

# Newton Girls Softball – Training Drills

## Throwing

Progressions – Done at the start of every practice for 10 minutes or so. The stages are:

### Step 1 – Wrist Only

- With a partner practice your grip with proper wrist and finger movement only. Hold ball in throwing hand with your forearm straight to the sky and elbow in front of your shoulder. This will form a 90 degree angle. Holding the ball with your wrist bent backward, using ONLY proper wrist “slap like” movement, toss the ball to your partner. The ball should fly only several feet if done properly.

### Step 2 – Wrist and Forearm

- Incorporating the wrist movement with your forearm – Same as above but allow your forearm to move from an vertical or upright position to a horizontal position as you pull down on the ball with your finger.

### Step 3 – Arm Reaching Back Fingers to Sky

- You can do this either standing up or with the player on one knee (ball-side knee down) facing their target (partner). If standing, have both feet facing your target while you rotate your upper body.
- Rotate the upper body until the glove-side shoulder, knee and foot are in-line toward target (knee drill position).
- Have your throwing arm extended backward, ball in hand, fingers toward the sky and facing away from you (picking an apple from a tree), and your glove pointing toward your target.
- As you bring your throwing arm forward it will begin to bend and your wrist will rotate forward so it faces the target. Your glove hand will be pulled inward toward your body resting below the rib cage.
- Your elbow will lead the throwing arm forward and should remain at a 90 degree angle to your body or horizontal to the ground. As your arm reaches toward your target you will release the ball by pulling down (when the ball gets to the target line at the top of the arm circle) with your fingers; thumb leads down toward the ground on release. Keep an even separation between the arm and the head. The throwing arm will follow through to eventually end up on your glove side near your pocket.

Step 4 – Full Rotation Using Lower Body -Same as above but now you will be using your legs. This will involve a transfer of weight from your back foot to your front foot.

- Rotate the body until the glove side shoulder, knee and foot are in-line with your target. You will be standing sideways to your target with your front foot facing your target and you back foot facing 90 degrees from the target.
- Start the arm circle by bringing your thumb past your thigh to the point where your fingers toward the sky and facing away from your target (prior drill starting point).

- As you begin moving your elbow forward you should also begin to weight the inside of your foot enabling you to drive forward. As your arm moves to forward you will transfer your lower body weight onto your front leg which is firmly planted on the ground (the knee is not locked).
- After release of the ball you follow through with your leg dragging the throwing side foot forward toward the target landing slightly in front of your glove side leg. The throwing arm ends up on your glove side between your pocket and knee.

Modified Progressions – Ask the players to get a partner to whom they will be tossing a ball too. Make sure they are gripping the ball across the “C” with 2 or 3 fingers. Make sure they bring the ball back “picking an apple from a tree”. You can have the players do this drill on one knee focusing on the follow through. The leg on the throwing side is bent with the knee touching the ground while the other leg is bent facing forward with the foot flat on the ground.

Arms high – Place a ball bucket a couple feet behind a girl. Have her take a ball, lift her arms to prepare to throw, and without looking have her flick her wrist and drop the ball in the bucket behind her. Position the bucket just under where you want her arm to reach. This drill works on getting the arm high and behind the body.

Throw to a target - To develop accuracy, have the girls stand near the pitcher's mound facing home plate. The coach is in the backstop and hits a ball towards the first girl on the mound. The girl rushes towards the ball, fields it, and throws the ball to a target hung up in the back stop (such as a hula hoop). The girls follow in a line and try to reach a goal of certain number of throws on target without missing.

## **Catching**

### Fielding Grounders

Getting in front of the ball – Take a group of 4 or 5 players and using their bare hands have them field grounders of lite flites. Have them practice getting in front of the ball and using both hands to have the “alligator” catch the ball. Girls can pair up and practice tossing grounders to each other.

Proper glove technique – Take a group of 4 or 5 players and line them up arms length apart on the infield dirt. Have them bend at the knees keeping their heads up and having the tip of their glove touch the ground. Roll a ball toward them making sure their throwing hand is in proper position to secure the ball once inside their glove. Using an analogy such as “alligator” can be helpful.

Balanced fielding – Pair up the girls. Ask the players to get on their knees. They will roll each other the ball. While fielding with bare hands (enforce soft hands) they lift their feet off the ground behind them. This forces them to see the ball all the way in. After they have done about twenty of them tell them to put their gloves on. Do about twenty more that way. Then have them work forehand and back hands the same way. After that you can have them practice

while standing up. Start with their gloves off and go back through the rotation. When they do backhand and forehand make them start with their feet already in the position they would be in when fielding the ball and make them concentrate on soft hands.

Path to ball - Place small cones in an arc in the outfield and then hit grounders to the outfielders. They must round the cones before reaching the ball. This teaches them to go to the path of the ball and not directly at the ball.

Pepper – Have a group of 4 or 5 lined up arms apart in a line in front of you. You can use gloves or not, but use lite flites when they do not have gloves. Standing approximately 10 feet away from the players have a player underhand the ball to you allowing you to hit a ground ball back to them. Watch for proper placement of their non-glove hand and touching of the ground with their glove.

Fielding Relay Drill – Ask the girls to form two or more lines with a minimum of 3 girls per line and an equal number of girls in each line. Space the girls out by a reasonable throwing distance keeping the lines far enough away from each other where a wild throw will not hit someone in another line. Give the first player in each line a ball. The girl should throw it to the next girl in the line. The ball will move up and down their line. Make a competition between lines out of it. Dropped balls must be returned and rethrown and caught. The focus of the drill is on quick footwork, quick release and accurate throwing.

Last man standing (modified pepper) - Divide the girls into two teams. Have the teams form two lines about 30 feet apart (use your judgment), with players shoulder to shoulder four feet apart. Place something two feet from each girl at either end of both lines. These are the goal posts. The goal posts can be buckets, cones, balls, or the parents. Hand a ball to one of the players. To play the game, the girls take turns trying to throw grounders through the opposing line. Depending on the player skill they may be allowed to throw as hard as they want (make sure they're spaced far enough apart). The player who fails to prevent the ball from going past the imaginary line between goal post is out of the game. The team who loses all its players first loses. The ball must bounce in front of the players to count. If a player's ball is caught on the fly without bouncing she is out - if it is dropped, she stays in. If a ball goes through the line without bouncing, it has no effect. Any throw outside the goal posts has no effect. As players are eliminated move the goal posts in until the last player has a goal roughly six feet wide. Remind the girls to charge the ball because it gives one of their teammates an opportunity to back them up. If there is a question as to which girl allowed the ball to get through the line, the opposing team decides.

Pop-Ups without gloves – toss lite flites to a group of 4 or 5 girls. Focus on having their hands and feet in proper position. When able, the fielder should try and position themselves under the ball with the glove hand below their eyes (allowing them to see the ball) with their arm out-in-front with a slight bend in it. Their non glove hand is behind the thumb side of the glove ready to protect the ball from falling out.

Pop-Ups with gloves – using lite flites or tennis balls toss or hit pop-ups to a group of 4 or 5 girls. Focus on having their hands and feet in proper position. When able, the fielder should try and position themselves under the ball with the glove hand below their eyes (allowing them to see the ball) with their arm out-in-front with a slight bend in it. Their non glove hand is behind the thumb side of the glove ready to protect the ball from falling out. Practice with regular softballs when the girls are able to field them safely.

Following the ball drill – Divide the girls into 2 groups. One group will be playing the field while the other will run the bases. Put a girl in left, center, and right field, and another at second and short. The other girls are runners with one on first base. Hit or throw a lite flite to the outfield or infield with one coach instructing the fielders while another is instructing the base runners. There is a lot of coaching here but you can simplify it by focusing on one or two aspects such as: 1) making sure the runners are watching the ball all the way knowing when to run to the next base and when to get back to the base they started from, and 2) knowing where to throw the ball (cut-off or base) and eventually to the pitcher, and 3) positioning of players (go to base, back up throws, be cut off).

## **Hitting**

Mechanics – Line 4 or 5 girls up far enough apart so that they do not hit each other when they swing a bat. Go through the steps of hitting adding one step each time. We like to use the terms; Coil, Toe Touch, Heal Plant, Fire.

Where to stand - Hit lite flite balls off a tee towards a fence several feet away. Teach girls where to stand in relation to the tee and review proper swing technique. The tee should be IN FRONT of the plate position. The ball holder should be as close to the front edge of the plate as possible. With monitoring, the girls can learn to work by themselves for a period of time. This can be a good on-deck exercise before hitting at the plate during batting practice.

Placing Bat on Ground – Have girls practice dropping the bat once they make contact. You can then have them practice running through first base at the same time.

Tees/Fielding – Set up two or more tees 15 feet apart. Using lite flites have one player field the batted ball while the other hits off the tee. Have them keep track of how many they catch in the air and the one with the most catches gets to be the leader of the warm up drills.

Fire only with tees - Have the player stand facing square to where the pitcher would be with the tee on their side slightly in front of their feet. With their feet flat on the ground have them coil, pause, then fire. They are practicing their hip rotation. Make sure they are striking the ball correctly and using their hips.

Soft toss - After working on a tee, soft toss lite flite balls to a girl, having her hit towards a fence standing a few feet away. This can be a good on-deck exercise before hitting at the plate during batting practice.

Lead arm - Girl working at tee holds bat in the lead arm (one handed), then they hit lite flites off the tee. Teaches girls proper movement (and importance) of lead arm in the swing.

### **Base Running**

Running through first base – Line the girls up behind home plate with a coach standing beyond first base. One at a time ask the girls to run out of the batters box toward first base. The coach should focus on the player running through first base and actually stepping on the outside part of the base. Have the player slap your hand as they go past the base to ensure they do not slow down.

Rounding First - Line the girls up at home plate. One at a time have them run toward first base making sure they swing wide to make the turn and hitting the base on the inside corner. Put a cone outside of the base path about 10 feet from first base. The runners should go on the outside of this cone. Instead of a cone you can use a coach as well. You can also incorporate having them listen/watch for the coaches’ signals either verbal such as “go to second” or “find the ball” or “back” (once they round the base) or arm motion.

Time trials – line up the girls at home plate. One at a time have them run around all the bases making sure they touch each base and round the bases correctly. Make a game out of it by timing them.

Stealing – Have the players line up at home plate. Have a coach pretend to pitch the ball to the batter. Start by having them run through first base. After they run through the base have them get back on the base. Have the first runner get a proper push-off of first base leaving at the appropriate release point. The batter will pretend to swing and run to first.

Following the ball – Divide the girls into 2 groups. One group will be playing the field while the other will run the bases. Put a girl in left, center, and right field, and another at second and short. The other girls are runners with one on first base. Hit or throw a lite flite to the outfield or infield with one coach instructing the fielders while another is instructing the base runners. There is a lot of coaching here but you can simplify it by focusing on one or two aspects such as: 1) making sure the runners are watching the ball all the way knowing when to run to the next base and when to get back to the base they started from, and 2) knowing where to throw the ball (cut-off or base) and eventually to the pitcher, and 3) positioning of players (go to base, back up throws, be cut off).