



NRRC Softball Instruction Guidelines

Introduction

In order to bring consistency in our program and consistency in our coaching, this brief guide for NRRC Softball was developed. Overall this guide is intended to fulfill the following goals.

1. Ensure consistency and accuracy in the way we teach the girls how to throw the ball.
2. Ensure consistency and accuracy in the way we teach the girls how to field the ball.
3. Ensure consistency and accuracy in the way we teach hitting form.
4. Ensure consistency and accuracy in the way we teach situational defense.
5. Provide guidance for the way we teach advanced softball skills such as bunting and sliding.
6. Provide examples and suggestions for drills that promote the above items.

Warm-Ups

It is very important that the girls warm-up prior to practice. These warm-ups should encompass the following at a minimum.

- Line or circle stretches.
- Infield agility drills such as high knees, donkey kicks or running from one baseline to another.
- Laps around the field.

Throwing Form

Many of the girls end up with a very short, choppy throwing style. We will strive to teach the girls the appropriate throwing form. Ultimately, we would like to see the ball be brought back with the arm full extended behind the player. The hand will be pointed in the opposite direction of the throwing target grasping the ball. The player will then turn their lead shoulder toward the target, step toward the target with the lead foot and come across the shoulder in a downward motion. The ball should travel from its highest point and end up at the target. The player should follow through completely with the arm/hand ultimately being pointed toward the ground in front of the player. The following are key attributes of the textbook throwing form for softball.



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1. Arm is extended back and up as far as possible.
2. Hand grasping the ball is pointed opposite the target as if the player was attempting to “take the ball off the shelf”.
3. Lead shoulder is turned toward the target.
4. Player steps with the lead foot toward the target.
5. The player brings the ball from its highest position across the top of the shoulder toward the target following through with the throw from the highest point all the way through to the ground.

The methodology for teaching appropriate fundamentals for throwing focuses on breaking down and isolating the upper and lower body. All form related to softball, either defensive or offensive is based on muscle memory. Once we train the muscles to act the same way every time, it becomes second nature to the girls. The following drills break down and isolate the upper and lower body to promote proper form.

1. Knee Drill

1. Players get in facing lines as if they are preparing for partner throwing/warm-up.
2. Players get on their knees facing one another approximately 15 to 20 feet apart.
3. If the player throws with their right hand, their right knee will be down and visa versa.
4. The player receiving the ball should hold the glove upright as the target at approximately chest height.
5. Arm is extended back and up as far as possible.
6. Hand grasping the ball is pointed opposite the target as if the player was attempting to “take the ball off the shelf”.
7. The player maintains a stable lower body position.
8. The player brings the ball from its highest position across the top of the shoulder toward the target following through with the throw from the highest point all the way through to the ground.

2. Progress to Normal Partner Throwing



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After having the girls go throw the first step of this drill, you can progress to Step 2. This step will focus on taking the fundamentals learned during Step 1 and add the lower body interaction necessary for a proper throw.

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2. The player receiving the ball should hold the glove upright as the target at approximately chest height.
3. Arm is extended back and up as far as possible.
4. Hand grasping the ball is pointed opposite the target as if the player was attempting to “take the ball off the shelf”.
5. Lead shoulder is turned toward the target.
6. Player steps with the lead foot toward the target.
7. The player brings the ball from its highest position across the top of the shoulder toward the target following through with the throw from the highest point all the way through to the ground.

Infield Fielding Form

Infield fielding and fielding in general is all about focus and footwork. We will be focusing on ensuring the girls have the appropriate fundamentals to support proper fielding of balls that are hit directly to them or to either side. The following are key attributes of proper infield fielding form.

1. Player is in a “ready position” with knees bent and glove near the ground.
2. Head is up looking at the batter.
3. As the player attempts to field the ball. The eyes follow the ball all the way into the glove and the chin stays down.
4. The non-glove hand then covers the ball in the glove where it is removed for a subsequent throw.



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5. The girls should be taught that a ball above the waist, the glove is pointed up. If the ball is below the waste, the glove should point down.

Balls not hit directly to the player must be fielded in the same manner. For the fundamental player, we will stress lateral movement to have them get in front of the ball. The following are example drills that aid in promoting these fundamentals.

1. Field and Throw

You can typically break the team into two groups to expedite the process. One line forms in the grass behind the shortstop position. The other line forms in the grass behind the 2nd base position.

1. The player that is fielding steps onto the infield dirt.
2. The coach stands near the pitching mound with either another player or assistant coach on 1st base for the one line and 3rd base for the other line.
3. The coach then throws an underhand grounder directly at the player or to the right or left to stress lateral movement.
4. The player fields the ball focusing on the key points above and then makes a throw to 1st base.

The coach can also mix pop flies or balls throw directly to the player into the drill.

2. Face Drill

In the younger age groups, many of the girls will be afraid of the ball and thus will not focus on the balls coming to them in order to catch the ball. Also, if they are afraid, they will tend to turn away or lift their head and will then miss the ball. This drill focus on taking away their fear to reduces the likelihood they will flinch when the ball comes toward them. This drill will requires the use of a “squishy” ball or other soft Nerf type ball.

1. The coach stands directly in front of the player approximately 10ft. apart.
2. The player is instructed to place their hands behind their back and to look toward the coach. They are encouraged to focus on the ball and not blink as long as possible.



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3. The coach then lightly tosses the ball aiming for the player's forehead. Once the ball bounces off their head, they then quickly use their hands to collect the ball and throw back to the coach as quickly as possible.

3. Sequence Relay

This drill promotes good form as well as being a fun game for the girls. Separate your team into two teams with equal number of players. Have them line up in two straight lines with approximately 15 to 20 feet between each player. Each team will have a ball. The goal is to have the ladies practice good throwing techniques as discussed above. As each player receives the balls, they rotate glove side to make a throw to the next girls in line. The ball is thrown from one player to the next all the way to the end of the line and then back again. The first team to make successful throws all the way through wins. Should a team drop a ball, the ball must go back to the beginning of the line and the sequence starts over.

Outfield Fielding Form

The biggest mistake I see being made with outfield fielding is that the girls want to catch the balls at or below their waist instead of catching the ball above their head. Appropriate outfield form focuses on having the catch made with the glove above the head. The following are key attributes of proper outfield fielding form.

1. Outfielders begin in a "ready position" with their knees bent and the glove held approximately waist height.
2. When the ball is in the air, the player should be instructed to run to the ball first and then raise their glove to the left of their head for right handers and to the right of their head for left handers while keeping their eye on the ball.
3. The non-glove hand should always be raised and can be used to point or track the ball while it is in the air.
4. Balls should be caught at nose or eye level.
5. The non-glove hand must immediately cover the ball. "Catch and Cover".



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Hitting Form

We should focus on a 3-point hitting form methodology. This methodology is intended to keep things simple but yet promote solid form and prepare the hitter for more advanced hitting techniques into the future. The following are the general guidelines for the preparation stage of hitting and are the basis for the fundamental hitting mechanics.

1. **Relax.** The hitter should be encouraged to step into the box and relay. Suggesting they rest the bat on their shoulder or dangle the bat in front of them will aid in keeping them relaxed. As part of being relaxed, they should grip the bat firmly but should not squeeze it.
2. **Foot Position.** The hitter should be lined up with their belly button in the middle of home plate. Both feet should point directly toward the plate. One of the biggest mistakes I see is where players point their back foot toward the catcher thus significantly reducing their ability to turn quickly on the ball.
3. **Hand Position.** The hands should be placed on the bat with the “door knocking” knuckles aligned. The hands should be shoulder level and should be back as far as possible without closing the hitter’s stance.
4. **Elbows.** After finding their grip on the bat, both elbows should point toward the ground. This is the biggest mistake that I see made. The back elbow does not point back and outward.
5. **Shoulders.** The shoulders must be level thus the hitter’s overall stance must be level.

The following are the key points for the hitting operation and are the three points that each hitter should focus upon.

1. **Hip Rotation.** As the hitter begins to hit the ball, the first thing that should happen is their lower body and hips must rotate toward the pitcher. Both feet must rotate toward the pitcher. This is where the power comes from.
2. **Extend/Hands to the Ball.** To make effective contact the hitting must have effective extension of the arms. Failure to do so will result in pop-ups, miss-hits or numerous foul balls. The girls should be taught to “bring their hands to the ball” as if they were going to try to hit the ball with their hands instead of the bat.



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3. **Head Down.** Everyone wants to see where the ball went and thus it is human nature to want to pick-up you're your head. Fundamentally, the girls should be taught to start out with their chin on the left shoulder and finish with their chin on the right shoulder looking down at the plate.

As you can see, effective hitting takes significant cooperation between the upper and lower body. In order to achieve this, we should focus on breaking down the upper and lower body activities. The following drills focus on these isolation techniques.

1. Tee Drill – Lower Body Turn

1. Using a hitting tee, have the player take a position at the tee in the same manner they would as if standing at the plate.
2. Have the player put a bat behind their back holding the bat close to their back with their arms.
3. The coach then puts a ball on the tee. The player works to turn their hips counter clockwise with the goal of knocking the ball off the tee with the end of the bat. The focus is to work on the hip and foot turn.

2. Tee Drill – Upper Body

1. Using a hitting tee, have the player take a position at the tee with the front knee up and the back knee down.
2. The coach places a ball on the tee. The player focuses on hand position, arm extension and keeping their head down as they swing to knock the ball off the tee.

3. Tee Drill – Putting it All Together

1. Using a hitting tee, have the player take a position at the tee in the same manner they would as if standing at the plate.
2. Work with the player having them hit balls off the tee to work on both their upper and lower body mechanics.

4. Soft Toss



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1. With the player at the plate or elsewhere on the field, the coach takes a position parallel to the player.
2. The coach then tosses balls to the player at a position similar to where the balls would be as if there was a plate there.
3. The player then hits the balls and focuses on the form as described above.

Work with the player having them hit balls off the tee to work on both their upper and lower body mechanics.

Bunting Form

Bunting will apply only in the non-instructional age groups. However, there is certainly no harm in beginning to teach this important tool early on. The following are key points to teaching effective bunting techniques.

1. The hitter must be in the front of the batter's box.
2. As the pitcher begins their wind-up, the batter will square around in the batter's box.
3. The hitter should be taught to always attempt to keep the barrel of the bat above the pitch. If they drop the barrel of the bat, this will result in pop-ups.
4. The batter should square around such that the bat is significantly out in front of the plate. We must ensure the ball drops outside of the batter's box.
5. The hitter should be instructed to run outside of the baseline when running toward 1st base.

Base Running Form

While we do not get into a lot of advanced base running in recreation sports, there are a couple of key points that I think we should focus on making to the girls. The following is a summary of these points.

1. Focus on running through the bag at 1st full speed. Then, have the player return to the bag as quickly as possible.



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2. Teach the girls to pick up visibility of the 3rd base coach as they round 1st heading toward 2nd.
3. When running from home to 1st base, the running must run to the right of the baseline. If they run on the baseline and are hit with a throw coming from the catcher to 1st, they will be called out due to interference.
4. Teach them what it means to round the bag and “get a lead”.
5. I also see no problem in beginning to teach the girls to slide beginning with the 6-8 age group. It is completely legal. My suggestion is to take the girls into the grass and begin by showing them what the end result of a slide position is. Then, work backward to show them how you get there.

Defensive Situations

While this document is not intended to cover every possible defensive situation, I think it is important that we consistently teach how to respond to certain situations. This section of the guide is intended to identify those situations and how we should coach the girls to respond.

1. **Bunt.** Typically on a bunt, the 1st baseman, 3rd baseman, pitcher and catcher may have to field the bunt. If there is a bunt, the 2nd baseman should cover 1st base and the shortstop should cover 3rd base.
2. **Passed Ball.** While this really does not come into play until 12U, it never hurts to get them started early. Should there be a passed ball, the pitcher should be instructed to cover home plate to protect against the potential steal. The catcher will always turn toward their left to retrieve the ball and will then be on their knees and “flip” the ball to the pitcher.
3. **Popup Behind 3rd Base.** This ball should be covered by the shortstop.
4. **Popup Behind 1st Base.** This ball should be covered by the 2nd baseman.
5. **Steal Coverage.** Shortstop will have responsibility for covering steals at 2nd base and at 3rd base.



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6. **Tagging a Runner.** The girls should be instructed that once they catch the ball in a situation where they must tag the running, they should catch the ball with the glove and then squeeze the glove together with their non-glove hand.
7. **Flips.** The girls should be taught, that when fielding a ball close to a base which will be the target, they should “flip” not “throw”.
8. **Cutoff Responsibility.** If a ball is hit to right or right center, the 2nd baseman should go out to receive the cutoff. If a ball is hit to left or left center, the shortstop should go out to receive the cutoff. The exception may be that if a ball is hit to right field, the right fielder may want to attempt to get the running at 1st.
9. **Coverage Responsibility.** If there is a runner on 1st coming to 2nd and the ball is hit on the right side of the infield, the shortstop has cover at 2nd. If the ball is hit to the left side of the infield, the 2nd baseman will have coverage at 2nd.

Some Other Fun Drills

1. Bucket Game

This game/drill promotes good fielding and throwing and the girls will have a blast. Place a bucket on top of another bucket at home plate or a single bucket will do. Divide the girls into two teams. One team will be ½ way between home and 3rd and the other team will be ½ way between home and 1st. Alternate hitting grounders to each team. The player that fields the ball will then attempt to throw and hit the bucket. Each time they hit the bucket, they get 5 points. We usually play to 20.

2. Base Relay

With this game/drill, divide the team into two groups and put one group at 2nd and one at home. Once the coach goes the “go” signal, the players will run all 4 bases and then tag the next partner in line until all players have run. The first team to cross either home or 2nd respectively wins.

3. Ball Relay

With this drill/game, you will place 3 balls approximately 10 feet apart between home and 3rd base and 1st and 2nd base. You will divide the team into two groups with one group standing at home and the other standing at 2nd base. When the coach says “go”, the first player in line runs to the first ball, picks it up and throws to the player in line at either home or 2nd base. That player then throws the ball back to the other player who puts the ball down and moves to the next 2 balls repeating the throws and catches. This continues until each player has had a turn.