

# **WAA Softball**

## Skills and Drills

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## COACHING

"**Woodbury rules**" is something I hand out at our first practice each year. The team must know these rules when asked. Use mine or come up with your own set of "rules".

1. School comes first.
2. Believe in your teammates. Believe in yourself.
3. No hanging your head.
4. Effort and attitude--give a 110%
5. Keep the bench clean.
6. Expect to hit every at bat.
7. Take the field running.
8. Three outs--get off the field.
9. Work hard in practice.
10. Root for your teammates while on the bench.
11. Be a role model off the field.
12. Never, Never Quit.
13. Listen and ask questions.
14. Set goals for yourself.
15. Attitude of gratitude.
16. Communicate with your teammates.
17. Have fun and enjoy yourselves.

**Royal Pride mission statement.** (From Royal Pride seminar.)

Believe in yourself. Do the absolute best you can. Don't worry about what anyone else does. Just keep trying, doing what ever you can to achieve your goal--And Never, Never, Never Quit.

If you think you can, you can.

If you think you can, you can.

It is not your talent or your gift at birth.

It is not your bankbook that determines your worth.

It's not the color of your skin.

It's your attitude that lets you win.

If you think you can, you can.

If you think you can, you can.

**Six steps to success.** from a Lou Holtz article.

1. Tell the team that we are going to choose the right attitude. You can have all the talent in the world but if you don't have that positive attitude you are not going to live up to your potential. Your talent determines what you can do and your motivation determines what you are willing to do, but your attitude determines how well you will do it. There is no substitute for a positive attitude, and as long as there is a choice to be made, my teams were going to choose to be fired up about our chances for success.
2. Take pride in making sacrifices. Losing people are always complaining about "I gotta do this" and "I gotta do that". Winners say I'm willing to do these things because I want to be successful" and take pride in being among the few who are eager to make those necessary sacrifices.
3. Have a passion for winning. Everyone won wants to win. But can you deal with failure or just being average??
4. Understand what you trying to accomplish. State your goals in pre-season and be specific and attainable.
5. You must dream to have goals and aspirations. It is the coaches job to provide a common goal for the team and then show them how we are going to accomplish it. Create multiple goals for the team to accomplish.
6. Make sure people can trust you. Let them know that you care about them and that everything you do is based on integrity and concern for them and that it's built on a foundation of trust.

### **Some Softball Fundamental Elements To Be Taught And Practiced As A Team**

Repetitious and regular individual and team practice is vitally important in fastpitch softball.

Singles to all fields  
Singles with runners on  
Extra-base hits/relays/cutoffs/back-ups  
Extra-base hits with runners on  
Double plays  
Pick-off plays/trick plays  
Base stealing/tags  
Bunts/sacrifice/slap/drag/push/etc.  
Hit-and-runs/squeeze plays  
Rundowns  
Pop-ups, foul balls  
Base coverage/infield depth play/outfield positioning

### **Basic Mental Skills Elements Of Softball**

Rules  
Offensive and defensive plays/strategies, position play -- individually/as a team  
Pitching/hitting theories  
Signals/signal calling and game plans  
Player motivation  
Player emotion

The probability for mental errors on a given play are enormous, and the odds are more likely that they will happen than that they won't. You can't play the game if you don't know how, and repetitious practice is where players gain the mental skills to execute both as a team and as individuals. Practice will reduce the statistical probability of mental errors. The failure of coaches to have their teams drill, drill, and drill, executing the routine play as well as the exceptional defensive plays, makes each ball hit a new experience for the players. This subjects them to a less than a 50/50 chance of successful execution. It's impossible to expect consistent mullet-player play execution without practice to establish rhythm, timing, and the experience of handling the ball. It's impossible to expect players to know what to do with the ball without practicing repeatedly what to do with it in a given situation.

### **Motivation**

The largest challenge for many coaches is the motivational part of any practice program. If, as stated above, a great deal of time must be spent in repetitious practice routine, a great deal of thought must be spent in trying to make practice interesting and at times fun. The biggest problem usually faced is trying to just keep everybody active and involved. Knowing what you want to practice and keeping the practice session moving

along are keys to keeping players alert and interested during practice.

In your daily practice planning, you should have a motivational theme built into the plan. Activities can be designed to be competitive and fun as well as instructional. Rewards for practice achievement are much more important than trophies for winning tournaments as practice achievement is what wins tournaments.

## Practice Organization And Management

The key to practice management is planning. Know what you want to teach so you will know what to practice. Write it down. Have a written master practice plan flexible enough to be adjusted to current individual and team situations and to where you are in the season. Your first practice has different objectives than a typical mid-season practice. Your everyday basic plan should incorporate the fundamentals of hitting, running, throwing, catching and infield/outfield play. A good plan will allow additional time for other things you may need or want to work on that are pertinent to the way your team and players are currently playing. In addition, you should have a special separate practice plan for pitchers and catchers.

### 9 Point Short List Daily Practice Plan

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Place/Facility: \_\_\_\_\_ Time Allotted: \_\_\_\_\_

Master Practice Plan Objective tie in: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Practice Plan Objectives for today: \_\_\_\_\_

a. Motivational objective for today: \_\_\_\_\_

b. Organization of activities/facilities/equipment: \_\_\_\_\_

c. Staff/Player assignments: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Warm Up/Conditioning: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Individual skill coaching points to teach: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Individual Skill Practice Activities:

Drill 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Focus \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ Players \_\_\_\_\_

Drill 2 \_\_\_\_\_ Focus \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ Players \_\_\_\_\_

Drill 3 \_\_\_\_\_ Focus \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ Players \_\_\_\_\_

New softball skill to be taught: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Team Skill Coaching Points to Teach: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Team Skill Practice Activities:

Drill 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Focus \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ Players \_\_\_\_\_

Drill 2 \_\_\_\_\_ Focus \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ Players \_\_\_\_\_

Drill 3 \_\_\_\_\_ Focus \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ Players \_\_\_\_\_

New softball concept to teach: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Rule to review for today: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Pitcher/Catcher practice plan: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Team communication and announcements: \_\_\_\_\_

## HITTING

**\*\*\* Fastpitch softball batters have to react to a pitch as quickly as major league batters do \*\*\***

When a major league baseball pitcher pitches at 90 miles per hour from 60 feet 6 inches, it takes the ball .46 of a second to reach the batter.

When a high school age fastpitch softball pitcher pitches at 55 miles per hour from 40 feet, it takes the ball .49 of a second to reach the batter!

### **TO DEVELOP INTO A GOOD HITTER YOU NEED TO WORK ON AND DEVELOP THE FOLLOWING:**

**Confidence-** Feeling comfortable with your swing so that you can repeat it and feel you can handle any pitch thrown in any situation.

**Consistency-** Following the same routine each time you hit so you are in the right position and mentally ready to hit.

**Discipline-** Putting in the practice time needed to become a good hitter and learn the proper mechanics. Having the mental toughness to hit pitches according to the situation and count.

**Balance-** Being able to set up, take your swing and finish in balance. This allows you to keep your head steady and on the ball and shows you have the right mechanics. Every time you step into the batters box and before each pitch you need to follow the same steps. By following the same routine you will establish consistency in being set up the same way each time ready for the pitch. You will also be mentally prepared for the pitch and the situation and be ready to focus only on the ball.

**Stance-** Set up far enough from the plate so that when you extend your arms the fat part of the bat covers the plate. Learn what this distance is so when you look at your feet you know how far they should be from the plate. Generally if you hold the bat in your lead hand you should be able to reach out and touch the outside edge of the plate with the end of the bat. Your feet should be a little wider than shoulder width apart with your weight on the balls of your feet. Slightly flex your knees so you can bounce a little to unlock your legs and bend forward a little at the waist to establish flexing at the waist to unlock your body.

**Grip-** To grip the bat you should rest the bat handle on your fingers and close them around the bat. This allows the bat to rest at the base of the fingers in your hands not running down the palms of your hands. You should line up your knuckles when gripping the bat so the middle (or door knocking knuckles) form a straight line. These steps are critical to allow your hands to turn and provide maximum bat speed through the hitting zone. You should grip the bat without squeezing it to tight. Your hands will tighten when you swing to the proper pressure to hold onto the bat. Gripping too tight locks up the wrists so you cannot generate maximum bat speed.

**Bat Position-** Rest the bat on your back shoulder. This is a good position to take your grip on the bat as it allows you to look down your knuckles to see they are properly lined up. From your shoulder pick the bat up and move your hands so the knob of the bat is even with your arm pit and lined up behind your back shoulder. This puts the bat at the top of the strike zone so the only move required is to pull the knob of the bat through the ball. ( The higher the competition level and faster the pitching, you may need to adjust by not positioning your hands as far back behind the shoulder.)

**Cocking the trigger-** In order to explode with your move forward you must first move your weight back slightly to the inside of your back foot. This is timed to the pitchers movement. When the pitcher begins her move to the plate you should slightly rock back to the inside of your back foot. This starts your stride forward into the pitch. Step with your front foot 2-3 inches forward toward the pitcher landing on your toe lightly like you were stepping on ice.

**The turn and pull through-** We do not call this the swing because we don't want to swing the bat, or have the bat leading our hands into the hitting zone. The hips start the move through the ball and always lead the hands. Turn the hips through and squash the bug, pivoting on the front of your back foot. This creates an inverted L with your back leg and back, allowing your weight to transfer to the inside of your front foot and

keeping your head centered and steady over your back foot at the finish. Your hands must go directly to the ball in a straight line across the chest to the ball, like a karate chop with the lead hand. Pull and lead with the knob of the bat to the ball and drive with the lead elbow with a slightly downward pull to the ball. The knob of the bat should move in a straight line to the ball and feel as though you are trying to hit the ball with the knob of the bat. This can't happen, because with your hands, set up properly the back hand (or top hand on the bat), will roll over the bottom hand and accelerate the barrel of the bat through the ball.

**The Finish-** Accelerate the bat all the way through to your back. This allows you to have maximum bat speed through the hitting zone. You should finish in balance with your back leg in the inverted L position, with your belly button facing the pitcher. Your head stays still and your back shoulder comes under your chin. In between pitches the hitter needs to re-think the hitting situation and get ready for the next pitch. Don't stand frozen in the batter's box in the hitting position. Rest the bat on your back shoulder, relax your arms and hands and rethink the hitting situation and count to define your zone. Go through your routine and regain your focus and get set back up to hit.

**Hitting Zones-** Hitting requires mental discipline, assuring you take advantage of the count to hit pitches that you have the best chance of hitting. Every hitter has a zone that if they get a pitch in that area, they will have a high success rate in hitting. There are other areas that even though the pitches are strikes they are not high percentage pitches to hit. To be a good hitter you must take advantage of the count to look for high percentage pitches when you are ahead in the count. When you are behind in the count your hitting zone has to enlarge as you cover a larger area of the strike zone. You are a much better hitter hitting pitches in your good zone, so when you are ahead in the count you must be disciplined enough to hit only pitches in this zone.

### **HITTING DRILLS - from a Ralph Weekly article**

The two most common and frustrating problems in hitting deal with the stride and the hands to the ball. This article discusses drills that will help with these problems.

## **Part One - The Hands**

### **1. Wall Drill**

Stand close to a wall or barrier. Place the nub of the bat against your belly button and the barrel of the bat against the wall. Using only that distance, execute your swing without the barrel of the bat striking the wall or barrier.

### **2. Tee Drill**

Kneel with a standard batting tee parallel to your body. Place the nub of the bat to your belly button and the barrel against the tee. Using only that distance, execute your swing without the barrel of the bat striking the tee or knocking the tee down.

### **3. One Hand Off Tee**

Kneel parallel to the tee. Take 25 swings with the forehand and 25 swings with the backhand. Work on keeping the hands in and drawing a line across your chest as you take the bat to the ball.

### **4. One Hand Toss**

If your right handed, hold the bat in your left hand in the ready position. Toss a ball up with your right hand and draw a line across your chest as you drive the ball. This forces you to keep your hands in and execute a proper swing. Reverse for left handed hitter.

### **5. Knob Of Bat To Tee**

(follow though) - Place a ball on the tee. Set up properly with stance and hands. Take the nub of the bat to the ball on the tee. This again emphasizes proper hand movement and a short compact swing. Repeat 25 times.

## **Part Two - The Stride**

*Teaching proper techniques requires a lot of repetition and a lot of patience. The key is the hips lead the hands, and the stride (pre and post) is the instrument that ignites the lower body and allows the hips to explode to the ball. A short, compact stride to a closed front foot starts the swing, the back then rotates, whipping the hips toward the closed front foot. This lower body action triggers the hands and thrusts the entire body into the ball in a controlled powerful motion. It is important that the back hip and hands stay inside the ball and stay together.*

### **1. Plumb Bob**

Take a balanced stance. Hold the bat by the nub at your belly button and let it dangle between your front and back leg. Trigger and take your step. If the bat moves forward with your step, you are committing to early. If the bat remains stationary, you are fine.

### **2. Shadow Drill**

Take a balanced stance with the sun behind you. You will cast a shadow. Place a softball on the head of

your shadow. Trigger and take your stride. If the shadow of your head moves forward of the ball, you are committing too early.

**3. Chair Drill**

Take a balanced stance with your back leg touching a chair. Trigger and take your stride. If your back leg comes away from the chair, you are committing too early.

## **OTHER HITTING DRILLS...**

### **MIME DRILL**

Have player stand facing a fence. Have her hold up her hands, palms facing the fence.

Trigger swing, but use only lower body driving back knee towards ground, rotating hips.

Keep her head and upper body facing forward makes her focus on the lower body and what it needs to do for a proper swing. This also helps player realize that the swing is two parts meaning the swing starts from the ground up.

### **IN CAGE**

Practice bunting left handed before swinging away. This makes player focus on ball. (It doesn't hurt to have a player or three who can bunt from the left side!!) I always have player start her round in the cage bunting from right and left side.

### **HANDS TO THE BALL**

Have player take proper stance. Hands should be out from shoulder, slightly back, back elbow up. Take bat out of player's hand while telling her to leave hands in position. Hold her glove in strike zone. Have her take left hand and draw line across chest and directly towards glove, driving her hand into her glove.

### **SOFT TOSS**

We do a lot of soft toss in practice. We feel this can accomplish a lot if done with a purpose. Always teach proper mechanics and finish that swing. We use different objects, small whiffle balls, colored balls (throw two up, call one color out to hit. Try hit/miss/hit. Hit ball, then try to miss the next one, then hit. They really need to focus to miss!

### **FROM CIRCLE TO BOX TIP**

Emphasize to your girls that getting mentally as well as physically prepared to hit must be done not only before the game but before your at-bat as well. Your at-bat begins when you step into the on-deck circle. Get your intensity level, aggressive attitude and swing mechanics properly prepared in the circle, then carry them with you into the box. Intensity and aggressiveness must be practiced!!!

### **FOOTWORK AND HIP ROTATION**

Most of us are familiar with the term "swish the bug". To show kids how, place ball on outside of their back foot near ankle. When player "swishes the bug" or pivots back foot properly, the ball should be "kicked straight back. A good hip rotation drill is to place bat across belt line with both hands and pull hips and bat through hitting zone. Place ball on tee and have player try to hit ball off tee, finishing with "belly button facing pitcher".

### **THE CHANGE-UP**

One thing we tried last year when our team was struggling with the change was to place two pitching machines on the mound. Players were given ten fast balls from one machine, then ten from the other throwing the change. We then mixed it up for ten. Keeping your weight back is critical.

### **60 SECOND DRILL**

What you do is, get someone to time the player for 60 seconds and make them swing as many times correctly as possible. While you are timing the player make sure each swing is done correctly.

### **TOSS DRILL**

Younger players tend to concentrate on hitting every ball tossed and mechanics may break down if used a lot. Just an enhancement of the traditional soft toss drill. I find that, especially with young hitters, they will get on information overload. Sometimes you have to force them to use what they have learned...without thinking about it. Merely put two or even three "tossers" into the mix when doing the soft toss drill. Time the tosses so that the batter has only enough time to pull the hands back, reset their balance and swing. I find

that this gives them a true feel for the swing....without getting too bogged down with information.

### **Basketball Drill**

This is a great drill for teaching follow-through. Get a couple of old basketballs and take most of the air out of them. Place them on one of those orange cones you see at construction sites. Have the batter take her normal swing and follow-through right through the basketball. HAVE THEM WEAR HELMETS!!! Use regular sized bats for this drill.

### **DROP DRILL**

Use some type of back-stop and a bucket or old milk crate. Have one player hold the ball at shoulder height and drop it straight down into the strike-zone. The batter must see the ball and react fast enough to hit it. This drill teaches the batter to take their hands straight to the ball. Have the player dropping the balls, drop them at different times so the batter does not "cheat". The batter can watch the release of the ball, but cannot move prior to the ball being dropped. This drill has increased our team bat speed a lot. We use this drill in warm-ups before every game and as a team.

### **DIFFERENT OBJECT**

Try golf whiffle balls, small coffee can lids (thrown like frisbees), pinto beans, etc., anything that has them concentrating on a smaller than usual target and hitting something that moves, rather than moving in a straight line. This will improve their concentration and teach them to follow the ball all the way in.

### **MISS/MISS/HIT**

Use a series of three pitches to teach them to watch the ball. The first pitch, the batter swings over the ball. The second pitch, swings under the ball. The third pitch the batter hits the ball. Repeat this drill until they can do it every time. After that, you can really fine tune this: Pitch 1 - just nick the top of the ball. Pitch 2-Just nick the bottom of the ball. Pitch 3- Hit it right in the middle of the ball.

### **TWO-BALL SOFT TOSS**

Get two different color whiffle balls (say red & white) or mark half of the balls with a different color dot. Works better with whiffle baseballs or even golf whiffle balls. Its easier to toss smaller balls plus helps hitters in focus and coordination. Toss the two balls at the same time (from same hand) and ask the player to hit one of them, either red or white. This helps players to coordinate, focus and react to hit the correct color ball.

### **BUNTING**

Have players bunt into hula hoops or squares drawn into dirt for points. Down lines = more points.

### **ADVISE ON BUNTING**

Teach this skill early and often!! When your 8 year old get to 12U, they will be welcomed with pitching, good pitching and will need to know how to bunt. Teach slap, drag, sacrifice, this will come in handy when you need that run to score from third base!!

## **INFIELD / OUTFIELD / THROWING / RUNNING**

**\*\*\* 80% OF THE GAME OF FASTPITCH IS PLAYED BELOW YOUR WAIST \*\*\***

***Every drill has a variation. Feel free to add your own ideas on any of these drills listed .***

### **5X5 DRILL**

Usually at the end of our practices we initiate the 5 x 5 drill. The drill is for infielders and outfielders including pitchers and catchers...

Each infielders will get 5 grounders to play at their specific position, field a bunt or slap, field a grounder and turn two, field 3 grounders hit to inside and outside their position, (watch their feet, do they shuffle or cross over) make the throws to 1st base.

Now here is the kicker, if they drop or juggle the ball they start over, if its a bad throw, they start over. If the ball is throw wild, start over. They soon find out what is expected of them. Outfielders will get fly balls on the run from left field running to center field to right field, with a proper throw to 3rd, 2nd and 1st (watch how they set their feet).

Catchers in full gear in their ready position, balls are rolled from behind make plays at 1st, 2nd, 3rd. We have the pitchers field bunts, turn and pivot to make plays at 1st, 2nd, 3rd. As I stated before, if there is juggle or dropped ball that specific player starts their 5 over again.... hope you can use the drill.

### **FOUR CORNERS DRILL**

I call this drill the Four Corners. Players are located at 3B fielding position, 2B (on bag), 1B (on bag) and at catcher. All other players are lined up at 3B coaching box. Coach hits ground ball to 3B who throws to 2B who throws to 1B who throws to catcher. After they throw, the player then sprints to the position she threw to. The next player in line then assumes 3B and the drill starts over. When everyone has been through I then place the players at 1B and the drill goes from 1B to 2B to 3B to catcher.

This drill provides a quick warm-up, works on fielding ground balls, throwing accuracy, and pivoting to make the next throw.

This is a great drill to begin each practice.

### **FUNNEL DRILL**

This drill was one of the most helpful drills as a player, and now as an assistant coach. Players can do this drill after warming up their arms, with their partner. One player keeps their glove on, the other takes their glove off. The partner with the glove rolls them the ball. The fielder must get down on the ball, or they will miss it.

They also learn they must get completely in front of the ball, and scoop or "funnel" the ball to their waist.

### **READY FOR ANYTHING DRILL**

Have someone to throw the ball and to catch. First you form a line about 30 to 40 feet away from the person that is throwing the ball. Tell the players just to charge the ball. Also tell them that they could expect almost anything. Grounder, Pop Fly, or a line drive right to them. Anything.

It teaches them to be ready for anything. And to always charge the ball.

### **INFIELD/OUTFIELD/RELAY DRILL**

With many years of coaching youth, high school, women's, and college fastpitch softball, I found one drill that fits every level of play. It develops both the INFIELD mechanics, OUTFIELD mechanics, and finally RELAYS to HOME.

I divide the team into 2 groups. One group lines up behind third-base. The other group lines up in deep right-center. I have an assistant coach acting as my catcher as I hit hard grounders to the first in line at third-base. She fields the ball and quickly makes a sharp throw to home-plate. I then hit a deep fly ball to the first in line at right-center. As this player sprints to catch the ball, the fielder that was at third-base sprints to a relay position for home-plate. The outfielder hits the now relay fielder who should be properly positioned to receive and relay the throw to home-plate.

The cycle repeats as the infielder that was the relay joins the rear of the line of outfielders. The outfielder that caught and threw the ball to the relay then joins the rear of the line of infielders. This cycle should be

repeated as to correctly get everyone to errorlessly field, catch, throw, and relay through an entire cycle.

### **OUTFIELD FLY DRILL**

There is a drill I have been using for the past 3 years for outfielders. Place half the team in left field and the rest in center. The coaches hit a fly ball in between the first two outfielders.

They both go for the ball with one catching it and the other properly backing up the fielder. If the ball happens to get by both fielders then they will use a relay throw to get the ball back to the coach.

This drill has helped greatly in backing up on all balls, and easy to do before games.

### **RELAY THROW DRILL**

Have the players line up in a line stretching to the outfield. The first player throws the ball to the glove side of the second player in the line. The second player must turn around in the direction for her glove side and throw to the glove side of the third player. Repeat this for every player until reaching the end of the line.

Divide the team into 2 or 3 groups. Have the groups compete to see which one can get the ball to the end of their line and back quickest. The girls love it.

This teaches the proper location for the relay throw and also teaches quick turn and release of the throw.

### **OVER-THE-HEAD DRILL**

Have the players line up and have one of them selected to field a ball hit over her head. Hit or throw the ball over her head and to the right or left. Make sure that she does not run with her glove up, but rather put the glove down and run to catch the ball and then get her glove up and make the catch.

Also, when doing these drills, make sure the fielder catches the ball in front or to her throwing side so she can make a quick release of the ball to an infielder.

### **STAR DRILL**

The fielder stands about 20 yards away from a coach or player throwing pop-ups. The fielder runs to the right and makes a catch, then drops the ball and runs to the far left, makes a catch, drops the ball, then runs away from the thrower for the long ball, catches it, drops it, and runs straight towards the thrower for the shallow ball.

### **RUNDOWN PRACTICE**

**Keep the ball ahead of the runner** - always run straight at the runner regardless of where you start on the field, the most likely tag area is 3-4 strides from the previous bag.

**Keep the ball in view & hold your arm steady** - hand up by your head, lots of white showing, no fakes. (Minimum ball movement will actually make the runner less certain of your intentions.)

**Make a short-arm, snap throw.** - a wrist shot straight to the glove.

**Throw beside, not across** - The receiver should present a good target on the throwing arm side for the player with the ball, never throw across the runner's path.

**Don't block the base path** unless you have the ball - as soon as you've made a relay, sprint forward to the base you just threw at to let your back-up fielder get a good view for the next throw.

**This is a good practice drill** - You can keep it going for several relays but in game conditions you want to keep a rundown to 1 or 2 throws max.

### **TURN & SPRINT / 3-FLY DRILL**

Start with all outfielders in a line. First fielder moves 50' out. First in line tosses a pop-up far enough beyond fielder to force her to turn and sprint. *Underhand toss is more accurate than a fungo.*

On first cycle, ball is caught and dropped, then a second then third ball is lobbed - each one farther out, to either left or right. *Emphasis on over-the-shoulder catches.*

On second cycle: each ball is caught and thrown to a cut-off player. The next lob starts as soon as fielder has released throw - no time wasted. *Emphasis here is first on clean catch, then on finding bearings for accurate throw.*

Player rotation should be cut-off to fielder, fielder to back of tosser line. More players can be run through this drill by dividing the team into groups of 3.

### **GIVE AND GO DRILL**

Find some room in OF and have team form line 15' in front of you. Give each player a ball. Player runs hard at you, tosses you ball and keeps sprinting past you. Turn and toss an over the shoulder throw to the player. Emphasize quick feet and proper mechanics when catching ball.

*VARIATION:* When player catches ball, have her relay the ball back to coach or someone catching off.

### **FIND IT DRILL**

Have team form line in OF. Player lays face down in grass, covering eyes. NO CHEATING!! Coach throws pop up in her general area and yells FIND IT! Player must get to feet, find ball, make catch and relay throw back to coach.

### **SOMERSAULT DRILL**

Team forms line in grass about 30' in front of you. On go, player runs does somersault on command, on her way up to her feet coach tosses ball underhand to either side of her to the point of diving for it.

### **GOT IT DRILL**

Team forms line on both sides of coach. On command, players from each line sprint straight out. Coach throws pop up, one player calls for it and makes catch. Player then relays ball back to coach and both players hustle back to end of line.

### **FOLLOW PATH OF BALL DRILL**

Team forms two lines, one in CF, the other in RF. Hit ground ball to outfield, both players run to *path* of ball. One player will field ball and hit cut at 2nd, other player backs up. Switch lines.

### **CUT DRILL**

We do this drill before every game. Do this along either base line. Need two coaches near home, half of team in line near first or third base fence, half of team in line in outfield, near fence. Coach A hits ground ball to first in line base player. Player fields and throws ball to coach B. Coach B throws pop up to first in line outfielder, who catches and throws to base player who is now on base yelling "CUT". Base player relays to coach B. Infield and outfield rotate, hustling to end of next line. When game time approaches we form one line and player gets two ground ball, one being a bunt. If player makes bad throw or bobbles grounders, they go to end of line to do it again.

### **BUNT LOOPS**

*Get everyone in motion early and keep them moving.*

This drill will get infielders charging harder on bunts and throwing on the fly.

First and third charge hard towards the plate.

Short and second charge hard to cover the corners. Line forms at 2<sup>nd</sup> and short.

Bunter (catcher) chooses either side to place the bunt.

Bunt is fielded by the nearest 'charger' and thrown to opposite corner (first baseman throws to third base, third baseman to first base.)

Both 'chargers' sprint to the end of the lines at 2<sup>nd</sup> and short. Players that covered the corners position themselves to charge the next bunt. Ball caught (at 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup>) is returned to the bunter (catcher)

*Variations:*

As soon as bunt heads down one line, the other (unused) charger breaks to second early to take a relay throw from the corner.

The catcher puts two balls in play at same time - one down each line.

Same set-up can be used to practice 'same base' plays - i.e., first baseman throws back to first, third baseman to third.

Incorporate batting practice by using a pitcher and a live bunter.

### **QUICK RELEASE DRILL**

To get infielders to release the ball quicker we line up half the team 3/4 of the way to 2<sup>nd</sup> base and the rest wearing helmets lined up half way to 1st base. A coach says "go" and rolls ball to infielder, she throws to first and tries to beat base runner who left for first on release of ball. Keep drill moving rapidly 3-4 times through and switch players. You may need to "tweak" where you start your runners until the plays at 1st get closer.

### **BACKHAND DRILL**

We don't pound ground balls at the team when we work on fundamentals. This drill is a good example of that. Team lines up at third, coach rolls easy ground ball to their throwing side. Player backhand fields ball off of her glove leg, out in front. She then throws to first and follows her throw as coach throws a easy pop up to her. She then under hands ball to first and hustles back to receive another backhand. She throws to 1<sup>st</sup> and returns to the end of line.

### **THE STEAL**

The steal is made in the first four steps and the slide at the end. At first we start with our runner facing home plate, with the left foot touching the inside of the bag. The first step involves a short rhythm step with the right foot or a cross-over step with the back foot turning towards second. With either move, the next critical area involves the arm action. It must be fast and powerful enough to get the body lined up with second base. As the steal motion is started, the right elbow is driven back bringing the body around and immediately upon facing second base, the arm and leg action begins.

*We want our runners to be at full speed within four steps.*

Work on the initial step or pivot, the arm drive and the first four steps.

Set a cone down the line from first base and time each runner to that point.

Have two players race to that cone to emphasize competition. The final note concerns timing. Too many coaches take it for granted that runners can easily determine when to start the steal motion. Actually it takes a great deal of practice. We have a line of runners at first, a pitcher throwing to the player and a coach standing at the best angle to watch both the runner and the Pitcher's release. The coach lets the runner know if she's gotten a good jump or was too quick or too slow. This can only be done once the runner is consistent with her stealing motion.

### **THREE BASE RUNNING DRILL**

BY JIM "STONEY" STONEHOUSE

Players start at home, first base or third base. A coach simulates a pitch to the batter at home plate, this "pitch" activates all three stations. First and third base coaches are in position.

1) The batter runs from home to first. Practice form; running in the lane, running through the bag and coming under control after running through first. (Player goes to back of the line; recovery time.)

2) The player on first base gets a jump and runs first to third, rounding second properly and using good footwork and technique. Runner will slide into third base as the third base coach instructs. (Player goes to back of the line.)

3) The player on third base leads off with the pitch and pretends that it is a fly ball. The player tags up and waits to be released to home where the on-deck batter gives instructions to slide or stand-up. (Player goes to back of the line.)

**Variations:** Let the players coach their teammates. Add an actual fly ball to left field and then throw to home. Hit to outfielders and throw to get runner at third base. Various slides can be incorporated.

This drill provides conditioning, reinforces principles of good base running, establishes the "system" for tagging up on fly balls, practices leadoffs, turns, fair and foul territory running and on-deck responsibilities are learned. Also, the third base coach learns to be sharp releasing the runner then picking up the player coming from first base.

This drill, run properly, is effective for any age. You can add your own things to the drill to make it more complex for older age groups.

### **TEAM BUCKET RACE**

Three coaches are needed for this drill. Divided the team into three groups. The It is not necessary that the groups be equal as the drill takes care of evening things out. The players in each group line up in single file behind the first player, who takes an infield ready position. The coach has five balls and a bat and is a base length (60 feet) away from the first player. A bucket is placed 15 feet away from the first player, toward the coach. The three coaches are approximately 25 feet apart.

Each coach begins hitting ground balls to her/his group at the same time, with each player, after she fields the ball, sprinting to the bucket and dropping the ball into it. When a ball is in the bucket, the coach can hit the next ball. When a player misses the ball, she must run after it and sprint back to the bucket (and drop the ball in) before the coach can hit again. When all five balls are in the bucket, player putting the fifth ball into the bucket runs bucket to coach, dumps balls at coaches feet, and returns bucket to where it was. The first team to complete five sets wins. The team has a lot of fun with this drill and usually asks to play it.

### **HIGH FIVE DRILL**

This drill is great for the younger players who were taught to stop on 1st base in tee -ball. Form two lines on the first base line, one half way to first, facing the outfield, the other 10 yards past first facing home. First girl in line runs *through* first and high five's first girl in line on opposite side. She then runs *through* first and high five's next girl in line...

This drill teaches girls to run hard through the bag and not to slow down when reaching first.

**FLOWER DRILL**

Divide the team into 2 groups and form 2 lines on opposite sides of a base facing each other 12 feet from base. First player in both lines starts running at the base at the same time. The runners hit their respective inside corner, turns left and runs approximately 12 feet and stops, turns and faces base and waits for the others to do the same. Continue around each corner. This drill works on hitting the inside corner when running bases.

*Emphasize exploding off base as they round it.*

### **FIND BALL DRILL**

Put players in line at first. Have a coach simulate pitch. First player breaks and slides into second. Have another coach somewhere in outfield hold up a ball. Player should pop up and "find ball" and break for third and take an aggressive turn and again "find ball". She then breaks for home and slides into home and returns to the line.

Emphasize:

Trying to get to full speed in four steps on break to second and leaving with pitch.

Proper sliding mechanics.

"Popping up" and breaking for third.

The aggressive turn at third.

This drill is good for pre-season. They will get a workout going through this drill 4-5 times.

### **THROW AND GO**

Divide the team in 4 equal groups and position at home, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup>.

The first player in line at home throws the ball to the first player in line at 2<sup>nd</sup> then runs to 1<sup>st</sup>.

The player that catches the ball at 2<sup>nd</sup> throws the ball to first to try to get the player running from home out.

From now on the pattern continues: throw the ball to the base the player is running to and run to the next base.

This is a conditioning drill that incorporates throwing and catching skills.

Add the sliding skill by requiring players to slide into the base they are running to.

Challenge the team to continue the drill until they have thrown and caught the ball 10, 20 or 30 times without an error.

### **DROP AND GO**

Line your players up in foul territory by 1<sup>st</sup> base with the first in line in the 1<sup>st</sup> baseman's playing position.

The coach stands at home plate with a bucket of balls and throws a hard line drive to the player at 1<sup>st</sup>.

The player catches the ball, immediately drops it and begins jogging toward 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The coach now throws a second hard line drive slightly leading the runner.

The runner catches the ball, immediately drops it and begins running all out past 2<sup>nd</sup> into left-center field.

The coach now throws a high pop fly leading the runner.

The runner catches the ball, turns and throws it back to home and returns to the end of the line.

Variation: Combine with the "Barney Game". Set Barney up on 3<sup>rd</sup> base. The players love it!

## GAMES

Turning practice drills into games avoids boredom and keeps the players interested while they are having fun learning.

### **PICKOFF GAME**

This is a good drill for all aspects of stealing. Put players at each of the infield positions. Have the rest of the team put on helmets and line up at 1st base. The base runners will each run the bases in this pattern: lead off, steal. Only one runner on the bases at time. The first runner gets ready on first. The pitcher pitches the ball and the runner takes a lead. The catcher attempts a pick-off at first and the runner tries to get back in time. On the next pitch the runner attempt to steal second and the catcher tries to throw her out. The runner proceeds with a big lead at second, stealing third and big lead off at third. The final pitch for that runner is a deliberate passed ball/wild pitch which gives the catcher and pitcher a chance to practice this play.

To encourage the runners to take big leads and to teach them what they can get away with we will place little pieces of candy in the dirt as a challenge. If they can grab the candy and get back safely, they can keep the candy. After they have done this drill a couple of times, allow the runners to do a "delayed steal" on their lead offs. If the catcher throws to first, the runners can attempt to go to second. This way the catchers learn to recognize the delayed steal and run the baserunner back.

The drill gives the catcher a lot of practice throwing to the bases, allows the infielder to practice positioning themselves for and putting on the tag, and allows the base runners a chance to practice leading off, sliding, and themselves before practice officially started while the coaches were taking care of some paperwork. The coaches decided to just sit a watch them coach themselves.

### **SPRINTING GAME**

This drill is for conditioning and control.

#### **Player set-up**

A catcher stands between first and second base with a discard bucket. The rest of the team stands between third base and home with gloves.

#### **Ball set-up**

Place three balls on the first baseline, spacing them a few feet apart. Do the same on the second baseline. Place 5 balls in the center of the field, vertically between catcher and player.

#### **Drill**

This drill should be run one player at a time. The player sprints to any ball on the field, and throws it to the catcher. (If the throw is not good, the ball is replaced by another player for a second try.) They then sprint back to where they started, and go after another ball. This goes on until all of the balls are in the bucket. This drill should be tiring, and should be run at a sprint. Time the players if they need motivation. The other players on the team should be cheering on the runner.

### **THE RUNNING GAME**

My daughter calls this game, "The Running Game". It is also as old as the hills, but we use it almost every night in practice.

Have half of the team line up at second base and half the team line up at home. On the signal, one player from each team runs the bases until she reaches the base she started out at. When she gets there, she tags the next runner in line and she runs the bases. This is done until all the runners have run. Whoever reaches their base first wins. The other team has to pick up the bases.

This is usually the last thing we do at the end of practice.

### **PICKLE GAME**

Place two bases 40-60 ft. apart. Only three people are needed. One at each base and one to be the runner. I would recommend using tennis balls to avoid getting hurt.

The fielder with the ball should begin at the bag opposite the runner. Starting with his foot on the bag, the runner gets a 3-5 sec. lead toward the base in front of them. After they have touched the first base and gets a start back to the other base the fielder they just ran from throws the ball to the other fielder to try and tag the runner out. If the ball gets past the fielder or they drop it, the runner can turn around after touching that base and run back to the other. The runner would just go back and forth as many times they can until they get into a pickle. If the fielder catches the ball, they can run the runner back to the base like a real pickle situation in a game. The runner can not get credit for this base because they didn't touch the other base, yet.

### **THUNDER GAME**

This game has been played ever since the start of time. It is played with 2 teams. One team is at bat with a tee or soft-toss, the other team has one fielder on third base and one on first base. The batter hits the ball off the tee or from a soft-toss as hard as she can and runs as many bases as she can until BOTH fielders have touched the ball.

Keep score by counting bases reached before the ball is touched. After all batters have batted, switch sides.

The goal of this game is to touch the bases as many times as you can without being tagged out. The runner must keep track of how many times they touch the base before a fielder tags them out. When that runner gets out, they rotate positions so that the fielders can be the runner. After everyone has ran, they compare their scores (bases touched).

### **BARNEY GAME**

I got this drill from our current Hitting Coach, Coach Burney. It is the most fun game we play and the players absolutely LOVE IT!!!

You get a Barney (or any other stuffed animal, but Barney works the best because they hate him) and put him on a chair by 1st base. If you have a net, put the net behind the chair to stop the balls, otherwise put the chair near home. Have a coach hit ground balls to shortstop.

The player fields the ball and makes a throw trying to knock Barney off the chair.

The ball must be fielded properly or no points. Have a time limit (about 5 minutes) and keep track of how many hits Barney gets. We have a rule that if the players can beat the previous record, we run (not me of course, I coach the pitchers).

### **GUTS GAME**

The girls have created their own names for this drill - guts, kill your teammate, the grounder game. Simply divide the girls into two teams. Have the teams form two lines about 40 to 60 feet apart, with players shoulder to shoulder three 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. They can throw as hard as they want (make sure they're spaced far enough apart).

The rules are fairly simple: 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. Hint: if the girls learn to charge the ball, 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.

### **PEPPER GAME**

The name of this game is Pepper. A coach gathers a small group of players which are only a few feet from him/her. The coach then hits or bunts the ball to the players in any random order, then the players must use quick reactions to retrieve the ball and accuracy to pitch, this pitch is only a toss, for the coach to hit again. You do this drill to improve the players reaction time. You have to do this drill as quickly as possible and the pace will increase as time goes on, and the players improve. This can also be used to help players with bunting by having a player bunt the ball in place of the coach.

### **THAT GAME DRILL (The team loves this game!! It's a nice change of pace.)**

We have called this drill "that game" because my daughter and I don't have a name for it.

You split your team into 3 teams it works well with 12 players and 2 coaches. The first team goes to the outfield, the second team plays the infield and third other team is up to bat. One coach pitches and one catches, you can also use the tee if you only have one coach, he/she needs to play catcher, or you can play pitcher and catcher after the ball has been hit. The pitcher pitches 3 pitches and the batter hits the ball and has to run all the bases, the team who touches the ball first has to field the ball and pass the ball under their legs until the ball has been passed to every girls on their team and the last girl has to throw the ball to the catcher before the batter/runner makes it home. The throw home has to be a good throw and the coach

receiving the throw home can stand on home plate and can stretch to catch the ball but can't leave the plate. If the ball arrives before the runner then the home team has one out--three outs and they go to the outfield and the infield team is up to bat, the kicker is that the pitcher can pitch as soon as a batter is up to the plate with a helmet on so if your team was just at bat you better be running to position yourself in the outfield. We end up with girls not even taking their helmets off, but they also learn teamwork, they have each others gloves ready for their teammates on their way to the field and they usually have the girl with the best arm line up at the end of the line to assure a good throw home, coaches beware, this game has just pooped me out, especially when you are playing pitcher and catcher!!!!  
Oh yah, the batter only gets 3 pitches, if she doesn't hit a fair ball after 3 she is out. And no bunting.

# PITCHING

Pitching is the most difficult and critical position in fastpitch softball. Without a good pitcher a team is in for some long games. Pitching requires dedication and practice outside of the normal team practices. It is difficult for a coach to work pitching instruction and practice into regular team practices. It is strongly recommended that a pitcher seek out a pitching coach.

## **SOFTBALL PITCHING DRILLS AND GAMES**

These are various pitching drills. The drills should be done with some purpose. The drills are for a right handed pitcher. Left handed pitcher will have to appropriately modify the position.

### **DRILLS**

- "A-B-C-D"--pitcher is in "delivery position" for these drills.  
A--pitcher holds her pitching arm in front of her and using only her wrist throws the ball.  
B--pitcher holds her pitching hand at belt level and throws, emphasizing the follow through  
C--pitcher holds her pitching hand at shoulder height and throws.  
D--pitcher holds her pitching hand above her head and throws. (Teaches proper snap and follow through.)
- Stork--standing on the right foot, with the left leg raised, putting the left foot near the right knee. Raise the right hand above the head, pivot, stride and throw. (Teaches balance and opening).
- Half frame--standing facing third base, feet approximately shoulder width apart, transfer weight to the right foot, raise the hand above the head, push off, stride and throw without closing
- Kneelers--kneel down facing third base, both shoulders aligned with catcher, raise the left knee, placing the left foot on the ground. The right knee stays on the ground. Throw to the catcher, staying in the open position through the entire throw.
- Three-pump--standing in the start position, the pitcher does her normal delivery. When she reaches "delivery position", she does three circles before releasing the ball. She raises and lowers the left foot during each circle. (Note: There should be no movement of the head and shoulders during the circles. If the pitcher's head bounces, the pitcher is letting her weight transfer too early.)
- Slingshot--the pitcher pitches slingshot. She stands open on the mound, raises her arm backward, pushes off with her right foot, and then releases the ball as her hand goes forward. (Teaches leg drive.)
- "Eyes closed"--the pitcher throws with her eyes closed (Teaches Zen--"Use the force, Luke.")
- Reps (repetitions)--the pitcher throws, then returns to the mound quickly. The catcher returns the ball as soon as the ball hits the mitt. The pitcher starts her throwing motion AS SOON AS the ball hits her mitt and throws again. The drill is to be done AS FAST AS POSSIBLE--NO CHEATING! Most pitchers, if they do this drill correctly, will tire at 50 reps. At the end, the pitcher AND catcher should be huffing and puffing. (Good drill to integrate the various skills into a smooth motion. Also teaches aerobic breathing in pitching.)
- Strides--pitcher assume pitching position, turns and strides, without making any arm motion.
- "The wall 1"--pitcher stands faces a wall. The pitcher raises her arm and places the palm of her hand against the wall. She then makes arm circles, holding the palm of her hand against the wall as she makes the circles.
- "The wall 2"--the pitcher stands with her non-throwing shoulder (left shoulder) near the wall and pitches. This helps stop excessive shoulder motion and throwing of the glove hand.
- "Throwing a glove"--the pitcher takes a glove in the right hand and spins the arm as fast as possible. The coach yells "go", the pitcher releases the glove. The object is for the pitcher to throw the glove in a straight line. Teaches: Release point, perfect circle.
- Wrist snaps--the pitcher take a ball in her right hand. She grasps her right wrist with her left hand. She lowers the wrist to her side and throws the ball, using \*only\* her wrist to throw the ball. The left hand keeps the elbow of the right arm from bending.
- Turns--the pitcher stands without a ball facing home plate. She raises her arms to shoulder level. She turns, pivoting on her right foot so she is fully open, and then lowers the left foot. Teaches: basic foot movement.
- Distance throwing--the pitcher takes one step back from the mound and throws. If the ball gets to home plate with no arc, she takes one more step back. This continues until the ball bounces before it reaches

home plate. The pitcher takes one step forward and pitches from that distance for 10-30 pitches. Variations include doing the same drill with the "three pump", the "slingshot", "half frame", etc.

- "The stroll" or walk through--the pitcher stands behind the mound two to three feet, walks forward, and, using her pitching motions, throws the ball as she walks over the mound. Teaches weight transfer and relaxation.
- "Carolina walk through"--the same as the stroll, except that, after release, the pitcher is to keep her right foot (for a right handed pitcher) off the ground until the ball is caught by the catcher. Teaches "keeping the weight back". (Named after Coastal Carolina, where the drill originated.)
- "Medicine ball"--weight a softball, usually best accomplished by inserting finishing nails into the ball. Do any of the drills with the weighted ball.
- Quarterback--throw a nerf football underhand, obtaining a tight spiral on the ball. Teaches proper wrist snap.
- "Hit the corners"--catcher moves targets to the four corners of the strike zone. Pitcher must hit the target before catcher moves to a new corner. For young players, pitcher need only get the ball on the same side of the plate as the target.
- "Drop ball bowling"--to practice a drop, set up an obstacle (like a lawn chair) that is waist height about 20 feet from the pitcher and between the pitcher and home plate. Stand soda cans on the corners of the plate. Have the pitcher practice throwing drop balls over the obstacle and knock over a designated can. Make sure the pitcher doesn't "arc" the ball. (NOTE: This is \*fun\*.)

## GAMES

- Beat Lisa Fernandez--starting with 5 points, the pitcher gets 1 point for each strike, and loses "X" points for each ball. If the pitcher gets to 10, she wins. If she gets to zero, she loses. "X" varies on the skill level of the pitcher. X would be 1 for a beginning pitcher and could be 3 or more for an advanced pitcher.
- "Two on, two out"--strike out the last batter of the game. (Variations include doing so with only drop balls, changeups, curves, or risers.)
- "One-on-one"--the catcher calls balls and strikes. Low scores in this game are better. Scoring is based on the number of walks in an inning. If a batter would have walked on four straight pitches, then a home run is charged to the pitcher. If a batter would have walked with one strike, then a double is charged. If a batter would have walked with two strikes, then a single is charged. Runs are scored as if there were "ghost runners". Three outs completes an inning.

## Miscellaneous thoughts on pitching

- In facing a batter, have 3 or 4 pitch sequences in mind before you throw the first pitch
- Throwing low to bunters can generate foul balls.
- Be careful using the change with runners on base.
- Brush back hitters dug in or crowding the plate.
- Know what the batter did the last time at bat.
- Get the first out of the inning yourself
- Avoid pitches to the sweet spot area of the bat, watch hitters practice swings
- Pitch to opposites when in doubt; high/low, inside/outside, fast/slow
- Throw junk at good hitters and heat at bad hitters
- Let your catcher be your eyes at the plate
- Ball movement is more important than speed.
- To pitch faster, pitch slower.
- Know when to walk a batter