Practical ball playing

Irwin Arthur A
PREFACE.

To develop any physical accomplishment through the medium of a printed treatise, though the novice possesses the requisite mental application and the physical ability, is, even when successful, a work of slow growth. Example is always more impressive than precept, its lessons more lasting.

The ball player who essays to become a good batsman will be influenced to a greater extent by the teacher who himself does what he wants the player to do than by one who simply tells him what he should do.

It is not claimed that a perusal of these few hints on scientific batting and fielding will make a successful player of the reader, but it is claimed, and confidently claimed, too, that the reader who carefully follows out the instructions herewith given will make more of his own natural ability, both for his own individual record and that of his club. A. A. I.

PHILADELPHIA, February, 1895.
PRACTICAL BALL PLAYING.

POPULARITY OF BATTING.

To the great majority of the followers and lovers of the national game batting is its most enjoyable feature. It furnishes the keynote to every game, whether the score be large or small. No matter how skilful the fielders may be, they will have no opportunity to display the stuff of which they are made unless the side at bat shall "hit the ball." Batting makes the spectacular part of the game, and without it there would be no game at all.

It was in obedience to the public demand, as voiced by the press throughout the country, that the Rules Committee of the National League and American Association of Professional Base Ball Clubs two years ago resolved to curtail the power of the pitcher, and increased the distance from the home plate to the box.

The wisdom of this move was soon made apparent. Though the time consumed by the ball in traversing the additional space was almost infinitesimal, it afforded the batsman an opportunity of which he was not slow to avail himself. It gave him just that much more time in which to "gauge" the ball, and as a consequence, base hits not only multiplied with gratifying steadiness, but the number of strike outs—that bane to the spectators' enjoyment, particularly when the home team is at bat—were materially reduced. More action was injected into the game, and the contests were involved in more uncertainty.
INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM BATTING.

There are two kinds of batting, individual and team, and of the two the latter is more important. It has been only during the past four or five years that team batting, which is far and away the most scientific part of base ball as it is played to-day, has received the attention its great importance demands, although it was practised as far back as '79 and '80 by Chicago; in '82, '83 and '84 by Providence; in '86 and '87 by Philadelphia; in '88 and '89 by New York, and since then by Boston, Baltimore and Philadelphia.

The success of the Baltimore club in the championship race last season was due entirely to the great degree of perfection attained in team batting by its players, and the teams that shall win the pennants in the future will be those who, everything else being nearly equal, shall develop to the greatest extent the art of "hitting and running together." In the judgment of many critics the Baltimore club of last season was outclassed individually by at least four others, but yet it won the pennant, and simply because it played a team-batting game from the beginning of the season until its end.

ESSENTIALS OF A GOOD BATSMAN.

But before team batting can be attained the individual batsman must be trained up to his part of the work. The prime requisites of a good batsman are (1) a good, clear, quick eye with which to "time" or gauge the ball, and (2) the strength of arm and body to give it impetus.

In no department of the game does form count for so much as in batting, and a batsman's form reveals at once his strength or his weakness. The batsman who takes up his position as shown in Fig. 1, facing the pitcher, his feet well together, and his bat gracefully balanced on his shoulder, is prepared for any ball that may come across the plate, and is more than likely to compel the pitcher to resort to all his cunning in order to dispose of him. On the contrary, the batsman who after reaching the plate nervously saws the air with his bat, is a comparatively easy "mark" for a patient pitcher who knows his business.

Having the physical requisites, the young player who aspires to become a great hitter should exercise the greatest care in selecting his bat. It should be as heavy as the player can conveniently handle, and made of second-growth ash, such as gotten out by A. G. Spalding & Bros. The ball will "shoot off" a heavy bat faster and harder than a light one, and by reason of its weight will tend to prevent the young player from sawing the air as above referred to.
Fig. 1.—Correct position at bat.
AS TO POSITION.

In taking his place at the plate the batsman should face the pitcher as shown in Fig. 1, his side on a line with second base, feet drawn well together, and the bat so nicely balanced on his shoulder as to make its weight imperceptible. There should be no "false" or lost motion, and there should be nothing to distract his attention from the pitcher.

At the first movement of the pitcher's hand the batsman should take a step forward, throwing the right shoulder back, but still keeping the bat in its original position, as shown in Fig. 2.

Fig. 3 shows the correct position of the batsman in the act of hitting the ball. The weight of the body, in addition to the strength of the arms, is brought into play, and the bat is held at right angles with the body, so that no matter what part of the bat the ball may hit it is bound to go out. Some idea of the advantage that the batsman who "throws his weight" into his bat while in the act of hitting has over the batsman who "pulls back"—that is, comes back on his rear foot, depending upon his arms entirely for his propelling power—is shown by the fact that "Big Sam" Thompson, of the Philadelphia club, is the only one of the great hitters of the League who is guilty of the latter practice.

BUNTING.

There is probably no one point of play that has aroused so much adverse criticism or has been so warmly defended as bunting. Its detractors condemn the play as being "babyfied," and do not hesitate to call to the luckless batsman, who may be acting under orders, to "hit it out." As a matter of fact, however, "bunting" has gradually developed into the very science of batting, and the clubs that have acquired the greatest proficiency in the art of "dumping them down" in front of the plate, or "pushing them" with tantalizing slowness toward first or third have always been nearer the front in the race for the pennant than those who have depended solely upon their ability to knock out singles, doubles and triples.

To bunt successfully the batsman must have a good eye, good nerve and good judgment. There is a knack in bunting which can only be acquired by practice, but when once acquired, like swimming, it is not soon forgotten.

In Fig. 4 the batsman is shown in position while attempting to bunt toward first. The bat is slanted back toward the catcher, and the batsman makes no attempt to hit the ball. He simply endeavors to catch or hold it, the force of the contact
FIG. 2.—AT FIRST MOVE OF THE PITCHER'S ARM.
with the bat generally carrying the ball half way toward first. To bunt toward third the same tactics are used, except that the slant of the bat is more toward the pitcher, as shown in Fig. 5.

**TEAM BATTING.**

There is probably no expression in the whole range of base ball literature that has been used more frequently than "teamwork," and none that has been so often misapplied. So far as fielding goes there is little or no chance for teamwork, for the reason that whatever the fielders will do is determined by the course of the ball. Of course, with a runner on first, the second baseman knows that he should cover second if a ball is driven to the short stop, and vice versa, and the infielders all know that they should, when possible, cut off the runner nearest home. But in almost every other instance their actions are governed by the exigencies of the occasion.

At the bat, however, there is every opportunity for teamwork, for the reason that the batsman and the base-runner or base-runners can work in unison to accomplish some desired plan already agreed upon.

In order to make teamwork productive there must be a thorough understanding between all the players. The base-runners must know what the batsman is going to try to do; the
Fig. 3.—IN THE ACT OF HITTING AT THE BALL.
batsman, in order to carry out his part of the programme, must
know what the base-runners are to attempt. An understanding
once arrived at, everything will depend upon the willingness
and the ability of the players—and the willingness is not infre-
quently harder to develop than the ability.

Team-play involves personal sacrifice, and the player who
believes that his commercial value is graded according to his
proximity to the .400 mark will never shine in that department
of play unless compelled to by his superiors. Team-work at
the bat produces runs, and runs win games. Very few batsmen
make more than one hit out of three times at bat, and yet there
is hardly a batsman in the country who could not by intelli-
gent effort and direction succeed in advancing a runner a base
at least four times out of five.

With a runner on first the central idea of the batsman should
be to "protect the runner," no matter what may happen to
himself. The runner is nearer the home plate than the bats-
man, and must be protected.

To begin with, there should be a code of signals thoroughly
understood by all the players. This is essential to the success
of all team-play, for many a plan has often been spoiled because
of the failure of a player to comprehend or act upon a signal,
whether it be a sign or a word. To illustrate: The first thing
for the base-runner to do is to endeavor to find out who will
cover second base—the second baseman or the shortstop—in
order to receive the anticipated throw down. This is done by
the base-runner making a "blind" start—that is, making a
dash for the base as though he really meant to try for it, and
then returning quickly to first. At this juncture the batsman
puts himself in evidence by watching the second baseman and
the shortstop. Assuming that the second baseman starts to
cover the base, then the plan of action is agreed upon. As soon
as the signal is given the runner immediately starts with the
movement of the pitcher's arm, and the batsman drives, or
attempts to drive, the ball into right field. This protects the
base-runner, for whether the ball is fielded or not, he reaches
second in safety, and is in position to score on an ordinary base
hit, and if the ball rolls safely into right field he will reach
third, from whence he can score on a fly to the outfield.

If the shortstop starts to cover the base, then the batsman
will endeavor to "pull" the ball toward third, and generally
with the same result. To make this play successful the base-
runner must start on the signal, and the batsman must hit the
ball in order to protect the runner. This is undoubtedly the
greatest play in team batting, for it not only makes runs for the
FIG. 4.—BUNTING TOWARD FIRST BASE.