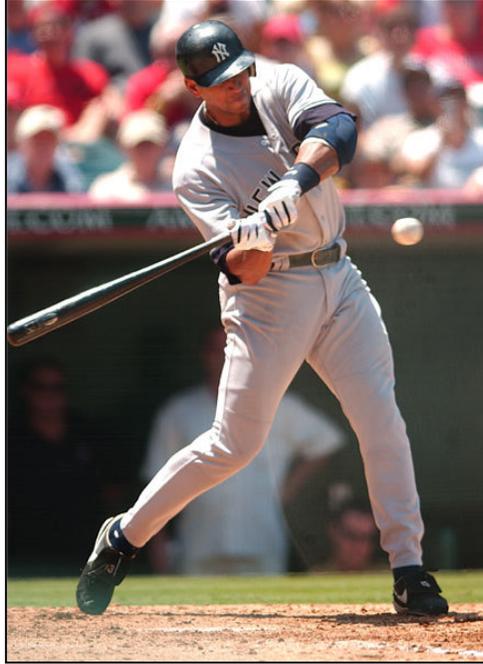


Hit Like Alex Rodriguez



Still whiffing at Wiffle balls? Let A-Rod show you how to swing for the fences.

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Step 1. Get comfortable

With balls whizzing toward you at 95 miles an hour, you've got no time to be tense. Purge every thought from your mind, relax your body, and breeze up to the plate. "It's really like I'm swimming or dreaming," Rodriguez says. Bend your knees and get balanced, but don't squeeze the life out of the bat. Rodriguez holds his with the last three fingers of each hand, his thumbs and forefingers barely touching the bat. "Really soft," he says, "as if a 10-year-old girl could come up behind me a second before the pitch is thrown and slip the bat away from my hands." You heard it here first, folks.

Step 2. See the pitch

Watch closely to see how the ball comes out of the pitcher's hand. If you see two fingertips a slight distance apart on top of the ball, a fastball's coming down the pike. If they're touching, expect a curve. If you miss the release, try to pick up on the ball's rotation: A fastball will show backspin, while a curve will turn toward you. (Oh, and you have about 2/10 of a second to do this.) "Your eyes are muscles, and some days they're able to lift 100 pounds," says Rodriguez. "Other days they won't see it quite as early." If you wait any longer than that fraction of a second, you may as well keep 'em closed.

Step 3. Pull the trigger

Bring the bat back, flex, and strike ("like a snake," says Rodriguez), using your hips as well as your hands. "Like a golfer, your hips go back, the torque comes in, and whoosh!" Rodriguez says. Uppercuts may get oohs and aahs from the crowd, but Alex tries to swing down at fastballs to maintain a line-drive stroke. Stand square to the pitcher, aim straight up the middle, and for God's sake keep those hands soft. "If you squeeze just before contact," Rodriguez says, "the bat head will bounce an inch or two." And your calculated sweet spot will go sour.

Step 4. Stay loose

So you've made contact. Even though technically your job's done, don't pat yourself on the back just yet: Good follow-through mechanics can mean the difference between a bloop and a blast. Rotate your body smoothly, making sure your hips go through their full range of motion and your arms extend fully. Go ahead and let it all out: Rodriguez exhales on every swing, because holding his breath keeps him bottled up and tense. "I feel an illusion in my mind," he says, "like I'm blowing the ball out of the ballpark." If only it were that easy.