

 Pitch Counts

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To be a successful batter, you must learn to swing in the right situations and think like a pitcher!

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From all the research investigated (fangraphs.com, college pitching coach interviews and articles) it shows that for pitchers to get ahead in the count they ideally try to throw two of the first three pitches for strikes. From an interview with David Cone (ex-Yankees pitcher) *“If you get a quick strike early in the count, then you can go to off-speed pitches more.”* With that said…

**GREEN**: Odds favor batter getting a good pitch to hit

**RED**: Odds favor pitcher – batter not getting a good pitch to hit – protect

**BLACK**: On average neutral for both batter and pitcher

**Count HITTER’S PITCH EXPECTATIONS**

*(Not an absolute - it’s a probability based on thousands of at-bats in like situations)*

 **0-0** **57-60% first pitches are thrown for strikes\*** – if in your Hot Zone – swing!

 **0-1** **Pitcher’s choice** (stay away from 0-2, but you do have a strike to give)

 **0-2** **Pitcher’s choice** - Protect the plate (often a waste pitch) You will rarely see a pitcher throw a fastball over the plate on 0–2. Pitchers who are up 0–2 in the count are taught not to throw the ball over the plate. Instead they are likely to throw a fastball up high/ outside low, or a breaking ball/ slider away from the plate hoping the batter will chase the bad pitch.

 **1-0 Fastball** (Tighten your strike zone – make it your pitch)

* 1. **Pitcher’s best pitch** (don’t panic)

For Greg Maddux, he thought 1-1 was the most important pitch. *"2-1 and 1-2 are*

*different worlds. At 2-1, you have to come to the hitter more. At 1-2, you can use all*

*your tricks to "expand the zone."*

(From the Washington Post – Pay Attention to the count, baseball’s hidden treasure – May 27th, 2010)

* 1. **Pitcher’s choice -Protect the plate** (Expand your strike zone a bit. Be aware the pitcher has pitches to “waste”.

 **2-0 Usually fastball** (great hitter’s count – pitcher doesn’t want to go 3-0)

 **2-1 Usually Fastball** (great hitter’s count - pitcher doesn’t want to go 3-1)

 **2-2 Pitcher’s choice** (Protect the plate. Treat it as 3-2 count)

Batters seem to lay off decent 2-2 pitches only to swing at worse pitches on 3-2.

Treat 2-2 as 3-2. Expand your strike zone a bit.

 **3-0 Fastball** (pitch probably in hitter’s best zone – but you’re usually taking)

 **3-1 Fastball** (great hitter’s count)

 **3-2 Typically a fastball** (be ready to hit – pitcher doesn’t want to walk)

(But also consider the situation. Ex: If bases loaded (or runner in scoring position) anticipate fastball. If two outs and no one on, anticipate off speed or fastball just out of the strike zone. He has three open bases so a walk doesn’t bother him too much.)

**Quick Important Thoughts to Keep in Mind**

* The bottom line is – don’t let the umpire decide for you – KEEP BATTLING!
* The better you can predict and/ or narrow what type of pitch may be coming, the higher your chance of success.
* If you know ***your*** hitting zone (also known as “hot zone”) – your probability of hitting your pitch increases even more. No one is “hot” in the entire strike zone.
* A pitcher will throw ***at least one pitch*** that is your perfect pitch (excluding an Intentional Walk)
* The goal is work your way to 2-0, 2-1, and 3-1 counts. *“Those are the counts you make your living on.”*
* There are factors you must consider that might affect pitch expectations - score, runner position(s), inning, hit and run, bunt, etc.

For the most part, there are two predominate types of pitchers and one less predominate.

* Fastball/ Curveball pitchers
* Fastball/ Change Up pitchers
* Fastball/ Slider pitchers (fewer)

They might have a fourth pitch but used infrequently (10-15% of the time – that’s only 10-15 pitches in 100). By knowing what the pitcher throws the majority of the time will also give you an advantage of predicting the next pitch.

If a pitcher does have a third or even a fourth pitch, the majority of the time they will not go to it when they need a strike. The pitchers third or fourth pitch definitely isn’t their best.

Also, the percentages indicate that hitters will get an off-speed pitch 80% of the time on the first pitch with a runner in scoring position and they find themselves with runners in scoring position approximately 25% of the time.

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**Other Quick Important Thoughts to Keep in Mind**

As the count changes, so does a batter’s ability to “sit on” a favorite pitch or ignore any ball not in their “hot zone.”

Remember – batters seem to lay off 2-2 decent pitches only to swing at worse pitches on 3-2. Treat 2-2 as 3-2.

You want to see all of the pitches the pitcher has to offer. Unless he has a really good fastball, he’s probably not going to throw it every time. So, he’ll have to throw one of his other pitches, and maybe that pitch isn’t as good.

*Psychologically, what the guy in front of you has done, more often than not, affects how aggressive you are or how much you take pitches. Why? Because batters also learn from their teammates. If one hitter makes an out while swinging at the first pitch, the next batter is much less likely to even consider swinging at the first pitch – even if a good pitch to hit.*

From Grantland – Debunking MLB First Pitch Strike Myth (June 2, 2014)

Skip Bertman, Louisiana State University’s former Hall of Fame head coach, often reminded his hitters to *“Sit on the same pitch that had just retired the previous hitter.”*

From Collegiate Baseball Newspaper- Hitter Discipline Can Beat Elite Pitchers (March 6th, 2009)

With runners on base… *The fact that with runners on base a much higher percentage of batters are called out on the 1-2, 2-2 and 3-2 pitches than with bases empty may indicate a psychological bias on the part of umpires to give the pitcher the benefit of close ones with men on base.*

From research.sabr.org - Research Journal Archives - Study of ‘The Count’ Yields Fascinating Data

Batters must have an attack plan to beat the pitcher and you must be flexibility to change your attack when the opponent or an umpire negates your initial approach. Say the ump has a “large” strike zone - you have to adjust to this. Too many batters during the course of a game do not adjust and strike out on an outside pitch that the ump had been calling a strike all night. They come back and say *“That was outside”*. It might have been but tonight the ump calls it a strike. You have to adjust.

***But you also must keep in mind*** that as the level of competition increases (especially college on up) pitchers will sometimes "pitch backwards". It's called pitching backwards because it is the opposite of what is expected in the given situation. But if you pay attention to the pitcher’s tendencies during the game there will be times you'll want to “look” for a backwards approach.

Pick the brains of the pitchers on your team. Ask them their thoughts when they are on the mount and what they do. Ask your pitching coach his philosophies on pitching to batters. You have to “think” like a pitcher if you’re going to hit.

Learn basic pitch recognition!

\*Below are recent stats on first pitch strikes comparing High School and MLB. We can assume the

 college numbers are between the High School and MLB numbers.

