

***More Great Softball
Drills and Practice
Plans!***

-Platinum Edition Bonus-

You Asked and We've Answered!

Who says you can't make a good book even better? As coaches you had questions – and found a few areas where we could do better – so **we will!** Here is a new bonus addition to **Softball Drills and Practice Plans** that addresses the different concerns you had so you can provide more drills and better practice plans for your players!

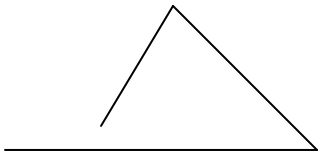


Slide to the bag

Sliding into the bag is an acquired skill that takes time to learn, but is extremely valuable in beating a tag out.

What you need – You can set up a couple stations for this drill, each with a line of players and a bag that they are going to slide into. Later on, you can add players trying to tag the runner out if you like. If you have players that are first learning this drill, you might want to try it out in the outfield to work on the technique, before you move to the infield.

How this drill works - The most important thing to begin this drill, and to reduce the chance of players hurting themselves, is to instruct the proper technique. When a player slides, they should be taught to create a triangle with the legs, and then to slide using the leg underneath, with the top foot free to touch the bag. It should look something like this:



The player should lead with their left toe, right calf and then the slide should finish on the back of the thigh. Try to teach players not to go directly on their bottom (it will hurt a bit), but to focus on sliding in with the backside of their thigh.

Result – Once players can master the sliding technique, you can take it one step further and show them what situations they should slide in. This is going to help their overall baserunning skills.

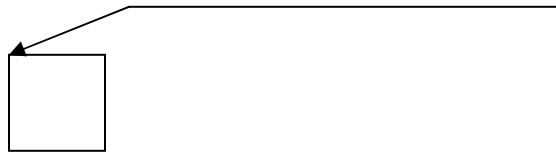


Head first slide

Although not taught extensively for beginners, it can be a very valuable baserunning tool for players to learn.

What you need – Same as the above drill, and this one is probably much better to learn the proper technique on the grass than on the dirt. Although eventual practicing on the dirt should take place.

How this drill works – You can run it the same as the beginner drill, except of course, the players will be going head first to the bag, instead of foot first. There is one major advantage to sliding head first, and that is reaching for the back corner of the bag. This should be one of the major elements taught to the player.



Runners will always approach the bag at different angles, but if they plan to slide head first, they should reach for the back corner. This allows the runner to try and avoid the tag from the defender, who will normally guard the front of the bag.

Players should also be taught to slide properly: ease into the slide (don't jump up and land on the chest, this will knock the wind out of them), make the slide an extension of their running to the bag, not a completely separate motion and they should begin a head first slide about 2 strides away from the bag (6 to 8 feet).

Result – This is simply an additional skill that can be taught to base runners, so they can reach a bag safely.

Note: Players may have a hard time nailing down the proper technique for sliding, and this can cause unnecessary pain to the ankle, knee and the behind, so learning good technique on the grass is probably the best way to go to start. Once a player becomes more confident with their slide, then you can move to the shale infield.



The beginning pitcher

Here are a couple ideas for reinforcing pitching skills:

Pitching in slow motion – Since the delivery is important, one of the ways to get your pitcher to find a consistent wind up and delivery is to have them exaggerate each step of their entire pitching motion. This creates muscle memory, and will help their body and mind work together to build a solid, consistent, motion for pitching.

Strike zone pitching – You can easily create an apparatus that simulates the average strike zone for a little league player, and you can use that to help a

pitcher build control, and to learn their proper release point for an increased number of strikes. Once a player starts to gain control, you can decrease the size of that area as the pitcher begins to pick specific target areas.

For softball pitchers:

Things are a little bit different, but you still need to work on your:

- Grip
- Delivery (wind up)
- Release (wrist snap)

There are two main styles of pitching – **windmill and non-windmill** – but most of the top pitchers are pitching the ball with a windmill style coupled with a step forward.

Grip – You can start with a simple three-finger fastball grip that goes either with the horseshoe, or across it, depending on the pitch you want to throw.

Delivery – The delivery is made up of several parts:

- Body lean – not bending at the waist, but leaning the body forward
- Push off from the rubber
- Stride forward and open up your body
- Then begins the release

The delivery is where the speed is generated – not in the arm whip. The body starts the entire process and allows a player to generate a great deal of momentum in their body.

You can practice this similar to the softball style pitch by doing it in slow motion to get the proper mechanics down.

Release – This might be the most important part of the pitch. It affects the accuracy, speed and the spin on the ball. The spin aspect might be what separates a good pitcher from a great pitcher.

The release should be done while a player is striding forward and they are still tall and upright. Your body cannot spring open when it is hunched over. Snap your shoulders back as you are about to release the ball. When you are ready to release the ball (you need to find the best release point for you), it must be done with a straight arm – to generate whip – and the fingers should be behind the ball when it is released.

The ball can be released with a little bit of a side spin to get some action on it, but for now, young pitchers should be working on their accuracy and control, along

with mechanics. Once they master those, then additional pitches, like a screwball, curve, riser and change up can be added to the mix.

Repetition is the key to success!

This is a good drill for strength and control for the softball pitcher:

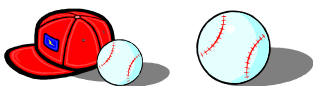
Distance pitching – Warm up your arm properly to begin with and then start by throwing a pitch from the mound. Once you get the ball back, step back two paces and throw the ball again. Retrieve and step back two steps – do this until you can't get the ball to the catcher anymore and then pitch on your way back.

Here is another one:

Weighted ball – This is a good one for strength and speed, but it should never be overused – especially by a young pitcher – because it can increase the incidence of injury.

You can get balls that have a slightly higher weight (10 to 12 oz instead of 6.25 oz) for strength training and your pitchers should throw these ball between 10 and 20 times during practice. This builds great strength in the arms of pitchers.

It is very important for softball pitchers to perfect their technique before the try to throw the ball hard. The proper mechanics is where all of the speed is – that's why it needs to be learned first!



Block the ball

Teaching youngsters to get in front of the ball is the first part to teaching them the catching position.

What you need – A set of catcher's equipment for each player that wants to learn the catching position, or, players can rotate through the position.

How this drill works – Since the catcher's position can possibly involve getting hit with the ball regularly (especially at the beginning levels), it is important for novice catchers to learn two things early: to not be afraid of the ball (because of the equipment), and that they should try to block the ball at all costs.

Once the coach instructs the proper crouch position for a catcher (good balance, balls of the feet, glove in front, eye on the ball), then they can throw a series of pitches that challenges the player to move to get their body in front of the ball.

The first object is to catch the ball, or trap it with the glove, but wild pitches need to be blocked with the equipment, while maintaining good body control.

Result – The player will understand the fundamental purpose of the catcher's position.



Throw out

You can get fielders and runner involved in this one!

What you need – Field a half infield (first, second and even shortstop), along with a pitcher, catcher and base runner.

How this drill works – It is important for the catcher to learn a couple of basic skills – first to throw out a runner going to second, and also to hold runners (if need be) on the base they are at.

The catcher should be focused on making a good throw to the runner side of the base. The ball should also come in low (this is something that can be worked on with the repetition of the drill), and coaches should make sure that correct throwing (with the mask still on) is taking place.

Result – You can work base running drills along with this one, and it will teach your catcher to react in that situation.



One man on base

This will help players develop an understanding of a force out.

What you need – You can start off doing this drill with no fielders or runners, but just explaining to your players what it means to be 'forced' to run to the next base.

How this drill works – Put a man on first base, and explain what happens when the ball is put into play – the man on first is 'forced' to go to second. If you start a man on second, explain that the man is **not** forced to go to the next base, and therefore he must be tagged out.

Once the players understand that, then you can move them into a basic play recognition drill when they get the ball and are able to make the play to second when there is a force play on. You can also put in a situation where there are two men on base (1st and 2nd base) and you can make the fielder decide where they have to throw the ball.

Result – With repetition, the players will learn to understand when there is a force out, and when it isn't. The instruction should continue to happen while the players are learning.



Four man cut off

This will show players that they need to hit the man helping them to get the ball in to the infield.

What you need – Have a man at shortstop, 2nd base, right and left field to do this drill.

How this drill works – When you teach this, you will have to show the players when they are supposed to go to be the cutoff person and why it is important. Illustrating this is important. Show them that a younger player will have trouble getting the ball all of the way into the infield by themselves, and that by having a player help them, they can get the ball in quicker and save some runs.

You can hit the ball to right field and instruct the 2nd baseman to go out to cutoff the ball. The shortstop should be shown he or she should cover second base. Likewise if the ball goes to left field, the shortstop should cut it off and the second base man should cover second.

Result – Your players will soon learn the value of using their teammates to get the ball in to the infield quicker with the cutoff man.

Time	Drill	Pg.	Coaching Tips
00 to :10	Throwing warm ups	-	Players should throw together
:10 to :15	Full body stretch	-	Shoulders, legs
:15 to :25	Light jog around the outfield	-	Limbering up and preparing for drills
:25 to :35	Alligator arms	6	To learn to trap the ball with two hands
:35 to :38	Water break	-	-
:38 to :45	Ball to first	6	This helps to reinforce where they should throw the ball
:45 to 1:00	Slide to the bag	New	The basics of the sliding position
1:00 to 1:10	From the tee	16	Helps with beginning batting skills
1:10 to 1:20	Eye on the spot	17	Keep the eye on the ball
1:20 to 1:30	One man on base	New	Teaches kids the force out
1:30 to 1:35	Water break	-	-
1:35 to 1:45	Four man cut off	New	Shows young players the importance of the cut off man
1:45 to 1:55	Past ball	5	Teaches players to get in front of the ball
1:55 to 2:00	Cool down	-	

Time	Drill	Pg.	Coaching Tips
<i>00 to :10</i>	<i>Throwing warm ups</i>	-	<i>One knee, stationary, etc</i>
<i>:10 to :15</i>	<i>Full body stretch</i>	-	<i>Shoulder, legs, groin, and lower back</i>
<i>:15 to :25</i>	<i>Light jog around the outfield</i>	-	<i>Limbering up and preparing for drills</i>
<i>:25 to :35</i>	<i>Scoop drill</i>	5	<i>Make sure the kids have the proper scoop</i>
<i>:35 to :38</i>	<i>Water break</i>	-	-
<i>:38 to :45</i>	<i>Alligator arms</i>	6	<i>To learn to trap the ball with two hands</i>
<i>:45 to 1:00</i>	<i>Ball to first</i>	6	<i>This helps to reinforce where they should throw the ball</i>
<i>1:00 to 1:10</i>	<i>One man on base</i>	<i>New</i>	<i>Teaches kids the force out</i>
<i>1:10 to 1:20</i>	<i>Learn the bases</i>	24	<i>Helps kids understand the different bases</i>
<i>1:20 to 1:30</i>	<i>Batter stance</i>	18	<i>Teaches the batter the proper posture</i>
<i>1:30 to 1:35</i>	<i>Water break</i>	-	-
<i>1:35 to 1:45</i>	<i>From the tee</i>	16	<i>Helps with beginning batting skills</i>
<i>1:45 to 1:55</i>	<i>Eye on the spot</i>	17	<i>Keep the eye on the ball</i>
<i>1:55 to 2:00</i>	<i>Cool down</i>	-	

Time	Drill	Pg.	Coaching Tips
00 to :10	Throwing warm ups	-	Throwing with teammates
:10 to :15	Full body stretch	-	Shoulder and leg warm ups
:15 to :25	Light jog around the outfield	-	Limbering up and preparing for drills
:25 to :35	Scoop drill	5	Make sure the kids have the proper scoop
:35 to :38	Water break	-	-
:38 to :45	Ball to first	6	Make sure they scoop!
:45 to 1:00	Past ball	5	Teaches players to get in front of the ball
1:00 to 1:10	Learn the bases	24	Helps kids understand the different bases
1:10 to 1:20	Base relay	25	Reinforces above drill
1:20 to 1:30	Batter stance	18	Teaches the batter the proper posture
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<i>00 to :10</i>	<i>Throwing warm ups</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>Practicing with teammates</i>
<i>:10 to :15</i>	<i>Full body stretch</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>Shoulder warm ups and legs</i>
<i>:15 to :25</i>	<i>Light jog around the outfield</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>Limbering up and preparing for drills</i>
<i>:25 to :35</i>	<i>Ball to first</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>This helps to reinforce where they should throw the ball</i>
<i>:35 to :38</i>	<i>Water break</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
<i>:38 to :45</i>	<i>Step away toss</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>Teaches players the strength behind throws</i>
<i>:45 to 1:00</i>	<i>Learn the bases</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>Helps kids understand the different bases</i>
<i>1:00 to 1:10</i>	<i>Base relay</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>Reinforces above drill</i>
<i>1:10 to 1:20</i>	<i>Four man cut off</i>	<i>New</i>	<i>Shows young players the importance of the cut off man</i>
<i>1:20 to 1:30</i>	<i>One man on base</i>	<i>New</i>	<i>Teaches kids the force out</i>
<i>1:30 to 1:35</i>	<i>Water break</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
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