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# SWOBAT: Baseball training facility swings into West Chester

By Matt Cunningham  
Staff Writer

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Along with the chatter of players and the ping of bats connecting with pitches, a new sound is being heard at Southwest Ohio Baseball Academy and Training's facility on Port Union-Rialto Road in West Chester Twp. An artillery boom occasionally echoes




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from the first batting lane, where a \$50,000 Pro Batter pitching simulator can punish the backstop with fastballs thrown at up to 100 miles an hour.

"It's the best tool I've ever seen," said SWOBAT co-founder and former Reds infielder Brian Conley, who added that it is only the second machine of its type in the state. The first belongs to the Cleveland Indians.

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Conley explained that the Pro Batter can throw an array of pitches with exact precision. A computer adjusts three drive wheels, allowing the machine to find different batters' strike zones and throw a random combination of pitches or throw the same pitch over and over again.

But the most visible feature of the Pro Batter stands between the pitching machine and batter. A screen hides the machine, showing instead the image of a pitcher on the mound. The images are aligned so the pitcher's release happens at a baseball-sized hole in the screen, through which the pitching machine hurls the ball.

"It gives a different look at the ball coming out of the hand," said SWOBAT general manager Mitch Kroell. "It's almost like being in game mode."


Conley said hour-long slots for the Pro Batter fill up quickly, and high school and college teams are latching on to the new technology.

Xavier University assistant coach JD Heilmann said the machine allows his players to work on hitting weaknesses – connecting with inside curves, for example – without wearing out the bullpen.

"It's just like having a pitch thrown live," he said. "The guy never gets tired, and keeps pumping strikes."

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Conley and Kroell said SWOBAT hopes to launch a Pro Batter league at the end of the 2008 baseball season, and said they are considering the installation of a second Pro Batter, along with a softball-specific version.

"I think, with us being new this year, next year it'll take off," Kroell said.

For more information on SWOBAT, go to [www.swobat.org](http://www.swobat.org) or call (513) 860-5828.

Contact this reporter at (513) 755-5127 or [mcunningham@coxohio.com](mailto:mcunningham@coxohio.com).

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