

Northfield Fastpitch Softball Association



Players & Coaches Manual

Updated April 18, 2017



Batting Stance & Swing

Stance

1. Feet
 - Toes square to the plate
 - Weight on the balls of your feet
 - 50-50 weight distribution on feet
 - Bend knees in an athletic stance while not bending at waist or hips
 - Stand where you can extend your bat to touch the middle of the plate
 - Inside of feet a little wider than shoulders
2. Hands
 - Knocking knuckles - more of finger grip & not palms
 - Wrist cocked
 - Bat should be just off shoulders
 - Bat angle - flashlight on end of bat and shine it in opposite box
 - Hands always start above the top of strike zone
 - Get some rhythm - stay loose
3. Arms
 - Elbows - relaxed and back elbow not up, but not tight to ribs

Stride

1. Feet
 - Shift weight to inside of back foot with a 35/65 weight distribution
 - Tap foot or stride a maximum of three inches toward the pitcher
 - Minimal stride, or none, so shoulders don't drop with the swing
2. Hands
 - When loading, maintain same distance between hands and ear
 - Advanced hitters - increase distance about 2"-3" by bringing hands straight back
 - Think of hands as tethered to back shoulder as you initiate swing to avoid drop
3. **DO NOT**
 - Sway when loading
 - Drop the head
 - Stride too far
 - Lunge
 - Step out of the box
 - Wrap hands

Pivot & Swing

1. Feet
 - Back foot - squash bug
 - Keep front toe closed until contact
 - Heel should face the catcher when finished swinging
2. Lower Body
 - Drive by leading with your hips and back shoulder in unison
 - Belt buckle should face the pitcher when finished swinging
 - Back leg should finish at a 90 degree angle
 - Front leg - post up and do not collapse
 - Stay balanced through the swing
3. Upper Body
 - Lead with front elbow going forward and not wrapping around body
 - Keep upper body level
 - Don't "spill the water" off the table
4. Hands
 - Throw your hands at the ball and do not drop
 - Downward angle
 - Pull the bat through until extension
 - Cocked wrist until contact
 - Palm up/palm down at impact along with slight bend in front elbow
 - Hammer at point of impact followed by straightening front elbow (extension)
 - Follow through should be high
5. Head
 - Chin goes shoulder to shoulder
 - Stays stationary with eyes down

Hitting Skill Development by age-level

8U

- Stance and Swing
 - "Knocking" knuckles align
 - Lower hands (don't wrap bat!)
 - Weight on back foot
 - Stride (short and straight forward)
 - Swing leading with elbow
 - Always evolving
 - Tee work is important at all levels



10U

- Introduction to Sacrifice Bunting
 - Stance - Pivot for stance, remain balanced
 - Hand Placement - Both hands shift upwards, bat cut in thirds
 - Barrel of bat above hands, not horizontal
 - Mechanics - Bat at the top of the strike zone
 - Move your legs, not the bat, to bunt the ball
 - “Catch” ball to deaden the ball
 - Timing - Show before pitch is pitched

12U thru 16U

- Introduction to Drag, Push and Directional Bunting
 - Some of these skills will only be taught to the top players



Fielding Fundamentals

Playing solid defense is what makes a great softball team outperform the competition. Fielding both ground balls and fly balls is the subject of this document. Basics of both will be explained below. *Words or phrases that are underlined, signify key ideas and terms that coaches will strive to keep consistent throughout our 9-12 program.

Ground Balls

1. **Pre-Motion:** As the pitcher begins her wind-up our infielders will be in motion, which we call pre-motion. First, they will present their gloves. Think of it like your glove hand palm is holding a tray and you are presenting the batter with a beverage. As the pitcher starts her motion, our infielders should step left -right - left into a ready position. The corner infielders should be lower than the middle infielders due to reaction time.
2. **Movement to the ball:** If the ball is hit to our left, the player's left foot should open and be followed by a crossover step. The opposite is true for a ball hit to the player's right. Stay low and quick to the ball.
3. **Fielding the ball:** Line up the ball with your glove side leg (left leg for a righty). As we approach the ball, our footwork is crucial. Similar to pre-motion, it should be left - right- left field and then right -left-throw. The knees are flexed, butts down and backs straight. During this we are keeping our glove open like a dustpan and down to the ground. Our head is also watching the ball all the way into glove. Terms "Head down, butt down" and "Field first" will be said often as reminders. Our bare hand is right about our glove and quickly covers the ball as it enters our glove. We are always making an effort to field the ball in the middle of our stance and use the backhand only as a last resort. Be careful not to make the mistake of standing up then getting back down to field. Also, avoid flipping. This is when a player gets in the ready position, sees the grounder coming, picks up her glove and then puts it back down again. Simply put, when a ground ball comes at you, just set your glove down and field it!
 - a. **Backhands:** Remember that we want to avoid using a backhand unless we absolutely can't get in front of the ball in time. To perform a backhand successfully, the fielder must bend the knees and get down to the level of the ball. Bending at the waist instead of the knees is the most common mistake. When in a backhand position the back knee should touch the ground. The glove needs to be help open wide with the fingers.

As the ball begins to enter the glove, the fielder must go with the ball or give with the ball. Once again the head is down watching the ball into the glove. Field first! After fielding the ball, the defender now steps right - left throw while lining up the left shoulder with the target.

Fly Balls

An outfielder's first step is always back on a fly ball. Always call a fly ball. "I got it" several times even if no one else is around. Always get to the spot as quickly as you can. Hold your glove over your forehead with your bare hand right behind your glove. Catch the ball on your throwing arm side using two hands always.

More advanced outfield techniques such as ground balls, diving, angles, etc. will be covered at different stages of the season depending on the team level and the athletes' abilities.

1. Ready position- good base, moving forward/hopping before the pitch, balls of your feet, knees bent, palms up
2. Catch the ball out in front of your body
3. Use two hands
4. Right handers (Right-left-field=Right-left-Throw)
5. Lefties (Left-right-field=left-right-throw)



Correct



Incorrect

Fielding development by age-level

8U

- Readiness Position: Triangle
- Where to position yourself at each position (1B and 3B slightly before the bag)
- Throwing to the nearest infielder or base when the reaches the outfield
- Catching a pop up/fly ball with glove up and open

10U

- Focus on watching the ball into the glove
- Free thinking Force outs vs. Tag outs
- Back up ground balls if you don't have the ball, get in the habit of moving on every play!
- Introduce Double Play coverage.
- Base coverage on ground balls
 - Second or short covers 2B depending on the side is hit, 1B, 3B and Catcher cover their own bag
- Cutoffs from the outfield
 - Shortstop and 2B cover their side of the outfield
- Catching a fly ball using a drop step - Tennis balls are great for work at home. If kids find this challenging, then just focus on catching the ball with glove up.
- Introduce a run-down tag chase them to previous base, tag with ball, and few throws as possible

12U thru 16U

- Catching a fly ball on *throwing shoulder* using a drop step
- Focus on bringing the ball into the body on a ground ball (soft hands), preparing yourself to throw to 1B
- Backing up Bases for Outfielders.
 - Right Fielder backs up 1B on throws from infield & catcher
 - Left Fielder backs up 3B on throws for Catcher or right side of infield
 - Center backs up throws to 2b from Catcher & other infield positions
- Cutoffs and Relays
- Applying a Tag
 - Glove in front of bag for a player to tag into, not a high tag. **Tag to the bag**
 - Let the ball travel to you
- Intro to the fundamentals of a double play
 - Different throws SS, 2B can make, and 1st to SS with P covering 1st
 - EVERYBODY MOVES ON EVERY PLAY! No role is more important than another



Throwing Fundamentals

- The ball can be held with 2,3, or 4 fingers depending on the player with the thumb underneath the ball
- Hold the ball in the fingers not the palm
- For more accurate throws hold the fingers across the seams
- Point your shoulder to the target
- Elbow at or above the shoulder
- Arm should look like an “L”



Throwing/Catching fundamentals by age-level

8U

- Throwing
 - Proper Grip - Ball doesn't rest in the palm of the hand
 - Calling the name of the player before throwing a ball
 - Throwing Form - Point glove at target (or elbow), arm back 90 degree angle, back of hand facing back of head
 - Greg Rota has a great progression drill for throwing that girls can do with any partner
- Catching
 - Catching the ball with the glove up - Tennis ball drill
 - Always 2 hands when you can

10U

- Focusing on Accuracy
- Work on Backhands

12U thru 16U

- Focusing on Power- strengthening the arm

Every Day Throwing Routine

Wrist Flips: On one knee, elbow in glove, forearm stabilized in glove, girls just use wrist to throw the ball. Used to warm up/strengthen the wrist and helps with shorter throws such as a run down.

Elbow only: Maybe call it short lever - on one knee, elbow rests on glove, uses a short lever throw

Follow Through: Still on one knee, player reaches back and throws, follows through and “grabs grass” on the other side of her foot. Reinforces the full throwing motion, forces the player to follow through, stretches the muscles in the player's shoulder and back.

Twist: Player is standing with their chest facing their partner, wide base with feet. Player keeps feet planted and twists at their trunk while throwing the ball to their partner. Emphasizes using your core to throw, forces player to reach back as they throw, stretches out core as well.

Sideways: Player stands with their glove side facing their partner, player reaches back and throws, follows through, finishes in athletic fielding position. Reinforces reaching back and following through.

Normal Throws:

Long Toss: Can't do inside

Rapid Fire: As the players close the gap, they play rapid fire until they are close and stop after a couple throws.



Pitching Fundamentals

1. Grip
 - Find “C”
 - ALL fingertips on a seam
 - Use your “piano playing” fingertips
 - LOOSE grip
 - 4 Seams (with the C) going through the air causes:
 - Better control
 - More speed
2. Wrist snap: MOST IMPORTANT PART OF PITCH
 - Loose wrist = faster snap = harder throw
 - Cock wrist, snap thru (finger tips pointing up)

DRILLS

- Place pitching arm on same knee, hold down with other arm
 - Fingertips facing down (load)
 - Snap up- finger tips should be straight up
 - Feel ball peel off middle finger
 - Look for more spin in ball and height
3. BIG X
 - Stand TALL (Right handed = belly button facing 3rd base, left handed = belly button facing 1st base)
 - Wrist cocked at top: rub shoulder to ear
 - Glove arm just as important as ball hand

DRILL

- Small K's (Feet shoulder width apart, at 45 degree angle, start arm about halfway up release at hip, progress to moving arm up to make body form large K)
- One knee drill (Right Hander down on right knee, left leg out straight or at a 45 degree angle, straight arm circle ,release at the hip)
- Arm Circles (Feet planted at a 45 degree angle on a power line, Straight back arm circle , release at the hip)
- Arm Circles with the stride on a power line (Same as above but striding with a power line and following through)
- Walk Through (Right handers : Three steps back from rubber, Right, Left, Right, and Explode into K's)

- Wall drill (Next to wall working on straight arm circles)
4. Pre Motion
- Can be as SLOW as you want; don't rush
 - Right foot a bit ahead of the left
 - Rock back into the "T" load
 - Rock forward into the "J" or "Elephant Trunk"
 - Slide arms up chest, elbows out
 - Bend at hips as arms, make a "J" with arms
 - Go into BIG X; complete pitch and follow through
 - SLOW, SLOW, EXPLODE!
 - Open the door, get through the door, close the door
5. Fast ball
- Velocity over control
 - Explode toward catcher
 - STAY LOOSE and LONG
 - Wrist snap
 - Open/close hips
 - FINISH; follow through high and hard

Jennie Finch-Instruction on her fundamentals of pitching

- <https://youtu.be/F9d2evfGPcc>

USA Softball Pitcher- Stance and Power position

- <https://youtu.be/7QSeusxR8TQ>

Proper technique and form will be introduced during practices, however to master pitching will require work outside of the regular practice time.



Try to do these in full gear. Do 15 of each drill - Keep glove inside of the jersey at all times.

1. Footwork - Proper throwing form. Right foot in chin line. Bow and arrow.
2. Two Knee Throws
3. Throw back to the Pitcher
4. BLOCKING - Knees replace toes- Chest slightly forward - Elbows in - Throwing hand behind glove
 - GOAL: Keep ball in front of you and close to home plate
 - Straight ahead
 - 45 degrees from left
 - 45 degrees from right
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ - Half pitches are strikes - half are blocks
 - Hockey goalie drills



Baserunning is very important part of the game, especially in High School. Baserunning can win a team games.

8U

- Proper stance on the bag: One foot on bag, other behind
- Run when the ball is hit
- Overrun 1B in foul territory (orange bag)
- Teach them not to overrun 2nd & 3rd base

10U

- Introduce the mechanics of leading off a base
 - 3 aggressive steps, body turn facing the catcher
 - Wait until catcher throws back before retreating to the base
- Introduce stealing 2nd and 3rd
 - Runner can make the attempt only after the ball has left the pitcher's hand
- Introduce sliding
 - Safely execute the figure 4 slide
- Importance of first 3 steps out of the batter's box.
- What to do in a rundown

12U-16U

- Be very aggressive
- Awareness
 - Looking to take an extra base on overthrows
 - Advancing when opposing team isn't covering a base
 - After running through 1B and looking for the ball
- Make good choices on base paths
- Older girls 14U-16U delayed steal