

Schuylerville Youth Recreational Softball Program



Coaching Guidelines

Schuylerville Youth Softball Coaching Guidelines

These guidelines are intended to provide coaches with:

- Explanations of the philosophy and practices of our softball program
- Educational resources to help them improve in all aspects of coaching
- General rules which must be followed in addition to the game rules for the level you are coaching
- Clear expectations that must be met in order to continue as a coach in our program

The commissioner may suspend, or remove any person from a coaching position at any time for inappropriate or unsportsmanlike conduct, failure and/or refusal to adhere to the rules, policies, and guidelines found in Parent and Coaches Handbook for Softball and these Coaching Guidelines.

The Parent and Coaches Handbook for Softball is available here:

<http://www.osacolts.org/index.php/sports/softball>

All coaches are required to complete the CDC Heads Up Concussion training once, and to complete a background check annually. You can find links to the websites used for the concussion training and background checks here:

<http://www.osacolts.org/index.php/forms-and-information>

Philosophy:

The opportunity to coach youth sports is an opportunity to positively impact the lives of the children in our community. Encouragement and positive reinforcement should be the most frequently used tools in the coach's toolbox.

Our main objective from a coaching perspective in this program is to keep the kids engaged in the game of softball. Improvement in softball, as in any other sport, is made incrementally through repetition. By keeping the game fun, providing a safe and positive environment, and continually emphasizing the correct techniques, we are giving the girls in the program every opportunity to reach their potential. When we keep the sport fun, we retain the players playing the sport. By continuing to play, the players receive more repetitions and become better players. When the players have fun, we may also attract new players to the sport through word of mouth.

Sportsmanship and Conduct:

You must read and follow the OSAA Code of Conduct, available here:

<http://www.osacolts.org/index.php/forms-and-information>

You are required to act as a role model for the players, parents, and fellow coaches at all times. Inappropriate or unsportsmanlike conduct will not be tolerated.

Player Safety:

Player safety is of the utmost importance in our program. It is imperative that you and your fellow coaches closely supervise the players at all times during practices and games. Before starting any drill in practice, you must consider whether it can be safely accomplished with the way that you organized it, taking into account the age and skill levels of your players. In the event of an injury, please note that you must report it to the commissioner as soon as you are aware of it.

Communication with Parents:

One of the most important things a coach can do to foster a positive relationship with parents is to communicate information clearly and in a timely fashion. Parents should expect clear and timely communications regarding practice and game schedules, cancellations (providing as much advance notice as the circumstances allow), and issues that arise. Open lines of communication should exist at all times to ensure the best experience possible for the players. If there are any issues or limitations that could impact the player's focus, behavior, ability to process information, or physical ability, parents should communicate this information with the coach.

Continuing Education:

The techniques used in the game of softball are not necessarily the same as the ones that you were taught when you played softball or baseball. Take advantage of the information available in this guide, and look around for additional resources that are available. Ask the commissioner to pair you with an existing coach in the league who you can use as a resource and sounding board. We encourage new coaches to observe practices run by more experienced coaches to get ideas for drills and practice organization. There are many great resources on the internet that you can use to learn about the proper techniques, drills to practice those techniques, and ideas for fun games you can incorporate into your practices:

- www.youtube.com
- www.softball-spot.com
- www.softball-tips.com

Playing Time/Defensive Positions:

At all levels of our league, every effort should be made to keep playing time for all players reasonably even, and to rotate players at various defensive positions so that they can gain experience at different positions. As players progress to the 10U and 12U levels in our league, players may begin to specialize more at certain positions, but an effort should still be made to rotate positions to keep the game fun and interesting for all players. No players should exclusively, or almost exclusively, play in the outfield in our league.

General Rules:

The following general rules will apply to every team practice, scrimmage, or game at all age levels, and are in addition to specific game rules for each level:

- No players will be allowed to swing a bat without wearing a helmet equipped with a facemask and chin strap at any time
- No players will be allowed to swing a bat outside the batter's box unless they are supervised by a coach in an area which is a safe distance away from players and spectators.
- Protective facemasks are strongly encouraged for all players, particularly all infielders. Protective facemasks are mandatory for pitchers at 10U and 12U, and batting helmets with a protective facemask and chinstrap are mandatory for players playing the pitcher position at 6U and 8U.

Practice Planning and Organization:

Spending a few minutes to write out a plan for practice can go a long way toward having an efficient practice that is fun for everyone involved. You should adjust how long you will practice based upon the age of your players, the weather conditions, etc. For the younger levels, you should limit the practice to 60 minutes, sometimes a little more or less. Use good judgment when trying to practice in difficult or potentially dangerous weather. Nothing is worth the potential risk of injury (or worse) in those situations.

The following is an example of a practice plan you might choose to utilize:

10 Minutes: Stretching, jogging, warm-ups

20 Minutes: Throwing and catching (with demonstrations and correction—every practice

20 minutes: Infield/Outfield defensive drills

30 minutes: Hitting stations such as soft toss, tee work, golf ball-sized wiffle balls, batting practice (rotate players through each station).

10-15 minutes: Fun game (base running, agility race, knockout with pop ups, etc...)

Practice:

"Practice doesn't make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect". –Cal Ripken Sr.

Think about that. If you are not practicing the techniques correctly, you are only getting more consistent, or "better", at doing it incorrectly. By not correcting improper techniques, we are allowing bad habits to become further engrained in the minds of the players, and therefore, harder to correct down the road.

By learning the correct techniques yourself as a coach, teaching them early in your season, and making corrections in a positive manner as needed throughout the season, you are doing everything in your power to teach the fundamentals game the right way. If a particular player

has shown that they use the right technique in a particular area, use them as a positive example that the other players can emulate.

Efficient practices are more fun and engaging for the players and coaches. To the extent possible, every effort should be made to break the team into small groups during practice, each group with its own coach, to work on techniques and drills. Too often, practice involves one player and one coach doing something (pitching to the kids in batting practice, for example) while all of the other players and coaches stand around waiting for the ball to come to them as they wait for their turn. This is an inefficient practice, and is one of the most boring types of practices that a player can experience.

You need multiple coaches in order to keep the groups small. The league constantly asks parents to volunteer to serve as coaches. **Once you draft your team, do not assume that the only parents that are willing to help are those that already signed up to coach.** In your introductory e-mail to your team after the draft, you are strongly encouraged to invite all of the parents to feel free to come out onto the field during practice to help you. If you do not invite them, some parents will be reluctant to come out to help as they feel they are intruding on your space.

Using wiffle balls is a great way to maximize field space. For example, you could have one station with one coach and a few players at a batting practice station in the outfield using wiffle balls. The use of these balls limits the danger involved in having another station nearby, such as one that is working on ground balls or fly balls, for example. Wiffle balls are also a great way to teach the basics of teaching kids how to properly catch a thrown ball or a pop up, as it eliminates the fear of being struck by the ball. Beginning in 8U, using smaller, golf-ball sized wiffle balls can be a great tool to further refine hitting skills.

Hitting off a tee is another great way to work on hitting. Major league hitters constantly work on hitting off of the tee to improve and fine tune their swing.

Especially at the younger ages in softball, every effort should be made to let kids play different positions on defense. At the 10U level, which is when players start to pitch to batters instead of coaches, you should encourage everyone to give it a try. You should try to give every player that expresses the desire to pitch the opportunity to do so in a game.

Skills:

Throwing and Catching:

At times we might overlook, or even take for granted, an essential skill as we work on all of the others: the ability to properly throw and catch the ball. By comparison, the next time you are at your child's soccer practice, pay attention to the amount of time youth soccer coaches work in each practice on ball handling and "touches" with their players.

We probably all set aside ten minutes or so at the beginning of each practice where the players play catch. We need to actively coach the players during these periods to correct techniques where needed. Coaches at the younger levels in particular need to emphasize working on this, but it should not be ignored at the older levels. Remember that every year, we have players at the 10U and 12U levels who have never played the game before.

At your first practice (and if necessary, at subsequent practices), demonstrate the proper way to throw and catch the ball:

- When waiting to catch the ball, you should be square to the player throwing the ball to you: feet apart, knees bent in a good athletic position. Eyes must stay on the ball. Two hands out in front ready to catch the ball. Use the bare hand to secure the ball in the glove.
- Once the ball is caught, flip your feet and shoulders so that you now have your glove side (side of your shoulder, side of your hip, etc.) facing the person you are throwing the ball to.
- When you remove the ball from your glove to move into a throwing position, your throwing arm should form an L, with your palm facing away from your target. While in this “L” or “Power” position, your glove arm should be extended directly at your target (“Point your glove”). Make sure that the throwing elbow is at or slightly above shoulder height.
- Complete the throw by pulling the ball through the throwing motion (“Pull it through”), rotate the throwing hip and the leg on your throwing side through, so that you finish in roughly the same, square, athletic stance you used when you were waiting to catch the ball.

Hand/finger placement when catching the ball:

One of the most common mistakes that we fail to correct early is that many players will try to catch everything with their palms facing up toward the sky, even a ball that is above their waist.

Picture the hands on a clock. Any ball, either right at you or to either side, that is **at or above** your waist (3 or 9 o’clock), should be caught with your **fingers pointing to the side** (3 or 9 o’clock), or **upward** (10, 11, 12, 1, or 2 o’clock) with your **thumbs together**. Any ball, either right at your or to either side, that is **below** the waist, should be caught with your **fingers facing down** and your **pinkies together**.

Fielding Ground Balls:

Everything starts on defense by being in a good athletic position.

- Eyes on the ball
- Feet a little wider than shoulder width apart
- Knees bent
- Both hands out front in a ready position.

As the ball approaches, we must move our feet if necessary so that we are fielding the ball with it under the center of our body (not off the side if possible). Bend the knees further to get low to the ground, extend both hands out front, and field the ball using both hands. Quickly flip the feet and hips so that the glove side (side of the shoulder, side of the hip) are now facing the target. Complete the throw.

Fielding Pop Ups:

Everything on defense starts with being in a ready position with your eyes on the ball. Whenever possible, players should attempt to catch the ball with two hands above their head, or at shoulder height, with their fingers pointing up. Only when the situation doesn't allow it (misjudging the ball, the wind blowing the ball off course, or a ball that we can't get underneath because of how hard or soft it was hit) would we want to catch the ball without our fingers pointing up or below our shoulders. Always use two hands to catch the ball.

Hitting:

Everything starts with the grip and stance.

The **grip** should be loose (they should not be tightly squeezing the bat handle) with the "knocking knuckles" (picture the knuckles you would use on your fingers to knock on a door) on both hands roughly aligned with each other. If they are not aligned well, it can be a sign that the player's wrists are "locked", which results in a very stiff and robotic swing.

The first part of the stance to check are the **feet**. Are they close enough to the plate that the player can reach the outside part of the plate with their bat? Are they a little wider than shoulder width apart as they should be? Are the toes on both feet pointing at the plate as they should be? Are the edges of the feet close to the same distance away from the near edge of the plate as they should be?

The **knees** should be bent. The side of the front side should be facing the pitcher. It should be difficult for the pitcher to see the full jersey number on the player's back (too closed). The pitcher should also not be able to see the full front of the batter's shirt (too open).

The hands should be at about shoulder height. Eyes on the ball at all times.

As the swing starts, the bat knob should move straight toward the ball. Not out and away from the body, which can result in a "long swing" with slow bat speed. As the pitching becomes faster as the players get older, this wasted motion can make it difficult for players to catch up to the ball. The eyes should stay on the ball through the point of contact— "**watch the ball hit the bat**". As the hands come through, the hips and feet should begin to rotate toward the ball in order to drive the ball. The front foot should stride slightly toward the pitcher.

Field Maintenance:

We are responsible for maintaining our own fields. Your participation in field clean up days is required and is essential to having the fields in great shape for Opening Day. When you miss clean up day, it sets a bad example for your assistant coaches and player's parents. If you are unable to make a cleanup day, contact the commissioner to let them know when you are available to work on the fields (before or after the scheduled clean up day). Participation in field clean up days, or lack thereof, is a factor when coaches request consideration to be an All Star head coach, and when you apply to coach each season.

We are responsible for lining, raking, and dragging our own fields prior to each game. If you are unsure how to line the fields or operate the tractor, please contact the commissioner.

Please emphasize to your players that they should pick up all garbage and remove all reusable water bottles following each practice and game. If you notice a piece of trash on or near the field, please pick it up and dispose of it. If we all do our part, it will make a noticeable difference at the fields.