

# Rogers Hornsby Reveals Expert Plays on Diamond

By ROGERS HORNSBY

Every boy, at one time or another, has known some chap whose high school or college pitching has been phenomenal—who has imposing strike-out and victory records to his credit—but who seems to have nothing at all on the ball when he gets into faster company. Likely you'll remember the case of Owen Carroll last year.

Carroll, at Holy Cross college, was a pitching sensation for three years. He had every college nine he faced in 1925 completely at his mercy and won every game. In three years of varsity baseball he lost only two games and won 49. So when the Detroit Tigers announced that he would play with them on his graduation other big league teams made envious comment.

Carroll was a "flop" in his first tries at big league baseball. He faced Boston before a big crowd eager to see this pitching marvel—and was batted out of the box. He made one or two other starts during the season and never seemed to hit his college stride.

Common sense tells you that Carroll's ability didn't just fade away overnight. He's still with Detroit, and he'll make good in time, doubtless. For, if he's like others I've known, he has just as good control, and curves, and speed, as he had when he played against amateurs. The difference in his record must lie in some basic difference in the batting methods of the men he faces. What is the difference—what is it that young batters so often do wrong?

We big leaguers think that the major fault with boys' batting is just this: They hit at bad balls.

That isn't the only fault in batting; there are plenty of others that cut down hitters' averages and help along the pitchers' percentages. But it's the one that bothers high school and college fellows most—major leaguers, too. Let's talk about it.

Every boy who can handle a bat knows what the "good ball zone" is. If the ball is over the plate and between your knees and shoulders, it's a strike; if it's high, low or wide it's a ball. The men who govern the rules didn't decide it that way just to be making another regulation. They had a reason—and the reason was that balls coming within that rectangle are the ones a batter can most easily and accurately hit. Rules protect you, you see, if you let bad ones go by. But everything is against you when you swing at the bad ones; for if you don't miss altogether, you'll probably foul off or hit an easy pop-up or grounder for a sure out.

HE LOOKED GOOD, BUT—

Last season I had an opportunity to watch a sand lot game, and the big rightfielder on one of the teams was a perfect example of what I mean. This fellow had a long, easy swing at the ball, and every move made me think he was a real batter. Then I saw him face the pitcher, and in five times at bat he made only one single. He swung at anything—low balls he liked particularly, but he hit at just about every pitch, no matter how far he had to reach for it. The result was that in spite of his promise he did nothing but foul or hit weakly into the ground. His one hit was a long clean one—and he made it when he swung at a good pitch!

When you've got that rule down fight, you're ready to go on with your batting training. There are several things every batter must know, and I'll take them up one at a time.

The first one ties up closely with the good ball rule. Keep your eye on the ball. I don't have to tell you that you can't connect squarely with the horsehide if you're not watching it every minute. I've seen fellows who looked at the pitcher, at the runner, at the player through whom they wanted to hit it. That's bad. From the minute the ball leaves the pitcher's hand to the instant it's where you want to hit it—or let it go by—keep your eye on it. Never look away for a second.

Naturalness is an important part of good batting. A good deal is said about correct batting form; but when you've seen the long, free swing of Harry Hellmann, Detroit player who led the American league in batting last year, and the tremendous wallop of Babe Ruth, and the powerful choke-swing of Jim Bottomley, first baseman with the St. Louis Cardinals—when you've seen all these and try to analyze them and write down similarities of form, you'll find it pretty hard to do.

The answer is that all of the great batters have their own individual styles—the styles that are easiest, most natural for them. Cultivate, as far as possible, the style of swing and grip simplest to you. I don't mean that you should scorn advice from players or coaches who know good batting; frequently their hints will help tremendously. But work in those hints with your own natural batting habits—make the two work together.

Your stance at the plate should also be just what is easiest for you. Some players stand with feet close together, others with them spread and not on a line. Every good batter faces the plate squarely, so that he can meet the ball when his bat is at the most forceful point in its arc.

Ordinarily I'd advise every batter to learn to "step into the ball" as he bats, rather than to step backward. "Stepping in" means advancing the left foot. (If you're a right-handed batter) toward the pitcher as you swing. That increases the power you impart to the bat, and puts you in good position to start your sprint for first if you connect. . . . Even that is not a little-known rule, although most batters practice it religiously. An outstanding exception is Al Simmons, the young outfielder with the Philadelphia Athletics who made such a fine record in 1925, his first big league year. Simmons steps back and still gets his hits. Most batters don't.

Where are you going to grip your bat? That's another question that depends largely on individual preference. Of course, there's a power in the free swing with the bat held at its extreme tip; I hold my bat that way, and likely that's the reason I've been able to get a fair share of balls over the fence. But not all good batters use that grip. Jim Bottomley, second high in the National league last year, is a choke hitter

## At the Theatres

Oregon—Corinne Griffith and Norman Kerry in "Mlle. Modiste," by Henry Blumson and Victor Herbert.

Hellie—"The Johnstown Flood."

High—Five acts vaudeville, and pictures.

In the home run crop. The great batters are the ones who have perfected their timing—old Hans Wagner, Cobb, Ruth, Sisler of the St. Louis Browns, Jacques Fourrier of Brooklyn, Frisch of the Giants and others.

Don't think that, just because I say timing is hard to get exactly right, it can't be learned. You can improve your timing in baseball just as you can in your golf swing, your tennis swing or your football kicking. Practice is the thing. Thevenow, the young shortstop who played with St. Louis last year, proved this. Thevenow came to the Cardinals determined to improve his batting, and every chance he got he had somebody pitching to him. He watched his timing, along with the other elements, and by the end of the season he was a much better batter.

Follow through! Here again, comes the parallel to golf, tennis and football. The bat should not stop dead when it hits the ball, nor immediately afterward. The arc should continue just as it started; the bat should keep on its path while the ball is well on its way. The follow-through is the logical conclusion of the swing, and it's worth a lot of work. I wish every young batter could watch the work of men like Bottomley, or Zaek Wheat, the veteran Brooklyn star. It's his vigorous follow-through that takes Babe Ruth off his balance when he swings and misses; and it's the strength of this follow-through that, imparted to the ball when it meets the bat, gives it such long rides. You don't have to lose bal-

ance like Ruth, of course. I never fall, although I put a lot of strength and rhythm into my follow-through.

A mighty good way to develop follow-through is to take your bat and practice free swinging—practice the long level arc and the continuation of the swing far around to the front. There's plenty of rhythm in a good baseball swing; try to get it into your own work.

A Write-snap Adds Force I've told you that you should meet the ball at the "top" of the swing. There are two more things to know about meeting the ball. One is a snap of the wrists that gives to the bat, just at the moment of impact, an added bit of force. Until the moment of this snap, the bat angles backward from your hands; the snap brings it suddenly out to the perpendicular from your body, so that it smacks the ball squarely instead of at an angle.

The second question is that of just where to plan on hitting the ball—directly over the plate and opposite your body, or out in front and slightly ahead of your body. Both methods are used in big league play. Stuffy McInnis, right-handed batter with the Pittsburgh Pirates, hits in front of the plate, as do many others. I hit the ball in closer to my body. It seems to be a question of individual differences again. Ernie Vick—you'll remember his name in football as well as baseball, for he was All-American center at the University of Michigan, as well as a star catcher, before he joined the Cardinals—learned to improve his hitting considerably by connecting out in front of the plate.

Bunting is a form of batting that absolutely demands hitting out in front. Your purpose in a bunt is to lay the ball down where it's going to be hardest for anybody to field. In effect, you stop the ball dead at the plate; your bat doesn't smash into it as in an attempt at crashing a hit, but simply meets it and drops it on the ground at your feet with just enough force to keep it out of the

catcher's reach, but not enough to carry it too rapidly to any other fielder.

Since the purpose of the bunt is to stop the ball and put it where it can be fielded with most difficulty, the direction in which you send it must be controlled. You must be able to tap it along the third base foul line, or toward the first sacker, or to the pitcher's right if you know he has difficulty in fielding that kind of ball. And in order to control the bunt you must hit it out in front. You can't do it accurately if you try to meet the ball over the plate, even with your body. Some men always step far to the front of the batting box for a bunt.

Keep that in mind when you try to bunt. Remember, too, that you don't get the free swing into a bunt. The bat is almost motionless, as a rule, when it meets the ball. Most players choke their bats when they bunt.

Here's a warning on bunting—do your best to hide your intentions from the men in the field. Of course, there are plenty of situations when the bunt is a conventional play—when there are less than two down and a man is on first, for instance—and usually in such situations the third baseman and the others will play in. But if you hold your bat in just the same way you do for a full swing (at least until the pitcher delivers the ball), don't look where you're planning to send the ball, and otherwise veil your plans, you're a much better chance of making the bunt effective.

Bunt Out of a Slump Because bunting is so different from swinging into the ball, it's mighty useful in another way—aiding a batter to work out of a hitting slump. There's never been a very good explanation of a slump—it's something that simply comes. Right in the midst of their season, frequently, big league sluggers find themselves unable to connect—their batting eye is bad, their swing feels awkward, their average goes down. Apparently they're doing things properly, too. But the base hits don't come. George Grantham, of the Pittsburgh champions, hit the ball hard all season and right up to the world series in 1925; he had been particularly effective against right-handed pitchers. But in the series he couldn't hit a thing—a slump got hold of him.

Often bunting comes in handy in a case like that. When you find you're unable to hit the ball at your usual average, forget every kind of hitting but bunting for a while. Practice all you can on bunting for a few days; gradually work back into regular batting, taking it easy as you go. It's more than likely that you will find the break from free swinging has chased the fault out of your batting, and that you're able to make your share of the hits again.

I've heard high school baseball players exert a lot of extra energy

in discussing the virtues of "place hitting." When they get to the big leagues, they'll forget it. Some men, according to report, learn to put the ball where they want it—to smash to left field, or through a shortstop, or down a base line—

but I've never run onto any of them.

About the only place hitting we do in the big leagues is try to hit back of the runner, rather than in front of him. For instance, if a man is on first and the order is

given to sacrifice him to second, a grounder down toward first is a lot more likely to be successful than one toward second. The reason is that he'll be nearer to second.

(Continued on page 7.)

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