

# Lesson Plans for Youth Softball—Drills

In working with younger players, there are things to remember when doing drills.

## Teaching Points (TPs):

- Have at least one ball for every two players
- Have a positive tone in your voice when teaching skills
- Walk around to every player to make corrections
- Show the players how to do it as well as telling them
- Some will need the coach to take them through the motions
- Eliminate players standing and watching, keep all busy
- Have more players involved, not just one at a time
- Upper body strength is limited, match the bat accordingly
- Work through any hesitations with positive enthusiasm
- Identify who is an early or late maturer, teach accordingly
- All players want guidance and to learn-teach them
- Repetition creates memory of how to do the skill
- Sequence from easier drills to harder drills when ready
- Go back each practice and briefly review earlier lessons
- Have a progressive timeline of where you want the team to be at a given point in time and work toward those dates.
- Teach strategy every chance you get in the drills

## Drills:

These are geared for younger players 12 and under but can be adjusted for older players.

### 1. Indoor Wall Toss with Softie balls:

Players can throw to a designated area on the wall (would help to put a square on wall for them to aim for) and field the rebound. This allows the coach to walk around to each player and correct their throwing and their fielding techniques.

### 2. Partner Throwing:

Begin 10-15' apart and gradually increase distance. Teach proper mechanics with the emphasis on rotating hips from side of hip to target to stomach to target, glove arm points in direction of target, glove arm comes back as throw is made. Could be related to a swimming motion. You can't swim with just one arm and you can make a good strong throw with one arm. The follow through is huge. Too many leave their throwing side leg on the grounder instead of picking it up and following through with hips rotating when the ball is released.

**TPs—Use consistent cues to players: rotate hips, stomach to target, foot up on throw, point to target.**

- 2a. Can add a grounder to one (B) who fields the ball and throws to partner (A). Increase the distance and work on Bs fielding and throwing, have A practice receiving the ball ready for a quick release which is a grounder to B. Rotate after 15.
- 2b. Two lines with coach placing a ball somewhere between two lines. A runs up to field ball and uses the appropriate toss/throw to B—long throw for farther away, back hand if throwing from the left of the target, sidearm if throwing from the right of the target, underhand is making a short toss to the target. A goes to the back of the B line after throw. B receives the throw and places the ball at a different spot before going to the back of the A line. Continue until everyone on both teams fields and catches numerous times.

**TPs—Coaches walk behind players and give positive corrections.**

**TPs—Coaches urge players to work on body control, increasing the speed of the play, being more accurate and using of proper techniques on the throws and receiving the ball during the plays.**

3. Progress the above drill to add the grounders going side to side, eventually a short one over the head and a short one like a bunt.

**TPs—With the younger players, the coaches may have to toss the ball to do this but it teaches them to get in front of the ball. Work on them little by little to gain more range in order to get in front of the ball and make the good throw. Eventually use a bat.**

**TPs—Have them turn their toes in a little to get them off their heels. This puts them in a more athletic position and makes them quicker. Being on their heels makes them slow.**

#### 4. **Three-Player Drill:**

A throws a grounder to B who fields it and makes the throw to C who is positioned off to the side. C throws ball back to A. This makes B field the ball and make a quick pivot to make the accurate throw to C. C works on receiving the ball and throwing (can add a tag to Cs job or a catch and quick pivot to throw to A. This would be more advanced after they learn the basics. C is on the glove side for a round of this drill and for round two also on the throwing hand side to teach players to field and throw both ways.

- 4a. Progress to side-to-side grounders, short flies over the head and short grounders.

#### 5. **Dive Backs:**

Put a player on each base—even home plate. Coach says, “Break off” and each player uses breaks off the base forcefully using the preferred method. I like using the rocker method but that is a personal choice by the coach. Forcefully means exactly that, we want the other dugout to yell steal on our break offs so that when we do steal, it is the same look as a normal breakoff. Each player should be turned toward the infield on whatever breakoff they use, toes turned in so they are off their heels, hands in front at waist for quickness and feet are always moving. Dead

feet, toes not turned in and hands down at side all makes the player slower and less agile.

Options for coach after break off:

- “Slide back” means do a slide step still watching who has the ball, which is normally the catcher. Doing the locomotor activity of a slide allows the player to get back to the base without turning their back and it allows the runner to take off for the next base if the ball is dropped by the catcher.
- “Steal” means the runner takes off for the next base. Coach can predetermine if the player will round the base and look or slide. Just depends on what the coach wants to work on.
- “Dive” means the player dives back into the base with right hand going to the corner of the base farthest away from where the player will be catching the ball.

**TPs—Mix these commands up to keep the players honest (especially the older ones, since they will anticipate what you are going to call).**

Another option is to say two and put up two fingers on the steal option so the players advance two bases instead of one base. Again, predetermine if they are rounding or sliding.

**TPs—If some players are not understanding what they are suppose to do, stop—reteach—try again. If it is one player, casually walk over to that area to help them trying not to single them out.**

**6. Fly balls:**

Two players a distance apart—around 30’, but adjust for age of players. Both players throw short fly balls to each other. Start with throws directly to each other, progress to side-to-side, shorter, farther.

- 6a. Same as above with two players but A throws a short fly to B. B rolls a grounder to A.

**TPs—Progress by moving the throws/grounders to different location and degree of difficulty.**

**7. Four-Player Drill:**

Four players in a square, A throws a fly to B who throws the ball to C who is playing a base (C can alternate throws from a tag play to a force play, C then throws a grounder to D who throws back to A who is playing a base also. Do this clockwise for “x” amount of throws, rotating roles to B and D playing a base, A and C fielding.

**TPs—Again, have them vary the throws for a harder workout.**

8. **T Work/Hitting:**

Place 4 players with their backs to each other facing out in four different directions. They need to be far enough away from each other so there is no chance of getting hit by another's swing. They will each hit off of a T with 3-5 players fielding for each hitter. More players can be used for each if wanted but make sure there is limited standing around.

**TPs—Standing around makes practices very boring and learning drops.**

Have another player with a couple of buckets of balls put the ball on the T for the hitter. A coach can do this also which gives them the opportunity to teach correct form to the hitter and give them positive cues. Buckets are also on the field for those players shagging to collect balls in after they are hit.

- 8a. 3-4 players in a hitting group, coach front tosses and each player has five swings each and rotates. Hitting more than around 5 balls each can sometimes cause players to lose their focus and they start just swinging at the pitch instead of focusing on the hit.

**TPs—The coach controls the speed of each pitch and the frequency of each pitch. Too long in between pitches could get boring. Since the coach controls the pitch, they can move it up, down, in, out and change the speeds.**

9. **Bunting—pepper:**

One bunter and 3 fielders. Ball is tossed to A who bunts the ball to the group of fielders varying who the ball is bunted to. Progress to being able to bunt to fielders in sequence 1-3 and back down 3-1.

- 9a. Coach front tosses to 4 bunters who rotate to the plate quickly. Coach needs to quickly toss to each so that the bunters learn to get in the box, get ready to bunt for a hit which means they are in motion when the ball is coming toward the plate and after contact to the ball, they take a couple of steps before going to the end of the line.

**TPs—Bunting for a base hit means the player is actually in motion before the bat hits the ball. If a player is still on both feet, it is not a bunt for a hit since they are still basically dead motion, which is slower. When bunting for a base hit, the rear foot on a right-handed bunter is actually off the ground ready to make the first step to first. With a lefty, it is almost always the opposite but not as clear cut as a right-handed hitter.**

**TPs—Emphasis should be on proper mechanics on a successful bunt and getting out of the box quickly. Progress from coach tossing to machine tossing.**

10. **Base Running:**

Runners on all bases including home. Coach says go and runners go two bases and round the base stopping in a good athletic position.

**TPs—When rounding the base teach toes in, slight bend of knees, hands in front of waist, balanced and moving the feet.**

**TPs— Watch as they run for arms going straight forward with hands going to the side of the face area and elbows going straight back versus arms going side to side, run on toes/balls of feet versus heels, hands open versus fists clenched.**

**11. Sliding:**

Teach feet first straight in and fade away, pop up, headfirst straight in and avoidance, slide by.

**TPs—It can be intimidating for a player even an older one to do their first slide especially headfirst. Two ways of teaching a headfirst slide would be inside on a mat with a sheet on it that will move when the player hits it allowing a smooth slide and outdoor on wet grass or tarp with a hose keeping it wet. In both cases, the players are about 20-30' away, run their fastest and dive over a line onto the sheet or wet area. Cues would be: run as fast as possible with out slowing down to dive, when starting the dive lean out over the lead foot, arms out and have the palms and forearms hit first and then the chest (some will put the knees down first which cannot happen so reinforce leaning out of the front foot). It helps if the coach yells down at the point when they should dive. It takes the indecision away from the player. Don't allow them to slow down. Compare it to diving out 6' into a pool. Kids love doing this drill. Pull a base down for them to dive for and progress to the avoidance slides where they slide to the right side of the base when the ball comes from the left of them or to the left side of the base when the ball comes from the right side of them.**

There are tons of drills that can be done, have a plan and pick the drills your team needs to practice. There are also fun little games that can be played with them also that will practice the skills needed also.

**GAME:**

Split team into two teams but do it in a way that no one gets chosen last. Please do not let players chose other players to be on their team. Instead use one of the following methods:

- Colors of shirts or shorts, color of gloves (brown one team/black the other), color of eyes (blue and green team A, hazel and brown team B)
- Count off when in a line (works the first time but after that they may jockey for those positions to be on the same team as a buddy)
- Birthday months-January-June/July-December, then the next time every other month is a team
- There are a lot of other ways to divide team without having the teams chose,

Base runner at home—object is for the runner to get around the bases faster than the fielding team can throw the ball to all infielders-1B, 2B, 3B, SS, C.

Coach throws or hits the ball anywhere including the outfield (refrain from sending it too deep into the corners all of the time. Make it a challenge to be able to throw the ball to all infielders including an outfielder and a challenge to run home to home.

Can give points for getting to the bases like 1B-1pt., 2B-2pts and so on. If ball caught on a fly, it is an out. Switch after three outs (coach can control the ease or difficulty of getting an out).

There are many, many more drills that can be found or made up on the spot. The idea is to keep them busy with lots of repetitions, teach and reteach. Teach them pride; determination and mental toughness to never give up. Stay positive.