April 23, 1963 J. L. ALBERT 3,086,775

BASEBALL PRACTICE DEVICE

Filed Oct. 19, 1961

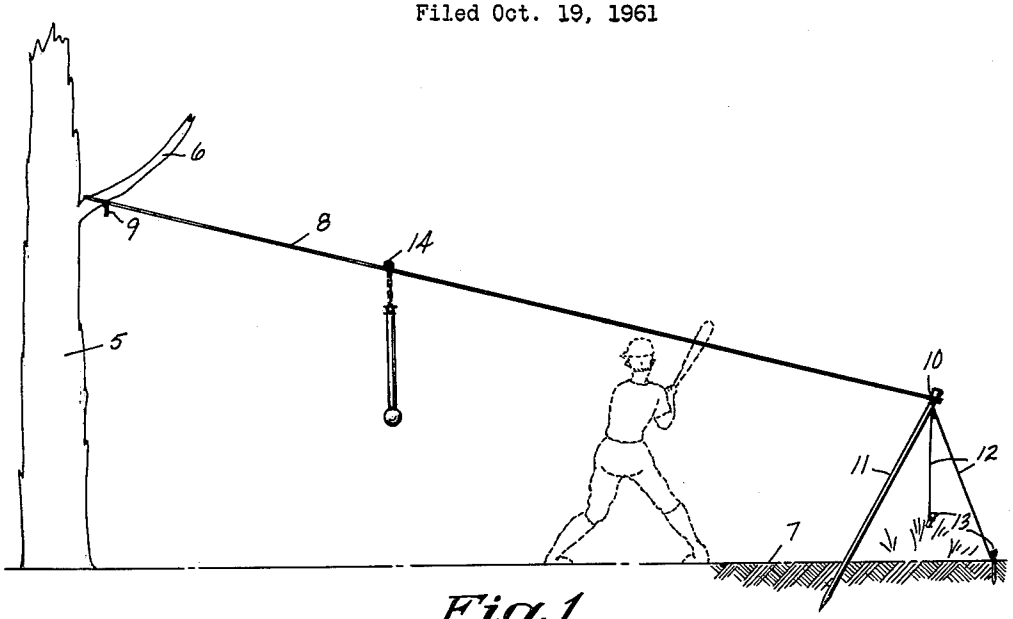


Fig. 1

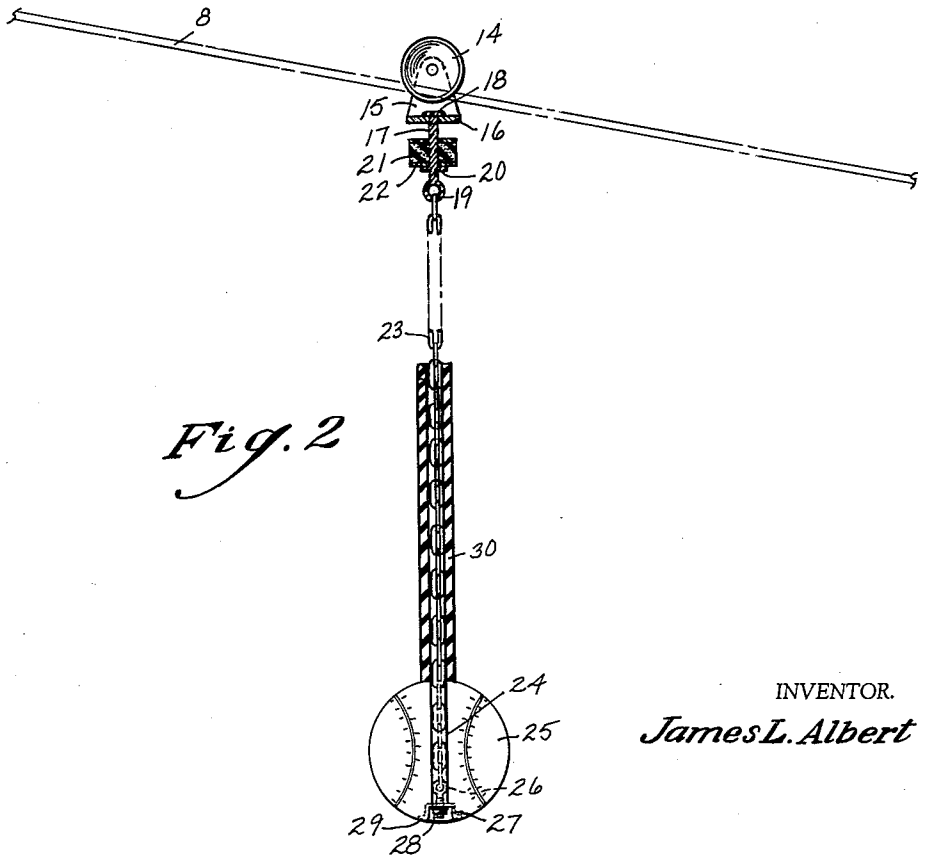


Fig. 2

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BASEBALL PRACTICE DEVICE

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This invention relates generally to the field of baseball and more specifically to a batting practice device for use in confined areas by young children who must practice on their own.

Although devices have been proposed in the past which repetitively return a ball to the batter for practice hitting, these devices have proved too slow and generally unsatisfactory in achieving their objectives. My invention is directed towards certain new and useful improvements in such practice devices which enables their satisfactory operation and permits the batter to obtain considerable exercise and enjoyment together with the requirement of a fair degree of batting skill and coordination.

It is therefore a primary object of this invention to provide a baseball practice device which may be operated by one person and wherein the ball automatically returns to the batter in a realistic manner at an adjustable speed and at various elevations.

It is a further object of this invention to provide a baseball practice device for children in the age group of eight to fifteen years which provides enjoyable exercise in confined areas and helps to develop co-ordination between the eyes and the arms.

It is a still further object of this invention to provide a practice device of the above class which enables the operator to obtain considerably more practice swings within in a thirty minute period than would be possible through other conventional methods of practice.

Briefly, the invention comprises the provision of a line which is stretched between two fixed points one of which is at higher elevation than the other. A baseball is connected by means of a length of chain to a pulley wheel which engages over the top side of the line. The ball thus approaches the batter due to gravity afforded by the slope of the line and the batter strikes the ball such that the pulley wheel returns to the top of the line in preparation for another approach. The lower portion of the chain is shielded by means of a rubber tube so as to prevent damage to the bat and excessive whipping when the ball is struck.

Further objects and advantages of this invention will become apparent from the following more detailed description of a preferred embodiment thereof, taken in conjunction with the attached drawings wherein:

FIG. 1 is a side elevation of the practice device assembled for operation between a tree limb and a stake driven into the ground.

FIG. 2 is a cross sectional view showing how the ball is supported and connected to the line.

Referring now to the drawings in detail, the numeral 5 represents a tree having a suitably elevated limb or branch 6. The tree is shown upstanding from the ground 7 and has been chosen for supporting means by way of example only, any suitable elevated structure being adaptable for the purposes of this invention. A line 8 which is preferably sheathed in plastic is secured at one end 9 to the limb 6 and is extended such that it will slope towards the ground and terminate at 10 to the upper end of a stake 11 which has been driven into the ground. The line is maintained in a taut condition by means of two guy ropes 12 which slope rearwardly from the top of a stake and terminate in rigid engagement with the ground by means of pegs 13.

A grooved wheel 14 is rotatably mounted between the arms 15 of a bracket 16, the said arms being disposed

adjacent the sides of the wheel such that the line 8 may be extended therebetween for continuous engagement with a grooved portion of the wheel. A shank 17 having an enlarged head 18 formed on one end is passed through the lower end of the bracket and extends downwardly therebeyond to terminate with an eye 19. A small collar 20 is formed intermediate the length of the shank and provides a stop for a rubber bumper 21 which extends over the upper end of the shank and is faced at either end with a washer 22. The purpose of the bumper is to prevent the head 18 of the shank from being driven upwardly through the bracket and snagging with the wheel 14 or the engaged line 8. A length of linked chain 23 is secured at one end to the eye 19 and passes through a central hole 24 formed through a conventional baseball 25. The chain terminates with a small eye bolt 26 which is disposed within the ball and engages a recessed washer 27 by means of a nut 28. The washer 27 has an outer peripheral flange 29 which blends with the outer contour of the ball and prevents the eye bolt from being forced through the hole 24. Further ruggedness is established by providing a counterbore 30 larger than the hole 24 which receives the washer 27 and provides a recess in which the nut 28 may be concealed. A length of rubber tubing or hose 30 extends over the lower portion of the chain and engages at one end with the ball so as to provide a protection for the bat and to eliminate whips in the chain which would otherwise occur when the ball is struck. A hose length in the order of thirty two inches is recommended for this purpose.

It will be appreciated that the rate of approach of the ball to the batter can be adjusted by varying the slope in the line 8, and that the striking elevation may readily be modified by the batter by varying his stance longitudinally beneath the line. The dimensions and material used for the construction of this invention are of course a matter of choice and will depend somewhat on the surrounding facilities which are available. It will also be appreciated that the shank 17 is free to rotate relative to the bracket 16 so that the ball may spin freely and thus avoid kinking or knotting of the chain.

Having described the invention in a preferred form, it will be appreciated that some modifications may be made to the precise configuration, without departing from the scope or spirit of the invention, as defined by the following claims.

I claim:

1. A baseball practice device comprising, in combination, a line rigidly supported at each end above the ground, said line sloping relative to the ground, a grooved wheel rotatively mounted between spaced arms of a bracket, said line passing intermediate the arms for engagement with the grooved wheel, a shank pivotally secured to the bracket and protruding therebeneath for swivelled support thereupon, a collar secured upon said shank, a yieldable bumper carried upon said shank intermediate said collar and said bracket for abutment with said bracket in response to axial movement of said shank relative to said bracket to limit said axial movement of said shank relative to said line, a flexible line secured at one end to a baseball and at the other end to the protruding end of the shank, said ball being supported by the flexible line and adapted to approach a batter under gravity.

2. A baseball practice device according to claim 1, wherein said flexible line is a linked chain, and a rubber tube covering a greater portion of the chain length from said one end toward said other end and completely enclosing said chain in the vicinity of said ball.

3. A baseball practice device according to claim 2, wherein a hole extends diametrically through the baseball to receive the chain therethrough, a counterbore formed in one lower end of the hole, said rubber tube communi-

cating with the opposite upper end of the hole, a washer mounted in the counterbore and having a peripheral flange engaging the surface of the ball in a flush manner, said chain extending from said rubber tube into said hole and terminating inwardly of the ball with an eye bolt protruding through the washer, and a nut securing the eye bolt and recessed in the counterbore.

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