



Softball Coaches' Manual

V1.0, April 2016



Thank You!



Coaches,

Welcome to Mansfield Girls Softball. Obviously, you have made a decision to volunteer to help guide the girls of Mansfield and help them along their pathway to become more well-rounded softball players and citizens. From the coaching perspective, we fully realize that your efforts require a lot of hard work and dedication. But it is also supposed to be enjoyable, rewarding and fun! This manual provides suggestions that I hope will help you get more out of coaching, and make the tasks associated with your commitment easier and more rewarding.

The commitment you have made cannot be taken for granted. You are to be congratulated and thanked for your willingness to help. Beginning with this manual, I want to support your efforts in any way possible. Please do not hesitate to contact me for anything, at any time.

Thank you again, and let's get ready to PLAY BALL!

Leo Lake

President of Softball, MGSA



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IMPORTANT REFERENCE WEB SITES

www.mansfieldgirlssoftball.com

www.registerasa.com (ACE Certification)

www.pony.org (Pony Softball Website)

<http://www.cdc.gov/HeadsUp/youthsports/training/index.html> (Heads Up Concussion Training)

www.hgssl.org (Hockomock League Travel Website)

www.teamusa.org/USA-softball (ASA- Softball Website)

Special thanks to SAGRA softball league for their help with this manual



Purpose of the Coach's Manual

Our goal is to provide coaches with a tool that helps prepare them for coaching youth softball. That applies to the encouragement of all of our coaches, new or experienced, Rookie Ball (6U) through to Senior League (14U), to focus more on teaching girls the fundamentals of the game of softball. We have included a variety of materials including:

- Sections on rules of the game
- Positional overviews
- Practice planning aides
- Age appropriate skill sets
- Communication suggestions

We suggest that you view this manual as an ever-evolving document. Please do not hesitate to offer suggestions on items for inclusion in future versions of this manual. We would further suggest that you read this manual each year you coach, no matter how long you have been coaching. For the beginners, this document can be a guide, for the experienced coaches it can serve as a reminder to some very important core principles (And you never know when you will pick up on some detail that will help you).

Mansfield Fastpitch Core Philosophy

Our philosophy is one shared by many of the best organizations and coaches in sports:

“Winning isn't the goal. Learning the fundamentals well is the goal. Fostering enjoyment of the game is the goal. Winning comes from those things.”

The Mansfield Fastpitch goal is to help the girls in our leagues develop. This includes development **at softball skills, developing life skills through sports and teamwork, and having fun** while doing it. Our hope is to increase the amount of time that each girl is interested in playing softball, giving our players good opportunities to compete as they move up through each level to the best of their abilities. If we can give the girls a good softball experience we hope that an ever-increasing number of girls will stay with the Mansfield Fastpitch program.



Preseason...Getting Ready.... Getting Organized

Coach Selection

Each year Mansfield Girls Softball solicits coaching staffs for each of its Recreational and Travel teams. We endeavor to pick a Manager (Head Coach), and Assistant Coach and a Team Parent.

The job descriptions are as follows:

Manager:	Head of Softball Operations for the Team In charge of developing practice plans, practice schedules game lineups and strategies. Primary contact with the Mansfield Fastpitch League Provides guidance to athletes on the fundamentals of softball and being a member of a team.
Assistant Coach:	Supports Manager's practice plans and game strategies Accomplishes tasks of Manager when Manager is not available Secondary contact with Mansfield Fastpitch League Provides guidance to athletes on the fundamentals of softball and being a member of a team
Team Parent:	Assists Manager and Assistant Coach with daily activities of the team Primarily keeps control and organization of the dugout Helps tend to minor First Aid issues during practices and games Announces Lineup and keeps batting order prepared Is sometimes chosen to communicate changes in schedule Keeper of the Team Phone Tree Organizes parents and collects completed Code of Conduct forms

The league typically attempts to complete the Coaching Roster by the dates of the scheduled Spring Evaluations. While the decision is up to the team Manager, the league would encourage the Manager to find as many Assistant Coaches as needed. Parent participation is key.

In most cases, returning Managers and Assistant Coaches are approached first, followed by a search of new candidates that expressed interest via their child's registration form. In rare cases, a Manager or Assistant Coach may be chosen that does not have any children in the program. This will be done after an interview process conducted by Mansfield Fastpitch Board members.



Team Formation

At an advertised time subsequent to the Registration Period, Mansfield Fastpitch will conduct Player Evaluations for purposes of gauging the athlete's softball skill set. These Evaluations serve two purposes:

1. To create, as much as possible, evenly matched Recreation teams. Typically, the team selection process will try to create rosters that are similar in total player score and age. Some consideration is given to spread out pitchers and catchers evenly amongst the team. It is important to note that the athletes are not "trying out" for positions on Recreational teams. All athletes will be placed on a team.
2. To serve as a "try out" for Mansfield Fastpitch's Spring and Summer Travel teams.

Note: The evaluation criteria and the Spring and Summer Travel team selection criteria are posted on the league website www.mansfieldgirlssoftball.com.

Notification of Team Members

After the Recreation teams are created, there exists a one week period of time in which the Manager's need to contact their teams and notify the league of any roster discrepancies. When "trading" or "swapping" players to answer a need, all changes must be approved by the Recreation Director and/or the President of Softball.

Note: Many players make special requests for various reasons regarding team placement. The League's official policy is NOT to honor any requests for team placement. However, if the requests can be honored in such a fashion as to keep to the competitive balance criteria mentioned above, the Board will endeavor to honor as many requests that it can.

Insurance

The Mansfield Girls Softball League, via MGSA, purchases a general liability insurance policy for the league, its athlete's, and its coaches. A copy of the policy is available via request through the MGSA Treasurer and/or President.

CORI Requirement

For the upcoming 2016 Softball Season, all Coaches and Volunteers will need to be CORI Checked; CORI forms will be available on www.mansfieldgirlssoftball.com. MGSA/Mansfield Fastpitch is registered under the provisions of M.G.L. c. 6, § 172 to receive CORI for the purpose of screening current and otherwise qualified prospective Board members, managers, coaches, and volunteers. A CORI form will be forwarded to all coaches, please forward them to all assistant coaches and volunteers for your team. Every adult on the field at any time, must be CORI approved.



PONY and ASA Coaching ACE Certification

Mansfield Girls Softball is committed to help its coaches develop a deeper understanding of the game of softball as well as positive coaching techniques. All Travel Program coaches are urged to be certified through the ACE process prior to being granted a position. In addition, any Mansfield Fastpitch Recreation Coach who wishes to gain level 1 certification will be reimbursed the \$25.00 fee. A copy of the certification must be submitted to the league to be eligible for reimbursement.

The ACE (Achieve, Certify, Educate) Coaching Certification Program is a coaching certification program, developed and designed to provide softball coaches of all levels – from beginning coaches to experienced veterans – an opportunity to certify as a coach with a national softball organization. (PONY and ASA) The ACE Certification videos and the ACE Certification Manual are practical guides to the everyday situations you will encounter as a youth softball coach. After obtaining your ACE certification, you will be well prepared to coach a youth softball team.

The guiding principles behind the ACE Coaching Certification Program are:

A-chieve: A certain level of knowledge.

C-ertify: To confirm that a coach has obtained a level of understanding over that which he/she has been tested on.

E-ducate: To assist with the gathering of knowledge and information.

Heads Up Online Training Course

All Mansfield Fastpitch Coaches are strongly urged to complete the Head's Up Concussion Training online course prior to accepting a coaching position. The course is 30 minutes long, and free of charge.



Heads Up: Concussion in Youth Sports is a free, online course available to coaches, parents, and others helping to keep athletes safe from concussion. It features interviews with leading experts, dynamic graphics and interactive exercises, and compelling storytelling to help you recognize a concussion and know how to respond if you think that your athlete might have a concussion. Once you complete the training and quiz, you can print out a certificate, making it easy to show your league or school you are ready for the season.



Code of Conduct

Prior to the beginning of each season, Coach's are asked to distribute and collect completed Mansfield Fastpitch Code of Conduct forms. The forms must be signed by a parent/guardian of the athlete. The Coach is required to keep the Code of Conduct Forms throughout the season. A Code of Conduct Form can be found at www.mansfieldgirlssoftball.com

Town of Mansfield Code of Conduct

The Mansfield Park and Recreation Department issues Field Use Permits on an annual basis. In order to obtain these permits, Mansfield Girls Softball must adhere to the Town's Code of Conduct. A copy of this policy is available for review at www.mansfieldgirlssoftball.com.

Coach's Equipment

Prior to your first practice you will be notified of a day/time to pick up your equipment. You will be issued a coaches bag with some or all of the following, some items will be emailed to you:

- A Scorebook
- Lineup Cards
- Bats/Helmets
- Season Schedule
- Official Team Roster
- Catcher's equipment
- 12 age appropriate softballs
- Facemasks

Player's Equipment

You should instruct each player to have the following:

- Softball glove
 - Cleats (rubber, no metal spikes)
 - Shorts, baseball/softball pants or athletic pants (no jeans) for practice
 - An appropriately sized bat (League will supply a few)
 - Helmet with cage and chin strap (all mandatory- League will supply a few)
 - Mouth guard or face masks. Mouth guards or a face mask is mandatory for players with braces
 - Facemasks are REQUIRED by MGSA for any player playing an infield position. Mouthguards are strongly recommended for Outfielders.
 - Mansfield Fastpitch supplies team uniforms such as shirts, pants and socks for recreation softball or full uniforms for travel teams.
- <http://www.mansfieldgirlssoftball.com/>



Team Pictures

Each Year, a team picture day is planned, typically during the season. **Participation in Picture Day is not optional!** This is an important event for our sponsors and ALL players and coaches must be represented so that plaques can be provided.

Rainouts

The President of Softball, along with the Recreation Director, will decide if games are to be played by 4pm (Recreation Ball). Once a decision has been made, The President of Softball or Recreation Director will ensure posting to the website (<http://www.mansfieldgirlssoftball.com/>) Twitter and Facebook. An email may also be sent out to the league. **A quick warning on rainouts.** NEVER assume. The decision is more likely to be made based on the condition of the fields. The fields at the South Mansfield Veteran's Memorial Park drain exceptionally well.

Incident reports

If a player is injured during a practice or game, there is a sportsmanship issue, a player or coach has been ejected, or there is a significant parent issue; the head coach should fill out an incident report and submit it to the President of the league or the VP of Softball. Copies of the form can be found on our website. Please contact the President of the League within 24 hours of any incident.

Hitting and Fielding Line Up

It is strongly recommended that you create positional and hitting lineup prior to the game. Typically, your team assistants will direct the athletes where they should be. This helps ensure a timely turnover from offense to defense, and frees the coaches up to coach.

Phone Tree

Please have your team parent develop a Phone Tree. It will be very helpful to be able to "launch" an effort to contact your team quickly. Email is always the quickest way but phone tree can be helpful in an emergency situation

Rules

PONY Rules are followed. In all cases, League rules will supersede those of PONY National. A Summary copy of the league rules will be handed out and will be available on the website. A full set of PONY rules is available in each Field Lockbox.

Key Dates

A summary of key season dates will be issued at the first Coach's meeting. Please keep those dates in your team folder attached to this manual.

<http://www.mansfieldgirlssoftball.com/>



During Season...Play Ball...Be Organized

Sound Coaching Fundamentals

Attitude: Be a positive role model for the players - politeness, positive attitude and great sportsmanship are contagious! **Correct and Praise**. Every time you correct something, provide positive reinforcement. Overpraise lesser experienced players to build confidence.

Umpires: Don't argue with umpires during game play. If you need to discuss something with an umpire, call time and talk with them quietly on the side. Don't make a scene.

Unsportsmanlike Parents: Parents sign a code of conduct too. If they become unsportsmanlike during a game, walk up to them and ask them politely to keep it under control. If they become unreasonable ask them to leave the game and remind them of the code of conduct they signed. If they continue, ignore them and report the incident to the President of Softball.

Parent's expectations: If a parent is unhappy with the time their child is playing at a certain position, be prepared to answer their questions. Give them suggestions of drills for their child to work on to gain more playing time in the desired position.

Communication: You will see this word over and over in this manual. Communicating with parents and players saves a lot of headaches and potential hard feelings. You cannot "over communicate".

Preparing for a game is critical to success

- Communicate with parents on missing players in advance
- Prepare a line up based on the active player list
- Set equipment up and keep benches clean
 - Assign one of the assistants to keep bench area clean
 - Bags hung on fence
 - Helmets in bags or under or behind bench
 - Gloves and face masks in bags when not in use
 - Bats in bags or up against fence
 - Catchers gear behind the bench
 - Benches are for players to sit and rest NOT equipment
- Have a set warm up schedule prior to game time:
 - Throwing (10 minutes)
 - Team stretch (5 minutes)
 - Batting practice (15 minutes)
 - Pitching warm ups (during batting practice/work pitchers in and out of BP)
 - Swap out batting practice time with a drill to help strengthen the team in a certain area for improvement



Coaching during the game

- **Keep the girls focused** -Have a short meeting each inning as girls come off the field.
- **Don't be negative** about errors or other problems in the field --treat them as learning opportunities and focus on them in the next practice.
- **Try not to coach during the play**, especially as girls get older.
- Positioning and **getting younger players into the ready position** as the play starts is important. Train them to get into "softball ready" positions when the pitchers start the wind up.
- **Keep adjustments brief**, simple and positive --don't give complex changes as they don't work -- focus on one thing at a time.

Don't Forget the Post-Game

- After the game it is important to get the team together briefly to talk about how things went, and to keep them as encouraged as possible.
- Try to leave them on a good note, whether a win or a loss.
- It's good to ask for the girls input about what they did well, what they could improve on. It encourages the learning process. Ask each of them to point out something that another teammate did right during the game.
- If you choose to give out incentives after a game (game ball, great play pin. etc) this is the time to do it. Always try to find positive things to say, both the typical (point out good hits, good defensive plays, strikeouts, etc) and the not-so-typical (be sure to point out hustle, or a player who is always in the ready position as the play starts or is vocally supportive of teammates, etc.)
- A helpful tip... Always have the team clean up the dugout prior to dismissing the team.

ALL FIELDS HAVE RAKES BY THE HOME PLATE FENCE. ALL FIELDS NEED TO BE RAKED AROUND HOME PLATE, THE PITCHERS MOUND AND THE 1ST AND 3RD BASE PATHS AFTER EVERY PRACTICE AND BY THE HOME TEAM AFTER EVERY GAME! THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS TO THIS.



(6U) Rookie Ball and (8U) Minors- Player/Coach Pitch

The Approach: For all practical purposes these two age groups have a similar skill set and experience. Both are at the beginner level of Fastpitch Softball and there basically two goals:

- Provide an enjoyable softball experience for both the players and the parents to encourage continuation into the next age group
- Provide a solid fundamental understanding of the very basics of Fastpitch Softball
- **Suggested practice length 60-90 mins (Once a week)**

Desired Skill Set Outcome: At the end of the season, each player should fully understand:

- Safety precautions
- Equipment management (Keep benches clean)
- The fundamentals of ball grip, throwing position (skateboard), throwing motion and catching
- The proper bat grip and hitting stance
- The positions in the field / and where to stand to play the position
- The basics of running bases, running after every hit (foul or fair) and listening to base coaches

Health and Safety:

- **Safety Precautions** - Never swing the bat unless instructed by and in the presence of a coach in designated area. Always make sure your throwing partner is watching and ready to receive the ball. It's the throwers responsibility to pay attention.
 - Pre-practice stretch
 - Hydrate- Makes sure they know to bring water and keep them drinking and explain why
 - Ensure you have a first aid kit and ice packs
 - Equipment needs:
 - Helmet with face cage and strap.
 - Batting gloves
 - Fielding glove
 - Bat (appropriate size)
 - Mouth guards or fielding masks mandatory for players with braces.
 - Fielding masks are highly recommended (Required for Pitcher, 3rd base, 1st Base)
- **Equipment management** - The bench is for players to sit on, not equipment. The fence will hold bags with equipment. If the player does not have a bag, equipment is placed on the ground behind the bench.



8U (Minors) and 10U (Majors) Specific Skills and Descriptions

- Promote Hustle – Hustle on and off the field. Hustle to the next base
- Paying attention to the game- Keep their interest up
- Keep drills to 5-10 minutes per
- Utilize other coaches to break into groups if necessary rather than have large groups standing around and waiting

Basics of Fielding:

- **Throwing a ball -proper grip** (three fingers on laces). Introduce “one knee wrist flicks” for proper technique and strengthening of wrist. This drill is also an opportunity to promote catching correctly. (See D-1)
- **Catching a ball -hands up!** (See D-2))
- Teach alligator, quick hands/ ball up to waste and “skateboard” ready to throw position (See D-3 D-4 and D-5))
- Glove rotation – Glove side / Thumb up- Cross over catch /Thumb Down- Top and Basket catch (See D-6 and D-7)
- Begin teaching the “Softball Ready” routine (See D-8)
- Pop ups- two hand catching
- The first fielding practice is to have the player’s field and throw to first. Eventually introduce throwing to other bases with more experience teams.

Basics of Hitting:

- Safety Precaution: Never swing without a coaches instruction or in designated area
- Feet shoulder width apart (describe batter box and stance within it)
- Bat on shoulder for ready position (see D 9)
- Align knocking knuckles (see D-10)
- Promote loose grip / play the flute (see D-11)
- Bend the knees slightly (sit in the invisible chair)
- Describe the load and swing
- Shetland hitting will be from a tee

Basics of Base Running:

- Running “ear to pocket” (see D-12)
- Introduce base coaches
- Run through first base
- Run to second base making the curl
- Run all the way home



Basics of Pitching :

- Both feet on pitching rubber to start spread hip-width apart
- Windmill motion
- Snap wrist when ball reaches thigh
- Arm should continue follow through after ball is snapped

Advanced:

- (Fielding) Feet first promote movement towards the ball, ALWAYS (See-D-8)
- (Fielding) Think about what to do if the ball comes to you
- (Fielding) Use the "3 second rule" – players only need to be alert and in the Ready position for three seconds, starting at the time the pitcher begins her wind-up. This can be helpful for focusing players who tend to mentally wander during games.
- (Fielding) Introduce the three B's: Ball, Base or Backup. Fielders are always doing one of the three
- (Hitting) Avoid taking bat to ball several times prior to final swing
- (Hitting) Pitched ball hitting & bunting (See D-17)
- (Base running) Forced based running...being pushed or not
- (Base Running) Focus on watching and listening to 1st/3rd base coaches when running
- **Advanced Practice 30-Minute Scrimmage with coaches on the field**



10U Player Pitch

The Approach: Within this age group coaches will find a mix of skill sets from first year to 3 or even 4 years of experience. It is critical that in the first three or four practices you provide the necessary drills to help the new players catch up to the experienced players. That is not to say the skills will be at the same level, but the new players need an understanding of skills detailed in “Desired Skill Set Outcome” in the 6U-8U section. You are not alone coach. Get the parents involved and give them drill instruction for backyard homework during the week. And ask your new players if they practicing at home.

- Provide an enjoyable softball experience for both the players and the parents to encourage continuation into the next age group.
- Provide a solid fundamental understanding of the basics and some advanced play of Fastpitch Softball.
- **Suggested practice length 75-90 min (Once a week)**

Desired Skill Set Outcome: At the end of the season, each player should fully understand:

- Skill sets detailed in the 6U-8U sections
- Offensive strategies such as the strike zone and when to swing and bunting
- An understanding of the “three B’s” concept of movement during a play. Ball, Back-up and Base. Nobody stands around. Everyone has a job.
- Advanced base running such:
 - Leading on every pitch
 - Running through first
 - Not overrunning second and third base
 - Stealing bases
 - Sliding
 - Ground ball/pop up base advancement



10U Specific Skills and Descriptions

- Promote Hustle – Hustle on and off the field. Hustle to the next base
- Paying attention to the game- Keep their interest up
- Keep drills to 10-15 minutes per
- Utilize other coaches to break into groups if necessary rather than have large groups standing around and waiting

Basics of Fielding:

- Begin skills by reinforcing / teaching/reinforcing ball grip, point and throw
- Promote Softball Ready
- Alligator ground balls with quick up to hips
- Work into skateboard toward throwing target
- Reinforce the understanding of positions in the field and where to play. Advanced players typically help the lesser experienced girls and you can promote that camaraderie.
- Introduce force plays at second and third base (where's the play?)
- Introduce keeping track of outs and where the throw should go
- Clean ball exchange from catcher to pitcher
- Getting the ball from in play back into circle (pitcher)
- Middle infield coverage (2B and SS) during steals
- **Work on the three B's**
 - Run towards the BALL when hit in your direction. Never watch it.
 - Get into position to the nearest BASE in case of a throw
 - BACK UP a player or a base if you can't get to the ball
 - Get right field backing up first, Left backing up third and short and second understanding base coverage and back up responsibilities

Basics of Base Running:

- Command of efficient base-to-base running
 - Teach runners not to overrun second and third base
 - Making the curl hitting first base going to second
 - Hitting the inside corner with inside foot
- Introduce signals from coach
 - Hold and/or advance to next base
- Leading
 - The pre pitch positioning
 - Do it on EVERY pitch (this will need reinforcement by base coaches)
 - Waiting on ball to leave pitchers hand (constant reminders by base coaches)



Basics of Base Running (cont'd)

- Stealing
 - No hesitation on pitch release
 - Head down, looking only at next base, ear to pocket running, listening to base coach
 - No looking at catcher
 - Sliding / no overrunning next base
 - Know when there is a force play and when there isn't

Basics of Hitting

- Safety Precaution: Never swing without a coaches instruction or in designated area
- Feet shoulder width apart (describe batter box and stance within it)
- Bat on shoulder for ready position (see D 9)
- Align knocking knuckles (see D-10)
- Promote loose grip / play the flute (see D-11)
- Bend the knees slightly (sit in the invisible chair)
- Describe the load and swing
- Understand the strike zone
- Don't wait for walks, be aggressive when strikes are thrown
- **ATTACK THE BALL**- It's an aggressive action. This is the age to begin promoting that.

Basics of Pitching:

- Both feet on pitching rubber to start spread hip-width apart
- Windmill motion
- Snap wrist when ball reaches thigh
- Arm should continue follow through after ball is snapped

Advanced

- (Fielding) Cutoff responsibilities for short and second
 - When to run to outfield
 - Lining up the throw
 - COMMUNICATION
- (Fielding) Catchers throwing runners out at second and third
- (Fielding) Double plays, looking for the extra out
- (Fielding) Defending the bunt
- (Fielding) How to throw to lead base, in front of lead runner, never behind
- (Base Running) Good Sliding techniques
- (Base Running) Tagging up
- (Base Running) Look to take the extra base
 - "first to third"
 - "thinking double"
 - advancing on dropped/pass balls
 - Advancing on errant throws to pitcher
- (Hitting) Proficiency at bunting
- (Pitching) proficient command of strike zone
- (Pitching) Introduce 'spotting' pitches (zones 1-5)



12U Player Pitch and 14U Player Pitch (Senior League)

The Approach: Within this age group coaches will find a mix of skill sets from first year to 4 or even 5 years of experience. It is critical that in the first three or four practices you provide the necessary drills to help the new players catch up to the experienced players. That is not to say the skills will be at the same level, but the new players need an understanding of skills detailed in “Desired Skill Set Outcome” in the 6U-8U-10U sections. You are not alone coach. Get the parents involved and give them drill instruction for backyard homework during the week. And ask your new players if they practicing at home.

- Provide a solid fundamental understanding of the basics and some advanced play of Fastpitch Softball.
- Suggested practice length 90 min (Once or Twice a week)

Desired Skill Set Outcome: At the end of the season, each player should fully understand

- Major rule changes: Drop third strike, stealing home, continuous steal.
- Pitchers advancement of pitches and when to use them. (these pitchers are most likely taking private lessons to learn the pitches but coaches help advance the knowledge of what to throw/when to throw)
- Catchers are beginning to call games at these levels with coach assistance and without.
- Defense should be learning how to keep base runners from the delayed steal
- Understand the importance of the “clean exchange” to the pitcher and the necessity to block balls at the plate to prevent runner advancement.
- Knowledge in offensive game strategies such as the double steal, continuous steal, the delayed steal, the squeeze play, bunting to advance runner, drop third strike advancement, overthrow advancement.
- Fielders should have a solid working knowledge of the three “B’s” on defense.
 - Run towards the BALL when hit in your direction. Never watch it.
 - Get into position to the nearest BASE in case of a throw
 - BACK UP a player or a base if you can’t get to the ball



12U and 14U (Senior League) Specific Skills and Descriptions

- Reinforce the understanding of positions in the field and where to play. Advanced players typically help the lesser experienced girls and you can promote that camaraderie.
- Begin skills by teaching/reinforcing ball grip, point and throw, skateboard, softball ready, batting stance.
- **Infield**
 - Fundamentals in stepping forward, alligator, quick to hips, skateboard all in one fluid motion
 - Defending the bunt with runners on and cleared bases
 - Defending the double steal
 - Defending the continuous steal
 - Defending the suicide squeeze
 - Defending the delayed steal
- **Outfield**
 - Run ready position with one foot in front of the other “ear to pocket ready”.
 - First step back
 - Going back on fly balls, the cross over step vs. the sprint
 - Communication
 - Hitting the cut off
 - Backing up the bases
- **Pitching**
 - The windmill motion
 - Hitting spots
 - When to throw “Junk”
 - Defense in the position
 - Defending the pass ball/wild pitch
- **Catching**
 - Positioning for the steal
 - Blocking the ball
 - Defending the pass ball/wild pitch



Basics of Base Running

- Leading
 - The pre pitch positioning
 - Do it on EVERY pitch (this will need reinforcement by base coaches)
 - Waiting on ball to leave pitchers hand (constant reminders by base coaches)
- Stealing
 - No hesitation on pitch release
 - Head down, looking only at next base, ear to pocket running, listening to base coach
 - No looking at catcher
 - Sliding / no overrunning next base
 - The delayed steal
 - The continuous steal
 - The suicide squeeze
 - Tagging up

Basics of Hitting

- Slap bunt
- Bunting
- Squeeze plays
- Drop third strike effect

Advanced

- Pitchers -work on 2nd or 3rd pitch upon command of fastball
- Catcher - Signals may be relayed from the coach through the catcher to facilitate learning
- Runners/Catchers - Stealing & pick-offs
- Catcher - Mastery of blocking/stopping
- Catcher - Call a game independently

Skill Set Drills

- D-1 Softball Grip : Find the “C” in the softball stitching. Hold ball so that the tips of index, middle and ring finger overlap a stitch seam. There should be separation of the ball and palm when in correct position.



- D-2 Softball “ready position” – knees slightly bent, bent at waist, hands in front. The top hand should be separated from the glove. This is called the softball ready position or the “alligator”.



- D-3 Catching: Hold glove in front, throwing hand behind glove, catch with glove, then cover with second hand to secure the ball. Communicate the position of the glove as ball is thrown in four positions- Glove side/Cross Over/UP/down (basket catch)

- D-4 Wrist flicks: This is a fantastic drill for beginners and to correct poor throwing motion with others. With girls lined two rows facing their partner players kneel but do not sit right knee bent, glove on right knee, right elbow in glove, girls “flick” the ball to a partner, throwing from the wrist Teach the girls grip on the laces.



- D-5 Point, make the “L” and throw: With girls lined up in two rows facing their partner still in the kneeling (not sitting) position, girls slightly further apart, point glove hand toward partner, right arm directly behind at a right angle to form an “L”, ball facing away from the player as she throws to partner



- D-6 Soft Hands: Pair up players (NO GLOVES) and space about 8-10 feet apart. In the softball ready position the roll the ball softly to each other. The receiver bare hands the ball and accentuates the pickup to the hip, then reciprocates by rolling ball back to their partner.



- D-7 Skateboard: Split girls into small groups evenly based on the number of coaches available. Roll ground balls to them and have them jump to the “skateboard” position each time. Once mastered, challenge them with rolls to either side and practice “feet first” concept.



- D-8 Grounder “Alligator” and “Feet First” drills: With girls lined up in two rows facing their partner ball is rolled to partner as a ‘grounder’, other girl catches the grounder with tip of glove touching the ground and opposite hand positioned well above the glove as an alligator’s mouth, opposite hand secures ball in glove



- An advanced version of this drill is teaching “feet first” side to side movement. Face a player and have her in a softball ready position. First grounder is straight on, she return throws, coach throws grounder to glove side. Get her to move quickly to accept ball straight on. Third throw is grounder opposite side. This is the toughest play teaching them to back hand the ball.

- D-9: Hit off a tee:

- Show player where to stand in relation to home plate with toes pointed toward the plate/tee, feet apart
- When gripping bat middle row of knuckles (knocking knuckles) on each hand should line up (doesn’t have to be exact)
- Have the player extend their arms as in mid-swing to make sure fat part of bat is centered over home plate/tee, adjust feet to correct the distance
- The player should “load” by shifting weight to back foot and then to front
- During swing back foot should remain in place, twisting slightly (like ‘squishing a bug’)
- During swing front foot may step forward toward pitching mound but should not step out toward third base
- Players should keep their eye on the ball (head down) at all times during swing



- D-10 Running Ear to Pocket: Preparation for base running. Running low and arms pumping alternation ear to pocket.

- D-10.5 Leading off a base: There are basically two acceptable methods. The front base lead get the player closest to the next base. The behind the base leads enables the runner to start the motion during the pitch, but can’t leave until ball is released.





- D-11 Base Running: Run through first with players understanding “ear to pocket” running skill. Have player pretend to hit the ball and run to first base, the player should run at full speed until after she has tagged the orange side of the base and is well beyond the base. Once the concept is understood, introduce a base coach and teach them going to second base as well. Mix it up so they learn how to listen to base coaches. This is a good drill to end a practice with.

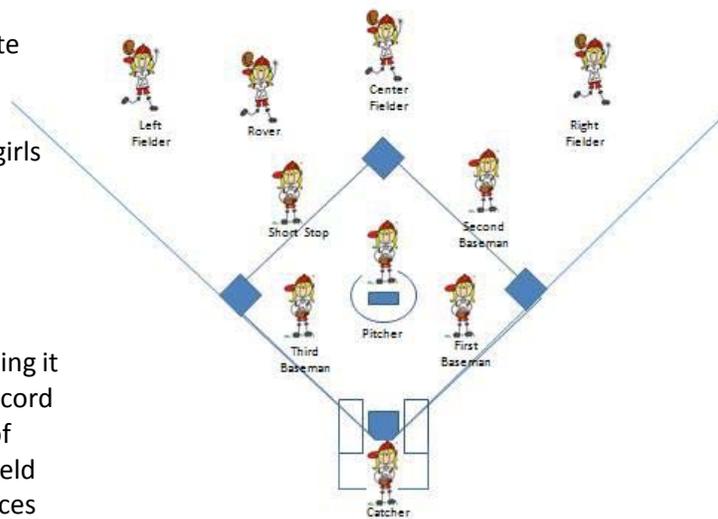
- D-12 Base Running- Making the turn: Draw a line like a banana curving towards first base. Teach the player to hit the left inside corner of the base and run towards second...listening to coach. Line up girls at home and have them run. Coach alternates “run through” or “look at two” commands.



- D-12 The base running stance and taking a lead. Don’t leave base until ball leaves pitcher’s hand. Show the player how far of a lead to take and note base coaches will help determine that length depending on situation.

- D-13 Base running on fly ball. This is a fun the players have a lot of fun with.

- D-14 Know the field and the bases – demonstrate the location and tell the name for each field position, have them repeat the name of the position, then say a field position and have the girls run to that position as a group



- D-15 Throw to base for force out: Begin by keeping it simple and making the throws to first base to record an out. Once mastered, introduce the concept of getting the lead runners. Coaches should let infield know where to throw prior to play. This introduces the very important concept of “NEVER THROW BEHIND THE LEAD RUNNER”.

- D-16 Catching pop ups (throwing): Begin soft toss pop up drills or even whiffle ball drills to initiate confidence. Advance as the level of comfort and confidence grows. For more skilled athletes increase the height more to present more of a challenge. For less experience athletes, decrease the height. For advanced athletes, 10U and up, hit the ball off a bat.





- For advanced outfield work, face the player six feet apart. Coach holds a ball in throwing hand. Hold it up to signal start, player should step back once (first step is always back) then coach holds ball above head left, then right, alternating while outfield adjusts tracking using “cross over step” running backward. After three or four shifts, throw the fly ball to the outfielder.



- D-17 Batting practice-Hitting live coach’s pitching. Most everyone knows this drill. Coaches pitch to batters for practice. The trick is to keep all girls involved. Have some as base runners and have fielders play as if a game situation. At younger levels where there is not a lot of outfield play, have another coach work with a group on pop ups, grounders, hitting tee and work players in and out of infield positions. Keep everyone involved and moving.

- Bunting Practice- Have the players bunt approximately 20% of the pitches thrown to them. Align defense accordingly for practice.



- D-18 Bunting: Pivot, hand slide and bat angle.

- D-19: Defending the bunt:

- Catcher and Pitcher have center lane responsibilities.
- Third base plays in and has the line
- First base plays in and has the line
- Second base covers first
- Short covers third
- Left backs up third
- Right backs up first
- Center Fielder covers second base (in some cases LC or RC covers second when four outfielders are playing)

- D-20 Infield / Outfield practice: Another common drill most coaches are familiar with. Place players into positions and hit to both infield and outfield from home plate. Be sure to tell players the situation and where the throw will go. This introduces the concept of “KNOW WHAT TO DO IF BALL IS HIT TO YOU BEFORE THE PITCH”. Be sure to have a pitcher and catcher in position and cover bunts.



- D-21 Base running on a pop up- This is a drill players have a lot of fun with. Have a runner on at first base. Coach stands between third and home in the field of play with a ball.
 - Coach throws ball into the air to themselves.
 - While ball is in the air, runner takes a lead and watches coach.
 - Coach either catches the ball, lets it drop or lets it hit their glove and fall for an error.
 - If caught, runner goes back to base. If ball hits the ground, runner tries to advance as a force play ensues.

- D-22 Stealing bases- Simulate a pitch on the mound. Have girls steal and teach the following.
 - Start in a running position when on the base
 - Don't step off base until you are sure ball leaves pitchers hand
 - Get low and run ear to pocket to the next base
 - Do not look at anything except the base and base coach in front of you
 - Slide if in the appropriate skill set
 - Once on the base, then turn attention to ball or coach for further advancement until you are sure play is over.



- D-23 Sliding- This is a drill where safety is number 1. The player must first be confident to be comfortable sliding.
 - Show the sliding position in a motionless seating position. Resting on the left thigh on the ground, the left lower leg should be bent while the right leg is straight and on top of the left ankle. This is called the "figure four" position. Have players sit and practice this stance.
 - Teach: Momentum needs to stay forward; Hands UP; in figure 4, cleat on top leg stays off ground; Don't lean back; NEVER head first slide.
 - To practice sliding, obtain a broom stick or something similar. Practice on dirt or grass (no stone dust). Have a coach on either side of the stick holding it about chest/belly level of player. Player runs toward stick, grab it to support themselves, positions legs in a figure four and hit the dirt.
 - There are training aids such as sliding mats that make it easier for players. Also, in warm weather a slip and slide is a great way to gain confidence and enthusiasm in sliding...as well as having some great fun!





- D-24 Four corners- This is an advanced throwing, receiving and movement drill.
 - Split your squad evenly at each base. For 12 players put three at home, three at first, three at second and three at third.
 - Start at home and have the first player throw to first as hard and accurate as possible. Once she throws, she moves to the back of the line at first.
 - The first player at first receives the ball and pivots to throw to second as hard and as accurate as possible. She then moves to second at the back of the line.
 - The object is to get quick accurate throws.
 - After a bunch of rounds, reverse direction.

- D-25 Around the horn grounders- An advanced drill for agility, strength and stamina.
 - Line up players at third base. First player takes third base position.
 - Coach hits a ground and player throws to home.
 - Player immediately shifts to short and coach hit grounder there. Do not wait for player to be set. The idea to keep them in motion.
 - Go around the horn and hit two at first base. One in normal position and one guarding the line. This introduces that concept as well.
 - For an intense work out have the player make one complete round from third to first, and then make them immediately make a return round back to third.



Post Season...Help the League Stay Organized....

Equipment Return

On the final weekend of the season the equipment coordinator will announce a day to return equipment, all Coaching equipment must be returned. A table near the equipment trailer will be set up for return. This should include any issued keys to the equipment trailer and field lock boxes. Timely return of equipment bags is required. This is important as we must make an inventory assessment within a month of the end of the season.

End of the Season

Our rec major and senior divisions will end with playoffs, awards will be given. Also, the league provides Ice cream gift cards to each coach to take their team out for ice cream and enjoy a successful season!

Post Season Evaluation Sheet

Beginning in 2016, the Coaches will be required to submit a simple to use, 1 page evaluation sheet for all players on the Recreation team. The purposes of these evaluations are several;

1. It will help define age specific areas of skill development that can be planned in the offseason.
2. It will create a better picture for the following year's competitive landscape when creating teams.
3. IT will help identify which athletes will benefit from a more competitive softball environment.
4. It will offer the Coaches an opportunity to critique the program, offer advice on improvement, and comment on any successes.

Remind Them

Let them know that softball doesn't have to end. Mansfield Fastpitch offers Summer and Fall Leagues, and Winter Training opportunities!



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