



www.SHBGFS.org

**COACHES HANDBOOK
SPRING revised- 2018**



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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

First of all **THANK YOU** for the gift of your time, talent, and energy to coach a team here at South Huntington Beach Girls Fast Pitch Softball!

SHBGFS is a recreational and instructional sports league designed to teach interested players the game of fastpitch softball. Although the league is certainly meant to be competitive its most important function is to teach players the proper fundamental skills, a proficient understanding of the game and to enable them to excel at each player's own pace as they move through the age levels.

Two of the most important steps in the teaching process is knowledgeable and positive coaching of our players. Girl's fastpitch softball requires a minimum of 3 skills to be successful. **Throwing, catching and hitting**, are primary skills that are essential and can be broken down further to an outfield or infield throw, catching a pop fly or grounder along with hitting and bunting of the softball.

Pitching in fastpitch softball is an integral part of the game. Learning this skill is challenging and requires patience and practice to be successful.

Correct teaching of fundamentals and positive encouragement are keys to an enjoyable player experience that will ultimately create great softball talent, a love of the game and have the player return for more softball fun.

The quality of the player experience and successes of the season are primarily in your hands. Coaching can be fun, yet it is a big responsibility. You have made the commitment to coach and we want you to know that as a league we are making the commitment to bring you more resources and support to help make your experience as a coach positive and rewarding. Accepting this role as a coach means you are accepting a role as a leader, and will take advantage of any and all opportunities to educate yourself in the proper fundamentals of the game and in turn teach these fundamentals to your players.

Please remember you are representing our league and our philosophy of teaching young girls the game of softball in a safe and fun environment. Give our players the opportunity to learn and play the game to keep them coming back year after year!

WHAT DETERMINES A SUCCESSFUL SEASON?

I am sure that most competitive coaches would think that coming in First Place in your age division would determine a great season; others may think that winning the season ending tournament is the pinnacle of success. These certainly are outstanding accomplishments but these alone don't necessarily mean you had a successful season. Although our league promotes competitiveness among the teams and the players, the following items determine success in order of importance:

- 1. All of your team had a great experience this season and over 80% of your players sign up to play again next season.**
- 2. All of your less experienced players that started with your team are rated higher in catching, throwing and hitting at next season's evaluations.**
- 3. Towards the end of this season one of your beginners who had no clue how to catch, throw or hit, lays down the perfect bunt or makes a great catch or throw during a game.**

"You win not only because you win games but because you build character in the players you coach." –Phil Jackson, NBA Coach

TEAM MEETING & SETTING PARENTS EXPECTATIONS

A well-organized team meeting to start the season is the single most important step many coaches ignore. A good team meeting not only gives you a chance to establish a positive precedent for the season but will also give you an opportunity to explain to the parents:

- 1) **The leagues coaching philosophy – Winning vs. Development**
- 2) **Why teaching the fundamentals of the game is important**
- 3) **Establishing the importance of practices and the parent/player responsibility of being punctual.**
- 4) **Explain the additional time needed if your daughter wants to pitch**
- 5) **Who is going to help out with practices?**
- 6) **What is proper softball gear and how to determine glove and bat size**
- 7) **Establish a team parent and other key volunteer roles (everybody participates)**

WHERE TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL TEAM MEETING

The team meeting should be at someone's house or maybe a community clubhouse. In order for the girls to have a chance to bond and become a team, they should be in a non-softball environment where they can have fun. While the parents are meeting, going over the technical details, the girls should be off on their own having fun, getting to know each other and determining a TEAM NAME. Have the meeting in the form of a party and make sure that **both** parents are invited. Even if you get other siblings it is worth it!

DO NOT put together a team meeting at the end of a practice session. This does not work for many reasons, the least of which is that it always seems to be cold and if you get most of the parents to attend, they will not have the patience to stay very long. You will never get both parents. IT IS A WASTE OF TIME and you will spend the entire season chasing parents for help and ALWAYS wondering why half of your players are either late or no-shows at practice. You will also wonder why you NEVER have any coaching help at practice.

This page shows an example of a team letter that should be handed out at your team meeting. This should be reviewed with all the parents. It gets everything out in the open so that there is no question as to what your plans and expectations are for the season.

TEAM LETTER EXAMPLE-PAGE ONE

INTRODUCTORY TEAM INFORMATION SHBGFS

Head Coach: Tommy Lasorda
Cell Phone xxx xxx-xxxx
Email: supercoach@yahoo.com

Assistant Coach: Sparky Anderson
Cell Phone xxx xxx-xxxx

Team Mom: Susan B Hefley
Cell Phone: xxx xxx-xxxx
Email: lovebug4@gmail.com

Our primary form of communication for the team will be email.

OUR TEAM

Serena Staple	Savanna Smith	Tatum Barber	Emily Spokes
Sydnee Jamison	Talia Copeland	Madison Copley	Kristin Adams
Maya Marhoul	Grace Texiera	Gabrielle Anderson	Grace Smith

***** WE ALWAYS NEED PARENTS TO HELP AT PRACTICE *****

Practice: - We plan to practice 2x / week > Tuesdays 4:00 – 5:00 / Thursdays 4:00 – 5:00
Practice starts promptly at XX. Plan to arrive 10 minutes before practice begins.
Parents please arrive 10 minutes before practice is scheduled to end. If you will miss a practice, try to let me know 24 hours in advance.

As Daylight savings time approaches we may move practices back to start later.
Games schedules will be posted on the League Website in addition to other valuable information. www.shbgfs.org.

GEAR NEEDED:

Gloves (10.75” – 11.75”) Leather - NOT Plastic

Bat (See below for information)

Helmet (NOCSAE approved- stamp) w/ Face Mask (mandatory) and Chin Strap (optional)

Cleats – Softball cleats are preferred, however Soccer cleats can be used

Sliding under shorts are recommended.

If you buy a bat for your child here is some basic info: To determine proper weight and length. Stand the bat next to your daughters outside leg. The bat should come to the “bend” in her wrist. Proper bat weight is determined with the player by holding a bat with their dominant hand, palm down, extending the arm in front of the body, straight out and parallel to the ground, hold steady for 10 seconds. If this can be done with ease and no shaking or drooping of the bat or arm, the weight is appropriate for the player.

TEAM LETTER EXAMPLE-PAGE TWO

COACHES EXPECTATIONS OF PARENTS

- I expect that all the parents will get involved helping in some way with **THE TEAM**
- I expect that all the parents will respect one another, all our players, umpires, and opposing teams and coaches
- I expect that all the parents will put our daughters needs ahead of ours, even when things get stressful in life
- I expect that all the parents will remember we are all human, we are not perfect, and we will make mistakes throughout the season!
- I expect that all the parents will make every effort to have their daughters to practices and games on time

COACHES EXPECTATIONS OF PLAYERS

- Remind your parents, you must be ON TIME to all practices and games.
- Call me 24 hours in advance if know you will miss or be late to a practice or a game.
- The 3 E's.....**ENERGY, ENTHUSIASM, EFFORT**
- **SMILE...HAVE FUN....IT'S THE GAME OF SOFTBALL**

OTHER IMPORTANT DETAILS

- Be sure and have ALL your parents fill out the emergency forms and give back to you. You should have these at all practices and games.
- Please arrive early and don't be late for pick up, if someone else is picking up your daughter other than you the parent, please let us know!
- Come ALL the way to the field when picking your daughter up; do not wait by the street or in your car.
- Gather email addresses and phone numbers. Make sure I have your CELL phone in case of emergency.
- Please help clean up, put away, AND GET INVOLVED / IT IS **OUR** TEAM!
- League Website for Key Information www.shbgfs.org

GETTING STARTED

A typical practice session for most age groups should run about an hour and a half. It is not unreasonable for the older girls to go closer to 2 hours and for 6u to run for an hour. The bottom line is that if a practice is thought-out and organized it will go quickly and not seem 'never ending' and boring for the girls. As far as number of practices per week, use the following as a guideline:

1. **6 and Under** – 1 practice, unless team consensus is 2.
2. **8 and Under** – 2 practices recommended.
3. **10, 12 and 14 Under** – 2 practices are **HIGHLY** recommended. Starting with 10's this level is where competition picks up; girls get bigger and hit the ball harder. Two practices are necessary to improve skills and allow the girls to keep up with other girls that not only practice twice per week but also play catch at home regularly and in many cases take private lessons.

There are a few tell-tale signs of a practice that is poorly run or in need of extra helpers:

1. Only one coach running the practice session.
2. Girls standing around waiting for something to do.
3. Girls are out of control or goofing off and not paying attention to the coaches.

Coaches must have a plan prior to starting a practice. WE CANNOT STRESS THIS ENOUGH! Coaches must have a plan prior to starting a practice!

That plan can be as detailed as this manual with a minute by minute account of what you will do throughout the practice. It can also be something you have planned in advance and put on paper. Don't get there and look like you are unorganized. The girls will see this and NOT take the practice seriously. When in doubt work on the fundamental drills to teach and reinforce the mechanics of throwing, catching, and hitting!

COACHES EQUIPMENT – Tools for Success

Here's a list of some of the things you will want to have before you get started with your first practice and games:

- Equipment bag from the League containing:
 - Catcher's gear
 - Practice balls AND Game Balls
 - Ball Buckets and Hitting Tee (if available)
 - Whiffle Balls
 - Throw down bases
 - First aid kit – with several first aid cold-packs
 - Key to the equipment shed
 - Athlete contact info, medical conditions, backup contact info
 - Line up cards

- Your own "Coach's Gear Bag" containing:
 - Copy of your PRACTICE PLAN!
 - An extra Glove for you or another coach
 - Bucket(s) for balls
 - Hitting net - Bow Net or similar
 - Tennis balls or soft safety type balls
 - Clipboard or notepad
 - Small plastic disc cones
 - Watch & Cell Phone
 - Line up board for dugout

MANAGEMENT 101

The most important ingredients to successful youth coaching are preparation and structure. As a volunteer coach your time is a valuable commodity just as is the time of the other sets of parents and athletes on your team. Taking the time to lay out the day's itinerary (including drills and associated times) can help to maximize limited field time and make for efficient, effective, and most importantly fun time with the team.

PLANNING PRACTICE

TIME BLOCKS

- Break practice drills down into time blocks of 15 minutes for 6u-8u, 10 minutes for 10u-12u. No more than 15 minutes per drill or you will lose the player's attention.
- Assign time blocks into instructional and fundamental categories

DYNAMIC WARM UPS

- Dynamic warm-ups provide the best pre-event athletic conditioning. Static stretching is no longer recommended.
- This **MUST BE DONE** to begin each practice.
- Complete before throwing and catching.
- Dynamic warm-ups are important and become essential as the athlete gets older.

THROWING & CATCHING FUNDAMENTALS

- This should be started only after the Dynamic warm-ups
- It can be done as a team and is described later in the handbook

STATION WORK

- Multiple work areas
- Minimize the number of girls in each group and maximize instruction
- Ask parents to help and give them a "lesson" for the station they will work.

FUN TEAM ACTIVITY OR GAME

- Use the last 1/3 of your practice to introduce new concepts and specific skills
- Be sure to include some fun game for the girls to compete and interact as a team each session
- With a little planning a practice can be run smoothly and the girls can learn **AND** have fun while doing it.

IT'S RAINING SHOULD WE CANCEL PRACTICE?

The answer to this question is obviously up to the coaching staff. During the spring there will be rainy days. Assuming that rain doesn't happen each week it actually can give reason to have a Garage or Pizza Parlor practice session. This session can be as productive and in some cases **MORE** productive than a field practice. Assuming a coach or parent has a 2 or 3 car garage here is what can be done during a Garage or Pizza Parlor Practice:

1. **White Board, chalk talk.** This gives a great chance to sit everyone around the chalkboard, draw a diamond and begin to ask the girls questions about the game of softball. Remember many girls don't know things about the game or why things are done the way they are. Something like where does the 2nd baseman play? What is a force out and why is an out a force out? What does it mean to "tag up" on a fly ball? What happens when there are 2 outs and you are on 1st base and there is a fly ball. What happens when you are on first and there is a ground ball hit? The list of things to discuss goes on and on. A good half hour can be spent reviewing things then quiz the girls and maybe give 'prizes' for those who answer the hardest or most questions.
2. **Signs** – Great time to introduce and discuss the use of signs in the game. Game strategy and the approach to hitting are also great topics.
3. **Work on Throwing Mechanics.** You would need a 'jugs' type net but with one you can work on fundamentals of throwing in the garage.
4. **Work on Batting Mechanics.** With the same net you can work on soft toss hitting and hitting off a 'T'.

There may be other things that can be productively done in a garage but just those will make the session **MORE** than worthwhile. Just like a regular practice make the practice fun. Set up stations that the girls rotate to and make one a video game that they get to play for 5 minutes!

FIRST PRACTICE OF THE SEASON

The first practice should be a fun time where everyone tries to get to know each other.

Prior to warm-ups have them get in a circle and introduce themselves. Things like

1. Name
2. School
3. How long they have played softball or pet's name.
4. Position they like to play or favorite food.
5. Why they like softball or favorite athlete, song or TV show.

These and other simple questions always work. The coaches should introduce themselves and briefly describe the team goals for the season. Learn your player's names early and use them regularly every time you see them.

You should spend the balance of the time evaluating the skill level of the girls. You should have a sheet of paper or form for each girl that you can note things like,

1. Arm strength,
2. Catching ability,
3. Whether they are afraid of the ball,
4. Good hand eye coordination, and
5. How they swing a bat.

Also you may want to time the girls running to 1st base (hit single) and then all the way around the bases. (hit homerun). You should evaluate their equipment. Take notes of any deficiencies and be sure to relay them to the parents. It is especially important to determine whether the glove is useable. If the glove cannot trap the ball properly the player will have a miserable time even though she may be doing everything correctly. Many girls show up with gloves that are too large, maybe Dad's old glove or too small or too stiff. Try to educate them on why they need a properly sized, broken-in glove. One they can manipulate and control.

During the season all of your practices should focus at least half the time on fundamental drills of throwing and catching and hitting. The following pages will go over some basics of throwing and catching along with an outline of a good practice session. The balance of the practices can be mixed and matched with other drills depending on how long they take. If possible always leave room for a fun or competitive drill. An exciting way to end practice is with Arizona or the 5 Minute Drill!!

MANDATORY PRACTICE

FUNDAMENTALS

FUNDAMENTALS OF A PROPER THROW

It is crucial that during the throwing drills described below, that you explain and show the girls, especially first timers, that a ball is NOT thrown with just the hand and arm. A PROPER throw is a combination of basically your entire body. Here a few pointers to remember:

1. **GRIP.** Locate the “horseshoe seam pattern” The OPEN side of the “horseshoe” should face to the right or left. The ball should be gripped with the middle THREE fingers along the TOP of the horseshoe seam, the fingers should lay across the seams where the knuckle closest to the fingertips are. Place the thumb under the ball on a seam, opposite the pointer finger. The ball is NOT in the palm. A firm grip is essential, NOT a tight grip.
2. **FEET and SHOULDER.** Hips and back foot should be “sideways” (90°) to target, front foot should be at 45° angle to target. Toes should NOT be POINTING at the target. The NON-Throwing shoulder and glove should be aiming at the target.
3. **THROWING HAND** travels first in a downward and back motion so that the thumb passes by the thigh, keeping the hand on top of the ball, the hand then travels upward reaching a position above the shoulder where the palm and ball is facing away from the target (elbow high, fingers to the sky, reach behind). The back foot begins to pivot and turn the body sideways.
4. **THROWING ARM** is long and loose (elbow NOT locked); the elbow should be at the same height or slightly higher than the shoulder (arm looks like the letter “L”) and the hand is higher than the head.
5. In **STARTING THE THROW**, transfer the weight from the back to the front utilizing a step toward the target, the elbow leads the arm and hand, past the ear into the release position. The palm has begun to turn forward keeping the elbow up in vertical line from the elbow to the wrist.
6. **ARM CIRCLE** path is on the “power line” (straight to the target). The throwing arm should not fall behind the head or body. No sidearm throws!
7. **BALL RELEASE**, is past the ear and slightly higher than the head, the wrist is snapped forward, the fingers pull down with force across the seams of the ball. The transfer and throw should be against a firm front leg. It is IMPORTANT that the elbow stay even with the shoulder during the throw. The follow through of the throwing arm finishes toward the glove-side (opposite) knee.
8. **COACHING TIP-** use the phrase “Thumb by the thigh, reach behind, elbow high, fingers to the sky, wave bye-bye, release the back side, let it fly, touch the thigh”
9. The **COBRA THROWING DRILL** (page 14) will reinforce the fact that the ball is SPUN off the fingers with a downward motion, NOT PUSHED as most first timers try to do.

PRACTICE SAMPLE-DAY ONE (1-1/2 hours)

AGE GROUP	TIME	DRILL NAME	DRILL DESCRIPTION
All Ages Every Practice	10 minutes	<u>DYNAMIC</u> <u>WARM UP</u>	Organize team into two groups and have them line up. One group at a time... forward steps toe touches, arm circles, lateral steps, etc. 20-30 yards.
			Continue with slow walking lunge, and then back alternating stretching by pulling knee up to chest. Next Frankenstein kicks, butt kickers, etc.
			Next...High explosive skips, cariocas, etc. and wind sprints utilizing rocker step replicating leadoff and steal technique. <u>Google search on the internet “Dynamic Warm ups” for more details and drills. Too many drills and options to list here. Choose enough drills to fill 10-12 minutes.</u>
All Ages Every Practice	10 minutes	COBRA THROWING KNEE	<p>Older girls (or more skilled players) should be paired up with a ball each. Younger or less skilled players should take 3-5 balls each.</p> <p>Girls line up on 1st and 3rd Base lines facing the dugouts. Girls kneel on the THROWING SIDE knee, bring the glove arm/hand across the chest, bring the throwing arm up, bend elbow with fingers pointing up and palm facing forward, rest the THROWING SIDE elbow on top of the opposite hand glove. THROWING SIDE elbow must be level with the shoulder. Ball is placed in hand properly with fingertips on seams. (See GRIP page 13 in this handbook).</p> <p>Using a ‘wrist flip’ motion, ball is SPUN off the fingertips to a net or to another teammate. Coaches should monitor and have the players throw one at a time down the line to make sure it is done properly. (continued)</p>

		COBRA KNEE (continued)	Once they get better, then synchronize the throws calling out “ready...go”. Gather balls and repeat drill 3-5 times with depending on how many balls each girl has. (min. 12-15 reps)
All Ages Every Practice	5-10 minutes	KNEELING FREEZE DRILL	<p>Players gather balls (or pair up), THROWING SIDE KNEE down, put on glove.</p> <p>Glove points to target, throwing arm moves backward, the elbow should be at the same height or slightly higher than the shoulder (arm looks like the letter “L”) and the hand is higher than the head. Ball facing rearward. (fingers to the sky). On coaches instruction, toss to fence. Repeat so that each girl gets 12-15 Reps.</p>
ALL	5-10 minutes	STANDING COBRA DRILL	<p>Players gather balls (or pair up), STANDING with both toes pointing at target, shoulder width apart.</p> <p>They do Cobra Drill with throwing elbow in pocket of glove or on top of glove. After a few throws they then do wrist snap at teammate’s glove with arm moving forward from elbow to hand with feet in same position. Repeat so that each girl gets 12-15 Reps.</p>
All Ages Every Practice	10 minutes	STANDING FREEZE DRILL	<p>Players gather balls (or pair up). Stand sideways with non-throwing shoulder towards target (fence or other girl if older age group). Feet, shoulder width apart.</p> <p>Arm is up at 90 degrees, ball facing back (reach back, fingers to the sky, wave bye-bye). The back of the hand should be seen and the head and glove are pointed at the target. (This is “FREEZE” Position).</p> <p>On coaches instruction ball is thrown straight to the target keeping elbow level with the shoulder. “Thumb by the thigh, reach behind, elbow high, fingers to the sky, wave bye-bye, release the back side, let it fly, touch the thigh”. If another girl is target have her extend glove and hand out to make a big open glove target, chest high.</p> <p>(continued)</p>

		STANDING FREEZE DRILL (continued)	Once ball is thrown have the receiver step towards the thrown ball with glove up and open working on aggressive receiving skills. REPEAT
All Ages Every Practice	3-5 minutes	WATER BREAK	Make sure when a water break is called the girls sprint to the dugout where bat bags etc are NEATLY organized. All girls MUST bring their own water.
All Ages Every Practice	10 minutes	CATCH/ THROW DRILL	<p>Break up into 3 groups of 4. Each group has a coach and a bucket of balls.</p> <p>Depending on skill level girls are 20-30 feet away in a line facing the coach. Girls are shown proper positioning to CATCH a ball, face the thrower, position and open glove out front, throwing hand up and behind glove, elbows and knees are slightly bent with glove foot slightly forward. Teach the “fingers up, fingers down” depending on where the ball is headed.</p> <p>In the early stages is a good idea to have them take their gloves off to learn to catch with both hands. Tennis balls and whiffle balls are great tools for the younger girls.</p> <p>The coach tosses ball and the player steps towards the ball aggressively. It is caught and then player positions feet for return throw (like Freeze Drill position) and throw ball back to coach. <i>“Thumb by the thigh, reach behind, elbow high, fingers to the sky, wave bye-bye, release the back side, let it fly, touch the thigh”</i> DO NOT have players chasing balls during this drill.</p>

ALL	10-15 minutes	GROUND BALL DRILL	<p>Break up into 3 groups of 4. Each group has a coach and a bucket of balls. Depending on skill level girls are 20-30 feet away in a line facing the coach.</p> <p>Players are shown proper positioning to catch a ground ball, with knees bent and on the “balls” of the feet (heels up slightly), glove is low and close to the ground with pocket fully opened. Glove foot slightly forward. (Youngers)-Throwing hand is next to and behind glove. (Advanced)-Throwing hand is further away from the glove, usually above and/or to the side.</p> <p>Coach rolls a grounder and the player moves forward towards the ball, keeping the knees bent and the back at an approximate 45° angle. Be sure the player brings her chin down as the ball approaches and sees the ball into the glove. Player positions feet for return throw (see Freeze Drill position) and throw ball back to coach.</p> <p><i>Intermediate to advance level- upon catching the ball the player takes an outward angled (approx. 45°) step toward the target with the throwing side foot, this step is to the glove side foot position. (right foot replaces left foot for right handers). This creates a “mini crow hop” for the feet to get into the proper throwing position.</i></p>

<p>All Ages Every Practice <i><u>(These drills should be modified when used with 6u or inexperienced level players.)</u></i></p>	<p>10 minutes</p>	<p>INFIELD DRILLS</p>	<p>INFIELD CROSS- Break up into 2 groups. Each group assumes the SS and 2B position. 2 coaches.</p> <p>One coach at each foul line opposite each group, hit ground balls, players throw back to coaches. Player sprints to the back of the other line. Repeat for 10 minutes.</p> <p>---or---</p> <p>INFIELD SITUATIONALS- Position players at each infield position. Coach at home plate hits grounders, pop flies and bunts. Coach or catcher calls the outs, position of runners and where the play is. Simulate game situations. Options to add outfielders and live runners. 10-15 minutes.</p> <p>DO NOT have players chasing balls during this drill.</p>
	<p>3-5 minutes</p>	<p>WATER BREAK</p>	<p>Make sure when a water break is called the girls sprint to the dugout where bat bags etc are NEATLY organized. Make sure the girls bring water.</p>
<p>All Ages Every Practice <i><u>(These drills should be modified when used with 6u or inexperienced level players.)</u></i></p>	<p>10 minutes</p>	<p>FLY BALL/ OUTFIELD DRILL</p>	<p>Break up into 3 groups of 4. Each group has a coach and a bucket of balls. Depending on skill level girls are 20-30 feet away in a line facing the coach.</p> <p>Players are shown proper positioning to CATCH a ball, with glove and front pocket upright fully opened, throwing hand up and behind glove, elbows and knees are flexed and slightly bent.</p> <p>Coach tosses a pop fly to player. Girls are shown how to get under the ball and position glove to catch ball in front of throwing shoulder with palm up. Make sure glove is upright (fingers to the sky) as less skilled girls try to catch the ball with palm up (basket catch, fingers to the thrower) which is very dangerous.</p> <p>For younger age groups using tennis balls or whiffle balls is a good idea. (continued)</p>

		FLY BALL/ OUTFIELD DRILL (continued)	DO NOT have them chasing balls during this drill. Progress to more advanced outfield drills, hitting balls deep and to gaps, working on back ups, angles to the ball, crow hop throws, blocking and ground ball running scoops.
	If you have time...		See ADDITIONAL DRILLS in this booklet for “end of practice” ideas.
8U and older	EXTRA 30 minutes	PITCHERS AND CATCHERS	NOTE: Pitching and catching practice should be done 30 minutes prior or after the regular scheduled practice time.

Assuming you are running a 1-1/2 hour practice twice a week, at this point you have completed most of the “day one” practice session. This practice session has focused primarily on fundamental catching and throwing and defensive skills. The defensive practice sample is a guide for maximizing instruction of fundamentals. As your team progresses through the season, these drills and times can be adapted and adjusted to best fit the specific needs of your team and field space availability.

ALWAYS TRY TO HAVE MULTIPLE COACHES RUNNING DRILLS

SIMULTANEOUSLY...example outfielders with coach #1, infielders with coach #2 and coach #3, this will save on time and you can get more drills accomplished.

You always want to run drills in a progressive method, starting with the basics and moving to the advanced drills.

Your next practice should focus primarily on hitting and base running fundamentals. Hitting is important and actually more fun to most players. But without the ability to properly catch and throw your team will not be very successful.

HITTING FUNDAMENTALS

FUNDAMENTALS OF A PROPER SWING

Any time batting is taking place, helmets MUST be worn.

It is a good idea, prior to breaking into small groups for batting drills, to have the players get their helmets and bats and form a large circle with plenty of room between the girls so that they cannot hit each other with a practice swing. A coach should get in the middle of the circle. Work for a few minutes on proper stance and swing with the girls going one at a time each then as a group. Coaches should be watching and teaching.

HITTING FUNDAMENTALS-Progression Phases

1. **PRE-LOAD PHASE- STANCE-** Feet are a bit wider than shoulder width (but not too far apart). Player is standing tall, no bottoms sticking out or crunched up look. They should be balanced and comfortably standing with knees slightly bent. Eyes and head level to the pitcher.
2. **PRE-LOAD PHASE- GRIP-** hold bat with the fingers, not the palm, relaxed but firm, no “death grips”. Lining up the “Door-knocking” knuckles are NOT the desired grip, lining up the “door-knocking knuckles” and “big knuckles” are the preferred grip. This keeps the elbows from being in a downward position and helps prevent early rolling of the wrists.
3. **PRE-LOAD PHASE- HANDS -** Hands are relaxed with bat held in front of right side of chest with bat resting on or close to top of shoulder. Arms and elbows are down and relaxed. Body remains balanced. The PRE-LOAD POSITION is initiated in the batter’s box and well before the pitcher’s windup.
4. **LOAD PHASE- POSITION-** Upon the pitcher getting the signs or her wind-up, lift the bat off the shoulder, knees are slightly bent, hands rotate to proper grip, (not “door knocking knuckles”). Hands move backward and slightly higher from the PRE-LOAD position to the top and back of the shoulder. The back elbow is slightly elevated and is no higher than the shoulder. The chin should be tucked
(continued)

close to the front shoulder. The front foot stride should happen at the same time as “hands back movement”. The STRIDE STEP is straight towards the pitcher and should be a soft and short toe-touch first, not a flat-footed step, 2-6 inches maximum and then heel plant. (toes first, then heel).

It is important that young players get their front foot DOWN before the swing phase. Knob of the bat should be pointing to the catcher position. (Intermediate to advanced- Front knee has slight backward (negative loading) rotation or pivot movement away from pitcher, then pivots forward on hip rotation)

5. **SWING PHASE-** Body is balanced, eyes and head level to the pitcher. Partial unloading of bottom half of body begins with initial FORWARD ROTATION OF HIPS toward the pitcher. Shoulders do not rotate and remain square to the plate and hands stay back and do not rotate with the hips until swing is initiated. Hands then stay inside the ball path, bat head lags behind hands. Back elbow falls into slot close to the body. Correct timing in this phase is critical for maximum results.

6. **SWING PHASE- CONTACT-** *Make contact with the middle pitch at the front of the plate (normal swing), contact with the inside pitch before the plate (early swing), contact with the outside pitch over the plate (late swing).* On contact, lead (bottom) hand guides the bat and (top) backhand provides the power through the ball. Head down, hit the center of the ball. Hands are flat, PALM UP-PALM DOWN and above the bat head. Do not swing or chop down on the ball. Wrists are straight and firm and not rolling at or prior to contact. Keep weight balanced, hands inside the ball and close to the body.

Use hip, body rotation at contact with a firm front side (minimal front leg/knee bend). Use the whole body to hit the ball. Bat extends through the ball with bat head pointing at the pitcher. Back leg should be rotated in a backward “L” position with the knee facing the pitcher and the back foot pivoting up on the toe.

(continued)

DO NOT USE THE TERM “SQUISH THE BUG”! Instead, the **BACK FOOT COMES UP ON THE TOE on CONTACT, NO SQUISHING THERE.** Eyes should be level and head should be vertical over the back knee at contact.

7. **SWING PHASE-FINISH-** Keep head down after swing, **BAT EXTENSION** occurs after contact. (Bat head pointed at pitcher). Rolling of the wrists occurs **ONLY** after extension, not before. Finish the swing around the shoulder level or higher. Do not over rotate back foot, stay balanced.
8. **FINAL NOTE-** We recognize there are a lot of opinions and theories with regards to hitting, some bad, some good, linear vs. rotational styles, baseball vs. softball, etc. We strive to give you the best of our knowledge, to help your players become better, based on top-level coaching information.

BATTING CAGES

The league will give teams access to the batting cages. The cages can be a great learning tool. **BUT, THEY ARE NOT THE ‘FIX ALL’ TO HITTING PROBLEMS, ESPECIALLY FOR NEW PLAYERS.** Take the time to develop a young hitters swing before turning a pitching machine on hurling balls towards a young player.

A good rule of thumb is teaching them to swing at a stationary target and then slowly introduce a moving ball from close up to further away. You must, as a coach spend more of your batting instruction time using the **BATTING TEE** and soft toss in order to stress the proper fundamentals.

Once the fundamentals are reasonably good then a session at the batting cages will be helpful and fun.

COACHES NOTE: If you can become a competent pitcher as a coach, you can use a protective net and pitch live **UNDERHAND** to your players with real softballs. Many coaches use this technique as it is more realistic, the girls tend to prefer this method, and you don't have to depend on unreliable pitching machines or worry about signing up for the cages. Pitch from closer distances to increase player reaction time and how to adjust to varying speeds. Your fielders should use this drill to practice fielding hit balls.

PRACTICE SAMPLE-DAY TWO (1-1/2 hours)

AGE GROUP	TIME	DRILL NAME	DRILL DESCRIPTION
ALL AGES EVERY PRACTICE	10 minutes	<u>DYNAMIC WARM UP-</u>	Organize team into two groups and have them line up. One group at a time... forward steps toe touches, arm circles, lateral steps, etc. 20-30 yards.
		SAME AS DAY ONE	Continue with slow walking lunge, and then back alternating stretching by pulling knee up to chest. Next Frankenstein kicks, butt kickers, etc.
			Next...High explosive skips, cariocas, etc. and wind sprints utilizing rocker step replicating leadoff and steal technique. <u>Google search on the internet “Dynamic Warm ups” for more details and drills. Too many drills and options to list here. Choose enough drills to fill 10-12 minutes.</u>
ALL AGES EVERY PRACTICE	5 minutes	COBRA THROWING KNEE- SAME AS DAY ONE (5 minutes)	<p>Older girls (or more skilled players) should be paired up with a ball each. Younger or less skilled players should take 3-5 balls each.</p> <p>Girls line up on 1st and 3rd Base lines facing the dugouts. Girls kneel on the THROWING SIDE knee, bring the glove arm/hand across the chest, bring the throwing arm up, bend elbow with fingers pointing up and palm facing forward, rest the THROWING SIDE elbow on top of the opposite hand glove. THROWING SIDE elbow must be level with the shoulder. Ball is placed in hand properly with fingertips on seams. (See GRIP page 13 in this handbook).</p> <p>Using a ‘wrist flip’ motion, ball is SPUN off the fingertips to a net or to another teammate. Coaches should monitor and have the players throw one at a time down the line to make sure it is done properly. Once they get better, then synchronize the throws calling out “ready...go”. Gather balls and repeat drill 3-5 times with depending on how many balls each girl has. (min. 12-15 reps)</p>

<p>ALL AGES EVERY PRACTICE</p>	<p>5 minutes</p>	<p>STANDING FREEZE DRILL-</p> <p>SAME AS DAY ONE</p>	<p>Players gather balls (or pair up). Stand sideways with non-throwing shoulder towards target (fence or other girl if older age group). Feet, shoulder width apart.</p> <p>Arm is up at 90 degrees, ball facing back (reach back, fingers to the sky, wave bye-bye). The back of the hand should be seen and the head and glove are pointed at the target. (This is “FREEZE” Position).</p> <p>On coaches instruction ball is thrown straight to the target keeping elbow level with the shoulder. “Thumb by the thigh, reach behind, elbow high, fingers to the sky, wave bye-bye, release the back side, let it fly, touch the thigh”. If another girl is target have her extend glove and hand out to make a big open glove target, chest high.</p> <p>Once ball is thrown have the receiver step towards the thrown ball with glove up and open working on aggressive receiving skills. REPEAT</p>
<p>ALL AGES EVERY PRACTICE</p>	<p>10 minutes</p>	<p>CATCH- THROW DRILL- -</p> <p>SAME AS DAY ONE</p> <p><i>(DO NOT have players chasing balls during this drill.)</i></p>	<p>Break up into 3 groups of 4. Each group has a coach and a bucket of balls.</p> <p>Depending on skill level girls are 20-30 feet away in a line facing the coach. Girls are shown proper positioning to CATCH a ball, face the thrower, position and open glove out front, throwing hand up and behind glove, elbows and knees are slightly bent with glove foot slightly forward. Teach the “fingers up, fingers down” depending on where the ball is headed.</p> <p>In the early stages have them take their gloves off to learn to catch with both hands. Tennis balls and whiffle balls are great tools for the younger girls.</p> <p>The coach tosses ball and the player steps towards the ball aggressively. It is caught and then player positions feet for return throw (like Freeze Drill position) and throw ball back to coach. “Thumb by the thigh, reach behind, elbow high, fingers to the sky, wave bye-bye, release the back side, let it fly, touch the thigh”</p>

ALL	10 -15 Minutes	WHIFFLE FORWARD TOSS STATION	<p><u>Have all players rotate through each HITTING station, 10-15 minutes per station. 3-4 stations = 30-60 minutes total.</u></p> <p>Batting Station 1 - Breakup into 3 groups of 4 or 4 groups of 3 players. Players are reminded of all HITTING FUNDAMENTALS as mentioned previously.</p> <p>Each player gets approximately 20 UNDERHAND tosses with whiffle balls. The feeder should be in front of the batter. The girls waiting should be placed to retrieve the balls so that things keep moving. As the skill level improves the ball is tossed faster BUT ALWAYS with an underhand motion. GIRLS MUST ALWAYS WEAR HELMETS DURING BATTING DRILLS.</p>
ALL	10 – 15 Minutes	BATTING Tee STATION	<p>Batting Station 2 - The batting Tee is used to reinforce fundamentals including proper foot placement and swing. The ball placed on the Tee must be even with the stride foot position. Also look to see that there is a proper bat grip (see above info on PRE-LOAD PHASE- GRIP-page 20) on bat.</p> <p>Focus on the player taking a small stride step, pivoting the hips, keeping the hands close to the body and inside the ball and the knob of the bat toward the ball on the tee. Each girl should get approximately 15 swings.</p> <p>You can use regular balls and hit into a batting net so that picking up balls is more efficient. GIRLS MUST ALWAYS WEAR HELMETS DURING BATTING DRILLS.</p>
ALL	10 – 15 Minutes	SIDE TOSS STATION	<p>Batting Station 3 – Using net and a throwdown plate, have the player set up to hit facing the net.</p> <p>The feeder is off to the open side and slightly forward of the hitter and softly tosses regular sized softballs in an upward angle in the forward area of the strike zone. The hitter hits the ball into the net as it begins to fall downward into the strike zone. Emphasize proper fundamentals.</p>

ALL	10 Minutes	BUNTING STATION	<p>Batting Station 4- Bunting is CRUCIAL to the success of your team. Some girls will have a harder time than others to learn how to properly HIT a ball BUT All girls can be taught how to lay down a bunt.</p> <p>You should never force a player to always bunt, however some girls may bunt more than others especially when they are having a problem hitting. Each girl should get the opportunity to bunt approximately 20 balls. The coach should set up about half the normal distance as in a game. All pitches should be UNDERHAND delivery.</p> <p>Teach the girls to start in the regular batting position. Once the pitcher's arm starts down towards delivery the batter should be taught to immediately bring the bat to the bunt position, pivot the toes pointing towards the pitcher.</p> <p>A proper bunt involves the bat at a 45° angle position and extended out towards the pitcher with elbows knees and back slightly bent. When the ball is low, the batter bends their knees to lower the bat to the ball, they DO NOT just move their hands to the ball.</p>
ALL	10 minutes	BASE RUNNING DRILL	<p>Have 3 groups of 4 players and 2 coaches. Players must wear helmets and batting gloves are suggested. First group sets up single file down the right field line directly behind first base facing the infield.</p> <p>Begin with rocker stance. On the coach's command the players simulate taking off from first base and go to second, go back, or dives back to first. Practice staying on the balls of the feet, in a low athletic position, pumping the arms when running, proper dive back position.</p> <p>Second group sets up at second base, begins with rocker stance and on command from coach at third base runs to third, slides, dive backs or runs to home.</p> <p>Third group starts at home plate simulates a hit and runs to first base, run through and break down or turn and look on command from coach at first base. Rotate groups after 5 minutes per station. If time permits have all do home to home runs, touching the inside corners of each base.</p>

8U and older	10 minutes	BASE SLIDING	<p>Sliding- Use the foam sliding mat available in the big bin. (a cardboard works well, do not use any form of the toy-slip and slid).</p> <p>Have the players remove their shoes. Practice feet first sliding utilizing the bent leg position. The bent leg resembles a “4” with usually the left leg bent and the right leg on top. The approach is similar to an airplane landing (gradual high to low), NOT like a helicopter landing (high to low with a plop).</p> <p>The chin is tucked to their chest and the hands are above the head at the beginning of the slide, assume the bent leg “4” position and let the top foot glide over the top of the base, not into the base.</p>
8U and older	5 Minutes	COACH’S SIGNS- GENERAL MEETING	<p>Have a meeting and go over your hitting and base running signs. Basic signs should include swing away, take, bunt, fake bunt, fake bunt hit, steal, delayed steal, etc. Practice this often...many games are lost on not knowing the signs. Review pitching signs with catcher and pitcher. Review any other items.</p>
8U and older	EXTRA 30 minutes	PITCHERS AND CATCHERS	<p>NOTE: Pitching and catching practice should be done 30 minutes prior or after the regular scheduled practice time.</p>

Assuming you are running a 1-1/2 hour practice twice a week, at this point you have completed the “DAY TWO” practice session.

This practice session has focused primarily on fundamental HITTING AND BASERUNNING skills. This practice sample is a guide for maximizing instruction of fundamentals. As your team progresses through the season, these drills and times can be adapted and adjusted to best fit the specific needs of your team and field space availability.

ALWAYS TRY TO HAVE MULTIPLE COACHES RUNNING DRILLS SIMULTANEOUSLY...example hitting stations with coach #1, coach #2 and coach #3, this will save on time and you can get more drills accomplished. You always want to run drills in a progressive method, starting with the basics and moving to the advanced drills.

ADDITIONAL DRILLS

THAT CAN BE ADDED/INCORPORATED INTO ANY PRACTICES.

Add/substitute these drills into your daily practice routines as you see fit. As your team improves you will want to include additional and advanced drills.

ALL	5 Minutes	CIRCLE OF FUN	<p>This is a drill to reinforce the proper stance to field a ground ball. It also improves the players' hand-eye coordination and reaction time. The players form a circle with feet about 3-4 inches apart.</p> <p>The players then BEND their knees to a proper stance to field a ground ball. Once in "ready position" the coach rolls a ball into the middle of the circle. The players then use their hands (NO GLOVES) to try to push the ball through another player's legs. If a ball gets between someone's legs they are out. The rest of the players then 'tighten' the circle and continue until there is a WINNER.</p> <p>Typically the players will want to do this over and over. Depending on how long each time takes you can determine how many rounds. Do not overuse this but use it as a 'treat' at most practices.</p>
8U or OLDER	5 Minutes	SHUTTLE DRILL	<p>The players form 2 lines facing each other about 20 feet apart (depending on skill level). There is one ball used. The first player in line throws the ball to the first player in the other line. She then "follows her throw" and runs to the opposite side of the other line. The player catching the ball does the same, running to the opposite side of the other line.</p> <p>This drill can be modified by having the players running at each other just tossing the ball underhanded and have them catch with the bare hand or glove.</p>

8U or OLDER	10 Minutes	<p>4 CORNER DRILL</p> <p><i>NOTE: This can be difficult for 8u and 10u. Stress correct fundamentals first and quickness second.</i></p>	<p>This drill involves the players lining up behind home plate safely away from the line of a throw.</p> <p>One player is stationed at each of the bases. The player at 1st BASE starts the drill by YELLING “1, 1, 1” , the player at home then throws to 1st Base. The girl at second yells “2, 2, 2” the ball is thrown to 2nd Base, same for 3rd then “4,4,4” is yelled for home. After EACH player makes the throw they run to the next base and wait for a throw as the ball moves around the bases.</p> <p>The drill should be run so that each girl goes to each base a couple times.</p> <p>REVERSE THE DIRECTION as a variation of this drill.</p> <p>NOTE: For 8u use the temporary bases and make a smaller diamond. Also put 3-4 balls at each base so that if a ball is missed they pick up another one and put it in play. DO NOT have them chasing balls during this drill.</p>
ALL	5 Minutes	<p>ROCKER STEP-BASE RUNNING DRILL</p>	<p>This drill is done in a group of 4 players. Go to 2nd Base. Each girl is shown the proper “Rocker” step (sometimes referred to as the “sprinter start) with the toes of the left foot placed on the dirt at the side of the base, closest to 3rd Base. The heel of the foot should be up on the base. This allows the player to ‘Push off’. The right foot is to the outside of the base but touching with the inside of the foot.</p> <p>The coach simulates a pitching motion in the circle. As soon as the arm of the pitcher starts on its downward motion towards the plate the runner then starts to “push off” towards 3rd base. (NOTE: Runners cannot leave the base until the pitcher has released the ball, you can usually get away with leaving a bit early)</p> <p>The coach should have already told the runner to either just take a good lead or has given the runner the (continued)</p>

		ROCKER STEP DRILL (continued)	<p>“Steal” sign. If the steal sign is given the girl pushes off and runs to 3rd. If a lead is taken then the coach can either tell the runner to “GO GO GO” to 3rd or “BACK BACK BACK” to 2nd. If they are told to go back they can be taught to dive back.</p> <p>The Rocker stance should be used at 1b and 2b. A traditional baseball stance is preferred at 3b, with back foot on the base and the other in front of the base.</p>
ALL	5 -10 Minutes	DROP STEP-FLY BALL DRILL	<p>This drill is done in a group of 4 players This is a great drill to teach the players how to move towards a fly ball hit over their head. The players are lined up in facing the coach maybe 12 feet away. The coach points to their left or right side. They take a “Drop Step”, meaning that the foot on the side pointed to immediately “drops back, leaving the other foot room to run at a 45-degree angle backwards. The coach then throws the ball out beyond the player. They run at the 45-degree angle and catch the ball. Ball is thrown back to coach.</p> <p>This drill can also be done where the coach just tosses the ball immediately to the players left, right or in front of them. The player reacts to the ball by diving to catch it before it hits the ground.</p>
ALL	5 Minutes	GROUND BALL CONE DRILL	<p>This drill is done in a group of 4 players. Three cones are setup on the infield forming a triangle. They should be, depending on the skill level, about 15-18 feet apart from each other.</p> <p>One girl at a time stands in front of one cone with the other two behind her to her left and right. The ball is then rolled to the outside of one of the cones behind the player. The player then does a drop step and sprints out around the cone to retrieve the ball.</p> <p>Once retrieved it is thrown back to coach or dropped in a bucket. Each girl does 3-4 balls before the next player takes her turn. (KEEP THEM MOVING).</p>

8U and older	5 Minutes	BUNT DEFENSE DRILL	<p>This drill is done in a group of 4 players. It reinforces the proper way to field a bunt from either 1st or 3rd base.</p> <p>The coach is at home plate with balls. The players are in the normal position for 3rd Base. They should be a couple feet in from the base line about 10 feet in front of 3rd Base. The first player in line gets in “ready position” for a 3rd Baseman.</p> <p>The drill can be done with or without a glove. Use both hands down when scooping the ball. The coach rolls a ball down the line, the player yells “BUNT” and runs in to field the ball. The player stays low and reaches with the glove hand to stop the ball and at the same time picks up the ball with the throwing hand, ALWAYS staying low and continuing to move forward towards the coach.</p> <p>The ball is then underhand tossed without bending the throwing hand wrist to the coach at home plate. The player continues on past and around the coach then back to the line near 3rd Base.</p> <p>Drill Variation: Work on throws back to 3b and 1b. Player needs to stay low on the throw and use more of a sidearm snap throw.</p>
ALL	10 minutes	RABBIT DRILL	<p>Purpose: This drill is used to improve the player's explosive power off a base.</p> <p>Procedure: Runner 1 is at first base, while runner 2 is 10 feet from first base and in the direction of second base. On the head coach's signal, runner 1 tries to catch runner 2 before runner 2 reaches second base.</p>

ALL	3-5 Minutes	RELAY RACE Good to end practice on this drill!	<p>Line up half the players at second base and the other half at home. Make sure the fastest players are separated. Do the same for the slowest. You want a good down-to-the-last- second race for the thrill of it!</p> <p>Let the players figure out their order. You might suggest a strategy to the players that the fastest runner goes last. Make a BIG DEAL about the race. Show a lot of excitement. They FEED off of your energy.</p> <p>To add a little levity and get the players to loosen up, create a false start by going "On your marks, get set..." and then pausing until someone invariably leaves early and call them back all excitedly.</p> <p>Act as announcer.</p> <p>Cheer and correct, short base turns, touch the inside corners of the bases.</p> <p>Encourage them to DIG, DIG, DIG!</p> <p>Make a big hoopla on the last leg of the race.</p> <p><i>If there's an uneven number, recruit a player's family member, a coach, yourself or make one team have someone run twice.</i></p>
ALL	5-10 minutes	HIT THE TARGET THROWING GAME Good to end practice on this drill!	<p>Place a large stuffed animal OR tall cones on a couple of buckets at home plate.</p> <p>Players in two groups - Players attempt to knock target off with their throws from about 15-20 feet away. Award a point for a direct hit and half a point for indirect hit (when throw hits the bucket causing the animal to fall off). Can add fielding grounders and then throw.</p> <p>This serves two purposes: 1) it shows how important accurate throws are; 2) IT'S FUN!</p>

ALL	10- 15 Minutes	ARIZONA THIS is an excellent RUNNING game to end practice with.	Arizona is a game played with two teams. The teams should be made even based upon the ability to hit and speed. Group 1 is at bat. Group 2 is in the field. Half of Group 2 is at 1st Base and the other half is at 3rd Base. A cone is put mid-way between 1st and 2nd with another cone put mid-way between 2nd and 3rd. The first player in Group 1 is at the plate. She can either hit the ball off a “T” or by a “soft toss” from a coach. Soft Toss usually works better because it is harder to determine where it will be hit. Group 2 prepares a runner at 1 st and another runner at 3 rd . A coach lines up at 1 st Base and another at 3 rd Base. Their job is to yell “Go” once the batted ball goes across the base line between 1 st and 2 nd or 2 nd and 3 rd . Once they yell “Go” the runners at 1 st and 3 rd sprint after the ball. The batter starts running around the bases AS SOON as they hit the ball. They get a POINT for every base they touch and cone they pass BEFORE BOTH runners touch the ball. If the runner gets all the way to 3 rd Base before both runners touch the ball in the outfield Group 1 would have scored 5 points (3 bases and 2 cones). 2 nd Base would have scored 3 points. Each girl gets to hit, points are accumulated, and then the next team is up. You can do 2-3 innings for each team. THIS is an excellent RUNNING game to end practice with. The girls don’t even realize that they get conditioning while having fun!
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ALL	10- 15 Minutes	<p>“5 MINUTE DRILL”</p> <p>Good to end practice on this drill!</p>	<p>The “5 Minute Drill” is a game played with two teams. The teams should be made even based upon the ability to hit and field the ball. Group 1 is at bat. Group 2 is in the field. Group 2 is evenly spread along the edge of the infield, just inside the outfield grass. The goal for Group 2 is prevent any balls from getting into the grass/outfield and to make “clean” plays on all batted balls (grounders or pop flies). The first player in Group 1 is at bat. She can either hit the ball from a pitching machine, off a “T” or by a “soft toss” from a coach. Soft Toss or a machine works best but a “T” works. The coach sets his watch for 5 minutes, and then tosses the first ball to the first batter. If the ball is cleanly hit or makes it to the outfield via an error, it is a point for the batting team AND she continues to bat. If the fielding team makes an error but the ball stays in the dirt, it is still a point for the batting team. If the ball is caught prior to entering the grass or the batter swings and misses, the next batter comes to bat. A batter keeps hitting until she makes an out. Group 1 continues to bat through the line-up as many times as they can until 5 minutes are up. A coach accumulates the number of hits or points for Group 1. Then Group 2 comes to bat and they have 5 minutes to beat Group 1’s number of points. This drill can be modified for younger girls with cones rather than the outfield grass.</p>
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8u and up	10 minutes	<p>THE BUNTING GAME</p> <p>Good to end practice on this drill!</p>	<p>Use individual players or two groups. Draw a half circle from foul line to foul line approximately 10-15 feet on the infield side of home plate. Place cones along the line. Coach sets up about halfway between home plate and the pitching rubber and pitches underhand balls to players in the hitting box. Each player gets three bunt attempts at each at bat. Players are to lay down a bunt and keep the ball fair and to not let it roll past the half circle. If they succeed in any of the three attempts they stay in the game. If they fail on all three attempts they are out. Play until there is a winner. Increase the difficulty by making the half circle smaller, use one or two attempts instead of three. Encourage a lot of energy and cheering!</p>
8u and up	10-15 Min	<p>KNOCK OUT GAME</p> <p>Good to end practice on this drill!</p>	<p>Coach or machine pitch, everyone bats. If a player does is not successful with a segment, they are knocked out of the game. 1st round at bat- player must make contact fair or foul to stay in the game, 2nd round- player must hit fair ball to stay in the game, 3rd round- player must hit fair ball past the pitcher to stay in the game, 4th round- player must hit fair ball in the air to the grass (cannot touch the dirt) to stay in the game. Winner is batter that was successful in last segment and has not been “knocked out” of the game. You can add a bunt segment as well.</p>

A sheet outlining Game Skills that can be covered throughout the season is on the next page. Since your job is also to teach the GAME this can be a valuable tool to track throughout the season.

SKILL	DATE COVERED							
CATCHER								
Passed balls								
Bunt/pop-ups								
Fielding situations								
Runners on 1st and 3rd								
Steal/throw to base								
Blocking								
Pick Offs								
Framing								
Throws home								
INFIELD								
Grounders								
Charging the ball								
Pop-ups								
Fore/backhand grounders								
Throws-1st, 2nd, 3rd, Home								
Relay/cut-off / backups								
Bunt coverage								
Fielding Situations								
Rundowns								
Pick-offs								
Runners on 1st and 3rd								
Get the lead runner								
OUTFIELD								
Fly's - short, long, right, left								
Drop Step								
Grounders								
Balls hit between fielders								
Charge fly's/grounders								
Throws-1st, 2nd, 3rd, Home								
Fielding situations								
Back-ups								
Hitting the cut-off								
HITTING								
Hitting off tee								
Soft toss								
Batting cage								
Mechanics								
Live pitching								
Bunts								
Slap hits								
Hit and run								
Bunt and run								
BASE RUNNING								
Getting a good jump								
Stealing								
Delayed steal								
Tagging up								
Pick off back to bag								
Listen to 1B Coach								
Picking up 3B coach								
Bunts								
Hit and Run								

GAME MANAGEMENT

6 and Under

There is no real game strategy during 6u games. The single most bit of advice or strategy the league can give 6u coaches is to make the season and especially the games fun for the girls. Make sure that the games DO NOT drag on and become boring. They must be fun at all times. Plan to make the games move quickly. Let the girls try as many positions as possible during the games. Move the girls to Coach Pitch or “Toss” as quickly as the girls can handle it. Batting T’s are important for learning the proper batting technique but coach toss is more fun. If a player looks to be advanced enough to let her throw a couple pitches, let her try.

1. Maybe keep track of the longest hit for the game, or the shortest “bunt”. Give prizes such as candy or Baskin Robbins certificates.
2. Keep track of the Best Catch or best throw.
3. Although standings and scores are not kept for the 6u group it may be something that is done ‘unofficially’. Try to keep the games close so that even though one team may be much better than the other, things are done to keep things even.
4. Use your imagination and put yourself in the girl’s position. If you think it is boring and slow than they probably do also. FIX IT!

As Coaches of this division you have one of the most important jobs in the league. Because 6u play may not be as exciting as the older ages you need to work harder than the other coaches to MAKE IT FUN. The more the girls learn the better, BUT it has to be **fun** or they will not come back to play next year.

In past seasons because the games were not made fun the girls dropped the sport. A few years later these same former softball players have excelled in another sport. They were asked their thoughts on when they played softball and it was stated how slow and boring it was. We are making a lot of progress in building **SHBGFS** into a more competitive and strong league. Everything starts at the younger age groups. It is imperative that the girls in 6u have a lot of fun and look forward to returning the next year.

8 and Under

8u strategy will be somewhat similar to what is noted for 10u below. We as a league want our 8’s to start to feel like they are playing a real game. The competition, although toned down for the younger groups, should be introduced. All Star competition for 8u is very competitive so we want to, within reason, get the girls playing like a team and begin to understand how the game works. We absolutely want to encourage ‘kid pitch’ as soon as possible. The players need to start to feel comfortable when in the ‘kid pitch’ situation and not simply stand and wait for the machine or coach pitch.

10, 12, 14 and Under

Once a player advances to these age groups, the games become competitive and very much the “Real Thing”. Correct teaching of fundamentals at an earlier age will result in significant player success at these age levels and beyond.

DROP DEAD and NO NEW INNING RULE

Games are played under a 6 inning or timeframe rule whichever comes first. The games must go at least 4 innings to be official. There is a lot of game strategy that can be used but remember, it is only a game and do not use the “win at all costs” philosophy. Because of the “no new inning rule” usually after 1 hour and 30 minutes, coaches have been known to “STALL” so that the team that is on the losing side does not get the chance to start a new inning prior to the 1:30 minute mark. Having a batter go to bat with shoes untied or calling several timeouts or having the catcher take forever to put the pads on is **absolutely un-sportsmanlike**.

On the other hand when a team is facing a DROP DEAD deadline, whereas the score could revert back to the score of the last complete inning, it is OK and sportsmanlike to have players step off bases (when the ball is in the circle with the pitcher) to get an inning over.

Usually that happens when you can start a new inning, say the 5th inning, when the game was at the 1:29 mark. The Visiting team, at that point was behind. They then go to bat at the top of the 5th and score 5 runs to take the lead. They do not as yet have 3 outs and if the game gets to the Drop Dead time (1 hour and 45 minutes) without the home team completing their half of the inning, the score will revert back to the LAST COMPLETE INNING (in this example the 4th) and the Home team will win. So after scoring 5 runs the visiting team decides to have base runners “step off” the base and be called out by the umpire.

This allows them to get out of their half of the inning to have an opportunity to win the game by holding the home team in the bottom half of the 5th. This strategy is acceptable, although it is NOT a good idea to have a batter intentionally strike out to get the out.

MAKING A LINE-UP CARD

Once you understand the batting ability and speed of your players you are in a better position to make a sound line-up.

1. Leadoff Hitter should be a contact hitter, and/or a good bunter, and be fast.
2. 2nd Batter should be at least a good bunter (maybe weak hitter) fast helps
3. 3rd Batter should have a bit of 'Pop' in her bat but contact hitter is good
4. Clean-up should be one of your stronger hitters (or good contact hitter)
5. 5th Position should be good contact hitter or strong hitter
6. 6th Position, weaker hitter, hopefully with bunting ability
7. 7th Position, a bit better hitter than 6th Position hitter
8. 8th Position, Good contact hitter, sandbagged
9. 9th Position, Weak hitter, poor bunter
10. 10th Position, Contact hitter, good bunter
11. 11th Position, Good Bunter
12. 12 Position, Competent player that is maybe fast, can bunt and or make contact

This is one set of ideas. What you do not want to do is put all of your strong hitters/bunters at the top of the lineup. It makes for a very predictable game. The other team can also use their better pitching for certain parts of your lineup, which may hurt your team. Having someone at the bottom of the lineup this is a competent hitter can help start a rally giving you no outs with the top of the order coming to bat.

Using this strategy you need to explain to the players what you are doing. Putting someone near the bottom or last can be frustrating to that player. Sit down and explain what's going on, the girls will understand.

SIGNS

Signs, usually delivered to the players from the 3rd Base Coach, are very important for many reasons. One big reason is the girls feel that it's a real game. They then start to really understand the strategy of the game and how things "work". Here are the basis signs that each team should take advantage of:

1. Bunt Sign, very important
2. Hit away Sign
3. Steal Sign
4. Fake Bunt Sign. This sign can be used along with a Steal sign to advance the runner on 1st Base. If you have a big hitter up and a runner on 1st, depending on the strength of the catcher, you may want to do a fake bunt and at the same time have the runner steal second. This helps to prevent the force out at second if the ball is hit to the shortstop. Fake bunts can also be used instead of a take sign when a batter has a 3 Ball 0 strike count.
5. Slap Sign. The batter would show the bunt early in the windup, then pull back and try to 'slap' at the ball, getting past the infield.
6. Take Sign. When you don't want the batter to swing, usually 3 balls 0 strikes.

STEALING AND BASE RUNNING

As a 3rd Base coach you need to teach the girls that when a ball gets past the catcher they should be looking to steal the next base (10u and older where you can steal home). The base runners need to be taught to be in a “Rocker” step position (advanced exceptions at 3b). When the arm of the pitcher is coming down toward release the runners should ALWAYS be taking a lead. If they have been given the steal sign, they are off to the next base. Heads up and smart base running is a big factor that separates the quality of the teams. (NOTE: unlike baseball, in fastpitch the runners cannot leave the base until the ball leaves the pitcher’s hand, runners typically can get away with leaving a bit earlier than this, but are at risk of being called out for leaving early). Encourage aggressive baserunning.

It is crucial that the 1st and 3rd base coaches are aware at ALL times what is going on. Each player should be taught that when they are up to bat that they are to step out of the box, with one foot, after each pitch and look at the 3rd base coach. The 3rd base coach should give them some sort of sign before each pitch.

In 6u and 8u home plate is closed and the only way you can advance to home plate is by a walk, hit batter or a base hit / sacrifice fly or bunt. For 10u, 12u and 14u you can steal home. That means that if there is a runner on 3rd and 1st base, you may want to steal and try to draw the throw from the catcher down to 2nd. The runner should be taught to watch and know the signs so that if the throw does go by the pitcher on the way to second they should be ready to possibly steal home. They need to be aware of trick plays where the catcher may throw the ball back to the SS who has no intention of trying to get the runner coming from 1st base out but is ready to throw the ball home and get the runner trying to steal home. Another trick play is once the runner takes off to steal second the catcher may throw the ball to 3rd base to try to get the runner out off the base.

PITCHING

Understanding your pitching situation is crucial to how a game is managed. Due to the fact that there are limits on the amount of innings a player can pitch during a game you have to manage your pitching staff effectively. If you have the luxury of having two players that can effectively put the ball over the plate without a lot of walks, you are in good shape. If you have one that tends to walk more than her share then you have to be careful how she is used. Typically you would want your stronger pitcher to start the game and deal with the top of the line-up. You could bring in your other pitcher to deal with the weaker hitters in the lineup.

Signs should be used between your pitcher and catcher. Even if your pitcher has nothing but a fastball you should at least indicate the location you want the pitch. If the pitcher is reasonably accurate you should mix pitches between inside and outside. If the count gets a little out of line then you would go back over the middle. If your pitcher has a “change up” it is best used against the bigger stronger, AGGRESSIVE, hitters. A good sign that a change up would work is if a batter is way ahead of the pitch and fouling the ball down the 3rd base line (right handed batter). It is NOT generally a good idea to throw change-ups to the weaker hitters or those that are swinging late and fouling the ball down the 1st base line. Unless the pitcher has very good control you would usually go with the change when you are AHEAD in the count.

It is important as a coach to keep an eye as to where the batter is standing in the batter's box. If a batter is standing too far away from the plate, an outside pitch works well. If they are standing too close to the plate an inside pitch tends to work. If the batter is standing in front of the box it is usually because it is a slow pitcher OR they may be looking to Bunt.

POSITIONING YOUR FIELDERS

The two most important players to position properly are the 3rd and 1st baseman. If you are playing a team that does a lot of bunting (most good teams will) they must be in position to make the play. They should both be position about a third of the way down the line towards home plate about 3 feet inside the foul line. It is recommended that their gloves should be up and in a position to protect themselves and ready to receive a line drive or grounder. Do not teach 1st and 3rd to have their glove down waiting for a grounder. **HAVING THE GLOVE IN A LOWER POSITION IS ONLY FOR EXTREMELY EXPERIENCED AND ADVANCED OLDER PLAYERS.** Second and short should be reasonably placed in their positions. With the younger players SS should be between 2nd and 3rd, between the bases, but out of the baseline. For the older players they should back further in order to gain more "range" when a ball is hit up the middle. The same would go for the 2nd baseman.

For the most part outfielders should be placed about 10-15 feet into the grass depending on the age and skill level of your opponent. Until you understand specific batters and how far they can hit the ball it is best to keep outfielders closer to the infield.

FINAL WORD- OUR EXPECTATIONS OF A COACH

We sincerely appreciate you sharing your time as a volunteer coach and your desire to help train our young players in the great sport of fastpitch softball.

We as a league feel every coach can learn something new and thus we will be offering various coaching clinics throughout the season. ***It is imperative and often mandatory that you as a coach attend all of these clinics. This is for your benefit, the player's success and for the strength of our league as a whole. Lack of participation in the clinics will factor heavily on future coaching opportunities.***

As a league we have certain expectations of our coaches. Our expectations from you as a coach are to create a safe, enjoyable and positive teaching environment for your team members. You are expected to be motivated and dedicated to the proper instruction of softball fundamentals and techniques.

In addition, our expectations require a commitment from you in becoming an educated "student of the game", including an obligation to further your coaching knowledge, become a competent teacher of the sport and effectively communicate this knowledge to your team.

(continued)

These core principles of coaching are part of our mission at SHB and as a coach for our league we will expect you to embrace and support these core principles.

This system works, as SHB has produced many coaches that have gone on to coach top level travel ball and high school teams. SHB teams have competed successfully in numerous local and national championships. SHB has also been the starting place for many players that have gone on to play at the highest levels of college softball!

Thank you again for your time as a volunteer coach at SHB and good luck in the season! Remember it's only a game!

“You can’t expect success from your players, if you haven’t shown them how to get there!”

“Your players don’t care how much you know until you show them how much you care.”

“The road to success is not a sprint, it is a marathon.”