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## Keep your eye on the ball: Pitch-recognition expert offers app to keep skills sharp

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Missouri designated hitter Peter Zimmermann, a former standout at Chaminade Prep, is sold on Peter Fadde's hitting instruction. (Mizzou Athletics photo)

**W**ith the sports world on pause, Peter Fadde keeps thinking about a line from a U.S. president. Not the president on television every day.

“I’ve been hearing the JFK quote going around,” Fadde said last week, “where he said, ‘The Chinese symbol for crisis has one brushstroke for danger and one for opportunity.’”

For Fadde, a professor of learning systems design and technology at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, today’s global health crisis has presented an opportunity for his passion and business.

For years Fadde has studied the science of hitting a baseball, with an emphasis on developing technology to improve the intricate skill of pitch recognition. Hitters and teams from youth levels to the major leagues have subscribed to his programs.

Mizzou baseball coach Steve Bieser has embraced Fadde's work going back to his days at Southeast Missouri State, where Bieser built one of the nation's most prolific hitting teams. (Fadde's son, Jae, is Bieser's director of baseball operations at Mizzou.)

## Free service

With baseball — and softball players — stuck at home, away from the fields of competition this spring during the coronavirus pandemic, Fadde has made his mobile application free during April. Hitters at all levels can download gameSense Sports Pitch-IQ and from the comfort of their quarantine keep their eye on the ball.

“It's not like watching the video is going to make you this great hitter,” Fadde said in a phone interview. “But doing the video work regularly, just like working in the weight room, is going to build up your recognition so when you start working with a coach again and working that into your live practices you can apply that into a game.”

The app is easy to use and applies the basics of Fadde's studies. Hitters can filter through a video library of a variety of pitchers, lefties and righties from college and the minor leagues, each listed with their repertoire of pitches.

The video, shot from the hitter's view on the left or right side of the plate, cuts off just after the ball leaves the pitcher's hand. Then the user guesses the type of pitch and whether it was a strike or ball. From there, a full-screen replay of the complete pitch shows where it fell in the strike zone. Regular use of such video occlusion training can teach a hitter's eye to read how different pitches appear coming out of the hand.

“I've got a lot of confidence in what we're doing,” Fadde said. “The overwhelming feedback we get is once you get (the app) in people's hands and they use it regularly, it's not some strange thing chasing around diamonds and squares on a screen. It's real baseball. If I play this instead of a video game for 10 to 15 minutes a day I'll get better.”

Mizzou slugger Peter Zimmermann was one of Fadde's first disciples. The St. Louis native from Chaminade Prep began his college career at St. Louis University, then made a pit-stop at San Jacinto College in Texas but all along has used the video technology.

"At one point he was calling me from a dugout somewhere in the Northwoods League to make some suggestions on the app," Fadde said. "He was almost like an informal consultant."

## Tech talk

At the NCAA level, baseball and softball seasons have been shuttered for good this spring. High school baseball seasons are in a holding pattern while schools have closed their doors. MLB and the minor leagues have suspended play indefinitely.

But more than ever, thanks to widespread advanced technology, baseball and softball players are better equipped to keep their skills sharp during a lengthy break from practices and competition. From Rapsodo to HitTrax to Diamond Kinetics, the tech industry is flooded with data-collecting resources to enhance cognitive and physical training. For years, the tech has been more pitcher-driven, but Fadde hopes his product can help balance the battle between the pitching mound and the batter's box.

"Part of that is pitchers are willing to take a chance and try something new and fiddle around, while hitters are more like, 'I know what works for me. I'm sticking with this,'" he said. "That's partly because even the high-level hitters almost recognize there's something magical going on and the last thing you want to do is look at it too closely."

Chris Malveaux is a believer. He's the associate head coach and hitting coach for the Missouri softball team and has used Fadde's pitch recognition technology the last two years at MU. During the team's fall practices he introduced his hitters to the video occlusion training and by the season he already saw a payoff. After at-bats hitters "were able to have different conversations" about what they saw coming from the circle, he said.

"The more you do it you can build up a computer in your mind where things start to look familiar from pitcher to pitcher," he said. "Plus it's extremely convenient."

On bus trips before road games, Malveaux would encourage players to pull out their phones and play a couple rounds on the app. Players would compete with each other to post the best scores, he said.

Those bus trips have stopped for now. The games will return at some point. Until then . . .

"Now," Malveaux said, "they can sit on their couch and do it during commercial breaks from the show they're watching."