

## **Relay/ Cut Off Drill**

Before putting your team through this drill explain:

1-What a relay is

2-What the purpose of a relay is

3-When a relay is used

Show them and teach:

1- What the role of each part of the relay is 2-How to properly execute each part

Split your team into groups. One group will be in the outfield, one group in the cut position, and the other in the receiving position at the end of the relay. Remind each player what you expect in each role.

Hit the ball to the outfielder and have your team relay the ball in. Each player in the each group should get a chance to execute their role (outfield/cut/receive) before you rotate the groups.

Things to Emphasize:

Outfield role: proper catching/throwing technique, accurate throws through the cut

Cut role: getting lined up, proper body position and calling for the ball from the outfielder, getting into proper catching position upon catch, moving to get the ball if necessary, making quick accurate throw so receiver can make a tag on the runner (keep the ball low, chest high is not where we want this throw).

Receive role: help cut line up, call for the ball, proper positioning on bag and for making the catch, quickly apply a secure tag on the runner, moving to make the catch if necessary

## **Catching Fly Balls- Drills and Practice**

Here's one you can incorporate right into your daily throwing warm-up. After the players are warm, have one line back-up so everyone is throwing farther than the base path (\*note: adjust the distance for younger age groups). Start all the balls with the players lined-up on the foul line.

Have one player call out a "Ready, Go!" or some other indicator to start.

Once the players call, the entire line throws their ball up in the air over their own head to simulate a fly ball. In other words, they are throwing a pop up to themselves.

When the ball comes down, the catch it and fire it over to their partner.

Things to look for...

Proper catching technique: Don't allow players to basket catch the ball or catch it down by their stomach. Everyone should be catching the ball up above them and out in front. Encourage the use of two hands on the catch.

Proper Positioning: Players should throw the ball up high enough to allow themselves time to get into proper position for the catch. If they need to move back or forward, make sure they are moving their feet and not just staying planted and reaching for the ball behind them or out to the side.

All players should be stepping to the ball with their glove foot on the catch. They should not catch the ball with their feet next to each other or with their throwing foot forward. Catching the ball with feet side by side or the wrong foot forward will result in a slower, weaker transition into the throw. The step with the glove foot should land just before the catch is made. Just as a player should step to the ball on a regular catch (throw being made to them), they should step to the ball on a fly ball or pop-up catch as well especially if they have a throw to make immediately following the catch.

Proper Throwing Technique: You may also looking for proper throwing technique after the catch, but this drills is primarily to give the players reps catching fly balls/pop ups with correct positioning, footwork, and catching technique. Encourage players to keep the ball down on their throw, not throw it way up in the sky as younger players may tend to do. Again, depending on skill level, you may want to focus on one aspect at a time and not bombard your players with feedback on EVERYTHING at once.

## **BLIND DRILL FOR CATCHING FLY BALLS**

Objective: Develop the skill of picking up the ball in flight, then moving to the ball and catching it.

Outfielder starts with back to thrower. Thrower tosses fly ball into the air and yells "GO". Outfielder turns around, picks up the ball in flight and catches it. You can run this drill with one or two (CF and Wing) outfielders.

### **Fielding Drill Infield:**

Use a three-ball drill for infielders and outfielders. Hit each infielder three ground balls. She fields the first ball and throws to first base. On the second ball, she throws to second to start a double play. On the third ball, she throws to the catcher to get the runner at home.

**For the outfielders**, hit one long drive that forces the outfielder to retreat to catch the ball, one pop-up that forces the outfielder to come in, and a hard line drive base hit. On that play, the outfielder must pick the ball up and throw it in to the catcher.

### **Pickle**

The game of pickle can be considered more of a childhood game than a drill. But the principles of running, avoiding tags and executing a proper rundown are important in softball. Have a base runner stand at second base and halfheartedly break for third, then throw the ball to the third baseman. The base runner should intentionally stop halfway and the fielders need to try and make the bag before the base runner gets back to second or safely to third

## **Star Throwing Drill**

For practice throwing with runners on base, consider the star drill. Infielders, with the exception of the pitcher, take their normal positions and a runner steps to home plate. When the coach signals, the runner starts running around the bases. Simultaneously, the catcher throws the ball to second, who then throws to third. Third base throws to first base, then to shortstop and then back to the catcher. The defense receives a point if the ball completes a star pattern before the runner returns home.

## **INFIELD FIELDING DRILL/ Pass Ball**

How this drill works: Explain to the kids the ball cannot get pass them. As the coach, roll or hit the ball and they player must shuffle to the left or right, keeping their glove down and in front of them.

## **Tag out Drill**

Set up players in the infield position and a runner at second base

How the drill works: Hit grounders to the infield with the runner at second. The infield must understand that the runner can stay at second or run. If the runner goes then they must make a tag at third. If the runner doesn't go they will look them down and throw to first.

## **Tagging up on Pop Fly's**

Getting caught not tagging up is a major frustration for coaches. Players often leave the bag too early or they don't even stay on the bag at all.

Set Up: Put runners on all bases with the rest of the players lined up at home. The coach will stand in the middle of the infield with the ball.

How this drill works: With all the runners on the bases, they start by leading off. The coach will toss a high fly ball to themselves. While the players are waiting for the ball to be caught they go back and tag the base. Once the ball is caught they will advance to the next base. Explain the difference between infield pop fly's and outfield fly's. On an infield fly once they tag they should not run unless the ball is dropped and they have a chance. On an outfield fly they can run when the ball is caught.

Results: Players will learn to anticipate the ball to be caught on a fly ball and be ready to make a quick break when the ball is caught.

## **BASE RUNNING DRILLS**

Explain to the girls depending where the ball is hit will determine how to execute your running skills through first base. Tell them that if they hit a ball into the infield, they must run hard through first base. If the ball is hit to the outfield they must take a turn and see where the ball is hit and determine if they can advance.

Have all the girls lined up at home plate. One at a time have them run on the call made by the coach.

- 1) Yell Out a type of hit for example, infield grounder, hit to left field, hit to right field hit to center.
- 2) Have the girl run the base and take the appropriate action depending where the ball is hit. If the ball is hit to right field they must turn in that direction to anticipate their next play. If you yell

out the outfielder dropped the ball or the ball got passed them, explain the girl should advance to the next base.

- 3) Alternate the calls between each player running the bases.

## **HITTING FUNDAMENTALS**

### **Softball Fundamental No.1: The Right Grip**

When gripping the bat, the hitter needs to apply pressure with the fingers, not the palms. She grips the bat where the calluses are. The bottom hand which would be the left hand for a right-handed batter controls the bat, and the top hand supports the bat loosely. The bottom hand grips the bat just like a person would grip a hammer or a golf club.

The top hand is placed against the bottom hand with the door-knocking knuckles (middle knuckles) of both hands in a straight line. The arms are not crossed. The bat is gripped loosely and the wrists have some flexibility.

Some hitters curl the index finger of the top hand so that it only lightly touches the bat. For better bat control the player may choke up on the bat by moving both hands several inches up from the knob. A choke grip means a shorter bat and less power.

### **Softball Fundamental No.2: Hand Position**

The hands start close to the body about three to four inches in front of the chest and between the shoulders. Both elbows are down, and the shoulders are tension free. Some players prefer a little movement back and forth with the hands and shoulders to keep them loose. This position is known as the power position, or power alley.

### **Softball Fundamental No.3: Stance**

The player positions herself in the center of the batter's box so she can swing at pitches all over the strike zone. The batter keeps her feet parallel to the direction home plate is pointing and digs them in around shoulder-width apart.

She bends her knees slightly, and keeps her weight evenly distributed on the balls of her feet. She moves her hands about 5 to 7 inches away from her body and approximately even with her shoulders. She

points the bat upward and angles it slightly toward her body and then turns her head toward the pitches and focuses her eyes on the upcoming pitch.

#### **Softball Fundamental No.4: Stride**

As the pitcher is moving toward the release, the hitter is starting to make some preparatory movement - the stride, which moves the front foot to establish momentum into the pitch. The stride should not be more than eight inches.

At the same time with the stride, most hitters will cock their hips and also have some movement with the hands. The hip cock is the inward turn of the front hip. The front shoulder also turns in a little as the front hip turns in. The hips remain parallel during this cocking action and the front shoulder should be a little lower than the back shoulder. The front knee turns in slightly and points at home plate, and the back knee remains firm but flexed.

As the hips and shoulders are turning, the hands are moving as well. Just after the stride, the hitter's top hand turns slightly so that it is closer to the pitcher than the bottom hand. As the pitcher releases the ball, all preparatory movement should be completed.

As the stride is completed, the hitter's weight is back on the inside of the rear foot. The hands should now be in the hitting position, just off the rear shoulder as the ball is released. The knees should be flexed and ready to initiate the swinging motion.

#### **Softball Fundamental No.5: Swing**

The swing begins with the leg and hips (the hands and shoulders stay back). The hitter pushes off the ball of the back foot as the softball approaches the plate. The back knee will begin to move in and the hips begin to rotate. During rotation the hips remain parallel to the ground.

During the movement of the legs and hips, it's important that the head and eyes remain level and still. As the hands begin to move the knob of the bat toward the ball, the hitter does not allow the bat head to fall below the hands. The lead arm maintains a 90-degree angle. This method of approaching the ball guarantees a shorter arc and a more compact swing.

One of the most important body parts is the front shoulder. Stress to the hitter to drive the front shoulder to the ball. If the front shoulder pulls away from the ball, the following problems might happen: the head will come out of the proper position and eye contact with the ball will be reduced, the back shoulder will drop down and that makes an unlevel position for the shoulders in their approach to the ball, the hands will drop which creates a loop in the swing, the back leg will collapse and eliminate any positive hip action in the swing. The batter should therefore allow the front shoulder to track the ball from the pitcher's hand to the contact zone.

As the bat approaches the ball, the arms remain bent. If the arms are extended too early in the swing, the swing arc will be too large and the hitter will sacrifice bat speed and power. As the hands move closer to contact, the top hand begins to rotate so that at contact the palm is nearly facing up. The hips continue to rotate as the hitter approaches the contact point. The back leg continues to drive into a now firm front leg, and the back toe begins to turn toward the pitcher.

#### **Softball Fundamental No.6: Contact**

The contact spot for a pitch down the middle is directly opposite the front hip. If the player were delivering a punch, she would want the recipient to be standing at this spot to get the maximum blow. Contact for an inside pitch happens sooner, in front of the body, and the hips must open earlier.

On an inside pitch the batter should drive the back elbow into the body to get the hands out sooner and open the hips more quickly. For an outside pitch the contact spot is between the center of the body and the back hip, so the batter must wait on the ball. The hips stay closed until contact, and then the back hip drives through. The hands are well ahead of the bat head on an outside pitch.

The batter must be patient and wait for the ball to come to her. By using good rotation of the hips, the hitter can hit just as hard to the opposite field as she does when pulling a pitch. The player must understand where to make contact with different pitches so that she hits the ball hard at each location.

At contact, both arms are bent close to 90 degrees and the bat is driven through the ball on a level plane. After the ball has left the bat, both arms are fully extended. Both arms are straight, and the hitter should be looking down both arms and the barrel of the bat.

The thumb and forefinger of the top hand are on top the bat, and the V between them points directly at the contact spot. As full extension of the arms is reached, deceleration occurs and the bat loses speed. The hitter moves her head down at contact and feels her chest go to the ball while maintaining a firm and rigid front side.

The action is like when a boxer drives his back hand and body into an opponent. Due to the pivot the back foot and knee are pointing at the front leg. Most of the weight is transferred to the inside of the front foot and leg. The body is in a balanced position with weight on balls of the feet. The body flows into the ball.

### **Softball Fundamental No.7: Follow-Through**

After contact the hitter must concentrate on hitting through the ball. The bat continues to move in the direction the ball is hit. A full weight transfer occurs with the majority of the hitter's weight over the firm front leg. This weight transfer helps ensure a long, full follow-through and a quicker time to first base. After contact is made and the follow-through is complete, the hitter's weight is balanced between both feet with the hitter's ear, back shoulder, hip and back knee in line with one another.