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1. Forward
“A hundred years from now it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove…But the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child.” – Author Unknown

2. Introduction

So you have decided to volunteer (or someone has volunteered you) to coach youth Softball. Good Luck, You’ll Need It!! But on a serious note, teaching beginners the game of Softball can be fun and rewarding.

It may not be apparent to you, but you will now be looked upon as a teacher, mentor, leader, ROLE MODEL, authority & parental figure by the youngsters on your team. Do not underestimate the effect or influence you can have upon a young child. Young Softball players are very impressionable and will watch your every move. Whether you feel it or not, your team will take on the characteristics of you. The team takes your lead and you are the leading influencer of the team’s attitude.

Does this all sound like a daunting task? While you should not become overwhelmed with your responsibility, you also should not take your coaching responsibilities lightly.

Think of the speeches that we have all heard, whether it’s an induction speech to the hall of fame or an interview by the media. When asked who has been a major influence on their lives, after mentioning family, many respond “my old coach from ….”

There are not many more rewarding positions than that of helping others, especially helping children. If you can have the slightest bit of positive influence on another’s life, your life has been a great success. Watching a player improve as both a Softball player and a person is one of the most fulfilling accomplishments one can have. If you are lucky enough that when a former player is asked who influenced his or her life and they say your name, you should consider yourself the “richest” person in the land.
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With a little organization, planning, and above all patience, coaching can be productive, educational and most of all enjoyable.

This instructional guide has been written to assist the coach in the following areas:

- Starting to Effectively Coach from Day 1
- Dealing with Players
- Dealing with Parents
- Team Organization
- Developing an Effective Practice
- Practice Drills
- Developing a Winning Game Plan
- Team Safety & First Aid Basics
- Useful Coaching Forms
3. Sports & Life

There is no question that sports are a great influence in the development of a child. During the developmental years, a child is growing physically, emotionally and psychologically. In these developmental years, most children are also involved in some type of organized sport. So, in addition to home life, school and church; sports help form the character and traits of a child. The lessons learned on the field, gym and rink help shape and mold the type of person a child may become.

Children learn many valuable lessons from sports, a few being:

- Ethics and how to follow rules and regulations
- How to cope with winning or losing (coping with failure)
- How to set and work toward goals
- How to work with others on a team (teamwork)
- How to respect authority
- How to follow directions

Studies have shown:

- Boys and Girls that participate in sports perform better in school, have a lower drop-out rate and a better chance to attend and graduate college
- Girls that participate in sports have higher self esteem, lower levels of depression than those who don’t participate in sports
- Girls that participate in sports are 80% less likely to have an unwanted pregnancy than those who don’t participate in sports
- Children involved in sports are 90% less likely to get involved with drugs than those who don’t participate in sports

Where as youth sports can attribute positively to the development of a child, unfortunately, they can also have a negative effect on a child.

In the August 2001 issue of Sport Illustrated for Kids and article entitled Kids Speak Out a survey found that:

- 57% of those surveyed said there was too much violence in youth sports
- 74% said they had witnessed out of control parents at their games
- 36% said they were embarrassed when witnessing bad parental behavior
- 37% said they witnessed parents yelling at kids
- 27% said they had witnessed parents yelling at coaches or officials
- 25% said they had witnessed coaches yelling at kids or officials
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- 4% said they had witnessed violent behavior by adults

As we have previously stated, as a coach you are looked upon as a teacher, mentor, leader, ROLE MODEL, authority & parental figure by the youngsters on your team. Do not underestimate the effect or influence (positive & negative) you can have upon a young child. In coaching young players, winning or losing should be the least important thing for both you and the players. Soon enough, children will be exposed to the competitive nature of sports. Your goal should be to teach the children about the game of soccer and to instill upon them a love for the sport.

If your players enjoy themselves and want to play again next season, you should consider your season a success.
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4. Getting Started
By obtaining and reading through this guide you are well on your way to an excellent start towards successful Softball coaching! In coaching young Softball players, planning and organization is half the battle. Before you step out onto the field, there are a number of things that you must first do.

Contact with Your League
The first step in effective coaching is to contact league officials to get the information you will need to run your team. Leagues vary on how well they are organized. Some leagues have an orientation/coaching seminar that will go over league rules, goals and points of contact. Some seminars may even provide you with practice ideas, game strategies, and tips on dealing with children and parents, as well as basic first aid.

However, in some leagues you may receive little, if any, information (only the basics - team roster and team name). Whatever way your league is organized, there is some basic information that you will need to effectively run your team. The quicker you receive this information, the quicker you can get down to the business of coaching.

The Basic information you will need before you get started is:

1. Practices – When and Where? Some leagues have standard practice days and times for each team. In other leagues the coach is responsible for reserving dates, fields and times for practice. You need to find out how your league organizes its practices and act accordingly. If it is your responsibility to “book” practices, do it as early as possible so that you are able to get the best times.

2. Games – Most leagues will have a pre-arranged schedule of games listing the dates, times and locations. You need to obtain this schedule so that you can distribute it to your team and then schedule practices on non-game days. In some Softball leagues, especially for the youngest kids, practices and games take place the same day.

3. Equipment – Who has the equipment and when will it be distributed to the coaches? If you are a first time coach, make sure
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you get the proper amount of equipment. To effectively run a team, you should have the following equipment:

- A Minimum of 4 Batting Helmets - each base runner (3) requires a helmet as well as the (1) batter.
- 1 Batting Tee
- A Full set of Bases
- 5-6 “softer” Softballs (NOT the hard softballs used by older players) – The larger/softer Softballs are softer and therefore slightly safer than competitive softballs.
- 1 Lightweight Softball Bat – make sure you get a smaller bat since you will have smaller players.

Optional Equipment

- 6-10 “Sock” Balls - “Sock” balls are softer than Tee Balls and good for a warm-up partner catch drill. They are also good for the “Hitting into the Backstop” drill.
- Sports Cones – Good for various drills detailed later in this guide.
- 1 Tennis or Racquetball Racquet
- 6-10 Tennis Balls – Used with the tennis racket for the “Pop Fly” drill as well as other catching drills.

Each player should be responsible for providing their own Softball glove.

Tips Regarding Team Equipment:

Tip#1 - Most likely the Batting Helmets provided by the league have been sitting around in a storage room all year gathering dust, mold and who knows what else! Before the season, take time to inspect the helmets and thoroughly wash them (inside and out) with soapy water. To be on the safe side, have your players where their Softball caps under the helmets.

Tip #2 – DO AN EQUIPMENT INVENTORY BEFORE & AFTER EVERY PRACTICE/GAME. Things tend to “Walk Away” and get lost during the season.
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4. **League Rules** – Each league has various rules and regulations. While Beginner Softball is the first step in Softball, many of the rules of Softball may not apply. In many Beginner Softball leagues, the following rules apply:

- All players will bat in an inning,
- There are no outs, all batters are safe at first base
- The inning ends when the last person on the team bats
- Score is not kept therefore, there is no winning or losing team

Prior to the start of the season, find out what rules your league follows.

**Contact Team Members & Parents**
Contact your team members as soon as possible, even if you do not have all the information regarding the upcoming season yet. For 4, 5 and 6 year olds, Softball may be the most important thing on their minds, they can be very anxious! We remember one 5 year old telling us before opening day ceremonies, “Coach, I have been waiting for this day my whole life!”

Give the parents your contact information. This information should consist of:
- Name
- Phone Number
- Cell Phone
- Email Address
- Date, Time and Location of First Practice or Team Meeting

**Tip on Team Contacting:** Email is great way to quickly and easily contact your entire time. Attempt to utilize email as much as possible!

**Confirm all player information**
The League should provide you with your team roster information. At a minimum this information should consist of:
- Players Name
- Parent(s)/Guardian(s) Name
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Address
Contact Phone numbers (Home, Work, Mobile)
Emergency Contact Number
Email address
Health Issues (i.e. allergies, asthma, etc.)

Make sure that ALL PLAYER INFORMATION is complete and correct by confirming it with a player’s parents. The last thing you want to have happen is to have to contact a parent in an emergency situation and have the wrong phone number!

Explain to the parents what equipment a player will need for the upcoming season (such as a Softball glove and Softball cleats). Advise parents that the Softball glove should be the proper size for the child and be somewhat broken in so as not to be too stiff where the player cannot close the glove. To help first time Softball parents in selecting the correct equipment for their child, send them the “Choosing the Proper Softball Glove” section in this guide.

If possible, try to have a team meeting with your players and parents prior to your first practice. This will give you time to discuss your Team goals for the year and handle any administrative matters. However, with busy schedules, this meeting may not be feasible, in that case set aside the first 10 minutes of the first practice to go over these issues.

Organize all your Information
After you have gathered all the information that you will need for your season, you’ll notice that you have quite a bundle! Much of this information you will need to bring with you for each practice and game (i.e. player emergency contact info, etc.) We suggest that you put all your information (League, Player, Practice Itinerary, batting order, position information) in a 3 ring binder. This makes access easy and important information readily available. You should also have plastic page protectors to protect your information from the rain.
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More Information Regarding Equipment

Choosing the Proper Softball Glove
In Softball, the most important piece of equipment is the glove. A glove can have a big effect on a player’s performance. In Softball glove selection, the number of choices is staggering! Not only are there gloves for specific positions (Catcher’s glove, 1st Baseman’s glove, Infielder’s, and Outfielder’s glove), gloves come in all types of qualities, sizes and colors.

The key to a glove is control. The Softball player should be able to move the glove quickly to the ball, which requires a glove that's not too big and heavy for him or her. And even more importantly, the player must also be able to close the glove with his or her hand, so that the ball does not fall out. This requires a glove that is soft and “broken in” enough so that the player can close the glove and 'squeeze' the ball.

It is recommended that a glove be in proportion to the player’s size. There are many “professional” gloves in the market today that are more suitable for catching bowling balls than Softballs. You want to avoid having a young Softball player lugging around huge 13-inch outfielder's gloves. A bigger glove is not a bigger target and will not make it easier for a Softball player to catch. Actually a glove that is too big will have an adverse effect on performance. The player will have no glove control at all.

Softball glove sizes begin around the 9-inch range; the measurement is usually listed on the glove itself. The new, pre-oiled gloves are usually excellent for Softballers, as they are soft and require little or no break-in. For a very small child, or one with less strength than his or her peers, there are vinyl, or combination vinyl-and-leather models. These are very inexpensive and, while they will not last as long as higher quality gloves, they bend easily and allow the player to catch the ball from day one. There are also full leather gloves in the under-11 inch size, which cost more, last longer, and might require some break-in. Some new models even have a notch designed into the heel of the glove to allow easy and immediate flexing of the pocket.

As much as you want to buy the best for your kid, avoid the expensive, stiff gloves for players under 10 or so. They'd have to play eight hours a day, seven days a
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week, for six months before it gets broken in. And in that time, they'd make so many errors that they'd be shopping for soccer cleats by then!

Breaking-in The Glove
There are as many different methods in breaking-in a glove. Some ideas that we have heard of are quite outlandish. However, the easiest and most effect method we have come across are from Rawlings.

Rawlings' "master glove designer" recommends:

1. Press a small amount of shaving cream with lanoline on a clean, dry cloth and carefully work the cream around the outer shell, palm, and back. A light coating is all that is necessary. This will lubricate the leather fibers.
2. Allow the cream to dry thoroughly for 12 to 24 hours.
3. Wipe off the glove and play catch for 10-15 minutes, or 50 to 70 throws. This stretches and conforms the glove to your hand and speeds the break-in process,
4. Position a ball in the pocket and tie the glove closed for a few days with a string or rubber band around the outer perimeter. An option is to use the new Rawlings "Mitt Kit", which is designed to quickly form the 'ideal' pocket. It includes a double-ended pocket form with a large sphere on one end and a smaller sphere on the other, to form the pocket and the web area simultaneously, and a wide elastic 'figure 8' to hold the glove firmly around the form.
5. As the glove starts to break in, pour a small amount of 'Glovolum' on a clean, dry cloth, and carefully work the oil around the outer shell, palm, and back. A light coating is all that's needed.
6. Allow the glove to dry thoroughly for 24 hours so the oil has time to penetrate and condition the leather.
7. Store the glove in a cool, dry place with a ball in the pocket, or a Mitt Kit when not in use.
8. Lace will stretch with use. Keep laces taut but do not over tighten. Check for replacement if necessary after each season.
9. Do not over oil your glove! Twice a season is sufficient!
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Making a “Sock Ball”
You will find that the sock ball will come in handy for many drills. It will also be a favorite of young inexperienced players, because the sock ball is much softer than a softball. The sock ball is very easy to make.

- Start with a pair of socks.
- Roll the socks up into a ball. Make sure the ball isn’t too big; however, it does not have to be the same size as a softball.
- Once you’ve rolled the socks, take duct or masking tape and start to wrap the socks. Do not use too much tape, only enough to cover the socks (if you add too many layers of tape, the ball will be too hard).

At the start of the season, you should have at least 6 sock balls ready for practice. You can use the sock ball for catching drills, pop fly drills, as well as hitting drills.
5. Dealing with Players

Communications
The most important, and most difficult task you as a coach will face is effectively conveying your message to your players. When talking to your players, remember that they are young. **You** need to talk down to their level. If you tell a young player to “run home”, they may in fact start to run to **their** home!

When explaining a drill or concept, do not get too technical. Yes, you must teach the basics, but do it in a way so that **THEY** can understand.

If you explain a drill 3 times to your team, and they don’t understand it; guess what!? **YOU** are explaining it wrong!

Learning Curves & Differing Abilities
You will quickly notice that some players are more coordinated than others. Also, your players will grasp concepts and learn at different paces. This is one of the challenges of coaching younger children. You don’t want to “lose” any child that may not be grasping the subject; however, you must also avoid “boring” the players that quickly master a drill.

Spend a little extra time with the players that may be learning slower than the others. After practice, give these players some additional “homework” to do before your next practice/game. Take these players aside and discreetly talk to them (be careful not to make it look as though you are singling out these players).

For the players that are excelling faster than the others, add some “twist” or additional complexity to a drill the rest of the team is performing.

Keep Them Moving Will Keep Their Attention
All children, especially young children have short attention spans. That’s what makes them children! It is your job to keep them focused and interested in what’s going on. Keeping a 5 year olds attention may be the most difficult thing you encounter in coaching.
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The best way to keep the players focused is with constant movement and change. Each drill station should have no more than 3-4 players. With this small number of players, you cut down on the amount of time a player is only watching the other players go through the activity. The time that a player is not engaged in activity is the time you will “lose them”. To have groups 3-4 players, you will need as much help from others as you can get. With a team of 11 players you will need 3-4 different groups (therefore, 3-4 different coaches).

As far length of time goes, each drill should be done for no more than 10-15 minutes at a time. Survey your team’s attention span and adjust the length of each drill accordingly.

“The Complement Sandwich”
Under NO circumstances should you ever criticize a player. For many Softball players this may be their first experience with any organized sport, let alone Softball. At this age children have very fragile egos. While what you may feel is correcting a player, the child may feel as criticism. Always focus on the positive.

When correcting a player, we recommend the “Complement Sandwich”. In the Complement Sandwich start out by praising/Complementing on what the player did correctly, and then explain the area they did wrong or where they could improve. Once you have done this, always finish with a positive complimentary statement. No one, especially a young Softball player, needs to constantly hear negative criticism.

Problem Players – YOU ARE NOT A BABYSITTER
Dealing with problem players can be quite difficult, you need to get a handle on this situation quickly. Coaching a bunch of young Softball players is difficult enough when everyone is cooperating. Throw in a few behavioral problems and the season can deteriorate quickly. In a player behavioral problem situation, take a look at the situation, analyze what may be causing the problem and attempt to address it accordingly (as quickly as possible).

- If there are a few players who seem to fool around during practice drills, separate these players and put them in separate groups.
- If one player seems to be disruptive because he or she is bored, attempt to keep their attention by talking to them throughout practice.
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- If a behavioral problem persists, sit the player down for a “time-out” for a few minutes. Once they see all the other players, who behave, enjoying themselves, they will want to join along.
- If all else fails, speak with child’s parent on a one-one basis, asking for their help in addressing the problem.
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6. Dealing with Parents

Get as Many Volunteers as You Can (You will Need Them)
Coaching should be looked as a team effort. Running a team of 10-12 five and six year olds is quite a bit of work; you will need some help. Hopefully, your league will assign at least one assistant coach to you. At the first practice seek out other “assistant coaches”. While, they don’t have to volunteer for every practice, you will need a few volunteers for each practice.

To run an effective practice, with 2-3 station drills, there will be the need for at least 3-4 coaches. Before every practice, give a detailed explanation to all the assistant coaches. Go over what drills the team will be doing and what you need them (the coaches) to do.

Explain your goals for the year
Before the season, meet with your players’ parents to explain the goals you have for the team for the upcoming season. At this level your team goals should be: to have fun, to learn the basic fundamentals of the game of Softball, and to show improvement from one practice to the next. If a parent has goals that differ from yours, have a side conversation with them, addressing the issues as soon as possible.

Suggestions/Constructive Criticism
As a coach you should be willing to accept suggestions and constructive criticism from parents during the year. Parents may have an “outside” view of how things are going and their input can be valuable.

For the overbearing parent that seems to have a problem/suggestion with everything you try to do, have them volunteer as an assistant coach (“Putting their money where their mouth is”). In most cases, the parent will see that some things are easier said than done. Having the parent make a commitment to the running of the team may quiet them down.

The Over-Critical Parent
There is nothing that will discourage a child more than criticism, especially from his or her own parent. At the beginner Softball level, your SECOND goal should be to teach the players a few Softball skills. The FIRST and most important goal
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for the season is to HAVE FUN!! Hopefully at this beginner level, you will not have to deal with parents who are over critical with their children. As previously mentioned, at the start of the season explain to the parents what your goals are for the team. Your team goals and the parents’ goals should be very similar. If a parent has different goals than yours (“I want my son to play error free in the field this year!”) they need to be discussed and addressed at the beginning of the season.

If a problem with a parent persists, discreetly take the parent aside, and once again explain your coaching philosophy to them. Explain that their criticisms are a distraction to not only their child, but to the entire team. Another tactic is to move the child to the opposite side of the field, away from the parent; and away from the comments.
7. Softball Positions

When asking a new player to “go play 2\textsuperscript{nd} base” nine times out of ten the player will go and stand directly ON the base. For the first few practices you may need to position your players in proper area of the field.

1\textsuperscript{St} Base
1\textsuperscript{st} base will be the most active (and can be the most dangerous) position on the field. The 1\textsuperscript{st} baseperson needs to pay attention at all times because most plays will end up at 1\textsuperscript{st} base. The 1\textsuperscript{st} baseperson should stand 2-4 feet off 1\textsuperscript{st} base (towards 2\textsuperscript{nd} base). If there is a base runner on 1\textsuperscript{st} base, have the fielder position themselves either in front or behind the base runner (so they don’t get run over when the runner starts to run for 2\textsuperscript{nd} base). It’s a good idea to have an assistant coach standing by the 1\textsuperscript{st} baseman to ensure the player is paying attention and ready to catch the ball being thrown to them.

The Pitcher
In Softball, the Pitcher can be a very active position. Majority of the hits are straight up the middle toward the pitcher. Because of this, the pitcher needs to be alert at all times. Also, the pitcher is the closest position to the hitter, therefore; the ball reaches the pitcher at a higher speed than any other player. Some leagues do not have a pitchers position. If your league does not call for a pitcher, simply add another infielder between shortstop and 2\textsuperscript{nd} base. If you are using a pitcher as a fielding position, do not have the player stand directly on the pitchers mound. Instead, have the pitcher move back a few feet off the pitchers mound to a safer location.

2\textsuperscript{nd} Base
2\textsuperscript{nd} Base is another position where young Softball players will find a lot of action. The 2\textsuperscript{nd} baseperson should line up 4-5 feet off 2\textsuperscript{nd} base (towards 1\textsuperscript{st} base).

Shortstop
The Shortstop should line up between the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Base bag and 3\textsuperscript{rd} Base (3-4 feet off second base to the players right).
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3\textsuperscript{rd} Base
The 3\textsuperscript{rd} base person should be lined up 3-4 feet off 3\textsuperscript{nd} base (to the players left, towards 2\textsuperscript{nd} base)

Catcher
Since in the majority of beginner softball leagues the players will be hitting off a Batting Tee, there is no real need for a catcher. At the beginner level, the catcher position could be very dangerous. Beginner Softball players tend to throw the bats after they hit, so a catcher would be in harms way of a thrown bat. Because of this danger, you should eliminate the catcher’s position and simply add an additional infielder or outfielder.

The Outfield
Unlike in older leagues, in many beginner Softball leagues there are usually 4-6 outfielders. You have your traditional Right Field, Center Field, and Left Field positions, as well as the following outfield positions:

- Short Field (usually lining up a few yards behind 2\textsuperscript{nd} base)
- Right Center Field (Lining up between Right Field & Center Field)
- Left Center Field (Lining up between Left Field & Center Field)
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**Position Key**

1 - Pitcher; 2 - Catcher; 3 - 1st Base; 4 - 2nd Base; 5 - 3rd Base; 6 - Shortstop; 7 - Left Field; 8 - Center Field; 9 - Right Field

*For Softball*

- Eliminate Catcher position 2;
- Add Left Center position between 7&8;
- Add Right Center position between 8 & 9;
- Add Short Fielder position in front of 8.
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8. The Effective Practice
At this young age, players have short attention spans and tend to get bored easy. You need have a well designed practice plan in place that will keep them active & moving throughout the entire practice and not have players standing/wandering around waiting for something to do. Once one drill ends, you need to be ready to move on to the next drill.

**Practice Tip:** While an effective practice plan is important, some drills just may not work with your team. The drills may be too hard, too easily, or too boring for your team. Each team is different. That is why it is important when planning a practice to have a few extra drills ready to be used as a substitution of a drill that’s just not working. Don’t try to fit a square peg in a round hole!

As previously mentioned, the best way to keep the players’ focused is constant movement and change. You should break your team into 2-3 groups. Each group should have no more than 3-4 players and each group should be doing a different drill. With this small number of players, you cut down on the amount of time a player is only watching the other players go through the activity. The time that a player is not engaged in activity is the time you will “lose them”. To have groups 3-4 players, you will need as much help from others as you can get. With a team of 11 players you will need 3-4 different groups (therefore, 3-4 different coaches).

As far length of time goes, each drill should be done for no more than 10-15 minutes at a time. After that time have the groups rotate into another station/drink. This keeps things different and helps eliminate player boredom. Gauge your team’s attention span and adjust the length of each drill accordingly.

Practice Goals
You need to establish goals for each practice. At the start of each practice these goals should be shared with the assistant coaches, parents and most of all the players. Don’t overwhelm your players with a large number of goals for each practice. Even if you want to accomplish many things in practice, only designate a few as “practice goals”. Remember for many players, this may be their first experience with Softball. You need to learn crawl before you can walk.
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Examples of Practice Goals
“Base Runners Run Through 1st base”
“Knowing where each position is on the field”
“Not to have all players Swarm for the ball in the field”
“Catching with 2 hands”
“Fielding the ball & throwing it to 1st base”

The one goal that should be consistent for each and every practice is:
TO HAVE FUN!!

Practice Components
Practices should have 3-4 basic components that should remain consistent throughout the season. While the practice components should remain consistent, the practice drills should vary so that the players do not become bored.

Examples of actual practice drills are provided later in this book.

Pre-Practice Talk – Before you start each practice, you need to tell your players what you will be doing in the practice. Quickly tell them what drills they will be doing (and in what order), what is expected from the players, and what the goals are for the practice. It’s a good idea to have the parents listen in to the Pre-Practice Talk so that they know what will be going on.

Warm-up & Stretching – It’s important to have a short 5 minute warm-up before you get into the heart of your practice. The warm-up should consist of stretching and light cardio exercises. Stretching will help loosen tight muscles and help prevent muscle injuries.

FUNdamental Skill Drills – In this portion of practice you will teach your players the fundamental skills needed to play Softball. These drills can consist of Base Running drills, Fielding & Catching drills, Throwing drills, Hitting Drills, etc. For this part of practice you should divide your team into 3-4 groups (depending on your team size) and have a different drill at each “station”. After 10 minutes have each group move to a new station.
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By using this station approach, you will have a smaller, more manageable group of players and be able to give more individual and one-on-one instruction. Also, players tend to become less bored since they will be more involved and not have to waiting around for long periods of time until it is their turn. In addition, the varied drills offered at the different stations will keep things new to a player and help keep things interesting.

**Game Situation Drills** - Many coaches will say that *“The only way you learn the game is by playing the game”* This may in fact be correct for older children, but for first time players, even the Softball basics may be a challenge. You may run into a situation where you even need to “coach” them on what hand their glove goes on.

Think of Game Situation Drills as small, manageable portions of games that will concentrate on the development of 2-3 core skills. Again, remember to try to keep all the players active during the drills. Lulls in the action and standing around waiting will quickly bore a young child.

**Practice Games/Scrimmages** – Practicing fundamentals and station drills all the time may grow tiresome to young players. After a while, they will want to play a “real game.” If another team is not available, simply divide your players into two groups and scrimmage amongst yourselves. Observe all the rules your team will face in league game. However, in these practice games/scrimmages, frequently stop the action to provide the team with tips and additional instruction.

**Post Practice Talk** – Just as the “Pre-Practice Talk” it’s important to have a “Post-Practice Talk” as well. In this short conversation you want to cover the following:

- Go over what the team has accomplished in this session, reinforcing the important key concepts.
- Strongly compliment the team, tell them how well they have performed.
- Also, remind parents of the next practice or game. Although all parents should have schedules by now, it will not hurt to remind them what’s coming up next.
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9. FUNdamental Drills

When going over the Softball fundamentals, do not get too technical with younger children. Yes, you must teach the basics, but do it in a way so that THEY can understand. If you explain a drill 3 times to your team, and they don’t understand it; guess what!? YOU are explaining it wrong!

We cannot over-emphasize the need for clear communication with your players. DO NOT assume they know what you are talking about. We remember telling our team to “run through the base”. After a few ill-fated attempts at this drill, one of the players finally called out “Coach, what’s a base?”

Clearly explain what the players will be doing before each drill. Look into their eyes as you’re explaining the drill. If they have the “fogged over” look on their faces, they didn’t get it! Explain it again and ask if they have any questions.

Communication Tip: Use language/phrases your team will understand. The Alligator Catch, The Gorilla Walk, The Statue Stance, etc. It may not be proper “Softball” lingo, but if it works, use it!

Position Recognition Drills

Many Softball beginners do not know the positions on the field. By using a few position recognition drills, your team will learn the positions in no time!

“Where is …?”

This is a good drill to start the first few practices. Simply call out a position, “Where is Shortstop!” and have your entire team run to that position. By having the entire team trying to find the position together, you are fostering teamwork and camaraderie, and those who don’t know the positions can learn from those who do know. After a few practices the entire team will learn where all the positions are on the field.

Position “Homework”

After a few practices, give your players some “homework”. The field positions worksheet in this guide can be used to help players with position
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recognition. A player simply writes the position initials (i.e., LF=Left Field, 1=1st base) on the proper place on the field. Parents may have to assist their child on this project.

**Base Running Drills**

Once again with new players, running the right direction after they hit the ball can be a challenge. Another challenge is having the runner “run through” 1st base and not slow down as they near the base.

**Base Running Warm-up**

As part of your warm-up drills, have the team run around the bases and call out each base as they touch the bag. This will help them become familiar with the positions, the bases, and *which direction they should be running*. As they get comfortable in where they should be running, have the team increase their speed, having them only step on the corner of the bases as they move from base to base.

**Relay Races**

Split the team in half, with one group of players behind home plate and other half of players behind second base. Give the first player of each group a ball. At "GO!" the first player from each team begins running the bases, with the ball in hand. After making a complete lap around the bases (back to each player's starting point), that player then hands the ball off to the next player in line, who continues the relay race. The first group of players to finish the race wins.

**Running Through 1st Base**

In Softball as well as baseball, 1st base is the only base that you can “run through” that is once you touch 1st base, you do not have to stay on the bag (as long as you turn right into foul territory after you touch 1st base). This concept is difficult for young Softball players to grasp.

For this drill, set up a coach 3-4 feet past 1st base. Have players run from home plate, touch 1st (remembering to run “through” 1st base) and give the coach standing past 1st base a “High-Five”.

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Home to 2\textsuperscript{nd} Base Run
Have the players start from home plate as if they were batting and run to 1\textsuperscript{st} base and then to 2\textsuperscript{nd} base without stopping. Emphasize that the players make a tight turn around 1\textsuperscript{st} base. \textit{Many new players will make real wide turns on their way to 2\textsuperscript{nd} base, practically ending up in the outfield!}

\textit{Variations of this drill can be Home plate to 3\textsuperscript{rd} base and Run all the Bases Drill.}
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Catching Drills
Catching a ball can be one of the most difficult things for a player to do. Some young Softball players will be afraid of catching a Softball because they are afraid of getting hit by the ball. This fear will make them flinch or turn away right before the ball reaches their glove. They'll end up dropping the ball instead of catching it, or, worse, the ball may hit them. If a player gets hit with the ball enough times, he or she may want to quit even before they have really started to play.

To overcome a player’s fear of the ball, start by using a softer ball. Beginner league Softballs are inherently softer than Competitive League Softballs, tennis balls are even softer. That’s why for beginner Softball players, you should think about using a tennis ball for the first few catching drills.

As we stated before, your players need to learn to crawl before you can walk. In learning to catch, having a player be able to simply touch the ball with their glove is more than half the battle. Praise them for this “simple” accomplishment.

The most important thing a young player can do when catching is, KEEPING THEIR EYE ON THE BALL. The player should focus on the ball and watch it enter their glove.

Catching Tip – Young players get confused as to how to hold their glove when catching. Many hold it with the palm up for all catches (see figure 1). This can be quite dangerous if a high throw is coming towards their upper body, the ball can roll past their palm, up their arm and could strike them in the face.

To prevent this from happening, instruct the players to:

>Hold the glove palm up for throws coming under their belly button.

>Hold the glove palm down for throws coming above their belly button.
Partner Catch Drill
This is simply a catch with a partner. Have the players line-up facing their partner, about 6 feet away from each other. The players throw the ball to each. The coach should emphasize good throwing and catching techniques.

- As the players master this drill, have the partners back-up a few more feet for long throws.
- You can also add a third player, and have the group form a triangle for a triangle throwing drill. Have the players throw the ball amongst themselves in a clockwise direction; then after awhile, switch to a counter-clockwise direction.

At Home Catching Drills
It is important that a player practice at home, in addition to practicing with the team. There is only so much time that can be dedicated to the basics. If a player works on the basics on their own and/or with a parent, the player will pick up the skills a lot quick. While practice may not make perfect, it will make a player better.

Ball Against the Wall or Pitch-back
This is a simple drill a player can do on their own, at home. The player throws ball at wall and catches it on its return. The player should vary the speed and height that the ball is thrown so that as a result the ball’s return will vary.
Fielding Drills

The Ready Position
The “Ready Position” is a simple technique to teach young Softball players. The players simply face the direction of the activity (i.e. the coach, the batter, etc), legs slightly more than shoulder width apart, bend at the knees and have their glove and hand out, down and ready for action. Having their hands low and facing towards the action (Pinkies down) completes the “Ready Position”

Keeping young players focused is a challenge in itself. The nature of Softball lends itself to many lulls between the action. During stoppages in play or lulls a player can become distracted and not focused. When a player is not paying attention they can be more susceptible to injury through getting hit with a ball, etc.

One way to have players pay attention during games to have them in “Ready Position” as the batter is getting ready to swing. Before a batter is to hit simply yell for your players to show you that they’re in the ready position.
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The Alligator Catch
As previously stated, when teaching a skill to your young Softball players, you need to make the explanation as easy as possible for THEM to understand. When explaining how to field a ground ball, use the alligator explanation. “The alligator has a big mouth and we use our hands like an alligator. The glove hand is the bottom and the throwing hand is the top of the mouth. When the Alligator closes his mouth he eats the ball.” Remember to have the players position their legs apart, bend their knees and have their gloves on the ground. Many young Softballers, don’t get their gloves low enough and the ball goes throw their legs.

Throwing Drills
While throwing may seem natural to some players, others find it quite difficult. Many new players get confused as to what foot moves forward with the throw. Break down throwing into small steps that are more easily understood.

• Face Target
• Properly grip ball with throwing hand
• Bring Arm Back in “L” shaped position
• Step forward with opposite foot (then that of throwing arm)
• Move arm forward in throwing motion and let go of ball
• Hand should be pointing to target (where you want the ball to go)
Throwing From a Kneeling Position
To eliminate the confusion of foot movement/placement, practice this drill. From a kneeling position, players practice throwing the ball to each other, the coach or at a target. This takes the foot movement confusion out of the picture and allows the player to focus on the arm movement mechanics of throwing.
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“Target Practice”
To develop throwing accuracy, the players try to hit a target approximately 10 –15 feet away. You can make this into a competition by awarding points. 2 points for hitting the target on a fly; 1 point for hitting the target on a bounce.
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Hitting Drills
It has been said that hitting a Softball is one of the hardest things to do in all of sports. Hitting off a Tee makes this task slightly easier. The goal for young Softball players is to develop good habits early. Emphasize the proper grip of the bat, proper stance, and the level swing. And remember, the most important thing when hitting is KEEPING YOUR EYE ON THE BALL!

Holding the Bat
Properly holding the bat is the first step towards good hitting fundamentals. You need to make sure that a player’s hands are in the proper position. For a right-handed hitter, the left hand should be at the bottom of the bat and the right hand should be on above the left. For a left-handed hitter, the hand positions should be the opposite (i.e. right on bottom, left above).

For some players, the bat may be heavy and quite difficult to swing. For these players, have them “choke-up” on the bat. This is, move their hands further up the bat.

Batting Stance
In the proper Batting Stance, the player should have his or her feet shoulder width apart, feet point straight, knees slightly bent, bat back and up.

Without a bat, have your team line up in the proper batting stance. Walk around your team, inspecting their stance and correct any errors.
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The Swing
When swinging the bat, a player’s **arms should be extended** and the **swing should be level**. Make sure that a player is not too close to the batting tee (This will cause the arms not be extended).

The player should make contact with the ball with the “sweet” part of the bat (the middle of the bat).

- Have the player practice hitting the top of the batting tee with bat before you place the ball on the tee.
- Once you place the ball on the batting tee, have the player take a “slow motion” swing, stopping just short of hitting the ball. Take a look at the swing and bat contact point and, if needed, adjust the player’s stance.
- Have the player hit the ball.

![Proper Contact Point - Hitting](image)

Hitting into the Backstop
This is a very effective drill. When you break your team up into smaller groups, have one group work on their batting techniques by hitting balls into the backstop or section of fence. Line-up the hitter approximately 3-5 feet from the backstop and have the player(s) hit off the Tee into the backstop or fence. This eliminates the need to chase all over the field after balls.
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For this drill you should use “sock balls” so that you do not damage the backstop or fence.

Also, it is important to have the other players whom are not hitting away from the action in a safe area.

Hip Rotation Drill
This drill will help young players develop the proper body rotation when hitting. Have the players line-up with their side facing you and hands on their hips. At your command, the players will rotate their hips, ending in the position where their stomach/belly button is facing forward.
10. **Game Time**

Well, you have practiced the FUNdamental drills with your team and now it’s time to put your skills to the test. **GAME TIME!**

**Rules**

In many Softball leagues, the entire team bats in an inning and all players are safe at 1st base. Therefore, score is not kept and there is no winning or losing team. Find out from your league director what your league rules are and prepare for the game accordingly.

**Line-up chart**

Included in the book is a line-up chart. This makes it easy for you as the coach to assign, keep track and rotate positions. Having a record of who has played where will make it easier to ensure that all players get a chance to play every position. The Line-up Chart also helps you rotate the batting order. No one player should always bat first or always bat last. With the Line-up Chart, you can easily rotate your batting order.

**Line-up rotation**

So that all players get a chance to play all positions, we suggest that you rotate your players every inning. The line-up chart included in this guide makes the field position rotation process easy. Before each inning, as your players are about to take the field, shout out the position where each player will be playing for that inning. You will probably have to help young Softball players find their positions, have your parent-helpers and assistant coaches aid in getting the players where they need to be.

**Games & Sportsmanship**

Remember, having fun should be the number one priority for players. Players should not ridicule teammates or opponents. As the coach you need to set the tone for good sportsmanship. Compliment good plays for each team (yours and your opponent). At the conclusion of the game, have your team line-up and shake hands with the other team.
11. Team Safety

Inspect the Field
Before all practices and games, inspect the field. Make sure there are no hazards such as broken glass, animal droppings, branches or other debris on the field. Also ensure that the playing surface is consistent and level. Make sure there are no holes or ditches in the field.

BE AWARE OF THE BATS!
A player swinging a bat can be very dangerous, especially with other players around them. Know where your team bats are at all times. The best way to accomplish this is to simply have only 1 bat. This makes it easier to keep track of the bat. If you have more than one bat, have all bats in 1 designated area. The only player with a bat in his/her hand should be the player who is hitting and in the batters box. At this early age, a Softball player doesn’t need to warm-up in the on deck circle. Since the players get an at-bat each inning, they can take a few practice swings in the batters box (away from other players) each time they bat. Assign an assist coach to be in the dugout/batting circle area to manage the bats and to make sure a player does not pick up a bat and start swinging.

Also watch for the hitter that throws the bat after they hit. At the beginner level, players tend to release the bat at the end of their swing, sending the bat flying. To prevent bat throwing, set up a cone a few feet to the side of the player and have the player “place” the bat at the cone before they run to 1st. This should help eliminate bat throwing.

Ball Safety
Softball should not be played with a “real” Softball like the ones the older children and professionals use. The Softball should be like a Softball, but softer and with a rubber/cushioning coating. While this ball is somewhat softer, it still hurts if you get hit with it. Be aware of where the balls are. If you start off your practice with a simple game of partner catch, you can have up to 6 balls flying around! For this partner catch drill, I suggest that you use tennis balls, they hurt less.

1st Base can be a Dangerous Position
When teaching the fundamentals to young children, majority of your fielding plays will end up being thrown to 1st base (at this age it’s easier to have your players
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throw ball to 1st base). Therefore, the child playing first base MUST be alert at all times and be able to catch, or knock the ball down, and/or get out of the way of the ball. Many young players may not be able to catch proficiently, however that should not stop them from taking their turn 1st base. As long as they don’t let the ball hit them, they should be fine. An assistant coach should be stationed at 1st base to make sure the player is paying attention and ready to attempt the catch.

No Need for a Catcher
Since players will be hitting off a Tee, there is no real need for a catcher. At this level, the catcher position could be very dangerous. Beginner Softball players tend to throw the bats after they hit, so a catcher would be in harms way.

Keep the Pitcher Back & Alert
In Softball, the Pitcher can be the most active position. Majority of the hits are straight up the middle toward the pitcher. Because of this, the pitcher needs to be alert at all times. Also, the pitcher is the closest position to the hitter; therefore the ball reaches the pitcher at a higher rate of speed than any other player. If you are using the pitcher as a fielding position, there is no reason to have the player directly on the pitchers mound. Have the pitcher move back a few feet to a safer location.

First Aid
Many leagues offer a First Aid seminar for their coaches. It is important that you and your assistant coaches attend this clinic. If your league does not offer a First Aid seminar, contact your local hospital; many have free or inexpensive clinics available. The information gained from these clinics will be of the utmost importance in the event of an injury.

Most leagues supply teams with first aid kits. If your league does not supply First Aid kits, purchase a basic kit; it can be an invaluable piece of equipment. Most basic First Aid kits can be purchased a local pharmacy, department store or online for under $25.

Your First Aid kit should consist of:
- 3-4 Ice Packs
- Assortment of Band Aids
- Sterile
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- Ace Bandage
- Splint
- Gauze
- Plastic Gloves

The most important piece of equipment regarding First Aid is a Cell Phone. If there is a serious injury on the field, precious time can be wasted searching for a phone to call an ambulance. Parents of an injured child can be contacted quickly as well. A mobile phone can cut down on the time between injury and help arriving.

Know of any Existing Player Conditions
As stated previously in this guide, it is extremely important for you as the coach to know of any existing conditions your players may have. Does a player have Asthma or Epilepsy or any Other Medical Condition? Does this condition require an inhaler or medication? If so, the player’s parents should be at the field at all times with the inhaler or the player should have the inhaler readily available. The children themselves should carry an inhaler with them everywhere. Parents of children with asthma should know their child’s limits and know when to stop an activity and have the child take a puff of medicine.

Is a player allergic to bee stings? For most people, the venom from a bee or wasp sting causes little more than local swelling, pain, and redness, which usually go away within several hours. Some people, however, are allergic to elements in the venom and have more severe reactions, which can range from extended swelling to potentially deadly anaphylactic shock.

For most stings, minimal treatment such as a cold compress or ice pack is sufficient. If you have multiple stings or a severe allergic reaction, you need medical help at once.

However, those allergic to bee stings can go into anaphylactic shock, the usual treatment is the bronchodilator epinephrine injection. Again, the player’s parents should be at the field at all times with the bee sting kit/injection readily available.

Disclaimer
The information contained in this guide is purely a source of information and can at no time replace the expert eye of a qualified professional. We recommend seeking professional advice.
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before embarking on any form of self-treatment. The content provided in this guide is NOT intended to be relied on for medical diagnosis or treatment. Never delay in seeking professional advice because of something read in this guide.
12. Conclusion
During the season, you will probably experience the whole spectrum of emotions from delight to frustration. Remember: It’s only a game. The kids are there to have fun! If you have taught them a thing or two, consider the season a success!

Top Ten Things to Remember when coaching
1. THE PLAYERS & COACHES SHOULD HAVE FUN!!!!
2. Be Organized
3. Have a Plan
4. Be Flexible Enough to change the Plan if it’s not working
5. Enlist the Help of other Parents
7. Keep the action moving
8. Break Down concepts/drills into small, manageable portions
9. Keep Your Sense of Humor
10. Keep Your Sanity – It’s only a Game!
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13. Practice Sample
This is an example of a 75-minute practice. Drills can be added or deleted to suit your needs

Pre-Practice Talk – 1-2 Minutes
• State today’s practice goals are:
  o Learning the Bases & Positions
  o Running to 1st base (Running THROUGH 1st Base)
  o Fielding Grounders Like an Alligator
  o Proper Throwing Techniques
  o Basic Hitting Fundamentals
• What drills you will be doing, how they will work

Warm-up and Stretch – 5 Minutes
• 20 Jumping Jacks
• Stretches Legs
• Stretches Arms & Shoulders
• Jog around bases calling out each base as players touch the base (2 times)

FUNdamental Drills
Base Running Drill – 5 Minutes
• Running through 1st base – Team lines up at home plate, one at a time the players run to 1st base, running through 1st base, high-five coach located 3-4 feet past base. (Emphasis should be running at full speed through the base)

Station Drills – Divide team into 2-3 groups (rotate groups after 10 minutes)
1. Station 1 – Alligator Fielding Drill – 10 Minutes
2. Station 2 – Knelling Throw Drill – 10 Minutes
3. Station 3 – Pop Fly Catching Drill – 10 minutes

Game Situation Drill/Scrimmage - 30 minutes
Scrimmage other team using “game type conditions”; i.e. game rules, player batting order and field position rotation, etc.

OR
Break team into 2 groups; play game by having players field only infield positions. Use game type conditions”; i.e. game rules, player batting order and field position rotation, etc.
14. Useful Coaching Forms

Field Positions & Batting Order
Each player should have an opportunity to play every position and bat first throughout the season. Using a Field Position & Batting Order sheet helps you organization the line-up from one inning to another and from one game to another.

This sheet can be customized to suit your league’s rules, actual team playing positions, etc. For this scenario we assumed an 11 player team and eliminate the catchers position. For an 11-player team, it will take eleven innings for the entire team to get to play all the positions. The length of you season should dictate when you switch the players’ positions. It is suggested that you switch player’s positions each inning.

The Line-up Sheet should be completed prior the season or each game. To fill out the lineup, simply list your players down the column, this will serve as there fielding position and the number where they bat in that inning. A “Planned” and “Actual” column has been included just in case you need to make game day or on the field changes due to absenteeism or injury.

For the next inning, you simply shift the line-up down one position and the previous last player (in this case the Short Fielder) moves up to the first position (Pitcher). The shifting method is continued until all players have played all positions and have batted in all slots of the line-up.
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Coaching Youth Softball

Snack/Refreshment Sheet
For young Softball players it can be debatable as to what the most important thing is during a season: *The game itself or what the snack will be after the game!* At the start of the season, hand out a snack sign-up sheet to parents. Snacks are a special treat for after the practice/game. Snacks are not a substitute for water (each player should bring water for water breaks during practice). Parents should take turns volunteering to bring a snack to the game/practice. They should bring enough for the entire team and any siblings that may be around.

With the increase in children allergies, great lengths should be taken to avoid snacks that children may be allergic to. At the start of the season when you parents about their child’s medical condition, you should also ask about any food allergies that may exist. To be on the safe side, snacks with peanuts should be avoided.

Snacks should be served AFTER practice/the game. If the snack is served in the middle of practice it may be difficult to get the players to refocus on Softball after the break. Snack time will help build team spirit and camaraderie.
Coaching Youth Softball

Snack Sign-up Sheet

Please volunteer to bring a snack for the team. Due to allergies, please avoid snacks that contain peanuts. Thank You!

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Coaching Youth Softball

Field Position Diagram

Answer Key

1 - Pitcher; 2 - Catcher; 3 - 1st Base; 4 - 2nd Base; 5 - 3rd Base; 6 - Shortstop; 7 - Left Field; 8 - Center Field; 9 - Right Field
# Coaching Youth Softball

## Injury Report Sheet

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<th>Location</th>
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<th>Type of Injury</th>
<th>Area involved in Injury (i.e. arm, leg, etc,)</th>
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**Note:** This form is used to record the details of any injuries sustained during a softball game or practice. It is important to fill out this form accurately and completely to ensure the health and safety of all players.
Coaching Youth Softball

Look for our other informative Coaching Books at

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Youth Softball Drills
&
Sample Practice Plans

coachingsoftball
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Softball Drills & Sample Practice Plans

Introduction

The following drills have been specifically included in this book, with the young softball player in mind. Many beginners to the game of softball may find some concepts more difficult than others. If a drill is not working, move on to another and revisit that drill during a later practice.

As we have mentioned in the Coaching Youth Softball book, all children, especially young children have short attention spans. That’s what makes them children! It is your job as coach to keep them focused and interested in what’s going on. Keeping a 5-8 year olds’ attention may be the most difficult thing you will encounter in coaching.

The best way to keep the players focused, is to have constant movement and change. You should attempt to have all the players involved with an activity/drill at the same time. That will cut down on the amount of time that a player is only standing around watching the other players go through the activity. The time that a player is not engaged in activity is the time you will “lose them”.

Also, to keep everything new and exciting, each drill should last no more than 5-10 minutes. Gauge your team’s attention span and adjust the length of each drill accordingly.

We have included a number of drills in this book so that you won’t find yourself running out of things to do.

Position Recognition Drills

Remember that for many Softball beginners, this is their first exposure to Softball. They may not know the positions on the field. By using a few position recognition drills, your team will learn all the positions in no time!

1. “Where is …?”

   This is a good drill to start the first few practices. Simply call out a position, “Where is Shortstop!?” and have your entire team run to that position. By having the entire team trying to find the position together, you are fostering teamwork and camaraderie, and those who
don’t know the positions can learn from those who do know. After a few practices the entire team will learn where all the positions are on the field.

2. **Call out the Base!**
   In this drill, have the team run around the bases (in the proper direction) calling out each base as they touch the bag. This drill serves two purposes. First it acts as a warm-up before practice. Secondly, by having the players yell out what base they are stepping on, will help the players become familiar with the positions, base, and which direction they should be running.

3. **Position “Homework”**
   After a few practices, give your players some “homework”. The field positions worksheet in this guide can be used to help players with position recognition. A player simply writes the position initials (ie LF=Left Field, 1=1st base) on the proper place on the field. Parents may have to assist their child on this project.
Base Running Drills

Once again with new players, running the right direction after they hit the ball can be a challenge. Another challenge is having the runner “run through” 1st base and not slow down as they near the base.

4. Base Running Warm-up
As part of your warm-up drills, have the team run around the bases calling out each base as they touch the bag. This will help them become familiar with the positions, base, and which direction they should be running. As they get comfortable in where they should be running, have the team increase their speed, having them touch only the corner of the bases as they move from base to base.

5. Team Relay Race
Split the team in half, with one group of players behind home plate and other half of players behind second base. Give the first player of each group a ball. At "GO!" the first player from each team begins running the bases, with the ball in hand. After making a complete lap around the bases (back to each player’s starting point), that player then hands the ball off to the next player in line, who continues the relay race. The first group of players to finish the race wins.

6. Running Through 1st Base
In Softball as well as baseball, 1st base is the only base that you can “run through” that is once you touch 1st base, you do not have to stay on the bag (as long as you turn right into foul territory after you touch 1st base). This concept is difficult for young Softball players to grasp.

For this drill, set up a coach 3-4 feet past 1st base. Have players run from home, touch 1st (remembering to run “through” 1st base) and give the coach standing past 1st base a “High-Five”.

7. **Home to 2\textsuperscript{nd} Base Run**

Have the players start from home plate as if they were batting and run to 1\textsuperscript{st} base and then to 2\textsuperscript{nd} base without stopping. Emphasize that the players make a tight turn around 1\textsuperscript{st} base. *Many new players will make real wide turns on their way to 2\textsuperscript{nd} base, practically ending up in the outfield!*
Catching Drills
Catching a ball can be one of the most difficult things for a player to do. Some young Softball players will be afraid of catching a Softball because they are afraid of getting hit by the ball. This fear will make them flinch or turn away right before the ball reaches their glove. They'll end up dropping the ball instead of catching it, or, worse, the ball may hit them. If a player gets hit with the ball enough times, he or she may want to quit even before they have really started to play.

8. Catching Pop Flies (Tennis Ball)
In this drill, have your players attempt to catch pop flies using a tennis ball. This will help reduce the anxiety a player may have of being hit and hurt with a Softball. The coach can also utilize a tennis racquet to hit the ball into the air. By using the racquet, it’s easier on the coach’s arm and players seem to get a kick out of it.

9. Catching Pop Flies - Group
This drill is essentially the same as the one described above with the change of having 3 – 4 players doing the drill at the same time. Before catching the ball, players must call for the ball by yelling “I’ve got it!” This will help prevent all the players from running over each other to get the ball. Emphasize that a player must stay in his or her zone.

10. Partner Catch
This is a simple game of catch between 2 players. This drill is a good warm-up drill towards the beginning of practice. Try to match players with similar skills. If you have an odd number of players, simply have a group of three players line-up in a triangle and perform the drill.

- Make this drill into a contest and see how many times they can catch the ball without dropping it. The group with the highest number wins.
- Or you can have each group sit after they drop a ball. The last group standing, wins.
11. **Ball Against the Wall or Pitch-back**
   This is a simple drill a player can do on their own at home. Player throws ball at wall and catches it on its return. Player should vary the speed and height that the ball is thrown so that as a result the ball’s return will vary.
Fielding Drills

12. The Ready Position Shuffle
The “Ready Position” is a simple technique to teach young Softball players. The players simply face the direction of the activity (i.e. the coach, the batter, etc), legs slightly more than shoulder width apart, bend at the knees and have their glove and hand out, down and ready for action. Having their hands low and facing towards the action (Pinkies down) completes the “Ready Position”

For this drill, line your players in a straight line across the field. On the coach’s command, the players are to get into the ready position. The coach then points either left or right, in whichever direction the coach points, the players are to shuffle to that direction maintaining the proper ready stance and avoiding crossing their feet so they don’t fall.

When explaining how to field a ground ball, use the “alligator method”. Explain that “the alligator has a big mouth and we use our hands like an alligator. The glove hand is the bottom of the mouth and
the throwing hand is the top. When the Alligator closes his mouth he “eats the ball”. Start by slowly rolling the ball directly to the player and watch for proper fielding technique.

As the players get familiar with this drill, start rolling the ball to the left or the right of the player. Emphasize the proper footwork (shuffling to one side or the other) to get their body in front of the ball.

14. “Don’t Rush” Drill

When fielding ground balls, many young players rush to throw the ball to 1st base. By rushing, the player may either lift their gloves too soon, letting the ball get through their legs; or a player may begin to throw the ball before they have control of it resulting in dropping the ball.

To slow players down, mark a number “1”, “2”, or “3” on a few balls. Make the marks large enough to read. Roll or hit ground balls to the player and have them properly field the ball into their gloves. The player then should look at the ball and shout out the number marked on the ball, then have the player throw the ball to the proper base.
15. “1-2-3” Fielding Drill
Another way to have players concentrate and slow down is to make them shout out each step of fielding. As the ball is hit or thrown to the player, have the player shout:

- “1-Catch the ball!” and they field the groundball,
- “2-Grip the Ball!” as they properly grip the ball, and finally
- “3-Throw the Ball!” as they throw the ball.

By having the players put words to their actions you are slowing the player down and making them concentrate on the specific task at hand and reinforcing proper fundamentals.

16. Don’t Swarm Drill
One of the biggest problems you may face on the field is swarming. That is, once the ball is hit ALL your players will rush towards the ball and wrestle each other for it. To prevent swarming, set-up designated zones that each player is “allowed” in. Cones can be used to set-up these zones. If the ball enters a player’s zone he/she is allowed to field it. If the ball is not in their zone, they should cover their base or position awaiting a throw.

After practicing this drill a number of times you should see a dramatic decrease in swarming.

17. Covering Your Position Drill
This drill can be used as a supplement to the “Don’t Swarm Drill”. For young players a very difficult concept to grasp is covering their position once the ball is hit. In this drill, have your players in their proper positions on the field. The first few times you do this drill, walk with a ball to a certain area/position on the field. Ask the players to move to where their proper positions should be given where the ball (the one your holding) is.

It’s best to go over this drill a number of times, having the ball “hit” (you walking it over) to all the positions.
**Softball Drills & Sample Practice Plans**

**Example 1:**
Ball is “hit” to 2nd baseman.
1st baseman covers 1st base
2nd baseman fields ball
Shortstop covers 2nd base
3rd baseman covers 3rd base

**Example 2:**
Ball is “hit” to Shortstop
1st baseman covers 1st base
2nd baseman covers 2nd base
Shortstop fields ball
3rd baseman covers 3rd base

Once all the players understand where they should be, increase the difficulty by either slowly rolling the ball or hitting the ball to a fielder and then have the other players take their proper position.

As players get older, you can show them how to properly back-up another player fielding the ball. However, at this age it’s easier to have them cover a base.
18. **Throwing From a Kneeling Position**
   To eliminate the confusion of foot movement/placement, practice this drill. From a kneeling position, players practice throwing the ball to each other, the coach or at a target. This takes the foot movement confusion out of the picture and allows the player to focus on the proper arm movement mechanics of throwing.

19. **“Target Practice”**
   To develop throwing accuracy, have the players try to hit a target approximately 10–15 feet away. The target can be a cone. This can be done in pairs by having players line up 20–30 feet apart with the target in the middle. You can make this into a competition by awarding points. Award 2 points for hitting the target on a fly; 1 point for hitting the target on a bounce. Depending on the players’ ability have them either move closer or further from the target.
20.  **Hula-Hoop Throw**  
Besides a cone, you can use a hula-hoop for your target. Lay the hula-hoop in an area and award points for getting the ball to land in the hula-hoop. This is a good drill when practicing the proper fielding for outfielders. When a ball is hit into the outfield, it is good practice to have the outfielders throw the ball to 2\textsuperscript{nd} base. Setup the hula-hoop around second base and having the outfielders throw the ball to the target.
Hitting Drills

21. **Batting Stance Drill**
   It is important for a young player to learn the proper Batting Stance. The player should have his or her feet shoulder width apart, feet point straight, knees slightly bent, bat back and up.

   Without a bat, have your team line up in the proper batting stance. Walk around your team, inspecting their stance and correct any errors. Then have them swing in “Freeze” just before they feel they would be hitting an imaginary ball. Again, walk around your team, inspecting their swing and correct any errors.

22. **The Proper Swing Drill**
   An add-on to the Batting Stance Drill is to have your players continue from the proper stance to the proper swing. Have your players, from their stance, begin to swing and “Freeze” just before they feel they would be hitting an imaginary ball. Again, walk around your team, inspecting their swing and correct any errors.

   *Remember, when swinging the bat, a player’s arms should be extended and the swing should be level. Make sure that a player is not too close to the batting tee (This will cause the arms not be extended).*
23. **Hip Rotation Drill**  
With this drill, you want to explain to a player; that when hitting, the player should use their whole body and not only their arms. The twisting motion simulates the proper body movement when hitting. Have the players line up sideways with their hands on their hips. On the coach’s command, the players should rotate their bodies and end with their upper bodies facing you.

24. **Hitting the Top of the Batting Tee**  
This is a good beginner drill that helps develop proper hitting technique. In front of the Batting Tee, have your player get into a...
good batting stance. Then have them swing and make contact with the top of the Batting Tee. The player should have a level swing and proper swing technique.

25. **Hitting off the Tee**
The player should make contact with the ball with the “sweet” part of the bat (the middle of the bat).
- Have the player practice hitting the top of the batting tee with bat before you place the ball on the tee.
- Once you place the ball on the batting tee, have the player take a “slow motion” swing, stopping just short of hitting the ball. Take a look at the swing and bat contact point and, if needed, adjust the player’s stance.
- Have the player hit the ball.

26. **Keep Your Eye on the Ball**
When hitting, a player should always keep their eye on the ball. To help develop this skill, mark a number “1”, “2”, or “3” on a few balls. Make the marks large enough to read. When swinging the player should look at the ball and shout out the number marked on the ball.

27. **Hitting into the Backstop**
This is a very effective drill. When you break your team up into smaller groups, have one group work on their batting techniques by hitting balls into the backstop. Line-up the hitter approximately 5 feet from the backstop and have them hit off the Tee into the backstop. This eliminates the need to chase all over the field after balls.

In this drill it is important to have the other players whom are not hitting away from the action and in a safe area.

So you do not damage the backstop, you should use *Sock Balls* for this drill.
28. **Home Run Derby**

Towards the end of your season, you may want to start to get your team ready for hitting a pitched ball. This drill may seem a bit unconventional, but players love it! Pitching with a tennis ball, have the players go into their proper batting stance and bat with a tennis racquet. The distance a hit tennis ball travels will boost a player’s self-confidence.
Game Scenario Drills

It has been said that the best way to learn the game is by “playing it”. This may be true for older players, but for new Softball players they first need to learn the basics. These game scenario drills resemble small, manageable portions of a game.

29. **Home, 1<sup>st</sup> base, 2<sup>nd</sup> base Drill**

In this drill, break your team into 3 even groups:

- Group 1 lines up behind home plate and are the base runners
- Group 2 is in the field playing 1<sup>st</sup> base
- Group 3 is in the field playing 2<sup>nd</sup> base

One coach hits or throws ground balls to the 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman. As the ball is hit or thrown, the base runners (Group 1) run to/through 1<sup>st</sup> base. The 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman should properly field the ball and throw it to 1<sup>st</sup> base. After each player has gone a few times, rotate the groups. The goals for this drill are:

- To have the base runners run THROUGH 1<sup>st</sup> base
- To have the 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman properly field the ball and throw it to 1<sup>st</sup> base
- To have the 1<sup>st</sup> baseman catch the throw from 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Have coaches at home plate, 1<sup>st</sup> base and 2<sup>nd</sup> base to make sure that all groups are properly performing the drill.

30. **2<sup>nd</sup> base, Shortstop, 3<sup>rd</sup> base Drill**

This is a fielding drill where a ground ball will be hit/thrown to the Shortstop or 3<sup>rd</sup> baseman and that player must then throw the ball to the instructed base. In this drill, break your team into 3 even groups:

- Group 1 is in the field playing 2<sup>nd</sup> base
- Group 2 is in the field playing Shortstop
- Group 3 is in the filed playing 3<sup>rd</sup> base

Start this drill by having hit go to the Shortstop. Before the play begins, the coach instructs the Shortstop where the throw should go (2<sup>nd</sup> base or 3<sup>rd</sup> base) and why it’s going there. The coach then hits or
throws ground balls to the Shortstop. The Shortstop should properly field the ball and throw it where he/she was instructed.

Next, have the hit go to the 3rd baseman. Once again, before the play begins, the coach instructs the 3rd baseman where the throw should go (2nd base or step on 3rd base) and why it’s going there. The coach then hits or throws ground balls to 3rd baseman. The 3rd baseman should properly field the ball and throw it where he/she was instructed.

After each player has gone a few times, rotate the groups. The goals for this drill are:
- To have the Shortstop or 3rd baseman properly field the ball and throw it to the proper base
- To have the 2nd or 3rd baseman catch the throw.

31. **Infield Practice (Entire Infield)**
In this drill you should have all infield positions covered. Start by hitting the ball in a clockwise rotation (1st base, 2nd, Shortstop, 3rd). Before you hit the ball, tell the infield where the ball is going to be hit and where that player should be throwing the ball.

As your team gets familiar with this drill, stop telling them where the ball is going to be hit.

Remember to rotate players into all the positions.

32. **Intra-Squad Scrimmage**
Divide your team into 2 squads. Team 1 will bat first. Team 2 will be on the field. If you do not have enough players for all positions, just make sure you have players covering the infield positions. If you’re missing positions, ask parent(s) to volunteer to play those positions.

Utilize all the rules of a regular game. Depending on the number of players you have, have the players bat 2 times before they switch to play the field.
Practice Sample 1
This is an example of a 75-minute practice.

Pre-Practice Talk – 1-2 Minutes
• State today’s practice goals are:
  o Learning the Bases & Positions
  o Running to 1st base (Running THROUGH 1st Base)
  o Fielding Grounders Like an Alligator
  o Proper Throwing Techniques
• State what drills you will be doing, how they will work

Warm-up and Stretch – 5 Minutes
• 20 Jumping Jacks
• Stretches Legs
• Stretches Arms & Shoulders
• Jog around bases calling out each base as players touch the base (2 times)

FUNdamental Drills
Base Running Drill – 5 Minutes
• Running through 1st base – Team lines up at home plate, one at a time the players run to 1st base, running through 1st base, high-five coach located 3-4 feet past base. *(Emphasis should be running at full speed through the base)*

Station Drills – Divide team into 2-3 groups (rotate groups after 10 minutes)
• Station 1 – Alligator Fielding Drill – 10 Minutes
• Station 2 – Knelling Throw Drill – 10 Minutes
• Station 3 – Pop Fly Catching Drill – 10 minutes

Game Situation Drill/Scrimmage - 20 minutes
• Scrimmage other team using “game type conditions”; i.e. game rules, player batting order and field position rotation, etc.

or

• Home, 1st Base, 2nd Base Drill
Practice Sample 2
This is an example of a 75-minute practice. Add or delete drills as you see fit.

Pre-Practice Talk – 1-2 Minutes
- State today’s practice goals are:
  - Proper Throwing Technique & Throwing Accuracy
  - Basic Hitting Fundamentals
- State what drills you will be doing, how they will work

Warm-up and Stretch – 5 Minutes
- 20 Jumping Jacks
- Stretches - Legs
- Stretches - Arms & Shoulders
- Team Relay Race Drill

FUNdamental Drills
- Partner Catch Drill – 5 Minutes
- Hip Rotation Drill – 5 Minutes

Station Drills – Divide team into 2-3 groups (rotate groups after 10 minutes)
- Station 1 – Target Throw Drill – 10 Minutes
- Station 2 – Batting Stance Drill – 10 Minutes
- Station 3 – Hitting into the Backstop Drill – 10 minutes

Game Situation Drill/Scrimmage - 20 minutes
- Scrimmage other team using “game type conditions”; i.e. game rules, player batting order and field position rotation, etc.

or

- 2nd Base, Shortstop, 3rd Base Drill
Practice Sample 3
This is an example of a 75-minute practice. Add or delete drills as see fit.

Pre-Practice Talk – 1-2 Minutes
- State today’s practice goals are:
  - Review where the positions on the field are
  - Proper Fielding Technique
  - Try not to SWARM on the field
  - Basic Hitting Fundamentals
- State what drills you will be doing, how they will work

Warm-up and Stretch – 5 Minutes
- 20 Jumping Jacks
- Stretches Legs
- Stretches Arms & Shoulders
- Jog around bases calling out each base as players touch the base (2 times)
- Home to 2nd base Run
- “Where is ….” Drill

FUNdamental Drills
- Don’t Swarm Drill – 5 Minutes

Station Drills – Divide team into 2-3 groups (rotate groups after 10 minutes)
- Station 1 – “1-2-3” Fielding Drill – 10 Minutes
- Station 2 – Catching Pop Flies Drill – 10 Minutes
- Station 3 – Keep Your Eye on the Ball Drill – 10 minutes

Game Situation Drill/Scrimmage - 30 minutes
- Scrimmage other team using “game type conditions”; i.e. game rules, player batting order and field position rotation, etc.
  
  or

- Covering Your Position Drill
- Infield Practice (entire infield)
Practice Sample 4
This is an example of a 75-minute practice. Add or delete drills as you see fit.

Pre-Practice Talk – 1-2 Minutes
- State today’s practice goals are:
  - Proper Fielding Technique – Remember, Do Not Rush
  - Proper Throwing Techniques
  - Basic Hitting Fundamentals
- State what drills you will be doing, how they will work

Warm-up and Stretch – 5 Minutes
- 30 Jumping Jacks
- 10 Push-ups
- Stretches Legs
- Stretches Arms & Shoulders
- Ready Position Shuffle Drill

Station Drills – Divide team into 2-3 groups (rotate groups after 10 minutes)
- Station 1 – “Don’t Rush” Fielding Drill – 10 Minutes
- Station 2 – Knelling Throw Drill – 10 Minutes
- Station 3 – Hitting into the Backstop Drill – 10 minutes

Game Situation Drill/Scrimmage - 30 minutes
- Scrimmage other team using “game type conditions”; i.e. game rules, player batting order and field position rotation, etc.

  Or

- Intra-Squad Scrimmage
Practice Sample 5
This is an example of a 75-minute practice. Add or delete drills as see fit.

Pre-Practice Talk – 1-2 Minutes
- State today’s practice goals are:
  - Learning the Bases & Positions
  - Running to 1st base (Running THROUGH 1st Base)
  - Fielding Grounders Like an Alligator
  - Proper Throwing Techniques
  - Basic Hitting Fundamentals
- What drills you will be doing, how they will work

Warm-up and Stretch – 5 Minutes
- 20 Jumping Jacks
- Stretches Legs
- Stretches Arms & Shoulders
- Jog around bases calling out each base as players touch the base (2 times)

FUNdamental Drills
Base Running Drill – 5 Minutes
- Running through 1st base – Team lines up at home plate, one at a time the players run to 1st base, running through 1st base, high-five coach located 3-4 feet past base. (Emphasis should be running at full speed through the base)

Station Drills – Divide team into 2-3 groups (rotate groups after 10 minutes)
- Station 1 – Alligator Fielding Drill – 10 Minutes
- Station 2 – Knelling Throw Drill – 10 Minutes
- Station 3 – Pop Fly Catching Drill – 10 minutes

Game Situation Drill/Scrimmage - 30 minutes
Scrimmage other team using “game type conditions”; i.e. game rules, player batting order and field position rotation, etc.

or
Softball Drills & Sample Practice Plans

Break team into 2 groups, play game by having players field only infield positions. Use game type conditions”; i.e. game rules, player batting order and field position rotation, etc.
## Practice Template Form

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General Comments:
Softball Drills & Sample Practice Plans

Making a “Sock Ball”
You will find that the sock ball will come in handy for many drills. It will also be a favorite of young inexperienced players, because the sock ball is much softer than a softball. The sock ball is very easy to make.

- Start with a pair of socks.
- Roll the socks up into a ball. Make sure the ball isn’t too big; however, it does not have to be the same size as a softball.
- Once you’ve rolled the socks, take duct or masking tape and start to wrap the socks. Do not use too much tape, only enough to cover the socks (if you add too many layers of tape, the ball will be too hard).

At the start of the season, you should have at least 6 sock balls ready for practice. You can use the sock ball for catching drill, pop fly drills, as well as hitting drills.

The Sock Ball
Look for our other informative Coaching Books at

|-----------------------|---------------------------|

www.CoachYouthSports.com