

Fun Softball Drills – Steal the Bacon

Purpose: To Develop ball-handling skills and practice tagging runners.

Procedure: This drill will need one baseball and gloves for each player. Divide the team into two groups, line them up across from each other, and number the players in each group from one to six. The coach puts a ball between the lines and yells out a number. Both players with this number run toward the ball and try to grab it, or steal the bacon. When one of the players picks up the ball, the other tries to tag him with the glove. The player who picks up the ball tries to run back to the line without getting tagged. Award one team a point if its player gets back to the line without being tagged. Award the other team a point if its player makes the tag before the runner reaches the line. Players can also run with the ball in their bare hands when trying to make a tag.

Players should squeeze their gloves when carrying the ball, No points are awarded if a player drops the ball during the drill

Softball Throwing Drills – Bucket Relay

Purpose: This softball throwing drill is to develop techniques for relaying a softball from the outfield to the infield.

Procedure: Two buckets of softballs, six empty plastic buckets, gloves. Divide the players into two teams, station, one team and a coach in right center, and the other team and a coach in left center. Each group has a bucket of hardballs. On home plate, stack six empty plastic buckets into a pyramid. Place one player from each team in the infield. The team alternate turns. The coach throws the ball high behind the outfielder, preferably hitting the outfield fence. The outfielder turns, locates the ball, runs to it, picks it up, turns, and throws it to the infielder. The infielder pivots after the catch, and throws the ball toward the buckets, trying to knock down as many as possible. The outfielder becomes the infielder, and the infielder goes to the end of the line in the outfield.

Softball Hitting Drills – Beach Ball Tee Ball

Purpose: To teach players how to hit off a batting tee.

Procedure: Batting tees, a bathroom plunger, a bat, and beach ball(s). Place a batting tee at home plate. Stick a bathroom plunger into the tee with the rubber part facing up. Place a beach ball or a large lightweight ball on top of the plunger. The player stands next to the batting tee and hits the ball off the plunger with the bat. Each player can take three or four swings. Softball hitting is one of the hardest skills in sports to master; however this low-skill drill for very young softball players offers a guarantee of success.

The less instruction you attempt the better. Limit comments to nothing more than "Hit the beach ball" and "Watch the bat hit the ball." Younger players have a tendency to turn their heads before the bat strikes the ball. If a player has this problem, start him out with a quarter or half swing before striking the ball. A top-of-the-line batting tee is not necessary for younger players a tee that supports a large ball is sufficient. Set up several stations to keep all players actively involved. This is an excellent parent-child drill that can and should be practiced in the backyard. This drill works well against a net, a tarp, and even the side of a house or apartment building. Teams and individuals can progress to smaller and smaller balls over a period of weeks or even days.

Softball Fielding Drill- Face to Face Drill

Purpose: To develop the basic mechanics for softball fielding a ground ball and following with an accurate throw.

Procedure: A bucket of softballs, gloves, cones TIME. Set up two cones 8 to 15 feet apart depending on the age and ability of players. One player stands between the cones. Another player serves as backup. The coach throws grounders between the cones, and the player tries to stop the ball with his glove before it gets behind him, just as a hockey goalie would sweep away a puck. Award a point for every ball the player stops. Coaches can practice this drill with either a predetermined number of throws to each player or with a time limit. Once done, the fielder moves to the back of the line, the backup becomes the fielder, and the next person in line becomes the backup. This is one of the few drills that teach players to stop the ball rather than catch it. This softball fielding drill also emphasizes the importance of keeping the ball in front of the body if it is mishandled or dropped.

Free Softball Drills – Target Drill

Purpose: To improve softball throwing accuracy for younger players.

Procedure: Equipment required soft-covered softballs, colored masking tape, access to a fence or a wall, time taken 4 to 6 minutes, on a wall or fence mark off three or four squares with blue painter's tape, 15 inches by 8 inches. The squares should be about 4 to 6 feet apart from each other. Within the large blue squares mark off smaller squares with white tape. Mark a line on the ground in front of each square. The distance between the line and the box depends on the age and skill level of the players. Divide the team into as many groups as there are large squares or the fence or wall. Give each player 3 to 5 balls. The first player in each line throws the ball against the fence. Award one point for throwing the ball within the blue square and two points for hitting one of the smaller white squares.

Key points:

Although it takes a long time to prepare, this is a simple, yet fun and effective, drill for young athletes.

1. In the early stages of the season, emphasize hitting the target as success. With young players, immediate success is important for positive reinforcement and will encourage their enthusiasm for the drill and willingness to listen to instruction.
2. Adjust the distance between the box and the line depending on the age and skill level of the team.
3. Incorporate throwing techniques only after introducing the drill at its elementary level.

Variation: Players can also aim for balloons, empty soda cans or plastic cones.

Youth Softball Drills – Golf Softball

Purpose : To develop softball throwing accuracy and to provide a game to break up practice.

Procedure:

Equipment: A bucket of softballs, four to six cones.

Time: 6 to 8 minutes.

1. Depending on the number of players, set up four to six cones about 50 feet apart from one another.
2. Divide the team into three groups. Each group throws toward its own cone.
3. Station one coach or parent with each group.
4. Each team's goal is to knock down its cone with the fewest throws possible.
5. The first person in each group throws the ball at the cone. The ball is left where it lands.
6. The second player in each group throws at the cone.
7. As in a foursome in a golf game, the player whose ball is farthest from the cone after the first throw is the first to make the second attempt from where his first throw landed.
8. Again as in golf, each player keeps track of the number of throws it takes to knock over the cone.
9. After each group is finished, the players rotate to the next cone (or hole).

Key Points:

Although this game gives the team an enjoyable drill for the players, it still provides players an opportunity to work on throwing skills.

1. Emphasize to the players that they do not have to knock over the cone on a fly. They can knock it over on the bounce.
2. Point out proper throwing technique, such as stepping and following through.

Softball Base running Drills – Base Race

Purpose: To teach base runners to cut tight corners and get around the bases as fast as possible. This drill works on the basics of base running.

Procedure: Set up an infield with no pitcher. Your base runner tosses the ball to herself and hits a ground ball. She then takes off around the bases as fast as she can, going from first to second to third to home. The infield also circles the bases with their throws, trying to get the ball to home plate before the runner gets there. If it's an inexperienced team, it should be about even. More advanced teams have to take the ball back to first each time – that means, field it, go to first, go to second, back to first, go to third, back to first, and then home. The person who fields the ball is not allowed to be involved in covering a base, just as it is in a game. Every base runner that makes it home before the ball gets a point. Make it a contest to see who can get the most points.

TRAIN

Exercise running and eye hand coordination at the same time. Groups of 4-5, running around the field, first person drops tosses the ball to the next person (over her shoulder), while the whole group is lightly jogging around the field. The goal is to not drop the ball and let it hit the ground. When the last person has it she is to sprint to the front of the line and start the ball again, tossing it to the second girl in line and so on.

Fielding: BARNEY GAME

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It is the most fun game we play and the players absolutely LOVE IT!!!

You get a Barney (or any other stuffed animal, but Barney works the best because they hate him) and put him on a chair by 1st base. If you have a net, put the nest behind the chair to stop the balls, otherwise put the chair near home. Have a coach hit ground balls to shortstop.

The player fields the ball and makes a throw trying to knock Barney off the chair.

The ball must be fielded properly or no points. Have a time limit (about 5 minutes) and keep track of how many hits Barney gets. We have a rule that if the players can beat the previous record, the coaches have to RUN!.

Base running Tips: THUNDER GAME

BASERUNNING/SPEED: THUNDER GAME

This game is tried and true! It is played with 2 teams. One team is at bat with a tee or soft-toss, the other team has one fielder on third base and one on first base. The batter hits the ball off the tee or from a soft-toss as hard as she can and runs as many bases as she can until BOTH fielders have touched the ball.

Keep score by counting bases reached before the ball is touched. After all batters have batted, switch sides.

Modification: Have a coach hit the ball (towards the outfield) and the players (at 1st & 3rd) have to run to the ball. The 1st player to touch the ball gets a point. This encourages the girls to run to the ball rather than waiting for the ball to come to them.

HITTING: EYE ON THE BALL PROGRAM

If your players batting mechanics are good, and they're still not hitting the ball, they are probably not seeing it correctly, or perhaps not following it right to the bat. Here are a few drills that are designed to really keep your eye on the ball

BALLS AND STRIKES DRILL:

Have the pitchers throw pitches and the batters just watch the ball into the glove and call balls and strikes. You'll be amazed at what batters think are balls. The best thing for good eyes are just seeing live pitching...lots of it, even if it is just being a batter while your pitcher is doing a workout. You can learn to read different pitches, and the pitcher gets better practice when there is a batter in the box.

HITTING DIFFERENT OBJECT:

Try golf whiffle balls, small coffee can lids (thrown like frisbees), pinto beans, etc, anything that has them concentrating on a smaller than usual target and hitting something that moves, rather than moving in a straight line. This will improve their concentration and teach them to follow the ball all the way in.

MISS/MISS/HIT:

Use a series of three pitches to teach them to watch the ball. The first pitch, the batter swings over the ball. The second pitch, swings under the ball. The third pitch the batter hits the ball. Repeat this drill until they can do it every time. After that, you can really fine tune this: Pitch 1- just nick the top of the ball. Pitch 2-Just nick the bottom of the ball. Pitch 3- Hit it right in the middle of the ball.

TWO-BALL SOFT TOSS:

Get two different color whiffle balls (say red & white) or mark half of the balls with a different color dot. Works better with whiffle baseballs or even golf whiffle balls. Its easier to toss smaller balls plus helps hitters in focus and coordination. Toss the two balls at the same time (from same hand) and ask the player to hit one of them, either red or white. This helps players to coordinate, focus and react to hit the correct color ball.

PICK A NUMBER:

Take 3 or 4 balls, write a number on each ball. The player's job is to see the ball well enough to tell you which number is on the pitched ball.

Things to think about:

- Consider using a hula hoop (or something similar) as an on-deck circle. For safety purposes, only the girl in the hula-hoop can have a bat in her hand and do practice swings. This may limit some accidental injuries.
- Nobody says you have to do team snacks. As the coach, you can choose not to and if a parent thinks snacks should be available then encourage him or her to arrange a schedule with the other parents.
- Consider putting together a team e-mail distribution list. It may take a little time to initiate, but once it's done the pay-off is great. It becomes a great way to communicate easily with parents. E-mail parents the team schedule, MAGFA's weather cancellation policy/hotline # and pertinent contact info for you. This also allows parents an easy way to contact you should their child not be able to attend the game/practice etc.
- Keep in mind the goal of your softball season. Ideally, as a softball organization (MAGFA) wants these young girls to acquire a love of the game. Keep things fun, smile, and remember that we all learn differently. Some are visual learners, some are hands-on. And for some.....well, eventually something just "clicks" and they all of a sudden "get it".

Thank you for taking the time and making the effort to be a coach! You are part of something GREAT.....you're making a difference in someone's life!