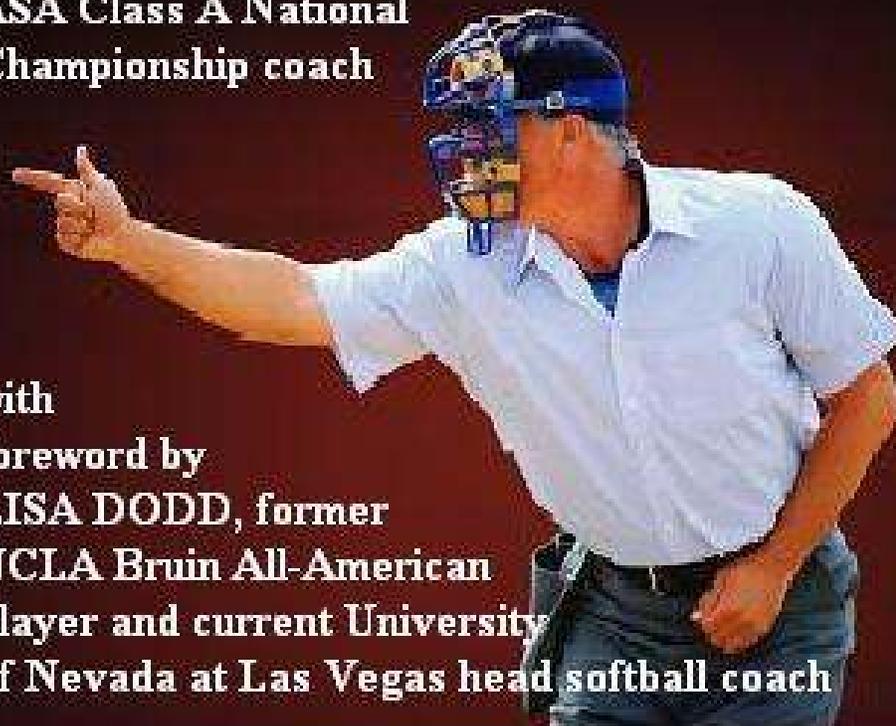


What's the Count?

**A MENTAL PLAN
for pitchers and hitters
of all ages for SUCCESS
with the game of
fastpitch softball**

**by TOM DODD, two-time
ASA Class A National
Championship coach**

**with
foreword by
LISA DODD, former
UCLA Bruin All-American
player and current University
of Nevada at Las Vegas head softball coach**



What's the Count?

by
Tom Dodd

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FOREWORD

As a young player I did not understand the game of softball like I do today. My success back then was a result of hard work and my father's influence. He always had a plan and a method for how and why to do things. I just did what he told me the same way every player does what her coach tells her to do. My dad did encourage me to think for myself about the game in all of its important details though, and become a "student of the game". To him, every practice and every game was a learning experience and an opportunity for me to grow as a player. When I was in middle school he arranged for me to practice with the local high school team so I could learn from girls who were older than me. He took me to watch players like Dana Sorenson (a then future Stanford graduate and NCAA World Series pitcher) and other high school and college athletes so I could see how they played the game at their levels. He even taped games of the Atlanta Braves when Greg Maddox pitched so I could see how to dominate batters with just location and off speed pitches like Maddox did. As I matured I began to understand my dad's thinking and his methods. I started to understand why it was so important to consistently be able to hit my spots and work ahead in the count as a pitcher and to look for a good pitch to hit early in the count as a hitter. I, myself, began to recognize the tendencies and patterns of opposing pitchers and hitters and understand what pitch to call and what pitch to expect. These ideas that I learned from my dad were greatly instrumental to my softball success and now they are available to you in *What's the Count?*



The game is the same at every level and the things I learned early on I still use today. The methods and plans my dad teaches to his travel ball players are the very same ideas that I try to instill into my college players. From the recreational league to the collegiate level what sets the great players apart is their mentality. With the growing popularity of our sport it has become commonplace for players to improve their physical skills through camps, clinics, and private lessons, but there seems to be a void when it comes to improving their mental game. This book will fill that void and provide you with the softball mentality to become a "student of the game" which will give you an advantage on your competition and maximize your full potential as a player.

What's the Count? focuses totally on the mental game, and specifically on how to get the advantage in the ongoing pitcher/batter battles. This book will educate you on all aspects of these battles and provide you with detailed step by step plans to get the advantage in them. If you are a pitcher it will tell you how to keep and increase the advantage you start with at the beginning of every at bat. If you are a batter it will tell you what is required for you to take the advantage away from the pitcher and have it for yourself. The book is complete with ideas, definitions, and terms required to understand the plans, handy lists of dos, don'ts, and goals for both the pitcher and the batter, and authentic real-life stories to exemplify the use and effectiveness of the plans.

The very best players are able to recognize and understand the tendencies and patterns of the game, process the information, and formulate plans to maximize their success both on the mound and at the plate. *What's the Count?* formulates and provides these plans.

Lisa Dodd
Head Softball Coach
University of Nevada at Las Vegas

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As a young player, Tom Dodd was a two sport athlete playing baseball and football while growing up and throughout his high school career. He was an All-CIF pitcher, earned a full athletic scholarship to the University of California, Irvine, and became an NCAA National Champion in baseball. After college Tom became a State Champion and multiple time All-State player in slow pitch softball, and has played on several men's open baseball and basketball championship teams since that time.



Both of his daughters, Sara and Lisa, played multiple sports while they grew up, excelling at softball, soccer, field hockey, and cross country. Both girls became All-CIF pitchers and CIF Champions in high school softball, and ASA National Champions in travel softball.

For much of his baseball career Tom was a power pitcher with great velocity who didn't need or have much knowledge about pitching. After arm injuries in high school and college however, his velocity was reduced and he could no longer just blow it by people so he learned how to pitch to get people out. This is when Tom started to become a student of the game, and a student of pitching and hitting. His philosophy and understanding of the game of softball have continued to grow since then and have evolved to what they are today reinforced by the success he has had as a player and a coach.

Tom has been a youth sports coach for the past fourteen years in club soccer, travel softball, and high school softball. In softball, his overall career record is 957-135. He continues to coach today with San Diego Thunder, a fastpitch softball travel team he formed in 1998. San Diego Thunder has become a nationally recognized name, has a career win loss record of 859-126, and has finished in the top ten at ASA Class A Nationals six times. Tom's Thunder teams have twice won ASA Class A National Championships and Tom is the only coach in San Diego to ever win more than one. In 2002, San Diego Thunder was voted the 14U fastpitch softball Team of the Year by *Softball Today* magazine. At the high school level Tom's leadership and strategies helped lead two different San Diego high school softball programs to their first ever CIF championship.

Tom's primary purpose for writing *What's the Count?* is to share the understanding he has acquired about how to be successful in the sport of softball with those desiring to know it. All players on Tom's teams have used the plans and strategies explained in *What's the Count?* and now you can too

Tom currently resides in San Diego and provides individual private instruction in all phases of the physical and mental aspects of softball and baseball. He continues to coach San Diego Thunder.

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Pat Riley

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INTRODUCTION

“Do, or do not. There is no try.”
Yoda

In any competition an athlete is always looking for an edge. Some advantage on the opponent that will increase the chances of winning. Having an advantage does not guarantee a victory, but having it supplies a benefit that will put the athlete in a relatively favorable position to succeed. How then do you get an advantage on your opponent in the game of softball?

Since the game of softball is primarily a series of individual battles between the pitcher and the batter, a victory in these battles is the key to an individual's success at the game. It is also typically the key to a team's success, because the outcome of any game is usually determined by who wins most of these battles. What's the Count? gives you plans to consistently gain the advantage in these battles. This book is about getting the advantage on your opponent, knowing when you have it, and utilizing it. It provides a mental map for you to succeed in softball much like a road map provides you with a way to succeed in finding an unknown destination. Without this map, guide, or plan you can easily get lost, whether it's on the road or in a softball competition. The mental plans in this book guide you towards your destination of softball success by showing you methods to give you an advantage in the game. If you are a pitcher they show you how to keep and increase the advantage you start with at the beginning of every at bat. If you are a batter they show you what is required for you to take the advantage away from the pitcher and use it for yourself. When followed, these plans will steer you to success in the game of softball.



At first you will discover that the advantage to either player in the individual pitcher/batter battles is determined by the count. You will learn about all twelve pitch counts, who they favor, and by how much. You will see that each and every pitch provides either the pitcher or the batter some measure of advantage. You will find out that the pitcher has the initial advantage in each battle and you will learn her strategy to keep it by commanding her pitches well. You will then learn the strategy for the batter to take the advantage away from the pitcher by using what I call aggressive discipline, a combination of aggressiveness and two types of hitting discipline. Additionally in chapter one, you will learn about things like the importance of the first pitch, how to pitch and hit with two strikes, the meaning of a '2-0 attitude', and much, much more.

Succeeding chapters will provide you with several concepts, various ideas, a definition of terms to help you understand the plans, and then the two mental plans themselves. The actual plans are described in chapters three and five and are provided in both outlined and detailed

form. Chapter three is the plan for the pitcher to keep the advantage on the batter while chapter five explains the plan for the batter to gain the advantage from the pitcher.

Finally, handy dos and don'ts lists are included in chapters six and seven. These are quick to read, easy to understand, single page lists that can be pinned to your wall or put in your pocket. One list is for the pitcher and one for the batter, and they include the many important dos, don'ts, and goals for each position's success.

At the end of each chapter I have included a story based on an actual real life experience so you can see the plans in action. In some cases names and personal information have been changed or omitted to preserve anonymity. The stories are re-created from memory and I have rendered them to the best of my ability. With each story you should note three things. First and foremost the thinking process that takes place for each situation. Second, how command of her pitches provides the advantages to the pitcher. And third, how aggressive discipline provides the advantages to the batter.

The mental plans explained in *What's the Count?* are time tested and proven to work. I used them myself and became an NCAA National Championship pitcher at UC Irvine. I used them with my travel teams to win two ASA Class A National Championships. I used them with two high school teams to win two CIF Championships. And I used them with my daughters and they both became ALL-CIF pitchers in high school. It is now my privilege to share them with you.

These plans will work for anyone and will help average talented players compete with and succeed over players with superior talent. They are part of becoming a self made player. A self made player has a good work ethic, and with it masters discipline, skills, and proper techniques to get good, rather than rely solely on her athletic ability. How do I know these plans will work for you and help turn you into a self made player? I know because they did for my daughter Lisa Dodd.

Lisa was neither exceptionally big nor strong, and at sixty miles per hour did not throw with excessive speed. She will be the first to tell you that she was closer to ordinary than extraordinary talent wise. While it's certainly true that Lisa had talent, she was really much more of a self made player. In place of superior talent Lisa learned and excelled at many things. Things like determination, desire, and mental toughness as a player, things like gaining the complete command of all of her pitches as a pitcher, and things like developing the discipline and emotional stability necessary to be a great hitter. Much of what Lisa learned came from the strategies explained in *What's the Count?* and it was enough to get her a scholarship to UCLA. It is hard to get a scholarship to UCLA because they can recruit the girls with superior talent. That is why this book is so important. *What's the Count?* supplied Lisa with the mentality that helped elevate her game enough to earn that UCLA scholarship with less than superior talent. This book can do the same thing for you.

Lisa Dodd is not the only player to have success using these mental plans to gain the advantage on her opponent. All the girls who have played for my San Diego Thunder teams have been trained with these strategies, including players like Taryne Mowatt (Arizona), Brittney Bargar (Notre Dame), and Linda Kohan (Notre Dame) to name just three. The results speak for themselves with two ASA National Championships, six top 10 finishes, an overall win loss record of 957-135, a nationals win loss record of 60-17, and in high school, two first ever CIF titles.

When understood and executed well, the mental plans provided in *What's the Count?* will help raise your level of play, allow you to attain your highest potential, and give you an edge to consistently prevail over your competition on the field and for those athletic scholarships to top rated softball schools like UCLA. I know because that is what they did for Lisa Dodd. It is my wish that they do the same for you.

CHAPTER 1: **GETTING THE ADVANTAGE**

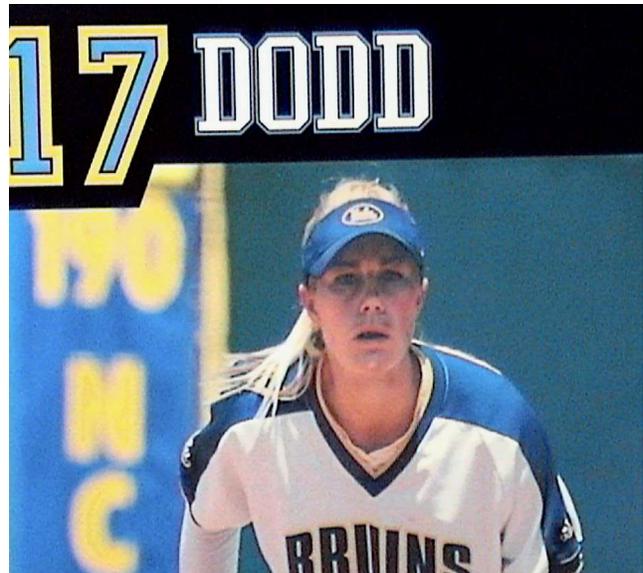
Definition of Advantage: Any condition, circumstance, opportunity, or means, particularly favorable to success, or to any desired end; benefit.

BrainyQuote.com

Clarification of the following terms will aid your understanding of this chapter.

- **ADVANTAGE TO A PITCHER**

A pitcher has an advantage on a batter when she can afford to throw pitches that are not called strikes and still not fear walking the batter. This is an advantage because pitches outside of the strike zone are much more difficult to hit than pitches inside the zone and now a pitcher can intentionally throw pitches outside of the strike zone to entice the batter to chase them. A pitcher also has an advantage on a batter anytime the batter has two strikes because batters have to expand their strike zone and in doing so will often times lose their pitch selection discipline.



- **ADVANTAGE TO A HITTER**

The batter has an advantage on the pitcher when the count is such that the pitcher is worried about walking the batter or is getting close to walking the batter. This is an advantage because in this situation the pitcher is forced to intentionally throw fat pitches over the plate and fat pitches are easiest to hit.

- **GOOD PITCH TO A PITCHER**

A good pitch to a pitcher is one that is in a location that is hard to hit. The inventors of the game made a strike zone for a reason, to give the batter a chance. This means that if you pitch the ball into that zone it is for the batter's benefit, not yours. The center of the strike zone is the easiest location for most batters to hit and hitting becomes more and more difficult as the ball approaches the outer edges of the zone. Pitches outside the strike zone are very difficult to hit and they get increasingly more difficult to hit the further out they get. To a pitcher then, a good pitch is one that is the hardest to hit while at the same time most likely be called a strike by the umpire. This is a pitch thrown at the edges of the strike zone. When way ahead in the count a good pitch to a pitcher may be one thrown outside the edges of the strike zone by the proper amount because it is not necessary for the pitch to be a called strike.

- **GOOD PITCH TO A HITTER**

A good pitch to hit for a hitter is one in which the entire ball is inside the edges of the strike zone, the closer to the center of the strike zone the better. I also call this a fat pitch. Learn to hit this pitch when it is on either half of the plate and your opportunities for a good pitch to hit double.

- **FAT PITCH**

Any pitch in which the entire ball is completely inside of the strike zone with no part of the ball touching any edge of the zone.

Several factors determine the outcome of a softball game, but none more directly than the batter's count. Most people do not realize that the count always offers someone an advantage, gives somebody an edge, and while it is certainly true that things like strategy, talent, skill, and even luck factor in strongly to who wins or loses, the batter's count is most often the determining factor, especially when the game is on the line. This makes sense because a softball game is a series of battles between the pitcher and the batter and nothing has more effect on the outcome of these battles than the count. The count determines what the next pitch thrown will be and where it is intended to go. When a pitcher is ahead in the count, batters lose discipline and swing at pitches out of the strike zone, especially with two strikes. A smart pitcher takes advantage of this by throwing pitches off the plate causing the batter to chase them. This situation is an advantage to the pitcher, increasing the chances of the batter making an out. Conversely, when a pitcher is behind in the count, most will throw fat pitches over the heart of the plate to avoid walking the batter, greatly increasing the batter's chance of making solid contact if she swings. This is a definite advantage to the batter, not only increasing the chances of her hitting the ball, but simultaneously increasing her chances of hitting the ball on the barrel of the bat producing a more powerful hit.

At every level, pitchers and pitch callers are constantly worried about walking people. To make sure they don't, they purposely throw fat pitches over the plate on the first pitch to get ahead and they purposely throw fat pitches over the plate when they get behind in the count. These counts are 0-0, 2-0, 2-1, 3-0, 3-1, and sometimes 3-2. Let me repeat this. PITCHERS INTENTIONALLY THROW FAT PITCHES TO HIT ON THE FIRST PITCH AND WHEN THEY ARE BEHIND. This fear of walking the batter is what provides the advantage in fastpitch softball. A fat pitch over the plate is a huge advantage to the batter and to get it all you need is one of these counts. If you're the pitcher, you start with the advantage on the 0-0 count but to maintain the advantage you start with, you must avoid falling behind with one of these counts.

Every count has an effect on the advantage, but none more than the first pitch or 0-0 count. If the first pitch is a strike, the pitcher's chances of maintaining the advantage on that batter increase to seventy-one percent of the time because five of the seven remaining possible counts favor her. If it's a ball those chances fall to even. Pitchers and batters must understand the importance of having the advantage and develop the skills and discipline necessary to consistently obtain it because being ahead or behind in the count has a huge impact on the next pitch, which in turn has a huge impact on what the batter does with that pitch, which in turn has a huge impact on that player's individual success and ultimately on which team wins the game.

Since the batter's count is this important, let us examine each count and determine who gets an advantage from each one:

- **0-0 count; advantage: pitcher, batter if pitcher makes a mistake**

The first pitch, or 0-0 count, is the most important pitch of any at bat. Although it appears to favor no one, it can become a powerful advantage to either the skilled pitcher or the skilled batter. Technically, this count initially favors the pitcher because she starts out with the ball and knows and controls where it will go. If it goes to a difficult place to hit she keeps the advantage, but if she makes a mistake and throws a fat pitch over the plate the batter gets the advantage if she swings. If the batter is not ready to swing and lets the pitcher's mistake go, this is a big mistake by the batter and now the pitcher has the advantage again. This cycle continually repeats itself. If a pitcher has poor command and does not really know where the pitch is going to go, but only hopes it goes to the right place, she does not have an initial advantage on the 0-0 count. Although 0-0 initially favors a pitcher who has command, most

pitchers and pitch callers do not use their initial advantage by aiming for the corners on the first pitch because they do not want to risk throwing a ball and falling behind to the batter. Instead, they throw easier to hit pitches over the plate. This kind of thinking makes the 0-0 count an advantage to the batter if she is ready to swing the bat. A pitcher then starts with an advantage on the 0-0 count and keeps it by throwing strikes to the corners, while a batter gains the advantage from the pitcher by letting bad pitches go or by swinging at strikes over the plate.

- **1-0 count; advantage: batter**

This count favors the batter and she will most likely get the same pitch she got on 0-0. Most pitchers throw fat pitches on this count because they do not want to get to 2-0. A smart batter is aggressive as usual, but not over aggressive because if she swings at a ball, she will not get the 2-0 count where she has an even greater advantage.

- **2-0 count; advantage: batter**

If you are the batter this is the count you live for, and if you are the pitcher this is the count you dread. No pitcher wants to go 3-0 so many pitchers and pitch callers panic when the count is 2-0 and intentionally throw fat fast pitches right down the middle. A smart batter will expect and anticipate these pitches and not let them go if they are strikes. This count offers the batter one of the highest percentages of all counts of getting a fat pitch to hit. So if you are the batter and you know the count is 2-0 you should be expecting and anticipating a fat fast pitch to drive, you should be extra aggressive and ready to swing at any strike over the plate, and you should not get cheated on your swing. If you do these things you are now exhibiting what I call a "2-0 attitude". This attitude is named after the 2-0 count because 2-0 is so predictable at producing a fat pitch to hit, but this same attitude also applies to the other pitch counts strongly favoring the batter like 2-1, 3-0, and 3-1. If it is a fast pitch strike over the plate like you are expecting, ***the biggest mistake you can make is to let it go.***

- **3-0 count; advantage: batter**

Obviously this count strongly favors the batter and should be treated with the same '2-0 attitude' as the 2-0 count. Many batters make the mistake of taking the 3-0 pitch, but unless you get the take sign you should be swinging if it is a strike. The chances of the batter getting a fat pitch to hit on 3-0 are very good and a smart batter should use this fact to her advantage. Sometimes when the count is 3-0 batters are purposely pitched around so avoid being overly aggressive.

- **0-1 count; advantage: pitcher**

This count slightly favors the pitcher and allows her more choices for the next pitch, but does not affect the batter's mentality. The batter is still aggressively looking for a fat pitch to hit with the discipline to lay off pitches out of the normal strike zone. It is important for the batter to swing if the pitch is a fat strike to avoid getting behind 0-2.

- **1-1 count; advantage: pitcher, batter if pitcher makes a mistake**

This count is handled the same as the 0-0 count by both the pitcher and the batter, and for the same reasons. Technically the pitcher has a slight edge to start and keeps it if she makes a good pitch. If she makes a mistake, the batter has the edge if she swings.

- **2-1 count; advantage: batter**

This count strongly favors the batter, almost as strongly as 2-0. Pitchers and pitch callers do not want to go to 3-1, so the pitch will most likely be over the plate. Batters should be geared up with their "2-0 attitudes" and attempt to drive the pitch if it is a fat strike.

- **3-1 count; advantage: batter**

This count strongly favors the batter and offers the batter the same strong advantage as the 2-0 count. To avoid walking the batter, pitchers and pitch callers are forced to throw fat pitches

over the plate when the count is 3-1. Smart batters are very aware of their advantage and aggressively swing the bat on this count if the pitch is a fat strike. On occasion, especially with first base open, pitchers will attempt to pitch around a batter when the count is 3-1 trying to get her to chase a pitch off the plate rather than throw a fat one, so if you are the batter be very aggressive and ready to swing on this count, but like always, maintain your pitch selection discipline.

- **0-2 count; advantage: pitcher**

This is the pitcher's most favorable count and gives her the strongest advantage on a batter. It is important that the pitcher use this advantage, rather than waste it, by making quality pitches just outside the strike zone but close enough that the batter has to swing, rather than throw poorly commanded pitches way out of the zone or mistakes over the plate. Avoid wasting this strong advantage by experimenting with new pitches or throwing rarely used ones just because you can. On all counts with two strikes batters need to expand the strike zone, swing at anything close, and swing at anything close to the umpire's strike zone if there is one, rather than look for any particular pitch or location. She should also let obvious bad pitches go, fight off and foul off tough pitches, put up a determined fight, battle, and make the pitcher work. Batters should develop enough pitch selection discipline to swing at pitches that are close without completely panicking and swinging at pitches way out of the strike zone.

- **1-2 count; advantage: pitcher**

This count strongly favors the pitcher, almost as much as 0-2. Pitchers should throw pitches out of the strike zone to get the batter to chase them just like when the count is 0-2. The batter's approach is the same as when the count is 0-2, which is to expand the zone, swing if the pitch is close, let balls go, foul off tough pitches, battle the pitcher, make her work, and be a tough out.

- **2-2 count; advantage: pitcher**

This count still favors the pitcher, but considerably less than 0-2 and 1-2 counts because the pitcher is much more careful on 2-2, not wanting to go to 3-2. The batter's thinking should be the same as it is on the other two strike counts while at the same time realizing that with the count at 2-2 the chances of getting a good pitch to hit are pretty good.

- **3-2 count; advantage: pitcher**

Although this count seems even and appears to favor no one, this is not the case. The pitcher has the advantage when the count is 3-2 for two reasons. One, she has the ball and knows where it is going, and two, the batter is stuck with two strikes. Two strikes on a batter is always an advantage for the pitcher because the batter's strike zone has to expand and batters get nervous. With a 3-2 count, a smart and skilled pitcher should understand and recognize the right time to challenge the batter to avoid a walk, to throw a pitch to the fat corner or a change up rather than challenge her, or to walk her and not even risk throwing a pitch to the corner. These decisions are dictated by the game's situation. Batters should handle the 3-2 count the same way they handle all counts with two strikes, keeping in mind that the chances of the 3-2 pitch being good to hit are very good due to nervousness, panic, poor strategy, or lack of command by the pitcher.

- **Summary of advantage**

An advantage has to do primarily with the pitcher's concern about walking the batter. If she is worried about this, she will throw pitches over the middle of the plate. If she is not worried about walking the batter, she will attempt to throw tougher pitches to hit. How worried she is about a walk is dictated mostly by the count and a little by the game situation. Most pitchers and pitch callers worry about walking every batter when the count gets to two balls with less than two strikes. This is why they choose to throw fat pitches on these counts and why a

batter has the advantage. Conversely, when a pitcher has less than two balls on a batter or is ahead in the count, she is not worried about a walk yet. This is why in these situations the pitcher has the advantage. It is because she knows she does not have to throw a pitch in the strike zone in her attempt to get the batter out.

- **Summary of counts**

As we have seen, every count offers someone an advantage or the opportunity to get an advantage. Early counts offer only slight advantages, and advantages do not really get significant until the count gets to two, either two strikes and/or two balls. A huge advantage occurs for the pitcher when the batter has two strikes and less than three balls. These counts are 0-2, 1-2, and 2-2. Pitchers should take advantage of these counts by throwing pitches off the plate to make the batter chase them. To avoid two strikes batters should hit the strikes that come early in the count. A huge advantage occurs for the batter when she has at least two balls and less than two strikes. These counts are 2-0, 2-1, 3-0, 3-1. Batters should realize their advantage on these counts and be very aggressive to swing the bat. I call the aggressiveness to swing on these counts having a "2-0 attitude". Pitchers should avoid these counts by commanding their pitches well early in at bats.

- **Summary of a "2-0 attitude"**

As the batter, you are aware of the count and know it is one that gives you a strong advantage on the pitcher. These counts are 2-0, 2-1, 3-0, 3-1. You are now expecting and anticipating a fat fast pitch over the plate even more so than usual, and you are extra aggressive and ready to swing at any strike over the plate with a full, hard, decisive swing. For the batter, this is what I call a "2-0 attitude".

- **Two strike note for the pitcher**

Batters lose discipline, decision making ability, and confidence when they have two strikes. This is a huge benefit to a pitcher so do not waste it by throwing pitches over the plate. Instead, practice throwing your main pitch(es) just off the plate enough to make batters chase them. How far off the plate you throw the pitch will vary and depends on the batter's stance, height, reach, bat length, and the umpire's strike zone. Learn how to judge these factors during your workouts and then practice throwing to these locations so you can get batters to chase pitches off the plate when you have two strikes on them.

- **Two strike note for the batter**

On all counts with two strikes a batter should expand the strike zone and swing if the pitch is close to the zone, but not panic and expand the zone too much. A confident and skilled batter will trust herself to hold up and not swing when pitches are out of the strike zone, even with two strikes, because she has worked hard to gain this skill during workouts. She should not be expecting or anticipating any particular pitch or pitch location. Some batters may find it helpful to shorten their swing, widen their stance, or stand a little closer to the plate with two strikes, all with the sole purpose of making contact and putting the ball in play.

The following three examples provide support for the belief that the batter's count provides an advantage to either the pitcher or the batter:

1. A study of batting average by count performed by Sports Illustrated on data from major league baseball shows that as a group in the year 2000 major league hitters hit .282 overall which includes all the counts. When ahead in the count however, they hit .349 as a group, and when they were behind in the count they hit only .244. When the count was 0-2, they hit a paltry .168.
2. On my team something we chart each game is the percentage of pitches my pitcher is ahead in the count. The goal is eighty percent or more ahead, which is a challenge. At

seventy percent ahead however, which is not that difficult to attain, the record shows that over the past twelve seasons my team's winning percentage is .882, as compared to a winning percentage of .786 when our pitcher is ahead in the count less than seventy percent of the time.

3. On my team we also chart all hard hit balls and what count they are hit on. It does not matter if the hard hit ball is a hit or not, or whether it is a line drive, fly ball, or grounder, only that it is hit hard. Our pitcher's goal is to allow zero hard hit balls when she is ahead in the count, especially on 0-2, and 1-2 counts. Over the past twelve years we have given up hard hit balls thirteen percent of the time when ahead of the batter and twenty-seven percent of the time when behind. In other words, when we are behind in the count opposing batters hit the ball hard more than twice as often. And why do we keep track of hard hit balls and not hits? Because a pitcher's job is to get batters out, not necessarily strike them out. In the long term, hard hit balls generally produce more hits and runs than weakly hit balls do. Weakly hit balls provide a much greater chance of producing outs.

In review, the batter's count provides someone an advantage on each pitch. The 0-0 count is especially important and offers a pitcher with good command an initial advantage. When the count favors the pitcher, pitchers and pitch callers tend to call more difficult pitches to hit on the edge(s) or even off the plate. When the count favors the batter, pitchers and pitch callers tend to call fatter pitches over the plate to avoid walks. The stronger a count favors the pitcher or batter, the greater the chance of the expected pitch's location (fat or hard to hit). It is important to keep in mind that the chances of getting a fat or a hard pitch to hit based on the count, or any other single factor, is just that, a chance, not a guarantee. Pitching around batters, pitching with first base open, lopsided games, and mistakes by the pitcher, catcher, and/or pitch caller all have their effect on those chances. In the long run though, the chance of getting a particular pitch location based on a particular count is surprisingly stable and predictable.

Now that you understand how the batter's count gives the advantage to one person or the other in the ongoing pitcher/batter battles and that these battles ultimately determine an individual's success as well as the outcome of the game, how then, do you get the count to be in your favor so **YOU** can get the advantage? In chapters two and three you will learn how the pitcher does it, and in chapters four and five I will tell you the batter's approach to getting the advantage.

FULL ADVANTAGE

August, 2001

Broken Arrow, OK

ASA Class A 14U National Championship, Championship Game

San Diego Thunder vs So Cal Crunch

Bottom of the 7th inning, tying run at third, 2 outs, we're on defense ahead 3-2. It's eight o'clock at night and we've been at the park since six AM. This is our fifth game of the day without a break after playing five in a row yesterday. The temperature is well over a hundred degrees and has been all week. Karla Wilburn is pitching and it's her third game of the day. Crunch's leadoff batter is up. She is a fast LH batter who mostly swings away. We've played this team several times and I know their batters well. This girl is a little high strung, has a tendency to swing at bad pitches, is weak outside and on change ups. We have the luxury of walking her, and even the next batter if necessary, rather than throw pitches over the plate, but we have to be smart because the middle of their order is coming up. There's a large crowd and it seems like every person here is

screaming. I can feel the nervous tension in the air. I call time out to relax the whole team and tell Karla to focus her thoughts and ignore the crowd noise. I remind the team to communicate loudly and enjoy the moment, not fear it. I tell Karla that good pitches get good batters out and that first base is open. I also remind her about this girl's tendencies. I can see in Karla's eyes that she is not scared. I can also see that the batter is very excited. Our plan is to take advantage of her excitement and the excitement in the air. We think she will be anxious. So on the first pitch we threw her a change up and we're right, she's way out in front, badly fooled, for a swinging strike. That swing makes the crowd scream even louder, but I can see that Karla is unaffected by the noise and very determined. I can tell by that swing that we can get this batter out with another change up once we get to two strikes. The next pitch I call is an outside fastball one ball width off the plate and Karla throws a perfect pitch just off the outside corner for a called strike two. The Thunder crowd goes wild. I remain calm to keep Karla focused, knowing we are one good pitch away from a National



Championship. Rather than anxiously go for the out on this pitch I decide to show this girl one more fast pitch to really set up the change up. Additionally, I also know she has a tendency to swing at bad pitches, so maybe she'll go for it. To do this though I have to trust Karla to not make a mistake and throw the pitch over the plate by accident. At this point in time I do trust Karla. To be safe the pitch must be way off the plate, so I get Karla's attention and lip the word "setup". She knows what this means, an unreachable pitch off the plate. Karla's dripping with sweat and nods her approval. I call a fastball three ball widths outside and Karla again hits the spot perfectly, the batter lunges at the pitch and barely fouls it off. We now have her where we want her. We have been in complete control of this batter the entire at bat because we have a good plan for her and because Karla has total command of her pitches, even in this heat and in this pressure packed situation. The batter is now perfectly set up for a change up and I feel confident that it will work because she is so visually driven by emotion. We are now one single pitch away from that ASA National Championship. The last thing we need is for this pitch to be a strike. I call for the change, Karla winds up, throws the change, a perfect strike, the batter is again way out in front, swings at it, misses it, strike three. Our catcher jumps for joy and Thunder fans rush onto the field. San Diego Thunder has won the 14U ASA National Championship. In this particular at bat the batter didn't have a chance. Karla had the advantage on her from the beginning to the end, with a perfect plan and the perfect execution of that plan.

CHAPTER 2: IDEAS FOR PITCHERS AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

“The most important pitch of any game is the NEXT pitch.”

Tom Dodd

Before I introduce the thought process and detail the plan for the pitcher to maintain the initial advantage she has on opposing batters, I will define a few terms and suggest a few ideas that are important to a pitcher's understanding of the plan.

- **ADVANTAGE**

A pitcher has an advantage on a batter when she can afford to throw pitches that are not called strikes and still not fear walking the batter. This is an advantage because pitches outside of the strike zone are much more difficult to hit than pitches inside the zone and now a pitcher can intentionally throw pitches outside of the strike zone to entice the batter to chase them. A pitcher also has an advantage on a batter anytime the batter has two strikes because batters have to expand their strike zone and in doing so will often times lose their pitch selection discipline.

- **BATTLE THE HITTER**

Determination, persistence, and competitive nature are all you need to battle the hitter. You do not need softball skill or talent. Above all else, put up a fight, make her work, do not give in, do not let up, and never let her win. No matter how tired you are, how angry you are, how sad you are, how hurt you are, or how bleak the situation looks, do not let her know how you feel and do not give up. Survive!

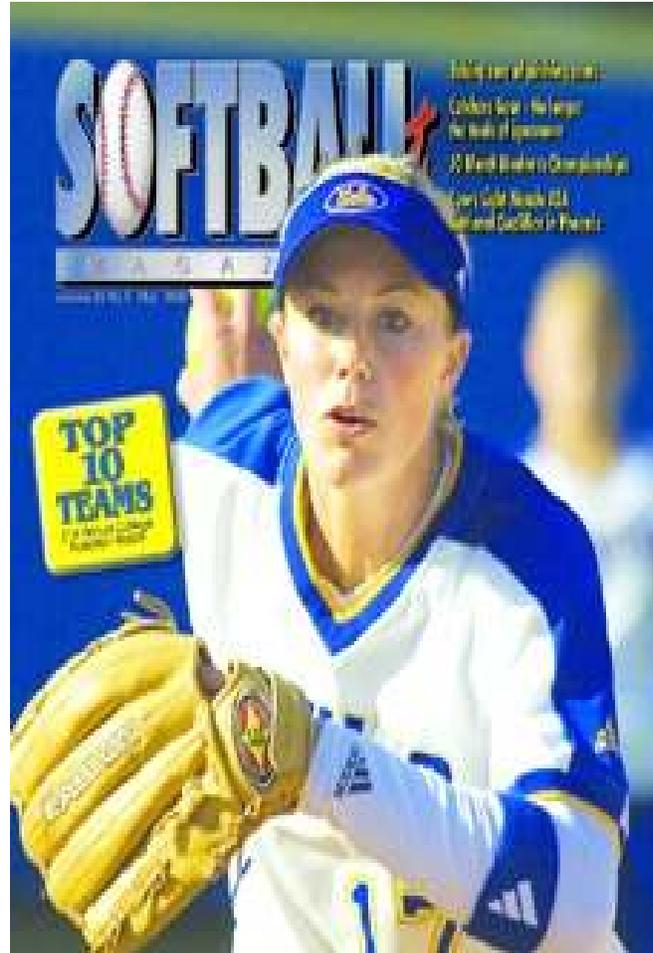
- **COMPETE**

Similar to battle the hitter. If you throw harder and are more determined when the bases get loaded in a close game than you did before they got loaded, this is an example of competing.

- **COMPOSURE**

The ability to think rationally and follow well thought out decisions in the face of adversity, in pressure situations, or when the game is on the line, rather than act emotionally. It is the same thing as keeping your cool, staying calm, and showing poise and self assurance when things go wrong. It is the opposite of panic.

- **EMOTIONAL STABILITY**



Understand and accept the ups and downs of the game. There will be times when things are going well and times when they are not. During all these times maintain emotional stability by not overreacting. Resist over confidence when things are going well and resist self doubt when they are not. If you pitch a no hitter act like you've done it before, same thing if you give up a grand slam. Don't make either one into too big of a deal. If you have success be grateful but do not become satisfied or over confident. Do not get lazy, take it for granted, or expect it again. Instead, work even harder in practice to have more. If you do not have success avoid frustration, giving up, or losing faith in yourself, your methods, or your system. Learn to understand and accept that at times you will fail. When it's appropriate, don't be afraid to give credit to the batter if she hits a good pitch. Strive for perfection but understand that no plan is perfect, nobody's execution is perfect, and there will be mistakes. Learn from the mistakes but then forget about them quickly and move forward. ***The most important pitch of any game is the NEXT pitch.***

- **REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS**

To help maintain emotional stability set reasonable goals and have reasonable expectations. If you have an extraordinarily good day on the mound don't use that result as the basis for future expectations. Also, avoid basing your goals or expectations on statistical results or comparisons to other players. Setting your sights too high or trying to keep up with someone else creates unnecessary mental stress which is bad for production. Instead, set goals and expect results that can be achieved on a regular basis with ordinary effort which you have some control of. A reasonable goal for a pitcher might be to stay ahead in the count seventy percent of the time each game.

- **ADJUSTMENT**

Use your eyes. Notice things. Notice the results of your efforts. When the results are poor alter some technique in order to bring the results into a more effective or efficient state. You should not have two or more consecutive poor results that are the same because you should change something after the first poor result which should bring upon a different result. If you try this but the result is unaffected, you need to exaggerate your change and make it much bigger. If you do not know what to change in order to get a different result, find out from one of your trusted advisors and then remember it. If you continue to do this and remember things, you will start to become a student of the game, and more importantly a student of yourself. Once you become a student of softball and yourself you will be able to make any necessary changes to get the desired results. If your curve ball goes inside, you realize it, actively make a change to your pitching mechanics, and then your next curve ball goes outside where it is supposed to go, this is an example of an adjustment.

- **COMMAND**

Command is the consistent ability to throw the pitch where you are aiming and the consistently repeatable accuracy of a pitch. It is different than control. Control is the ability to throw more strikes than balls. Command means locating those strikes to specific small areas, and most importantly, being able to do so repeatedly. If you have command you can consistently throw the ball to a small target a high percentage of the time. If you lack it and your pitches go to easy to hit locations, even pitches with exceptional speed and movement will often times be hit hard.

- **THE BIG THREE**

There are three factors that describe a pitch; velocity, movement, and location. Most people get excited about the first two because they are flashy and they put on a good show. I get excited

about consistent location of the pitch because that is what gets batters out when the game is on the line. Consistent location is command. If you have command of a pitch along with exceptional velocity and/or movement of that pitch all the better, but if you have to settle for one thing, you need command.

- **I NEED A WEAPON**

Pitching is a battle and you should not go to battle without a weapon. In fact, the more weapons you have the better. And what is a weapon in fastpitch softball pitching? A weapon can be a lot of different things. Mentally it can be things like competitive spirit, focus, determination, knowledge, and toughness. Physically, things like strength, stamina, toughness, and the ability to throw accurate pitches. Accurate pitches thrown to the proper locations are weapons, inaccurate pitches are not. You must command a pitch to call it a weapon. To command a pitch means you can throw it where you want it to go at least seven times out of every ten.

- **WHAT IS A GOOD PITCH TO A PITCHER?**

A good pitch to a pitcher is one that's in a location that is hard to hit. The inventors of the game made a strike zone for a reason, to give the batter a chance. This means that if you pitch the ball into that zone it is for the batter's benefit, not yours. The center of the strike zone is the easiest location for most batters to hit and hitting becomes more and more difficult as the ball approaches the outer edges of the zone. Pitches outside the strike zone are very difficult to hit and they get increasingly more difficult to hit the further out they get. To a pitcher then, a good pitch is one that is the hardest to hit while at the same time will likely be called a strike by the umpire. This is a pitch throw at the edges of the strike zone. When ahead in the count a good pitch to a pitcher may be one thrown outside the edges of the strike zone by the proper amount because it is not necessary for the pitch to be a called strike.

- **WHAT IS THE CORNER?**

If the inside edge of the ball touches the outside edge of the plate on either side, technically the pitch is a strike. Since the ball is about four inches wide, this means the outside edge of the ball can be four inches outside of the edge of the plate and still be a called strike. To me, this is the corner. I call it the skinny corner. If the center of the ball crosses the edge of the plate I call this the black corner referring to the black frame around the plate, and if the entire ball is over the plate with the outside edge of the ball touching the outside edge of the plate I call this the fat corner. In order of effectiveness it is the skinny corner as the most effective, then the black corner, and fat corner.

- **FAT PITCH**

Any pitch in which the entire ball is inside of the strike zone with no part of the ball touching any edge of the zone.

- **FAST PITCH**

Any pitch that is not an off speed pitch or a change up.

- **YOU HAVE HOW MANY PITCHES?**

Time and time again pitchers tell me they have three, four, five, even more than five pitches as if that is impressive. After I watch them pitch though, often times I have to tell them they do not have any pitches. This is because they lack command of their pitches, not to mention many of the young pitcher's pitches do not move at all or even spin correctly. Having a pitch to me means you can throw it where you are aiming at least seventy percent of the time. If your curve ball outside

has good speed and breaks a lot, but gets to the correct location only one time out of five, you do not have that pitch. You have the potential to have that pitch but need many more repetitions to be able to call it a pitch. It is my opinion that there is too much emphasis nowadays on movement and not enough on commanding each pitch. Command is not one lucky pitch that goes to the correct location. It is hitting the correct location every time, or at least seven times out of every ten.

- **FASTBALL...YOU THROW A WHAT?**

Despite what some may say, in fastpitch softball a fastball is a pitch, or at least it should be. If you throw one, use it. If you do not throw one, get one. It is the quickest pitch to learn, the easiest pitch to control and command, and the least stressful pitch on your arm. All young boys learn and use a fastball for their entire careers, girls should too. You should not be embarrassed to say you throw a fastball.

- **I HAVE FOUR PITCHES...ALL FASTBALLS**

The fastball is the easiest pitch to learn, control, and command. In fact, a good consistent fastball can be four pitches all in one. Let us name them outside, inside, high, and low. They can be used effectively as substitutes for curve, screw, rise, and drop, until these more difficult pitches to throw can be mastered. My team won an ASA National Championship with two pitchers who threw only a fastball and a change up, but threw both pitches with great command. To me, both girls had five pitches, not two.

- **CHANGE UP IS MY BEST FRIEND**

If there is one pitch that can neutralize a good batter, it is a change up. Thrown at the right time it can be a pitcher's greatest weapon. To be a great weapon however, it must be a strike because the right time is often when the pitcher is behind in the count. If there is one pitch you need to practice and practice and practice until you can throw it for a strike at least seven times out of every ten, it is the change up.

Even More Ideas for Pitchers:

1. **Do not use the middle of the plate**

Command your pitches well enough that you can throw them for strikes on at least the fat corner seven times out of every ten. This includes first pitches and all non change up pitches when you are behind in the count. I have called many games in which I have not called a single fast pitch down the middle.

2. **Miss the correct way**

No pitcher is perfect and you will make mistakes, but it is important to make mistakes in the proper direction. When you are aiming for corners, never miss over the plate. When throwing inside or outside miss too far in or out, not toward the middle. When throwing a rise ball, miss high, not flat. If throwing a drop learn to only miss low, never up.

3. **Pitch Low**

Generally speaking every pitch except the rise ball should be aimed low, at the very bottom of the strike zone. A low pitch is far from the batter's eyes and hard to reach. Low pitches produce ground balls. Ask your catcher to keep her target low during workouts. Lazy catchers and workout partners often give a high target for their own comfort. Do not allow this.

4. Pitch outside

All batters are innately weak on two things. Pitches away from them and pitches that are off speed. Some are better than others at both, and sometimes they get lucky, but these are areas of weakness for all batters. And even when an outside pitch is hit, it cannot be driven as hard or as far as a pitch that is inside. In addition to these benefits, the margin of error is much less for outside pitches because you do not have to worry about hitting the batter. You should throw outside seventy-five percent of the time and be able to consistently hit the outside corner seven times out of every ten. My younger daughter Sara once struck out twenty-one consecutive batters in a 12U recreation league seven inning game throwing nothing but outside fast balls.

5. Throw first pitch strikes

If you throw a first pitch strike you have a seventy-one percent chance of staying ahead of that batter the entire at bat. A first pitch ball drops your chances of getting and staying ahead to fifty-fifty. First pitch strikes are critical to a pitcher's long term success, but not just any strike. They need to be at least over the fat corner of the plate. Throw a first pitch strike seventy percent of the time.

6. Throw change up strikes

Be able to consistently throw a change up for a strike seven times out of every ten. Since a change up affects timing, its horizontal location is not the important factor. The important factor of a change up is that it needs to be a strike. In order to maximize its called strike efficiency a change up should not be aimed to the corners of the plate, it should be thrown to the middle. That's because it affects timing and often freezes the batter, so when this happens, you want to get the called strike, not throw a ball off the plate because you were aiming for the corner. The best times to throw a change up is on the first pitch, when you are behind in the count, and when the count is full.

7. When ahead in the count

When ahead in the count, rather than throw erratic pitches that you are learning or do not command, throw your main pitches further off the plate to at least the skinny corner. When you are way ahead (0-2, 1-2), throw your main pitches even further off the plate, up to eight inches off depending on the batter's stance and reach.

8. When behind in the count

When you fall behind in the count and you do not want to walk the batter you must do one of two things to succeed consistently against good hitters. Throw your main pitches for a strike on at least the fat corner or throw a change up for a strike. Good batters expect fat fast pitches when they are ahead so if you can hit the corner they will usually take the pitch or hit it on the handle or end of the bat. If you throw a change up they will likely be fooled or frozen. Either way, the pitch must be a strike. You must get good enough to throw these pitches for strikes seven times out of every ten.

9. Set up pitch

A set up pitch is a pitch with a purpose other than getting the batter out. Its purpose is to make the batter think about something other than the pitch and/or location that will be coming next. If I know a batter is weak outside and I have two strikes on her, I may throw a pitch inside to make her think about inside to "set up" the next pitch which will be outside. A set up pitch cannot be a called strike though, because if it is it may be hit and then you will lose your opportunity to get her out where you know she is vulnerable.

10. Attention Getter

Commonly called a brush back pitch, it is a pitch intentionally thrown inside, close to the batter, to move her away from the plate and not allow her to feel comfortable in the batter's box.

11. First base is open (not occupied)

When first base is open, at times it may be advantageous to walk the current batter. If you fall behind, instead of 'giving in' and taking your chances by throwing pitches down the middle you can continue to throw the ball to the skinny corner or off the plate and if you walk her that is okay. Depending on the score, the inning, who is up, and who is on deck, a walk may be best even if you do not fall behind to help you get past a tough hitter or to help your defense by setting up a force play. It could even be a good strategy on occasion to walk two consecutive batters with a runner at third. When pitching, always be aware when first base is open and use that open base to your advantage when appropriate.

12. Pitch around

Based on the situation, the score, the on deck batter, or other factors, it may be an advantage to you to walk the current batter on purpose and go after the next one. This can be done intentionally by throwing four wide pitches, or unintentionally by throwing pitches out of the strike zone and hoping the batter chases them.

PERFECT PITCHING

May, 2000

San Diego, CA

CIF-SDS Playoffs, Semi-Final Game

Mira Mesa High School vs Ramona High School

Lisa Dodd is pitching for Mira Mesa with a 1-0 lead, bottom of the fourth inning, one out. Lisa is a freshman and Mira Mesa has never made it this far in the playoffs before. Mira Mesa fans are very excited and very nervous at the same time. They are in unknown and uncharted territory. After cruising along for three and a third innings without allowing a hit, suddenly Lisa and her team are in trouble when the bases get loaded on an error, a walk, and a hit. There is now a quiet tension on the Mira Mesa side while Ramona's fans are cheering loudly. The tying run is at third and the go ahead run is at second. I call time out to talk to Lisa and go over the game plan for the batters coming up. We do not know this team well and have only the previous at bat from each batter to go on. I remind Lisa to make one good pitch at a time and urge the defense to be aggressive and want the ball. We play the infield in. Lisa appears confident and unrattled even though Ramona's crowd is extremely loud. The batter coming up hit a weak ground ball on an outside pitch her first at bat so we're going to stick with our usual plan of outside fastballs. In this situation there is little margin for error. We can't risk putting the ball over the plate and we can't walk her either. Fortunately this is something we practice every pitching workout. We are prepared. On the first pitch to the first batter Lisa throws an outside fastball just off the outside corner for a called strike. It is a perfect pitch, just like the ones she throws in practice when we simulate this situation. She throws the next fastball outside a little more and the batter fouls it weakly to the right, strike two. Lisa is pumped and throwing hard and I can see the batter starting early to make sure she isn't late. Seeing this I call for a change up and know we can get her if the pitch is a strike. Lisa's change up is perfect, at the knees freezing the batter for a called strike three. Two outs. The Mira Mesa fans are cheering now, just as loudly as the fans from Ramona, but Lisa and I keep our focus. The next batter is a left handed slapper who last at bat seemed to

really run up far. I like to throw change ups to slappers like her to affect their timing. The risk to this strategy is if they touch the ball and it stays fair, they've got a good head start to first base. I decide to throw the change up and I call the entire infield in, especially the corners, and remind them there's a force at home. Lisa throws a first pitch change up strike and the batter is fooled badly with a weak swing. Even had she hit the ball it appears she would have been out of the box. She was fooled that much. The batter is very animated and seems to be driven by the emotion of the crowd. Seeing this I call for another change up and again she's fooled badly. Strike two. I think we can get her with a third change up but I want to show her something different first so I call a fastball outside as a setup pitch. The girl is standing far from the plate and steps toward first so an outside pitch seems safe, especially two ball widths off the plate where I call it. Lisa throws the set up pitch, outside, off the plate, just where we want it. It is a perfectly placed fastball. So perfect that the batter almost swings but holds up and the umpire gives us the call anyway. Strike three, inning over. Those were six absolutely perfect pitches all in a row, including three consecutive change ups. Every one in the heat of the moment, under pressure, with the game on the line. Lisa and I often talk about that sequence of pitches and to this day I have not seen a more perfect placement of consecutive pitches at any level. It is not surprising to me though because we practice trying to be perfect every week. Mira Mesa goes on to win the game 1-0.



Mira Mesa pitcher Lisa Dodd (center) gets hugs from Carissa Castle and Natasha Sevco after 1-0 win vs. Ramona. *Charlie Neuman / Union-Tribune*

CHAPTER 3: PITCHER'S PLAN

“Being prepared and awaiting the unprepared is victory.”

Sun Tzu

Chapter 3 provides the plan for the pitcher to understand how to keep her initial advantage on the batter, how to increase it, and what to do if she loses it. It is described initially in outline form to provide a basic overview and then followed with a detailed explanation.



Outline of the Pitcher's Plan

- Understand that you have an advantage on the batter at the beginning of every at bat and can keep it if you can locate your pitches properly.
- Develop command of every pitch you throw and if you do not command its accuracy do not use that pitch until you do.
- It is better to have few, or even one pitch that you command, than several that you don't.
- It is okay to have a fastball as a pitch.
- Make first pitch strikes a top priority, then stay ahead of the hitter.
- Pitch outside most of the time and use the inside pitch primarily as a set up pitch.
- Pitch to the edges of the strike zone and then outside of the strike zone when you get ahead.
- Pitch to the edges of the strike zone or throw change ups when you get behind.
- Have a change up that you can throw for consistent strikes.
- Your control will never be perfect, but learn to miss away from the center of the plate, not toward it.
- Know when first base is open and other situations when it is okay to walk the batter.
- In difficult situations show composure and always display emotional stability.
- Develop the competitive spirit to win the battle with the batter at every at bat.

Details of the Pitcher's Plan

If you are the pitcher consider yourself lucky because you have the *initial* advantage in all of your individual battles with each batter, all you have to do is keep it. Why? Because each batter starts her turn at bat with *the ball in your hand* and you know where the pitch is going to go, she does not. The first pitch is extremely important to you because you want to keep the advantage you start with. Throw a good first pitch and your advantage increases. Your goal should be eighty percent first pitch strikes. Continue to make good pitches and you will never lose

the advantage. Good pitches get people out, and a good first pitch for a pitcher is on the fat corner or better. If you start with a good pitch and continue to make good pitches your advantage gets stronger and your chances of success increase. If you never lose the advantage then the pressure is always on the batter. When the pressure is on the batter she becomes defensive, loses discipline, and sometimes panics. She is an easier out. After the first pitch, and each subsequent pitch, the advantage can change, or even switch to the batter, depending on the result of the previous pitch(es). If the advantage switches to the batter your chances of success will decrease because you will be forced to throw pitches over the plate to avoid a walk. Keep in mind that even good pitches occasionally get hit hard although most of the time they are hit weakly or missed completely, so stick with the plan.

When you get ahead in the count throw your main pitches further off the plate. Do not throw new pitches, pitches you are learning, or pitches you do not command well just because you can afford to throw a ball or because you have not thrown that pitch for a while. Not only is this a waste of your advantage if the pitch is a ball, but even worse, if it is a pitch over the plate it may get hit hard. Instead, throw those types of pitches in the middle of the count if you have to throw them at all. When you are way ahead in the count (0-2, 1-2), throw your main pitches even further off the plate, up to eight inches off depending on the batter's stance, length of reach, and displayed discipline.

If you fall behind in the count and lose the advantage, then what? First and foremost, stay composed and exhibit emotional stability. In this situation a smart batter is expecting a fat fast pitch over the plate so you have to be smart enough to avoid giving her one. You need to get good enough to throw a called strike, but on the corner, not over the middle of the plate. This is what made Lisa Dodd so great. She could hit the outside corner for a called strike on 2-0 and 3-1 counts time and time again and get herself back to even. If batters take these pitches you get back even in the count or regain the advantage. If they swing, since the pitch is on the corner it is usually not a hard hit. Another way to get back even in the count when you are behind is to throw something off speed. For most pitchers this is a change up. The batter is not expecting a change up when she is ahead, she is expecting something fast, so if you can throw a change up or some other off speed pitch you can fool her and get her out on a swing, or get the called strike to get back even in the count or go ahead. This is another thing that Lisa could do that set her apart and made her so tough to hit. She could consistently throw a change up for a called strike when she fell behind in the count. In these situations you are already behind in the count so the pitch must be a strike. Get good enough to throw a change up for a strike seven times out of every ten and then throw it often when you are behind in the count.

That is your plan if you are a pitcher and it boils down to this. You have the advantage to start and you can keep it by throwing first pitch strikes on the corner and then staying ahead. When you fall behind keep your composure and throw strikes to the corners or change up strikes. When you are ahead throw to the corners, and when way ahead throw your main pitches off the plate rather than pitches you do not command well.

Knowing this plan and what you need to do is critical to your success but it is not enough all by itself. Now that you know what you need to do, you have to get good enough physically to be able to do it. To get this good you have to train. A training program takes time, effort, repetition, work, and sweat, but the results are worth it, just ask Lisa Dodd.

To learn the drills, exercises, workouts, training program duration, frequency, and intensity, and more, that Lisa Dodd and others have used please read my ebook "What, More Perfect Practice". It will tell you how Lisa got good enough to do all the things mentioned in this book and how you can physically execute the pitcher's plan successfully yourself.

NOTHING TO HIT

September, 1972

Peoria, IL

Illinois Collegiate Baseball Summer League, League Game
Mattoon vs Peoria

I'm pitching for Charleston-Mattoon and we're playing Peoria late in the season with the league championship on the line. It is a typical 102 degree mid west summer day. We're ahead 2-0 in the bottom of the eighth inning with two outs. After back to back errors and an infield single, Peoria has the bases loaded and their clean up batter is coming to the plate. He's their best hitter and is always a tough out. We've played this team before so I've learned a little about him. He's a patient right handed hitter, not overly aggressive, with a good eye. Although he's patient, he does like to swing at the first pitch and he is a definite first pitch fastball hitter. Coach comes out and asks me if I'm tired but it really doesn't matter what I say because nobody is warming up. I tell coach I can get this guy out. After coach leaves I think to myself that I am not going to give in and give him what he wants because even if I walk him



we will still have the lead. I don't really want to walk him though because I want the shutout. I tell the catcher to call a first pitch slider so I can accept the first sign and give the batter the impression that a fastball is coming. In those days fastballs were most often called on the first sign given and shaking off the first sign usually meant some other pitch would be thrown. I knew even back then that it was beneficial to make the batter think. I want to throw a slider because it looks like a fastball and that's what he likes being a first ball fast ball hitter. I throw the slider to the outside corner and it breaks just off the plate, a perfect pitch. The batter starts to swing but holds up realizing a little late that it isn't a fastball. The pitch catches the corner for a called strike one. On the next pitch the catcher calls for a fastball outside but I shake him off. I do want to throw a fastball outside but I want the batter to think it's something else, so I shake off several more signs before the catcher gets to fastball outside again which I accept. I throw the pitch four or five inches off the plate and the batter takes it for a ball. As I mentioned earlier he has a good eye. On the next pitch I again shake off several signs to make him think and then select another fastball outside. My thinking is that he won't be looking for two fastballs in a row. Again I throw the pitch slightly wide, he takes it and the umpire calls ball two. With the count now at two and one, the bases loaded, and the number four batter up I have to be careful because he's probably looking for a fast ball down the middle like good hitters usually do in situations like this, and he is a good hitter. With this in mind, I know what I need to do. I need to throw something he's not expecting on a 2-1 count. He won't be expecting a change up. I have a good change up and practice it often for situations like this one. The most important thing is that it has to be a strike because I don't want the count to go to 3-1. The catcher knows me well and on the next pitch gives me the sign for a change up which I quickly accept, hoping the batter will think a fastball is

coming. I throw the pitch and the batter goes after it like it's a fastball. By the time he realizes it's slow he has gone too far and is frozen at the plate. It is a perfect pitch at the knees for a called strike two. The count is now two and two and the batter still hasn't had a good swing. This is good pitching so far, but one mistake will ruin everything. I'm determined not to make that mistake and to get out of this jam. When I pitch I try to make batters think a lot by wiping off a lot of signs or stepping back off the rubber, especially with two strikes. I've already done some of this to this batter and I do it again now by shaking off several more signs to make him think anything is coming but the fastball. It is the fastball outside however, that I want to throw next because I don't think he will be expecting a fastball with two strikes. I throw the fastball outside and it appears to surprise him as he lets it go. I think the pitch catches the corner and begin to walk off the mound but the umpire calls it a ball, just outside. Unlucky call for me, but I'll give the batter credit for a good knowledge of the strike zone and good pitch selection discipline. This combination makes him a tough out. Or maybe he was just lucky. Either way, the count is now full but I'm not going to give in to him and feed him what he wants, which is a fastball over the plate. A good batter like him is usually sitting on that pitch with a 3-2 count just like he was when the count was 2-1. Instead, I'm going to make him think what he wants is coming by throwing a pitch that looks like a fastball until the last second. I'm going to throw him another slider like I did on the first pitch. I won't tense up and hang it over the plate because I tell myself that if I miss I'll miss outside and walk him. The catcher knows me well, but not well enough. Rather than the slider, he calls for another change up. Instead of shaking off the change up I slap my chest the appropriate number of times to signal the catcher for a slider. I do this to minimize the shaking off behavior so the batter is more likely to think a fastball is coming. It would have been better if I could have thrown what was initially called for without any delay, but I couldn't. I now begin my motion from the stretch position to hold the runners longer since they'll be running on the 3-2, two out pitch. The batter is dug in and ready. I come to a set position. The third base coach is encouraging the batter. Instead of throwing the pitch however, I now step off the rubber to make the batter back out of the box and reset himself. When I take the sign again, this time the catcher gives me the slider sign first, I accept it quickly, and now it looks like I'm throwing the first pitch called which is usually a fastball. The catcher and I have worked this move before and he knew what to call. As I come set in the stretch position I'm thinking about arm angle and tight spin, not the game situation. I release the pitch and as it's heading towards home plate I can see a dot on the ball indicating good spin and that the pitch is headed to the outside corner at the knees. The batter aggressively drives hard on the pitch believing it's hittable but as it breaks sharply outside he is completely fooled and tries desperately to hold up on his swing. He's unable to do so. He's fooled so much and is swinging so hard that the bat flies completely out of his hands past the third base dugout and down the left field line. Strike three, inning over. Mattoon goes on to win the game 2-0, and I do in fact get my shutout. I just fought a successful battle with a good batter in a tough situation without him even taking a good swing. It happened from having a good scouting report, from not giving in, from executing good pitches made possible from thorough preparation, and from using a good mental thought process or what I call a plan. Add it all together and he got nothing good to hit.

CHAPTER 4: IDEAS FOR BATTERS AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit."

Aristotle

In this chapter we will develop a mentality and a strategy for the batter to take the advantage from the pitcher and use it to increase her chances of getting a fat pitch to hit. Before we do, let's examine some ideas and define some terms that are important to the batter.

- **ADVANTAGE**

The batter has an advantage on the pitcher when the count is such that the pitcher is worried about walking the batter or is getting close to walking the batter. This is an advantage because in this situation the pitcher is forced to intentionally throw fat pitches over the plate and fat pitches are easiest to hit.

- **BATTLE THE PITCHER**

Determination, persistence, and competitive nature are all you need to battle the pitcher. You do not need softball skill or talent. Above all else, put up a fight, make her work, do not give in, do not let up, and never let her win. No matter how tired you are, how angry you are, how sad you are, how hurt you are, or how bleak the situation looks, do not let her know how you feel and do not give up. Survive!

- **COMPETE**

Similar to battle the pitcher. After you fall behind in the count 0-2, if you foul off several tough pitches and are more strongly determined not to strike out than you were before you fell behind, this is an example of competing.

- **COMPOSURE**

The ability to think rationally and follow well thought out decisions in the face of adversity, in pressure situations, and when the game is on the line, rather than act emotionally. It is the same thing as keeping your cool, staying calm, and showing poise and self assurance when things go wrong. It is the opposite of panic.

- **EMOTIONAL STABILITY**

Playing the game produces many emotional ups and downs. Limit these emotional swings. Don't get overly excited or deeply depressed about your short term results. If you hit a home run to win a game act like you've done it before, same thing if you strike out with the bases loaded. Don't make either one into too big of a deal. If you have success be grateful, but do not become



satisfied or over confident. Do not get lazy, take it for granted, or expect it again. Instead, work even harder in practice to have more. If you do not have success avoid frustration, giving up, or losing faith in yourself, your methods, or your system. Learn to understand and accept that at times you will fail. When it's appropriate, don't be afraid to give credit to the pitcher if she makes good pitches and gets you out. Strive for perfection but understand that no plan is perfect, nobody's execution is perfect, and there will be mistakes. Learn from the mistakes but then forget about them quickly and move forward. ***The most important pitch of any game is the NEXT pitch.***

- **REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS**

If you go three for four in one game do not expect to do the same in the next. This would be an unrealistic expectation because nobody consistently hits seven hundred and fifty. Enjoy the hot streaks but realize that in the long run cold streaks are coming to even things out. Setting your goals too high or trying to keep up with someone else creates unnecessary mental stress that is bad for production. To stay comfortable and mentally relaxed stick with reasonable goals and expectations that you can accomplish with ordinary effort. An expectation that I like to use is to have a "quality at bat" every time to the plate. A "quality at bat" consists of things that you can learn, improve, and control, and is not based on luck or statistics. Look below for the definition of a "quality at bat". A reasonable goal for a batter is a hit or a walk a game. Yes I said, or. I know this sounds simple, but it isn't. It is a challenging long-term goal that you have some control of, is reasonable, and is productive for you and your team.

- **QUALITY AT BAT**

To reduce anxiety and the mental stress that comes with worrying about your hitting production, do not focus on hits, results, or comparing your performance to others. Instead, strive for and judge your hitting success on the quality of your at bats. A "quality at bat" is defined as not swinging at bad pitches, not taking good pitches, and battling the pitcher. It consists of the proper combination of discipline, aggression, and determination, all important skills to focus on for self improvement and to accomplish your expected result. Striving for quality at bats rather than worrying about offensive results helps provide emotional stability.

- **FAT PITCH**

Any pitch in which the entire ball is inside of the strike zone with no part of the ball touching any edge of the zone.

- **FAST PITCH**

Any pitch that is not an off speed pitch or a change up.

- **GOOD PITCH TO HIT**

A good pitch to hit for a hitter is one in which the entire ball is inside the edges of the strike zone, the closer to the center of the strike zone the better. I call it a fat pitch. Learn to hit it when it is on either half of the plate and your opportunities for a good pitch to hit double.

- **MISTAKE BY THE PITCHER**

A pitch thrown intentionally or unintentionally in which the entire ball is inside the edges of the strike zone. I call this a fat pitch and it should be swung at unless you have the take sign. A mistake by the pitcher is the same thing as a good pitch to hit.

- **AGGRESSION**

On every single pitch thrown to you at every at bat, anticipate and expect a fat fast pitch strike and be prepared and ready to swing at it unless you have been given the take sign. Don't swing at anything else. Let change ups go, corner strikes go, and balls go. This should be your approach in every at bat unless you have two strikes on you or you are looking for a certain pitch or location.

- **DISCIPLINE**

Knowing the strike zone and swinging at the strikes while letting the balls go is called pitch selection discipline. Swinging at only what you are looking for is called hitting discipline. If you are looking for a fast pitch do not swing at a change up. If you are looking for inside, do not swing at outside. Both forms of discipline are absolutely necessary to consistently obtain favorable counts which will provide you with fat pitches to hit.

- **AGGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE**

The combination and simultaneous use of aggression and discipline as defined in this chapter.

- **ADJUSTMENT**

Use your eyes. Notice things. Notice the results of your efforts. When the results are poor alter some technique in order to bring the results into a more effective or efficient state. You should not have two or more consecutive poor results that are the same because you should change something after the first poor result which should bring upon a different result. If you try this but the result is unaffected, you need to exaggerate your change and make it much bigger. If you do not know what to change in order to get a different result, find out from one of your trusted advisors and then remember it. If you continue to do this and remember things, you will start to become a student of the game, and more importantly a student of yourself. Once you become a student of softball and yourself you will be able to make any necessary changes to get the desired results. If your curve ball goes inside, you realize it, actively make a change to your pitching mechanics, and then your next curve ball goes outside where it is supposed to go, this is an example of an adjustment.

- **NOTHING IS FREE**

Do not be afraid to work hard for what you want. Invest your time. Understand and master techniques and skills in practice and try to become a student of the game. Real confidence comes from doing well, so do well in practice. If you put in extra time but immediate positive results do not come, don't get frustrated. The game is hard and often times very slow to pay you back, but do not let that stop you. Keep pushing yourself in practice until it does.

- **KNOW THYSELF**

Recognize, address, and improve your faults and weaknesses, rather than ignore them. Find advisors who can tell you what they are, and then learn to accept and embrace constructive criticism as a road to self improvement. When you are going poorly everybody's a critic and an expert on what you need to do, even family and close friends. Do not desperately believe whatever they say or let any of their words discourage you or generate self doubt. Instead, know yourself, your methods, and your system, stick with them and make adjustments. Have good advisors, trust them, and know when to ask for their help and guidance.

- **PAY ATTENTION AND WATCH THE GAME**

More times than not the first pitch of a game is the pitcher's 'go to' pitch. That is the pitch you are going to get when she is behind in the count. If you bat sixth, you have five people to learn from.

Look for trends, tendencies, and patterns. All pitchers and pitch callers have recognizable tendencies if you look for them. Acknowledge and recognize the umpire's strike zone and if it is different than the true strike zone utilize it when you have two strikes, but not until then.

- **2 - 0 ATTITUDE**

Realize that the chances of getting a fat fast pitch to hit are great, anticipate it, and expect it even more than usual when the count is 2-0. When it does come, swing hard and try to drive the ball, not just touch it. I call this a '2-0 attitude' but it also pertains to all other counts in which you have a strong advantage, namely, 2-1, 3-0, and 3-1. Do not let this pitch go if it is a strike in which the entire ball is over the plate. Become good enough to hit a strike on either half of the plate and spray the ball around the field because as the level of play goes up it gets more and more difficult to get the exact pitch you want.

- **2 STRIKE ATTITUDE**

With two strikes you should expand the strike zone but never panic and swing at pitches too far out of the zone. Swing at any pitch that is close however, so the umpire does not decide your at bat. Continue to show discipline by trusting your judgment, instincts, and reactions, all of which you should work hard to improve at every practice and workout. Some batters may find it helpful to shorten their swing, widen their stance, or stand a little closer to the plate with two strikes, all with the sole purpose of putting the ball in play and not striking out.

- **GUESSING GAMES**

There are times when looking for a certain pitch or location is a good strategy, rather than just a fat fast pitch. For example, if a pitcher throws inside and outside to every single batter it might be good to look for one or the other, either inside or outside. If you do, make sure you swing at your pitch when it comes and make sure you do not swing when your pitch does not come, even if it is a strike. When you are playing a 'guessing game' you are not really guessing, you are expecting, and to play it correctly you need discipline. Develop the discipline to swing at what you are expecting and not swing at anything else. If what you are expecting does not come, let it go. You also need to make sure that what you are expecting has a very good chance of coming. It should be obvious that you do not look for a certain pitch or location when you have two strikes on you because you are not able to let it go if it is not the pitch you are expecting.

- **GOOD PLAN, GOOD STRATEGY, GOOD DISCIPLINE, GOOD MENTALITY...BAD RESULTS**

You are following and executing the plan in this book flawlessly, getting the advantage on the pitcher and a lot of fat pitches to hit, but you are missing them, fouling them off, or hitting them weakly. What is the problem? This usually means that you have to work harder on your swing mechanics, your timing, and your hand eye coordination. Getting good pitches to hit is the emphasis of this book. Being able to hit them comes from sound mechanics and good timing. To improve in these areas you should work harder at improving your hitting techniques by working more often, trying new or different methods, or by getting some new or different ideas. You could also try having your eyes examined.

2-0 ATTITUDE

August, 2006

Johnson City, TN

ASA Class A 14U National Championship, Winner's Bracket Game

San Diego Thunder vs Texas Travelers

Thursday afternoon, our first elimination game of the tournament. It is a dark, damp, overcast day and thundershowers have been active all morning. The game is in the fifth inning tied 0-0, with both teams excited, energetic, and playing well. We are coming up to bat in the bottom of the fifth. Their pitcher is shutting us down with a good mixture of in and out pitches in addition to a very effective change up. As we're getting ready to bat in the fifth inning there is a burst of heavy rain, thunder, and then lightning, and we are forced to leave the field and take shelter. We are delayed for more than an hour. I noticed in earlier games that after a rain delay the umpires tried to hurry the warm ups and get the game going before the rain came again. I figure they will do the same thing now with us. I tell my team that when the game resumes, this inning will be a great opportunity for us to jump on the pitcher who may not be totally warmed up or completely focused after the long delay. Our batter leading off the inning is Jennifer Aanderud and I specifically tell Jen to be real aggressive and swing at the first good pitch because the pitcher might not be sharp after the lengthy wait. I tell her to go up there with her "2-0 attitude" and Jen says she will. When we are called back to the field, I'm right. The umpires minimize the warm up time and rush the game to resume. Their pitcher warms up on the field and I can see that she isn't even throwing full speed when she tells the umpire she's ready. I have a feeling the pitcher is going to have trouble with her control by the nature of her warm up so I have a decision to make. Should I give Jen the take sign and hope for a walk or continue with the plan that we have already discussed and trust Jen to display the proper discipline. I decide to trust Jen. As Jen gets into the batters box and digs in I can see she is focused, determined, and ready to swing just like we talked about. The pitcher delivers the first pitch and Jen starts to swing then holds up. The pitch is outside for ball one but it comes in a lot faster than the prior warm up pitches. Jen digs in the box again, and once again the pitcher delivers the pitch, and once again Jen takes the pitch. It's a little bit outside, ball two. With the count 2-0 I can give Jen the take sign to ensure she doesn't help the pitcher out by swinging at a bad pitch, but I don't. I don't because Jen is very focused and I like her approach at the plate. Their coach calls time to talk to his pitcher so I have the chance to talk to Jen. I know the coach doesn't want to walk Jen in a 0-0 game and he is probably saying that to his pitcher, so I tell Jen to expect a fat fast pitch and make sure you swing hard when it comes. As the pitcher gets ready to pitch again I see the catcher set up inside but I don't say anything because I don't want to disturb Jen's concentration. The pitcher throws the ball and once again Jen starts to go for it but holds up in time. The pitch is inside for ball three. So far in this at bat Jen has displayed exceptional discipline for a kid who anxiously wants to swing the bat. All three pitches are fairly close to the strike zone. I can also see a little frustration building up in the pitcher. So now, with the count at 3-0, Jen looks at me for a sign and I give her the take sign just to see her reaction, then I wipe it off and smile. Jen smiles back. Jen knows I want her to swing if the pitch is a strike. As Jen digs in again and the pitcher gets her sign I'm hoping Jen gets on base because we have a good bunter waiting on deck. The pitch is delivered and I hear a loud 'crack' sound and see the ball flying deep and far to left center field, back, back, back, over the fence. Jennifer Aanderud has just hit a game changing home run at ASA Nationals on a 3-0 count. She gave herself that opportunity by having the pitch selection discipline to let three close pitches go in a clutch situation. Then, rather than waste the fat 3-0 pitch she worked so hard to get by letting it go, she crushes it with a hard swing from her "2-0 attitude". It is Jennifer's first ever over-the-fence home run and it could not have come at a better time for Jen or for San Diego Thunder. Thunder goes on to win the game.

CHAPTER 5: **BATTER'S PLAN**

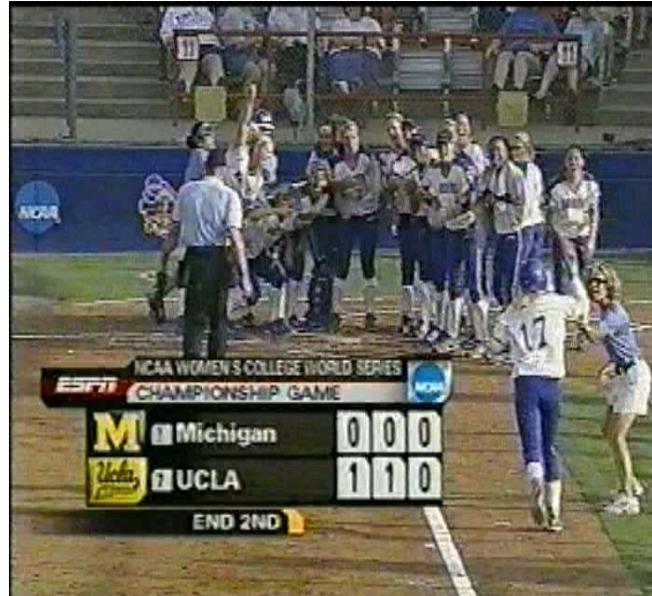
"The biggest mistake a batter can make is to let a fat pitch go."

Tom Dodd

Chapter 5 provides the plan for the batter to understand how to get the initial advantage away from the pitcher and utilize it for herself. It is described initially in outline form to provide a basic overview and then followed with a detailed explanation.

Outline of the Batter's Plan

- Know where you are in the batter's box at all times.
- Learn and know the strike zone.
- Develop pitch selection discipline.
- Develop the discipline to let change ups go when you do not have two strikes on you.
- Develop the discipline to only swing at what you are expecting and let anything else go.
- Develop your swing mechanics and timing so you can consistently hit fat pitches hard on both sides of the plate.
- Develop trust in your judgment, reflexes, and decision making abilities.
- As a general rule, expect and anticipate a fat fast pitch to hit on every single pitch of every single at bat and swing when it comes.
- Hit early in the count by aggressively swinging the bat at all strikes over the plate. Do not take fat strikes.
- When up to bat, do not get caught up in the emotion of the moment. Stay composed and have useful, positive, and productive thoughts.
- Have reasonable goals and expectations to help maintain emotional stability.
- Know the count on every single pitch and know what each count means in relation to the advantage it may provide to you.
- Develop your own "2-0 attitude" on the appropriate counts.
- Do not panic with two strikes, trust yourself, but swing when the pitch is close to the strike zone.
- Do not swing at an "umpire's strike zone" until you have two strikes.
- There are times when it is okay to look for a certain pitch or location. When you do, do not swing at anything else.
- Strive for quality at bats instead of statistical results. A "quality at bat" consists of not swinging at bad pitches, not letting good pitches go, and battling the pitcher.
- Develop the competitive spirit to win the battle with the pitcher at every at bat.



Details of the Batter's Plan

Since the pitcher starts off each batter with the initial advantage, it takes both discipline and aggressiveness to get the advantage from her. Keep in mind that the selection and intended location of the next pitch is determined by who has the advantage and by how strong that advantage is, so it is extremely important to get it. To get it you need the combination of an aggressive hitting attitude and good hitting discipline, which I call aggressive discipline. Aggressive discipline is a learnable skill and should be developed in workouts. If the first pitch is a fat strike, swing, this is the aggressive part. If you let it go the pitcher increases her advantage and another strike puts you in a big hole at 0-2 where you do not want to be. If it is not a strike, let it go, this is the discipline part. If you take the first pitch and it is a ball, the advantage shifts to you and another ball puts you in the ideal position at 2-0 which should get you excited and supply you with a "2-0 attitude". Remember, a fat strike is one in which the entire ball is inside the strike zone.

The first pitch of any at bat is extremely important. As a batter, you should always be expecting and aggressively looking for a fat fast pitch to hit on every pitch of your at bat, but particularly on the first pitch. **The biggest mistake a batter can make is to let a fat pitch go** on any count, but especially with a favorable count like 0-0. The first pitch is one of the most favorable pitch counts for a batter because most pitchers and pitch callers call pitches over the plate on the first pitch to get ahead. They do not throw tough to hit pitches like rise or drop balls and they rarely throw change ups or any pitches intentionally off the plate. If you always take the first pitch from habit, or because you have been told to "work the count", change your thinking because on the first pitch you will see a good pitch to hit more than half the time. If the first pitch is a ball, let it go, and continue to look for a fat fast pitch. During the course of every at bat know the count and be extra aggressive when you are ahead, because you realize the chances of getting a fat fast pitch to hit have increased. When it comes, jump on it because you may not see another one. If a fat fast pitch does not come, stay ready for one, and keep letting other pitches go until one of three things happen; you walk, you hit the ball, or you get two strikes on you. Once you get two strikes on you your approach changes. You change to a "2 strike attitude". A two strike attitude means you no longer expect and anticipate a fat fast pitch. Instead, expand the strike zone and look for and swing at any pitch that is close to the zone, and especially any pitch that is close to that particular umpire's strike zone in that particular game. Additionally, compete hard and make yourself a tough out.

Be aggressive and stay aggressive your entire at bat. Aggressiveness is an important key to getting the advantage away from the pitcher. Since you do not know when it is coming, expect a good pitch to hit on every pitch and hit it when it comes as early in the count as possible. Know the count after each pitch. It literally drives me crazy when I ask my batter the count and she has to ask the umpire. If you have put the count in your favor with good discipline and increased your chances of getting a good pitch to hit, you should know it and be ready to swing the bat hard and drive the ball. Conversely, when you are behind in the count you have to know that too so you can adjust your thinking to the two strike hitting mentality. It is impossible to reach your potential as a hitter if you do not know the count and use the information it provides to your advantage. In addition to just knowing what the count is, understand what it means, and what to expect from it on the next pitch. The most favorable hitting counts are 2-0, 2-1, 3-0, and 3-1. On these counts know that your chances of getting a fat fast pitch to hit are very good, so be ready, do not let it go if it is, and develop your own "2-0 attitude" to crush it.

Know the strike zone. Knowledge and discipline of the strike zone are two more important keys to getting the advantage from the pitcher. Do not swing at bad pitches. **The second biggest mistake a batter can make is to swing at pitches that are not strikes.** If you do this it allows the pitcher to get or keep the advantage without having to work for it and

generally makes you an easier out. Like always, stay aggressive and expect a good pitch to hit, but rely on your pitch selection discipline to let pitches go when they are not strikes. This discipline must be developed and it can be improved over time if you make a point to improve it. The discipline to let change ups and other off speed pitches go can also be developed and improved over time if you work on it. It is hard enough to hit pitches that you expect, so do not swing at something slow when you are looking for and expecting fast just because it comes. If you learn to let these pitches go you will have more success in the long run and pitch callers will not throw you as many since you do not appear to be fooled.

Sometimes if a pitcher is throwing a lot of change ups or some other pitch you might decide to look for that particular pitch instead of the fast pitch, and this can be a good strategy. I call this playing a guessing game, but it is not really just guessing, it is expecting or looking for a certain pitch or pitch location other than just a fat fast pitch. To play this game correctly you will have to have discipline and like all games, there are rules you must follow to play it correctly and here they are: One, make sure you are looking for something that is likely to come; two, be specific in what you are looking for such as an outside strike, not just an outside pitch, or a change up strike, not just a change up; three, if what you are looking for comes make sure you swing at it; four, if what you are looking for does not come make sure you do not swing at it even if it is a strike; five, have patience and stick with your plan; and six, never play this game when you have two strikes on you. When you get two strikes on you your thinking must change. You should get more defensive and not just swing from the heels with a "2-0 attitude". You no longer have the luxury to look for a certain pitch or location, you no longer have the luxury to let change ups go, and you no longer have the luxury to just swing at a fat fast pitch strike over the plate. Instead, you should expand your strike zone, swing at **any** pitch that is close to that expanded strike zone, and avoid striking out.

To avoid getting into situations with two strike counts, make it a point to **hit the ball early in the count**. If you do, you will avoid letting the pitcher get a strong enough advantage on you to start throwing some of her tougher pitches. The tougher pitches are those with movement like rise and drop balls intended to end up out of the strike zone, change ups and other off speed pitches intended to fool you, and any pitch intentionally thrown outside of the strike zone to get you to chase it. Pitchers, especially young ones, usually wait until they are well ahead in the count or have two strikes on you before they throw these pitches, so do not hang around and wait for them to come. Hit the ball early in the count before they do.

When you do fall behind in the count or get two strikes on you maintain your discipline and continue to battle. Always keep your composure and maintain emotional stability. It's okay to shorten your swing, widen your stance, or stand a little closer to the plate with two strikes if that will help you put the ball in play and not strike out. With two strikes do not fall apart, swing at anything, and turn into an easy out. Never panic. Instead, expand your strike zone but maintain some discipline. Swing if the pitch is close to being a strike and swing at any pitch that is near this particular umpire's zone if it happens to be different than the actual strike zone. Additionally, this is the most important time to battle the pitcher. Even though you are stuck with two strikes you can still make yourself a tough out by making her throw a lot of pitches. Do whatever you can to foul off her good ones and stay alive. If she throws the change up or some other off speed pitch hang in there and fight it off. When she throws balls let them go and win the battle with an eight or ten pitch walk. Make her sweat and not want to face you again even if you end up striking out. Each battle with a pitcher is as much a battle of will as it is a physical battle. Win it.

That is the batter's plan and it boils down to this. Anticipate and expect fat fast pitches. Hit early in the count by being aggressive and swinging at the first good pitch you see, especially the first pitch. Do not take strikes and fall behind in the count. At the same time be disciplined and do not swing at pitches out of the strike zone or pitches you are not looking for. When you are

ahead, be selective, but not too selective, and drive pitches with a "2-0 attitude". When you are ahead it's okay to guess on occasion, but follow the rules of guessing. When you have two strikes on you expand your strike zone and swing at any close strike, but do not panic and lose all of your discipline. Avoid two strikes as much as possible by hitting early in the count. No matter what happens, stay composed, never give up, and take pride in making yourself a tough out. If you follow this plan and get your share of good pitches to hit but are missing them, fouling them, or hitting them weakly, do not get discouraged. Instead, work on your swing mechanics and timing.

Pitch selection discipline, hitting discipline, and knowledge of the strike zone are all necessary and critical skills, which when mastered, will greatly improve your chances for success as a hitter. These skills coupled with an aggressive hitting attitude will allow you to consistently take the advantage from the pitcher in your on going pitcher/batter battles and enable you to fully execute the hitting plan explained in this book. The execution of this "aggressive discipline" will maximize your potential as a hitter and reward you with consistent offensive production.

Like all skills, these skills must be learned, improved, and perfected with the proper drills, instruction, repetition, and correction. For a guide on how to learn, improve and perfect these and other skills, read my ebook, ["What, More Perfect Practice?"](#)

GUESSING GAME

August, 2003

Salem, OR

ASA 18U Gold National Championship, Semi-Final Game

Orange County Batbusters vs Worth Firecrackers

It is a beautiful sunny afternoon and the Batbusters have to win this game to get to the Gold finals for the second consecutive year. Last year at the finals in Oklahoma City they beat Gordon's Panthers by a score of 2-0 to win the Gold championship. I am just a spectator today. It is late in the game of a 0-0 tie. Lisa Dodd is pitching for the Batbusters but this story is about hitting. The pitcher for the Firecrackers is not overpowering but so far has been very effective by getting ahead of the hitters, consistently spotting both corners, and throwing a lot of change up strikes. I notice that she is throwing the change up a lot on the first pitch and a lot when she's behind in the count. It is a good strategy. It is also a very good change up and is consistently freezing or fooling the Batbuster batters. The Batbusters have had few base runners and no scoring opportunities until now. In this inning after two outs the Batbusters have put runners on first and second bringing Lisa Dodd to the plate. Lisa bats third and has hit well in the tournament, but is hitless in this game. There is a conference at the mound so Lisa talks to her third base coach. I can sense a build up of nervous tension in the air by the fans of both teams. This is a big moment in the game. Both runners for the Batbusters are extremely fast so any kind



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of a hit should score a run. Lisa walks to the plate and digs in. I'm thinking to myself, here comes a first pitch change up. The pitcher winds up, delivers the pitch, and sure enough it's a change up. Lisa almost goes for it but lets it go and the pitch is outside for ball one. I notice that Lisa is really late to load and really stays back on the pitch, almost as if she is looking for a change up, but I don't know that for sure. Lisa steps out, takes a deep breath, and then steps in the box again. The pitcher stares her down and takes a long time to get her sign. I'm now thinking to myself here comes another change up because this girl has thrown two in a row several times earlier in this game. I don't know if Lisa is thinking the same thing, but I know Lisa well enough to know she has some type of plan. The pitcher winds up and delivers, but it's not a change up. It's a curve ball outside. Lisa lets it go for ball two, but again she appears to be late with her approach to the pitch. The Batbuster fans start to get excited now because they know Lisa is in the driver's seat with a 2-0 count. Lisa and I have talked countless times about the advantage of hitting with a 2-0 count and Lisa certainly knows what to expect from it and has developed her own "2-0 attitude" to swing with authority if the pitch is a strike. I'm hoping that because there's a good hitter up next the Firecrackers will challenge Lisa with a fast pitch over the plate rather than take a chance on walking her. That's what Lisa should be looking for. Lisa gets ready again and I see the focus, determination, and desire in her body language. I've seen this body language many times before in pressure situations and she seems to thrive when the game is on the line. I know the signs and am glad to see that Lisa has the hit away sign. As the pitcher winds up and delivers the pitch I can see the catcher keep her glove over the plate. This is a good thing to me and probably means a fat pitch is coming. The pitch is thrown and it is a fat pitch. It looks like a fastball right down the middle. It's the exact pitch that Lisa should have been expecting, anticipating, and swinging at to win the game, but she didn't. She let it go. Unbelievable. After years of training to hit it, she let it go. The Firecracker fans cheer. At first I'm surprised, but then I realize that Lisa really is sitting on that change up because she just doesn't let pitches like that go very often. The count is now two balls and one strike. At 2-1 the count is still in her favor and there is a good chance that she will see the same pitch again. Or maybe not, because this pitcher has been throwing a lot of change ups when she's behind. I guess we'll have to wait and see. As Lisa again takes her place in the batter's box there is an unusual quietness to the crowd. Everyone is on the edge of their seat waiting to see what is going to happen. This is a big pitch in this game. The pitcher winds up, delivers the pitch, and it's a beautiful change up, but Lisa is not fooled. Her weight is back and as the pitch arrives at home plate she unleashes her hardest swing on it and drives it on a line to the left center field fence. Before they can get the ball in two runs score and the Batbusters now lead the game 2-0. Lisa has delivered. The Batbusters go on to win the game 2-0. After the game I ask Lisa about that at bat, and specifically why she didn't swing at the 2-0 pitch. She says, "Dad, I was waiting for a change up the whole time. She threw everybody at least one change up every at bat so I was trying to stay back and wait for one to hit until I got two strikes on me. I didn't swing at the 2-0 pitch because you say to only swing at what I'm looking for and not at anything else when I'm guessing for a certain pitch." Sweet music to my ears.

CHAPTER 6: **DOS, DON'TS, AND GOALS FOR PITCHERS**

“Insanity is doing the same thing you've always done and expecting different results.”

Roger Milliken

Do

1. Have reasonable goals and expectations
2. Recognize and improve your weaknesses.
3. Make adjustments when required.
4. Work hard for your success.
5. Throw first pitch strikes.
6. Throw change ups on the first pitch.
7. Pitch mostly outside.
8. Miss away from the center of the plate, not toward it.
9. Stay ahead in the count.
10. Pitch to the edges of the plate when you are ahead.
11. Pitch off the plate when you are way ahead.
12. Pitch to the corners when you are behind.
13. Throw change ups when you are behind.
14. If you miss with a change up throw another one.
15. Throw inside as a setup pitch mostly, not an out pitch.
16. Recognize the umpire's strike zone and utilize it.
17. Know who is on deck and when first base is open.
18. Remember batter weaknesses.
19. Compete.

Don't

1. Throw pitches down the middle of the plate.
2. Throw inside on a regular basis.
3. Throw an inside pitch with more than half the ball over the plate.
4. Throw erratic pitches when you are way ahead.
5. Aim change ups to the corners.
6. Walk batters unintentionally.
7. Hit batters.
8. Give in.

Goals

1. Maintain emotional stability.
2. Throw first pitch strikes on at least the fat corner 7 times out of every 10.
3. Stay ahead in the count seventy percent of the time.
4. Throw outside seventy-five percent of the time with non off speed pitches.
5. When you are way ahead throw the ball 6 to 8 inches off the plate 7 times out of every 10.
6. When you fall behind in the count throw strikes on at least the fat corner 7 times out of every 10.
7. When you fall behind in the count throw change up strikes 7 times out of every 10.
8. Walk less than one batter per seven innings.
9. Allow no hard hit balls when you are way ahead in the count.
10. Out think every batter.
11. Out compete every batter.
12. Become a student of the game.

SCOUTING REPORT

August, 1999

Fresno, CA

ASA Class A 12U National Championship, Winner's Bracket Game

San Diego Thunder vs So Cal Crunch

Going into this tournament San Diego Thunder, USA Athletics, and So Cal Crunch are the three favored teams to win Nationals. Coincidentally, all three teams fall in the same half of the bracket and have to battle it out early. After we defeat the Athletics we have little time to rest because our very next game is against Crunch. We know the Crunch team very well because we've played them in the Fresno Force Tournament, twice in the State Tournament, and twice in round robins. In this game we take an early lead, Crunch comes back to tie it in the sixth, then we go ahead again in the top of the seventh and lead by the score of 3-2. We are now the bottom of the seventh inning. Jamee Avii is our pitcher and her weapons are the will



to win, and fastballs and change ups thrown with pinpoint accuracy. It seems like the last inning is never easy in big games and that is again the case in this game. Crunch has loaded the bases with only one out and they have their two, three, and four hitters coming up. I call time out to talk to my team. Jamee is cool and calm like always and attentive to what I have to say. I tell the infield to play in and remind everyone that the bases are loaded and to get a force out somewhere if there is no play on the lead runner. I remind Jamee and the team of the scouting report on the batters coming up and tell them we can get out of this jam. Their response is positive and they all encourage Jamee. Crunch's first batter is left handed and fast, but not a slapper. She's weak outside, vulnerable to change ups, and will chase the high pitch. After her comes their best hitter. She is extremely aggressive and swings at just about everything. Unfortunately for us, she can hit just about everything. I know from the past that we do not have to throw her a strike to get her out. With the bases loaded, I hope I'm right. The lefty steps in and we throw an outside corner fastball at the knees for a called strike. Perfect pitch. We throw another one a little bit more outside but she holds up just in time and the umpire calls it a ball. After those two fastballs I call for the change up and she's fooled badly, barely fouling it with a defensive swing. At this point I firmly believe we can get her with another outside fastball but I want to set that up first with a high fastball which I know from the past that she might chase. I have to trust Jamee to not make a mistake and throw the pitch flat so I yell out to her "set up". Jamee knows what this means. I call the pitch up and in just in case it does go flat, so at least it won't be down the middle. With the bases loaded we can't risk throwing it very far in though because we don't want to hit her. Jamee throws the pitch just right, up and in. The batter lays off but she has to bend and duck a little out of the way. The pitch is a ball and she didn't chase it, but I think it served its purpose which is to keep her mind off of outside. The count is now two and two and she's all set up for that outside fastball just off the plate. The Thunder and Crunch fans are screaming encouragement to their respective teams but Jamee appears completely composed. Jamee rarely gets rattled. She winds

up, throws the outside fastball, and hits the target perfectly. All the batter can do is wave weakly at the pitch with a swing and a miss. Two outs. Great pitching by Jamee so far, but her work's not complete. The infield moves back and we prepare for their best hitter. Because I know this girl is such a free swinger I would normally throw her a first pitch fastball three ball widths off the plate outside, but with the bases loaded I want to make sure she swings so I call it just two ball widths wide, about eight inches. As expected, she swings mightily at it and fouls it back. With the crowd roaring she appears pretty psyched up so I figure she's going to keep swinging. With that thought in mind I call another outside fastball this time three ball widths outside and she swings again, this time cueing the ball weakly off the very end of the bat just foul down the first base line. She barely reached that pitch, just a little more outside and we'll get her. I ask the umpire to make sure she's not getting too close to the plate to keep her back as far as possible. He draws a new inside line to the batter's box. With her now on that new line and with the count 0-2, we have to throw her something she can't reach. Believe it or not, on the next pitch I call for a pitch out but signal the catcher to stay low at the knees with her target. That's how far outside I want to throw it. With the crowd screaming Jamee winds up and throws the pitch clear over the middle of the left handed batter's box, right where we want it. The batter swings from the heels and misses, strike three. Thunder wins. We had played this team often and I had scouted them well but all the good scouting reports in the world are worthless if the pitcher can't throw the pitch where it's called for. We got out of this jam and won this game because Jamee could. Command of your pitch is everything.

CHAPTER 7: **DOS, DON'TS, AND GOALS FOR BATTERS**

“Baseball is ninety percent mental. The other half is physical.”

Yogi Berra

Do

1. Have reasonable goals and expectations.
2. Recognize and improve your weaknesses.
3. Make adjustments when required.
4. Work hard for your success.
5. Value “quality at bats”.
6. Trust yourself.
7. Know the strike zone.
8. Develop and improve both types of hitting discipline.
9. Be aggressive.
10. Expect and anticipate a fat fast pitch to hit every pitch.
11. Swing at the first **GOOD** strike.
12. Hit early in the count.
13. Know the count and how it relates to the next pitch.
14. Develop your own “2-0 attitude”.
15. Swing hard when you are ahead in the count.
16. At times, look for a certain pitch or location.
17. Expand the strike zone with two strikes.
18. Swing at the umpire’s strike zone with two strikes.
19. Notice and remember pitcher’s patterns and trends.
20. Compete with the pitcher and battle at every at bat.

Don't

1. Take fat strikes.
2. Swing at pitches out of the strike zone.
3. Treat the first pitch in any special way.
4. Swing at change ups or off speed pitches unless you are looking for them or you have two strikes on you.
5. Panic with two strikes.
6. Give up or give in.

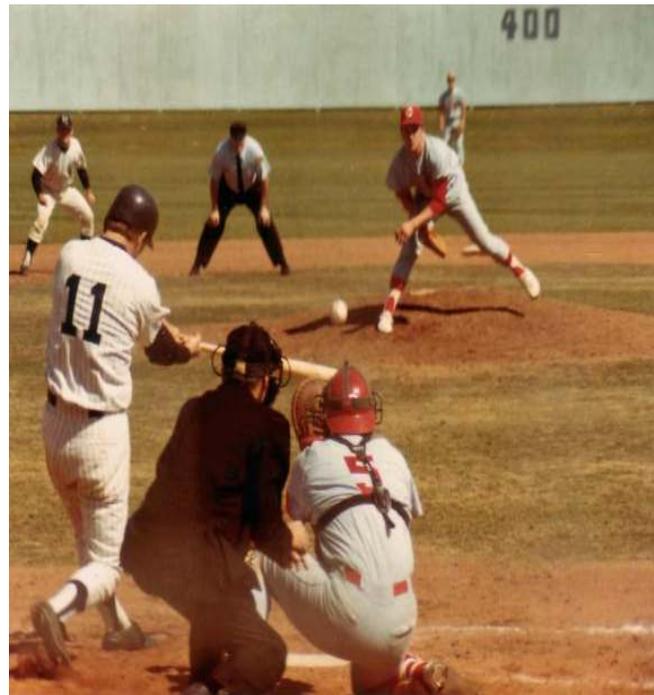
Goals

1. Maintain emotional stability.
2. “Quality at bat” every time up.
3. A hit **OR** a walk a game.
4. More walks than strike outs overall.
5. Be a tough out.
6. Out think every pitcher.
7. Out compete every pitcher.
8. Become a student of the game.

AGGRESSIVE HITTING

Regular Season Game
UC Irvine vs Chapman College

It is late in the season and this is an important game for seeding purposes into the NCAA regional playoffs. I'm the pitcher for UC Irvine. Pitching for Chapman College is former San Diego Padre Cy Young award winner, Randy Jones. This game is a pitcher's duel with no score going into the bottom of the eighth inning. Everything Jones throws is low. He has been getting us out with low and outside fastballs and sharp low and inside sliders. After watching him for the past seven innings I do notice a trend now. Almost every first pitch is a fastball out and it seems like he mostly throws the slider for his out pitch with two strikes. When he falls behind he relies on the same pitch as most of his first pitches, a fastball outside. We've been letting first pitches go, getting behind in the count, and chasing the slider with two strikes, myself included in my last at bat. Mike Sheline is our catcher and he leads off the eighth inning. I bat next. Since I'm a pretty good hitter and nobody is warming up for us in the bullpen I know I will be batting this inning and I'm waiting for my turn in the on deck circle. The first pitch to Sheline is the same thing I noticed, a fastball outside at the knees for a called strike. I tell myself that is the pitch I'm going to look for when I get up. Sheline falls behind in the count 1-2 and then sure enough the slider comes and jams him inside but he gets enough of the bat on it to loft it over third base down the left field line for a bloop double. This brings me to the plate in what now appears to be a sacrifice bunting situation. When I look down at the third base coach for a sign, I'm very surprised to get the hit away sign rather than the bunt sign. Since it is a potential bunting situation to Chapman, I'm not sure if Jones' strategy of throwing the first pitch low and outside will be the same as it's



been, but I'm sticking with my plan to look for an outside fastball on the first pitch. I'm going to swing at it even if it's a little low because that's where most of them have been. I am totally prepared and ready for it and not surprised when the first pitch comes to me as a fastball out over the plate and low. I talk a good rip and line the pitch high off the center field wall for a stand up triple. Two batters later I come in to score to give us a 2-0 lead and we go on to win the game 2-0. Being aggressive, hitting the first good pitch, hitting early in the count, noticing trends and tendencies, and having a plan of attack are all parts of an active approach by the batter to be able to get the advantage from the pitcher. Today this approach worked against a future Hall of Famer.

APPENDIX 1: LISA DODD MINI BIOGRAPHY

“Winning isn’t everything, but wanting to win is.”

Vince Lombardi

Lisa threw only fast balls and change ups until her sophomore year in high school. Rather than spend her time working on multiple movement pitches she worked on command of her fast ball and change up and she near perfected them both. Once in a pitching workout throwing full speed at forty feet she hit an eight inch target forty-one times in a row with her fastball. We made up a lot of games and contests together as motivation to develop her accuracy and she could hit pitch locations that gradually dwindled down to one ball width. Lisa threw a fastball because that pitch is the simplest to command and the least stressful on the arm, but it is not necessary that you throw a fastball. You can choose any pitch or pitches you want to throw, it is your ability to command them that is the important thing. Lisa’s command was so good that she walked less than ONE BATTER EVERY TWO GAMES in her career. From age eight to fourteen she played on my teams and by fourteen she had a pretty good understanding of both the pitching and hitting plans in this book and began to execute them well. At fourteen she joined So Cal Squeeze, a 16U team in Orange County, and pitched them to a top ten finish at ASA Class A Nationals while throwing only fastballs and change ups and executing the plans herself since I could not be there. She was quickly recruited by the 18U Gold OC Batbusters and as a freshman had two hits off Cat Osterman in the ASA Gold championship game. This entire time Lisa continued to work out with me and my teams four times a week and continued to practice my training program including the mental plans in this book. I continued to coach her and use these strategies in high school where she made varsity as a freshman at Mira Mesa, led her team in hitting, set the CIF record for hits in a season with fifty-three, allowed only two earned runs all season, and ended the season with a streak of thirty-six consecutive scoreless innings pitched. Her sophomore year she extended that streak to 84 2/3 innings, a new CIF section record. As a junior she beat her own section season hit record by collecting fifty-nine, and as a senior beat that with sixty-three. Sophomore and junior years she pitched shutouts in CIF semi-championship and championship games with the same pitches and the same pitching strategies. It was at this time in her career that she made that sequence of six consecutive perfect pitches in that 2001 CIF semi-final game against Ramona that I mentioned at the end of chapter two. As a junior Lisa learned to throw a drop. She practiced the drop an entire year before she commanded it well enough to call it a weapon, being very careful not to lose the command she had of her fastball and change up. By her senior year Lisa was the master of all three pitches and with them became a CIF champion for a third consecutive time at University City High School pitching a shutout in the



championship and hitting the game winning home run. She also won two ASA Class A 18U Gold National Championships with the Batbusters during this time period. Overall Lisa pitched shutouts in seven of the eight championship games those two years and allowed only one total run in the other game. At the end of her senior year she was selected to the USA Junior National Team. She earned a hitting award at the Hermisillo, Mexico qualifier where the USA team went undefeated and qualified for the International Softball Federation Junior Women's World Championship Tournament in Nanjing, China. In Nanjing, Lisa pitched a shutout in the semi-final game against Australia, knocked in the first two runs of that game with a double and batted .375 overall for the tournament in which the United States finished second to Japan.

QUALITY AT BAT

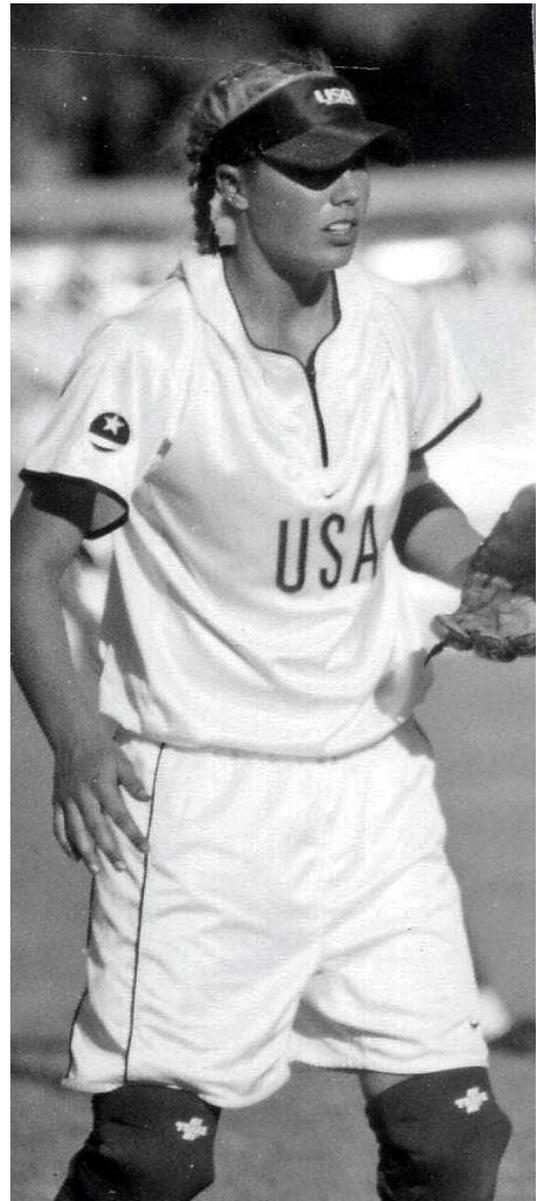
October, 2003

Nanjing, China

ISF Junior Women's World Championship Tournament, Championship Game

USA vs Japan

After winning their pool that included teams from Argentina, Canada, Chinese Taipei, Netherlands, Russia, and Thailand, USA lost to Japan yesterday in the second round of the playoffs by a score of 2-1. Japan is the defending Junior World Champion from 1999, the last time this event was held. To get to the championship game USA will now have to defeat the winner of Australia and China who played last night. In that game Australia broke open a scoreless dual in the sixth inning to score four runs and defeat the home town team from China by a score of 4-0. That result now sets the stage for the bronze medal game scheduled for today, Monday, in which the United States will play Australia. The winner will then play Japan for the World Championship later in the day. The VII ISF Junior Women's World Championship is the first event ever played in the new softball stadium on the campus of Nanjing University of Technology, and marks the first time that a softball world championship takes place in China. I arrive at the new stadium very early this morning with a few of the other USA parents excited with anticipation about the upcoming game(s). The game against Australia is scheduled for ten AM and we get to the stadium about eight. From inside the stadium I can see the warm up areas for other teams and to my surprise, at about nine AM I see the Japanese team arrive and begin their extensive warm up routines and rituals. Their game is not scheduled to start until two PM, roughly five hours from now. Interestingly, they will warm up the entire time from nine until two by incorporating rest times and food breaks into their routines. At ten AM our game begins and Lisa Dodd is



the pitcher for USA. She is sharp like always in big games and shuts out the Australians on two hits. The U.S. gets all the runs they would need in the top of the third inning when they score four times. The scoring begins when Lisa Dodd hits a two out double to score Norrelle Dickson and Emily Zaplatosch. Dodd scores on the next at bat when Andrea Duran crushes a home run to left field. The final score ends up United States 7, Australia 0. After a short break the stadium begins to fill in anticipation of the championship game between the United States and defending champion Japan. Japan opens the scoring with a run in the top of the second only to see the U.S. come right back with two of their own in the bottom half of the inning. Japan gets a run in the top of the fifth to tie the game at two. The score stays this way as the game goes to extra innings under the international tie breaker rule. In the top of the eighth inning Japan scores a run when Kumi Suzuki scores on Yuri Masuyama's single and they take a 3-2 lead. The stadium is nearly full and the crowd of many nations is buzzing with excitement and anticipation to see what is going to happen as USA gets ready to bat in the bottom of the eighth. Caitlin Benyi of UCLA fame is placed on second base and USA fans are hopeful with the team's fourth, fifth, and sixth place hitters coming up with a chance to tie or win the game. First to bat is Emily Zaplatosch, also from UCLA, and the big question now is, do you bunt the runner over with your number four hitter? According to USA coaches the answer is yes, as Emily lays down a successful sacrifice bunt on the first pitch to move Benyi to third. This brings Lisa Dodd to the plate with the tying run at third base and one out. Lisa is always clutch in situations like this as I mentioned earlier in the story at the end of chapter five. The Japanese pitchers have shown good command of their pitches and good off speed pitches in this game. I notice that they like to pitch inside a lot on the first pitch and that is where they threw it to Lisa in her last at bat and she laced a rocket ground ball down the third base line for a double. Lisa had good at bats earlier in this game as well, so I'm thinking they are going to be careful with her but they can't afford to be too careful because I know they don't want to walk her and put the winning run on base. As Lisa steps toward the plate there is tension in the air and a hum generates from the crowd. American fans are shouting encouragement to Lisa while the Japanese fans are cheering for their pitcher in Japanese. Lisa is calm and cool as she energetically goes through her warm up routine and takes a few practice swings. I can read her like a book, and her body language tells me she's ready. The adrenaline is pumping and although I feel a little nervous for her, there's nobody I'd rather have up in this situation than her. Moe Yamazaki is the Japanese pitcher's name and she has been pitching since the third inning. As she begins her deliberate motion and comes set to deliver the first pitch to Lisa, a quiet hush falls over the huge crowd at Nanjing University stadium and all eyes are focused on the game's next pitch. This is an interesting situation to me because they like to throw inside but Lisa hit inside hard her last time up. They are aggressive and like to throw first pitch strikes, but Lisa is aggressive too, and hit the first pitch hard last time up. They throw a lot of change up strikes, but not on the first pitch and they haven't thrown one to Lisa so far. With all these things to consider and the pitcher in the set position ready to deliver, I wonder what Lisa's plan is going to be? Lisa has finished her preliminary swings, is set in the box, and patiently and rhythmically waiting for Moe's first pitch. Moe rocks back, strides, and delivers the pitch with all her effort. Lisa swings, and "crack", the ball is hit like a shot and is flying deep into left field. As the ball is in the air time seems to stand still as I hear a loud roar begin to erupt from the American fans. Quickly though it is silenced, and for one split second the stadium is quiet. The left fielder has caught the ball. At first everybody thinks that shot is a home run or at least a game tying hit, but the left fielder is playing very deep, too deep actually, but in this case just deep enough if you are rooting for Japan, and she catches the ball. She is positioned perfectly for this hit and the ball goes right to her. The ball is a line shot and hit like a bullet, it is not a high fly ball. It is hit so hard and gets to the left fielder so quickly that by the time Benyi gets back to the bag at third base to tag up it is too late. She can not score. The next batter pops up and the game is over. USA loses the game by one run

and has to settle for the silver medal while Japan wins the Junior Women's World Championship gold medal for a second consecutive time. Later on I ask Lisa what she was looking for on that pitch and she said a strike. "It didn't matter to me if the pitch was in or out as long as it was over the plate. I wanted to be aggressive and hit early in the count so she didn't get ahead of me." Lisa's thinking was sound and her execution was perfect. To me, Lisa came through again with the game on the line because all a batter can do is hit it hard. If it goes right to someone and they catch it, this is just bad luck and luck cannot be controlled. On this particular day, very bad luck for Lisa Dodd and team USA, but a very good quality at bat for Lisa nonetheless.

APPENDIX 2: LISA DODD STATISTICS

“Refuse to lose.”

Jennifer Reynolds

Using every edge she received from her training, Lisa also had the following accomplishments:

- She allowed only one earned run for every nine games of pitching in high school, that is a four year high school career ERA of 0.12, second best ever in San Diego Section history.
- She had 47 career shutouts, third best in history, along with 783 strikeouts, and she walked less than one batter a game in over 500 innings of pitching.
- She pitched a total of 11 CIF and 18U Gold championship games from 2000 to 2003, won them all, and allowed only one total run in 77 innings with 10 shutouts.
- As a hitter she had a high school career batting average of .502 and had more base hits than anyone else in San Diego Section history with 225.
- In college Lisa was a four year starter as both a pitcher and hitter at UCLA, was an All-American and team MVP, and she ranks eighth all time on the UCLA career home run list with 36.
- She had a career college pitching record of 41-11, and a career college ERA of 1.12.
- She hit home runs in CIF, 18U Gold, and NCAA championship games and holds the California state high school record for home runs in a season with 17.
- Lisa was the Gatorade State and National High School Softball Player of the Year in 2003, a two-time ASA 18U Gold National Champion, a three-time High School CIF Champion, a three-time CIF Player of the Year, an NCAA Champion, a European champion, and a two-year member of the USA National team.
- With a career this brilliant Lisa would most certainly have been a number one pick in the professional draft had she been a boy. Lisa achieved these results without superior talent or athletic ability. She did it by training hard to get good at many things, none more important than the mental plans and strategies described in *What's the Count?*



FIRST BASE IS OPEN

April, 2001
San Diego, CA
CIF-SDS Eastern League Game
Mira Mesa vs Serra

It is getting late in the season and there is a lot at stake in this game. We played this team earlier in the season and lost 1-0 in extra innings so we have to win this game in order to win the league title. They have a pretty good pitcher who shut us down last time and we have a pretty good pitcher too, named Lisa Dodd. Lisa pitched well in the first meeting only to lose at the end on an unearned run. In this game both pitchers are sharp, and dominating, and the game is still scoreless going into the top of the seventeenth inning. We had a couple of chances to score earlier in the game but left the bases loaded both times. They have had no



threats to score and very few base runners. In the top of the seventeenth inning we get a walk, an error, and a hit with two outs and have the bases loaded once again. This time our batter comes through with a ground ball single to left field and we score a run, but that is all we get as the next batter makes the third out. We head to the bottom of the seventeenth inning leading 1-0. Lisa has pitched all sixteen innings so far striking out twenty-two batters and walking none. The defense has played well, but not in the seventeenth inning. The first two batters hit weak ground balls but both get on by infield errors. I'm thinking to myself, here comes another tough last inning. After a time out to settle things down we prepare for the sacrifice bunt, and they do bunt moving the runners to second and third. Lisa jumps ahead in the count to the next batter, competes hard, and strikes her out. We've now got two outs with the tying run at third and the winning run at second base. There are not many people left watching this game since it has gone on for so long but those who are still here are starting to get excited. Lisa and I both know the batter coming up and although she has not produced much today we realize that she is a good hitter and a dangerous one. I also realize that first base is open and the batter on deck is not as strong of a hitter as the one coming up. Accordingly, I secretly signal to Lisa and the catcher that we are going to pitch around this girl and take our chances with the next batter. Lisa knows what this means and what to do because she has prepared for situations like this during her pitching practice routines. Like a lot of our strategies, we don't have to use this one very often but we practice it every week for times like this so we won't make any mistakes. We will use this strategy now because by walking this girl we are not only getting past a tough batter, but we are setting up a force situation on the bases to help out our defense. Our plan is executing as the count gets to 2-0. I call the next pitch way outside and Lisa hits the spot, but for some reason the batter swings from the heels and misses it. The catcher looks at me in disbelief. I call another pitch way outside still planning to walk her but she swings wildly again most likely filled with the emotion of the few, but boisterous home team fans who still remain. I think to myself, "back even in the count, let's not walk her now, instead, let's take advantage of her emotion. Let's throw her a change up." I quickly glance at my scouting report to confirm my memory that this girl has trouble with change ups anyway. My memory is correct. I get the catcher's attention, and Lisa's, and let them know that we're no longer walking this girl, we are going after her. They both understand and nod their heads in approval. This change in strategy has taken some time to organize so the umpire is now telling me to hurry up, which I do. I call for a change up and Lisa throws a beauty. The batter swings so hard and so early that she stumbles out of the box and almost falls down. Strike three. Game over. You just never know.

CONCLUSION

"When you have completed 95 percent of your journey, you are only halfway there."

Japanese Proverb, Great-Quotes.com

Thank you for reading my book. It is my sincere wish that the information provided will benefit you as much as it did Sara and Lisa Dodd, and others.

It is important to realize that the possession of certain softball skills will help you to fully and consistently execute and utilize the mental plans and strategies described in *What's the Count?*. Work hard to master these skills and the execution of the plans will become easier to accomplish. An aggressive hitting approach, pitch selection discipline, and hitting discipline are required skills for batters, while pitchers need a strong command of every pitch they throw and a reliable change up.



There is no better road to softball success than the road of hard work. Enjoy the journey.

Lisa, Sara, and Tom Dodd