

THE SHORT GAME

By Bob Harrow

Not: The following notes are extracts from the Softball Australia Hitting manual.

Principles of Bunting

Sacrifice Bunting

*Used to advance the runner.
Bunt strikes only.*

Option one: Square around

- Both feet parallel to the pitcher.
- Start bat at top of strike zone.
- Bottom hand on bat in front of your chest.
- Bent knees
- Bend elbows to allow soft hands.

Option two: Pivot:

This bunting position gives you a couple of extra options-slap and drag.

- Turn front and back foot towards pitcher.
- Be on the balls of your feet (not on your heels).
- Bent knees.
- Bottom hand on bat in front of chest.
- Bend elbows to allow soft hands.

You must be COMMITTED to bunt. Runner MUST be advanced to the next base. STRIKES only. We will take a walk.

Push Bunt

Try to push the ball by the first and third basemen who are charging towards the plate.

- Same bunting stance as above.
- With elbows bent, try to extend arms towards the pitched ball.

Squeeze bunt

To score the runner stealing from third base.

- Same bunting stance as above.
- Must try and get ball on ground.
- Must foul off any bad pitches (balls).

Slapping shortstop slap:

Try to get infielders cheating. Slap ball into pivot's area.

Right and Left Handed Batters

- Pivot with feet just like the pivot sacrifice Bunt above.
- Bent knees (always).
- Slide top hand up bat (end of grip).
- NOT a full swing.
- Go with pitch. Eg: Inside – pull,
Outside - go with the pitch.

Hard Slap:

Teams that are cheating (playing in very close to batter) this allows us to swing the bat hard and therefore hit the ball harder.

- Same principal as s/s slap.
- Fake a bunt to draw to infield in.
- Draw bat back
- Swing the bat hard (strikes only).

Running Slap L/H: Great for batters with speed.

Need to get ball onto ground and put the pressure on defence.

- Step back with back left foot, pivot with right foot.
- Step forward with left foot and hit the ball off the left foot.
- Don't open up shoulders too early, you will have trouble with outside pitch.
- Does not have to be a hard swing.

Two Strike Hitting

Two strike count

If having trouble making contact. More contact less strike outs more pressure on the defence.

- Barry Bonds Grip - slightly choked up the handle of the bat
- Move closer to plate to protect the outside corner
- Slightly open up front foot, this will help you stop going on your heels.

- Any pitch that is close must be fouled off don't stand and watch the third strike.

STRATEGY

(Taken from Softball strategies, coverages, signals and charts – Key information and details to help give you and your team a competitive edge. By Cindy Bristow)

This section will look at some of the strategies that a coach can use.

- Sacrifice Bunt
- Bunt and Run
- Drag Bunt
- Push Bunt
- Squeeze Bunt
- Safety Squeeze Bunt
- Running Slap
- Hit and Run
- Steal
- 1st & 3rd

Each of these offensive strategies will be examined in the following manner:

- Reason for using the play,
- What the Batter does,
- What the Runner does
- Advantages
- Disadvantages
- Best Count to try this play and
- The reason

While these plays may be simple to use, there are some significant details to each. Many of these plays are very similar and as such can be used in similar situations. However, as coaches we can still make decisions on gut feel. That's Ok. The following information is provided to ensure you are aware of all your choices, and what factors you need to consider when weighing up your options.

SACRIFICE BUNT (usually called the "sac bunt")

Reason for Using This Play:

- This bunt is used to advance the base runner to 2nd base when you don't think your batter can get a base hit to advance her.
- Also, used to advance a runner from 2nd to 3rd base usually with 0 outs.

What Batter Does:

- Bunts a strike only (preferably a low pitch)
- Tries to bunt the ball on the ground to avoid popping up.

What Runner Does:

- Runner waits to be sure ball has been bunted on the ground before running.
- Runner only runs if the ball is bunted.

Advantages:

- Because the hitter only bunts strikes, this bunt is safer to keep from popping up.
- If the pitcher is fairly wild, or unpredictable with her strikes this is a safer bunt to use.
- Because the runner waits until the ball is on the ground before running, this bunt usually prevents a double play on a POP UP.

Disadvantages:

- Because the runner doesn't leave with the pitch, a slower base runner can possibly be thrown out at 2nd if the bunt is too hard.
- Because the hitter doesn't have to bunt the ball (unless it's a strike) she can sometimes just freeze at the plate and end up watching a strike go by.

Best Count To Try This Play:

- Almost any count before the batter gets 2 strikes is a good count for the sacrifice bunt.

Reason:

- Because the batter is out if they bunt a ball foul with strikes, you'll want to avoid trying this play on any 2 strike count - except to one of your very good bunters.

BUNT & RUN

Reason For Using This Play:

- Give the base runner a much greater chance of being safe at 2nd base by putting her in motion with the pitch.
- This bunt will also give a slow or slower base runner a much better chance of making it to 2nd base.

What Batter Does:

- Batter must bunt the very next pitch, no matter where it is.

What Runner Does:

- Runner leaves with the very next pitch, just as if they were stealing,

Advantages:

- This bunt will give your base runner a couple of steps head start and thus a much greater chance of making it to 2nd base,
- This can help prevent a force at 2nd base because your runner leaves with the pitch.
- This bunt can also give a slower base runner a good chance to make it to 2nd by leaving with the pitch.

Disadvantages

- This can lead to a double play if the bunt is popped up because the base runner leaves with the pitch.
- You run the risk of getting your runner thrown out at 2nd base if it's a bad pitch that your hitter cannot bunt.

Best Count To Try This Play:

- Usually best to try this when ahead in the count 1-0, 2-0, 3-0, 2-1, 3-1, or 1-1,

Reason:

- These counts are the best for this bunt because the pitcher has to try and throw a strike, which gives your hitter a greater chance of having a good pitch to bunt.

DRAG BUNT (Base hit bunt, or running bunt)

Reason for Using This Play:

- This is used as a surprise element to catch the defence off guard. It is very often effective by a good hitter who had a long hit either the previous time at bat or on the previous swing. Good choice if the defence, especially the 3rd baseman, is playing exceptionally far back.

What Batter Does

- Lays down a bunt on her own as a surprise element to the defence.
- Batter waits as long as possible before moving her back foot to bunt

What Runner does:

- Runner usually isn't aware the batter is going to do this so she'll react as she would to any regular hit by the batter.

Advantages:

- Great element of surprise.
- Even if not successful, can force the defence to move in giving the following batters better angles to get base hits,

Disadvantages:

- Not easily executed by everyone
- Not easy to control because of how long the batter must wait before showing the bunt.
- Can take an at-bat, and a possible extra base hit, away from a big hitter,

Best Count To Try this Play:

- First pitch, especially if the pitcher tends to throw 1st pitch strikes.
- On any count when the batter is ahead (1-0, 2-0, 3-0, 2-1, 3-1),
- On any count with less than 2 strikes so the batter doesn't foul the ball off and strike out.

SQUEEZE BUNT (also called the "suicide squeeze")

Reason for Using This Play:

- Great element of surprise!
- Great to try with a good bunter at the plate, a runner at 3rd base, and their 3rd baseman playing back.

What Batter Does:

- Batter bunts the very next pitch no matter where it is!

What Runner Does:

- Base runner leaves 3rd base on the pitch sprinting home.

Advantages:

- Biggest advantage is the element of surprise.

Disadvantages:

- Big risk of the batter missing the pitch, or popping up the bunt, and the runner being either tagged out or doubled off.
- Risk of not knowing if the next pitch is going to be a strike or one that is buntable.

Best Count To Try This Play:

- Since the success of this play depends on the batter being able to bunt, or at least get her bat on the ball, you have to pick a count where the pitcher will have a huge likelihood of throwing a strike. This means a 2-0, 2-1, 3-0, or 3-1 counts.
- This is especially risky against a pitcher that tends to be a little wild.

SAFETY SQUEEZE

Reason for Using This Play.

- This play gives the runner a "safety valve" of not having to run home in case the bunt is popped up, or the play doesn't work.
- It's a good play to run if you have a close score and can't afford to throw a run away - especially against a pitcher who won't let you get to 3rd base very often.

What Batter Does:

- Batter bunts the very next pitch, trying to bunt the ball on the ground.

What Runner Does:

- Runner waits before running home. She can decide to either stay at 3rd base (if it looks like she'll be out trying to score), she can try to score on the bunt, or she can wait and try to score on the fielder's throw to 1st base.

Advantages:

- Creates an element of surprise.
- Gives the runner a "safety valve" of not having to run in case the bunt is popped up, or the play doesn't work.

Disadvantages :

- Because the runner doesn't have to run, it can cause the runner to be tentative and either not run, or run at the wrong time and be thrown out.

Best Count To Try This Play:

- Usually good on the first pitch, or when ahead in the count.

Reason:

- The first pitch is a good time to expect a strike, which is a much easier pitch to bunt.

PUSH BUNT

Reason for Using This Play:

- This bunt is used to "push" the ball either between the infielders (usually 3rd and Shortstop), or 1st and 2nd.

What Batter Does

- The batter holds the bat like she's going to bunt, pulling the defence in. Then she pushes the ball between the infielders.

What Runner Does

- Runner waits to see that the ball is on the ground before running just like with the sacrifice bunt

Advantages:

- This bunt, when executed properly, really allows you to beat defence that's crashing in trying to beat your bunter.
- Because the defence is expecting your batter to bunt, this type bunt creates a great element of surprise.
- Creates confusion amongst the infielders, especially if the 2nd base player moves the wrong way.

Disadvantages

- The hitter runs a risk of popping the ball up, or pushing the ball right to one of the defenders causing your runner to be forced out at 2nd base.

Best Count to Try This Play;

- Good to try this after the batter has faked a bunt on the previous pitch, causing the defence to come in a few steps, making it easier push the ball between the infielders.
- Any positive count is good (1-0, 2-0...)

Reason:

- You'll want a positive count if you're trying the push bunt because it will be easier to hit a strike.

SLAP BUNT

Reason for Using This Play:

- This bunt is used to "slap" the ball either between the infielders usually 3rd and shortstop, or 1st and 2nd, or over the infield.

What Batter Does

- The batter holds the bat like she's going to bunt, pulling the defence in.
- When the batter pulls the bat back from the bunt position, she brings the bat back about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way back. Then the batter hits down on the ball hard.
- The batter may split their grip on the bat as well to have better control.

What Runner Does

- Runner waits to see that the ball is on the ground before running just like with the sacrifice bunt

Advantages:

- This bunt, when executed properly, really allows you to beat defence that's crashing in trying to beat your bunter.
- Because the defence is expecting your batter to bunt, this type bunt creates a great element of surprise.
- This play can really force the defence to get back on their heels – allowing your batter to either hit the ball past them, or freeze them back

Disadvantages

- The hitter runs a risk of popping the ball up, or slapping the ball right to one of the defenders causing your runner to be forced out at 2nd base.

Best Count to Try This Play;

- Good to try this after the batter has faked a bunt on the previous pitch, causing the defence to come in a few steps, making it easier slap the ball between the infielders.
- Any positive count is good (1-0, 2-0...)

Reason:

- You'll want a positive count if you're trying the slap bunt because it will be easier to hit a strike.

RUNNING SLAP

Reason for Using This Play:

- Add to the runner's speed by turning her around to hit from the left handed batter's box.
- This type of hitter will force the defence to rush their throws and result in numerous throwing errors.

What Batter Does:

- The batter starts in the back of the left-handed batter's box and as the pitch approaches she runs toward the ball, slapping down on the ball as she drops the bat and runs for 1st base.
- Batter tries to hit the ball down on the ground to get the ball to bounce either high or to the deep part of the infield (shortstop area), all in an effort to beat the ball to 1st base.

What Runner Does:

- Runner responds according to ball - she doesn't leave on the pitch unless there is another play on like a bit and run.

Advantages:

- The slap allows a player who is not a very good, bitter but who is very fast to start out 2-3 steps closer to I' base by starting in the left-handed batters' box. Hitting the ball hard down into the ground gives the runner a good chance of beating it out.
- Since hitter is hitting the ball down on the ground she has a very slim chance of popping it up.

Disadvantages

- Because the runner is running while trying to hit the ball it can often be very difficult to execute at first,
- Because the defence knows just what the hitter is doing it can position itself close to the hitter and force the batter to place the ball, or to hit it through them.

Best Count To Try This Play:

- The count doesn't really matter as much as selecting a pitch that the hitter likes to hit.

HIT and RUN

Reason for Using This Play:

- This play puts the runner in motion to either help them avoid being forced at 2nd base, or to allow them to get to 3rd from 1st on a base hit

What Batter Does:

- Batter swings at the next pitch, trying to hit the ball on the ground so the runner isn't doubled off on a pop up or line drive.

What Runner Does:

- Runner leaves on the pitch, turning her head to find the ball in the event the batter has hit either a line drive or a pop up.

Advantages :

- Because the runner is in motion on the pitch there is less chance for a double play.
- Hit and Run can put a slower runner in motion to help prevent her from getting forced out at 2nd base.

Disadvantages:

- No way to prevent the hitter from popping up or hitting a line drive.
- Not a big percentage play.
- Can cause the batter to chase a bad pitch, getting the runner thrown out at 2nd base.

Best Count To Try This Play:

- Either the first pitch, or when the hitter is ahead in the count.

Reason:

- This count will put the pitcher in a position to have to throw a strike, giving the batter a much greater chance of hitting a strike.

STEAL

Reason for Using This Play:

- Put a runner into scoring position (2nd base) without having to give up the current batter's at bat.
- Also put a base runner closer to home (stealing from 2nd to 3rd)

What Batter Does:

- This can vary: the batter can either swing at the next pitch and miss on purpose, trying to distract the catcher's view and subsequent throw or, the signal can be given without the hitter knowing, This can depend on whether the coach wants to give another strike to the hitter.

What Runner Does:

- Runner leaves with the pitch.

Advantages:

- The steal can put a runner into scoring position without giving up the current batter's at bat.
- The steal is a good way to advance a runner to second (a very fast runner) if you have a weak hitter or poor bunter up at bat.
- Can prevent the double play by getting your runner to 2nd.

Disadvantages:

- Can run yourself out of the inning.
- Can create an open base and allow the current batter to be walked especially if a very good hitter.

Best Count To Try This Play:

- Late in the count to lull the defence.
- Immediately after a pitch-out.
- Anytime you might suspect a ball or a bad pitch - especially a low pitch since this is the hardest pitch for the catcher to handle on a throw.
- Anytime you think the pitcher is going to throw a changeup, since this pitch will give your runner an advantage. (A runner at 2nd base can see the signals and relay them to hitter).

- Anytime the runner gets a good jump or lead off on the pitch and you're playing a so-so catcher who bobbles a low pitch.
- On a 3-2 count (full count) - ESPECIALLY WITH RUNNERS ON 1st and 2nd. It's very difficult for a team to get both the hitter and the runner out, and with 2 runners on you will exchange a runner at 2nd and 1st for a runner at 2nd.

1st & 3rd Play.

Reason for using this Play:

- Create confusion among the infielders regarding which runner is
- Going to run, if any, and when.

What Batter Does:

- This depends on whether you have a steal on. If you do, then the batter will usually swing and miss while the runner at 1st steals 2nd.

What Runner Does:

There are 4 options:

- i. Runner at 3rd stays at 3rd while runner at 1st steals 2nd
- ii. Runner at 3rd stays at 3rd, while runner at 1st jogs to 2nd trying to draw a throw from the catcher and get caught in a rundown. At some point during this rundown the runner at 3rd breaks for home trying to score - it's a timing play where the runner is trying to time her break toward home with a fielder being unable to throw her out.
- iii. Runners at 1st steals 2nd while runner at 3rd steals home on catcher's throw to 2nd
- iv. Nothing happens - neither runner runs anywhere.

Advantages:

- This play, when run correctly, creates a lot of confusion in the defence.
- Because there are so many options for the runners, it puts the defence in a position to react and make the wrong decision.

Disadvantages

- Runners can often run into outs,
- Runners often force things to happen and make stupid decisions thus leading to an out.
- Minimal disadvantages for the offence

Best Count To Try This Play:

- If runner at 1st is stealing then count isn't that important if you're trying a Hit & Run or Bunt & Run with runner at 1st then try with a positive hitter's count 1-0, 2-0, 3-0, 3-1.)