

# 10 Reasons Why Softball Can Change Your Life

-by Amanda Scarborough

When I first started playing softball at age 5, I never would have guessed that I would end up where I am now – calling games on ESPN and coaching young softball players all over the country. Softball teaches and allows young girls to experience more than just striking people out and hitting a home run (yes, I know, those are 2 of the best feelings in the entire world). But SPORTS have the ability to teach us so much more than what meets the eye.

There are so many things to learn through sports, and I wanted to take it a little bit deeper than just the basic ra-ra about teamwork and hard work. What is it about working with your teammates that stretches you as a person? What is it about the beautiful combination of failing and winning that keeps us coming back for more? I want to start with one of my favorite things to do in this entire world that I learned from softball. Travel...

## 1) Travel:

Playing on a select tournament team led me to my current passion that I have for traveling. I loved going to the tournaments that were outside of Houston, inside of Texas, but what I really enjoyed was getting a chance to visit states like Florida, Arizona, California, Oregon, Colorado, and many others. I even got to go play in Australia when I was in 7th grade against teams from Japan and teams from within Australia. Had softball not been a part of my life, I may have never gotten to have these amazing travel experiences. I consider travel such a great way to explore the world and to get to know another culture and another state. I remember being a young girl and going to a different state and just taking in everything about it from the way that their highways were different than ours in Houston to how the houses were built differently. It's fascinating to me and such a good learning experience. This traveling continued and increased once I got to Texas A&M as we traveled almost every other weekend in the spring. I have such a passion in my life for travel now, which works well since I am always traveling outside of Houston for camps/clinics/television games. Also of course, I love to do it for fun as a hobby, as I have been to many different countries including, Australia, Thailand, Dominican Republic, Honduras, and many countries in Europe. It's because of travel, I want to make memories all over the world.

## 2) Networking (old coaches, former teammates, girls who I played against, former private instructors, old coaches I

# played against, parents of players who I played with):

Little did I know that even as a young girl I was networking for my future. You parents may laugh at this one, as networking seems like a concept that you really only start once you get to college. But for me, I look back and that is just not true. I am still in contact with so many amazing coaches and adults from my childhood. It may have been years since I last spoke to some of them, but they always have a place in my life as we shared a bond growing up from softball that will always tie us together. I had no idea that....

*.... while my coaches were impacting ME, I had the ability to make an impact on THEM even though I was much younger.*

Imagine that. The networking and relationships formed does not just deal with the people who were adults when I was growing up, but also with my teammates I played with on various different teams. We now have a new relationship as some of them are coaching collegiately across the country. Now our relationship is not based on a competitive "team spirit," but with me talking to them about potential players they may want to recruit to their college teams or about a new pitching/hitting philosophy we can debate and learn from each other on. When you play a sport, it can become an instant bond with anyone you meet who played that same sport. **People who were once your opponents become your friends just because of the connection of our sport.** *One of the most important things you can remember is that you never know the impression you are leaving on someone- teammates, coaches, opponents- make it a lasting one.* And better yet, you never know where that teammate or coach or other parent might end up, head of a company, head of doing volunteer work you want to participate in, or even have mutual friends.

*You can never learn too early that people won't always remember what you said, but they will remember the way you make them feel*

– one of my favorite quotes and I think that it can make an impact the fastest in people's lives. Plus, you never know who people know.....

## 3) Time Management:

The older you get, the more you realize what a big concept time management is. When you have 40 things on your to do list and only 8 hours to get them all done, how are you going to manage your time and emotion to be able to come through? More importantly, how are you going to be able to look at that to do list and rank priorities? When you're playing softball as just a kid, already you're learning

how to balance your time with practice, school, homework, lessons, friends, quiet time, family, church, other sports, extra curricular activities and games. And let's face it, it's hard. That's a lot to try to manage, especially as a 12 or 13 year old.

*But like anything, your body and mind learn to adapt to the challenge gradually as you take on a little more and a little more.*

Softball players (and athletes, period) have the ability to be one step ahead of everyone when they get to college and things start to move a little faster and there is more of an individual responsibility on each student. The concept of time management grows even stronger once you make it as an athlete in college; but after college, you are set. **If you make it past collegiate sports, it feels a little bit easier to manage time once you are in the "real world."**

This time management helps build *accountability* and *dependability*— if you're young, I know these are big words, so my best example to you is just imagine you told your friend you would meet her at the playground and you didn't show up because you were doing something else.

Being late? It makes me anxious to even think about it. I don't want to be late to a hair appoint, movie, party, game. Noooooo....the thought of it makes my heart beat fast. As an athlete, you learn that if you are on time, you're late, and if you're early you're on time. Being late is a selfish act- even if you are not MEANING to be selfish. If you're late and making people wait on you, you're saying to the other people who made it there on time, their time is not as valuable as yours. **You learn fast in college that there are VERY few, VERY VERY few acceptable reasons to be late.** Start being on time now and create a punctual, early habit that you can take into your life post-sports.

## 4) How to Manage Relationships on a Team:

In a team setting there are so many different personalities. When you play sports, you have to pay attention to everyone's personality and learn what the best way to is to talk to each person. Every teammate is going to be different with how you can talk to her. You learn that you do not have to be best friends with everyone, but you will respect them.

*So quickly on a team we learn everyone is NOT just like us, and recognize differences in personalities, opinions, leadership and attitude.*

Are you going to be the one who shuts down when things go wrong and someone doesn't agree with you? Or are you going to be the one that learns to communicate and work through a problem? Ah,

problem solving. One of the keys to success of the future. Being on a team puts you in a position to gain experience on this. In order to get the best results on the field, you have to manage your relationships off of the field. **Managing relationships and being best friends are two separate things.** Once you hit that field, nobody in the entire complex should be able to tell that there is an argument or something going on between you and a teammate stemmed from off the field problems. Understand you need separation, aka compartmentalization.

## 5) Communication:

**To me, there is no bigger concept in our lives than communication.** Communication is a commodity in every type of relationship. If you cannot communicate, life is going to be a long, tough road ahead. Through sports as a kid, you're on a path to communicate in many different situations to gain experience and confidence for when you are an adult. So you know you want something or you need something. It's in your mind. How are you going to be able to articulate it so that someone actually HEARS what you are saying?

1. **a) With your Coach** – I remember as a kid, one of the hardest things to do is have a conversation with an adult – whether it was to order my own food at a restaurant or talk to my coach about a specific play. (I remember the beginning times when I was about 9 maybe 10, shoot it could've been 8....but we were ordering pizza and my mom told ME to make the call. What? Me???) But there's going to be an adult on the other line and I might mess up. There comes an age where it is time for a player to approach her own coach about playing time, pitch calling, or any kind mechanics questions. If you do not understand what someone is telling you, you have to learn to speak up!! That simple dynamic of a player communicating with a coach is just like an employee going to speak with his/her boss. It takes confidence, and it takes a plan of knowing what you want to say and the message you are trying to convey. It doesn't just deal with the words that actually come out of your mouth, but more importantly HOW you say those words. Softball teaches you how to communicate with those who are in authoritative positions about something you really want.
2. **b) With your Teammates** – Communication on the actual playing field is critical to our game, or someone could get hurt. However, "hurt" can be more than just physical injuries. **Important to remember that this communication is two-sided; as a player you are learning not only how to speak to someone, but also how to TAKE IN what someone is trying to tell you.** You could be great at communicating TO someone, but how are you going to handle it when that person is going to start communicating BACK to you. Sports teaches you how to communicate (both talking AND listening) and how to compromise with your peers. In the real world, you are most likely going to be on another "team" in the future. You have to learn how to work together with a group of people, sometimes even your friends, for the betterment of a single goal. A big part of reaching that goal will include effective communication and being able to adjust your communication so that someone else can hear what you are saying.



3. **c) With your parents** – Let's face it – we are stuck with our parents. To be able to feel like you can communicate with your parents is a process that does not just need to happen while you are playing softball, but lasts an entire lifetime. There are many things a player should be able to communicate to her parents about: if she feels like she is injured, if she feels like she needs a break, if she feels like she needs to practice more, if she feels like she needs more support, if she feels like her parents are being too hard on her. How a parent listens sets the example for the child of how to listen. Are you open minded? Are you someone your child can come talk to? The open communication about softball helps make your relationship stronger from growing up to when you become an adult. I was very lucky that I had parents who told me that I could talk to them about anything and built a strong relationship. They did such a good job of communicating to me that softball was not the only thing that defined me and that at the end of the day, if I didn't want to play softball anymore, they would be okay with that. I never felt forced into playing softball, and because of that, it made me feel like I could open up to them and talk to them on rough days. **Because the communication piece of our foundation was set when I was younger, our relationship only gets stronger as I get older.**

## 6) Failure:

It's inevitable. We are going to fail at softball sometimes. We are going to fail at SOMETHING in life. We cannot be perfect. My mom used to tell me we are all perfectly imperfect, and that's a phrase that has always stuck with me. Softball teaches us how to be able to rebound from that failure quickly. The quicker you rebound, the quicker you will get to feel success again. **How do you fail? Do you do it gracefully?** Do you do it where everybody in the entire stadium knows you failed? Are you able to make an adjustment, or do you repeat the same mistake over and over again? Fail fast, but learn faster. If you are learning from your mistakes and making adjustments, you have no reason to fear failure.

## 7) Winning:

In the same breath that we have to learn how to fail, we have to learn what it takes to win. Not just win...but compete. **A winner's mentality does not have to be a negative, in-your-face mentality.** You win gracefully AND lose gracefully. Why wouldn't you *want* to win? A winning mindset is a pure WANT to win. A winner hates to lose more than he/she likes to win.

*A winner likes to **compete** – not just when things are easy, but when things are tough.*

Winning is a sense of achievement. A winner only knows one speed – FULL OUT, because they know if you go full out you have a higher chance to WIN. A winner knows that some days if you want to win, you have to fight. Not with someone else, but with yourself. Fight to win. Fight to be the very best you, so that more days than not, you have the higher number on the scoreboard when it's all said and done. That number should not represent your pure physical talent, but you're pure fight and determination to give your all every single time you take the field.

There is something to be said of an athlete who has been on championship/winning teams. They know what it takes to not only get to the big stage, but compete at the big stage. They know how to handle pressure. **Competing for a position, having pressure at a big job, how to win – these are things sports teaches us. Everybody likes a winner.**



## 8) To Never Give Up:

Do you know what a dream is? Do you know what it feels like to never give up on that dream? Do you know what it feels like to fight for a dream? Softball teaches us (if we let it) a work ethic that makes us forget failure and forget people around us who may not believe in us. (On a side note, I don't understand those kind of people. The people who are looking to pull you down instead of help you rise up. I don't know about you, but I don't have time for those people. I am too busy envisioning my future).

*When we can learn to work through failure, our dreams gain in our mind, they seem more within reach. When we can learn to push those negative, outside thoughts away, dreams can feel more tangible. A dream or goal is used as motivation.*

Put an idea in your head, **feel it in your heart if it's your passion** and keep moving forward, outworking everybody around you along the way. Hard work pays off. Hard work leads us to our dreams. Softball has this magnificent way of proving to us that if we never give up, and we put our all into something, good things will come in return.

## 9) Presence:

More than what comes out of our mouth, we are communicating with so many non verbals every day. We start to learn body language as little kids. It's like learning as a toddler that if we throw a temper tantrum, we still might not get what we want. And all we do with the temper tantrum is draw unnecessary attention to ourselves. Well in life we aren't always going to get what we want, and as adults it should not affect our body language and the energy we are giving off towards others. Throughout a game and a practice you have opportunities to practice your presence and your body language – at the plate AND in the circle. There are a few reasons for this:

1) **Fake it til you make it** – Even if you are feeling a little down or a little off, if you have to try to work through it on game day, a lot of times you can fake yourself out into feeling good and have good results. As a girl, and as a human, I understand there are some major parts of life we aren't and shouldn't hide our feelings from. But when it comes to how you warmed up, or if one pitch isn't working, or if the weather is bad, you learn to be a leader and work through some things to show yourself and your team that you can be a leader. Can't make excuses..you just gotta go get it.

2) **Don't show your enemy your weakness**– You want to appear strong and confident. You want to appear stoic, like nothing can change your emotions. When your enemy sees weakness, they know they can attack. And on the other half of that, when your enemy feels an abundance of confidence (even if it's the fake it till you make it confidence), they can be set back a little bit and you get the apprehend.

3) **Strong Presence = Leadership**– Eventually you may become president of a company and many employees will be looking up to you. Because in sports you've practiced having a strong presence under pressure, it can translate to a real job or being on a different kind of "team." Your presence speaks volumes about who you are as a player, a person and as a leader.

## 10) Be Present and Let Go:

We are going to make mistakes throughout games and throughout life. We can't take ourselves too seriously. If we hang on to those mistakes, it's so much harder to rebound and be present in the next play ahead. You quickly have to learn, but not judge, your mistakes. **Be able to focus on the present play at hand without hanging on to the past.**

*If you can give the current play your FULL focus, you are going to have a much higher chance at success!*

If in the back of your mind is something that happened 2 days ago, 2 weeks ago or a year ago, you will never be able to live up to your full potential. **Learn from your mistakes, have them teach you, but be able to move past them.**

These things combined...used all together...have the ability to grow your confidence and belief in yourself more than you ever imagine. Picture a well traveled woman who is independent, confident, can multi task with ease, communicates with her peers, and isn't scared to go in and ask her boss for what she really wants. Envision a woman in the future who lets things go quickly because she has confidence in herself and in the beauty of her dreams even when there are bumps in the road. Softball teaches us every bit of this. This is what we go through as softball players and this is what is building us and preparing us to take on the world ahead of us once we hang our cleats. I would want that woman on my team any day.....



