

When teaching your young players to throw, focus on the following:

I. GRIP

****Training Tip****

Draw a stripe on the ball with a black marker. (Figure 1) When we talk about the "stripe" on the ball, this is what we are referring to.

- The player should grip the ball with two (3) fingers (unless it is a baseball, beginning grip should be 3 fingers), so that the ball is not in the palm of the hand.
- Grip across the seams (large horseshoe) of the ball if possible. The fingers will form a backward "C" around the ball with the middle of the index finger on the stripe. (Figure 2)
- The little finger will "ride" loosely on the ball.
- Place the thumb under the ball; the thumb should be underneath the pointer finger.
- The fingers should cross the seams where the knuckle closest to the fingertips are. This is so the fingers can pull down on the seams during release.
- The pressure on the ball from the fingers that cross the seams should be evenly distributed.



Figure 1



Figure 2

****Coaching Tip****

A tight grip on the ball will inhibit your ability to spin the ball. The grip should be firm, but not tight allowing your wrist to stay flexible and create backspin.

II. ARM CIRCLE AND RELEASE & LOWER BODY DRIVE

****Coaching Tip****

When explaining things to young players, talk in terms of "ball side" (throwing hand side) and "glove side."

1. The throwing hand travels in a downward and back motion so that the thumb passes by the thigh, keeping your hand on top of the ball, reaching a position where the palm is facing away from the target above the shoulder ("fingers to the sky"). The back foot begins to pivot and turn the body sideways.
2. The throwing arm is long and loose (elbow not locked); the elbow should be at the same height or slightly higher than the shoulder and the hand is above the head (figure 3A). At this point the front foot has landed and established a firm front side.

****Coaching Tip****

When teaching young players, use the phrase **"thumb by the thigh, (2) elbow high, (3) fingers to the sky, (4) wave bye-bye, (5) and release the back side"**

3. As the weight transfer (from the back to the front) begins, the elbow leads the arm into the release position above the head in line with the shoulder. The palm has begun to turn forward and the elbow is slightly higher than the shoulder in a vertical line from the elbow to the wrist. (Figure 3B) There should be a separation that remains even from the head to the elbow all the way to the wrist.
4. The path of the arm circle, from the starting point to the release point, is on the



Figure 3A

“power line” (straight to the target). For example, the throwing arm should not fall behind the head or body. (Figure 3B)

- As the ball is released, the fingers should pull down with force across the seams of the ball (intensity of grip across seams increases during the pull down). (Figure 4A) The transfer and throw should be against the firm leg.

****Coaching Tip****

The thumb leads the hand down toward the ground on release.

- Follow-through: The hand follows through down and toward the glove-side (opposite) knee. (Figure 4B) The back leg should continue following through (releasing the back side)
- The goal at release is to create complete vertical backspin on the ball.
- The glove-side (non-throwing) arm extends toward the target. The glove-side (non-throwing) shoulder stays on the power line to the target as weight transfer and release occur. (Figure 4C)
- Keep the glove hand close to the body through the release and follow-through. (Figure 4B)



Figure 3B



Figure 4A



Figure 4B



Figure 4C

III. LOWER BODY DRIVE

- Establish a strong throwing-hand side base by opening instep of the throwing side foot slightly toward the target (45 degrees). This is the **pivot foot**. The **pivot foot** turns out toward the target to begin the throwing sequence. (Figure 5)
- The glove hand side foot should land at a 45 degree angle when transfer is beginning to occur.
- Weight should be balanced “athletically” on the balls of the feet. (Figure 5)
- Lower body transfer begins as the front (glove side) foot steps on line to the target, with the arm in the “fingers to the sky” position (Figure 6)
- Weight transfer begins as the glove side arm “pulls” down and into the chest as the throwing arm comes forward into release position. (Figure 6)
- Lower body weight transfer completes as the ball is released and follow through occurs. The ball side leg (back leg) continues forward at a natural pace (a drag of the foot is recommended). (Figure 7)



Figure 5



Figure 6A



Figure 6B



Figure 7

THROWING RECAP AND TEACHING PROGRESSION**1. To develop grip, spin and release.**

1. Player on one knee (ball side knee down) facing target. (Figure 8)
2. Rotate the body until the glove side shoulder, knee and foot are in line toward target (knee drill position).
3. Release the ball by pulling down and across the seams (when the ball gets to the target line at top of the arm circle) with fingers; thumb leads down toward the ground on release. Keep an even separation between the arm and the head.
4. The glove side arm follows through up to the chest.

*Figure 8***2. To create arm circle.**

1. From the knee drill position (see 1. above), start arm circle by bringing thumb past thigh to a point where the palm faces away from the target.
2. The elbow leads arm forward into release position.
3. Release same as described above.

3. Lower body action from standing position.

1. Player turns sideways to target, glove shoulder, hip and knee pointing toward target.
2. Weight evenly distributed on the balls of the feet.
3. Hands relaxed at sides.
4. Bring both arm up into "fingers to the sky" position (players should see the backs of both palms in this position).
5. As arms move, shift weight slightly to the inside of the ball side (back) foot.
6. Elbow leads throwing arm forward into release position. At the same time transfer lower body weight against a firm front side (not locked).
7. Ball release occurs as described above. Follow through with hand down and to the glove side (opposite) knee.
8. Drag ball side foot toward target on follow through. (Shoe laces to the ground)

****Coaching Tips****

- Use smaller balls with younger kids; make sure they have a ball they can handle.
- Draw or tape a stripe on the ball; this provides great visual feedback on spin.
- Use dry mechanics, shadow throws, be very deliberate (slow motion repetition).

Kids need to have a throwing program that they do every day (for purposes of loosening up and for practicing and improving their throwing skills). **Every practice must include a selection of throwing and catching drills.** Throwing is as important as hitting, pitching, etc. Treat it as such!

****Training Tip****

- Throwing drills should be done with a striped ball.

****Coaching Tips****

- Tell your players that the ball will go where their hand (or more specifically, the "dot") is pointing when they let go of it.
- "Flipping" the wrist means more to a kid than "snapping" the wrist. Kids snap their fingers, they "flip" their wrists.

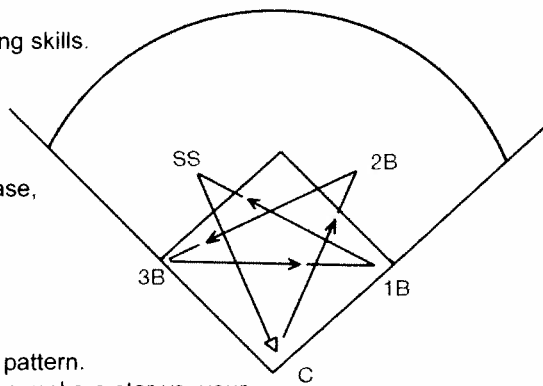
THE STAR DRILL

The Star Drill is a drill that will help your players improve their throwing skills.

Drill Name: Star Drill

Drill Focus: Catching and Throwing

1. Players get in the basic infield positions (first, second and third base, shortstop, catcher), but not necessarily at regular distance.
2. Catcher starts by throwing the ball to the second base.
3. Second base throws to third base.
4. Third base throws to first base.
5. First base throws to shortstop.
6. Shortstop throws to catcher. This makes the ball travel in a “star” pattern.
7. To make this more game-like, time how quickly your infielders can make a star vs. your outfielders, and keep track of these times on a board at practice.
8. Also you can add baserunners (with helmets) and have them run around the bases before the players can complete the star.



Video Information:

These drills and others can be found on the ASA training videos available for purchase at 1-800-654-8337 or via the ASA website at www.asasoftball.com or www.softballoutlet.com.

Catching A Thrown Ball

Like hitting, the skill of catching a thrown ball is difficult for a young player to perform because (1) it requires good hand-eye coordination, and (2) most young players are afraid of the ball.

If your players are struggling playing catch with each other, have them take their gloves off and try using bigger balls like volleyballs, soccer balls, beach balls, and even lightweight basketballs. Using a bigger ball will make it easier for your players to focus on the ball, which really helps with their hand-eye coordination. Also, a bigger ball will help your players use both hands when they catch the ball. With their gloves off, it will be nearly impossible for them to catch the ball with just one hand.

When teaching young players how to catch a thrown ball focus on the following:

- Ready Position: “Athletic” ready position – knees slightly bent, weight on balls of the feet, shoulders, hips and feet are square to the ball.
- Hands start in “neutral” position – approximately waist high, thumbs up, palms facing each other
- Receive ball with hands in front of the body, palms facing the ball.
- Catch ball in the middle of the body.
- When the ball is above the waist, catch the ball with fingers toward the sky: “High to the Sky.”
- When the ball is below the waist, catch the ball with fingers toward the ground: “Down to the Ground.”

Coach, you need to remember that young players are so afraid of getting hit by the ball that they will try to avoid it rather than try to catch it. This is why your players will move their heads, and sometimes their entire body, as they try to catch the ball. Your challenge is to remove the fear of the ball by using safety balls, and by teaching your players the proper way to catch a thrown ball. That way you won’t have to say “Don’t be afraid of the ball” over and over.

Above and Below Catching Drill

The **Above and Below** drill will help your players improve their catching skills.

Drill Name: Above & Below

Drill Focus: Hand Position

1. Have player remove their glove.
2. Using a volleyball or soccer ball, and standing about four to six feet in front of the player, gently toss a ball to the player. The toss should be above or below the player’s waist.
3. Player has to say “High Sky” or “Down Ground,” depending upon where the ball is when they catch it.
4. Vary the tosses so the player has to react properly.
5. Gradually add a glove for the player and then begin using a softball.

Catching A Fly Ball

Catching a fly ball is one of the most difficult skills of all for a young player to learn. This is mainly because of a child's underdeveloped hand-eye coordination and their fear of being hit on the head by a ball falling out of the sky. While all players will have to catch fly balls from time to time, it is a skill that is mainly performed by outfielders. However, catching a fly ball is a skill every player needs to learn.

Try to get your players to think of fly balls as thrown balls that just go a little too high. This won't guarantee that all fly balls will be caught, but it will help your players get over the mental block of catching a fly ball.

Work with all of your players on the following fly ball basics.

- Line your throwing side up with the ball.
- Get your glove up in-line with the ball with your fingers pointing to the sky.
- Elbows are bent and relaxed (do not extend arms straight to catch ball).
- Catch the ball in front of your head off the throwing side of the body. (Figure 1)
- Catch the ball with one hand (glove), covering the ball in your glove with your bare hand.
- Position glove close to top of head on throwing shoulder.
- When catching a ball in the sun, try to adjust angle to play ball out of the sun. Use either the glove or the throwing hand to shield the sun while tracking the ball.



Figure 9

****Coaching Tip****

Start young kids with very soft and light balls to help eliminate their fear of the ball. For example, use a volleyball to teach catching with two hands with palms facing away from body and fingers up.

Fly Ball Drills

Three drills that will help your players improve their fly ball skills are:

1. Self Toss
2. Football Toss
3. Roof Toss

1. Drill Name: Self Toss
Drill Focus: Confidence in Catching A Thrown Ball

1. Each player has a ball and their glove on.
2. They toss the ball up in the air and catch it.
3. As they get more confident, have them toss the ball higher and higher.
4. If your players have difficulty, have them use a safety ball or a tennis ball to help them overcome their fear of being hit by the ball.
5. Also, try to make this drill competitive by seeing who can toss the ball the highest and make the catch.

Note: This drill is good because all players can do it at the same time.

2. Drill Name: Football Toss
Drill Focus: Judgment

1. Players keep their gloves on and line up in two lines ready to go out for a pass.
2. Instead of using softballs, you will throw footballs to your players.
3. Have one player at a time from each line "go out for a pass" while you throw them the football and they catch it with their glove and their bare hand.

3. Drill Name: Roof Toss
Drill Focus: Catching Skills

1. Have your players try this drill at home with a whiffle ball or a tennis ball so it won't damage the roof.
2. Your players toss the ball up on the roof and practice catching it when it rolls down and falls off.
3. This drill really helps their judgment and catching skills.

Fielding A Ground Ball

While hand-eye coordination is not as crucial in fielding a ground ball, **fear of the ball** is a big problem. Most kids are scared to death of getting hit by a ball that is bouncing sharply, heading directly toward them. Softballs are not soft and they can hurt young (and older) kids.

The best thing you can do to improve your players' ability to field ground balls is to remove their fear of the ball by using softer, safety balls. Use safety balls, whiffle balls, tennis balls or any softer ball, that won't hurt the player if it takes a bad bounce and hits them. Pain and injury are two things that will certainly keep your players from paying attention long enough to ever learn how to field correctly. And with all the great safety balls available now, it doesn't make any sense for you not to use them. If you are the type of coach who thinks kids just need to take a few grounders off the face until they learn to "stay down on the ball and keep your body behind it," you are in for a surprise - those days are over. Kids have many choices now as to what sport they want to play and it doesn't take much - fear, injury, boredom - before they choose to go play something else. So be compassionate and use safety balls when teaching your players how to field ground balls.



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

Here are the basics for fielding a grounder:

1. "Athletic" Ready Position: Knees slightly bent, weight on the balls of the feet, with balance slightly forward. The shoulders, hips and feet are square to the ball. Bend at the knees, not at the waist, to lower the body into good fielding position. (Figure 10)
2. Let the arms hang in a relaxed position, fingers down. Hands start in "neutral" position – approximately waist high, thumbs up, palms facing each other. (Figure 10)
3. Approach the ball like an airplane. Try to get your players to imagine that they are airplanes coming in for a landing when they approach a ground ball. This will help them get lower to the ground the closer the ball gets to them, instead of approaching the ball like a helicopter and plopping down on top of it at the last minute. If they approach it like a helicopter they will either miss the ball completely or field it behind them.
4. Just prior to gathering the ball into the glove, make sure the tips of the glove are touching the ground (you never want to have to go down for the ball at the last minute – it's quicker to have the glove close to the ground in anticipation of fielding the ball). (Figure 11)
5. Field the ball with hands in front of the body, palms facing the ball, elbows in front of the knees, elbows slightly bent. (Figure 2) Field ball on the glove hand side of the body
6. Gather the ball using "soft" hands. Field the ball with your hands, not with the glove. (Figure 12)
7. Gather the ball through the middle of your body to the throwing side as you move your feet to a throwing position, stepping toward the target. (Figure 13)

Video Information:

These drills and others can be found on the ASA training videos available for purchase at 1-800-654-8337 or via the ASA website at www.asasoftball.com or www.softballoutlet.com.

Ground Ball Drills

Three drills to help your players improve their ground ball fielding skills are:

1. Gloveless Whiffle Balls
2. Wall Bouncers
3. Chicken

1. Drill Name: Gloveless Whiffle Balls

Drill Focus: Confidence

1. Have your players spread out around the infield facing home plate—no gloves!
2. Now, using only whiffle balls, randomly roll grounders out to your players. Be sure not to go in any particular order so your players have to practice always being ready.
3. To ensure that you spend more time fielding grounders instead of chasing balls, have extra whiffle balls (use a plastic five gallon paint bucket) and have your players roll the ball back into you after they field them.

2. Drill Name: Wall Bounces

Drill Focus: Glove Work

1. Player stands six to 10 feet from a wall and throws a ball near the bottom of the wall.
2. As the ball bounces off the wall, the player fields the ground ball and throws it at the bottom of the wall again.

3. Drill Name: Chicken

Drill Focus: Competition

1. Two players face each other about six feet apart in ground ball fielding position.
2. They try to throw the ball on the ground through each others legs.
3. Have them keep points: one point each time the ball goes between someone's legs, and the first one to five wins.

Hitting

If you are coaching t-ball, hitting won't be quite as difficult as it will be if your team is hitting off "live" pitching. With live pitching, hand-eye coordination and timing come in to play, as does the fear of being hit by a pitched ball. If your players are afraid of getting hit by the ball, use safety balls or tennis balls in your practices to remove fear of the ball.

ABOUT BATS

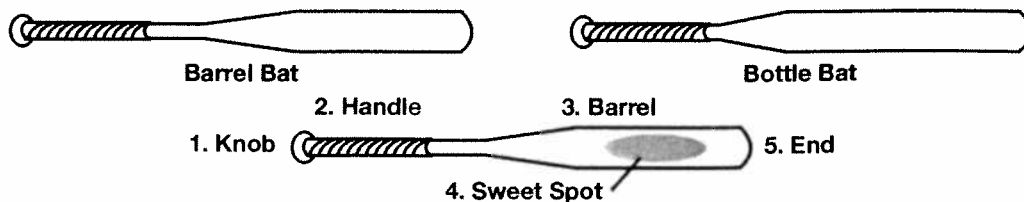
Even though it is extremely important that your players have a solid, fundamentally sound swing, it is just as important that they use the proper size and weight bat. Therefore, it is important to go over some bat basics.

There are two types of bats: a Barrel Bat and a Bottle Bat. A Barrel Bat is the shape of a traditional baseball bat, while a Bottle Bat is the more traditional softball bat. While both types are used by elite level softball players, your players will probably have more success with a bottle bat because it has an enlarged hitting area.

In addition to knowing the different types of bats, it's a good idea for you to become familiar with the various parts of the bat:

1. **Knob:** The knob is designed to help keep a player's hands from slipping off the end of the bat. When players are told to "choke up" it refers to moving their hands further away from the knob.
2. **Handle:** Where the players' hands go. That's why it's called the hand-le.
3. **Barrel:** The "fat" part of the bat. The barrel is the part of the bat actually designed to hit the ball. It's size will vary depending on the type of bat used.
4. **Sweet Spot:** The ideal part of the barrel for hitting the ball. While each bat has a "scientific" sweet spot, it is usually a few inches from the end of the bat.
5. **End:** Just what it says, the end of the bat. It isn't designed for hitting the ball, but occasionally your players will swing too early and hit the ball off the end of the bat. As you can imagine, when this happens the ball doesn't go very far.

Use a bat that's light enough for the player to easily control.



Now, the simple basics of hitting:

I. Grip & Stance

A. Grip:

1. Hold the bat as you would grip an axe handle. (Figure 14)
2. Line up door-knocking knuckles or "split." (Figure 15 & 16) Adjust slightly for whatever is comfortable for the player.
3. Hands and wrist are relaxed in the stance; the grip on the bat will tighten slightly as the swing starts.

****Coaching Tip****

Verbal/physical cues for a proper grip:

- Like you would grip an axe handle, and use the same grip on your bat. (Figure 16)
- Pretend you are pounding a stake into the ground from over head.
- Pretend you are pounding a nail with a hammer.
- Hold a bat horizontally out in front of you and pretend you are "shaking hands" with the bat. (Figure 14)

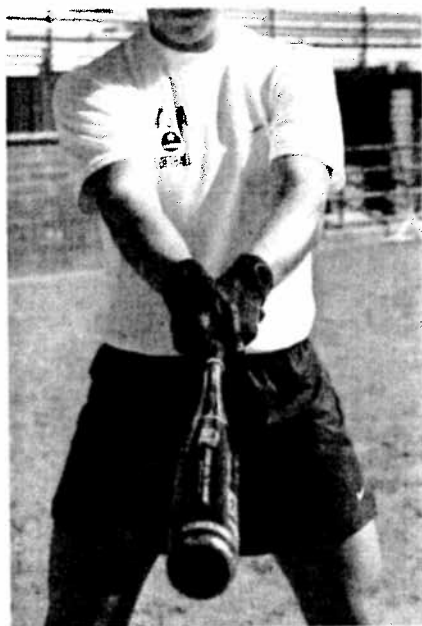


Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16

B. Stance:

1. Purely cosmetic (most variety in hitting will be found in the stance)
2. Stance must be comfortable, relaxed and allow the hitter to move into a strong attacking position.
3. Must have the ability to create rhythm in the stance (unlocking of body parts)
4. Should allow the hitter to get a good two eye look at the pitcher
5. Should allow the hitter to achieve proper plate coverage upon reaching toe touch (Stride)
6. The only mistake you can make in the stance is getting to wide!!
7. Some hitters prefer their hands high-some a little lower. The hand position in the stance is up to the individual.

Coaching Pt:

The hand position in the stance must allow the hitter to move to a strong hitting position when the front foot reaches toe touch (stide). The ability to reach this position on time and with minimal movement is essential

C. Lower Body Position:

1. Feet in good athletic position (like guarding someone in basketball).
2. Feet are slightly outside the hips, wider than shoulder width apart.
3. Weight is on inside balls of feet.
4. Knees are inside of the feet. (Figure 17)
5. Flexion in ankles and knees.
6. Slight bend at the waist ("head over toes" or "slight" bow toward the plate).
7. To make sure you are in a position to achieve full plate coverage, reach out and tap the outside corner of the plate with only the bottom hand on the bat. (Figure 18)
8. Stand even with the center of home plate or with your belly-button lined up with the front edge of the plate. (Figure 19)
9. Weight stays centered (balanced) in the stance (evenly distributed on front side and back side - 50/50).



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19

D. Upper Body Position

1. The bottom hand should be held at least at the top of the strike zone. Better to have hands too high than too low.
2. Bat held at or inside of back shoulder
3. Bat held at 45 degree angle
4. Elbows down but in a strong throwing position (Figure 20).

> Drill: With a short, light bat, have the hitter hold the bat with their top hand only and hit one-handed. The hitter will automatically bring the top hand elbow down into the strongest natural position. (Figure 21)

E. Keys for whole body

1. Good vertical alignment-shoulders over hips, hips over knees.
2. Big rhythm early in stance to small rhythm just prior to pitcher's motion

II. Loading or Triggering Phase

Definition: Slight movement away from the pitcher

1. Slight weight shift to inside of back leg (knee inside of toe) (Figure 22)
2. Movement can be back or down into back leg
3. Hands move to strong "throwing" position (ex. skipping rock)
4. Hand movement slow and continuous (on time with the pitcher)
5. Hand stay even or slightly inside of front elbow
6. No twisting of upper body



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22

III. STRIDE

Definition: Movement toward the pitcher to establish a strong hitting position

1. Stride concludes at toe touch, but can vary (Early stride, No Stride, Stride on heel)
2. Weight lands on inside of front foot.
3. Front foot down early vs. late (recognizes and react)
4. Hips and Shoulders remain square to the plate (Figure 23)
5. Move to a strong hitting position
6. Equal bend in the knees
7. Front foot at 45 degree angle
8. Hands end up in a strong throwing position
9. Hands even or slightly inside of lead elbow.
10. Bat angle slightly back towards head
11. Back elbow slightly elevated to create space between back elbow and hip



Figure 23



Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26



Figure 27a

IV. SWING

Definition: Rotational movement that takes the bat from launching position to contact

1. Weight shifting into front side initiates rotation (just prior to or at heel plant) (Figure 24)
2. Back elbow falls into "slot"
3. Hips and hands work together (skipping a rock) (Figure 25)
4. Hands stay inside of ball to bat lag position (knob pointed towards pitcher-barrel pointed towards catcher).
5. Lead with front elbow (Figure 26)
6. Bat head on plane and ready to release forces.
7. Hands in front of center of gravity (belly button) (Figure 26)
8. Contact: position that allows you to release the bat with the most force:
 - Middle pitch: barrel even with the hands. (Figure 27a)
 - Inside pitch: barrel ahead of the hands. (Figure 27b)
 - Outside pitch: barrel behind the hands. (Figure 27c)
9. Hit against firm front side
10. Hand position: Palm Up/ Palm Down (Figure 28)
11. Lead elbow above hands, hands above barrel (Figure 28)
12. Wrist straight
13. Eyes and head focus on the ball / head down
14. Back heel finishes up.

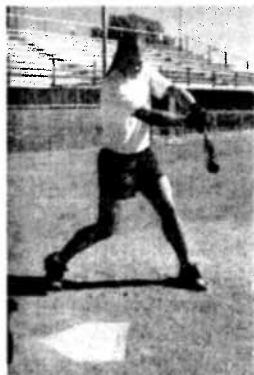


Figure 27b



Figure 27c



Figure 28



Figure 29

V. Finish

1. Ultimate goal is to hit through a large zone.
2. Extension occurs after contact. (Bat pointed towards the pitcher) (Figure 29)
3. Rolling of the wrist occurs after extension. (Figure 29)
4. Finish the swing around shoulder level or higher. (Figure 30)

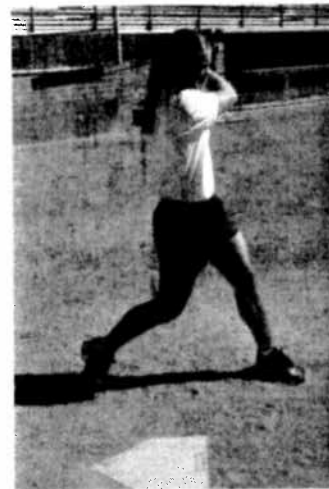


Figure 30

VI. MENTAL ASPECTS OF HITTING

- Use funnel approach (broad to narrow thoughts going from dugout to box): Dugout: Gather information about pitcher, situation, etc. What am I going to be called upon to execute (ex. bunt, slap etc.).
On Deck Circle: Time the pitcher, positive self-talk.
Batter's Box: See the ball - hit the ball!
- Relaxation: Control breathing (i.e. deep breath as hitter steps into box).
- Positive thoughts (focus on "what I want to do" rather than "what I don't want to do").
- Coach needs to know what verbal cues work for individual hitters.
- Avoid too much coaching just before an at-bat or between pitches.
- Challenge for coaches and hitters is dealing with the 7 out of 10 "failures" at the plate.
- Keep a "well-hit" average, as opposed to batting average.
- Evaluate at-bat on something other than outcome ("did you see the pitch?" "were you relaxed and in control?" etc.). Focus on having good at-bats.
- Batting practice is the time for the coach to give hitters confidence, make them feel good about their performance.
- Confidence is big key - preparation builds confidence.
- Visualize success - encourage hitters to keep a VCR tape in their head to play back good at-bats in their minds.

Video Information:

These drills and others can be found on the ASA training videos "*Principles of Infield Position Play*," "*Basic Infield Fundamentals*" and "*Fundamentals of Catching*." These videos can be purchased by calling 1-800-277-0071, or via the ASA website at www.asasoftball.com or www.softballoutlet.com.

Hitting Drills

Three drills that will help your players improve their hitting skills are:

1. Throwing Drill
 2. One Hand Drill
 3. Front Toss Drill
1. **Drill Name: Throwing Drill**
Drill Focus: Sequencing the upper and lower body properly
 1. Establish your hitting stance with a ball in your top hand (right hand for right-handed hitters and left hand for left handed hitters)
 2. Perform a throwing motion into a net and pretend you are trying to skip a rock on water
 2. **Drill Name: One Hand Drill**
Drill Focus: Sequencing the upper and lower body to work efficiently
 1. Place the tee (even with your stride foot at toe touch for top hand and slightly behind toe touch for bottom hand)
 2. Have the player use a small bat to begin with and eventually use their regular bat
 3. Player executes with proper mechanics the entire swing and emphasizes proper hand position at contact and hitting through a long zone. Make sure the hitter stays inside the ball on all swings
 4. Repeat the drill with the top hand and bottom hand
 3. **Drill Name: Front Toss Drill**
Drill Focus: Sequencing
 1. Feeder stands behind a screen approx. 10-15 ft away in front of the hitter
 2. Feeder tosses the ball underhanded giving the hitter a timing mechanism. Swing hand back as you step forward to throw. When the feeders hand goes back, the hitter makes their negative move to prepare to hit.
 3. Coach releases the ball and the hitter executes a proper swing. (You can use small balls, whiffle balls, tennis balls, or regular softballs. Coach should be able to move the ball in different parts of the strike zone to simulate a rich pitch.
 4. Great drill to work on timing of the swing -Coaching Pt: Make sure the hitter is starting the negative move on time and getting the front down soon enough prior to the release.

Fast Pitch Pitching

Fast pitch pitching - the one skill above all others that we tend to place the most emphasis on. Because the pitcher is so crucial to the flow of the game and ultimately a team's success, we put an unfair amount of pressure on the pitcher.

For the most part, we recognize that skills like catching, throwing, and even hitting take a few years to develop. So we are relatively patient as they do develop. Yet when it comes to pitching, patience goes out the window. We expect kids who maybe have never even pitched before to master the skill to the point of throwing strikes in a matter of weeks. After all, your first game is only days away, right?

Well Coach, pitching is not easy. First of all, it is an extremely difficult skill to learn. Secondly, what really makes pitching so hard is the number of times the child is asked to perform the skill successfully. The pitcher touches the ball on every play of every game. We expect the pitcher to perform successfully over 80% of the time. That is a tall order for anyone to fill.

The following are some points to keep in mind when working with your pitcher. These tips will help shorten their development time and increase their rate of success.

1. **Keep it Simple.** While this has been said over and over about all the skills of softball, keeping pitching simple is almost more important than anything. If you can simplify the learning process, the easier it will be for your pitcher to remember what they are supposed to do. Break the pitching motion into understandable parts, and keep it simple!
2. **Be Patient.** Learning takes time and you have to allow pitchers *time* to develop their skills. If you get angry or frustrated your pitcher won't learn faster. In fact, it will only scare them, make them tense, and hinder their development. Before talking to your pitcher take a deep breath and count to 10. The key is for you to be relaxed and calm when working with your pitcher.
3. **Be Confident.** If you are positive with your pitchers and let them know you can see their improvement, they will have more confidence in themselves and their abilities. They will work hard for your approval and your positive feedback. Coach, trust that your pitchers will "get it." Every great pitcher started out throwing balls behind the batter and over the backstop—so just be patient and be confident.



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33

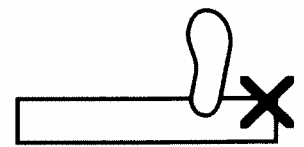


Figure 34

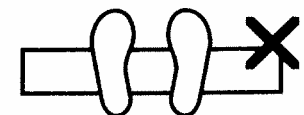
The following are the basics for your young pitchers:

I. Grip

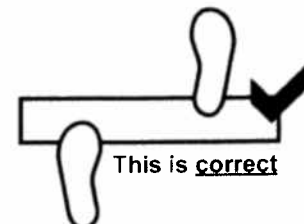
- a. The fingers should be on or across the seams on the ball to form the grip. Just like overhand throw grip
- b. 4 seam grip or 2 seam grip depending upon objectives.
 - > 4 seam grip lends itself to straighter movement or a straight line. (Figure 31)
 - > 2 seam grip lends itself to more variation off that line. (Figure 32)
- c. A 4 seam grip is good for beginners. **However, the key is a comfortable grip.** Hand shapes and sizes are different; therefore, grip comfort varies based on hand size and shape.
- d. The thumb and middle finger are the strongest digits on the hand. They establish the initial *line of force* for the pitch.
- e. When forming the grip across the seams (2 or 4 seams) the seam should fit into the 1st groove of the middle finger for maximum snap at release. (Figure 33)
- f. For a proper grip hold the ball in the fingers, not the palm of the hand.
- g. Your pitcher should never experience any pain when throwing a pitch.



This is **NOT** correct



This is **NOT** correct



This is **correct**

II. Stance

- a. Begin with two feet touching the pitching rubber (ASA rules). This does not mean the middle of both feet need to be in the middle of the rubber. It simply means that any part of each foot must touch the rubber. (Figure 34) Teach your pitchers to begin with their throwing foot forward just like they do when they throw overhand.
- b. Start with both hands relaxed and down in front of the body, with the ball in the glove.

- c. The feet should be balanced and approximately shoulder width apart. (Figure 35)
- d. The ball of the pitching hand foot should be over the front of the rubber.
- e. The toe of the back foot should be pushed against the back of the rubber.
- f. Beginners should make every attempt to learn to pitch from the center of the rubber (the line of force at its most central point), with both feet pointed toward home plate.
- g. The pitcher should take the signal from the catcher with their weight on the front foot, which allows the transfer of weight to the back foot.
- h. While the weight is on the front the hands should come together and the pitcher must pause to comply with the pitching rules. The weight will transfer to the back foot during this move. (Figure 36)
- i. The rules also dictate that the front foot must remain in contact with the rubber during the transfer of weight.



Figure 35



Figure 36



Figure 37



Figure 38a



Figure 38b

III. Initial Arm Swing

- a. To start the arm motion push, the glove with the ball being gripped by the throwing hand, down and slightly back on the throwing side of the body. This will enhance the pivot of the throwing side foot.
- b. The shoulders should follow the glove down and back turning slightly to also enhance the pivot. Weight should transfer back to the inside of throwing side foot. (Figure 37)
- c. The glove serves as a guide to the arm so it can stay on one of two lines of force. The first line of force (LOF1) is the line that is created by the completion of the pivot when the front foot lands. That line is created by drawing a line from the front of the back foot to the target. The second line of force (LOF2) is the line drawn from the release point to the target. Both lines will be close to parallel. LOF2 will be slightly outside LOF1, but they will both meet at the target.
- d. Ideally, we want to start the arm swing forward as the pivot foot begins to turn and our body begins to "open" to the target. As our arm begins to move forward we want to keep the ball in our glove as long as "naturally" possible. This will hide the ball as long as possible to the hitter.
- e. When the front foot lands (at around a 45 degree angle), the arm has completed a circle like motion over the top on the throwing side of our body. The elbow and wrist have led us up and over. Our arm position should be close to the parallel to the ground and our palm should be faced slightly away from our body pointed the same way as our chest. Our glove hand should also be parallel with the glove pointed at the target, palm also facing away. Our shoulders should be on LOF2 creating a ball path in front of our hips, knees and chin. Our hips, knees, and chin should be of LOF1. (Figure 38a and 38b)



Figure 39



Figure 40

IV. Legs

- a. The instep of the back foot initiates the drive forward for transfer of weight from the back foot (leg) toward the front foot (leg). (Figure 39)
- b. The front knee (stride leg) lands flexed, but firms up as the weight transfers from the back leg to the front leg. (Figure 40)
- c. The hips should finish square to the plate after releasing the ball, with the follow-through into a good fielding position.
- d. The shoulders and upper body finish tall with the shoulders finishing square with plate. (Figure 41)



Figure 40

V. Arms - Downswing

- On the downswing, maintain a long (not locked) lever (extension) on the downward path. (Figure 39)
- A cocked wrist on approach to the release point allows for a maximum wrist snap. (Figure 39)
- The wrist snap and release of the ball occurs between 7:00 and 5:00 (pitcher is the clock). (Figure 42)
- The ball rolls off the middle finger (LOF).
- The hand and arm finish out and up (longer lever), remaining loose and relaxed.
- The follow-through continues in direction of the ball on the LOF.
- Short-arming (tight "v" with elbow) decreases the length of the lever (arm) and creates tension, therefore decreasing speed.
- When the arm circle takes away from the path of a perfect circle, or, leads a different direction (away from LOF), it will detract from solid fundamentals and adversely affect the pitch



Figure 41

VI. Snap/Release

- The pitcher releases the ball with their hand facing the catcher (imagine there is a dot in the middle of the hand, and as the pitcher releases the ball the dot on will face the catcher).
- The wrist snap should produce 6-12 or 5-11:00 spin - determined by hand size and flexibility. (figure 43a)
- Relaxed shoulders – meaning they will be slightly rolled forward (slumping) which will facilitate a smooth transition from snap to release to follow through. (figure 43b)



Figure 42

NOTE: It is very important to teach your pitchers that the ball will go where their hand is pointing when they let go of it. While it sounds simple, it's the key to your pitcher's control.

If they can learn this simple principle they can make adjustments immediately following a bad pitch:

- If the pitch is too high, they should let go of the ball sooner.
- If the pitch is too low, they should hold on to the ball longer.

Most pitches will go high at first and the pitcher's natural reaction will be to throw slower. Instead, just teach your pitcher to "let go sooner, don't pitch slower!"



Figure 43a

Summary

The simple wording pitching summary, that all of your pitchers should know and be able to repeat is:

- **Step** (toward the target)
- **Swing** (arm toward the target)
- **Land** (with glove foot in-line to the target)
- **Release** (with ball hand facing the target)

Video Information:

These drills and others can be found on the ASA training videos "*Principles of Infield Position Play*," "*Basic Infield Fundamentals*" and "*Fundamentals of Catching*." These videos can be purchased by calling 1-800-277-0071, or via the ASA website at www.asasoftball.com or www.softballoutlet.com.



Figure 43b

Fast Pitch Pitching Drills

Three drills to help your players improve their fast pitch pitching skills are:

1. Knee rolls
2. Rhythm Snaps
3. Line Pitching

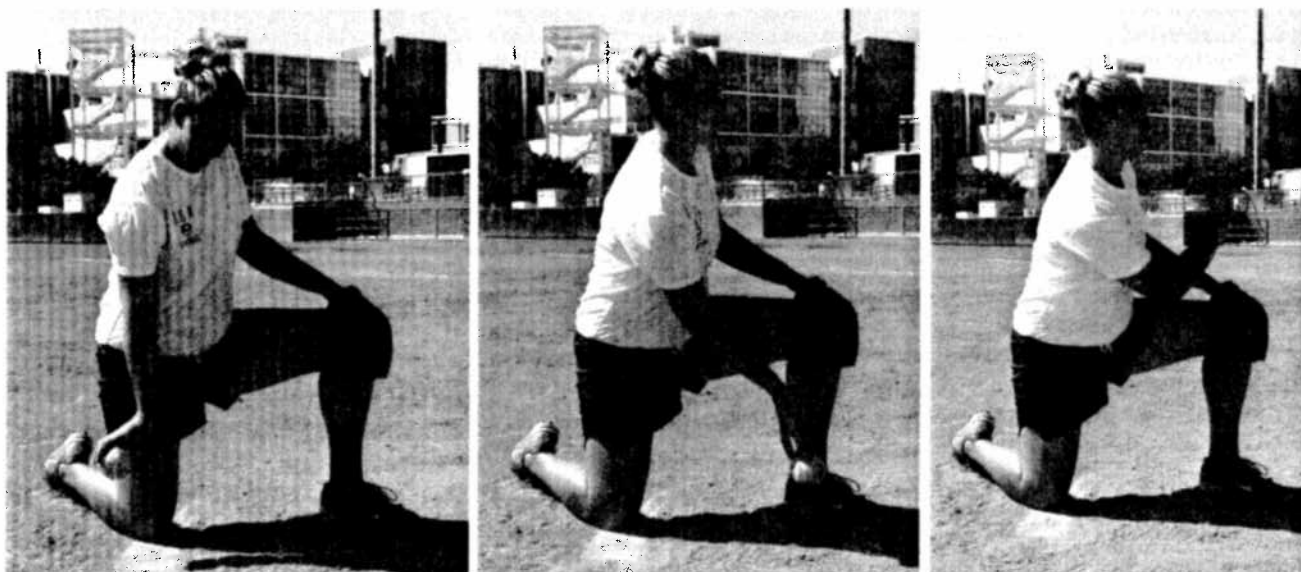


Figure 44

1. Drill Name: Knee Rolls (Figure 44)

Drill Focus: Wrist snaps and spins

1. Players stand sideways to each other with the glove shoulder closest to their partner.
2. Have the pitcher angle their shoulders at about a 30 degree angle.
3. Pitcher is on knee with glove hand resting on a firm glove of the ball side thigh. Cock the wrist back and snap it forward releasing the ball in a roll towards the target. The wrist through will only be as far forward as the wrist was cocked back. Repeat 10-20 times.

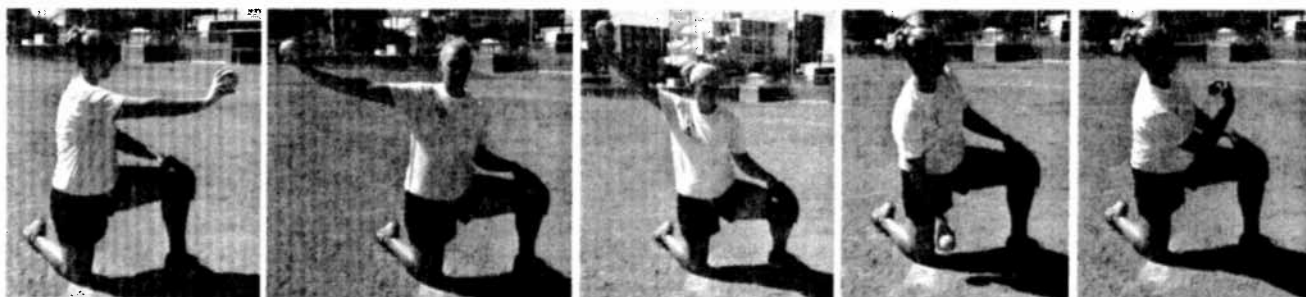


Figure 45

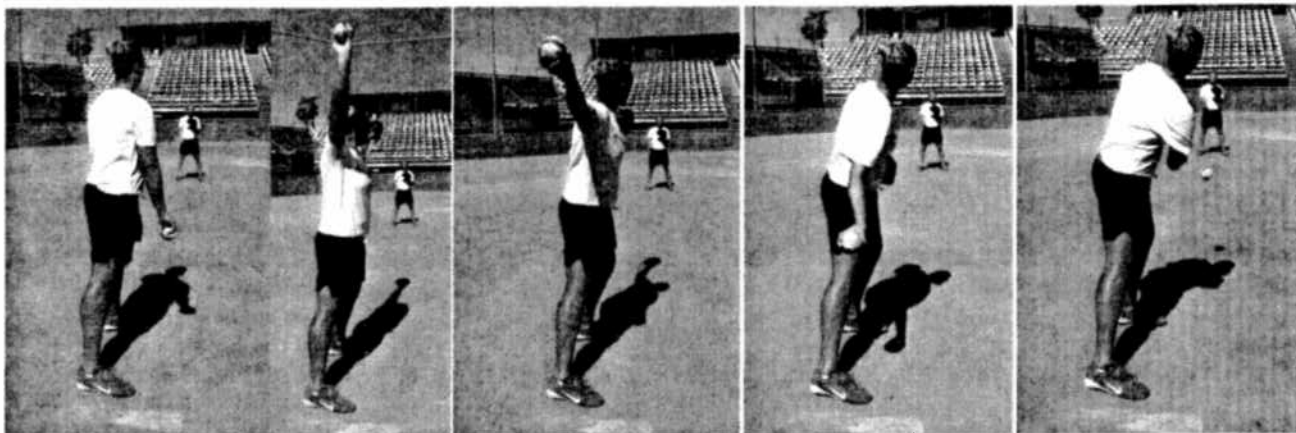
2. Drill Name: Rhythm Snaps (Figure 45)

Drill Focus: Timing, Circle, Snap

1. Pitcher maintains proper knee drill position
2. Start with ball forward, shoulder high, hand on top of the ball, on the LOF. Let the hand drop by relaxing the shoulder and let the momentum let the arm swing back as high as the back shoulder.
3. Let the smooth transition swing back forward to the starting position. This will constitute 1 swing.
4. Do it twice and then on the 3rd transition forward let the arm go all the way over the top and release the ball at the natural point (at the bottom of the arm swing) and continue to follow through after wrist snap.

3. Drill Name: Line Pitching**Drill Focus: Control**

1. Player now stands on the line directly toward the target.
2. Place the glove-side foot and arm on the line toward the target.
3. Start to swing the ball and arm toward the target.
4. The pitcher keeps the ball over the line throughout the arm swing.
5. The pitcher releases the ball directly over the line toward the target.

*Figure 46***Slow Pitch Pitching**

Although slow pitch pitching is not as technically difficult as fast pitch pitching, young pitchers may still have trouble with the slow pitch motion. A good slow pitch pitcher will be able to pitch with control and consistency.

Speed isn't a slow pitch pitcher's focus—throwing hittable pitches is. The objective in slow pitch is not to strike people out – it is to throw hittable pitches. Once a slow pitch pitcher learns how to pitch with the proper arc on the ball and with some accuracy, they can learn how to throw pitches that batters will hit to certain fielders.

The key to a pitcher's control is to feel connected to the target (home plate). Help your pitcher get that connection to home plate by having them imagine there is a line connecting them directly to the catcher. In fact, actually make a line on the field. Draw one in the dirt, or have your pitcher pitch on the foul line. You might want to take the field liner and actually make a chalk line for your pitcher from the pitcher's mound to home plate. This will greatly improve their control and their ability to feel connected to the target.

Lets look at the basics of slow pitch pitching:

1. Step with the glove foot in line to the target.
2. Keep the arm-swing on that line to the target.
3. Release the ball with the middle of the hand (the Dot) facing the target.

Slow Pitch Pitching Drills

Two drills to help your players improve their slow pitch pitching skills are:

1. Ladder
2. Fence or Clothesline

1. Drill Name: Ladder Drill**Drill Focus: Pitch Height and Angle**

1. Your pitcher stands on the pitching rubber with a ball.
2. Place a ladder in-between the pitcher and home plate. Put a bucket at home plate.
3. Have your pitcher toss the ball over the ladder and try to get it into the bucket.

2. Drill Name: Fence or Clothesline Drill**Drill Focus: Height and Control**

1. Have your pitcher and your catcher get pitching distance apart from each other and have either a clothesline or a fence in between them.
2. Have your pitcher try to pitch strikes over the clothesline or fence.
3. To help challenge your pitcher, place a batter in the batter's box.