

AYSA COACHING MANUAL

SKILLS PER AGE GROUP

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This is a list of skill the girls should be learning and constantly improving upon as they move through AYSA. These skills should be touched upon in every practice.

4-6 Year Olds

- Girls at this age are just learning, Teach Fundamentals
 - Offense:
 - How to hold the bat and hit the ball off the tee and by a coach
 - Rules about running the bases
 - Defense:
 - Proper throwing mechanics
 - Learning how to catch the ball
 - How to field grounders

7-8 Year Olds

- Still learning the game (most girls) and improving on skills
 - Offense:
 - Learn to hit a moving ball (not on the tee)
 - Base running: watching the coaches, rounding first to run to second (making a banana)
 - Defense:
 - Continued improvement throwing and fielding mechanics
 - Continued improvement to field balls and catch pop-ups
 - Getting the ball in from the outfield

9-10ear Olds

- Improve from the previous age, adding a few more skills/rules
 - Offense:
 - Continued hitting and base running skills
 - Defense:
 - Outfield is stronger: catching balls, hitting cut-offs
 - More accurate throwing, wider fielding range
- Slow pitch
 - Pitchers able to throw majority of strikes
- Fast pitch
 - Pitchers able to throw strikes, some able to pitch change-ups
 - Hitters hit strikes and learn to bunt
 - Runners learn proper leads, watch for the coaches, rounding 1st (banana), learning how to slide
 - Introduce bunt coverage

11-12, 13-14 Year Olds

- Much stronger defensively: learn to dive for balls, field backhanded, catch pop ups, hit teammates in the chest with throws
- Fast Pitch
 - Offense:
 - Pitchers are faster and more accurate. Able to throw consistent pitches. Able to field their position.
 - Base running: steal bases, slide around tags
 - Defense:
 - field bunts, throw out steals, block balls in the dirt, field bunts
 - Slow pitch-should be pitching strikes

15 and up

- Continued improvement on previous skills. Pitchers are better developed as are hitters and fielders. They should have and be continually building a better understanding of bunt coverage's (for fast pitch) and fielding situations such as getting the lead runner out.

Throwing

I. GRIP

..Training Tip**

Draw a stripe on the ball with a black marker. (Figure 1) When we talk about the "stripe" on the ball, this is what we are referring to.

- The player should grip the ball with two (3) fingers (unless it is a baseball, beginning grips should be 3 fingers), so that the ball is not in the palm of the hand.
- Grip across the seams (large horseshoe) of the ball if possible. The fingers will form a backward "C" around the ball with the middle of the index finger on the stripe. (Figure 2)
- The little finger will "ride" loosely on the ball.
- Place the thumb under the ball; the thumb should be underneath the pointer finger.
- The fingers should cross **the seams where the knuckle closest to the finger tips are**. This is so the fingers can pull down on **the seams during release**. The pressure on the ball from the fingers that cross **the seams should be evenly distributed**.

-Coaching Tip** A tight grip on the ball will inhibit your ability to spin the ball. the grip should be firm, but not tight allowing your wrist to stay flexible and create backspin.



Figure 1



Figure 2

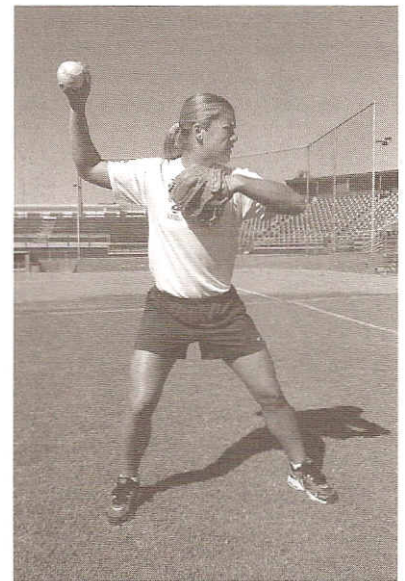
II. ARM CIRCLE AND RELEASE & LOWER BODY DRIVE

-Coaching Tip** When explaining things to young players, talk in terms of "ball side" (throwing hand side) and "glove side."

- The throwing hand travels in a downward and back motion so that the thumb passes by the thigh, keeping your hand on top of the ball, reaching a position where the palm is facing away from the target above the shoulder ("fingers to the sky"). The back foot begins to pivot and turn the body sideways.
- The throwing arm is long and loose (elbow not locked); the elbow should be at the same height or slightly higher than the shoulder and the hand is above the " head (figure 3A). At this point the front foot has landed and established a firm front side.

-Coaching Tip** When teaching young players, use the phrase **"thumb by the thigh, (2)elbow high,(3)fingers to the sky, (4)wave bye-bye, (5) and release the back side"**

- As the weight transfer (from the back to the front) begins, the elbow leads the **arm into the release position above the head in line with the shoulder**. The palm has begun to turn forward and the elbow is slightly higher than the shoulder in a vertical line from the elbow to the wrist. (Figure 3B) There should be a separation that remains even from the head to the elbow all the way to the wrist.
- The path of the arm circle, from the starting point to the release point, is on the "power line" (straight to the target). For example, the throwing arm should not fall behind the head or body. (Figure 3B)
- As the ball is released, the fingers should pull down with force across the seams of the ball (intensity of grip across seams increases during the pull down). (Figure 4A) The transfer and throw should be against the firm leg.



****Coaching Tip**** The thumb leads the hand down toward the ground on release.

- Follow-through: The hand follows through down and toward the glove-side (opposite) knee. (Figure 4B) The back leg should continue following through (releasing the back side)
- **The goal at release is to create complete vertical backspin on the ball.**
- The glove-side (non-throwing) arm extends toward the target. The glove-side (non-throwing) shoulder stays on the **power line to the target as weight transfer and release occur**. (Figure 4C)
- Keep the glove hand close to the body through the release and follow-through. (Figure 4B)

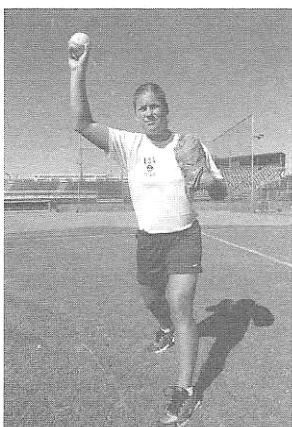


Figure 3B

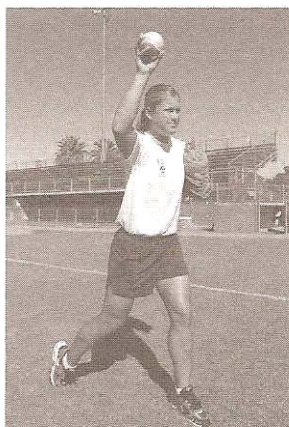


Figure 4A

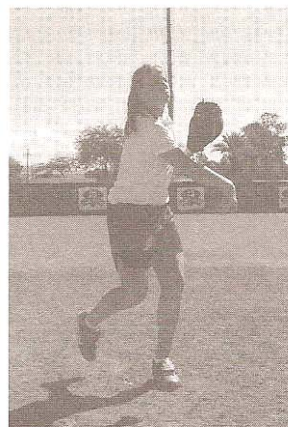


Figure 4B

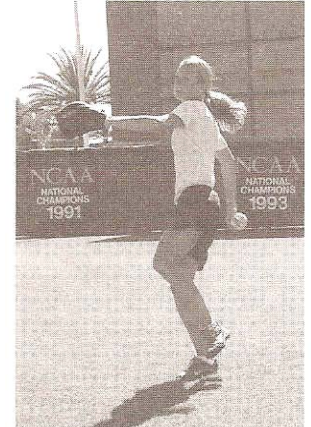


Figure 4C

III. LOWER BODY DRIVE

- Establish a strong throwing-hand side base by opening instep of the throwing side foot slightly toward the target (45 degrees). This is the pivot foot. The pivot foot turns out toward the target to begin the throwing sequence. (Figure 5)
- The glove hand side foot should land at a 45 degree angle when transfer is beginning to occur.
- Weight should be balanced "athletically" on the balls of the feet. (Figure 5)
- Lower body transfer begins as the front (glove side) foot steps on line to the target, with the arm in the "fingers to the sky" position (Figure 6)
- Weight transfer begins as the glove side arm "pulls" down and into the chest as the throwing arm comes forward into release position. (Figure 6)
- Lower body weight completes as the ball is released and follow through occurs. The ball side leg (back leg) continues forward at a natural pace (a drag of the foot is recommended). (Figure 7)

4.

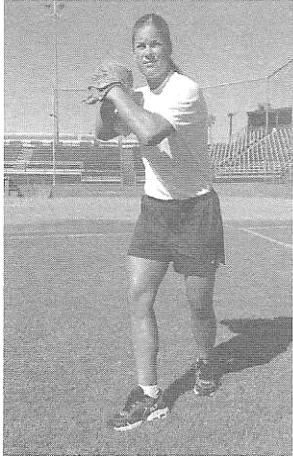


Figure 5

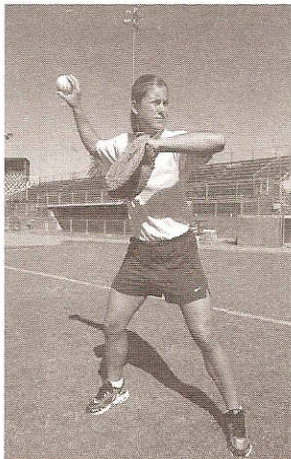


Figure 6A

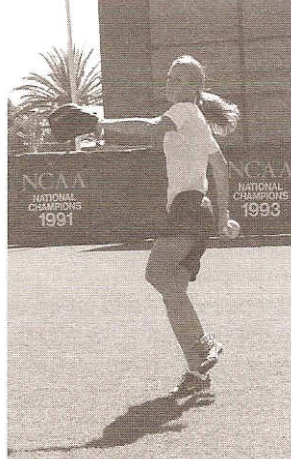


Figure 6B

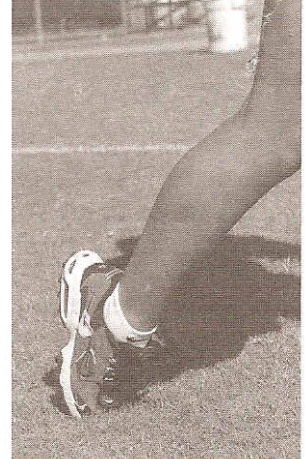


Figure 7C

THROWING RECAP AND TEACHING PROGRESSION

1. To develop grip, spin and release.

- Player on one knee (ball side knee down) facing target.
- Rotate the body until the glove side shoulder. Knee and foot are in line toward target (knee drill position).
- Release the ball by pulling down and across the seams (when the ball gets to the target line at top of the arm circle) with fingers; thumb leads down toward the ground on release. Keep an even separation between the arm and the head.
- The glove side arm follows through up to the chest.

2. To create arm circle.

- From the knee drill position (see 1. above). Start arm circle by bringing thumb past thigh to a point where the palm faces away from the target.
- The elbow leads arm forward into release position.
- Release same as described above.

3. Lower body action from standing position.

- Player turns sideways to target. glove shoulder, hip and knee pointing toward target.
- Weight evenly distributed on the balls of the feet.
- Hands relaxed at sides.
- Bring both arm up into "fingers to the sky" position (players should see the backs of both palms in this position)
- As arms move, shift weight slightly to the inside of the ball side (back) foot.
- Elbow leads throwing arm forward into release position. At the same time transfer lower body weight against a firm front side (not locked).
- Ball release occurs as described above. Follow through with hand down and to the glove side (opposite) knee.
- Drag ball side foot toward target on follow through. (Shoe laces to the ground)

Coaching Tips** Use smaller balls with younger kids; make sure they have a ball they can handle. Draw or tape a stripe on the ball; this provides great visual feedback on spin. Use dry mechanics, shadow throws, be very deliberate (slow motion repetition).

Kids need to have a throwing program that they do every day (for purposes of loosening up and for practicing and improving their throwing skills). Every practice must include a selection of throwing and catching drills. Throwing is as important as hitting, pitching, etc. Treat it as such!

Training Tip" Throwing drills should be done with a striped ball.

Coaching Tips**Tell your players that the ball will go where their hand (or more specifically, the "dot") is pointing when they let go of it. "Flipping" the wrist means more to a kid than "snapping" the wrist. Kids snap their fingers. they "flip" their wrists.

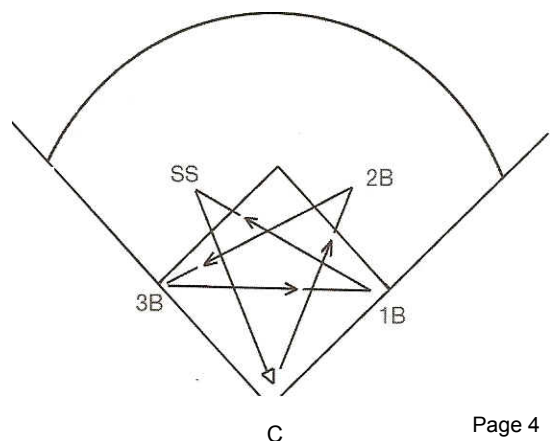
THE STAR DRILL

Drill Name: Star Drill

Drill Focus: Catching and Throwing

The Star Drill is a drill that will help your players improve their throwing skills.

- Players get in the basic infield positions (first, second and third base, shortstop, catcher), but not necessarily at regular distance.
- Catcher starts by throwing the ball to the second base. Second base throws to third base.
- Third base throws to first base.
- First base throws to shortstop.
- Shortstop throws to catcher. This makes the ball travel in a "star" pattern.
- To make this more game-like, time how quickly your infielders can make a star VS. your outfielders, and keep track of these times on a board at practice.
- Also you can add base runners (with helmets) and have them run around the bases before the players can complete the star.



Catching a Thrown Ball

Like hitting, the skill of catching a thrown ball is difficult for a young player to perform because (1) it requires good hand-eye coordination, and (2) most young players are afraid of the ball.

If your players are struggling playing catch with each other, have them take their gloves off and try using bigger balls like volleyballs, soccer balls, beach balls, and even lightweight basketballs. Using a bigger ball will make it easier for your players to focus on the ball, which really helps with their hand-eye coordination. Also, a bigger ball will help your players use both hands when they catch the ball. With their gloves off, it will be nearly impossible for them to catch the ball with just one hand.

When teaching young players how to catch a thrown ball focus on the following:

- Ready Position: "Athletic" ready position - knees slightly bent, weight on balls of the feet, shoulders, hips and feet are square to the ball.
- Hands start in "neutral" position - approximately waist high, thumbs up, palms facing each other Receive ball with hands in front of the body, palms facing the ball.
- Catch ball in the middle of the body.
- When the ball is above the waist, catch the ball with fingers toward the sky: "High to the Sky."
- When the ball is below the waist, catch the ball with fingers toward the ground: "Down to the Ground."

Coach, you need to remember that young players are so afraid of getting hit by the ball that they will try to avoid it rather than try to catch it. This is why your players will move their heads, and sometimes their entire body, as they try to catch the ball. Your challenge is to remove the fear of the ball by using safety balls, and by teaching your players the proper way to catch a thrown ball. That way you won't have to say *"Don't be afraid of the ball"* over and over.

Above and Below Catching Drill

The Above and below drill will help your players improve their catching skills.

Drill Name: Above & Below
Drill Focus: Hand Position

1. Have player remove their glove.
2. Using a volleyball or soccer ball, and standing about four to six feet in front of the player, gently toss a ball to the player. The toss should be above or below the player's waist.
3. Player has to say "High Sky" or "Down Ground," depending upon where the ball is when they catch it.
4. Vary the tosses so the player has to react properly.
5. Gradually add a glove for the player and then begin using a softball.

Catching A Fly Ball

Catching a fly ball is one of the most difficult skills of all for a young player to learn. This is mainly because of a child's underdeveloped hand-eye coordination and their fear of being hit on the head by a ball falling out of the sky. While all players will have to catch fly balls from time to time, it is a skill that is mainly performed by outfielders. However, catching a fly ball is a skill every player needs to learn. Try to get your players to think of fly balls as thrown balls that just go a little too high. This won't guarantee that all fly balls will be caught, but it will help your players get over the mental block of catching a fly ball.

Work with all of your players on the following Fly Ball Basics.

- Line your throwing side up with the ball
- Get your glove up in-line with the ball with your fingers pointing to the sky. **Elbows are bent and relaxed (do not extend arms straight to catch ball).**
- Catch the ball in front of your head off the throwing side of the body. (Figure 1) Catch the ball with one hand (glove), covering the ball in your glove with your **bare hand**.
- **Position glove close to top of head on throwing shoulder.**
- When catching a ball in the sun, try to adjust angle to play ball out of the sun. Use either the glove or the throwing hand to shield the sun while tracking the ball.

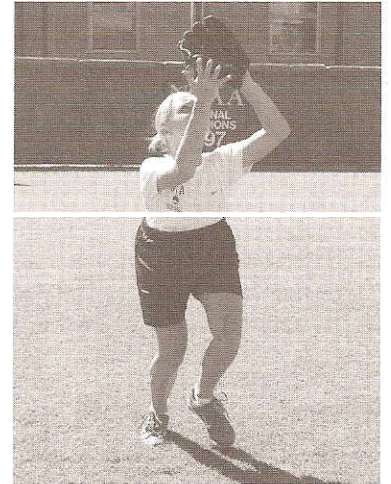


Figure 9

****Coaching Tip** Start young kids with very soft and light balls to help eliminate their fear of the ball. For example, use volleyball to teach catching with two hands with palms facing away from body and fingers up.**

Fly Ball Drills

Three drills that will help your players improve their fly ball skills are:

1. Self Toss
2. Football Toss
3. Roof Toss

Drill Name: Self Toss
Drill Focus Confidence in Catching A Thrown Ball

- Each player has a ball and their glove on.
- They toss the ball up in the air and catch it.
- As they get more confident, have them toss the ball higher and higher.
- If your players have difficulty, have them use a safety ball or a tennis ball to help them overcome their fear of being hit by the ball.
- Also, try to make this drill competitive by seeing who can toss the ball the highest and make the catch.

Note: This drill is good because all players can do it at the same time.

Drill Name: Football Toss
Drill Focus: Judgment

- **Players keep their gloves on and line up in two lines ready to go out for a pass.**
- Instead of using softballs, you will throw footballs to your players.
- Have one player at a time from each line "go out for a pass" while you throw them the football and they catch it with their glove and their bare hand.

Drill Name: Roof Toss
Drill Focus: Catching Skills

- Have your players try this drill at home with a whiffle ball or a tennis ball so it won't damage the roof.
- Your players toss the ball up on the roof and practice catching it when it rolls down and falls off.
- This drill really helps their judgment and catching skills.

Fielding a Ground Ball

While hand-eye coordination is not as crucial in fielding a ground ball, fear of the ball is a big problem. Most kids are scared to death of getting hit by a ball that is bouncing sharply, heading directly toward them. Softballs are NOT soft and they can hurt young (and older) kids. The best thing you can do to improve your players' ability to field ground balls is to remove their fear of the ball by using softer, safety balls. Use safety balls, whiffle balls, tennis balls or any softer ball, that won't hurt the player if it takes a bad bounce and hits them. Pain and injury are two things that will certainly keep your players from paying attention long enough to ever learn how to field correctly. And with all the great safety balls available now, it doesn't make any sense for you not to use them. If you are the type of coach who thinks kids just need to take a few grounders off the face until they learn to "stay down on the ball and keep your body behind it," **you are in for a surprise ~ those days are over, Kids have many choices now** as to what sport they want to play and it doesn't take much - fear, injury, boredom - before they choose to go play something else. **So be compassionate and use safety balls when teaching your players how to field ground balls.**



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

- "Athletic" Ready Position: Knees slightly bent, weight on the balls of the feet, with balance slightly forward. The shoulders, hips and feet are square to the ball. Bend at the knees, not at the waist, to lower the body into good fielding position. (Figure 10)
- **Let the arms hang in a relaxed position, fingers down. Hands start in "neutral" position - approximately waist high, thumbs up, palms facing each other.** (Figure 10)
- Approach the ball like an airplane. Try to get your players to imagine that they are airplanes coming in for a landing when they approach a ground ball. This will help them get lower to the ground the closer the ball gets to them, instead of approaching the ball like a helicopter and plopping down on top of it at the last minute. If they approach it like a helicopter they will either miss the ball completely or field it behind them.
- Just prior to gathering the ball into the glove, make sure the tips of the glove are touching the ground (you never want to have to go down for the ball at the last minute - it's quicker to have the glove close to the ground in anticipation of fielding the ball). (Figure 11)
- Field the ball with hands in front of the body, palms facing the ball, elbows in front of the knees, elbows slightly bent. (Figure 2) Field ball on the glove hand side of the body
- Gather the ball using "soft" hands. Field the ball with your hands, not with the glove. (Figure 12)
- Gather the ball through the middle of your body to the throwing side as you move your feet to a throwing position, stepping toward the target. (Figure 13)

Ground Ball Drills

Three drills to help your players improve their ground ball fielding skills are:

Drill Name: Gloveless Whiffle Balls
Drill Focus: Confidence

- Have your players spread out around the infield facing home plate-no gloves!
- Now, using only whiffle balls, randomly roll grounders out to your players. Be sure not to go in any particular order so your players have to practice always being ready.
- To ensure that you spend more time fielding grounders instead of chasing balls, have extra whiffle balls (use a plastic five gallon paint bucket) and have your players roll the ball back into you after they field them.

Drill Name: Wall Bounces
Drill Focus: Glove Work

- Player stands six to 10 feet from a wall and throws a ball near the bottom of the wall.
- As the ball bounces off the wall, the player fields the ground ball and throws it at the bottom of the wall again.

Drill Name: Chicken
Drill Focus: Competition

- Two players face each other about six feet apart in ground ball fielding position.
- They try to throw the ball on the ground through each others legs.
- Have them keep points: one point each time the ball goes between someone's legs, and the first one to five wins.

Hitting

If you are coaching t-ball, hitting won't be quite as difficult as it will be if your team is hitting off "live" pitching. With live pitching, hand-eye coordination and timing come in to play, as does the fear of being hit by a pitched ball. If your players are afraid of getting hit by the ball, use safety balls or tennis balls in your practices to remove fear of the ball.

ABOUT BATS

Even though it is extremely important that your players have a solid, fundamentally sound swing, it is just as important that they use the proper size and weight bat. Therefore, it is important to go over some bat basics.

There are two types of bats: a Barrel Bat and a Bottle Bat. A Barrel Bat is the shape of a traditional baseball bat, while a Bottle Bat is the more traditional softball bat. While both types are used by elite level softball players, your players will probably have more success with a bottle bat because it has an enlarged hitting area.

In addition to knowing the different types of bats, it's a good idea for you to become familiar with the various parts of the bat:

1. **Knob:** The knob is designed to help keep a player's hands from slipping off the end of the bat. When players are told to "choke up" it refers to moving their hands further away from the knob.
2. **Handle:** Where the players' hands go. That's why it's called the handle.
3. **Barrel:** The "fat" part of the bat. The barrel is the part of the bat actually designed to hit the ball. It's size will vary depending on the type of bat used.
4. **Sweet Spot:** The ideal part of the barrel for hitting the ball. While each bat has a "scientific" sweet spot, it is usually a few inches from the end of the bat.
5. **End:** Just what it says, the end of the bat. It isn't designed for hitting the ball, but occasionally your players will swing too early and hit the ball off the end of the bat. As you can imagine, when this happens the ball doesn't go very far.

Use a bat that's light enough for the player to easily control.

Now, the simple basics of hitting:

I. Grip & Stance

A. Grip:

- Hold the bat as you would grip an axe handle. (Figure 14)
- Line up door-knocking knuckles or "split." (Figure 15 & 16) Adjust slightly for whatever is comfortable for the player.
- Hands and wrist are relaxed in the stance; the grip on the ball will tighten slightly as the swing starts.

****Coaching Tip** Verbal/physical cues for a proper grip:**

- **Like you would grip an axe handle, and use the same grip on your bat. (Figure 16) Pretend you are pounding a stake into the ground from over head.**
- **Pretend you are pounding a nail with a hammer.**
- **Hold a bat horizontally out in front of you and pretend you are "shaking hands" with the bat. (Figure 4b)**

B. Stance:

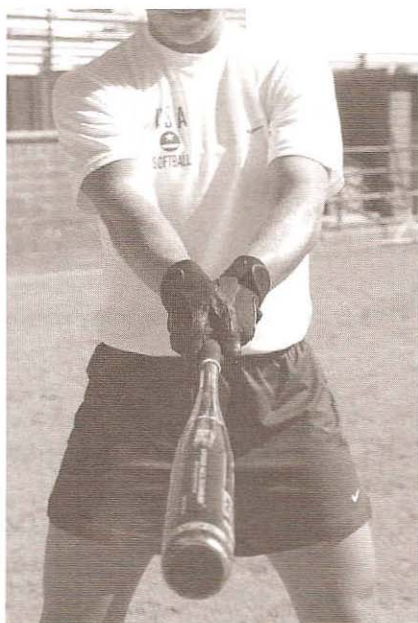


Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16

- Purely cosmetic (most variety in hitting will be found in the stance)
- **Stance must be comfortable, relaxed and allow the hitter to move into a strong attacking position.**
- Must have the ability to create rhythm in the stance (unlocking of body parts)
- Should allow the hitter to get a good two eye look at the pitcher
- Should allow the hitter to achieve proper plate coverage upon reaching toe touch (Stride)
- **The only mistake you can make in the stance is getting too wide!!**
- Some hitters prefer their hands high-some a little lower. The hand position in the stance is up to the individual.

Coaching Point: The hand position in the stance must allow the hitter to move to a strong hitting position when the front foot reaches toe touch (slide). **The ability to reach this position on time and with minimal movement is essential**

C. Lower Body Position:

- Feet in good athletic position (like guarding someone in basketball).
- Feet are slightly outside the hips, wider than shoulder width apart.
- Weight is on inside balls of feet.
- Knees are inside of the feet. (Figure 17)
- **Flexion in ankles and knees.**
- Slight bend at the waist ("head over toes" or "slight" bow toward the plate).
- **To make sure you are in a position to achieve full plate coverage, reach out and tap the outside corner of the plate with only the bottom hand on the bat. (Figure 18)**
- Stand even with the center of home plate or with your belly-button lined up with the front edge of the plate. (Figure 19)
- Weight stays centered (balanced) in the stance (evenly distributed on front side and back side - 50/50).

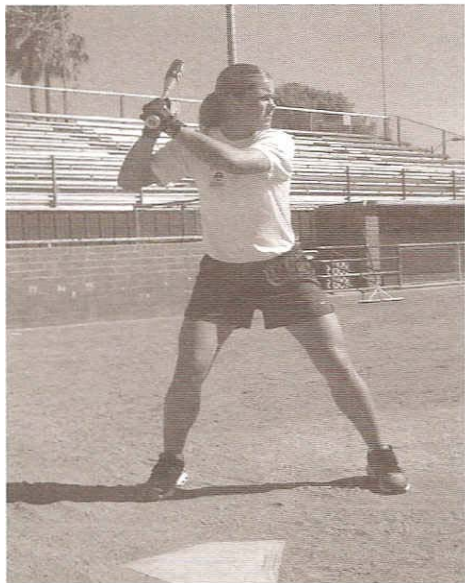


Figure 17

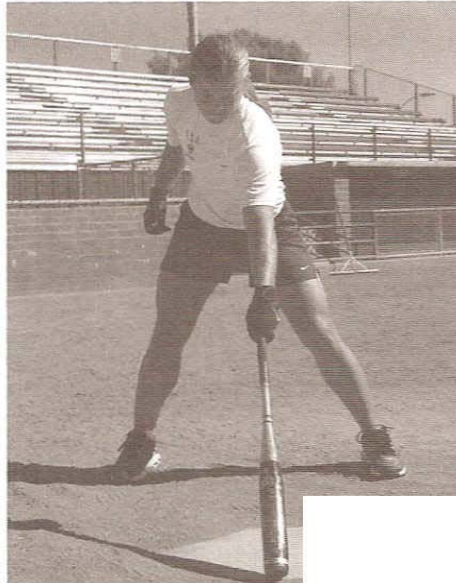


Figure 18



Figure 19

D. Upper Body Position

- The bottom hand should be held at least at the top of the strike zone. Better to have hands too high than too low.
- Bat held at or inside of back shoulder
- Bat held at 45 degree angle
- Elbows down but in a strong throwing position (Figure 20).

> **Drill:** With a short, light bat, have the hitter hold the bat with their top hand only and hit one-handed. The hitter will automatically bring the top hand elbow down into the strongest natural position. (Figure 21)

E. Keys for whole body

1. **Good vertical alignment-shoulders over hips, hips over knees.**
2. Big rhythm early in stance to small rhythm just prior to pitchers motion

II. Loading or Triggering Phase

Definition: Slight movement away from the pitcher

- Slight weight shift to inside of back leg (knee inside of fee) (Figure 22)
- Movement can be back or down into back leg
- Hands move to strong "throwing" position (ex. skipping rock)
- **Hand movement slow and continuous (on time with the pitcher)**
- Hand stay even or slightly inside of front elbow
- No twisting of upper body



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22

III. STRIDE

Definition: Movement toward the pitcher to establish a strong hitting position

1. Stride concludes at toe touch. but can vary (Early stride. No Stride. Stride on heel)
2. Weight lands on inside of front foot.
3. **Front foot down early vs. late (recognizes and react)**
4. Hips and Shoulders remain square to the plate (Figure 23)
5. Move to a strong hitting position
6. Equal bend in the knees
7. Front foot at 45 degree angle
8. Hands end up in a strong throwing position
9. Hands even or slightly inside of lead elbow.
10. Bat angle slightly back towards head
11. Back elbow slightly elevated to create space between back elbow and hip



Figure 23

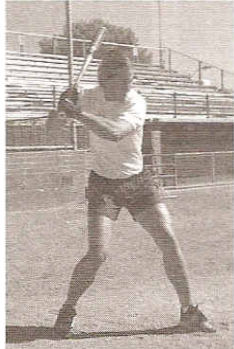


Figure 24

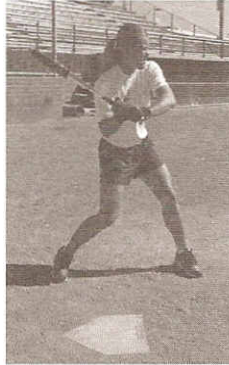


Figure 25

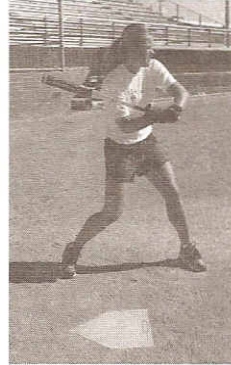


Figure 26

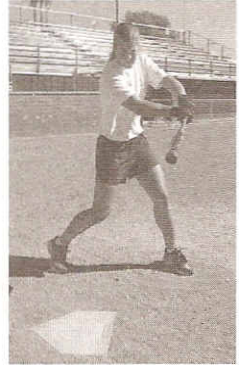


Figure 27a

IV. SWING

Definition: Rotational movement that takes the bat from launching position to contact

1. Weight shifting into front side initiates rotation Just prior to or at heel plant) (Figure 24)
2. Back elbow falls into "slot"
3. Hips and hands work together (skipping a rock) (Figure 25)
4. Hands stay inside of ball to bat lag position (knob pointed towards pitcher-barrel pointed towards catcher).
5. Lead with front elbow (Figure 26)
6. Bat head on plane and ready to release forces.
7. Hands in front of center of gravity (belly button) (Figure 26)
8. Contact: position that allows you to release the bat with the most force:
 - Middle pitch: barrel even with the hands. (Figure 27a)
 - Inside pitch: barrel ahead of the hands. (Figure 27b)
 - Outside pitch: barrel behind the hands. (Figure 27c)
9. Hit against firm front side
10. Hand position: Palm Up! Palm Down (Figure 28)
11. Lead elbow above hands, hands above barrel (figure 28)
12. Wrist straight
13. Eyes and head focus on the ball! head down
14. Back heel finishes up.



Figure 27b



Figure 27c



Figure 28



Figure 29

V. Finish

1. Ultimate goal is to hit through a large zone.
2. Extension occurs after contact. (Bat pointed towards the pitcher) (Figure 29)
3. Rolling of the wrist occurs after extension. (Figure 29)
4. Finish the swing around shoulder level or higher. (Figure 30)

VI. MENTAL ASPECTS OF HITTING

- Use funnel approach (broad to narrow thoughts going from dugout to box): **Dugout**: Gather information about pitcher. Situation, etc. What am I going to be called upon to execute (ex. bunt, slap etc.).
 - **On Deck Circle**: Time the pitcher. Positive self-talk.
 - **Batter's Box**: See the ball - hit the ball!
- Relaxation: Control breathing (i.e. deep breath as hitter steps into box).
- Positive thoughts (focus on "what I want to do" rather than "what I don't want to do"). Coach needs to know what verbal cues work for individual hitters.
- Avoid too much coaching just before an at-bat or between pitches.
- Challenge for coaches and hitters is dealing with the 7 out of 10 "failures" at the plate. Keep a "well-hit" average, as opposed to batting average.
- Evaluate at-bat on something other than outcome ("did you see the pitch?" "were you relaxed and in control?" etc.). Focus on having good at-bats.
- Batting practice is the time for the coach to give hitters confidence, make them feel good about their performance. Confidence is big key - preparation builds confidence.

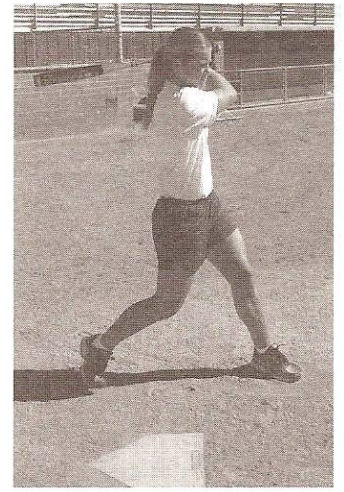


Figure 30

Visualize success - encourage hitters to keep a VCR tape in their head to play back good at-bats in their minds.

Hitting Drills

Three drills that will help your players improve their hitting skills are:

1. Throwing Drill
2. One Hand Drill
3. Front Toss Drill

Drill Name: Throwing Drill

Drill Focus: Sequencing the upper and lower body properly

- Establish your hitting stance with a ball in your top hand (right hand for right-handed hitters and left hand for left handed hitters)
- Perform a throwing motion into a net and pretend you are trying to skip a rock on water

Drill Name: One Hand Drill

Drill Focus: Sequencing the upper and lower body to work efficiently

- Place the tee (even with your stride foot at toe touch for top hand and slightly behind toe touch for bottom hand) 2. Have the player use a small bat to begin with and eventually use their regular bat
- Player executes with proper mechanics the entire swing and emphasizes proper hand position at contact and hitting through a long zone. Make sure the hitter stays inside the ball on all swings
- Repeat the drill with the top hand and bottom hand

Drill Name: Front Toss Drill

Drill Focus: Sequencing

- Feeder stands behind a screen approx. 10-15 ft away in front of the hitter
- Feeder tosses the ball underhanded giving the hitter a timing mechanism. Swing hand back as you step forward to throw. When the feeders hand goes back, the hitter makes their negative move to prepare to hit.
- Coach releases the ball and the hitter executes a proper swing. (You can use small balls; whiffle balls, tennis balls, or regular softballs. Coach should be able to move the ball in different parts of the strike zone to simulate a rich pitch.
- Great drill to work on timing of the swing -Coaching Pt: Make sure the hitter is starting the negative move on time and getting the front down soon enough prior to the release.

Fast Pitch Pitching

Fast pitch pitching - the one skill above all others that we tend to place the most emphasis on. Because the pitcher is so crucial to the flow of the game and ultimately a team's success. We put an unfair amount of pressure on the pitcher.

For the most part, we recognize that skills like catching, throwing, and even hitting take a few years to develop. So we are relatively patient as they do develop. Yet when it comes to pitching, patience goes out the window. We expect kids who maybe have never even pitched before to master the skill to the point of throwing strikes in a matter of weeks. After all, your first game is only days away, right?

Well Coach, pitching is not easy. First of all, it is an extremely difficult skill to learn. Secondly, what really makes pitching so hard is the number of times the child is asked to perform the skill successfully. The pitcher touches the ball on every play of every game. We expect the pitcher to perform successfully over 80% of the time. That is a tall order for anyone to fill.

The following are some points to keep in mind when working with your pitcher. These tips will help shorten their development time and increase their rate of success.

- **Keep it Simple.** While this has been said over and over about all the skills of softball, keeping pitching simple is almost more important than anything. If you can simplify the learning process, the easier it will be for your pitcher to remember what they are supposed to do. Break the pitching motion into understandable parts, and keep it simple!
- **Be Patient.** Learning takes time and you have to allow pitchers time to develop their skills. If you get angry or frustrated your pitcher won't learn faster. In fact, it will only scare them, make them tense, and hinder their development. Before talking to your pitcher take a deep breath and count to 10. The key is for you to be relaxed and calm when working with your pitcher.
- **Be Confident.** If you are positive with your pitchers and let them know you can see their improvement, they will have more confidence in themselves and their abilities. They will work hard for your approval and your positive feedback. Coach, trust that your pitchers will "get it." Every great pitcher started out throwing balls behind the batter and over the backstop-so just be patient and be confident.

a.



Figure 31



Figure 32

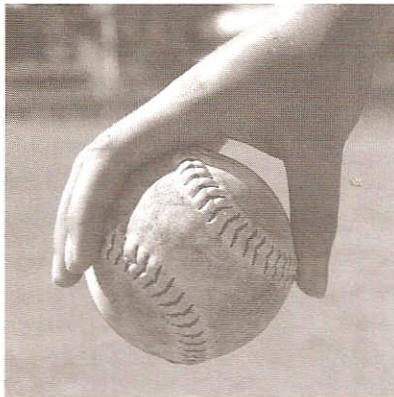


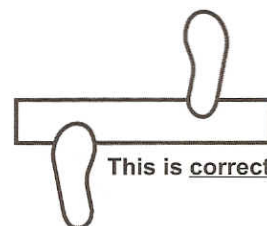
Figure 33



Figure 34

The following are the basics for your young pitchers:

- **I. Grip**
- **The fingers should be on or across the seams on the ball to form the grip. Just like overhand throw grip**
- **4 seam grip or 2 seam grip depending upon objectives.**
 - 4 seam grip lends itself to straighter movement or a straight line. (Figure 31)
 - > 2 seam grip lends itself to more variation off that line. (Figure 32)
- **A 4 seam grip is good for beginners. However, the key is a comfortable grip. Hand shapes and sizes are different; therefore, grip comfort varies based on hand size and shape.**
- **The thumb and middle finger are the strongest digits on the hand. They establish the initial *line of force* for the pitch.**
- **When forming the grip across the seams (2 or 4 seams) the seam should fit into the 1st groove of the middle finger for maximum snap at release. (Figure 33)**
- **For a proper grip hold the ball in the fingers, not the palm of the hand.**
- **Your pitcher should never experience any pain when throwing a pitch.**



II. Stance

- **Begin with two feet touching the pitching rubber (ASA rules).** This does not mean the middle of both feet needs to be in the middle of the rubber. It simply means that any part of each foot must touch the rubber. (Figure 34) Teach your pitchers to begin with their throwing foot forward just like they do **when they throw overhand.**
- **Start with both hands relaxed and down in front of the body, with the ball in the glove.**
- **The feet should be balanced and approximately shoulder width apart. (Figure 35)**
- **The ball of the pitching hand foot should be over the front of the rubber.**
- **The toe of the back foot should be pushed against the back of the rubber.**
- **Beginners should make every attempt to learn to pitch from the center of the rubber (the line of force at its most central point), with both feet pointed toward home plate.**
- **The pitcher should take the signal from the catcher with their weight on the front foot, which allows the transfer of weight to the back foot.**
- **While the weight is on the front the hands should come together and the pitcher must pause to comply with the pitching rules. The weight will transfer to the back foot during this move. (Figure 36)**
- **The rules also dictate that the front foot must remain in contact with the rubber during the transfer of weight.**

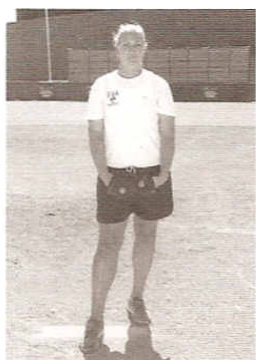


Figure 35

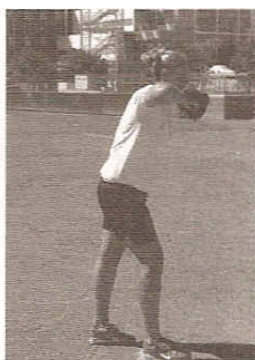


Figure 36

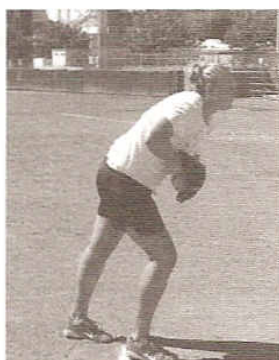


Figure 37



Figure 38a



Figure 38b

III. Initial Arm Swing

- a) To start the arm motion push, the glove with the ball being gripped by the throwing hand, down and slightly back on the throwing side of the body. This will enhance the pivot of the throwing side foot.
- b) The shoulders should follow the glove down and back turning slightly to also enhance the pivot. Weight should transfer back to the inside of throwing side foot. (Figure 37)
- c) **The glove serves as a guide to the arm so it can stay on one of two lines** of force
The first line of force (LOF1) is the line that is created by the completion of the pivot when the front foot lands. That line is created by drawing a line from the front of the back foot to the target. The second line of force (LOF2) is the line **drawn from the release point to the target. 80th lines will be close to parallel.** LOF2 will be slightly outside LOF1, but they will both meet at the target.
- d) Ideally, we want to start the *arm* swing forward as the pivot foot begins to turn and our body begins to "open" to the target. As our arm begins to move forward we want to keep the ball in *our* glove as long as "naturally" possible. This will hide the ball as long as possible to the hitter.
- e) When the front foot lands (at around a 45 degree angle), the arm has completed a circle like motion over the top on the throwing side of our body. The elbow and wrist **have led us up and over.** Our arm position should be close to the parallel to the ground and our palm should be faced slightly away from our body pointed the same was as our chest. Our glove hand should also be parallel with the glove pointed at the target, palm also facing away. Our shoulders should be on LOF2 creating a ball path in front of our hips, knees and chin. Our hips, knees, and chin should be of LOF1. (Figure 38a and 38b)

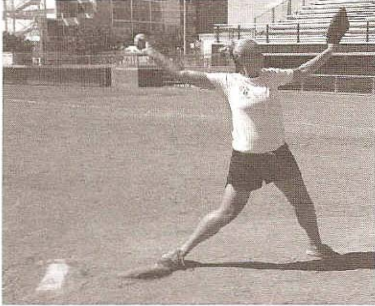


Figure 39



Figure 40



Figure 41

IV. Legs

- a) The instep of the back foot initiates the drive forward for transfer of weight from the back foot (leg) toward the front foot (leg). (Figure 39)
- b) The front knee (stride leg) lands flexed, but firms up as the weight transfers from the back leg to the front leg. (Figure 40)
- c) The hips should finish square to the plate after releasing the ball, with the follow through into a good fielding position.
- d) The shoulders and upper body finish tall with the shoulders finishing square with plate. (Figure 41)

V. Arms- Downswing

- On the downswing, maintain a long (not locked) lever (extension) on the downward path. (Figure 39)
- A cocked wrist on approach to the release point allows for a maximum wrist snap.(Figure 39)
- The wrist snap and release of the ball occurs between 7:00 and 5:00 (pitcher is the clock). (Figure 42)
- The ball rolls off the middle finger (LOF).
- The hand and arm finish out and up (longer lever), remaining loose and relaxed.
- The follow-through continues in direction of the ball on the LOF.
- Short-arming (tight "V" with elbow) decreases the length of the lever (arm) and creates tension, therefore decreasing speed.
- When the arm circle takes away from the path of a perfect circle, or, leads a different direction (away from LOF), it will detract from solid fundamentals and adversely affect the pitch



VI. Snap Release

- a. The pitcher releases the ball with their hand facing the catcher (imagine there is a dot in the middle of the hand, and as the pitcher releases the ball the dot on will face the catcher).
- b. The wrist snap should produce 6-12 or 5-11 :00 spin - determined by hand size and flexibility. (figure 43a)
- c. Relaxed shoulders - meaning they will be slightly rolled forward (slumping) which will facilitate a smooth transition from snap to release to follow through. (figure 43b)



NOTE: It is very important to teach your pitchers that the ball will go where their hand is pointing when they let go of it. While it sounds simple, it's the key to your pitcher's control. If they can learn this simple principle they can make adjustments immediately following a bad pitch:

- If the pitch is too high, they should let go of the ball sooner.
- If the pitch is too low, they should hold on to the ball longer.

Most pitches will go high at first and the pitcher's natural reaction will be to throw slower. Instead, just teach your pitcher to Ulet go sooner, don't pitch slower"

Summary

The simple wording pitching summary, that all of your pitchers should know and be able to repeat is:

- Step (toward the target)
- Swing (arm toward the target)
- Land (with glove foot in-line to the target)
- Release (with ball hand facing the target)

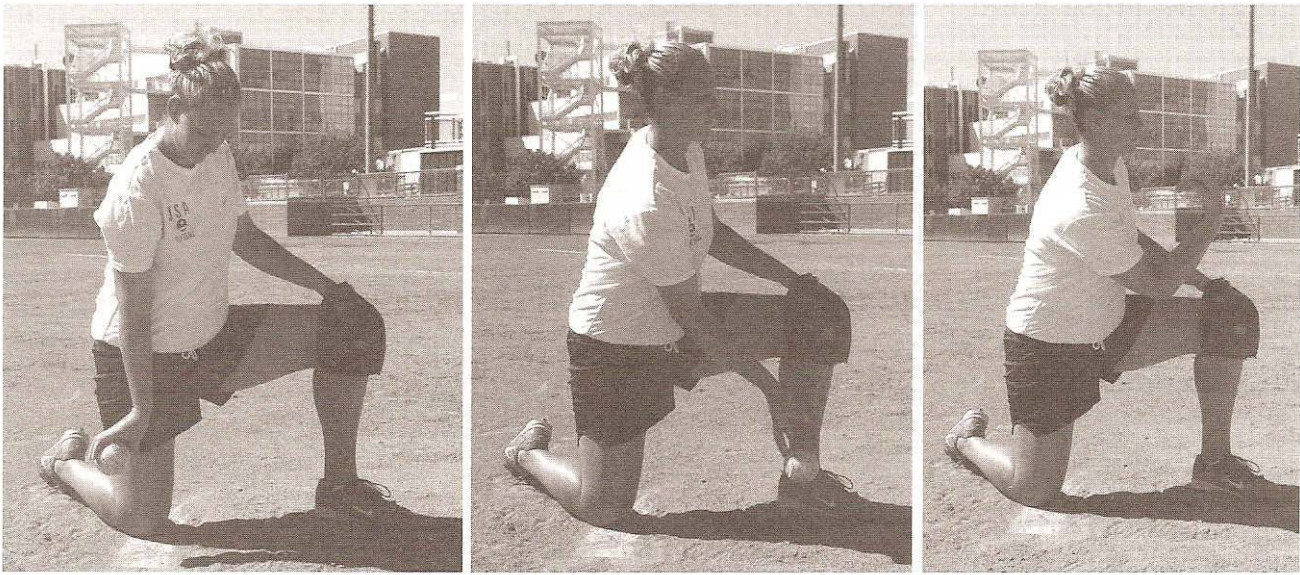


Figure 44

Fast Pitch Pitching Drills

Three drills to help your players improve their fast pitch pitching skills are:

1. Knee rolls
2. Rhythm Snaps
3. Line Pitching

Drill Name: Knee Rolls (Figure 44)

Drill Focus: Wrist snaps and spins

1. Players stand sideways to each other with the glove shoulder closest to their partner.
2. Have the pitcher angle their shoulders at about a 30 degree angle.
3. Pitcher is on knee with glove hand resting on a firm glove of the ball side thigh. Cock the wrist back and snap it forward releasing the ball in a roll towards the target. The wrist through will only be as far forward as the wrist was cocked back. Repeat 10-20 times.

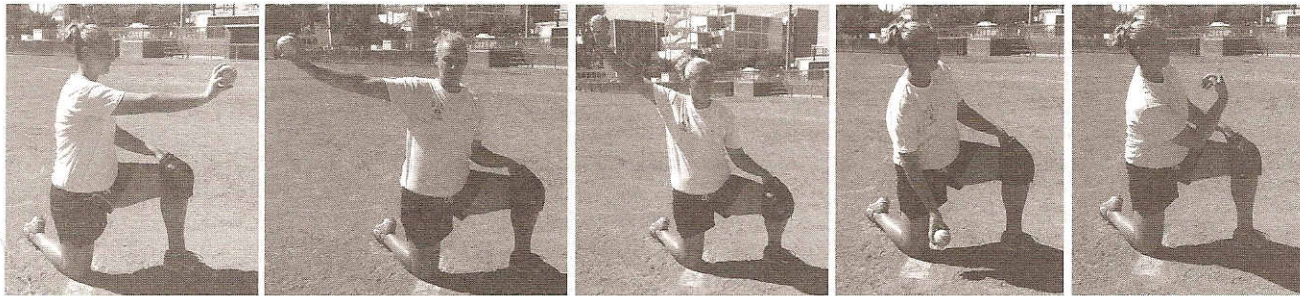


Figure 45

Drill Name: Rhythm Snaps (Figure 45)

Drill Focus: Timing, Circle, Snap

1. Pitcher maintains proper knee drill position
2. Start with ball forward, shoulder high, hand on top of the ball, on the LOF. Let the hand drop by relaxing the shoulder and let the momentum let the arm swing back as high as the back shoulder.
3. Let the smooth transition swing back forward to the starting position. This will constitute 1 swing.
4. Do it twice and then on the 3rd transition forward let the arm go all the way over the top and release the ball at the natural point (at the bottom of the arm swing) and continue to follow through after wrist snap.

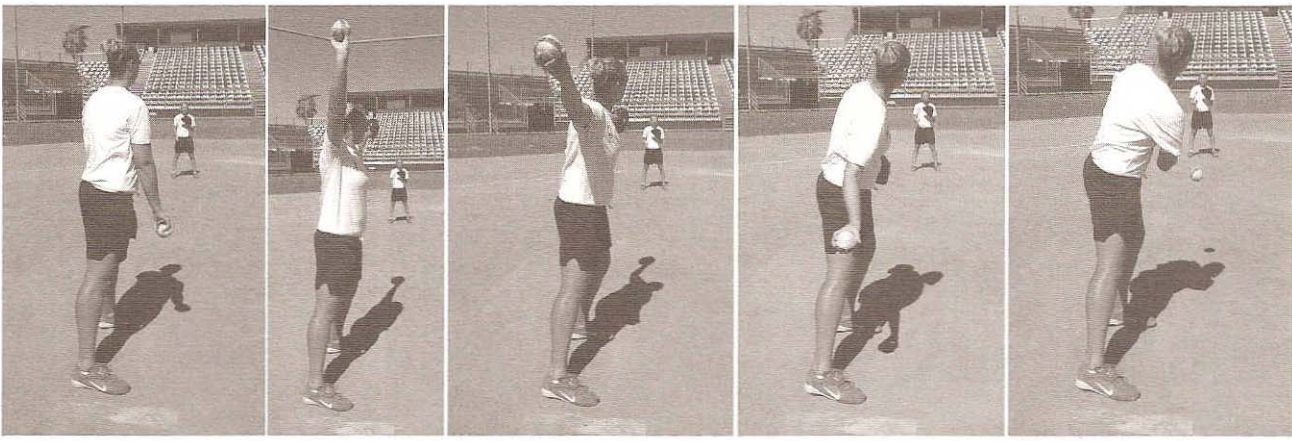


Figure 46

Drill Name: Line Pitching
Drill Focus: Control

1. Player now stands on the line directly toward the target.
2. Place the glove-side foot and arm on the line toward the target.
3. Start to swing the ball and arm toward the target.
4. The pitcher keeps the ball over the line throughout the arm swing.
5. The pitcher releases the ball directly over the line toward the target.

Slow Pitch Pitching

Although slow pitch pitching is not as technically difficult as fast pitch pitching, young pitchers may still have trouble with the slow pitch motion. A good slow pitch pitcher will be able to pitch with control and consistency.

Speed isn't a slow pitch pitcher's focus-throwing hittable pitches is. The objective in slow pitch is not to strike people out - it is to **throw hittable pitches**. Once a **slow pitch pitcher learns how to pitch with the proper arc on the ball and with some accuracy**, they can learn how to throw pitches that batters will hit to certain fielders.

The key to a pitcher's control is to feel connected to the target (home plate). Help your pitcher get that connection to home plate by having them imagine there is a line connecting them directly to the catcher. In fact, actually make a line on the field. Draw one in the dirt, or have your pitcher pitch on the foul line. You might want to take the field liner and actually make a chalk line for your pitcher from the pitchers mound to home plate. This will greatly improve their control and their ability to feel **connected to the target**.

Let's look at the basics of slow pitch pitching:

1. Step with the glove foot in line to the target.
2. Keep the arm-swing on that line to the target.
3. Release the ball with the middle of the hand (the Dot) facing the target.

Slow Pitch Pitching Drills Two drills to help your players improve their slow pitch pitching skills are:

1. Ladder
2. Fence or Clothesline

Drill Name: Ladder Drill
Drill Focus: Pitch Height and Angle

1. Your pitcher stands on the pitching rubber with a ball.
2. Place a ladder in-between the pitcher and home plate. Put a bucket at home plate.
3. Have your pitcher toss the ball over the ladder and try to get it into the bucket.

Drill Name: Fence or Clothesline Drill
Drill Focus: Height and Control

1. **Have your pitcher and your catcher get pitching distance apart from each other and have either a clothesline or a fence in between them.**
2. **Have your pitcher try to pitch strikes over the clothesline or fence.**
3. To help challenge your pitcher, place a batter in the batter's box.

Catching

Stance/setup

Signal stance

- signals should be given clearly and quickly
- middle infield and pitcher should see clearly
- protect signals with glove and be aware if hitter/coach are cheating
- Very little movement. ... don't want to tip off

Receiving stance

- widen feet for more balance and agility
- don't sit on heels (don't sit on knee savers)
- relaxed and comfortable wrist, with flexible elbow
- protect throwing hand

Receiving

Target

- give a good target
- don't set target too early
- Elbow is shock absorber. keep it flexible
- stick pitches in the zone, frame pitches out of the zone

Framing

- key is to frame gray pitches, not black and white pitches
- movements have to be subtle, no violent moves
- use body as well as glove to "get around" pitch
- shift body weight
- "dust the strike zone", finish the pitch
- don't let pitch take glove out of the zone
- don't leave ball in zone too long, don't want to embarrass umpire

Blocking

- a good blocker gives confidence to pitcher
- goal is to keep ball in front of you, catching the ball is a bonus

Body position

- forward body lean
- don't sit on heels, might have to get off knees to make next play
- glove shoots straight down to keep ball from getting between legs
- shoulders rounded to control rebound
- "get big", as much surface area as possible
- make body a "pillow", stay soft to absorb impact
- tuck chin to protect throat and use facemask

Getting into position

- replace feet with knees
- movements must be quick and deliberate
- lateral movement with rounded shoulders
- responsible for about 1 ball width outside of plate
- finish with a closed shoulder
- blocking off-speed pitches a must
- on harder pitches, foot replacement more difficult
- BOTTOM LINE: get into position as quickly as possible

Plays at the Plate

Force plays

- keep legs flexed, ready to move
- be prepared to stretch if necessary, make sure to get one out
- catch with two hands, secure ball in glove before looking to turn two
- read throw and walk into play
- keep back foot on plate, step into throwing lane to first
- clear yourself from sliding runner
- make sure to clear runner down 1st base, take extra step into throwing lane
- only make secondary throw if there is a play, no wasted throws

Tag plays

- recommend keeping mask on for safety and if "blocking" throw necessary
- start slightly in front of plate, show runner the plate
- entice runner to slide straight into plate rather than back door
- as ball comes in, move back and into position
- take step back with back leg, then slide right foot into position
- secure ball with both hands and protect space between legs
- be prepared to follow back door slide
- DON'T CHASE RUNNER, stay home

Throwing

To 2nd base

- location of the pitch dictates what your feet will do
- bring glove to throwing hand
- stay low in the Shoot don't stand up straight
- keep a high elbow, hand a backward "C" facing away
- fingers on top of the ball
- stride, front elbow, and follow-through always toward target
- pull down with front side and release back side on follow-through
- keep base runner on 1st in peripheral vision and anticipate steals

To 3rd base

- depending on hitters setup, either clear behind hitter or in front
- step or shuffle should be moving on an angle toward 3rd, not away
- don't throw over hitters head
- clear hitter to create a throwing lane
- take your time, accuracy key: bad throw equals a run

Pickoffs

- movements will depend on a right or left-handed hitter
- throwing to 1st, make sure to get front side closed and move toward 1st
- stay low so you don't give away the pickoff
- don't throw unless there is a play
- anticipate aggressive runners breaking to next base
- don't expect a perfect pitchout from pitcher, be ready to move

Bunts

- know players likely to bunt and bunt situations
- "beat the ball", get to it quickly
- stay low out of the shoot
- know where your play is and set footwork accordingly
- think lead runner and adjust, always want an out
- field bunt off of back foot to transition to throw quickest
- down I SI base, take slight step back to clear runner and create throwing lane
- field bunts with two hands unless ball is at dead stop
- try to get around the ball to create momentum to target
- down 3rd, reverse pivot is fastest

Pitcher/Catcher "Cheat Sheet"

I. Do you know what to throw if... ? The count is:

0-0	strike pitch on the corner
0-1	occasional strike or waste on the black or off the plate waste pitch off the plate
0-2	waste pitch off the plate
1-0	strike pitch on the corner
1-1	strike pitch on the corner or waste pitch
1-2	occasional strike or waste on the black or off the plate strike pitch on the corner
2-2	strike pitch on the corner
3-1	strike pitch to come back
3-2	strike pitch on the corner, no walks

II. Do you know what to pitch to certain types of hitters?

Basic rules: (note: know what to do if the batter adjusts')

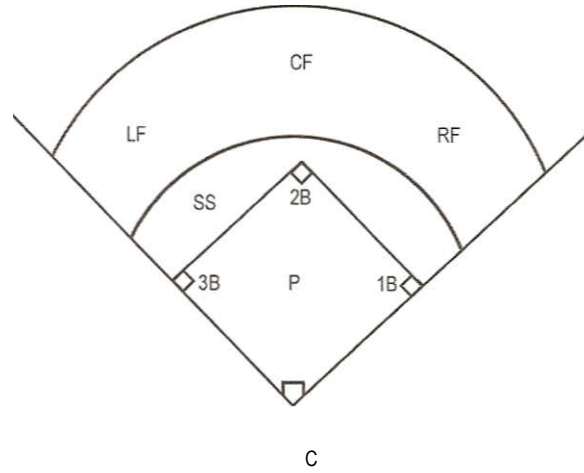
IF: the batter swings up	THEN: throw up
IF: the batter swings down	THEN: throw down
IF: the batter swings late	THEN: jam her no change ups
IF: the batter crowds the plate)	THEN: jam her
IF: the batter is off the plate	THEN: throw outside corner
IF: the batter dives into the plate	THEN: jam her
IF: the batter pulls out	THEN: down and out and off speed
IF: the batter inside-outs	THEN: jam her
IF: the batter has flat bat	THEN: throw down
IF: the batter has straight bat	THEN: throw up

Things that affect game calling

- the count and outs
- pitchers ability
- hitters ability
- on deck batter
- situation of game
- defensive ability
- field conditions
- umpire
- batters last at bat

Fast Pitch Softball Positions

The diagram below shows you the different positions involved in fast pitch softball. Together these positions are called "team defense." We will discuss team defensive concepts in greater detail later in this chapter under "Basic Fast Pitch Defensive Coverage's."



For now, let's look at the common characteristics of each position.

First Base (1 B)--- The first base position is one of the busiest defensive positions in softball. Thus, it involves more than being able to catch and hold a thrown ball. Either in a direct or assisting role, the first baseman is involved with almost every play. They must know when and how to throw the ball, how to back-up throws to home plate, how to take a relay from the outfielder, when to hold the runner on first base, and so on ..

Qualities Include:

- Good glove and quick hands Quick feet
- **Good leadership abilities** Tall, If possible
- **Good arm, if possible**
- Left handed, if possible (can throw to other bases more easily Catches the ball with both hands, when possible)

Second Base (2B)-Second base is a pivot position for double plays. A second baseman should be able to shift their feet quickly and throw accurately. The second baseman should be able to charge slowly hit ground balls and snap throws to first base. They will also be called upon to back-up their teammates and take relay throws from the outfielders. In addition, they will coordinate with the shortstop as to who will cover second base on a steal attempt.

Qualities Include:

- Good fielding ability
- Good range to their left and right Quick feet for double-plays **Average arm**

Third Base (3B)-Keeper of the infield's "hot corner." Must be able to handle everything from sharply hit line drives or onehop shots to slowly rolling bunts. The third baseman's most important physical asset is their ability to field and throw to first base in one motion. They must also stay mentally in the game to be able to handle every situation.

Qualities Include:

- Mental toughness for hard hit balls Quick Reflexes
- **Accurate arm**
- Aggressive attitude

Shortstop (SS) - Because the shortstop must cover so much area and participate in a wide variety of plays, shortstop is considered the most demanding infield position. Without hesitation, the shortstop must react to any situation - run back quickly for pop flies, charge slowly hit grounders, make strong, and make accurate throws to first base from deep in the hole. The shortstop will also work with the second baseman on turning double plays and with the outfielders on relay throws.

Qualities Include:

- Very good glove skills
- Very good range to their left and right Strong arm
- **Very accurate arm**
- **Good sense about the game Recover quickly from mistakes** Usually your strongest infielder

Outfielders - The outfielders must always be alert as to what to do with the ball, should the ball come to them. They should be mindful of game situations at all times. Outfielders should have strong throwing arms. They should keep the trajectory of the throw low to the ground. Outfielders should be taught to call for balls. They should also be taught to block ground balls to make sure the ball doesn't get through. As the last line of defense, outfielders should be taught to back up their teammates. **The following are some of the individual qualities of the outfield positions:**

Left Field (LF)

- Good foot speed Good ball judgment
- **Strong arm because more long balls are hit to left field resulting in the need for longer throws** Ability to catch ball on the run

Center Field (CF)

- **Good leadership abilities** Very good quickness **Strong and accurate arm**
- Very vocal, not afraid to talk to teammates Good decision-making abilities
- Ability to catch ball on the run
- Very good speed

Right Field (RF)

- Good speed and endurance for constantly backing up first base Good glove for sharply hit balls that tend to tail off in the outfield Accurate arm with quick release
- Usually have the weakest arm of all the outfielders

Pitcher (P)-A pitcher has an important role as a defensive infielder. Many games have been won through the pitcher's fielding ability as well as his/her pitching talent. To be successful, a pitcher must back up plays and cover bases when necessary.

Qualities Include:

- **Very hard worker** Intelligent
- Motivated and determined
- Good size and strength, if possible
- Natural ability is not a must, but it can help a lot Good fielder

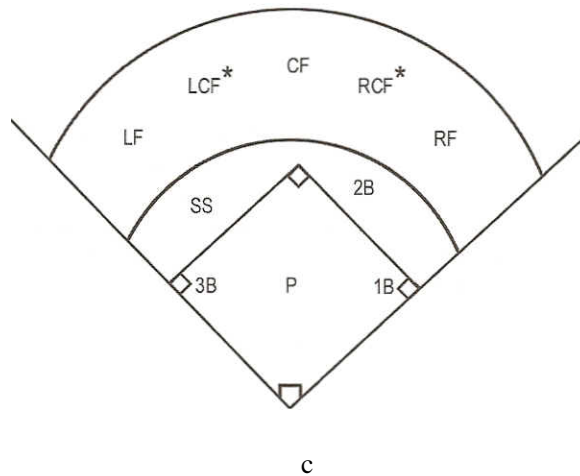
Catcher (C) - The catcher is the leader of the team, and as such, should not be afraid to be vocal and to take charge. **The catcher has to be aware of game situations at all times, and communicate plays and strategies to the infielders. The catcher** must be able to handle pitchers, and keep the game under control.

Qualities Include:

- Good size and strength Intelligent
- **Hard workers and tough individuals Good leaders**
- Quick hands and a quick glove Should have quick feet, if possible
- Should have a strong arm and a quick release

Slow Pitch Softball Positions

The diagram below shows you the different positions involved in slow pitch softball and where they play. Together these positions are called "team defense." We will discuss team defensive concepts in greater detail later in this chapter under "Basic Slow Pitch Defensive Coverage's."



For now, let's look at the common characteristics of each position.

First Base (1 B)-The first base position is one of the busiest defensive positions in softball. Thus, it involves more than being able to catch and hold a thrown ball. Either in a direct or assisting role, the first baseman is involved with almost every play. They must know when and how to throw the ball, how to back-up throws to home plate, how to take a relay from the outfield, when to hold the runner on first base, and so on. They should catch the ball with both hands, when possible.

Qualities Include:

- Good glove and quick hands Quick feet
- **Good leadership abilities** Tall, if possible
- Good arm, if possible
- Left handed, if possible (can throw to other bases more easily)

Second Base (2B)-Second base is a pivot position for double plays. A second baseman should be able to shift their feet quickly and throw accurately. The second baseman should be able to charge slowly hit ground balls and snap throws to first base. They will also be called upon to back-up their teammates and take relay throws from the outfielders.

Qualities Include:

- Good fielding ability
- Good range to their left and right Quick feet for double-plays **Average arm**

Third Base (3B)-Keeper of the infield's "hot corner." Must be able to handle everything from sharply hit line drives to onehop shots. **The third baseman's most important physical asset is their ability to field and throw to first base in one motion.** They must also stay mentally in the game, and be aware of how to handle all possible situations.

Qualities Include:

- Mental toughness for hard hit balls Quick Reflexes
- **Accurate arm**
- **Aggressive attitude**

Shortstop (SS) - Because the shortstop must cover so much area and participate in a wide variety of plays, shortstop is **considered the most demanding infield position. Without hesitation, the shortstop must react to any situation - run back quickly for pop flies, charge slowly hit grounders, make strong, and make accurate throws to first base from deep in the hole.** The shortstop will also work with the second baseman on turning double plays and with the outfielders on relay throws.

Qualities Include:

- Good glove
- Good range to their left and right **Good sense about the game**
- **Recovers quickly from mistakes**
- Usually the best infielder

Outfielders - The outfielders must always be alert as to what to do with the ball, should the ball come to them. They should be mindful of game situations at all times. Outfielders should have strong throwing arms. They should keep the trajectory of the throw low to the ground. Outfielders should be taught to call for fly balls. They should also be taught to block ground balls to make sure the ball doesn't get through. As the last line of defense, outfielders should be taught to back up their teammates. **The following are some of the individual qualities of the outfield positions:**

Left Center Field, Rover, or Short Field (LCF, R, SF)

- Great quickness
- Strong arm
- Very accurate arm
- Good leadership abilities Good ability to judge the ball

Center Field (CF)

- Good leadership ability Good quickness
- Very strong and accurate arm Very vocal

Right Field (RF)

- **Good speed and endurance for constantly backing up first base**
- **Good glove for sharply hit balls that tend to tail off in the outfield**
- **Accurate arm**
- **Average arm strength**

Pitcher (P)-A pitcher has an important role as a defensive infielder. Many games have been won through the pitcher's fielding ability as well as his/her pitching talent. To be successful, a pitcher must back up plays and cover bases when **necessary**.

Qualities Include:

- **Quick reflexes for balls hit back up the middle**
- **Good hand-eye coordination**
- **Hard worker**
- **Intelligent**

Catcher (C) - The catcher is the leader of the team, and as such, should not be afraid to be vocal and to take charge. The **catcher has to be aware of game situations at all times, and communicate plays and strategies to the infielders. The catcher must be able to handle pitchers, and keep the game under control.**

Qualities Include:

- **Good size and strength**
- **Does not have to be very fast**
- **Works well with the pitcher**
- **Good hitter**
- **Good endurance for backing up plays at first base**

Basic Fast Pitch Defensive Coverage's

Defensive coverage's refers to knowing where everyone on your team should go when the ball is hit into the outfield. This **section discusses some simple, easy-to-understand concepts about defensive coverage's.**

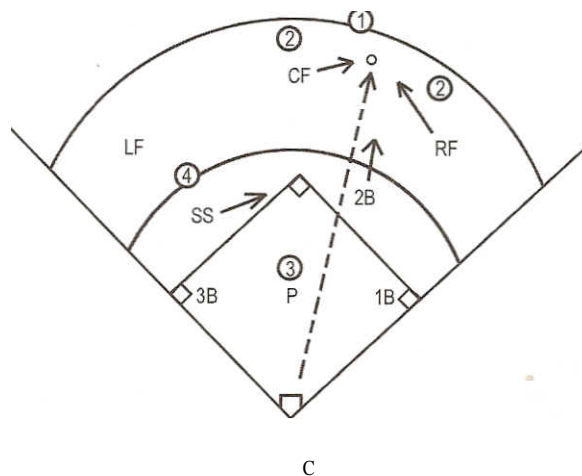
There are certain principles your team should follow on defense. If your team can understand these principles they will have a much easier time figuring out where they should go when the ball is hit.

The Magnet Concept: The easiest way to explain basic defensive coverage is to think of the ball as a magnet and your players as metal pieces attracted to the magnet. While this concept doesn't apply to every player on the field, it does work for the players who move the most-the players in the middle of the field: the shortstop, second base player, centerfielder, leftfielder, and right fielder.

Let's look at the following diagram of a ball hit into right-center field and see how this magnet principle works (the same principle applies when the ball is hit to left field):

----- = the ball's path

----- = the player's movement



1. We can see in this example that the ball (the magnet) is hit to right-center field.
2. The ball (magnet) attracts the centerfielder and the right fielder to it. The first one to the ball will pick it up and make the play.
3. Meanwhile, the magnet concept pulls the second base player out toward the ball in case he or she is needed to help get the ball back into the infield. (This will depend on how far the ball is hit past the outfielders.)
4. The magnet also pulls the shortstop to cover second base in case the batter, who hit the ball, tries to run to second base. (The shortstop must cover second base because the second base player has been drawn out into the outfield toward the ball.)

Basic Slow Pitch Defensive Coverage's

Defensive coverage's refer to knowing where everyone on your team should go when the ball is hit into the outfield. This section discusses some simple, easy-to-understand concepts and defensive coverage's.

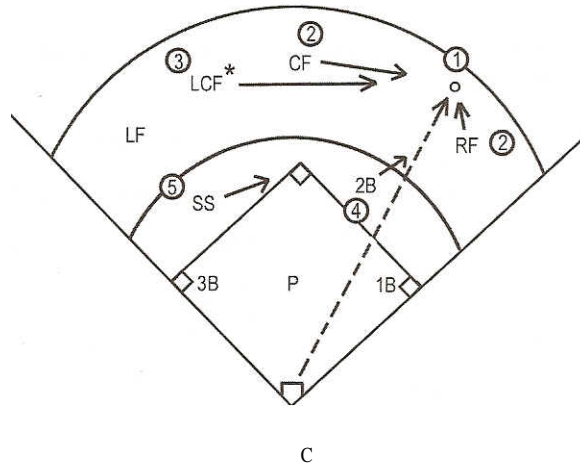
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Let's look at the following diagram of a ball hit into right-center field and see how this magnet principle works (the same principle applies when the ball is hit to left field):

----- = the ball's path

----- -- the player's movement



1. We can see in this example that the ball (the magnet) is hit to right-center field.
2. The ball (magnet) attracts the centerfielder and the right fielder. The first one to the ball will pick it up and make the play.
3. The left centerfielder will move slightly toward the ball in case he or she needs to make a play.
4. Meanwhile, the magnet concept pulls the second base player out toward the ball in case he or she is needed to help get the ball back into the infield. (This will depend on how far the ball is hit past the outfielders.)
5. The magnet also pulls the shortstop to cover second base in case the batter, who hit the ball, tries to run to second base. (The shortstop must cover second base because the second base player has been drawn out into the outfield toward the ball)

PRACTICE PLAN

FAST PITCH-Early Season

- 10min Warm Up
-run, stretch, loosen arms
- 15min Patriot Drill
- 20min Pair Bears, Line Drill (infield), Pop Ups (outfield), Catchers work on blocking
- 30min Hitting
-review stance, hands
-dry cuts
-soft toss (2 stations, 1st and 3rd, a batter on deck, everyone else fields)
- 10min Base running
-rounding 1st base (making the banana-inside foot touching the inside
Corner of the bag)
-watching the coaches

- Pitchers and catchers need to throw at every practice. Whether it's before, after, or during practice. A minimum of 20 minutes.

PRACTICE PLAN

FAST PITCH-Early Season

10min Warm Up: run, stretch, loosen arms

10min Throwing Drill: Team

12min 2 Line Ground Balls-infield (roll the ball then hit grounders)
Partner Drop Steps-outfield

28min Bunting Practice

-have 2 groups, one girl bunting at a time in each group with the other fielding the Balls

20min Relays

-divide the team up into 3 or 4 teams and have them get into a line (each girl Should be about base distance apart). Have the girls relay the ball back and forth. Making good throws-not allowed to over throw the ball and skip a player-each Player has to make a good throw. Maybe have them race at the end-having the First team to finish sit down.

10min Sliding Practice

-keep hands up!

PRACTICE PLAN

FAST PITCH-Mid Season

10min Warm Up: run, stretch, throw

40min Hitting Stations

- one station bunting
- one hitting front toss on the field being pitched by the coach
- the last station is fielding the front toss group

40min Full Defense

Have every player their position (some positions may more then one player-for Those make sure the players rotate and/or have the extra players run). Some situations: like play at 1st, runner on first-try to get her out at 2nd, balls to the outfield-get it in to 2nd.d

PRACTICE PLAN

FAST PITCH-Mid/End Season

- 10min Warm Up
-run, stretch, loosen arms (remember the patriot drill)
- 20min Infield: line drills (10min), full infield-random grounders, bunts, etc (10min)
Outfield: lined up on the foul line-tossing the ball over the shoulder-practice
Each side (10min), two lines in the outfield-hit the ball in between-
call the ball! And back each other up!
- 15min Bunting
-practice stance
-divide to four groups, 1 group at each base, four people to front toss to
each group, get the bunt down on the ground then run to the next base-
leave your bat
- 20min Hitting
-have two stations (if you have to pitchers on your team-have them pitch
The stations-one station at 1st, one at 3rd) everyone field balls
- 20min Full Team Defence
-have a goal, try to get 21outs in a row, or as many outs in a row as you can
-hit random balls (popups, bunts, hard/slow grounders), yell out different
Situations
- 5min Conditioning

PRACTICE PLAN

FAST PITCH-End Season

- 10min Warm Up
 - run, stretch, loosen arms
- 10min Base cycle (drills)
- 60min Full Team Scrimmage
 - Divide the team into 3 separate teams. Each team will rotate through (10min Each group twice). Everyone is working on defense, pitching, catching, Hitting, bunting, running.
- 10min Bunting

PRACTICE PLAN

SLOW PITCH-Early Season

10min Warm Up

-run, stretch, loosen arms

15min Patriot Drill

20min Pair Bears, Line Drill (infield), Pop Ups (outfield)

30min Hitting

-review stance, hands

-dry cuts (line knuckles up, hands by head, smooth swing, use hips)

-soft toss (2 stations, one batter hitting at each station at 1st and 3rd, a batter on deck, everyone else fields)

10min Base running

-rounding 1st base

-watching the coaches

5min Conditioning

-game

PRACTICE PLAN

SLOW PITCH-Early Season

- 10min Warm Up
 - run, stretch, loosen arms
- 15min Pop ups (infield and outfield separate)
 - infield, short stop has priority
 - outfield, centerfield has priority
- 20min In Between Fly Balls...make sure the call the ball!
- 35min Hitting Practice-3 stations
 - one station is hitting the ball off the tee
 - station 2: hitting live pitching
 - station 3: defense, fielding the live batters
- 10min Line Drill

PRACTICE PLAN

SLOW PITCH-Mid Season

- 10min Warm Up
-run, stretch, loosen arms
- 15min Line Drill
-Outfield: Partner drop-steps
- 35min Team Defense:
-goal is to get 21 outs in a row without any errors
-hit the ball randomly, with different situations
-have the extra players run
- 30min Step-hips-swing
Balance drill
-then partner up and hit soft toss

PRACTICE PLAN

SLOW PITCH Mid/End Season

- 10min Warm Up
-run, stretch, loosen arms (remember the patriot drill)
- 20min Hitting
-3 stations: one soft toss, one with the main pitcher throwing to batters,
One fielding

-divide the team in to three teams and rotate stations
- 30min Team Scrimmage: (keep same three teams) one team hits at a time, the other
Team fields in normal positions (may have to field a position that isn't
Their normal position). To have things move along a little faster-start
The batters with a pitch count, such as 2-2.
Have one of the pitchers throw to batters to get practice
- 30min Full Defense (random hits and situations)
-Situations such as: nobody on base, play at 1st; runner at 1st-look to get
The lead runner first-if you can't-play at 1st; bases loaded-infield in play
At home; Runner on 2nd-hit to outfield-play at home; etc...

PRACTICE PLAN

SLOW PITCH End Season

- 10min Warm Up
 - run, stretch, loosen arms
- 30min Full Team Defense
 - work on situations
- 30min Hitting/Defense
 - have two girls hitting (one at 1st base and the other at 3rd) with the rest of the Team fielding the balls-make it a game-points for who catches the most!
- 10min Line Drill
 - 10min Base cycle

Hitting Drills

Side toss.

Balls are tossed to hitter from an angle slightly to the side of the hitter. Be sure toss is out in front of the plate. This drill allows hitter to work on mechanics and timing.

Two color side toss.

Same as side toss except that two different color balls are used. Tosser calls out which color ball is to be hit. Tosser can also not call a color which tells hitter to "take" the pitch. Be sure toss is out in front of the plate. This adds decision making to the drill. Two balls of the same color can be used, Tosser calls top or bottom ball.

Fastball tennis ball bounce.

Side toss with a bounce. Hit the ball on the rise. Ball should have some tempo on it. Forces adjustments in timing.

Change up tennis ball bounce.

Same as 5 except hit ball on fall. Ball should bounce, reach its highest point and then the hitter hits the ball after it falls back into hitting zone.

Reverse Tennis ball bounce.

Ball is bounced from behind. Hitter triggers on sound of bounce, looking forward, hits the backside of the ball as it goes through the hitting zone.

Little balls/little bats.

Same as side toss except we add the variable of smaller balls and/or smaller bats. Adds difficulty to the drill while still allowing the hitter to work on the full swing. (Tennis balls, plastic golf balls, dowels, small bats, hitting stick)

Drop ball.

The ball is dropped into the hitting zone from above. Be sure ball is dropped out in front of plate. The hitter works on full swing. As the players become accustomed to this drill do not let them look up as the ball is dropped, they must pick ball up as it enters the hitting zone.

Two color drop ball.

Same as drop ball except two different color balls are used. Adds decision making to drill.

Reverse hitting.

The ball is tossed from behind the hitter (catchers position). Hitter keeps head forward as if looking at the pitcher. Pick ball up with peripheral vision. Hitter wants to hit the ball out in front of the plate. Forces quick visual recognition and a very quick swing.

Stride checking.

A ramp (safe obstacle) is placed in front of hitter. They measure out what they believe to be their stride length. Then, while looking at the pitcher not the stride checker, they start with their stride. Eventually adding in the rotation, swing, etc.

Back foot pivot.

The hitter works on rotation, focusing on the back foot pivot. A ball is placed behind the heel of the hitters back foot. As they pivot they push the ball with their heel. Keep the weight on the ball of the foot.

Tee hitting.

The hitter works on hitting the ball off the tee. Allows hitter to focus on mechanics of entire swing, without the variable of ball speed or movement.

Heavy ball tee hitting.

Same as tee hitting but adds variety. Use 16", old volleyballs, beach balls, mush balls. Emphasize hitting through the ball.

Little ball tee hitting.

Same as tee hitting but with tennis balls, baseballs, golf whiffle balls.

Griffey Tee.

Gives instant feedback about hands dropping and so on. Remove top loop and tee is now useful for both right and left handed hitters without time consuming changes.

Inside/Outside tees.

Set up to work on hitting either inside or outside pitch without adjusting hitters' position. Focus on contact point and appropriate rotation.

Call Inside/Outside.

Balls on both inside and outside tees. Hitter triggers then partner calls ball to be hit. If no ball is call then the hitter does not swing to simulate change up. If call is slow then simulates having to hold and adjust to changing location and contact point.

Knee hitting.

Isolates on the swing component of the total swing. Place the hitter on their back knee, rotating the body into the appropriate position, and have them work on leading with their hands and then exploding into the ball. A short tee can be utilized to allow the hitter a target as they swing.

Top hand.

Same as knee hitting, isolate on the top hand. We lead with the hands hit ball with the knob. We then progress to hitting the ball off the tee with the barrel of the bat.

Bottom hand.

Same as 28 except we isolate on the bottom hand.

Strike zone recognition.

The hitter takes their stance in the box. Their partner pitches the ball to them and they track the ball all the way through the hitting zone. The hitter says "Yes" if it is a strike, "No" if it is a ball.

Situational strike zone recognition.

Same as strike zone except we give the hitter a situation, i.e. 2-0 count, and now they say yes to pitches they would hit in that situation not just strikes or no to pitches that they wouldn't hit even if it is a strike.

Quick hitting.

Same as side toss only now the object is to take as many quality swings as possible as quickly as possible.

Short toss.

Short front toss with Tennis balls.

Short toss with bounce.

Tennis ball short front toss with a bounce.

Batting Stance

- knocking knuckles should be lined up
- loose grip on the bat (no killer grips)
- hands up close to the ear
- feet comfortable, about shoulder width apart or a little wider
- slight bend in the knees
- slight bend at the waist
- smooth swing
- use the legs (make sure the hips rotate, still have a little give in the waist and knees)

-finish with the bat higher than the shoulder, the shoulder/hip/knee should all be aligned, back foot rotated with the toe pointing to the pitcher

Step-Hip-Swing

This is a hitting sequence drill that requires you to breakdown your swing into three parts.

First take a step, while keeping your stride soft and short. Next, turn the hip, and make sure that your hands have stayed behind your hips (no forward movement of the hands when the hips turn!). Finally, throw the hands forward, as if you were fully extending the bat to the ball.

Balance Drill

Players can work on creating a balanced stance by striding and then jumping up and landing back in a balanced stance. Some keys here are the weight stays **between the feet**, the knees stay **soft** (bent), and that the weight stays on the **balls** of the feet.

To achieve weight on the balls of the feet. Have your players bend at the waist before they bend their knees when they get in their stance. If they bend their knees before bending their waist then all of their weight is going to be on their heels.

Frisbee Toss

This drill is done to primarily work on extending the hands. The batter will hold a Frisbee while standing in her stance. When she brings her hands **forward** she will release the Frisbee and toss it straight into a net (it should not, for a right handed batter, hit the left side of the cage or fence).

Scoring Zone Challenge

Using athletic tape or paint, create scoring zones with appropriate point values on the netting of your cage. Our scoring zones are as follows:

Line Drive up the middle – 5 points

Line Drive in the left or right gap – 4 points

Line Drive left or right – 3 points

Ground Balls – 2 points

Fly Balls - -3

You can set the point values with whatever your hitting philosophy reflects. This drill is highly competitive and you'll add some excitement to the robotic repetitions that often accompany machine-hitting. This same game can be done with bunting.

Soft Toss Drills

Standard – We make sure that the toss comes from the front. So often we see coaches who toss directly perpendicular to the hitter. We feel as though this promotes a tardy swing and an unrealistic contact point. When tossing from in front and off to the side, aim for the front hip to feed the batter.

Two –Ball – Using two different colored balls, different numbered balls, etc., give two balls at once to the hitter prompting them which one to hit only after you've tossed them.

Top-Drop – The dropper in this case, stands on a bucket slightly in front and perpendicular to the batter. The “dropper” holds the ball approximately at her own head level before dropping it into the hitting zone. This drill is designed to promote a quick bat and increase reaction time.

Sacrifice Bunts:

The batter should turn towards the pitcher as she starts her windup. One hand stays at the end of the bat while the other should be in the middle of the barrel (the thumb and pointer finger hold the bat-keep them behind the bat so that they do not get hit by the pitch). Start the bat level at the top of the strike zone with the knees bent. Never drop the bat to try to bunt the ball. Instead bend the knees and go down to bunt the ball. Try to bunt the top of the ball so that its not a pop up.

Bounce Drill

Using a tennis ball or any other ball that bounces well – the individual will bounce the ball in front of her, **load and swing**. Most kids like this drill and it will help with their rhythm, timing, and hand / eye coordination.

Fielding/Throwing

Patriot Drill:

1. Start on the right knee (for right handers), other foot pointed toward partner. With the glove hold the throwing/right elbow out in front. Snap the ball to the partner (partners should only be a few feet apart)
2. Back partners apart, still on the knee. Get in the 'T' position with the back elbow bent (the back of the hand should be facing the back of the head...the ball shouldn't be facing the partner or off to the side). Arm swing should be close to the head and high. Finish with the throwing hand across the body to the bent knee.
3. Standing..back partners up a little more. Start with the lead foot pointed to the partner, in the 'T' position (watch the back hand), throw the ball, finish with throwing hand across the body to the left knee.
4. Working on form-back away from partner and stretch arms out more.

Throwing Drill: (Team)

-the team is split up between all four bases

-start with a ball at home

-the ball is thrown to 1st, then they throw to 2nd, then to 3rd, then back home (keep it going-count how many good throws in a row so you can get, always trying to get a higher number then last time)

-for the first time, catch the ball on the throwing side, make a quick turn to throw it to the next girl

-after this drill, catch the ball on the glove side, turn around, throw to the next bag

-for the first time, keep the girls at the bag that they start at

-when the drill gets easier, have the girls follow their throws and run to the next bag and get to the end of the line

4 Base Throwing

Players are divided into teams of four (they do this on their own). On the command

(NEXT!) a team will occupy each base including home. The person at home has the ball.

A coach will shout out a number of throwing instructions, which the group has to perform perfectly or they must run. (EX. Home to First, First to Third, Third to Home, Home to

Second, Second to Third, Third to First, First to Home.)

Box Throwing

Create a box using four players. The players should spread far-enough apart to meet the strength of their arms. One ball is used and it can be thrown to anyone at anytime. We emphasize proper footwork and throwing technique. We encourage that the drill move at a fast pace.

Pair Bears: (infield)

1. (without gloves and with a partner) start a few feet apart. Knees bent, butts down, hands down on the ground ready for a grounder. Partner slowly rolls the ball. Field the ball out in front with both hands then pull it into the stomach-always with eyes on the ball.
2. (add gloves) same as the 1st drill but with glove. Make sure you field the ball out in front and cover the glove with the free hand and pull into stomach.
3. Backhands...get in fielding position. Partner rolls the ball to the foot opposite the glove hand of the partner. Knees bent, reach over to field the ball. No stabbing at the ball with the glove...instead catch the ball and have a little give when you catch the ball.
4. Next roll the ball to the glove side, but further away. (ex...for a right hander roll the ball outside the left foot). Shuffle in front of the ball, field out front, pull into stomach, then jump into the ready throwing position.
5. **Line Drill**

Two coaches hitting grounders. One coach on both sides of the batters box-one on the 1st base side of the field and one on the 3rd. The coach on the 3rd base side of the field hits grounders to the girls at second and first base. The coach on the 1st base side of the field hits to the shortstop and 3rd. Can either toss the balls off to the side or return them back to a catcher next to the coach that hit them the ball.

2 Line Fly Balls

Two coaches, each with a bucket of balls are located, 60 yards from one another in the outfield grass. Players form a line at each bucket. On the coaches command the first person in line takes off toward the opposite bucket. The coach will throw a pop fly or line drive in which the fielder must catch and deposit in the bucket opposite from where they started. This drill is a continuous circle of movement and it can be a good conditioning drill as well as a good outfield drill.

Partner Drop-steps

Partners stand approximately 10 feet apart from one another. The player without the ball will be in a ready position facing her partner with the ball. Player 1 then tosses the ball high over either of Player 2's shoulders. Whichever shoulder Player 1 tosses the ball over; Player 2 has to drop-step and retreat to field the ball. The drill is then repeated back to Player 1.

2 Line Ground Balls

This drill involves coaches rolling ground balls from the center of the diamond to two lines; one line at the shortstop position and the other in the second baseman's position. When the fielder successfully fields the ball, she quickly tosses it back to the coach and returns to the back of the line.

In-Between Fly Balls

This is a communication drill that develops better talk between infielders and outfielders. A coach will toss balls in a variety of ways in-between the fielders, who break on the throw. Players then have to execute by our rule. *Infielders go for the ball until they're called off by an outfielder.

INF fly balls

A coach can toss fly balls or use the pitching machine to shoot fly balls around the infield. Players are lined up at or around each position and fly balls are placed between them to promote communication between fielders.

Block Drill

The catcher is in full gear. A coach throws balls right and left of the catcher, mostly on the bounce. The catcher has to fully move in front of the ball and attempt to **center** the ball in front of her body. The catcher will collapse in front of the ball; the head should be down, shoulders square, and the glove protecting the area between the legs.

Base Cycle

Starting at home plate, a single line is formed, from fastest to slowest. Allowing for proper spacing (usually five steps or so) players sprint up the line to first base, running all the way through the bag. On our field our rule is to run through the bag to the grass. Once each player has made it through first, then they repeat the action running through second, then third, and finally home. The next step in this drill is to run home to second (make sure they pick up their base coaches), then second to third, and last third to home. The progression then takes us from home to third, then eventually, to end the drill, players have to run a home to home to complete the base cycle.

NOTES

1. Pitchers for both fast pitch and slow pitch should pitch at every practice, preferably with the team's catcher, whether it is before, after, or during practice. They should throw a minimum of 20 minutes. Coaches need to stress to the pitchers that they need to throw outside of practice and games when they can for extra practice.
2. To help the practices run more efficient, have a set practice plan before with a set time for each drill. Work on the areas that need the most work first to make sure they are covered. Also, explain to the girls that practice is only 1.5 hours and they need to always hustle to each drill and/or water break.
3. Add in a little competition every once in a while, whether its who can stop the most grounders without an error, make the most accurate throws-longest without any bad throws, catches the most balls in the outfield, (team game) as many outs in a row as possible, or even a running game.
4. Don't have one player batting while all the other players are standing around on the field. Always try to have the whole team involved. If you are going to have one player hit, have a few run bases so that the defensive players can work on situations.

Pitching Trouble Shooting

Here is some help for coaches when the pitchers are struggling during the game.

1. If the pitches are high, make sure the girl is snapping the ball at the hip.
2. Sometimes the pitches can either be too high or too low-watch the girls body and make sure she is not leaning back too much (too much weight on the back foot) or too forward (head over the front foot-leaning forward)
3. If the pitches are off line (too inside or outside), make sure the pitcher is striding on the power line and/or watch the hips.
 - a. Power line is a straight line from the dragging foot towards the plate. The stride foot should land on that line so that the body stays in a straight line.
 - b. Often times the girl turns her hips to face the batter too quick making the ball go very inside-so keep those closed and let the arm pass the hips before the hips turn.
4. If a pitcher has to be taken out of the game make sure you are positive. Let her know she's not a terrible pitcher, it's just time for another girl to pitch or that it just wasn't her night. Let her know she needs to continue to practice and focus on what she may be struggling at.
5. If they hit a batter, make sure you tell them that it won't be the last time they hit someone as a pitcher and that everyone does it. Its ok and it happens. Have her refocus, breathe, and go on to the next batter.
6. Have the pitcher tell the coach what they have been working on during the pitching clinics or lessons so that, as the coach, you can just remind the girl during the game or practice what she has been focusing on. If she has been having trouble with pitches being too inside or outside-remind them of the powerline, etc.
7. If you just don't know what to say to a pitcher, tell her to refocus and think about the basics. It's ok...she can do it! Just take a breath, relax, and throw the pitch.

Pitching Levels

Level 1: very basic, learning how to throw

Level 2: able to get the ball more in the strike zone, better control

Level 3: throwing more strikes (inside/outside), has a change up

Level 4: better control with the ball, change up, also another pitch (drop/rise)

Level 5: has all pitches and good control of them!