

MHAA Softball Coaches Guide

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General Practice Guidelines

The #1 goal of every practice is to keep kids from standing around. A poorly planned practice results in players getting less repetition and standing around waiting. At the end of a practice, players and coaches should feel exhausted. That is a well run practice that leads to players developing their skills.

- 1. Skills development drills should always be broken into multiple groups to get more reps.**
 - a. Some drills require doing it as a full team, but try to limit this to 30 minutes or less per practice and even fewer at younger age levels. Keep practices moving quickly and active for all players. Put yourself in your player's shoes. Sometimes you feel busy, but they're spending half the practice standing if you don't find ways to keep them active.
- 2. Keep it fun, add games, make it competitive**
 - a. Any drill can be turned into a game with a point system where players are competing.
 - b. Always be thinking of ways to make practices more fun and competitive.
 - c. Team Rewards - Find ways to reward the entire team when they do a good job of working hard during practice. End practice with a fun game if they do a good job or bring candy, food or drinks for everyone.
 - d. Individual Rewards - Creating a recognition system where one or two players earn a reward during practice are a great way for kids to work toward a goal.
- 3. Practice times should be limited, keep it efficient**
 - a. In-House
 - i. 6U – 60 minutes maximum. Rotate kids through quick drills that do not last more than 10 minutes.
 - ii. 8U- 75 minute maximum. Continue keeping drills short – no longer than 10 minutes.
 - iii. 10U/12U – 90 minute maximum. 30 minutes of pitching/catching skills should be the first or last 30 minutes. Could extend certain game scenario drills to 15-20 minutes at this age but should continue keeping things rotating and moving.
 - b. Traveling
 - i. 10U/12B and 12C
 1. Practices should be limited to 90 minutes with additional 30 minutes for pitching/catching. Some nights can be limited to 60 minutes.
 2. Longer practices are occasionally needed and can extend to 2 hours but should be limited and used more often on weekends without a tournament.
 - ii. Top 12U Team and older:
 1. Coach's discretion. Practices should not exceed 2 hours unless there is an exceptional reason to extend the length.
- 4. You don't always need a ball field to run a successful practice**
 - a. We do not always have enough fields for teams to practice on a ball diamond. Making up cancelled practices may require practicing on a patch of grass instead of a ball diamond. It is rare, but it shouldn't stop you from practicing. It is absolutely possible to run a successful practice without a ball diamond on rare occasions.

- b. Early in the season when fields are wet and we don't have approval to practice on fields yet, hard surfaces like a hockey rink, tennis court or parking lot can work if it's warm enough outside – just get permission
- c. During the season, when field availability may be slim on a given day, getting out on a park field or football field can still result in a productive practice.
- d. In-House teams may often be scheduled 2 teams to a field. When your team uses the outfield grass, it is a perfect opportunity to work on hitting, throwing and situations. Dirt is great, but you don't need dirt to develop a 5-8 year old's skills.

Teaching Proper Technique and Mechanics

All of the information on technique and mechanics provided below is available in the training video playlist available at <https://www.mendotaheightsathletics.com/page/show/4356421-skills-training-videos>

Throwing Mechanics

1. Youtube Video -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLqP5FY3hLh8JsiFET4ME6cJKSf3MqQqDL&time_continue=4&v=fB6-rRxMVE
2. Grip
 - a. Grip with fingertips, not the palm.
 - b. Fingers across horseshoe
 - c. Form good habits with grip but not to the point of focusing on it and hesitating to throw without proper grip. Players need to learn to throw without the grip as well.
 - d. Index and middle fingers should grip the ball perpendicular to the horseshoe of the seams or stitches (younger players may need 3-4 fingers).
 - e. Ball to be released with the most perfect backward rotation possible. This is to deter the ball from veering left or right in the air.
 - f. The four seam grip ensures that the ball will rotate backwards perfectly. Because your middle finger is a bit longer, it will leave the softball last and give it that backwards rotation.
3. Mechanics
 - a. When throwing the ball, players should get sideways/perpendicular to their target with feet shoulder width apart, glove shoulder facing target.
 - b. Lower Body
 - i. Goal should be to transition from fielding or catching to a throw in 2 steps
 1. Step 1 - Throwing side foot turns sideways to rotate player's glove side shoulder and hips toward target. Weight on back throwing side knee before stepping forward.
 2. Step 2 - Glove side foot steps toward target.
 - ii. Hips rotate from glove side hip facing target (12 o'clock) to the throwing side hip being close to 12 o'clock as you finish the follow through of the throw.
 - c. Upper Body
 - i. Torso/Shoulders
 1. During step 1 as the foot turns sideways, the glove side shoulder should be facing the target with elbow or glove pointing at target.
 2. Same as hips, the shoulders and torso rotate from glove side shoulder being at 12 o'clock to the throwing hand shoulder being close to 12 o'clock as the player follows through.
 - ii. Arms/Hands
 1. Glove and throwing hand come together toward the throwing shoulder as player takes first step.

2. Before taking 2nd step, the ball should come above your shoulders behind the head (should be able to see ball if looking back) making an 'L' shape so you don't throw the ball like a shot put sacrificing distance and velocity.
 3. "Form the C" – ball should not be facing the target but not opposite of target either for shoulder health. Ball should be at 3pm from target for righties, 9pm for lefties.
 - a. Many players, and even adults, do not do this. As the upper torso rotates, the hand facing away will eventually be facing forward as needed.
 4. Glove side elbow should point to target or some people prefer to point glove at target.
 5. As throwing arm moves to right position, glove hand is in opposite rhythm with elbow coming out toward target or glove coming out toward target.
 6. As player takes step toward target, torso rotates with chest facing target and player releases ball with momentum moving forward. As throwing hand whips forward, glove side hand is the reverse with hand coming back toward body
 7. Player follows through to the opposite knee
- d. Types of throws (10U+)
- i. Quick infield throws, the "L" forms closer from chest to L
 - ii. For catchers, ear to "L" for even quicker throw
 - iii. For outfielders, hand can go from hip to "L" to generate more power and a larger windup
- e. 4-3-2-1 Throws for Long Throws/Outfield Throws (10U+)
- i. When catching a flyball, we teach the 4-3-2-1 approach, which is 4 steps to a long throw
 1. Catch the flyball with the throwing foot forward (4)
 2. Get momentum with glove foot stepping forward (3)
 3. Throwing side foot steps/shuffles behind glove foot to turn sideways (2)
 4. Glove side foot steps forward as you throw (1)
 - ii. This is a change from crow hop.
 - iii. 4 step can become a 2 step or 3 step depending on scenario or how quickly the outfielder needs to release the ball.

Catching (Receiving a Throw) Mechanics

Youtube Video -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLqP5FY3hLh8JsiFET4ME6cJKSf3MqQqDL&v=zKwgYM3Nzo8>

1. For younger players
 - a. "Fingers up"
 - i. Young players like to turn their hands down to use their glove like a basket. Emphasize "Fingers Up".
 - ii. Practice doing drills without gloves on and use tennis balls where kids catch the ball with their left hand with fingers up then add the glove until they've developed skills to catch with fingers up.
 - iii. Should only have fingers to the side if catching the ball on throwing hand side or pointed down if catching below the waist.
 - b. "Big Target"
 - i. Teach players to keep their glove open with palm facing out toward player throwing to show a big target.
 - c. "Squeeze the Juice"
 - i. When ball hits glove, squeeze the glove hand like the player is catching without a glove.
 - d. "Close the Lid"
 - i. When ball is caught, use throwing hand to "close the lid" and secure ball which also becomes the prep phase of a throw back.
 - e. "Paint the Rainbow"
 - i. Moving from glove side to throwing side, the angle of the glove is like painting a rainbow (thumb up if catching a throw on far glove side, to thumb sideways in front of face, to thumb down on far throwing side).
2. For all players
 - a. "Nose to Knuckles"
 - i. With every catch, focus on getting your head behind the ball
 - ii. Get nose behind knuckles on glove hnd when you can. Move to the ball.
 - b. Step to Catch
 - i. With every catch, step toward the ball with your glove foot to get used to moving your feet to the ball
 - c. Active catching
 - i. Players should never be lazy when catching the ball. Players should learn to position their bodies for an easy catch (not extending arms when they don't have to) and preparing their body for a return throw back as they catch the ball.
 - ii. Playing catch the right way should result in players breaking a sweat

Mechanics for Fielding Ground Balls

Youtube Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TM6hnPz8-uo&list=PLqP5FY3hLh8JsiFET4ME6cJKSf3MqQqDL&index=4>

1. Stance
 - a. Start with hands on knees, transition to elbows on knees, as pitcher winds up movement forward with hands transitioning out in front of body, chest up, butt up, knees bent on balls of feet ready to move
 - b. Stationary movement – keep body moving side to side on balls of feet so you’re ready to move
 - c. Stay square to the plate – shoulders and hips squared to move 4 different ways based on where ball is hit
2. Approach
 - a. Gradually lower center of gravity
 - b. On hard hit ball right at the player, ready position is to stay lower and react to the ball
 - c. On all other balls hit (routine or slow), round the ball based on where it’s hit to get momentum moving toward target
3. Fielding the Ball
 - a. Always keep body behind the ball attempting to field on glove side of body to center.
 - b. Players should top of their glove on the the ground as they field the grounder – palm facing forward with top of glove on dirt – not palm up with back of glove on dirt
 - c. Legs with wide staggered stance – feet should be at least shoulder width apart
 - d. Alligator Arms – As ball is scooped forward, throwing hand “chomps down” on glove – keep fingers pointing up
4. Transition to Throw
 - a. Young Players
 - i. 1-2 Throw
 1. Right Left Throw for righties, Left Right throw for lefties
 2. Focusing on two steps and getting perpendicular so glove side shoulder is facing target after 1 step.
 - b. Older players
 - i. 3 types – all geared toward getting perpendicular to the target with a Right-Left-Throw (for righties) technique to quickly release the ball
 1. Step Forward
 - a. Throwing side foot steps toward target, turn hips and shoulders, 2nd step toward target with glove side foot
 2. Replace Feet
 - a. Used when moving fast through the ball and angle of target requires replacing your glove side foot with your throwing side foot then turn hips and shoulders, then stepping with glove side foot toward target as you throw
 3. Step Behind

- a. When momentum is taking player away from target, glove side steps behind the body to get body perpendicular to target
 - b. / “1-2-Throw” (Right-Left for rightie, Left-Right for leftie) first step is made to position the body to be perpendicular to target with throwing side foot, glove side foot is 2nd step toward target with quick throw.
 - ii. Body always stays low as you throw – players should not stand tall after fielding the ball.
- 5. Balls Hit Away from Player
 - a. Glove Side
 - i. If ball is hit to glove side requiring quick movement to the hole, pivot foot, crossover and reach for ball with step behind footwork to transition to throw
 - b. Backhand (introduce this at 8U, develop the skill at 10U)
 - i. Used when you cannot get body behind the ball and must use backhand to field the ball
 - 1. 3 scenarios
 - a. Left Foot Forward
 - i. If you field with left foot forward, field with ball out in front, using elbow as hinge
 - ii. More difficult to transition to throw as right foot must move and plant as first step before throwing.
 - b. Right Foot Forward
 - i. Similar technique but preferred method for rightie as your throwing side foot is already planted allowing for quicker transition to throw
 - c. Rake Through Ball
 - i. Cannot get around the ball and rake through the ball to field it cleanly on the backhand
 - ii. Turn glove over, glove down thumb pointing back toward body
 - iii. Field ball out in front of body using elbow as a hinge

Fielding Flyball Mechanics

Youtube Video -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLqP5FY3hLh8JsiFET4ME6cJKSf3MqQqDL&v=QZ4lrNN5Pv8>

1. Ready Position
 - a. On balls of feet, feet slightly staggered, more upright than infielder and ready to move left or right by being square to the plate
2. Approach – Drop Step or “Skateboard”
 - a. Get hips and shoulders turned to sprint toward ball to get behind softball
 - b. Pump arms to get under the ball – don’t run with one arm with glove out
3. Securing the Catch
 - a. Get Behind the Ball then Move Forward
 - i. Biggest mistake players make is not getting behind the ball to get momentum moving forward for a throw back into the infield as they catch it
 - b. If routine fly ball, turn body slightly so it’s ready to transition to crow hop throw without hip or shoulder rotation
 - c. Keep 2nd hand close to ball to secure ball in glove and transition ball to throwing hand
4. 4-3-2-1 Throws
 - a. View Throwing section for more info

Baserunning Mechanics

Youtube Video -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLqP5FY3hLh8JsiFET4ME6cJKSf3MqQqDL&v=awBfD3Fm-y4>

- Running through 1st Base
 - a. Run 65 feet, not 60 feet, run through the bag
 - b. Touch inside or front of the bag, not on the bag
 - c. Stay in foul territory but don’t veer into foul territory.
 - d. Look right to view errant throw but turn left to be ready to advance or return to bag (10U+)
- Rounding 1st Base (introduce at 8U, develop at 10U)
 - a. When ball is hit to outfield, player should run toward first base coach and drop left shoulder and edge of inside of 1st base with right foot so body is position to continue into 2nd base
 - b. If ball is hit to right field, shorten the turn, left foot hits edge of bag and turn toward outfield to see play
- Leading Off from 1st base (10U+)
 - a. Rocker start with Left leg forward with left foot hanging over edge of base with right leg back
 - b. Recommendation of 4 steps for most age levels from first base
- Leading Off from 2nd base (10U+)

- a. Same rocker start
 - b. Recommendation of 6 steps for most age level from 2nd base
- Leading off from 3rd base (10U+)
 - a. Recommend 4 steps for most age levels
- Balls that are thrown High or Low (10U+)
 - a. “High or Low, Probably Gonna Go”
 - i. At younger age levels, teach players to read the pitch. If the ball is low, players should have freedom to run without steal. Most catchers will not be able to field off a bounce and throw a player out
 - ii. With high pitches, you want to anticipate those that will go over their head but advancing on high throw caught by catcher puts catcher in perfect position to throw
- Fly Balls
 - a. Watch where ball is hit. If outfielder is turning and running toward ball, a good opportunity to tag. When tagging, always watch play
 - b. If routine fly ball where no tag opportunity, get down line, freeze, and return if ball is caught
- Returning back to base (introduce at 8U, develop skill at 10U)
 - a. Always know where the ball is never look away
 - b. Always return back to the outside of the base to make it a longer tag
- Sliding Techniques
 - a. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_VnRRY5KYc

Hitting/Bunting Mechanics

- Youtube Video - https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLqP5FY3hLh8JsiFET4ME6cJKSf3MqQqDL&time_continue=4&v=fB6-rRxMVE
- Grip
 - a. Grip bat with fingers, not palms
 - b. Door knocking knuckles aligned or split the difference
 - c. Top hand like your shaking hands with the bat or an axe handle
- Stance
 - a. Square stance – feet parallel to plate
 - b. Knees inside the feet
 - c. Feet shoulder width apart
 - d. Start with bat on shoulder like a photograph pose, lifting bat slightly off the shoulder
 - e. Bat angle at 45 degrees
 - f. Lead arm bent at 90 degree angle
 - g. Hands on bat and elbows form a Power Triangle
- Stance
 - a. Feet should be around shoulder width apart, knees inside feet, feet straight toward plate.

- b. Begin in the “photo” position with bat resting on shoulder to relax, slightly lifting bat off shoulder to get in stance.
 - c. Player should have a “power triangle” with correct stance with hands, elbows and bat in correct position. Elbows relaxed, making a triangle with hands on bat and each elbow. Bat should not be straight up and should not be flat. At good angle.
 - d. Goal of stance is to be comfortable, good plate coverage, good balance, two eyed look at pitcher and create some rhythm
- Hitting – Negative Movement or Load
 - a. Must have movement back before you can move forward (introduce at 8U)
 - b. Heel lift from front foot, weight shifts to back foot on inside of leg
 - c. Do not twist upper body in negative move (no coiling – keep front shoulder facing pitcher)
- Hitting – Positive Movement
 - a. Toe touch or stride is optional, just a preparation of transitioning from negative move to prepare for movement toward pitcher
- Swing/Connection
 - a. Lower body rotation – back foot pivots – EMPHASIZE THE LOWER BODY. Young players often swing with nothing but arms. Power is generated from the lower body and rotation of hips – explode with hips
 - b. Elbow and hands line up with stripe of pant
 - c. Bat leg – barrel of bat is pointed toward catcher, bottom is pointing pitcher, hands remain in front of belly button. “Lead with the knob”
 - d. Generate bat speed and leverage with bat head to contact point over the plate
 - e. Top hand palm up and bottom hand palm down
 - f. Back shoulder should never be higher than front shoulder -- level or below front shoulder to hit liners and at correct plane.
- Extension
 - a. From contact to extension – bat moves from contact to pointing barrel at pitcher
 - b. Wrists don’t roll until extension completes
- Follow through
 - a. Wrists roll with bat finishing on back shoulder
 - b. Young hitters can release to 1 hand but should not release until after extension

Catcher Mechanics (10U +)

- Youtube Video –
https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLqP5FY3hLh8JsiFET4ME6cJKSf3MgQqDL&time_continue=38&v=qwdeRteH3es
- Stance
 - a. Athletic position
 - i. Staggered feet
 - ii. Feet wider than hips to have good balance in squat
 - iii. Squat with butt down, balanced and not falling forward or backward
- Glove Work

- a. Soft Hands, Relax
 - b. Subtle Shift to get around ball
 - i. Frame a borderline pitch
 - 1. Catch outside of ball, don't rake them back in
 - c. Stick the Pitch
- Setup down the middle until pitcher is ready with subtle move to inside or outside of plate
- Throwing
 - a. Nice short arm circle
 - i. Rake toward ear as quick as possible
 - ii. Footwork has to be quick and efficient
 - 1. Replace Feet
 - a. Throwing Foot replaces glove foot to get hips and shoulders square to target
 - 2. Load to Back Leg
 - a. Once catcher has more strength, throw with one step with load to back leg vs replacing glove side foot
 - 3. Don't take extra steps when throwing
- Fielding Bunts
 - a. Bunt To First Base Side
 - i. Get around the ball to position body for throw as you scoop the ball with two hands
 - b. To 3rd base side
 - i. Field with back toward first base, spin and throw

Pitcher Mechanics (10U+)

View the 28 step program on how to teach pitching mechanics

<https://www.mendotaheightsathletics.com/page/show/3920562-pitching-videos>

Position Skills

- Infield and Outfield Position Skills Video
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLqP5FY3hLh8JsiFET4ME6cJKSf3MqQqDL&v=yV0Cljuiz4o>

Practice Drills

The following is a list of practice drills you can incorporate into your practice plans.

Throwing / Catching

The following is a list of throwing and catching drills you can use in your practice plans.

Paired Throwing Drills

- Every practice and pregame should incorporate at least some of the steps of paired throwing drills
- By the end of the season, every player be very familiar with these paired throwing drills. The goal is to have this become a standard for MHAA teams.
- On days where you are abbreviating throwing time, you can do less time for drills and focus only on certain paired throwing drills for that practice. Early in the season, as many as 30 minutes of your practices should be dedicated to this regardless of age. As season progresses, pairing down to 10-15 minutes for older age levels is typical. For younger in-house players, it should remain a focus along with other basic skills.
- To warmup arms, incorporate at least 2 of the first 5 drills.
- For all throwing drills, players should be actively catching the ball – stepping toward ball and getting themselves in position to throw back. No lazy catching.
- Warmups before a game should involve the same steps used in practices, just less steps with less reps to accomplish it within 10 minutes
- For young 6U players, or even intro 8U players, it is often more beneficial to line kids up with coaches until players demonstrate enough skills to do paired throwing and catching drills.
- ** Drills listed with the double asterisk are items that some coaches disagree on as drills that aren't as useful while some coaches believe they are – choose what you are comfortable with

1. Standing Wrist Flips (Wrist only)

- a. Standing close together
- b. Players work on getting rotation on the ball and getting vertical spin.
- c. Glove under elbow, elbow out in front at shoulder height, players flick wrist
- d. 5 wrist flicks each and move to next drill.

2. Standing Dart throws (like wrist flips but add elbow)

- a. Players back up 3-5 ft
- b. Same drill as Step 1, but add the elbow for a dart throw.
- c. Players learn this skill for rundown throws and for warming up
- d. 5 dart throws.

3. "10 Toes"

- a. Players back up 3-5 ft.
- b. Toes facing target instead of perpendicular.
- c. Players learn to twist their upper body so glove shoulder facing target.
- d. No steps when throwing, but twisting upper body back as they throw. Younger players may understand whipping a shower curtain open as a similar movement twisting to throw.

- e. 5 throws.
4. Standard Throws / Weight Transition
 - a. Players back up 3-5 ft.
 - b. Players stand perpendicular to target with glove side shoulder facing target.
 - c. Shift weight to back knee and drive off that foot as they step to throw.
 - d. Teach players to use their lower body and momentum when throwing.
 - e. 5-10 throws.
 5. Simulated Grounder and Throw
 - a. Players back up 3-5 ft
 - b. From same distance, player with ball sets on ground.
 - c. After player catches ball, they simulate fielding a grounder. Using correct mechanics to field ball, scoops up the ball with glove, gets to correct throwing position (“1-2-Throw and stay low”), and make a good throw.
 - d. 5-10 throws.
 6. 4-3-2-1 Throws
 - a. Move players back 5-10 feet as you do this drill and continually move the back to get them throwing longer distances.
 - b. Ball in glove, player pretends to catch a popup or fly ball
 - c. From catch, teach the 4-3-2-1 throw (see throwing mechanics) for outfield throws.
 7. Quick Hands
 - a. Girls come back to a close distance and the goal is to make as many good throws with good mechanics back and forth in one minute. Players count.
 - b. Push them to get the ball out sooner with good mechanics.

Other Team Throwing Drills

1. Drunken Sailors (10/12U +)
 - a. More of a focus for players at traveling levels
 - b. Player places ball in front of them
 - c. Grab ball bare handed and keep waist bent to make a quick throw. Simulates fielding a softly hit ball or bunt down the line with a quick throw to 1st
 - d. It will look like a side armed throw but if players stay low, bent at waist, it's the same mechanics as a standard throw but rotated sideways
2. Throw on the run (3 players)
 - a. Player 1 starts with ball and runs bout half way to player with ball out in front like elbow flips drill ready to throw ball
 - b. Player 2 calls for ball when player is approaching half way point. Player 1 throws to Player 2.
 - c. Player 1 lines up behind Player 2. Player 2 repeats drill and throws to player 3.
 - d. Repeat.

3. Distance Throwing
 - a. To strengthen players arms, use the crow hop and keep moving players back 10 feet until they are throwing a distance that forces them to throw further than they can
 - b. Emphasize throws on a line, not a rainbow – better to throw on a line and bounce than to throw a rainbow
4. Rundowns
 - a. With 3-4 players and a runner with a helmet on, similar to “Throw on the Run” drill but with runner on base.
5. Around the Horn
 - a. Players line up equally at each base and home.
 - b. 1 player at each base and home, rest are in line behind those players 10-15 feet behind as a backup
 - c. Ball starts with catcher. Catcher throws to first and follows ball.
 - d. 1st throws to 2nd and follows ball.
 - e. 2nd throws to 3rd and follows ball.
 - f. 3rd throws to home and follows ball.
 - g. Process repeats until the catcher that started the drill is back at home plate and catches the last ball.
 - h. Time how long it takes the team to complete throughout the season. Make it a competition.
6. 4 square survivor
 - a. On field or with temporary bases, line up in a square/diamond
 - b. Equal players at each base, 1 player with rest of players in line as backups to throw 10-15 feet behind.
 - c. Catcher throws to 1st and goes to back of line at same position.
 - d. 1st base lays down a tag, then turns and throws to 2nd. Players goes to back of line at same position.
 - e. Same thing at 2nd Base, 3rd base and home.
 - f. After each player has 2 rotations, becomes a survivor game. If the player makes a bad throw or a player drops the ball or doesn't make a tag, they are out.
 - g. Eventually the game gets down to 2 players where 1 player wins.
7. Relay / Cutoff Race
 - a. Line up in 2 separate lines with 4-6 players per line spaced out evenly down a foul line from 3rd base to pole or 1st base to pole.
 - b. Player 1 throws to Player 2, Player 2 to Player 3, etc until it reaches the last player who then throws it back the other direction.
 - c. First team to go there and back “x” number of times wins the race.
8. Body Points
 - a. Line up players in 3 lines or one for each coach that can catch the ball.
 - b. Players have ball thrown to them from coach.
 - i. 0 points for dropped ball
 - ii. 1 point for catching ball
 - iii. 2 points for catching ball with nose to knuckles and moving body to ball
 - c. Players then throw back to coach
 - i. 0 points for uncatchable ball

- ii. 1 point for ball the coach has to reach for
 - iii. 2 points for ball thrown to chest or face.
 - d. After “x” number of turns, player with most points wins.
- 9. Bucket Home
 - a. With players lined up at short and 2nd in two equal lines, stand up a bucket at home plate.
 - b. Hit players a softer ground ball that they charge and make a throw home to hit the bucket.
 - i. Hit the bucket without a bounce or 1 bounce and it falls over – 2 points
 - ii. Hit the bucket without a bounce or 1 bounce and doesn’t fall over – 1 points
 - iii. Anything else – 0
 - c. Player with most points wins after “x” number of turns
- 10. Hit the Buckets
 - a. Setup a stack of 3 buckets
 - b. Line up players a correct distance away for your age level
 - c. Players attempt to hit the buckets with a throw
 - i. 2 points if you knock over the buckets
 - ii. 1 point if you hit the buckets in the air
 - iii. 0 points if it bounces or doesn’t hit the bucket
 - 1. If long distance throw, 1 point for 1 bounce if it hits bucket
 - d. Player with most points wins

Hitting Drills

- On days where you have more time for hitting, you can do more of these drills
 - On days where you have less time for hitting you can do less drills
 - Goal should be to get players some swings at all practices and keep things moving.
 - Pre-game warmups involve same steps, just less of them (Tee, Soft Toss, Live with wiffles, Weighted balls are typical)
 - Intended to be drills that you cycle through quickly – 10 to 15 swings per player setup as stations that players rotate through. Form 3-4 groups depending on the number of coaches you have to rotate through stations.
 - Using tennis balls for soft toss and tee drills are optimal. Smaller ball size requires more focus and precision, sound of tennis ball being hit solid gives good sound feedback, and you can fit way more tennis balls in a bucket.
1. Tee and Bownet (or Fence) with Real Balls, Tennis Balls or wiffles (if using real balls must be a bownet)
 - a. Focus on proper hitting approach
 - i. Relax, load, stride and swing (yes until no)
 2. Live Pitching with wiffle balls or other limited distance balls (weighted or other)
 - a. Throw with full windmill if capable to help with timing and work on early load (when windmill starts) then stride with yes/no swing decision
 3. Bunting with real balls (10U+)
 - a. Throw toward a fence with batter in front of fence
 - b. Have them square around each time – square as pitcher winds up
 - c. As they improve, focus on bunting down lines
 4. Soft Toss with Bownet or Fence– real balls, tennis balls or wiffles (if using fence, wiffles or tennis balls only)
 - a. Lineup at correct angle with batter to toss ball toward front hip.
 - b. Focus on proper hitting approach, same as tee drill but soft toss.
 5. Machine (Jugs Machine or Lite Flite) – if you have access to a machine and cage
 - a. If you have access to a pitching machine or lite flite machine, live pitches from a machine are nice to mix in.
 - b. Tee and Soft Toss work are more valuable than machines – do not overuse machines.
 - c. Don't waste a nice field by placing a pitching machine at the pitchers mound and everyone waits for their turn and no one can utilize the field for any other purpose.
 6. Bat Behind Back
 - a. With bat positions across a player's lower back and hands behind their body holding bat against their bag, position the barrel of the bat out toward the hitting hip.
 - b. Line up with a tee and hit the ball with only the rotation of the hips
 - c. Work on lower body
 7. Variations of Hitting Drills to mix in to practices
 - a. Tee Variations
 - i. Inside Pitches (inside strike zone)

1. Put a plate where players stand, put tee out in front on inside corner to teach players to hit inside pitches out in front of them before it reaches the plate.
- ii. Outside Pitches (inside strike zone)
 1. Put a plate where players stand, put tee out on back corner of outside plate to teach players to hit outside pitches later so bat can connect.
- iii. Low Pitches (inside strike zone)
 1. Setup tee low
- iv. High Pitches (inside strike zone)
 1. Step tee high
- v. Weighted Balls on Tees
 1. Teaches players to swing through the pitch
- b. Soft Toss Variations
 - i. Toss high/low/inside/outside
 - ii. Toss from behind the batter

Hitting Games / Competitions

1. Bunt for points (zones worth 1, 2, or 3 points) (10U+)
 - a. Keep Track of Points during batting drills (Line Drive = 2, Grounder = 1, Popup = 0, Miss = -1)
2. One Pitch Survivor
 - a. all players ready to hit, one player at the plate at a time, rotating quickly. Each player gets one pitch. If they make contact, they stay in. If they miss, they go to field. Give players a couple of turns before the survivor game begins.
3. Smash Derby
 - a. Create 3 separate teams. 2 teams outfield, 1 team batting
 - b. Using tennis balls, pitch to players if they hit it past the outfielders, they get a point. Players should line up in shallow outfield for younger players
 - c. Players get 10 good pitches each. Most points among all players wins.
4. More Games available online - <https://www.discussfastpitch.com/coaching-softball/30960-competitive-end-practice-drills.html>

Keep Kids Moving When in Line for Hitting Drills

Hitting drills can create the most time waiting for kids because there are limited coaches to setup multiple hitting stations.

With young kids that cannot run their own hitting stations, setup extra stations that kids cycle to on their own without a coach and they have to do some sort of conditioning drill. Jumping Jacks, Running, Pushups, etc are good ways to keep them active, moving and engaged during short breaks until it is their turn to hit.

For older kids, teach them how to run their own stations so kids are either feeding players soft toss or balls on a tee or hitting and coaches can spend more time with instruction.

Fielding Drills

- Fielding Drills should keep kids moving with as much activity as possible in a short amount of time
- Paired fielding drills are an excellent way to increase the number of reps a player receives in a short amount of time
- Follow your throw drills after fielding can incorporate conditioning into your fielding drills
- Rotating players through infield and outfield stations for non-paired drills keeps players moving and interested. Based on the number of coaches you have, setup 2-4 fielding stations and rotate through.

Paired Fielding Drills

- These can be incorporated into paired throwing drills as well for practices where you move from throwing to fielding
 - Rather than going back and forth, player 1 gives player 2 five reps and then switch. Paired drills allows coaches to walk through and correct issues with mechanics while keeping everyone active
 - Paired fielding drills may be difficult for 6U/8U players. Introduce at the 10u level and up.
1. Paired Ground balls.
 - a. Player 1 rolls easy groundballs to Player 2. Player 2 throws back. Switch every 5.
 - b. Emphasize proper mechanics, correct mistakes. Do it without gloves and tennis balls to begin with to work on mechanics.
 - c. Move to forehand and backhand doing 5 each.
 2. Groups of 4
 - a. Cardinal Drill – No Throw
 - i. Two lines for the group of 4.
 - ii. 1 player (Player A) on one side with ball. Other 3 players across, player B first in line.
 - iii. Player A rolls balls to player B.
 - iv. Player A runs on the right to get in line behind player D. Player B runs to the right to get in line behind Player A. Player A rolls ball back to player C and runs to the right to get in line behind Player D.
 - v. Rinse and repeat. Players fielding balls and running.
 - b. Cardinal Drill – With Throw
 - i. Two lines for the group of 4.
 - ii. 1 player (Player A) on one side starts with ball.
 3. Movers & Shufflers
 - a. Player 1 rolls a mixed bag of balls on forehand and backhand sides and charges to make player 2 move to field balls. Player 2 fields and throws back. Switch after 5-10.
 - 4.

Group/Rotation Infield Drills

- Setup several stations and rotate players through

1. Line Drill - "Left-Right-Field-Left-Right-Throw" (for righties) "Right-Left-Field-Right-Left-Throw" (for lefties)
 - a. Line up all players on foul line or gym line
 - b. In proper fielding position, simulate taking 2 steps (Left-Right) to approach fielding the ball, pretend to field ball, then 2 steps (Left-Right) to position yourself to throw ball, simulating a throw. Move all the way down the field or gym and then back simulating the steps and throws.
2. Hit Groundballs - For all of these drills you can either roll for younger players or hit grounders for older players. Should be used in rotation with other drills. Don't line up an entire team waiting for their turn.
 - a. Drill 1 - Basic Grounders
 - b. Drill 2 – Backhand/Forehand Grounders
 - c. Drill 3 – Charge grounders
 - d. Drill 4 – 2 hop/1 hop grounders
 - e. Drill 5 – Midfield and corners
 - i. Coach lines up ahead of the pitchers mound and works with players and SS and 2B rolling ground balls away and to bag. Practice force outs at 2nd.
 - ii. 2nd coach lines up at home hitting grounders to the corners with throws from 1st to 3rd.
 - iii. Rotate players.
 - f. Drill 6 – Mixed bag. Keep players on their toes, mix in grounders to make them move in any direction.
3. Popup Drills
 - a. Drill 1 – Standard popup drill
 - i. Toss or hit popups to 2-3 separate lines
 - b. Drill 2 – Middles and Corners
 - i. 1 coach throws or hits popups to middle infield
 - ii. 1 coach throws or hits popups to corners
 - iii. Players rotate
4. Relay/Cutoff Drills
 - a. Drill 1 – Pair up in groups of 3.
 - i. Player 1 throws to Player 2
 - ii. Player 2 positions themselves to cutoff and throw to player 3. Position to turn to glove side and throw.
 - iii. Player 3 positions themselves to cutoff and pretend to throw. Then throws back to player 2.
 - iv. Repeat 2-3 times and switch spots.
 - b. Drill 2 – 2 Groups
 - i. 6 lines of players.
 1. Group 1: 1 line at 3rd, 1 line at short, 1 line at left
 2. Group 2: 1 line at 2nd, 1 line at short, 1 line in right.
 3. Coach for group 1 hits or throws balls to left field. Shortstop makes cut and throws to 3rd. 3rd catches and tags.

4. Coach for group 2 hits or throws balls to right field. 2nd base makes cut and throws to 2nd with short covering and tags.
- ii. Drill 3 – Full field
 1. Players at all positions with runners.
 2. Ball hit to outfield.
 3. Players need to react with proper cuts and relays.

Group/Rotation Outfield Drills

1. Over the Shoulder
 - a. Player drop steps to one side (left or right), coach throws fly ball to that side forcing the player to run under the ball and catch it. Player throws back to coach.
2. Head Turns
 - a. Player drop steps to one side (left or right), as player is running in that direction, coach yells “now” and throws ball behind player to opposite side so they have to turn their head and switch directions.
3. Hip Turn
 - a. Player drop steps to one side, ball is thrown to opposite side and player turns hips vs head turn for an earlier adjustment to the ball.
4. QB Drill
 - a. Line up 2 lines on each side of the coach. One player goes at one time rotating sides. Coach throws ball out in front of players like a quarterback. Players run under the ball to catch fly balls and throw back to coach and line up in other line.
5. Side to Side
 - a. Each player receives 3 short fly balls. Coach throws to their left, to the right, and back to their left. Player throwing back to the coach each time. Force players to move fast to the ball.
6. Drop Step Reaction
 - a. Coach points in one direction before throwing ball. Player must drop step and turn hips to correct side and chase down ball. Differs from over the shoulder as player needs to react to direction.
7. Hit or Throw Fly Balls from home plate
 - a. Line up 3 lines at each outfield position with players in line out of the way.
 - b. Coach throws or hits fly ball from home plate so players can learn how to judge fly balls coming from home.
 - c. Emphasize players reacting with drop step backward rather than getting caught moving forward with first step. Easier to drop back then charge then to step forward and then drop step on a misjudgement.

Fielding Games/Competitions

1. Grounder Eliminator
 - a. Kids line up at an infield position and have to field ball and make clean throw.
 - b. Let players go a couple of rounds with no elimination
 - c. Elimination begins in 3rd round and players are eliminated if they don't cleanly field it or cleanly throw it
2. Fly Ball Eliminator

- a. Same game as above with flyballs

Baserunning Drills

1. For In-House Levels and Younger Traveling Players
 - a. Run Through 1st Base
 - b. 1st to 2nd
 - c. 2nd to 3rd
 - d. 3rd to Home
 - e. Rounding Bases (8U and traveling)
 - f. Run All the Bases
2. For traveling players and 10U/12U In-House
 - a. Run through 1st Base with Advancing to 2nd
 - b. Leadoffs and Breakdown from each base (4-6-4)
 - c. Advancing to home from 3rd base
 - d. Stealing 2nd / Stealing 3rd
 - e. Sliding Drills

Baserunning Games/Competitions

1. Baserunning Relay Race
 - a. Half of the team lines up at 2nd base, half at home plate
 - b. One player from each team running at a time.
 - c. Players run around and return from where they started and tag next player.
 - d. First team to finish wins.
 - e. Emphasize rounding bases.
2. Time the players running to first or around all bases

Scenario Drills (introduce at 8U, develop 10U+)

Variety of drills, lining up players at positions to cover:

More common scenarios to practice as an example:

- a. Force out scenarios at 1st base
- b. Force out scenarios at 2nd base
- c. Force out scenarios at 3rd base
- d. Force outs at home
- e. Non-force outs, tagging players at any base or on baseline
- f. Hits to outfield, cutoff and relay to 2nd, 3rd, or home
- g. Hits to outfield requiring double cutoff

Pickoff Scenario Drills (Traveling)

1. Depending on your team's pickoff plays, walk players through assignments for specific scenarios and practice them.

- a. Common Plays
 - i. Catcher to 1st
 - ii. Catcher to 3rd
 - iii. Catcher to Pitcher to 1st
 - iv. Catcher to Pitcher to 3rd
 - v. Catcher fake throw to 2nd to 3rd

Bunt Coverage Drills (Traveling)

1. Depending on your team's bunt coverage plans, walk players through assignments for specific scenarios and practice them. For more on bunt coverages - <https://www.softballtutor.com/softball-bunt-defense/>

Short Sided Scrimmage Ideas

To teach scenarios, schedule scrimmages within your own team with only infield positions. For other practices, schedule the last half scrimmaging with another MHAA team to scrimmage with all positions. Stop the scrimmage to cover scenarios and re-iterate players calling out how many outs, where the play is, etc.

Practice Plans

- All practice plans are given a range for 1 hour (In-House/Traveling) to 1.5 (Traveling).
- All traveling teams should include extra time at practice at least once or twice a week that includes 30 minutes specifically for pitchers and catchers practice time. This time is not indicated below.
- These practice plans are just suggestions on different types of practices you can conduct and mix in drills. You can mix in however you'd like to run your own practice.

Offensive Focused Practice

- 3-5 minutes - Dynamic Warmup
- 5-10 minutes - Throwing Drills
- 25-30 minutes – Batting Rotation Drills
- 15-30 minutes – Baserunning Drills
- 10-15 minutes – Batting or Baserunning Game

Defensive Focused Practice

- 3-5 minutes - Dynamic Warmup
- 15-20 minutes - Throwing Drills
- 25-30 minutes – Infield/Outfield Fielding Rotation Drills
- 15-30 minutes – Position Scenarios / Bunt Coverage / Small Sided Scrimmage
- 10-15 minutes – Fielding or Throwing Game / Small Sided Scrimmage

Mixed Practice

- 3-5 minutes - Dynamic Warmup
- 10-15 minutes - Throwing Drills
- 15-20 minutes – Batting Rotation Drills
- 15-20 minutes – Fielding Rotation Drills
- 15-20 minutes – Baserunning Drills
- 5-10 minutes – Fun Game

Conditioning Focused Practice

- 5-10 minutes - Dynamic Warmup
- 10-15 minutes - Throwing Drills
- 20-30 minutes – Running / Batting Rotation Drills
 - Rotate players between batting drills and conditioning drills
- 20-30 – Running / Fielding Rotation Drills
 - Rotate players between conditioning drills and fielding drills
- 5-10 minutes – Fun Game to End Practice

Softball IQ / Position Focused Practice

- 3-5 minutes - Dynamic Warmup
- 10-15 minutes - Throwing Drills
- 20-30 minutes – Bunt Coverage or Game Scenarios or Base/Backup Assignments
 - Rotate players between batting drills and conditioning drills
- 20-30 – Infield Position Skills

- Rotate players through middle infield skills, corner infield skills, and outfield skills (3 stations)
- 5-10 minutes – Fun Game to End Practice