

# Elkridge Youth Organization 13U Softball Coach's Manual



# Elkridge Youth Organization

## Coach's Manual

This Coach's Manual is a compilation of a number of sources – websites, authors, and personal experience – provided to all coaches within EYO to use as a guide to help instruct and develop our young softball players. This detailed guide provides insights on proper mechanics and teaching strategies used by successful coaches.

Some of the information contained in these manuals represents advanced training techniques and skills. It is up to each individual coach to tailor the drills and teaching strategies in this manual to the team that he/she is coaching. Further, each coach needs to understand the needs/ability of each individual player to make sure that the game remains simple and fun, and that each player learns at a healthy pace.

The primary objective of this manual is to make our leagues better by making our coaches better. The ideas presented in this coach's manual are only as good as each coach's commitment to bringing them to practice each day. We encourage you to read through this manual on a regular basis, discuss your thoughts/ideas with your fellow coaches, and implement the teaching strategies contained within.

Thank you for your time and commitment to our softball program. Good luck, and have a GREAT SEASON!



Chris Jakubek  
EYO Softball Commissioner



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# Elkridge Youth Organization 13U Alliance Softball Rules

## Howard County Softball Alliance Rules of Play

General ASA Rules Apply for All Age Groups except where modified below.

1. The player's age for league purposes is her age on December 31st of the previous year.
2. League will begin play in September and continue until end of October (weather permitting).
3. Games will be played with 60-foot base paths.
4. For all games, the Alliance Coordinator will procure umpires.
5. Each Organization must provide a home field or fields for the Alliance Coordinator to use for scheduling.
6. Home team must provide one new game ball and have two back up balls available.
7. Home team shall line and prep the field accordingly for each game.
8. Games will be a maximum of 6 innings in length.
- d. Saturday Games, no inning may be started after 105 minutes (1 hr 45 min)
9. All players attending will bat (a.k.a. Bat the Bench).
10. A maximum of five runs per inning may be scored by each team. Once five runs are scored, that half of the inning is over. This rule does not apply to the 6th inning or in cases where the game is shortened, the last inning (as estimated and declared by the umpire, when considering rule 8).
  - a. When the last inning is declared, IF the HOME team is down by 5 or more runs:
    - HOME TEAM will stay at the plate and bat to start the "top of the inning"
    - If Home team does not erase deficit - GAME Ends. Otherwise VISITOR gets final "At-Bat".
11. Every effort should be made to play scheduled games. Borrowing players is permissible in the fall season.
12. Unlimited substitutions will be allowed. This rule is to include pitchers - who may return to pitch after playing elsewhere in a previous inning (as long as rules 14 and 15 are adhered to).
13. The number of innings a player plays in the field (defensive innings), may not exceed the number of defensive innings of any other teammate by more than one. (Example: If Sarah plays six defensive innings, everyone else on her team must have played five defensive innings.)
14. Each player will be limited to pitch a maximum of two consecutive innings, and no more than 4 total innings per game. (One pitch thrown is equivalent to pitching an entire inning).
15. Defensive positions Before Play Begins:
  - Outfielders should be positioned no closer than 10 yards beyond base paths (i.e. 3 Steps in Grass) when play begins.
  - No more than 5 defensive players (4 Fielders and Pitcher) can be positioned on the infield to start the play.
16. If a pitcher hits two (2) batters in one inning, she must either sit on the bench or be moved to a non-pitching position. If she returns in a subsequent inning, and hits two (2) more batters for a total of four (4) batters, then she will not be allowed to pitch for the remainder of that game.
  - Clarification/Point-of-Emphasis: Especially at the 13U level, a ball that bounces/rolls and hits a batter while still ruled a dead-ball shall not be considered a "credited" hit-by-pitch by this rule, and the batter, while having option to take first base, should be encouraged to remain hitting.



17. Any pitching style (High School Federation, ASA, NSA or Pony) is legal for League play. Both feet need to start on the rubber. Once the hands come together you may not step back off the rubber. The pivot foot may remain in contact with or may push off and drag away from the rubber prior to the front foot touching the ground, as long as the pivot foot remains in contact with the ground. You may not replant the pivot foot and push off again.

18. Batters may NOT Throw Bats. Upon first instance, BOTH teams will be warned verbally by umpire. All subsequent instances result in Dead Ball, batter-runner to be declared out and base-runners return to their previous bases.

19. Coaches shall remain in the first and third base boxes when their team is at bat.

20. Absolutely no one (coach, player, fan, and parent) is permitted to sit or watch the game from behind the backstop while a game is in progress.

21. Any coach, player, parent, or spectator ejected from a game must leave the field area immediately and may not continue to watch the game.

22. Any coach or player who is ejected will serve a mandatory one-game suspension. Any further disciplinary action will be at the discretion of the Alliance Coordinator.



## 13U Softball Key Coaching Elements

### Key Instructional/Coaching Objectives:

The principal responsibility of a coach at the 13U Softball level is to provide a safe, fun, and organized learning environment.

1. Keep the practice/game fun. Keep things moving. Keep kids interested.
2. Teach correct throwing and catching techniques (more info in pages to come).
3. Develop strategic defensive thinking (where's the play?)
4. Develop proper hitting mechanics. Use soft toss and tee work.
5. Develop an understanding of the strike zone.
6. Develop good, instinctive base running skills.
7. Help players understand and follow the rules of the game.
8. Encourage fair competition.
9. Introduce and reinforce softball strategy.
10. Keep things simple and basic (ie most outs are made at first base).
11. Help kids understand that softball is played "out in front" (ie. ball is caught out in front, ball is fielded out in front, ball is hit out in front, etc).
12. Get support from parents and recruit several assistant coaches.

### Coaching Recommendations:

**Get help nobody does it alone** – Find parents that are willing to help out during practice – it makes your life a lot easier.

**Accomplish 3-4 Objectives for the season** – Realistic objectives help you focus so your team can focus.

**Write it down** – Make a plan for your season/practice/game and stick to it.

**Make them move** – Soccer and lacrosse are fun because players are moving more than standing.

**Consider pre-practice baserunning** – Kids are full of energy when they come to practice, getting them to run the bases like big league players releases that energy so they can be more focused during practice.

**Make it competitive** – Healthy and fair competition develop good competitors and kids love it. Make a game out of any activity/drill that you can. Kids love to play games and try to win.

**Make throwing/catching a priority** – No longer just to warm-up. Create games and teach throwing/catching. More games are won when the ball is thrown/caught well, than when the ball is hit well.

**Change every 15-20 minutes** – Attention spans are short. Variety is the spice of life.

**Divide players into smaller groups** – Smaller groups means more reps, and less of an opportunity to lose focus or get distracted. Remember suggestion #1 (get parents involved), give each player more rep's and keep them moving.

**Encourage kids to watch other games** - Listen to the announcers during games on TV, the game itself is a great teacher.

**Play wiffle ball** –It's a safe alternative to a hard softball and it's great for hand eye coordination.

**Talk with each player individually each day** – It doesn't have to be about softball. It doesn't have to be warm and fuzzy. Kids look up to their coaches. They are thrilled to share info with their coach!



**Be positive** – Celebrate the game of softball at every opportunity. Grow the enthusiasm for the game among your players.

**Have a rule of the game or a philosophy point to discuss for every practice** – Sesame Street has a word of the day – it works for big bird, why not for you.

**Make things look easy/fun** – At this level, you want to break things down into only a few simple parts. Use kid-like visuals to help increase understanding.

**Explain why, ask why** – Help kids understand why they should perform a certain skill. Ask them to tell you why (or you can tell them why)!

**Have high expectations during practice and a true sense of reality during games** – Talent level is not an issue during practice. Teach the proper way to do things. Perfect practice makes perfect.

**Practice time is for coaches, games are for the players** – Make the practice time meaningful and skill-driven. Don't over-coach during a game. Let the kids play, and stay positive.

**Keep a copy of your practice plan** - It helps evaluate and plan for the next practice.

**Be prepared for your game before you step on the field** – Have a lineup and defensive rotation ready. Be flexible, but be prepared.

**Understand the basic tenant of coaching youth sports** – Boys feel better when they play better. Girls play better when they feel better. Understand this principle and you will be able to make the experience more enjoyable for young boys and girls!



## **Notes on Drills**

In the pages that follow, skill development drills and games will be presented. Insert these drills into a practice plan to keep your players moving and keep their interest. As you coach your team, you may find that some drills and games are better suited for your team than others. The key at this level is to make sure that the players are having fun. Skill development, although important, is sometimes secondary to kids having fun and wanting to come back to the next practice/game.

In order to effectively communicate and execute these drills, a coach needs to do 2 things: 1) properly describe the skill being taught (ie what you are looking for the player to do – the objective), and 2) demonstrate the proper way of doing the drill. It can't be overemphasized how important #2 is to the overall success of the drill. If for some reason the coach is unable to demonstrate the drill, find another coach, parent, or player that can.

### **General Sample Practice Plan (13U Softball)**

(more detailed drills by week are listed in the pages that follow)

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| 5 - 10 Minutes:  | Warm Up Drills/Base Running   |
| 10 - 15 Minutes: | Throwing Program/playing catch  |
| 25 – 30 Minutes: | Stations – small groups 10-12 minutes per station and rotate<br>A) Throwing Drills<br>B) Batting Drills<br>C) Fielding Drills |
| 15 -20 Minutes   | Game Situations / Team Fundamentals   |
| 10 – 15 Minutes  | Team Drills/Favorite Drills   |
| 30 – 45 Minutes  | Hitting   |

Pick your drills for the practice you want to run based on the table below.





## Drill Scheduling by Practice

| Drill/Game                      | Practice # | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|---------------------------------|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|
| <b>Base Running Drills</b>      |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| Next Base Drill                 |            | X | X | X |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| Run Through the Base            |            | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |    |    |    |
| Home Run Drill                  |            | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Catch the Players               |            | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Four Corners                    |            | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Base Runners                    |            |   |   |   |   |   |   | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| <b>Fielding/Throwing Drills</b> |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| Underhand Square                |            | X | X | X | X | X | X |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| Plays at First                  |            | X | X | X | X | X | X |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| Alligator                       |            | X | X | X | X | X | X |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| Receive the Throw               |            | X | X | X | X | X | X |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| Lateral Pick Up                 |            | X | X | X | X | X | X |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| Bucket Drill                    |            | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Bounce to the Bucket            |            |   |   |   | X | X | X |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| Block the Ball                  |            |   |   |   | X | X | X |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| Rundown                         |            |   |   |   | X | X | X | X | X | X |    |    |    |
| Knock Down Game                 |            |   |   |   | X | X | X | X | X | X |    |    |    |
| Follow the Throw                |            |   |   |   | X | X | X | X | X | X |    |    |    |
| Hit and Cover                   |            |   |   |   | X | X | X | X | X | X |    |    |    |
| Drop Step                       |            |   |   |   | X | X | X | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Long Toss                       |            |   |   |   | X | X | X | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Relay Shuffle                   |            |   |   |   | X | X | X | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Catch Contest                   |            |   |   |   |   |   |   | X | X | X |    |    |    |
| Count the Catches               |            |   |   |   |   |   |   | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Pepper                          |            |   |   |   |   |   |   | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Charging                        |            |   |   |   |   |   |   | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Communication                   |            |   |   |   |   |   |   | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Speed Throw                     |            |   |   |   |   |   |   | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Quarterback                     |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  |
| One Knee Throwing               |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  |
| One and Two                     |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  |
| Learn the Crow Hop              |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  |
| Soft Fly Ball                   |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  |
| Reach Out                       |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  |



## Drill Schedule by Practice

| Drill/Game               | Practice # | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
|--------------------------|------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|
| <b>Batting Drills</b>    |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| Wiffle Ball Batting      |            | P | P | P | P | P | P | P | P | P | P  | P  | P  |
| Broomstick               |            | P | P | P | P | P | P | P | P | P | P  | P  | P  |
| Front Foot Batting       |            | X | X | X | X | X | X |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| Beach Ball Batting       |            | X | X | X | X | X | X |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| Tee Drill Weight Shift   |            | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Front Toss               |            | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Kiss & Swing             |            |   |   |   | X | X | X |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| High Hands               |            |   |   |   | X | X | X |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| Hip Turner               |            |   |   |   | X | X | X |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| A Drop in the Bucket     |            |   |   |   | X | X | X |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| Spot the Ball            |            |   |   |   | X | X | X | X | X | X |    |    |    |
| Three Tee Batting        |            |   |   |   |   |   |   | X | X | X |    |    |    |
| Two Strike               |            |   |   |   |   |   |   | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Target Practice          |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  |
| Knock Out the Catcher    |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  |
| Tee Hitting for Distance |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  |
| Colored Ball             |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  |
| Outside Pitch            |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  |
| What's the Count         |            | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| <b>Team Drills</b>       |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| First Base               |            | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |    |    |    |
| Don't Miss               |            |   |   |   | X | X | X |   |   |   |    |    |    |
| Pizza Slice              |            |   |   |   | X | X | X | X | X | X |    |    |    |
| Hit, Run, Get, Throw     |            |   |   |   | X | X | X | X | X | X |    |    |    |
| Call the Ball            |            |   |   |   |   |   |   | X | X | X |    |    |    |
| Offense and Defense      |            |   |   |   |   |   |   | X | X | X |    |    |    |
| Hit and Field            |            |   |   |   |   |   |   | X | X | X |    |    |    |
| Infield Rotation         |            |   |   |   |   |   |   | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Go to Your Base          |            |   |   |   |   |   |   | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Home Run Derby           |            |   |   |   |   |   |   | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |
| Tag Out/Frozen Tag       |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  |
| Triangle Relay           |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  |
| Batter Out               |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  |
| Get the Out              |            |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  |



# **Fundamentals for EVERY PRACTICE**

The first 20 minutes of practice should be dedicated to running and throwing/catching. These drills add fun to any practice and ensure that the players are moving down the proper path to enjoying the game of softball.

## **Running the Bases.**

Base running at the beginning of practice serves two purposes. First, it is a great way for the kids to release all of the energy that they brought to practice and loosen up. Second, there are many different base running skills that can be taught to players while they're doing the thing that they love to do – RUN!

The best way to get the most out of any drill is to demonstrate it to your players. Leading the run around the bases can be educational and fun. If you're energetic, when you get to home plate, celebrate as if someone hit a grand slam in the bottom of the 9th inning to win the World Series. The kids will love it!

Among the specific “in-game” base running drills you can do include: 1) the proper way to run to first base on an infield hit (have the players run straight through the base to give the coach a high five about 10 feet past the base), 2) running from home to second, 3) running from first to third, 4) running from second to home, and of course 5) running and touching all of the bases. If possible, time the runners as the run to first – and over any other combination of bases. Making it a competition always increases involvement and interest.

## **Throwing the Softball**

Probably the most difficult (and important) teaching mechanic for young softball players is the act of throwing and catching a softball. Young players are not aware of proper throwing mechanics, and have not developed the eye-hand coordination to properly catch a softball. Throwing and catching are essential in the game of softball and should be worked on at every practice. Before you begin, review the proper mechanics of the throw. Break it down into sections and have each player go through it step-by-step during their throws (see “The Throwing Program” for the step-by-step process).

At this age group, we offer a slight variation to the throwing mechanics since the players are getting stronger and have a better understanding of throwing a softball (nice work Tee-Ball Coaches!).

## **FIVE STEPS OF THROWING**

### **Step One: Step**

Start square to your partner (torso facing the target), step towards your partner with the foot of your throwing hand. Plant your foot with the inside of the foot facing the receiver, this will align the glove shoulder to your partner.



**3.1 Start**



### Step Two: Shoulder-to-Partner

You will want to have your glove shoulder facing your partner. The thrower's hands are to move downward towards the center of their body until they separate. The thrower steps forward toward the target with the glove foot. This will lead you to the launch, which is the next step.



**3.2 Shoulder-to-Partner**

### Step Three: Launch

At this point the thrower will turn their thumbs in to get the elbows up putting the arms in the launch position. The ball will be in the throwing hand away from the receiver with a four-seam grip and the knuckles of the throwing hand facing the receiver.



**3.3 Launch**

### Step Four: Delivery

The thrower should stay behind the ball when throwing and snap their wrist when throwing to the receiver. The release of the ball is out in front.



**3.4 Delivery**

### Step Five: Finish

The thrower's weight will continue towards the receiver and the arm will follow through to the 2 hand target.



**3.5 Finish**

Throwing mechanics are the most important thing a young softball player can learn. These motions are the building blocks for the game, and once learned are difficult to alter.

It is important to emphasize that no throw is to be made unless the receiver is giving a proper target. A proper target is when the receiver has both hands up and is ready to catch the throw. Do not allow players to throw a softball to a player that is not looking at the thrower!



You can structure this throwing in any way you would like. Here are a few ideas:

Kids throw to parents.  
Kids throw to kids.  
Kids throw to targets.  
Kids throw for distance.

### **Catching the Softball**

Catching a softball is a very difficult skill for players at this level.

You will need to do your best to eliminate the fear of being hit by the ball and improve the ability of your players to catch a thrown softball. One way is to introduce balls that do not hurt if they are missed by the player. Wiffle balls, tennis balls, or even larger rubber balls (think kickballs) can help kids develop this skill and feel more confident and comfortable with an object being thrown at them.

The best teaching process I've found for tee-ballers to learn how to catch a softball is provided by "Softball Positive".

*Receiving (catching) a throw has three key action points:*

- 1) *"Ready Position" (moving from a standing position to a Ready Position is an action)*
- 2) *"Move Your Feet to Catch"*
- 3) *"Reach Forward to Catch"*

*Any child on your team can perform these three fundamental skills every time, though they will not likely catch the ball very often. When they perform these actions in their attempt to catch, we can praise those actions and they will remain eager to keep trying ...and will progress faster in their skill development.*

#### **"Ready Position"**

*Instruct players to stand with their feet wider than shoulder width and with their hands (and elbows) held out in front of their body. The ideal position of the hands is 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock with the palms facing in. This stance is difficult for a young child however, because of their lack of leg and shoulder strength.*

*The interpretation of these instructions commonly result with their hands close together at the center of their chest with their elbows pointing straight out or with their elbows close to their body or their hands above their elbows like little football referees signaling 'Touchdown'. Keep working with them to get in a proper position even though some many will not master it at this age. When we see them standing in the positions described, at least we know they are trying.*

*A fun and effective way to train this concept is to tell the kids to pretend they are frogs. Tell them that when you call out "Ready Position" they jump up and land with their feet wide and hands and arms extended in*



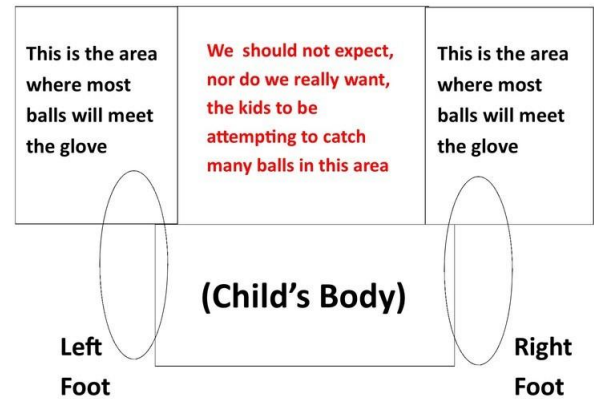
front of them (in a Ready Position) and holler out loudly, 'Ribbit!'. Doing this along with them makes it more fun and engaging.

### **“Move Your Feet to Catch”**

We want to remind our kids that the ball does not always come straight to them. They will need to “Move Their Feet” in order to take their hands to the ball to catch it. We “Move Our Feet to Catch”; we “Catch the Ball with Our Feet”.

### **“Reach Forward to Catch”**

When a player (at any age) extends their arms and hands out in front of them; not necessarily ‘in front of their face’, but in front of the space occupied by their body. The result is they have both the ball and their glove in their line of sight. This positioning of the glove, within the player’s line of sight, and gives the brain a better chance of coordinating the glove with the ball. Most young children, because of the lack of shoulder strength to support the weight of their arms (and the glove), hold their glove (and elbows) close to their body when preparing for, and attempting to make, a catch.



*Important: We will often see the kids position their glove outside their shoulders when attempting to catch. They recognize they will often miss the ball and are smart enough to not stand directly in the flight of the ball. However, a child can still extend their glove out ‘in front’ of where their standing and not have their glove directly in front of them.*

Given the fact that this age group has great difficulty catching the ball, a most efficient playing catch scenario involves each player with an adult (mom or dad) as their throwing partner.

As your player’s confidence builds, consider making a game out of playing catch. Play an elimination game where players who catch the ball stay in, and those who miss the ball drop out.

You can play the “wide receiver” game with a tennis ball. Have your players run across the field about 10-15 feet from you as you toss them the ball. The kids won’t catch the ball, but they’ll have fun trying.

### **Fielding the Softball**

Here are the basics for teaching players how to field ground balls.

#### Ready Position

- 1) Feet shoulder width apart
- 2) Knees bent - weight should be forward on the balls of feet Their head is up facing the ball.
- 3) Keep eyes on the ball until ball is in the glove.



Proper glove/hand position:

- 1) Glove hand should just be touching the dirt at a 45 degree angle. Throwing hand should be above the glove with the palm facing the ball.
- 2) Once the ball reaches the glove the top hand should cover the ball inside the glove.

Teach the fielders to catch the ball out in front. Do not allow players to field a batted ball between their legs. Hands MUST be in front of their feet.

### **Base Coverage Responsibility**

This is the first time that players are introduced to position responsibilities. In line with the theme of “keeping things simple”, here is a short list of key points for infielders. There is also a “follow the ball drill” that is a good drill for the players that emphasizes base coverage responsibilities. In general, players are either going to a bases, or going to the ball.

- If an infielder does not field the ball they cover a base (“Ball or Base”).
- The third baseman and first baseman have one base.
- The shortstop and second baseman have two bases; one to their left and one to their right.
- If the ball goes to the left of the shortstop or second baseman, and the player isn’t fielding it, run to the base on your left. If the ball goes to the right and the player isn’t fielding it, run to the base on your right.

The pitcher follows the same rules as the shortstop and second baseman. The base to the pitcher’s left is first base, the base to their right is third base.

It is understood that early in the year most of the kids on defense will want to attack the ball and will not recognize that some/many balls that are hit, are not 'theirs'. The 'positional movement' drills will start the kids on their way to recognizing that one infielder gets the ball and the other infielders cover a base.

One of the fundamental differences between softball and softball defense is in the movement of the defense. Softball players are constantly in motion when on defense. Encourage your outfielders to assume base back up roles on every play.

### **Hitting the Softball**

Before beginning any instruction on hitting, make sure that you explain the safety expectations around swinging a bat.

Players must always keep two hands on the bat, never throw it, and stay in their spots so that there are no accidents. Coaches need to designate an area (about a 30 foot diameter) where no players (other than the batter) are allowed to occupy.

In order to properly instruct the players on how to hit a softball, it’s important to understand a few basic principles of the mechanics of hitting. It is critical that the coaches pay attention, direct, and correct the swing of their players. Making contact with a softball is sheer joy for a tee-ball player. We need to make sure the players are following the process to make this happen as often as possible.



Hitting mechanics - focus on good stance and hand position

- 1) Hands back
- 2) Feet slightly more than shoulder width apart
- 3) Emphasize good hand position (behind the ears)
- 4) Lower body drives the swing and generates power
- 5) Follow through after contact

In order to teach the proper hitting mechanics, consider using the guide.

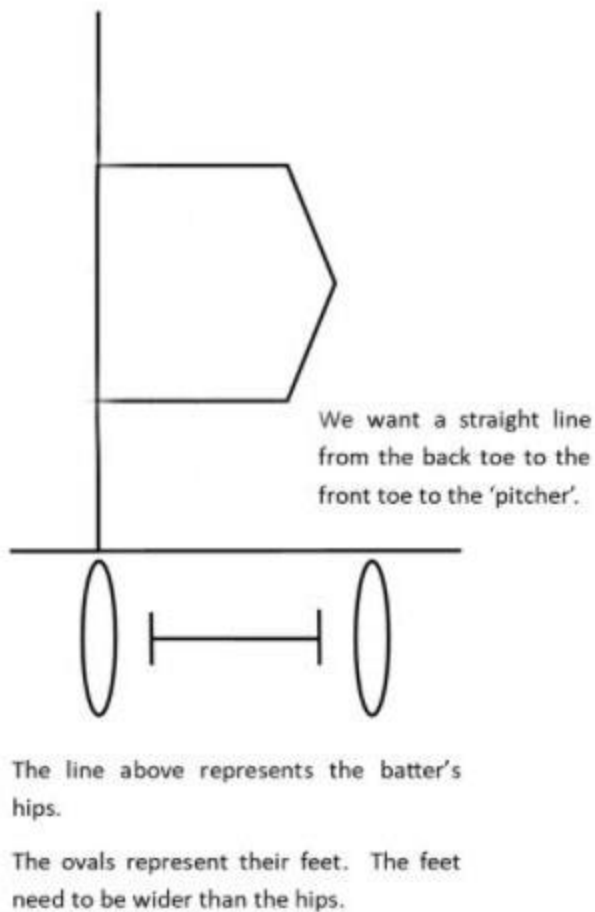
There is a slight variation to how we want to teach hitting for 13U Softball players. The batter will position their feet to align with the front part of the plate. We do this for two reasons. First, it gives the players a visual reference point for their feet. Second (and this is where coaching comes in), it is meant to prevent the batter from leaning too far forward in order to hit the softball. As coaches, we need to make sure the pitches are traveling across the plate (versus landing on the plate or being short of the plate). We don't want the player reaching forward with his/her hands in order to hit a pitch that is thrown short of the plate.

Have a perpendicular line (or cone, or other marker) running across both batter's boxes, intersecting the front of the plate. The batter's front foot is lined up with this marker. This position is important because it gives us a good starting point and will encourage the player to hit the ball "out in front".

The batter's feet are spread slightly beyond shoulder width. A good visual for the kids is to tell them to "have their feet wider than their knees". It's easy for them to see the difference between their feet and their knees.

Position the batter's feet so that the bat (with arms extended) can touch the outside of the plate.

Make sure both feet are lined up parallel with home plate and the shoulders are in line with where the pitcher would be.





The hands should grip the bat in one of three ways: 1) line up door knocking knuckles, 2) offset door knocking knuckles, and 3) knuckles boxed (big knuckles aligned with door knocking knuckles). It's important to note that the bat is to be held by the player's fingers, not in their palms.

Have the players put their index finger of one hand into the palm of their other hand. They should close the hand over the finger as tight as possible. Once the hand is closed, have the players try to get their index finger out. Do this again with the index finger being placed where the fingers meet the hand the second time. Again have them grip down hard and try to take their finger out of their hand. It should be much more difficult to free their finger the second time. This should demonstrate to the players that using the fingers is a stronger grip than using the palms.

Have the players raise the hands behind their ear, holding the bat perpendicular to the ground.

The swing is initiated with a step of the front foot, and/or the movement of the knob of the bat toward the pitcher. The step of the front foot is not necessary, but recommended. Some kids can start adding in a small step to start their swing – doesn't need to be a big step at this age which will just throw their swing off. Try not to allow the player to drop his/her hands prior to the initiation of the swing.

As the swing begins, the batter's eyes are fixed on the ball, and the head movement should be minimal.

Work on the bat coming through hitting zone on a level plane, and with a snap of the wrists (think about hammering a nail into a wall at about waist height - that's the action you want as the bat comes through the hitting zone). Many kids want to uppercut the ball in order to get the ball off the tee, or to travel farther. Try to discourage this. Better to hit line drives and ground balls at this age.

Follow through – wrists flip over after contact, and bat finishes on front shoulder/tricep (ie don't let swing stop out in front of you as with a forehand in tennis – flipping wrists over after contact and bringing bat around to front shoulder/tricep will add power.

You can try to help the players supply more power to their swing by training them to get their lower body into the swing. This is done by rotating the hips during the swing. The hips rotate when the back foot rotates. When this happens, the batter's belt buckle faces the pitcher and the back foot "squashes the bug".

Most important thing at this and any age really – especially in the games – remind them to watch the ball all the way to point of contact!

### **13U Softball Basics**

- 1) Make sure your players are familiar with the defensive positions (names and locations).
- 2) Review the areas that each position covers – emphasis on fielding balls hit in that area only.
- 3) The players need to know what to do when a ball is hit to them (throw the ball to first base, mostly).
- 4) Tell the fielders what to do if the ball is not hit to them.
- 5) Discuss backing up fielders on balls put into play.
- 6) Begin to teach the rules of the game (fielding and baserunning).



# The Throwing Program

Throwing properly is the most important skill in the game of softball to learn. Players that do not throw properly will struggle with the game of softball, will be overlooked by coaches, and may develop bad throwing habits that may cause injury. Implementing a throwing program at the start of playing softball is vital. In the paragraphs that follow, we will define a simple throwing program that we want our young players to use as much as possible. Proper throwing for 10 minutes 5 days a week in season and 2 - 3 days a week in warmer weather out of season will be sufficient to develop a strong throwing arm, and good technique.

Throwing the softball correctly is the key to a enjoyment and success in the game of softball.

## The Target

Giving a good target, and demonstrating proper receiving technique, is very important to the overall training of the thrower. A target should be given with both hands separated and in front of the body. The target is important for several reasons, but most-importantly, to make sure the thrower is throwing TO a target, not AT someone. The catch is made with two hands, ensuring that the ball, when caught, is held on to.

Make sure that both the thrower and receiver are actively involved in the Throwing Program. As is the case with all of softball, there needs to be a purpose to the action. Throwing aimlessly AT someone is a recipe for poor technique and poor results. Furthermore, throwing TO a target promotes safety, making sure that both the thrower and receiver are engaged in playing catch.

## Warming Up

Completing a proper warm up is an essential part of the Throwing Program. This warm up can consist of a combination of stretching and mild aerobic exercise.

“Warm up to throw. Don’t throw to warm up”

### Suggested Stretching

1. Arm windmills – Start by extending the arms out at the side. Make small forward circles with the arms, gradually making larger and larger circles. Complete the circles by making full windmills (full circles) with the arms. When finished, repeat the stretch by doing reverse circles.
2. Scratch the back – Reach back over the shoulder with one hand touching your spine. Use the opposite hand to pull down on the elbow causing a stretch of the tricep muscle. Hold for a 10 count. Repeat on other arm.
3. Arm crossovers – Allow the arm to hang across the body to the opposite side. Turn the opposing arm toward the body and pull the opposing arm toward the body, using the front of the wrist. The player should feel a stretch of the shoulder. Hold for a 10 count. Repeat the stretch for the other arm.
4. Jumping jacks
5. Easy jog/run
6. Toe touches (wind mill)



## Throwing Program

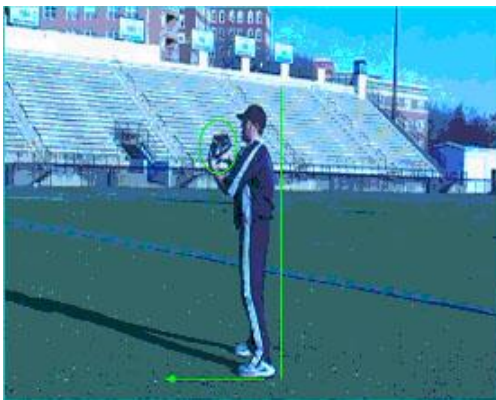
### **Part 1: Shoulder to Shoulder (10 – 20 Throws)**

(this drill focuses on upper body mechanics, allowing the thrower to concentrate on hip rotation, elbow placement and arm slot)

1. Toes pointed to target, feet parallel
2. Grip = 4 Seam or C Grip (fingers across the seams, fingertips touching the seams)



3. Glove in front – like a pitcher



4. Break arms down and in a circle motion to the highest point



5. Front elbow pointed at target
6. Back elbow in straight line to target
7. Back of the hand facing the target



8. Drive front elbow across the rib cage
9. Release  $\frac{3}{4}$  or over hand to target (keeping throwing elbow above shoulder)



10. Follow-thru to the glove side hip pocket



11. During this drill, no step is taken toward the target



## **Part II: Feet in Straight Line Drill (10 – 20 Throws)**

(this drill focuses more on lower body involvement, allowing the thrower to feel the impact of the legs in the throwing motion)

1. Side of feet facing the target
2. Hands in front, middle of the chest – like a pitcher



3. Break hands circle motion, raising throwing elbow at or above shoulder level
4. Weight distribution 60 percent backside/40 percent front-side
5. Front elbow facing target
6. Back of the hand to the target



7. Explode weight forward, no more stride
8. Arm across rib cage
9. Finish follow-thru to glove side hip pocket



10. During this drill, no step is taken toward the target prior to the throw



### **Part III: Step & Throw (10 – 20 Throws)**

(this drill puts it all together and allows the thrower to perfect the throwing mechanics)

1. Start the feet parallel to the target (same as in Part I)
2. Step with the “throwing arm leg first, in front of the glove arm leg” – foot is perpendicular to target
3. Keep the hands together still at this point
4. Notice that the step is turned in - this will provide the drive because the weight will transfer from the outside of the foot to the inside of the foot allowing for maximum push to the target.
5. Make sure to step in a straight line and not off to the right or left
6. The glove leg will explode through and now land the same as in Part II of the throwing program
7. The break of the hands happens as the glove arm leg lands to the ground



8. Notice as the follow-through happens, weight is still moving forward to the target.
9. We like to tell players to keep their feet moving to their target after the throw, this will also keep them in a straight line headed in that direction.



## **Stations/Drills/Games**

Running a successful tee-ball practice revolves around 3 themes: 1) organization, 2) energy (from players & coaches), and 3) fun. Remove any one of these legs from the “three-legged stool”, and you will have a practice that will fail to capture the attention of your players. If you lose your players, no one will enjoy practice – including you.

The drills and games that follow can be inserted into the practice plan at any point after the run/throw/catch portion of the practice. Breaking the players into smaller groups and keeping the drills to 5-10 minutes in length will keep the players moving and the practices interesting.

## **BASERUNNING**

### **Next Base Drill (practices 1-3)**

Once a player is on first base, they may not always know where they need to go next.

You can set up a couple of stations if you have enough bases. Set up a diamond with the bases as they would normally be set up. Start with a player on first base and a lineup of batters.

This drill starts with a player on first base and one at the plate to bat. Instead of hitting a real ball, players will ‘show’ coach their great swing and then run to first.

You will also have to explain to the kids on first base, where they need to go next. Another coach, or a parent volunteer can be on second to help direct the players where to go next. Keep going so each player has a chance to bat and run around the bases.

Coaches should watch that the runner understands which base he or she is headed to, and also that they stop right on the base.

This is a basic baserunning drill that helps kids learn where to go during the game.

### **Run Through the base Drill (practices 1-9)**

Early on in their softball careers, young players need to be reminded to run through first base on a ground ball. This drill will help them understand this point.

Line up your players at home plate. Position coaches on the right field foul line beginning about 5 feet beyond the bag at first base – about 3 feet apart from each other. Explain to your players that you expect them to run past first base every time they hit the ball, and that in this drill, the coaches want to give them a “high five” if they do the drill correctly. Demonstrate the drill for them.



The player simulates a swing at the plate and runs toward first base. Once he passes first base, the coaches encourage him to continue running to first base and give the player high fives when he passes the coaches.

This drill can be run with multiple “first bases”. Simply line up 2 other bases parallel to first base. Set up multiple “home bases” parallel to the field’s home base. In that way you can have multiple players running to first base at the same time to keep practice moving.

During the scrimmages/games for the younger players, have your first base coach stand just beyond the bag at first. Encourage your players to run past the coach at first. They can give you a high five during the games too!

### **Home Run Drill (practices 1-12)**

Kids love to be timed running around the bases. Grab a stopwatch, line your players up at home plate, and watch the fun and competition begin.

At the younger age groups, it is not important that the players use good base running mechanics. At the older age groups, the coach will want to demonstrate the proper way to run around the bases, and point out the players that execute the base running skills properly.

This drill can be used as a practice starter, or ender. It is a fun drill for the kids.

### **Catch The Players Game (practices 1-12)**

Speedy baserunning is the key to this fun drill for the kids and lots of work for the coaches!

You can either set up a couple of stations with four bases, or have coaches and parent volunteers alternate. Groups of four runners at a time will go.

The coach will start the four runners, one at a time. Give each runner a five second head start and then send the next runner. After all four runners have gone, the coach heads around the basepath.

The object is for each player to catch the players ahead of them while they are running around the bases. Once it gets to the coach, then the coach needs to run fast to catch the players that are left. If any of the players run off the baseline, or if they go to the wrong base, they will be out of the game.

This will probably be one of the most fun games you and the kids are playing. It teaches them they need to run around the bases as fast as they can, or coach will catch them. It translates well to a game situation.

### **Four Corners Game (practices 1-12)**

This drill teaches kids about team competition and cooperation, base running and rounding, and throwing progressions. It also reinforces the skills of receiving while offering kids a fun way to get better conditioned.

Start by dividing your team in half. Line up one team at the home plate and the other at second base. Hand





the first player in each line a softball.

Tell them to run three consecutive bases. So, those starting at the home plate will end on third base and those starting on second will end on first base.

Once they've reached the right base, they must stop, set their feet, and throw their ball to the next player in line. The next player up catches the ball and repeats the activity.

If the player doesn't catch the ball, they must retrieve it. Touch their starting base. And then run the sequence.

Players must finish by sitting in a designated area you assign before the drill begins. Whichever team finishes with all of its members seated in the right spot first wins.

### **Base Runners Drill (practices 7-12)**

Players need to learn to listen to what their coaches say when they are running the bases.

You can have the tee set up, with a batter at the tee, but without a bat. The coach will be at first base.

The player will take an imaginary swing with the imaginary bat and then run as fast as they can to first base. As the runner approaches the base he or she will call out to the runner to either stay at the base, or to keep running.

Run each player through the drill differing each time what you are going to say to the player. They will begin to learn through the repetition to listen for their coach's voice when they are running the bases.

Knowing the coach is going to help them will give some players confidence on the base paths. For others it is a lesson in listening to what the coach says on the field.



## **FIELDING/THROWING DRILLS**

### **Underhand Square Drill (practices 1-6)**

This drill teaches players the correct way to underhand the ball to a make a play at a nearby base.

Five players are needed to conduct this drill. Four players are positioned in the formation of a square, approximately 15 - 20 feet apart. There are no gloves used in this defensive drill. One of the four players has a softball in his/her hand. The fifth player lines up behind the player with the ball.

When the coach says, "go!" the ball is tossed underhand to the player to the right – using a flat-wristed technique. After the throw is made, the thrower immediately runs toward the player to whom he/she has thrown the ball, and takes his place. The player who receives the underhand throw turns to his right and throws the ball to the next player, and follows his throw, replacing the player to whom the ball has been thrown. This pattern continues until the ball is dropped and the players reset.

In order for this drill to be effective, the coach must insist that the players use a flat wrist to underhand the ball to the next player. The player receiving the throw must use two hands to catch the ball and release the ball quickly. Accuracy and speed are the name of the game here.

To add some competitiveness, have the players keep track of how many throws are made in a row by counting each successful throw and catch out loud.

### **Plays at First - Grounder Drills (practices 1-6)**

Form one line just behind 2nd base

Have one player at a time move into the 2nd base position, and have a coach/parent stand on 1st base. Roll the grounder to 2nd base. The player should field the ball and make throw toward 1st base.

For a variation, roll the balls left and right of the player to make the player move to get in front of the ball. The player should field the ball and make throw toward 1st base.

Start this drill at 20 feet from the player, and eventually move to 40 feet from the player.

Emphasis the importance of moving to get in front of the ball instead of reaching out with the glove.

### **Alligator Drill (practices 1-6)**

Roll grounders to the kids and have them make an alligator out of the arms. Bottom arm with glove is the jaw and the top arm without glove is the head. When the ball rolls in have them the act like the alligator is biting or eating the ball. Both arms come together.

Fielder should form a triangle with their two feet and glove. The idea is to have the player reach out to make the biggest triangle that they can.



### **Receiving the Throw Drill (practices 1-6)**

Instruct players to stand with their feet wider than shoulder width and with their hands (and elbows) held out in front of their body. The ideal position of the hands is 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock with the palms facing in. This stance is difficult for a young child however, because of their lack of leg and shoulder strength.

The interpretation of these instructions commonly result with their hands close together at the center of their chest with their elbows pointing straight out or with their elbows close to their body or their hands above their elbows like little football referees signaling 'Touchdown'. Keep working with them to get in a proper position even though some many will not master it at this age. When we see them standing in the positions described, at least we know they are trying.

A fun and effective way to train this concept is to tell the kids to pretend they are frogs. Tell them that when you call out "Ready Position" they jump up and land with their feet wide and hands and arms extended in front of them (in a Ready Position) and holler out loudly, 'Ribbit!'. Doing this along with them makes it more fun and engaging.

#### **“Move Your Feet to Catch”**

We want to remind our kids that the ball does not always come straight to them. They will need to “Move Their Feet” in order to take their hands to the ball to catch it. We “Move Our Feet to Catch”; we “Catch the Ball with Our Feet”.

#### **“Reach Forward to Catch”**

When a player (at any age) extends their arms and hands out in front of them; not necessarily 'in front of their face', but in front of the space occupied by their body. The result is they have both the ball and their glove in their line of sight. This positioning of the glove, within the player's line of sight, and gives the brain a better chance of coordinating the glove with the ball. Most young children, because of the lack of shoulder strength to support the weight of their arms (and the glove), hold their glove (and elbows) close to their body when preparing for, and attempting to make, a catch.

Important: We will often see the kids position their glove outside their shoulders when attempting to catch. They recognize they will often miss the ball and are smart enough to not stand directly in the flight of the ball. However, a child can still extend their glove out 'in front' of where their standing and not have their glove directly in front of them.

### **Lateral Pick Up Drill (practices 1-6)**

This drill improves the players overall conditioning, and improves the player's ability to move laterally and to assume a good defensive position in fielding a ground ball.

The drill has one tosser and one player, who are 6-7 feet apart facing each other. (Pairs) Drill can have as many groups as desired.



The tosser rolls a ball about 5-6 feet out to the side. The player moves on a semicircular path to field the ball. Make sure the fielder is fielding the ball by lining up his chin with the ball, with his hands extended. Do not allow the player to field the ball between his legs. He must field the ball in front of him. After picking-up the ball, the player throws the ball back to the tosser using a flat wristed, underhand throw, and returns to the center position. The tosser then rolls a ball about 5-6 feet out to the opposite side, and the player fields the ball in a similar manner. The drill sequence is repeated from 10 – 20 times depending on the player's conditioning level.

The number of repetitions is increased as the players conditioning level improves. It is important for the player to field the ball by moving on a semicircular path (not in a straight line) in order for the drill to be effective.

### **Bucket Drill (practices 1-12)**

This drill can be pulled out and used at any time. It is the best way to get the most ground ball practice for your team.

The drill is incredibly simple.

Place a work bucket on second base and you have the kids line up at the shortstop and the second baseman positions. One coach hits (or rolls) ground balls to shortstop, the other to second base. The players field the ball, run toward the bucket, and place the ball in the bucket. The player continues running to the other defensive line (ie shortstop to second base, and second base to shortstop).

Continue this process until all the softballs are hit or the bucket is full. Rinse, repeat.

### **Bounce to the Bucket Game (practices 4-6)**

It's good to learn throwing accuracy at an early age – this is a fun game to learn!

Set up a bucket or other target at first base. You can set up more than one station for this drill. Line up kids at each station about 10 feet away to start.

The first thrower steps up and tries to get the ball into the box or bucket – and they get 10 points. If they hit the side of the bucket they will get 5 points. The closest ball to the bucket will get 2 points.

You can increase the difficulty of the drill by increasing the distance that the players have to throw. But, don't sacrifice the distance for the accuracy. Once the kids gain the accuracy, then in time they will build the strength to throw the ball a greater distance.

The players will begin to develop a sense of how to get the ball to their intended target by aiming at the box or bucket.

### **Block the Ball Drill (practices 4-6)**

This is the first step to getting kids to learn the prospect of fielding the ball.



Set up two or three lines of players so the kids can get maximum repetition. Have a coach or parent volunteer at each line with several balls.

With this drill coaches need to first instruct their players on how to move to get in front of the ball. Start the players off in the ready position (hands on the knees, slightly bent, and with their head up watching the play).

The coaches or volunteers should roll the ball directly at the players at first, but then to either side. The player needs to shuffle to get their body in front of the ball to knock it down. For each ball that the player knocks down they get three points. If the player scoops the ball with their glove, they get five points.

The players will get excited about getting points for knocking the ball down.

To teach players how to use their gloves properly, try using plastic milk jugs with one side cut out to form a “scoop”. Have the kids use the scoop to field the ball. This will help them learn to use their gloves to scoop up the ball, rather than trap it.

Learning to knock the ball down and ultimately to try and scoop the ball is the first part of fielding the ball.

### **Rundown Drill (practices 4-9)**

A player stands at first and one at second base with gloves on. One of the two players has the ball. A third player (with batting helmet on) is positioned halfway between the two bases. Coach says, “go”, and the drill begins. The primary defensive objective is to get an out. The secondary defensive objective is to get an out with the runner moving toward first base. The objective is for the runner to reach either base safely. Keep score. The first to 5 wins. You can add a second runner to the mix and have a contest between the 2 teams of two players.

For younger players, it is recommended that a tennis ball be used until the coach has confidence that the drill can be done successfully with a hard ball.

### **Advanced Rundown Drill (practices 4-9)**

Two players stand at second base and one at first with their gloves on. A runner with a helmet on starts in the middle of first and second base. The ball is given to one of the players at second base, and the rundown begins. When a player throws the ball to the base, he follows his throw and becomes the next defensive player at that base.

The objective is to make the least amount of throws, and tag out the runner going back toward first base.

Make sure that when receiving the ball, the defensive player is at least three feet in front of the base. In



that way the runner cannot get by the defensive player without being tagged with the ball.

### **Variation on the Rundown Drill (practices 4-9)**

Two players stand at first and second base with gloves on. A third player positioned inside the base paths near the pitcher's mound has the ball (you can also place the fielder at the edge of the outfield grass). A fourth player (with batting helmet on), is positioned halfway between the two bases. Coach says, "go", and the drill begins. The player with the ball immediately raises the ball and runs toward the base runner, forcing the runner to make a decision. The ball is thrown to a base, and the rundown begins. The player who threw the ball runs to the base to which the ball was thrown and becomes part of the drill. The drill continues with the infielder's trying to get the out and the base runner trying to find safety.

Note that once an infielder makes a throw to a base, he becomes the back up for that base and is part of the rundown.

The primary defensive objective is to get an out. The secondary defensive objective is to get an out with the runner moving toward first base. The objective is for the runner to reach either base safely.

### **Knock Down Game (practices 4-9)**

Arrange 3 batting tees in a row about 10 feet apart from each other.

For beginner players, place a large ball on each tee (playground ball, soccer ball, etc.). For more experienced players, place a softball on each tee.

Group players into three lines about 20 feet in front of each batting tee. All players should have a ball and glove.

Players work on their throwing accuracy by trying to knock a target off a tee.

The object of this drill is for players to try and hit the ball off the tee with a square throw. First player in each line throws ball at the target. If they hit the target, they need to run out and reset the batting tee with the ball for next player in line then return to the end of their line. If they do not hit the target, they should return to end of the line and wait for their turn again.

Make it easier: Increasing the size of the ball on the batting tee makes this drill easier. For example, a beach ball can be used for little ones! Alternatively, you can move players closer to the batting tee.

Make it harder: The smaller the target on the batting tee, the harder this drill becomes. Another way to increase the difficulty is to have players throw from farther back.

### **Follow the Throw Drill (practices 4-9)**

The keys to a strong, accurate throw are lining your shoulders up with the target, exploding with a crop hop towards the target, and following the throw towards the target. This drill targets all three skills.



Set up orange cones in an “L” shape, with the top of the “L” pointing towards the coach at first base. The players stand in line in the ready position (knees and waist bent, weight on the balls of the feet, hands in front). The coach rolls the ball to the player who steps in and fields the ball. The player then lines up the shoulders to the target, springs into a crow hop, makes the throw to the coach at first base, and follows the throw – taking about 2 – 3 steps toward the coach at first. The ball is then thrown back to the player. The player catches the ball and returns it to the coach who rolls the grounders. The player returns to the back of the line.

### **Hit and Cover Drill (practices 4-9)**

With the infield in position hit a ball to the third basemen who makes the throw to first. First base brings the ball home and the catcher throws it back to the third basemen covering the bag. The third baseman catches the ball, makes a swipe tag, and fires the ball home again. Repeat the activity around the infield with each new base throwing to the previous one i.e. hit to first comes home back to first then to second third and home again. If proper throws are not made then start the drill again. We have found that this help get the infielders set and used to making good throws.

### **Drop Step Drill (practices 4-12)**

In order to catch a ball that is hit behind them (or over their head), outfielders must be able to move back as quickly as possible. The drop step allows outfielders to range backward without back peddling.

Players line up. First one steps forward, tosses ball to coach and assumes ready position. Coach says go and player performs drop step (drop one foot back, turn body and cross the other foot over in the direction of the ball). Coach throws ball directly over player’s head, high and close enough that he can catch with two hands above the head. Have players take time to get footwork correct before tossing. Stop players and have them do it correctly before throwing ball if step not done properly.

### **Long Toss (practices 4-12)**

The best way to build arm strength is by long tossing. Players should gradually move back until they have to put a little air under the ball to get it all the way to their partner. Once the players get to the point where they can barely get the ball there or they can only get it there on once bounce, they should make several throws from that distance before shortening up and finishing. It’s okay for players to involve the body by taking a big step toward their target or shuffling their feet. Long toss should be done by young players at every practice with the main goal of being able to throw the ball farther as the season progresses.

### **Relay Shuttle Drill (practices 4-12)**

This drill is great for teaching a number of skills. The fielder learns the correct position to receive a relay throw, how to catch it with both hands in front, and which direction to turn to throw. This drill can be adjusted for a variety of skill levels.

1. Get 3-4 players 45-50 feet apart in a line with one softball to start with.
2. Each player in the relay assumes the position of the receiver – throwing hand shoulder pointed



- toward the thrower, glove and hand pointed toward the thrower, and bent slightly at the knees and waist in an athletic position.
3. One of the players on one end throws the ball to the next player in line concentrating on the other player's glove hand/shoulder.
  4. The receiving player catches the ball with both hands in front and turns into his glove hand to throw the ball to the next player in line etc.
  5. This continues there and back.

The coaches concentrate on throwing technique and body rotation/spin, catching, etc. We do this against the clock or head to head with the winning team getting popsicles or ice cream. This drill teaches so many things, and as the kids get acclimated to it we increase the distance to stretch out their arms and increase.

### **Catch Contest Game (practices 7-9)**

This is a game that pits the throwing and catching skills of the players against one another. It should be a fun game for all of the kids to participate in.

Pair up the players on the team and give each pair a ball. Each should also have their gloves.

Once you have the players paired up, start them off a short distance apart from one another – probably between 8 and 10 feet. The players should throw the ball back and forth executing overhand throws and catches.

The players need to make good throws and good catches, as each time they miss or drop the ball, the pair has to stop in the game. The game ends when the last pair to keep throwing and catching the ball without dropping it is still in the game.

If the game lasts longer (with improved play), you can move the pairs back a step or two.

The players will gradually build their throwing and catching skills and learn to work with the other players on their team in this manner.

### **Hit the Bucket Drill (practices 7-9)**

You need a bucket to act as home plate – but if you can't find one, a bag works just fine. Have all players form one line about 100-200 feet away from the bucket, and each bring a couple softballs with them. Coach will stand beside the bucket to collect the thrown balls.

One at a time, players will attempt to throw a ball that hits the bucket. Each player gets 5 throws.

After a couple cycles, make it a game. Each player takes their throws, with the top four from the first round moving on to the semis, and continuing on through the finals until you've crowned a winner.

COACHING TIPS: Remind players that one or two hop throws count as well! They will quickly learn that





these types of low, hard throws are easily the most effective way to hit the bucket. Offer a prize, like a Gatorade or pack of softball cards, to the player who wins the drill

### **Count the Catches Game (practices 7-12)**

This is a good drill to help players strive toward making good catches, and also a drill they can work on at home.

You can either do this as a group drill, or you can make it a drill that has players paired up with each other.

If you do this as a group, you can get two stations going in order to compete against each other, and have a coach or parent volunteer at each station. With a group, the coach will underhand toss the ball to the player in the line and they must make the catch. Everyone yells out, “one!” Then, another toss and “two!” And so on.

Each side goes on until a player in the line drops the ball. Then they start at one again. You can run this drill in pairs, with the players trying to catch the ball between each other.

This drill simply reinforces the skill of the catching the ball.

### **Pepper Drill (practices 7-12)**

Break up the team into smaller groups of 3 – 4 players. Line them up with their gloves on against the fence. A coach with a bat stands about 15 – 20 feet away from the players. The coach hits the ball toward the players; the ball is fielded and thrown back to the coach so that he can hit the ball back to the players. The objective is for the players to field the ball cleanly, or at least keep the ball in front of them. If the ball gets by a player (hits the fence), the player loses a point. A player is eliminated after 5 points. See who is the last player remaining. This is your pepper champion.

This drill develops quickness and reaction skills.

### **Charging Drill (practices 7-12)**

This drill improves the player's ability to charge a softly hit ground ball and make a strong and accurate throw to first base.

A coach stands at home plate and one at first base. The players begin by lining up at third base. The coach rolls the ball about midway between home and third, forcing the player to have to charge the ball. The player must charge the ball, set his feet correctly, use two hands to field the ball, gather the ball, point his shoulders toward first base, crow hop, and make a strong accurate throw to first base. Run the drill for 10 turns at each base (third, short, and second).

Make sure the players are not taking shortcuts to this drill by fielding the ball to the side, or running through the ball when fielding it. We want to teach the proper fielding mechanics. See how many the players can do successfully in a row.



### **Communication Drill (practices 7-12)**

Outfielders form two lines at least 20 feet apart. First players in each line step forward. Coach throws fly balls in between the two fielders, who must communicate and make the play. Player fielding ball should yell, "I got it!" at least three times while waving his arms. Other player should back up. A strong, accurate throw should be made to coach or cutoff man (another player who rotates out of the drill) after ball is caught. For younger players you can use soft softballs or tennis balls.

It is important for the outfielder to give both a verbal and visual cue to the other outfielder to make it clear that the ball is his to catch.

### **Speed Throw Drill (practices 7-12)**

This drill teaches players how to achieve a quick catch and release of the softball, which is important for any position on the field – including outfield.

It also teaches – when done correctly – the concept of the "replacement step". The replacement step is the most common and fastest method to release a caught ball toward its target.

With the receiver squared to his/her thrower, the left foot is placed slightly in front of the right foot (for right-handed throwers). Both hands are placed in front, glove open to the thrower – ready to catch a thrown ball. When the ball is caught, there is a release of the front foot (left foot) toward the intended target. The throwing hand's foot (right) is placed where the front foot (left) used to be (replacement) and the front footsteps toward the target. This is more easily executed than written down.

Run this drill in any large open area (a field or a gym). Divide the team into as many groups of two as possible. If an uneven number of players are present use a coach to fill out the last group.

One member of each group lines up on one side of the area, the second member opposite on the other side. Space players an equal distance apart along each side of the area to allow room for safety.

Each group should have a ball. On the word "GO" each team begins throwing the ball back and forth across the area. Each time a team completes one throw and catch they count one point. If the throw is bad, or the ball is not caught, that team's score goes to zero.

Allow between thirty and sixty seconds for a round then call "STOP." Each team then gives its score. The team with the highest score wins and each of those two players gets one point. Then rotate to the left so that all teams are different.

As soon as all teams are set and have a ball, start another round as above. Run as many rounds as the time allotted for the drill will allow. At the conclusion the player(s) with the most points win.



### **Quarterback Drill (practices 10-12)**

Outfielder is 10 feet away from the coach with both feet pointing toward the coach. The coach uses the words “drop step and go” and points in the direction to where he wants his player to drop step and go.

As soon as the outfielder hears the coach’s command the player uses the drop step and cross over in order to turn his body and sprint in the direction to where the coach has pointed. If the coach points to the player’s right – the player will drop step with his right foot and cross over with his left. If the coach points to the player’s left – the outfielder will drop step with his left and cross over with his right.

Once the player has sprinted approximately 20-40 yards (depending on skill and age) the coach will throw a high fly ball, and the outfielder who is sprinting must try to get under the ball in order to make the catch on the run. Once players get comfortable with the drill and make several catches you can increase the difficulty by throwing the ball further in order to make outfielders run harder and possibly make a diving catch.

To make the drill easier and work the players harder, have each player line up with a ball in their glove. When it is their turn they will toss you the ball and wait for your command. Once they have caught the ball they will jog back to the line up with the ball in their glove.

### **One Knee Throwing Drill (practices 10-12)**

This helps players learn the upper body action of throwing, without using their legs. Also builds throwing strength.

Each player needs to have a ball to perform this drill. To start, you may want to give the players a softer ball, like a tennis ball.

This drill emphasizes the upper body action: right from the grip, to the raised arm and elbow, the L-shape between the forearm and bicep, and then turning the body and following through towards the intended target.

The player starts with the body facing the target and the ball raised. The player can throw at a target, a fellow player, or a coach. The proper throwing mechanics should be watched for as the player throws the ball toward the target. A good follow through toward the target is important.

This drill helps the player learn to upper body action for throwing, along with building throwing strength and accuracy.

### **One and Two Game (practices 10-12)**

This drill helps players to understand the importance of accurate throws and catches that are at the shoulder level. It makes it easier for kids to throw and catch if they have something to aim for. It makes it especially better if it becomes a game and there are points at stake.

Pair up the players and give them each a ball. Award points to the players for throwing and catching the ball at shoulder level or above.



If the pair throws and catches at shoulder height, then they get two points. If they throw the ball and then catch it at waist level, then they get one point. If it is lower than the waist, they get no points.

This will help the players learn to keep the ball up where their teammates can catch it much easier.

More accurate throws and players can compete against each other in a game-like setting.

### **Around the Horn Drill (practices 10-12)**

Divide players up so that there are an equal number in line at each base. You can also just set this drill up in the deep outfield, with 4 cones around 60 feet apart from each other, replicating a diamond. The first player in line at home plate will start with a softball in her hand

1. The player at home plate will throw the ball to 3rd.
2. The 3rd base player throws to 2nd
3. The 2nd base player throws to 1st
4. The 1st base player throws to home.
5. The throws continue in a counter-clockwise direction until Coach says to stop.

COACHING TIPS: If you have enough players, create a line at each base. After the player throws, she will immediately sprint to join the line at the next base (continuing in a counter-clockwise pattern), then step forward and receive the throw when it's her turn.

To increase the difficulty, you can start to throw out extra commands after the ball has been moving around for a couple minutes: 'reverse' to change the direction, or you can call out base numbers and test their reaction skills!

### **Soft Fly Ball Drill (practices 10-12)**

Sometimes younger softball players have a fear of catching the ball because they are afraid it is too hard.

You will need enough softer balls (tennis balls, wiffle balls, puffy balls) for all of the players. The player should have their gloves.

It is tough for some young players to get over the fact that the ball is very hard and they may get hit. This prevents some players from making the effort to catch the ball. They are afraid that if they miss, the ball is going to hit, and therefore hurt them.

Start off by showing the players that the ball is very soft, and even if it hits them in the head, they are not going to get hurt. Then, you can start off with the players in the lines and throw the ball to them one by one. Once the players get the hang of it, they can start throwing the ball to each other to try and catch it.

Younger players will get over the fear of catching the ball by working with the soft ball and eventually



moving up to the harder ball.

### **Reach Out Drill (practices 10-12)**

This drill teaches players to get and keep their hands in front while fielding ground balls.

Players line up single file with gloves on. Place a bat on the ground about 6 – 8 feet in front of the players – perpendicular to the player’s feet (you can use a 2x4 instead). The coach rolls a ball toward the bat. The player must advance up to the bat, assume a good fielding position with the hands in front, and field the ball before it touches the bat. In order to accomplish this, the player must reach out in front of the bat and field the ball – exactly what you want the player to do on every groundball.

The players return the ball to the coach with an overhand throw, and return to the back of the line.

This is a fast-moving drill that the kids will have fun with and will learn good fielding habits. See how many the kids can get in a row!

### **Variation of the Reach Out Drill (practices 10-12)**

Another important aspect of fielding is getting the ball into the throwing hand as soon as possible. Combining the Reach Out Drill with a quick release is a great way to teach the kids this skill.

Set up the Reach Out Drill as described above. Position two coaches on either side of the bat – about 8 feet from the ends of the bat.

The coach rolls the ball to the players and they approach and field the ball, reaching over the bat with their glove to do so. When the ball is fielded, the player grasps the ball out of the glove and flicks the ball backhand to one of the coaches on the side – to the right for right-handed throwers, to the left for left-handed throwers.

Challenge the players to get the ball out of the glove quickly, while making an accurate backhand toss to the coaches.

### **Final Progression of the Reach Out Drill (practices 10-12)**

Now that the players have found the correct fielding position, and figured out how to get the ball out of the glove quickly, we want to have the players incorporate these skills while making an accurate throw to first base.

Set up the drill as outlined above, except this time make sure that the bat is placed in such a position that when the player fields the ball, he is in a good position to make the right, left, throw to first base.

The ball is rolled to the player as he/she approaches the bat. Hands are extended to field the ball. After the ball is fielded, the player needs to step over the bat with the right foot to begin the right, left, throw process.

This is a great way to teach the kids to get their momentum going toward first base when making a throw.



## **BATTING DRILLS**

### **Wiffle Ball Batting Drill (pre-practice drill)**

Instead of allowing players to play catch when they arrive, set up a whiffle ball batting practice (the best type of ball to use is a 'pickle ball').

One coach can throw to two kids at once; two coaches can throw to four kids, and so on. A coach who has gained proficiency at pitching in this environment can pitch to three kids at once.

Have half the kids batting and half chasing balls (they love this!). Give each player 8 swings then switch. Note: No "one mores". This can turn into 4 or 5 more, and eat up a lot of valuable time. If a player swings and misses on their eighth swing we tell them, "Good Swing!! ...now switch to chasing balls". Suggestion: tell the batter when they have two or three swings left, so they understand they soon will be done batting.

Make it crystal clear to the kids that running through the space between the pitchers (coaches) and batters. Call this space 'Interstate/Hwy 95'. There is no way they would run across a major highway filled with cars and trucks. ...and there is no way we will allow them to run through this space; it is absolutely prohibited. They have to go around the outside. When a player runs through this space, they potentially will run next to another player in the middle of swinging a bat; we do not want this to happen

Making this rule stick is not as simple as telling them one time; even though we point out the safety hazard. It will take some time, and discipline (on our part as coaches), to train them that there are no exceptions to this rule.

Make it a rule that there is to be no swinging of a bat except when at the 'plate' and when a coach is pitching. Kids will want to pick up balls and try to hit them back to the coaches when picking up balls during or at the end of the drill. Be ready to squash this activity the moment it starts. Make it clear this will not be tolerated under any circumstance.

The origination of Whiffle Ball Batting was to give the players something to do between their arrival at the ballpark and the official start of practice, so to not play catch unsupervised. However, since this is such a fun activity and is only available prior to the start of practice, it becomes an incentive for kids to arrive early. Ultimately this leads to practices starting on time with all or most kids ready to go.

### **Broomstick (pre-practice drill)**

Make a couple of bats from broomsticks about 30" for little league. Purchase practice plastic golf balls at any sporting goods store. Have players break up into two groups of four, one player pitching, one hitting and two others for retrieval. Coach should position himself about 20 feet from the batter. The coach throws the balls to the batter while on one knee.

At first players will have difficulty making contact but with concentration on point of contact they will begin hitting consistently.



This drill can be done anywhere. Prior to practice or prior to a game.

### **Front Foot Batting Drill (practices 1-6)**

Set up the ball on a tee. Batters should have a bat and a helmet on.

Explain to the player they must keep their front foot in line with the tee, and show them how far away they should be from the tee (around 24 inches). If a young player can understand they need to keep their front foot lined with the ball on the tee, then you will have much great success teaching them where to stand in order to hit the ball.

Once you've got the player lined up properly, have them swing at the ball. After the swing is over, remove them from the batter's box for a reset. Give each player 5 swings, then rotate the players into the box for their turn.

### **Beach Ball Batting Drill (practices 1-6)**

Giving the batter a larger target will make it easier for all players to make contact with the ball on the tee and promote confidence as the practices progress.

Set up a tee with a beach ball (or similar) on top of it, and line up a batter in the batter's box.

The players will swing to hit the beach ball the same way they would swing to hit the softball. This game will be fun for the kids because contact is all but guaranteed.

You can give one point for hitting the beach ball off the tee, and 3 points for hitting the beach ball without hitting the tee.

### **Tee Drill – Weight Shift (practices 1-12)**

So many young hitters stand ready to hit and then lunge forward as the ball approaches. While they may make contact consistently, their swings don't pack much of a punch. The hips never fully rotate and the bat listlessly comes to a stop not long after contact. These hitters lack proper weight shift.

The misconception is that weight shift involves taking the body weight forward to hit the ball. That is only a half truth. To generate maximum power and core involvement in the swing, all good hitters shift their weight to the back side, where they gather their energy, before exploding forward. To throw a more powerful punch, a boxer pulls back before extending forward. Likewise, a cobra that is about to strike recoils before attacking. "You have to go back to go forward."

All good hitters possess a weight shift, and we like to utilize the batting tee to help young hitters get a feel for shifting the weight back before coming forward. When a ball is sitting on a tee, it is stationary, so the batter can easily work on weight shift without having to worry about a ball coming toward him or her. A rhythm and feel for going back to go forward can be developed through repetition and hopefully will carry over into live hitting over time.



For this drill have the hitter exaggerate the weight shift to the back side so that the front leg comes off the ground, almost like a pitcher, before exploding forward. Have the hitter swing hard, attempting to drive the ball right through a target on a net. Make sure to remind the hitter to watch the ball and to go straight back and straight forward.

### **Front Toss Drill (practice 1-12)**

Set up a bow net or some other target for the kids to hit into (do not use a fence for this drill).

Players assume their batting stance perpendicular to the net. Coach takes a knee about 4-6 feet from the batter alongside the net. Coach underhand tosses the ball to the hitting zone. Batter attempts to make contact and drive the ball into the net

Give each player 5-10 swings, then rotate batters.

### **Kiss & Swing Drill (practices 4-6)**

This will be a fun drill for the kids as they try to get the bat to kiss the ball

Place a ball upon the tee, and have a batter with a helmet and bat standing in the proper position to hit the ball. You can have two or more stations for this drill with a parent helper or assistant coach at each station.

Coaches will help the batter assume the correct stance in the batter's box. The rest of the drill is up to the batter. Sometimes, taking a swing in slow motion so a player can visualize where they want to hit the ball is valuable in building memory.

Before the batter takes a swing, they need to slowly go through the batting motion and stop the bat right where they want to hit the ball. This is the 'kiss' the bat will give the ball. The player then brings the bat back up and then takes a normal swing at the ball.

Focusing on the spot they want to hit (the kiss) is a fun way for kids to learn what motion they need to hit the ball where they want. The players will begin to develop the muscle memory and coordination to make consistent contact with the ball.

### **High Hands Drill (practices 4-6)**

One of the most common mistakes young hitters make is to drop their hands as the ball approaches. This tends to lead to a long, upper-cut swing in which the shoulders don't remain level (back shoulder drops) and the bat crosses through the same plane along which the pitch is traveling for only a very brief time. The bat head actually seems to come around the ball in a sweeping motion rather than being taken directly to the ball. This problem can become very evident when players hit off of the tee, because they tend to drop their hands and back shoulders in an attempt to elevate the ball.

A variation of the basic tee drill can help correct this problem. Place a ball on the tee and raise it to the top of the strike zone. Will the ball in that position, have the players shift his weight back and then come forward, attempting to swing down to the ball. The object is to hit a hard line drive by staying on top of the ball. To





accomplish this there is no way that a batter can drop the hands.

### **Hip Turner (practices 4-6)**

This drill develops quicker hips and the relationship of hip speed to the entire swing.

Place a bat behind the waist, horizontal to the ground, and use a glove as home plate. While holding the ends of the bat in the hands, assume a normal batting stance and watch an imaginary pitch being delivered. Execute a stride and quick turn using the bat to help turn the hips faster. Finish in the proper contact point position.

### **Spot the Ball Drill (practices 4-9)**

Sometimes a visual mark will help a player understand where they need to make contact with the ball.

Set up a tee with a ball on top of it, and line up a batter in the batter's box. You can have fielders to field the ball if you want. The ball will have a black dot the size of a nickel marked on it (with a black marker).

This is a simple batting drill that once again helps the batter to focus on a spot they want to hit. Think of the saying, "aim small, miss small." With the black dot facing back toward the backstop, the player is able to locate and ultimately hit the spot on the ball.

The player will focus on striking the spot with the bat – not just the ball. If a player tries harder to focus on hitting the spot, it can decrease their overall margin of error and make it much easier to hit the ball.

Over time, you can reduce the size of the black mark on the ball, until eventually the black mark is gone and the player is just hitting the ball.

### **Three Tee Batting Drill (practices 7-9)**

This is a good listening drill as much as it is a drill for the player to hit. Coaches need to watch the batters when they swing.

Set up three tees with ball on them and have three batters with helmets and bats.

This helps young players learn to listen to the coaches, and also for the coaches to see their players swing so they can help them with any problems.

Each batter lines up in their batting stance and gets ready to swing the bat. Make sure the players know which tee is number one, number two, and number three. When the players are all ready, the coach will call out one of the numbers and that batter must take a swing and hit the ball.

At this point, the coach is able to watch the individual player and help them with swing technique, but it also keeps the young players excited about hearing their number being called and having it be their turn to take a swing at the ball.

The main result of this drill is for the players to improve their batting technique through the help of



coaches. It is also a good drill for the players to learn to make sure they listen to the coaches when on the field.

### **Two-strike Drill (practices 7-12)**

At the end of a specific group's batting practice round, have the kids go through a two-strike drill before they head to another station or return to the field. This is a rapid-fire drill designed to teach them how to protect the plate with two strikes. Again, the coach should mix up pitches. If the player takes a strike or swings and misses, he or she goes to the end of the line. If the player takes a pitch that definitely is not in the strike zone or makes contact in any way, he or she stays in until strike three is recorded. After a couple of times through the line, eliminate the players who strike out until only one remains.

### **Call the Dot Batting Drill (practices 10-12)**

With a red marker, make a dot – between the size of a dime and a quarter – on somewhere between a quarter and half your softballs. This drill can be done in the infield, or by soft-tossing whiffle balls in the outfield.

The coach throws 10 pitches to the batter. After each pitch, ask the batter whether or not there was a red dot on the ball. After 10 pitches, rotate a new batter through, continuing the drill until everyone has gotten a chance to hit. Your champion is whoever correctly identified the most balls correctly on the team!

### **Tee Hitting for Distance Game (practices 10-12)**

Players use proper fundamentals to see how far they can hit a ball off of a tee. Use weight shift (“go back to go forward”), winding up almost like a pitcher to take the weight to the back side before exploding forward. Head should stay on ball and front shoulder and stride should be directly toward the pitcher until contact. Batters who drop the back shoulder and try to hit ball high intentionally are eliminated. Line drives are best, but hard ground balls count. Set up a point system or designate a home run line on the field.

Make sure that the batters are using proper mechanics when striking the ball.

### **Colored Ball Drill (practices 10-12)**

Paint several softballs with different bright colors (solids, of course). Pitch the ball to the batter and have the batter call out the color of the ball prior to hitting it. The batter can only swing at the ball if the pitch is in the hitting zone.

Variation- Soft toss two balls at once. Just before tossing, coach tells batter which color to hit.

If you only have white softballs - tell batter to hit top or bottom ball, or simply ask the batter to pick one of the two balls to hit. The objective is to force the hitter to concentrate on the ball, and place the bat squarely on the ball



### **What's the Count Drill (anytime)**

Take a round of batting practice, again with the players broken up into small groups, in which the count is different every time the players come to bat. The first time up the count is 0-0. They stay in until the at-bat is complete, with the coach mixing up pitches in a manner consistent with the pitch selection common for that age group. As soon as the player either hits a fair ball or strikes out, a new hitter steps in.

Subsequent at-bats can start with counts of 0-1, 0-2, 1-2, 2-0, 3-1, etc. to simulate different approaches that should be taken. A two-strike swing is protective, while a 2-0 or 3-1 swing should be more aggressive if the pitch is a good one.

A variation on this drill would be to give each batter 16 pitches with different situations. The first 4 could be 0-0 count, the next 4 could be runner on third, the next 4 could be 3-0 count, the last 4 could be swing away.



## **TEAM DRILLS**

### **First Base Drill (practices 1-9)**

This is the most basic play in softball and should be taught early

You can start with the players just in a couple of single file line in the infield, or you can put them at positions. You may want to start them in lines and have them closer to first base to build confidence. Have a coach or parent at first base to start.

This is a basic fielding drill for beginning players. The coach will softly hit or roll grounders to the players and they need to scoop the ball, set, and then make an accurate throw to the coach.

Coaches should focus on making sure the player gains good control of the ball, faces their target and then goes through a good throwing motion to get the ball to the coach or parent on first base.

You can make the drill more challenging by putting players at the infield positions. The players will learn the fundamentals of making an out.

### **Don't Miss Game (practices 1-9)**

This is a game that can be played with the players to try and establish the desire to hit the ball.

Set up a station(s) with one batter and three or four fielders. Set up one base that the hitter will run to.

With a batter at the plate and fielders in the field for each station, the coach pitches the ball to the batter. The batter will attempt to put the ball in play by hitting it. If the batter misses the ball, it will be considered a strike. This is a perfect opportunity to teach them about how three strikes make an out.

This will be one of the player's first introductions to an 'out'. The player needs to understand the importance of making contact with the ball in order to get to first base and to advance other runners.

Each time the player hits the ball, they must drop the bat and run to first base.

This drill adds a step to the process, after hitting and then running to first base. Making contact within three strikes is the key.

### **Pizza Slice Defense Drill (practices 1-9)**

This helps the players learn to stay in their own area based on the position they are playing.

If you have a chalk liner this works well, or you can use pylons or other markers. Separate the field into 'slices' like pizza, and have it correspond with one of the positions on the field.

This drill is intended to teach younger players the importance of playing their position on the field – to prevent kids from fighting over the ball when it is hit.



Show the players that they each have a 'slice' of the pizza, but they can't have a slice of any one else's pizza. When the ball is hit, or rolled to the players, they must stay on their own slice of pizza when the ball comes out. They cannot go to another player's slice to steal the ball.

Players who go into the other players slice will have someone else come in and take their piece of pizza from them.

Gradually, when players lose their slice of pizza, they will understand that they cannot go into other players' areas to get the ball. This prevents five infielders from going after the same ball.

### **Hit, Run, Get, Throw Game (practices 1-9)**

Divide your team in half. Place a defensive player in every position except for catcher.

Let batters know that once the ball's in play, they need to run as many bases as possible. They score one point per base for their team.

While the batter runs the bases, the defense gets to work on fielding the ball. They'll do this by throwing consecutively to every fielder and finishing with a toss back to the pitcher.

Reminder:

Encourage your fielders to stay in their positions while receiving throws. They should only move for offline throws or to catch the batted ball. When overthrows happen, the ball comes back to the thrower for a repeat try.

### **Call the Ball Drill (practices 1-9)**

It is important for younger players to learn that communication on the field is essential.

Line up two single file lines that are about 10 yards apart. One coach will stand in the middle, just slightly away to the side of the players.

With the two players ready to catch the ball, the coach will throw a fly ball in between them. The players will converge on the ball and they will watch for the other player.

Teach the players to understand that the player closest to the ball is to call, "I've got it". They can scream it, yell it, or just say it softly. They will have fun with that – but they must say it.

The player that calls the ball must try to get under it, and the other player should be their back up in case they miss the ball.

This drill will help teach the players basic communication, along with working on their fly-ball catching skills.



### **Offense and Defense Drill (practices 1-9)**

The players are divided into two teams. One team must go behind the line of cones in the field, and the other team is near home plate with a tee and plastic balls (or in line at a tee ready to take a turn).

On “go”, the players at the tees all swing and hit their plastic balls into the field. The players in the field stay behind the cone line to field the balls and then run to place them in the bucket that is also behind the cone line in the field.

The game is continuous and teams should switch sides after a specific time or until all of the balls are gone. All players (or most) are moving at all times.

### **Hit and Field Game (practices 1-9)**

Separate players into two groups. Send half out into the field behind a line of cones and the other half to home plate.

The players in the field must stay behind this line during the game. There is also a bucket out in the field behind the cones. At home plate, have three or four tees (depending on number of players) set out apart from each other. Evenly send the players at home plate to the tees. On “go,” the players at each tee take turns hitting the ball into the field (3 or 4 balls are being hit at once).

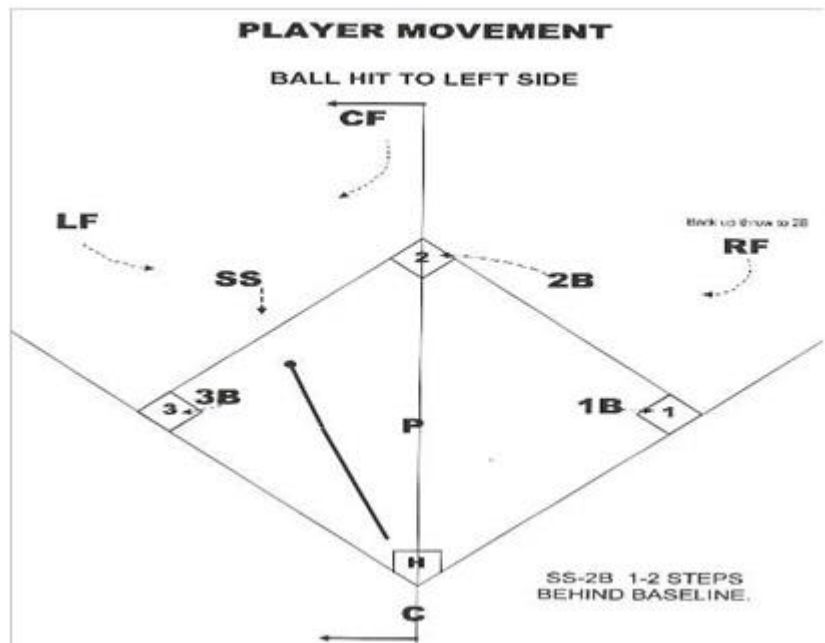
The players in the field must collect the balls and put them into the bucket. Players at home plate rotate continuously (quickly) and take turns. Play for a specified time (4-5 minutes) then switch sides.

### **Infield Rotation Drill (practices 1-12)**

This drill teaches the players infielder’s (second and shortstop) responsibility on an infield ground ball. Conceptually, you want the shortstop and second baseman to think about “following the ball” when the ball is put in play in the infield.

With players at third, short, second, and first, the coach hits the ball to any position in the infield. The players are asked to execute the proper infield rotation to be in position to make a play on a runner at any base.

If a ball is hit to the third baseman, the shortstop follows the ball (covers third), the second baseman moves toward the ball (covers second). The first baseman covers his base.



If a ball is hit to the shortstop, the second baseman follows the ball (covers second). The first and third basemen cover their bases. The shortstop can either make the play at third, second, or first.

If the ball is hit to the second baseman, the shortstop follows the ball (covers second). The first and third basemen cover their bases. The second baseman can either make a play at second or first.

If the ball is hit to the first baseman, the second baseman follows the ball and covers first base; the shortstop follows the ball and covers second base. The third baseman covers his base. The first baseman can either make a play at first, second, or third base.

You can run this drill with only the infield, or add the outfield. Each position has a responsibility when a ball is put in play. See below for an example of where each of the players move on a ball hit to the left side.

### **“Home Run” Derby Game (practices 1-12)**

This is a basic batting drill to help a player work on the contact they make with the ball and for the defense to make plays

Divide your team in half (or have the player pick teams – choose 2 captains to pick players). One team will bat, while the other team plays the field.

Each player on offense gets 5 swings at the ball pitched by the coach. The coach should help the batter set up properly so they can increase the chance of good contact.

The players in the field are spread along the basepath and assume defensive position.

The objective for the offense is to hit the softball (fair) past the infielders. The objective for the defense is to keep the ball in front of them by any means possible (ball does not need to be fielded cleanly, just kept in front).

The offense gets a “home run” for each ball that gets past the infielders. The team with the most home runs, wins the game.

### **Tag Out/Frozen Tag Game (practices 1-12)**

This helps players to learn the importance of tagging with the ball, and also promotes a whole lot of fun.

Mark off an area about 20 yards by 20 yards. The infield might work if you don’t have too many players. Two players will need to have their gloves and a ball inside the glove.

This is a tag game that actually requires the taggers to tag the other players with the ball inside the glove. The two players that are ‘it’ will chase other players and they will have to tag those players with their gloves.



If the ball comes out of the glove, then the player tagged is NOT frozen. If they don't tag with the ball, then the player is NOT frozen. Players that are tagged must be frozen and they need to get unfrozen by their teammates by going underneath their legs or their arms.

Players will quickly learn the importance of tagging others with the ball in their glove, and maintaining control of the ball when doing it.

### **Triangle Relay Drill (practices 1-12)**

What you need – Match up two players and a coach, and if you have parent volunteers you can have several stations for this drill.

How this drill works – This drill works on a player's ability to field the ball (in the outfield for example), and then get the ball back to the relay player and then back to the coach or the parent volunteer.

Start the players out about 30 feet away from each other, and the coach about another 15 feet from the 'relay' player. This drill begins with the coach rolling a grounder to the player that is furthest away. That player must stop the ball, control it, pick it up and make a good throw to the relay player.

The relay player must then grab the ball from the glove and then make a good throw to the coach. Repeat this drill and switch the players.

This is the first chance kids will get to learn how to use teamwork (relay) to get the ball where they want it to go.

### **Batter Out Game (practices 1-12)**

This is a good game that works on three critical areas: hitting, fielding and catching.

Divide the team into two teams. Make sure that you have a catcher and first baseman on each team. You can use either a tee, or allow the coach to pitch. Make sure the batter has a helmet on.

If you have more than 5 fielders, that's ok. Spread them out in the infield. Make sure they understand the area that they're supposed to cover. There are no outfielders in this game.

The batters will try to hit the ball, and the fielders try to make a play to first base. The offense is awarded 1 point if the batter beats the throw to first base, or if a fair ball leaves the infield (not caught). The defense receives one point if they throw out the runner at first, catch a pop fly, or the batter strikes out. You can allow each player on the team to bat 2 or 3 times.

The team with the most points wins.

### **Tag Out Drill (practices 7-12)**

Players at this age often understand how to get players out at first base and they may have also learned the basics of a force out play. However, they must also learn about tagging players out at bases. Before





this drill, you need to teach players the difference between a force out and a tag out.

What you need (set up): You will need players to fill the infield. Put a runner on second base to start.

How the drill works: You will hit grounders to the infield with the runner on second base. The players must understand that the player can stay at second or run. If the player runs, then they can go to third and make a tag out. If the runner doesn't go, then the infielder can look the runner off and then throw to first.

There are several different variations of this drill that your team can use. You can hit shallow fly balls into the outfield and then try and tag out the tagged-up runner. You can hit line drives through the infield and if the players catch it, they have to throw to the base with the runner to try to get them out.

### **Get the Out Game (practices 10-12)**

This is a variation on the Home Run Derby game. It incorporates a lot of the same fun competition as the HRD game, and will help teach the kids where to make plays in the field.

Divide the team into two separate teams. One team bats while the other takes the infield positions. The objective of the offense is to score runs. The objective of the defense is to get outs.

Establish how many 3 out innings you want to play before you switch positions in the field. A coach (or machine) pitches to each batter. The objective of the batter is to put the ball in play to force the infield to make a play. The batter runs out the hit ball, while the infield tries to make a play (the coaches want to ask the defense, "where's the play" before every batter gets up). If the batter is out, he leaves the base path. If the batter is safe, he retains his position on the bases, and is ready to advance based on the next batter's hit. The inning/game continues until the all the outs are made. The offense receives a point for each run scored.

Based on the level of play, you might want to encourage the offense to take extra bases, or simply move station to station.



# Pitching Drills

## Wrist Snap

Stand with feet apart facing the catcher. Extend the throwing arm straight down with palm forward. Without moving arm, snap the wrist toward the catcher and release the ball. Repeat 15 times. Glove hand can be placed in front of pitching arm to keep it from moving.

## Pull Down

Stand in stride position. Extend throwing arm to rear, parallel to the ground, and glove arm forward, parallel to the ground. Pull down the throwing arm and glove arm and release the ball with a full wrist snap. Do not stride, but shift weight slightly to the stride leg and close hips towards the catcher after release. Allow throwing arm to follow through to bent release position. Repeat 15 to 20 times.

## “K” Drill

Stand in stride position but with legs closer together than for Pull Down. Hold ball directly overhead with arm comfortably extended, and extend glove arm towards the catcher. Pull down the throwing arm to the release point while striding forward along the power line towards the catcher. Release the ball with a full wrist snap, pulling glove arm behind the body. Complete a full follow through while dragging the pivot foot forward. Repeat 15 to 20 times.

## Ball-Knee Drill

Stand in release position. Raise stride knee off the ground (thigh parallel to the ground and calf perpendicular to the ground). Balance weight on the pivot leg. Extend throwing arm over left thigh and knee, and glove arm over throwing arm. Push glove arm and throwing arm towards catcher while pushing out with stride leg. Perform full arm circle while striding forward. Release ball, complete full follow through. Repeat 15 to 20 times.

## Wall Drill

For pitchers who are not maintaining a good arm circle along the power line, position in stride position next to a wall or fence. Perform full arm circle three times before simulating release of the ball.

## Arm Circle Drill

For pitchers who are not extending arm properly during arm circle, position in stride position facing catcher. With glove and hand pointed towards catcher, perform three arm circles before releasing ball to catcher and following through. Repeat until proper arm circle is achieved and then return to using full motion.

## Pitching into Glove

Stand in stride position with glove open next to left thigh. Wrist Snaps, Pull Downs, “K” Drill, Arm Circle Drill, and full motion can be performed with ball released into the glove. Have pitcher follow through to bent arm position after releasing the ball. Use a sock ball or other soft ball to perform these drills indoors.

## Stride Drill

For pitchers who can't keep weight back during stride. Set up to pitch in front of wall and perform full motion without releasing ball. Also, coach can hold rubber surgical tubing around the pitcher's waist to help her



keep her weight back. Also can have pitcher stride onto inside toe area and not drop heel until after pitch is released.

### **Step Back – Arm Circle**

To help a pitcher keep her weight back, have her stand in stride position and perform a full arm circle drill. With glove and hand pointed towards catcher, have her perform one arm circle, driving the back knee in to the front knee at ball release. She should immediately take a step back with the back leg giving her a sense of falling back. She should fall back along the power line or she was off balance at ball release.

### **Weight Back – Full Motion**

To help a pitcher keep her weight back, have her deliver a pitch at 75% speed driving her back knee into her front knee and holding that balanced position until the catcher returns the ball.



## PRACTICE PLANS

To follow are a list of 12 practice plans you can follow to work your way through your season. These are just suggestions. Feel free to insert different drills and games, as well as re-use them if you feel your team needs additional work, or if they were fun for the kids.

Coaching tip. When addressing small children, it's always more effective to get down to their height. Try to give most of your talks to the players while you're on one knee.

Make sure you add water breaks into your practice. Snacks after the practice are optional, but recommended.

The single most important aspect of any game or practice is that the kids have fun. Make this a priority and you will have kids wanting to come to practice, ready to play and learn.



# **Practice Plan 13U Softball Practice 1**

## **Introductions**

(10 min)

Sit the players in a circle. Explain the rules for the introduction process. Only the player holding the ball is allowed to talk. Each player tells their teammates their first name and something about them (favorite animal, favorite food, school they attend, etc). Coach should repeat the name of the players as the introduction continues.

## **Warm-up**

(5 Min)

Explain which direction players run around the bases. Point out which base is 1st, 2nd, 3rd and home. Run around the bases. Coaches can lead here for the first lap. Then let them run around one at a time. After the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> time the players should be warmed up and ready for practice to begin.

## **Throwing Drills**

(15 Min)

**Teach** – The Throwing Program elements (3). Take time to make sure the players understand the process and the purpose of this program. You will use it before every practice going forward.

## **Stations**

(25 Min)

### **Throwing Station**

**Teach:** Proper “ready position” to field (Alligator Drill).

- Alligator Drill (with sound, for fun)

### **Infield Station**

- 20' Ground Balls with underhand toss
- 40' Ground Balls with overhand throw

### **Hitting Drills**

- Front Toss Drill/Front Foot Batting Drill (tee)
- Hit in cage (if available)

## **Call the Ball Drill**

(15 Mins)

**Teach** – Fly ball priorities. Use this drill as an opportunity to explain to the players which position has priority on fly balls while on defense. Centerfield has #1 priority. Left and Right field have #2 priority. Short and second base have #3 priority. 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> base have #4 priority. At this level, pitcher has #5 priority. Catchers have #6 priority. Everyone in the area runs toward a fly ball with reckless abandonment until someone with a lower priority number calls them off. This is one of the most important safety lessons you will teach your players. Level 2.0 for this drill is to help the players understand that they are either “going to the ball, or going to a base”. Make sure the players know their responsibilities when a ball is hit toward them, and when a ball is not hit toward them.

## **Get the Out Game**

(15 Mins)

**Practice Point of Emphasis:** Lots going on in the first few practices. Many skills and drills are introduced. The following will be RECURRING points of emphasis for practices going forward: 1) focus on proper mechanics for all skills – throwing, fielding, catching, hitting and 2) promote safety cues for the players to understand the roles that each position has on defense (fly ball priorities).



## **Practice Plan 13U Softball Practice 2**

**Introductions** – Re-introduce everyone to the team (5 Min)

**Warm-up** - Run around the bases (5 Min)

- Run Through the Base Drill

**Throwing Drills** (10 Min)

- Throwing Program

**Stations** (25 Mins)

### **Throwing Station**

- Receiving the Throw Drill (instruction and practice catching)

### **Hitting Station**

- Front Foot Batting Drill
- Tee Drill Weight Shift
- Front Toss Drill/Hit in Cage (if available)

Use **wiffle balls** for batting. Designate a line approximately 30' in front of the batter behind which the player(s) chasing the balls are positioned. Make it clear to all players that they are not allowed to enter the space between the batters and the 30' line.

It is absolutely critical that, prior to each swing, a batter's feet are positioned in the proper relationship to the plate.

Have each batter take 5 swings, then rotate other players in to bat. Ideally each player gets 2-3 times batting.

### **Fielding Station**

- 20' Ground Balls with underhand toss
- 40' Ground Balls with overhand throw

**Teach** – If players miss a ball, or make a mistake fielding, “That’s okay. Let’s make the next play.” It’s okay to make a mistake. Just keep working hard, no matter what!

**Bucket Drill** (15 Mins)

**Pizza Slice Drill** (10 Min)

**Hit, Run, Get, Throw Game** (15 Mins)

**Practice Point of Emphasis:** Have fun, try hard, be a good sport, and make the next play!



## **Practice Plan 13U Softball Practice 3**

**Warm-up** - Run around the bases (10 Min)

- Home Run Drill
- Next Base Drill

**Throwing Drills** (10 Min)

- Throwing Program

**Stations** (7-8 minutes per station...consider time needed to rotate) (25 Min)

### **Throwing Station**

- Adults throw to players, wide throws - players "Move Feet to Catch"

To make this drill less intimidating for the players, coaches can substitute plastic balls. We want to create an atmosphere that allows the kids to learn to catch without worrying about being hit by a hard softball.

### **Batting Station**

- Beach Ball Batting Drill
- Front Toss Drill

Review the proper grip on the bat. Talk about how tight they should hold the bat. They should act like they are holding a small bird in their hands. They need to hold it tight enough that it won't fly away, but they can't hold it so tight that they hurt it.

### **Fielding Station**

- Lateral Pick Up Drill

**Pitcher Communication Drill** (15Min)

**Bucket Drill** (15 Min)

**Home Run Derby** (20 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – Proper grip on the bat an important source of power for the batter. Make sure that the hands are positioned properly as described in the Coach's Manual.



## **Practice Plan 13U Softball Practice 4**

### **Warm-up – Running to First Base**

(5 Min)

- Run through the base drill

Here we want to have the players take an imaginary swing and run toward first base. Emphasis is on running straight down the base line, only looking at the base, and running THROUGH first base.

### **Throwing Drills**

(10 Min)

- Throwing Program

### **Pre-Drill work**

(10 Min)

- Alligator Drill

**Teach** - Athletic position, feet shoulder width apart and knees bent. Glove out and in front. Use two hands like an alligator. Field in the center of the body.

- Lateral Pick Up Drill

### **Stations**

(25 Min)

#### **Playing Catch Station**

- Long Toss Drill

#### **Batting Station**

- Hip Turner Drill
- Kiss & Swing Drill
- Spot the Ball Drill

#### **Defense Station**

- Plays at First – Grounder Drills
- Block the Ball Drill

### **Batting Drills**

(20 Min)

- Hip Turner Drill
- Front Foot Batting Drill
- Front Toss Drill

**Teach** - Bat at fingertips with a loose grip. Feet spread shoulder width apart and in an athletic position. Head looking at pitcher with both eyes. Level swing through the ball. Follow through with both upper and lower body

### **Scrimmage**

(25 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – Proper fielding position. Hands out in front. Do not field the ball between the feet. Ball is scooped into the glove. Throwing hand on top of the glove when fielding.





## **Practice Plan 13U Softball Practice 5**

**Warm-up – Coach Run Around Drill** (5 Min)

**Throwing Drills** (10 Min)

- Throwing Program

**Stations** (25 Min)

**Playing Catch Station**

- Knock Down Game

**Batting Station**

- Kiss & Swing Drill
- Spot the Ball Drill

**Defense Station**

- Bucket Drill

**Rundown Drill** (10 Min)

**Call the Ball Drill** (10 Min)

Play the game with balloons. Split the team into groups of 3 or 4. Teams must keep the balloon from hitting the ground. In order for a player to tap the balloon into the air, the player must call it. No player can tap the balloon twice in a row. See how many taps in a row a team can get.

**Don't Miss Game** (15 Min)

**Get the Out Game** (20 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – Defensive players need to understand their place on the field and their role in making plays. Ensure that your players understand the responsibilities for defensive positions on the field.



## **Practice Plan 13U Softball Practice 6**

**Warm-up** – Run Through the Base Drill

(5 Min)

### **Throwing Drills**

(15 Min)

- Throwing Program
- Underhand Square Drill

### **Stations**

(35 Min)

#### **Playing Catch Station**

- Relay Shuffle
- **Play Catch** - Make 'one hop', overhand throws to each other (have ball bounce 10'-15' in front of the receiver of the throw)
- Receiving the Throw Drill

#### **Batting Station**

- Beach Ball Batting Drill
- Kiss & Swing Drill

#### **Defense Station**

- Bucket Drill
- Lateral Pick Up Drill

**Pitcher/Catcher Drills** (see coach's manual, pick 2-4)

(10 Min)

**Hit, Run, Get, Throw Game**

(15 mins)

**Scrimmage**

(25 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – Proper swing mechanics, which include level swing plane. Ensure that the batter's swings are parallel to the ground.



## **Practice Plan 13U Softball Practice 7**

**Warm-up – Four Corners Drill** (5 Min)

**Throwing Drills** (15 Min)

- Throwing Program
- Long Toss Drill

**Stations** (25 Min)

**Playing Catch Station**

- Field and Bounce to the Bucket Drill
- 20' Ground Balls - using Underhand Toss
- 40' Ground Balls - Overhand Throw

**Batting Station**

- Drop In the Bucket Drill
- Spot the Ball Drill

**Defense Station**

- Catch Contest
- Drop Step Drill

**Infield Rotation Drill** (10 Min)

**Block the Ball Drill** (10 Min)

**Home Run Derby Game** (20 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – Safety is a part of softball. Make sure the players understand the steps you take as a coach to ensure their safety. This will help them appreciate the point of emphasis in the “Drop in the Bucket” Drill.



## **Practice Plan 13U Softball Practice 8**

### **Warm-up - Relay Race**

(10 Min)

Players start at home and second base. You can have the players run between home and second (second and home), or between home and first (second and third). Make it fun for the kids!

### **Throwing Drills**

(15 Min)

- Throwing Program

### **Stations**

(25 Min)

#### **Playing Catch Station**

- Relay Shuffle

#### **Batting Station**

- Front Toss Drill/Pitching Machine (if available)  
Play "Two Strike Drill"
- Spot the Ball Drill

#### **Defense Station**

- Simple Pop Fly Game (use tennis balls)
- Charging Drill

### **Tag Out/Frozen Tag**

(10 Min)

### **Hit and Field Game**

(15 Min)

### **Scrimmage**

(25 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – Lots of catching in today's practice. Try to help players gain confidence in catching the ball above the shoulders. This is not easy. Demonstrate the skill if you can. Encourage the players to try their best.



## **Practice Plan 13U Softball Practice 9**

**Warm-up Home Run Drill** (5 Min)

**Throwing Drills** (15 Min)

- Throwing Program
- Catch Contest Game (pairs)

**Stations** (25 Min)

**Playing Catch Station**

- One Knee Throwing
- One and Two Game

**Batting Station**

- Front Toss Drill
- What's the Count Game

**Defense Station**

- Charging Drill

**Quarterback Drill** (10 Min)

**Hit, Run, Get, Throw** (10 Min)

**Scrimmage** (25 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – Encourage your players to compliment their teammates when they do something right. Same for you. Today's practice should focus on the positive moments in practice. Make sure you have 2 positive things to tell each player throughout the practice today.



## **Practice Plan 13U Softball Practice 10**

**Warm-up - Run Through the Base Drill** (5 Min)

- Home Run Drill

**Throwing Drills** (15 Min)

- Throwing Program
- Learn the Crow Hop Drill

**Stations** (25 Min)

**Playing Catch Station**

- 20' Ground Balls (underhand toss)
- 40' Ground Balls (overhand throw)

**Batting Station**

- Target Practice Game
- Hit off the Tee(s)/Front Toss

**Defense Station**

- Bucket Drill

**Pepper** (10 Min)

**Home Run Derby Game** (15 Min)

**Scrimmage** (25 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – The home run derby game is a great opportunity to teach the kids to root for and congratulate their teammates for making great plays. Challenge the kids to motivate each other to keep the ball in front of them.



## **Practice Plan 13U Softball Practice 11**

**Warm-up – Catch the Players Game** (5 Min)

**Throwing Drill** (10 Min)

- Throwing Program

**Stations** (25 Min)

**Playing Catch Station**

- Learn the Crow Hop Drill
- One Knee Throwing

**Batting Station**

- Tee Hitting for Distance Game
- Colored Ball Drill

**Defense Station**

- Pepper Drill
- Reach out Drill

**Get the Out Game** (15 Min)

**Tag/Freeze Out Tag Game** (10 Min)

**Scrimmage** (25 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – Ensure that the players do not change their hitting mechanics during the hitting for distance game. Instead, teach the players the benefit of the weight shift and rotating their hips. A lot to grasp, but some will understand.



## **Practice Plan 13U Softball Practice 12**

### **Warm-up – Bat Spin Relay Race**

(5 Min)

Players spin around a bat three times with their head placed on the knob of the bat, then they run to a designated spot and back.

### **Throwing Drill**

(10 Min)

- Throwing Program

### **Catch Contest**

(5 Min)

### **Target Practice Game**

(15 Min)

### **Batter Out Game**

(15 Min)

### **Knock Out the Catcher Game**

(15 Mins)

### **Scrimmage**

(25 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – FUN! Do whatever you can to make today's practice special. This is the last practice of the season. Go ahead and play all of the games that your team loved to play over the 11 practices. Water balloons might work well here too. Set the coaches up as targets. The goal is to laugh loud and long today!

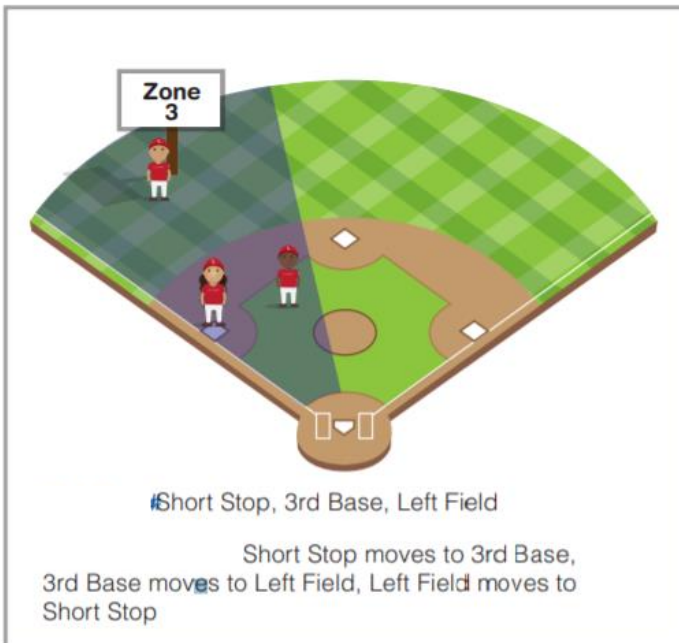
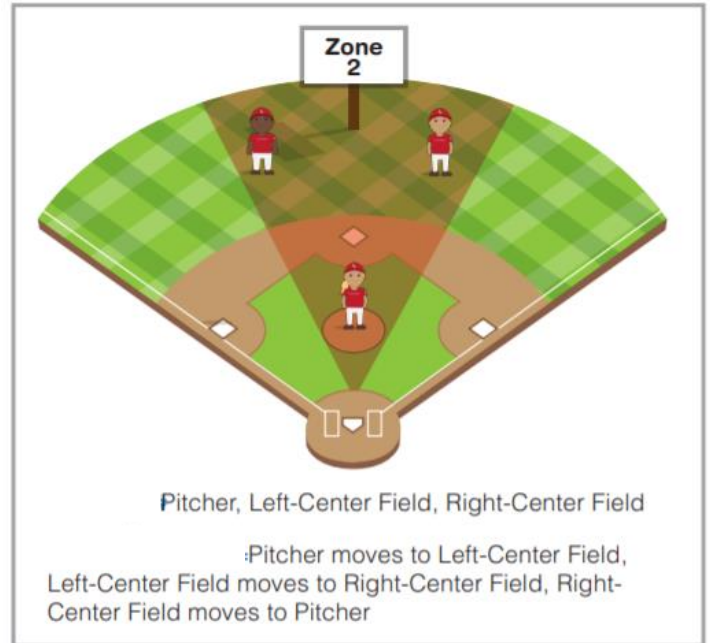
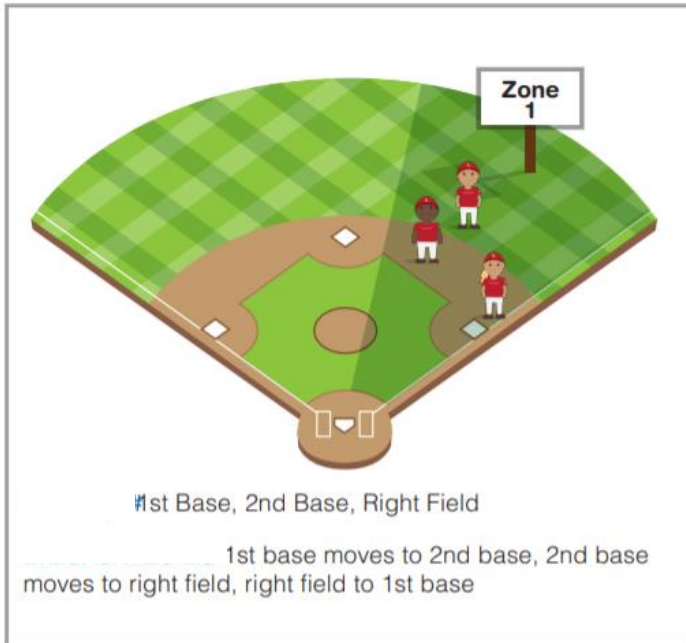




# GAME MANAGEMENT

## ROTATE PLAYERS ON DEFENSE

Rotating players during the inning on defense is a great way to keep them engaged. An effective way to do this is to divide the playing field into 2 or 3 zones, assigning a coach to each zone, and rotating players within each zone after every batter (or after a predetermined number of batters). The following sample defensive rotation divides the field into 3 zones and ensures that every player gets to play an infield and outfield position every inning.



Make sure to assign a coach to each zone

- Once players have rotated, have them get in a ready position for each batter
- Consider using a Frisbee or other marker to clearly mark each position on the field

### **UTILIZE COACHES ON DEFENSE**

Utilizing coaches on defense is a great way to keep players engaged in the field. The defensive team's coaches should divide the field into zones and work with players in their area to stay alert and engaged.

Utilizing tactics such as having players get into a ready position, having players call out where they will throw the ball if hit to them, etc. keeps players active and focused. Coaches can also consider taking an extra ball or two onto the field with them to toss to players to keep them engaged during times when the ball is not hit in their direction



# **COACHING**

## **Coaching Youth Softball**

*This excerpt is from the book, **Coaching Youth Softball the Ripken Way (Human Kinetics, 2006)** by Cal and Bill Ripken with Scott Lowe*

Softball gets serious enough fast enough. As coaches, we need to recognize this and do our best not to put too much pressure on young, developing softball players. These days it's not uncommon to see 8-, 9- and 10-year-old kids playing 40 or more softball games in a summer for their local travel teams. In some ways this is great. Youth players today have opportunities to play softball that we never had. If the kids wake up every day and all they talk about is that day's game or practice – if they're truly excited to get out on the softball field that often without being pushed – then, by all means, let them have at it.

The truth of the matter, however, is that for most kids that's too much softball. When kids get to be 11 or 12 years old, they begin forming their own likes and dislikes. Kids at this age start making their own decisions on what they want to do. If they don't want to play that many games, they won't; it's as simple as that. Younger children are not so independent in their thinking, however. Most of them still want to do what makes mom or dad happy. So, the danger is that there will be kids who really do enjoy the game of softball on a recreational level and will keep going out there to play on a travel team every day because it's what their parents want. At some point, usually then they turn 11 or 12, these kids will get sick of the sport and look for other ways to spend their recreational time. This is dangerous for the future of softball.

You also have the other extreme, which is just as dangerous. Many kids enjoy softball or are at least curious about the sport. They want to be part of a team and to learn and enjoy the game in a structured environment. We call these kids recreational or in-house players. However, if you look at these kids as the seeds representing the future of the game, it's very important to nurture them properly, just as you would water the grass seed in your front yard or the seeds for the flowers you've planted in your garden.

Children don't mature at the same rate physically. Plus their interest levels and attention spans vary considerably from age group to age group. If a player is interested in softball at a very young age, but is not as physically prepared to play as some of his or her peers, that player's interests and needs must be considered. If that player has a positive experience, he or she is likely to stick with the sport. At some point he or she is going to mature and might turn into a heck of a ballplayer. If he or she is neglected or has an otherwise negative experience early on, the sport of softball loses out on a potential superstar, or at the very least, a potential lifelong fan. Neither of these outcomes is good for the game.

Similarly, if a player is only moderately interested in the sport, it's important that his or her interest be cultivated and maintained. There are a lot of activities competing for the attention of the young people in this country. If I'm an active 10-year-old and can play basketball, softball, football or soccer, I'm probably going to give them all a try to find out which ones I like. Initial experiences and impressions significantly influence how a child feels about something. If football practice is more exciting than softball practice, I'm



probably going to make sure I make it to football practice every time. I'll go to softball practice when I feel like it or if it fits into my schedule.

With all this in mind, it's easy to see that youth softball coaches – most of them volunteers trying to balance their own work and family lives with coaching – play an enormous role in shaping a child's on-field experience. Almost all male adults played softball at some point in their lives. It's one game that everyone seems to think they know something about. So, when our kids decide to play softball, we feel confident that we can get out there for a few hours a week and make a positive impact by coaching their teams.

Unfortunately, it's not that simple. Softball is a game that lends itself to some standing around. A lot of the strategy and thinking involved in softball takes place in between the actual game action. As we get older, the strategic part of the game becomes very appealing to us. Younger kids are not built that way, however. Attention spans are short at the younger ages, and energy levels are high. If these factors aren't considered by the youth softball coach, their players' earliest experiences can be negative.

So, as you can see, there's a fine line to walk as a youth softball coach. Again, think of the kids as seeds that need to be nurtured. Every seed is a little bit different and needs its own personal attention. You're not going to treat grass seed the same way that you treat a pumpkin seed or a geranium seed. If you treat them all the same way, some will grow and others will die. Likewise, if you try to handle every kid at every age the same way, you're going to kill some of the kids' interest along the way, and participation will decrease.

Motor skill development is age specific. Sure, you're going to find some advanced 5-year-olds who can catch thrown and hit balls pretty regularly. But, for most kids that age, catching is one of the hardest skills to develop. As coaches, we need to be able to cater to the needs of the kid who can't catch one ball and still make softball fun and exciting for the kid who can. It's a difficult balance, but one that's important to understand at all age levels.

A list of a youth softball coach's responsibilities:

- Be an effective communicator
- Create a safe, enjoyable environment
- Be a role model
- Be organized



## Coaching Your Own Child

*This excerpt is from the book, **Coaching Youth Softball the Ripken Way (Human Kinetics, 2006) by Cal and Bill Ripken with Scott Lowe.***

Many, if not most, coaches get involved with youth softball because they want to make sure that their children have a positive experience. The local league might be short on coaches and be looking for volunteers, or perhaps a parent who has a busy work-week sees coaching as a way to spend some quality time with his or her child.

Some of these parents have a lot of softball experience, and others have very little. Some have coached before, and others have never set foot on a field. All of them want their children to have a great experience, and none of them wants to show favoritism. This seeming contradiction can lead to some difficult situations for these coaches.

For parents coaching their own children, the golden rule is to treat your child just like everyone else on the team, in good times and in bad. It doesn't matter if your kid is one of the best players or one of the lesser-skilled players. On the one hand, don't give your child preferential treatment when it comes to playing time or a spot in the batting order. On the other hand, don't weigh your child down with unfair burdens that aren't placed on the other players. For example, don't ask your kid to always carry the team equipment or to make sure the other players are doing the drills correctly. And, finally, be very careful not to discipline your child in a way that separates him or her from the others. You want your child to look forward to being on the softball field, not dread what punishment you might inflict if practice isn't going well.

Balancing this dynamic can be difficult. The natural instincts are to protect your child, whereas the fear is that other parents will think that you are playing favorites. If your policy is to not argue with umpires – as it should be – make sure you don't question an umpire if your child is on the short end of a close call. If you reverse the batting order each inning, make sure that your child has to adhere to that rule. If every player sits out two innings, your kid should, too. Make sure that any personal disagreements that arise are handled at home and not in front of the team, and that your child is not disciplined at practice because he or she did something wrong at home.

There is always time before and after practices and games to give your child extra attention and to help him or her improve. But when the team is together on the field, make sure that you do the best that you can to give everyone equal attention and treatment.

As players get older and things such as designating team captains and handing out team awards become more a part of coaching, continue to go out of your way to treat your child the same way you treat the other team members. If you think that your kid is captain material, instead of appointing captains, let the team vote and be willing to stick with those selections. You can do the same thing for team awards, or you can even let the parents vote on these. By handling difficult situations in this manner, no one can question you, no matter what happens. The parents and team members can't accuse you of favorable treatment if your



child is chosen, and your son or daughter can't accuse you of going out of your way not to acknowledge him or her. In the long run, recognition from teammates will mean more to your child than recognition from you.

Another thing to be wary of is singling out your child for mistakes made by the team or for overall lackluster play. Everyone is responsible in these situations. If you feel like you need to be a little more stern than usual to get through to your team, pull them aside away from everyone and address the situation. Don't let your need to have an outlet to release your pent-up frustration cause you to unfairly discipline your child.

Remember, when it comes to having your son or daughter on your team – no matter what level you are coaching – live by the golden rule: Treat your child the same way as every other team member. If you can manage to do that, your life will be easier on and off the field.



## **Evaluating Your Coaching Experience**

**By Cal and Bill Ripken**

Even the most successful youth softball teams have concluded their seasons at this point in the year. Unfortunately, many volunteer coaches see the end of their seasons as a relief – an opportunity to do something else during their free time. They've put a lot of time and energy into helping the kids on their teams get better and now it's time to hit the links or go fishing. Before you pick up the golf clubs or put your boat in the water, however, we would recommend taking a few minutes to review your season.

We understand that most volunteers make a great sacrifice in giving up some of their personal free time to help kids learn the game of softball. We also understand that there are many challenges involved in coaching youth sports and that after a season of coaching, just like with any activity, it is natural to look forward to taking a break. However, a review is much more effective and accurate if it takes place as close to the end of the season as possible.

While it may not be clear in your mind as to whether you will be coaching again in the future – we certainly hope that you will – if you do end up coaching, you owe it to yourself to evaluate your season as accurately and objectively as possible. If you wait too long to do this you run the risk of forgetting many of the details that made your season either frustrating or rewarding.

It also would be helpful to your players and their parents to provide an evaluation of each player's progress and what each one needs to work on to become a better ballplayer. Finally, if you don't end up coaching and turn the team over to another coach, a formal review of the season could prove to be extremely helpful to the new person who will be taking over the program.

A thorough season review should consist of three parts. Part one should be a review of your performance as a coach; part two should be based on team accomplishments and progress; and part three should be an evaluation of each individual player. The first two components are a necessary part of any review, while the third is optional (although your parents would be appreciative). In no way should any of these three areas be based on wins and losses or statistics, and the entire evaluation should be as positive as possible.

When evaluating your performance as a coach, the key components to look at are:

- Did you enjoy the experience?
  - o If you didn't, there is very little chance that the kids did. Why did you enjoy it or not enjoy it, and what can you do in the future to ensure that you enjoy coaching more?
- Did you lead by example?
  - o Were you positive at all times?
  - o Did you single out kids for mistakes?
  - o Were you patient?
  - o Did you deal with umpires in a professional, courteous manner?
  - o Did you handle parental complaints and issues in a polite, professional manner?
  - o Did you interact appropriately with opposing team coaches and players?
  - o Were you consistently on time?
- Were you organized?



- Did you develop appropriate team goals for the season and create practices that focused on achieving those goals?
- Did you run fun, effective practices?
- Did you emphasize fun and learning over winning?

When evaluating your team's progress, consider the following:

- Did the players have fun?
  - o Were they as excited at the last practice as they were at the first?
  - o Did they talk a lot about next year or next season and seem excited about it?
  - o Were they sad to see the season come to an end?
- Can you pinpoint one area in which each of your players improved?
- Did the team improve as a unit?
- Did the team achieve the goals that you set prior to the season?
- Did the team surpass the goals that you set in any particular area?
- Was your team competitive on a regular basis?
- Did your team display good sportsmanship and proper behavior toward opposing coaches, opposing supporters and umpires?

When evaluating each individual's progress, take the following into consideration, remembering to keep the comments positive in all instances:

- What were each player's strongest attributes in each of the following areas?:
  - o Throwing
  - o Catching
  - o Fielding
  - o Hitting
  - o Baserunning
  - o Knowledge of the game
  - o Pitching (if appropriate)
  - o Sportsmanship
  - o Team play/Being a good teammate
- What can each player do to improve in each of the following areas?:
  - o Throwing
  - o Catching
  - o Fielding
  - o Hitting
  - o Baserunning
  - o Knowledge of the game
  - o Pitching (if appropriate)
  - o Sportsmanship
  - o Team play/Being a good teammate
- Create a list of season highlights and achievements for each player

Our dad, Cal Ripken, Sr., used to say, "If it's worth doing, it's worth doing right." Keeping that in mind, as a





coach it is important to bring your season to closure. Your job as a coach is to help your team members develop into better all-around softball players. Simply concluding the season without giving the kids and their parents any feedback about their progress and what they need to improve upon would be leaving part of the job unfinished. Reviewing your team's performance will take a little bit of time, but in the end it will reinforce your commitment to helping the players on your team improve and may eliminate a lot of one-on-one phone calls and conversations that could take up even more time during the off-season.

An end-of-the-season party in which you acknowledge each player's contribution to the team, thank the parents for their support and hand out any awards that you might have to present, affords a great opportunity for coaches to bring the season to a close. It also is the perfect venue to pass out the team and confidential individual season reviews.

During the season there are times when a coach must raise his or her voice to reinforce a point, communicate over a great distance or to discipline team members. Realistically, even the calmest of coaches is going to have moments when tensions run a bit high. It's something that we all try our best to avoid but still happens. The end-of-the year fun get together, combined with a positive season review, can help reinforce how much you care about each player and demonstrate to them that you are committed to providing them with a positive experience and helping them grow as athletes. Parents will be impressed and appreciative, and hopefully everyone will leave with a good feeling about the season and the future.

