

How to Maximize Your Players Focus Flexibility

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“Get focused!”

There are tons of softball players who've heard the statement above from their respective coaches, trainers, and maybe even parents. Focus is certainly one essential skill that any athlete should have.

Another important attribute: flexibility. It doesn't take long to figure out that flexibility plays a major role in softball. Flexibility is the ability of a joint to move in a jam-packed array of movement. There's no doubt that flexibility betters, improves, and enhances your softball performance. Plus it often helps minimize injury to help keep you at the top of your game longer.

While both focus and flexibility are important to any softball players, what about focus flexibility? What is it and how does it affect the overall performance of an athlete?

Actually, focus flexibility is quite important. Focus flexibility is the capacity of the eyes to quickly and accurately change visual focus from near-to-far and far-to-near without experiencing loss of clarity or perception. This ability can actually be improved with focus flexibility exercises that help condition the muscles of the eyes making them move flexibly and rapidly from near-to-far clear focus and vice versa. Drills that center on the eye and focus flexibility can also help improve not only an athlete's vision but also their brain's ability to process information.

The moment a softball player moves her eyes, she is processing a great deal of visual information so she can properly execute the skill necessary for the situation. Consider a player who is running to cover a base with a throw already on the way. They must identify the spot they need to get to, and

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while on the move, pick up the ball in flight and quickly get the message from their eyes to their brain and then to their hands to catch the ball!

Your eyes actually go through this process hundreds if not thousands of times a day: collecting information and sending it to your brain so that you can function and move properly throughout the day. Sometimes this process works flawlessly, other times it doesn't. Whatever the case, simply going through this process over and over all day long sounds tiring doesn't it? The truth is, your eyes DO get fatigued and tired. This is another reason why athletes work on training their eyes, to prevent fatigue of their eye muscles.

Focus flexibility exercises are essential to incorporate during softball drills as these obviously improve player performance. These exercises can help players perform softball skills more easily and swiftly. What a great advantage to have!

The most common way to work on focus flexibility is with the use of near-far-near vision charts. These charts are simply covered with random letters that are arranged in columns and rows.

Place this chart about 20 feet away from the athlete while the athlete holds a smaller version of the chart in her hand about 6 inches away

Have the athlete focus on the first letter on the chart she is holding and call out the letter. Then have her focus on the first letter on the chart that is 20 feet away and call out that letter. She is then to move on to the second letter on the close chart, then the second letter on the far chart and so on and so forth.

Have your athlete do this for one minute and record how far she gets.

Different charts should be used from time to time to prevent memorization of the letters.

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You can also make the drill more sport specific by putting these charts at a height that is relevant to softball. For example, instead of placing the far chart at eye level, place it at the height of a pitcher's release point. You could also have your athlete do this exercise with the far chart placed at ground level since players are often down for fielding grounders.