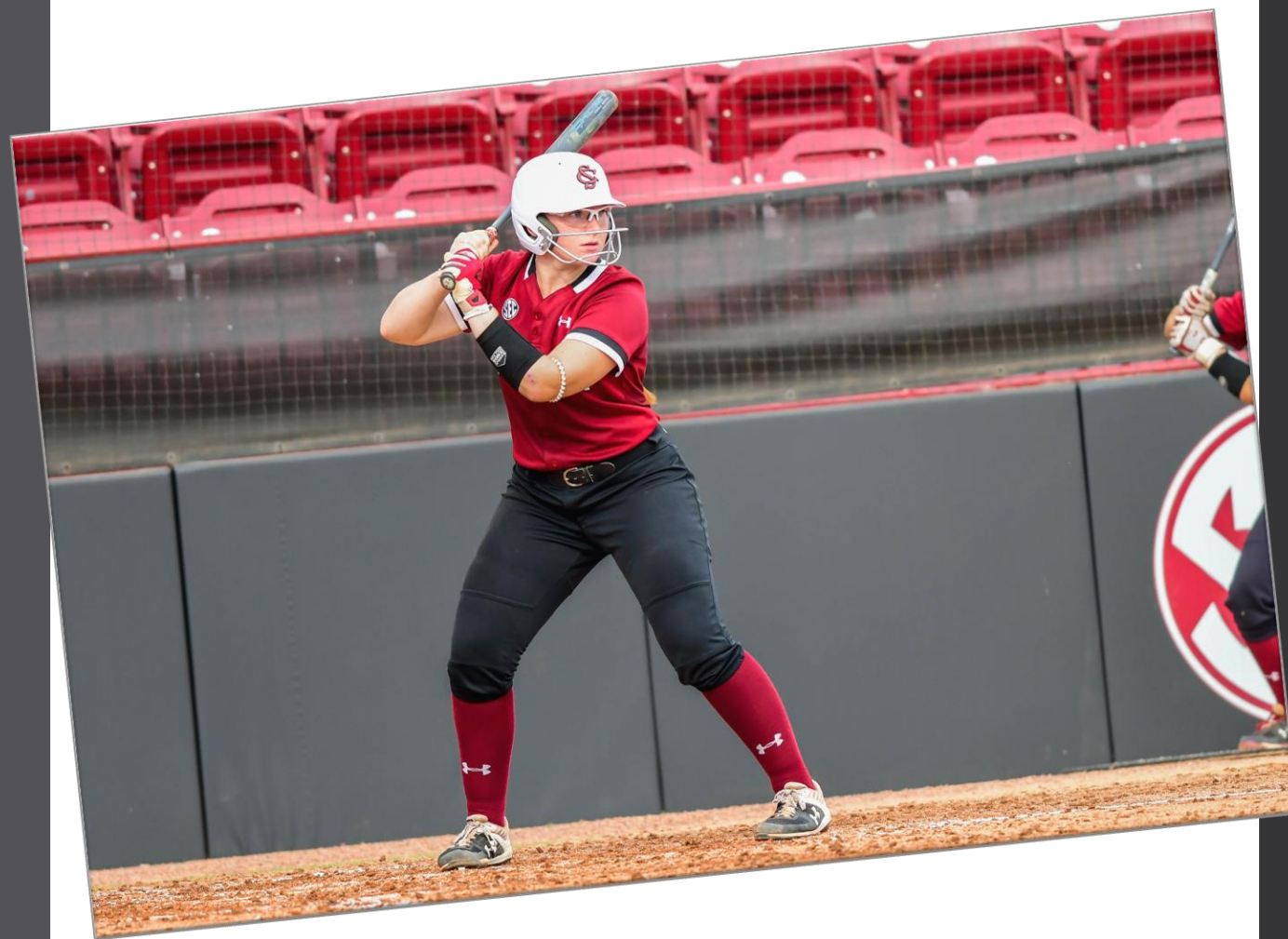
Hip
Hinge/Posture

Barrel Turn/Bat Path

- Get BEHIND the ball.
- Body turns the barrel.



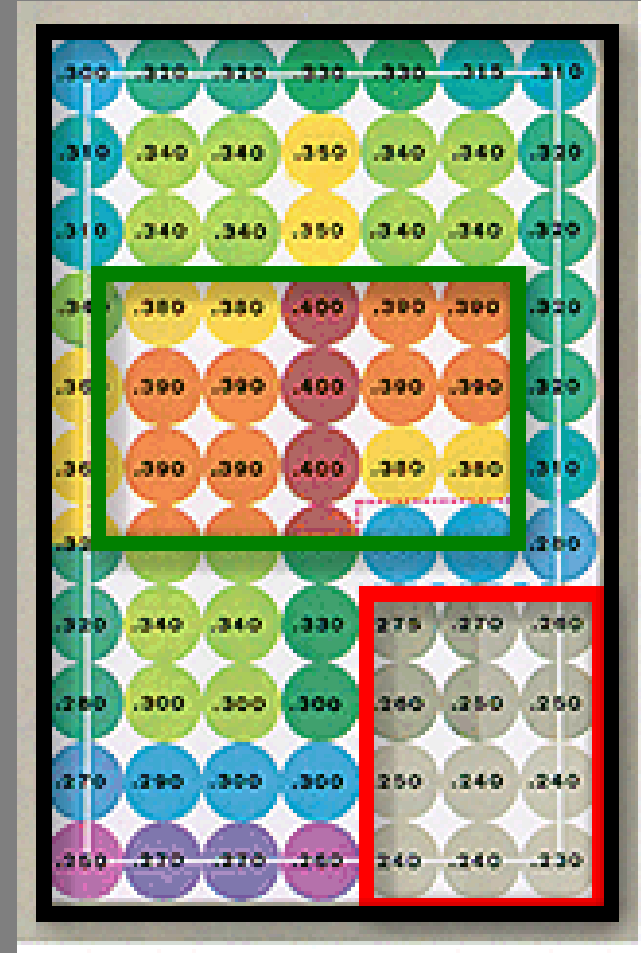
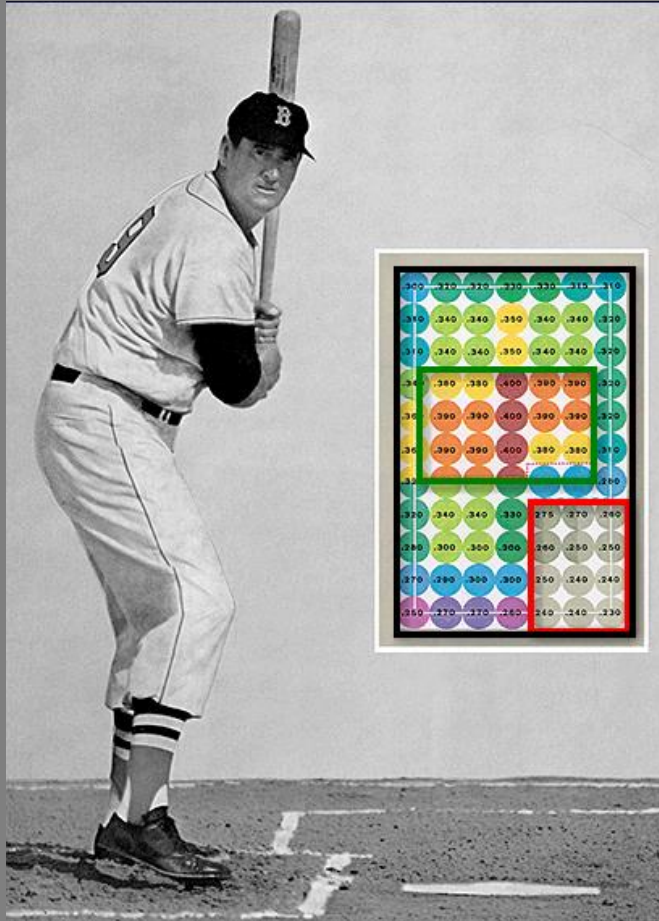
Approach



Approach

- Know yourself
- Know your role
- Know the strike zone
- How are they pitching you? → what is our plan for that?

Know yourself



Cheetahs

Speed

Speed is the Cheetah's asset. Their number one job is to get on base by any means necessary, because this is where they are most dangerous. They get on base typically by hitting the ball on the ground, and need to be proficient in short game. Once they're on base, their job is to be a constant distraction because they are always a threat to steal.



Coyotes

Opportunistic

Coyotes are smart, wily hitters. These gritty hitters take advantage of what the defense is giving them. They will challenge the pitchers by working the count, eating pitches, and running up the pitch count. Coyotes may not be the fastest or the strongest, but they have excellent

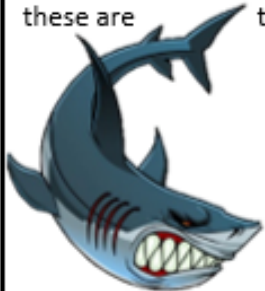


bat control and handle the bat well. These are the hitters who will bunt, squeeze, hit and run, and be masters of situational hitting. These are the hitters who turn the lineup over, and their threat lies in their ability to pass the bat and keep the offense moving.

Great White Sharks

Power

Everyone fears the Great White Shark. This is your big, physical hitter who is there to be a presence in the lineup. This hitter has one job: to challenge the fence on every swing of the bat. Although they are typically not the fastest, speed is irrelevant to the Great White; these are



the hitters that we want hitting the ball in the air, swinging for extra bases.

Alligators

Combination (Gap power, line drive hitters)

Alligators have a blend of speed and strength. They are dynamic players who typically have more gap power than brute, home run strength. Their speed in addition to strength makes them deadly in many different ways. A defense cannot play them back because of their speed, and cannot play them in because of their power. These versatile reptiles can play within all 4 categories.

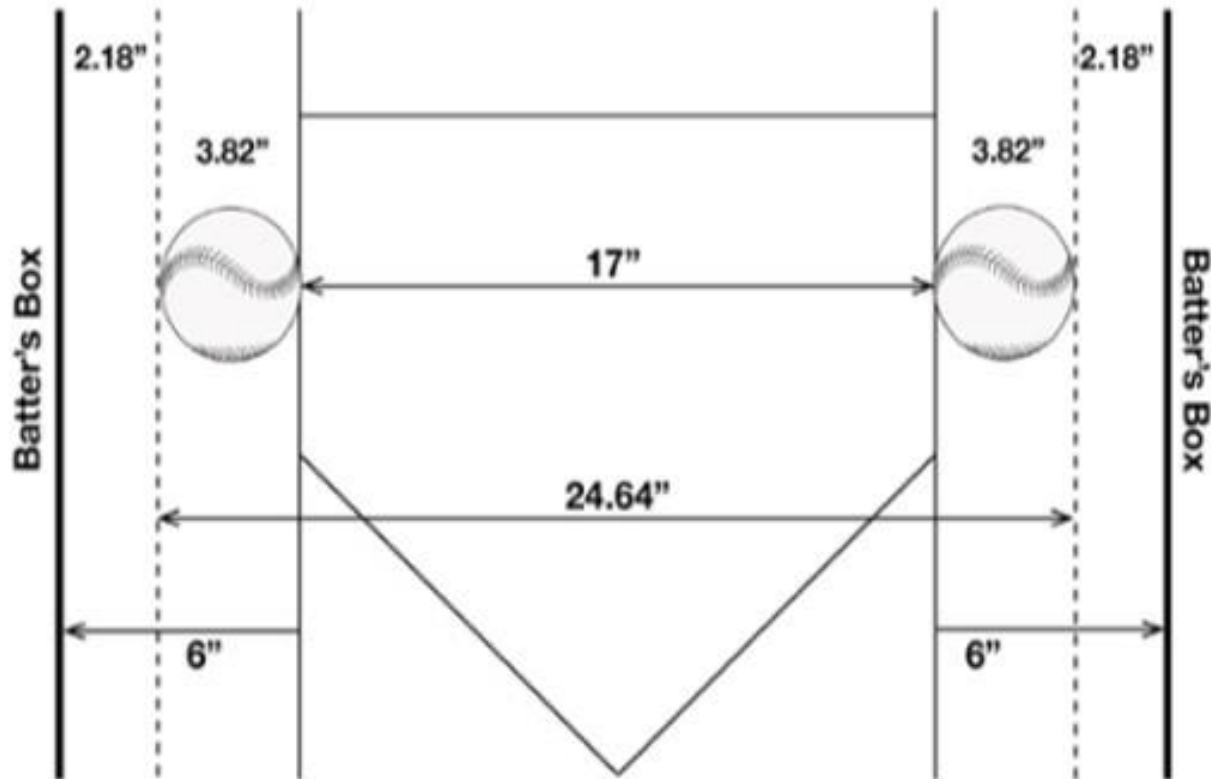


Roles: Who are you as a hitter?

- “Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.” – Albert Einstein
- Strengths based
 - Less pressure on players to try and be something they're not
 - They do NOT have to do everything!
- Clearly identify and define roles for all hitters – show them how they contribute to team's offensive success.
 - All roles needed and important, so all roles equal

The Strike Zone

View from behind Home Plate
Horizontal View



Know the Strike Zone

- Know the strike zone
 - Plate is 17 inches, add 3.82 inches to each side for 'corners' → strike zone is 24.64 inches side to side
 - Barrel of the bat is less than that, sweet spot much smaller

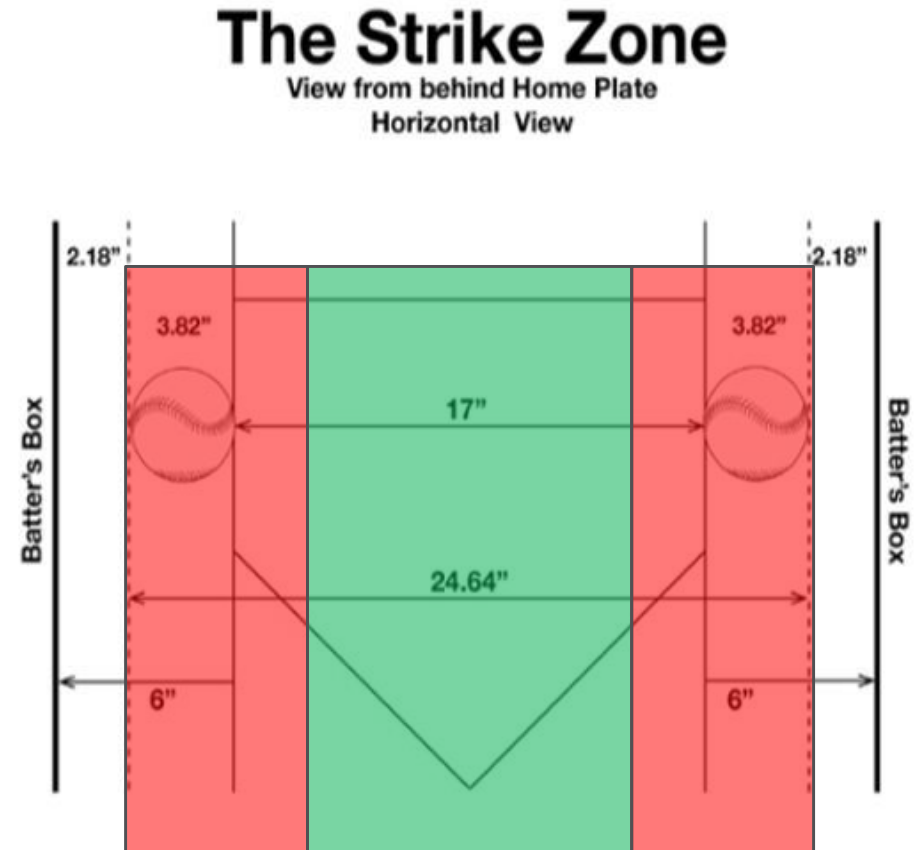
Zoning

- When the pitcher's strengths and your strengths line up = no problem, sit your pitch
- When your strengths are opposite of the pitcher's strengths...that's when things get complicated
- Have to hunt what you're going to get, not necessarily what you want to hit...Hunting Polar Bears in Florida
 - Have to hit what you 'don't want' enough to get the pitch that you do want



Hunting middle of the plate

- Effective strategy typically against a pitcher with a higher ERA, somebody who makes mistakes over the middle of the plate

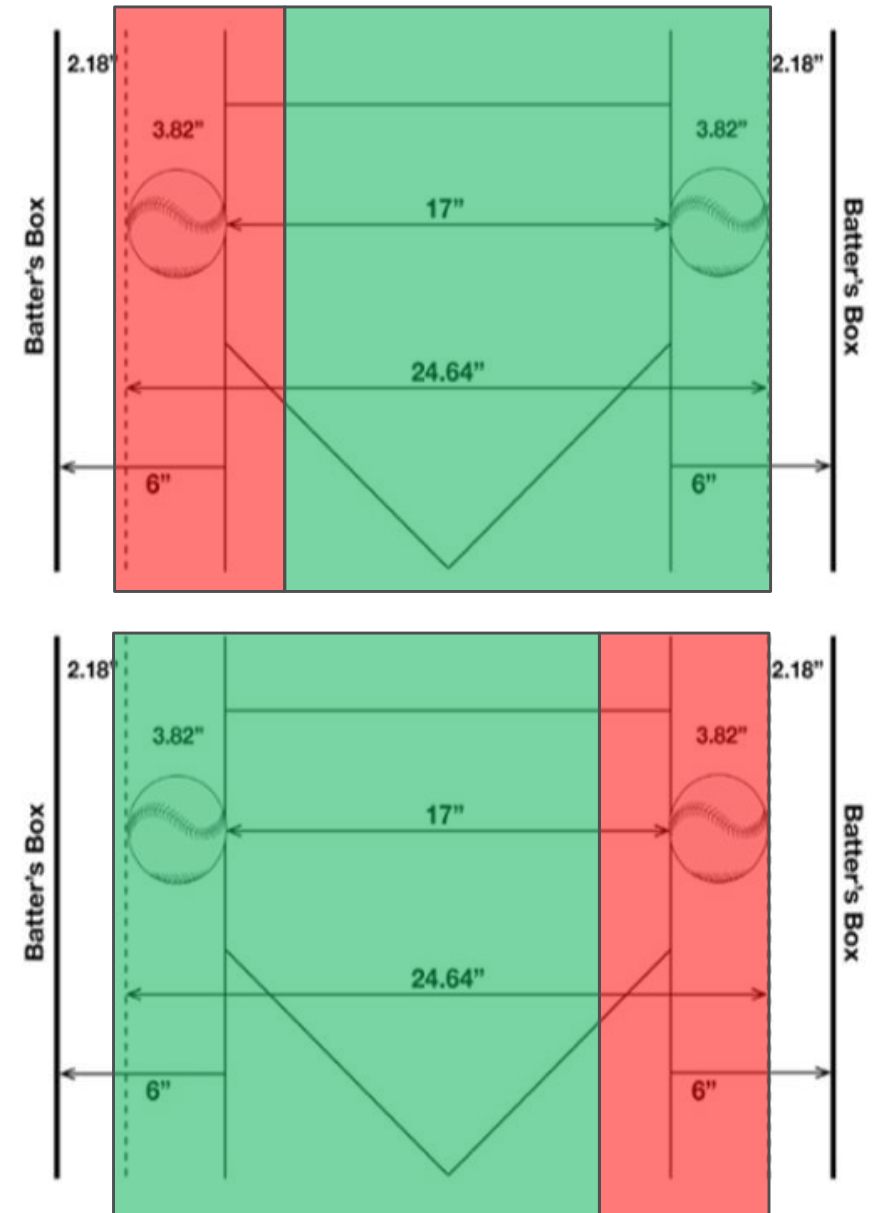


Splitting the plate

- When we split the plate, we talk about hunting the inside half or outside half, but its not an even split
 - Whether sitting away or sitting inside, can still hit middle effectively
- Really just taking away the opposite corner of the plate

The Strike Zone

View from behind Home Plate
Horizontal View



Sitting speeds

- Sit hard or soft
- For pitchers with 3 speeds, consider sitting the middle speed





Box Adjustments

- Purpose:
 - 1. Enhance the ability to hit the pitch you're looking for.
 - 2. Take away a pitch from the pitcher.

Two Strike Approach

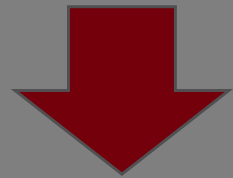
- Stats from D1 Softball (via 6-4-3 Charts):
 - 2020:
 - 48.7% of all ABs went to 2 K's
 - Batting avg with 2 K's: = .190
 - BABIP with 2 K's = .289
 - 2019:
 - 47.1% of all ABs went to 2 K's
 - Batting avg with 2 K's: = .194
 - BABIP with 2 K's = .287
- If almost half of your teams AB's are going to go to 2 strikes, you better have a plan (and practice it!)
- I prefer **individual** approaches to two-strike adjustments
- Two strike ideas:
 - Physical adjustments
 - Choking up?
 - Stance width?
 - Mental Adjustments
 - Shrink the zone vs. expand the zone
 - Box adjustments
 - Up or back in box?
 - On the plate more?
- If hitter's aren't comfortable hitting with 2K's, they need to be aggressive earlier in the count.

Mental Control

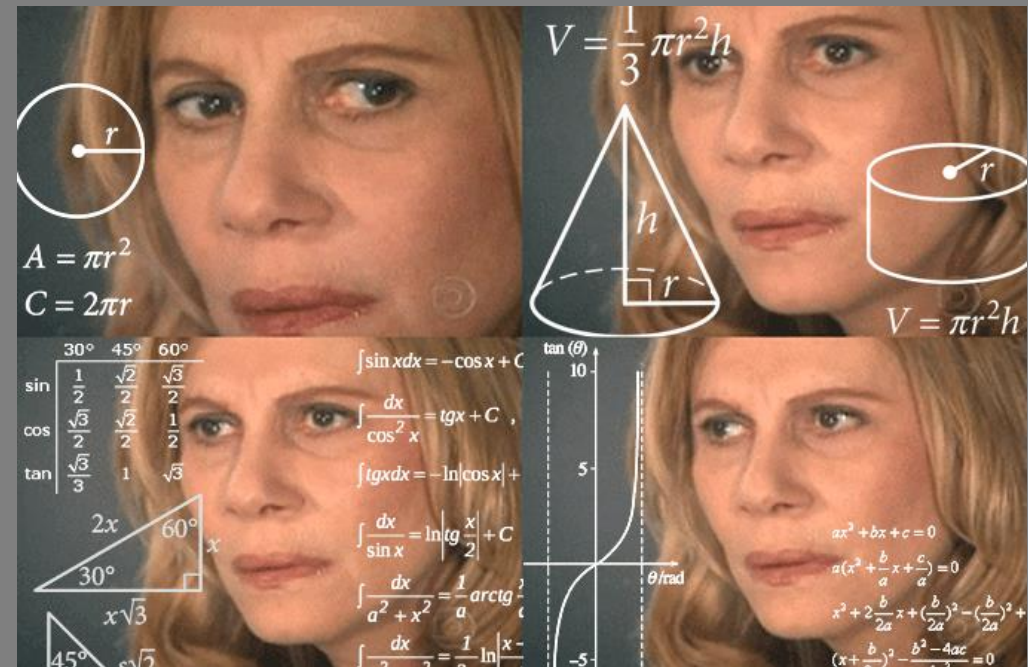


Why is the mental game so important to hitting success?

- The moments between the moments!
- ‘Dead time’
 - How much time are you actually pitching/hitting/fielding/throwing the ball?
 - Compared to how much time you’re waiting for the ball to be pitched/hit/fielded/thrown?
 - Lots of time waiting = lots of time to think



• **WE HAVE TO CONTROL OUR THOUGHTS!**



Goals

- I believe the ultimate goal of a strong mental game is getting hitters to be where their feet are, in the present moment, able to compete one pitch at a time.



It starts with awareness

- Traffic Light Analogy
 - Green light: going good, confident, focused
 - Yellow light: adversity happens, doubt starts creeping in
 - Red: out of control
- Also gives us a shared verbiage
- Awareness important so we can take action to stay green or get back to green.

How do we stay/get back to GREEN?

Routines, Breathing, and Releases

- Routines
 - Routines allow for consistency
 - CONSISTENCY is key
 - When the game speeds up, tense situation, pressure, adrenaline rushing...gives us something to fall back on; we NEED to slow it down, whereas most tend to rush and speed things up
- Tools for routines:
 - Breathing
 - Releases
 - Focal Points
 - Cue words
 - Imagery/visualization
- Breathing
 - To help gain self-control
 - A breath connects you to the present moment
 - Physiologically helps oxygenate the body and keep a consistent heart rate
- Release
 - A routine or a gesture to symbolically let go of negative thoughts and feelings
 - MUST be something physical
 - You need to put your negative emotions somewhere, put them somewhere you can throw out of your way
 - Ex.:
 - Wipe the batter's box clean, have a clean slate for the next pitch

The mental game in action → in practice

- Good hitters will fail 5-7 times out of 10 ABs.
- Does our practice environment mimic this?
- Prepare hitters for failure during practice...that means they have to actually fail in practice, and fail often.
- Hold them accountable to using mental skills to recover from failure.
- Create an environment where failure is normalized (not feared) and failure recovery is prioritized.



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Questions?