SPORT NEW ZEALAND

Softball NEW ZEALAND

6x WEEK OFFENSIVE & DEFENSIVE PROGRAMME

COACH SUPPORT NOTES

WEEKS 1 & 2

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The Rookie Sox 6x Week Offensive & Defensive Programme is designed to support the further development of 11-12 year old softballers. The programme is not necessarily for individual clubs but more for identified players covering a cluster of clubs or a region.

The programme has been developed to put your team (or identified players) ahead of the competition with six weeks of structured and innovative training. Trainings outlined in this programme include 2 hour sessions with appropriate skill progressions to improve the offensive and defensive abilities of players in ôall positionsõ

Highlights of the Programme include:

- Softballers are introduced to all 9 defensive positions on the diamond. The purpose of this concept is to expose and allow all players the opportunity to gain a wide range of softball skills.
- Honouring the Game - a component built into each session exposing athletes to the national team pathway and characteristics that define successful softball players.
- Carefully designed practice plans allowing both coaches and players the ability to understand the game and think more for themselves.
- The document complements and builds on the ôRookie Sox Manualõand the ôRookie Sox Pitching & Catching 6x Week Programmeõ

How does it work?

The Rookie Sox 6x Week Offensive & Defensive Programme is made up of two key documents.

1. Session Plans - There are 6 weekly session plans covering fundamentals for each position. The session plans include simple but effective training drills that coaches can use to run a training. The 2 hour session plans include all the necessary information a coach requires to run the session on the day.

2. Coach Support Notes ï Session plans are accompanied by an additional document providing background reading and information to allow the coach to prepare in advance for each training session. Information in this document covers; dynamic stretching, warmups, warm downs and a breakdown of fundamentals skills.

Who can run a 6x week programme?

There are no restrictions as to who can and can't run a Rookie Sox 6x Week Offensive & Defensive Program. However it is advised that coaches have some experience in coaching children of this age group.

It is recommenced coaches undertake the following coach accreditation modules to gain a greater understanding of the content within the modules and to ensure they are confident in their delivery.

- Induction Unit
- Hitting & the Short Game
- Throwing & Fielding
- Base running & Sliding
- Pitching Mechanics & Rules

Modules can be undertaken free of charge via the Softball NZ online coaching programme. Please email snz@softball.org.nz to register for a login.

HOUNOURING THE GAME

Through the ôHonouring the Gameôconcept players will develop a greater understanding and appreciation of softball. We will promote; national team players, success of our national teams on the world stage, the history of the game, interesting stories and opportunities available within the game.

The highlight of the concept will be to expose talented softballers to inspirational messages and characteristics of what makes a successful softballer.

Honouring the Game includes:

Week 1 - Video messages from ï Rookie Sox Ambassadors Cole Evans and Lara Andrews
Week 2 - New Zealand National Teams
Week 3 - Respect for the Game
Week 4 - Softball in New Zealand and around the World
Week 5 - Opportunities and Pathways
Week 6 - Qualities of National Team Success

WARMUP:

DYNAMIC STRETCHING

What Is Dynamic Stretching?

A dynamic warm-up uses stretches that are "dynamic," meaning you are moving as you stretch. For decades, static stretching, which requires holding a stretch for 10 or more seconds while motionless, was the most popular type of warm-up for athletes.

Dynamic stretching is ideal as the core of a warm-up routine for several reasons:

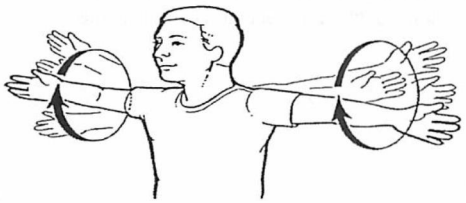
1. It activates muscles you will use during your workout. For example, a lunge with a twist is a dynamic stretching exercise that engages your hips, legs, and core muscles. Whether you are doing weighted lunges in the gym, or lunging for a soccer ball, the muscles involved have already been engaged during your warm-up.
2. Dynamic stretching improves range of motion. So if you feel like you can barely bend over to tie your shoes after a long day at work, a dynamic warm-up routine can help you feel more limber.
3. Dynamic stretches improve body awareness. If you donôt warm-up and hop into a soccer game, it may take a while for your body to perform optimally. Moving as you stretch challenges your balance and coordination; skills that could help your performance.
4. Warming up in motion enhances muscular performance and power. Studies reveal dynamic stretching before a workout can help you lift more weight and increase overall athletic performance compared to no stretching or static stretching. If you are trying to get stronger, build more muscle, or simply perform better, a dynamic warm-up routine is likely your best bet.

Example and Overview of Possible Dynamic Stretches

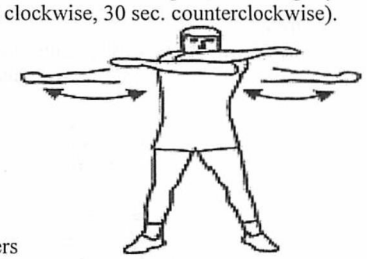
Complete 10 reps of each exercise below for 1-2 rounds, and check out the videos at the bottom for tips and demonstrations of a variety of stretches.

Dynamic Stretching

1. Small Shoulder circles/ Large Windmills – Stand with feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent, Start with small circles for 15 sec. and then large circles 15 sec. (30 seconds clockwise, 30 sec. counterclockwise).



1. Windmills

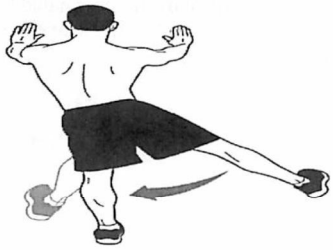


2. Huggers

2. Huggers / Cross body arm swings – Swing both arms out to sides and then cross then in front of the chest; 30 seconds.

3. Hamstrings/Quadriceps –Holding onto the fence, swing with straight leg out in front of the body so that a stretch is felt in the back of the leg, then swing the leg behind the body; 30 seconds. Switch Legs. First Picture Below.

3. Hams



4. Adductors

4. Adductors – Holding onto the fence, swing the leg side to side as high as possible; 30 seconds. Switch Legs.

Phase 3: Strength, Conditioning, Throwing

1. Lunge and Twist - Lunge forward with a light twist at the waist from foul line to 2nd base , jog back to foul line.

2. Lunge & Twist

2. Lateral Slide

3. Lateral slide -Stand with your feet just beyond shoulder width. Get in mini-squat position, with hips back, bend the knees, and lower the body until hips are just slightly higher than your knees. Slide from foul line to 2nd base facing the infield and then return still facing the infield. See second Picture Above.

Forward Lunge with a Twist

As the name implies, this is a combination of two different moves: a forward lunge and a horizontal twist. The forward lunge helps stretch the hip flexors and activates the legs, glutes, and hips, while the twist stretches out the upper and middle back and activates core rotation. As you do the lunge, step forward, then drop your hips. You shouldn't try to lunge too far forward so your front knee extends far beyond your toes. After you have lunged, slowly twist toward the side you are lunging for a more intense hip flexor stretch.

Knee to Chest

This exercise mimics the top of a running stride as you bring your knee toward your chest before striking the foot toward the ground. You can alternate each leg while stationary or do it while walking forward. Focus on bringing the knee cap into the chest by hugging your shin while stepping onto your toes with your opposite foot, which will give you more leverage.

High Kicks

High kicks help warm-up the hamstrings and improve range of motion. You can do them while alternating as you walk, or how I prefer, stationary while focusing on one side at a time. If starting with your right leg, extend your left arm straight out. Kick your leg up while keeping your leg and hand straight so that your toes hit your palm. Try to progressively kick higher, but complete this exercise while staying under control.

Hip Stretch with a Twist

This is an exceptional stretch, especially for working professionals who sit a lot during the day. It helps open up the hips and groin while stretching the core, upper, and middle back. Start in the push up position and bring your right foot up to your right hand while keeping your hips down and lower back flat. Take your left hand, twist to your left while extending your arm and reaching toward the sky. Come back to the starting push up position and repeat on the other side. A possible substitution for this exercise would be a side lunge to help work on your lateral movement.

T-Push-Ups

A T-Push Up is a great exercise to help warm-up your upper body, especially the shoulders, while also activating your entire core. Start out in the push-up position, and then lower yourself down towards the ground. As you push back up, extend your right arm toward the sky while keeping your left arm stable and your hips from moving down, or up. Bring your arm back to the starting position, do another push up, and then repeat with the left arm.

Jump Squats

Jump squats are a great plyometric exercise for warming up the lower body. Because the exercise is fast, it requires a greater degree of force production and power than the other exercises on this list, so it's a more advanced warm-up exercise. Stand up with your feet about shoulder width apart while holding your hands behind your head, or on your hips. Squat down until the hips are about parallel with the ground, then forcibly jump off the ground. Land softly and repeat the jump.

Jump Lunges

Jump lunges are another great plyometric exercise for warming up the lower body. This exercise also requires balance to help activate your stabilizer muscles in your legs and hips. With your hands at your sides or behind your head, start with one foot extended forward and one behind. Drop your hips downward and forcibly jump into the air. While you are in the air, switch your legs so that your forward leg is now behind you and your back leg is now in front of you.

Additional Examples:

YouTube video links:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6WqKxXa73w
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guxFDNqD8Rg
- https://greatist.com/fitness/full-body-dynamic-warm-up\

THROWING MECHANCIS

The following outlines sound throwing mechanics to use a guide to help support the development of the arms of the Rookie Sox player.

Two finger grip

The Grip

- The 3 basic qualities to look for in a good throw are: ACCURACY, SPEED and REVERSE SPIN. A proper grip achieves these.
- There are 2 grips that are acceptable ï two or three finger
- The right one for you is the one, which is most comfortable and natural.
- Holding the ball across the seams gives you a better grip and achieves more rotation on the ball.
- The ball should be held in the fingers rather than the palm of the hand, and the grip should be firm but not rigid.

Three finger grip

- While important to know how to grip the ball properly, players should realise that in the heat of the game it may not always be possible to hold the ball exactly as described. They must learn to throw quickly and accurately regardless where their fingers happen to land on the ball.
- Practice finding your grip of choice inside your glove. This is important for your transition from fielding the ball to throwing the ball.

Step/Stride

The throwing action can be broken down into 5 basic parts:

1. Step/Stride
2. Hip/Shoulder Rotation
3. Arm action
4. Release/Wrist action
5. Follow through

Step/Stride (stay balanced)

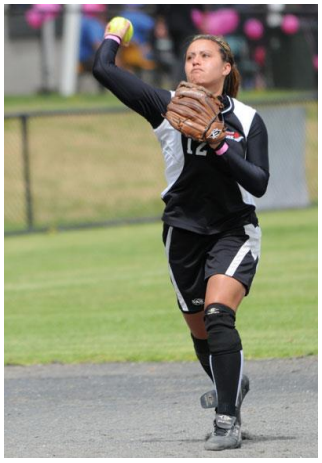
- The throwing foot starts slightly forward. This will make sure that the first foot moved is the glove foot.
- Pinky toe towards your target. This will help the upper body start to turn toward the target.
- Step with an extended walking step with the glove foot toward the target and point at the target with the glove shoulder (bent elbow directed towards your target). Check that your ball is facing away from the players body. This helps to cock the wrist which in turn will provide better rotation on release.
- When completed the pinky toe should be pointing toward your target (a 45 degree angle).
- Striding too far or too short will cause the throw to go too low or too high. Feet should be shoulder width apart and in an athletic position. Your body weight shift is equally important. Keep weight on back leg and finish throw with a balanced stride.

Hip/Shoulder Rotation

- As the step is taken, the hips, upper body and shoulders rotate toward the throwing side.
- A complete rotation would mean the shoulder opposite the throwing hand would be pointing at the target.
- Once this position is reached the body begins to unwind or rotate forward.
- It is the winding and unwinding that produces the power in the throw. The important thing to remember is that the sequence must occur in the order described to produce the desired power, i.e. hips, shoulders then arm.

Arm Action

- As the step is taken, and the body rotates in preparation for the throw, the throwing arm is swung down and back. The bigger the wind the further the throw, i.e. Outfielders ï biggest clock ï about knee height; Infielders ï slightly smaller clock ï bellybutton height; Catchers ï very small clock (shoulder height).
- Keep the elbow close and high this will produce a more stable and accurate throw.
- The ball and palm should end up facing away to allow for greater backspin on the ball once released.
- The glove hand should spin so that the palm is facing upwards followed by the elbow tucking in behind the thrower.



Release/Wrist Action

- As the arm comes forward to release the ball; the wrist should be underneath the ball and below the head with the ball facing the target to produce reverse spin.
- Release the ball with wrist snap so that the ball spins from 12 o'clock to 6 o'clock.
- Proper wrist position will ensure that the following hand is behind the ball at the moment of release increasing the power and accuracy of the throw.
- Weight is transferred to the front foot as the arm comes forward.

Follow Through / Glove Arm Movement

- The front elbow should pull down toward the core. This is similar to a windmill motion, such that the glove arm helps generate power for the throwing arm. This also helps to take pressure off of the throwing shoulder.
- Once the ball is released, the body should continue its forward rotation until the throwing shoulder is pointing at the target.
- The throwing hand is allowed to continue down to, even past, the opposite hip, and the back leg swings forward naturally.
- This represents a complete follow through which will ensure maximum power with minimum stress on the elbow and shoulder.

Underhand & Overhand Toss

Underhand Toss

The underhand throw is used on short throws that must be made quickly.

- **Separating the Ball** ï Once you field the ball, take the ball in your throwing hand and separate it from your glove, where you caught it. Usually this happens below your knees.
- **Get your glove out of the way** - Pull it behind you or up outside your left shoulder. Your goal is to give the receiver the best view of the softball possible and you donôt want the glove to obstruct his view.
- **Load** ï Move your throwing arm back just a few inches. Keep it straight and only use your shoulder as a hinge point.
- **The Throw** ï Drive your right leg toward the target and bring your right arm through in a straight line toward the bag. Use your legs to get momentum on your toss. The more you push with your legs, the harder the ball will be tossed.
- **Low to High** ï Remember the ball is still low and close to the

	ground, and easily visible to the receiver. The toss needs to go from low to high. It is much easier for the receiver to catch a feed that has an upward trajectory, compared to a downward trajectory. • **Follow through with legs** ï After the ball is released from your hand, continue using your legs and walk through your target this will help keep the ball from being tossed too high.

Overhand Toss

The overhand toss is used when the receiving fielder a little too far for an underhand toss.

- **Separate the ball -** Once we field the ball we want to make sure we separate the ball from the glove.
- **Show the ball -** Immediately you want to give the receiver a good look at the ball - Get your glove out of the way of the receiverôs visual path to the softball.
- **Square up -** After we secure the softball, take our left foot and point it towards the targeted base so our feet are in line and we are squared up to our target.
- **Release Point -** After securing the softball, we want to make sure the path of the toss has an upward trajectory. Our release point of the toss is going to be higher than an underhand toss so we need to work hard to throw the ball to the receivers chest or face every time. It is much easier for them to handle.

One of the most important factors for the overhand toss is to throw from down to up. It is much easier for your receiver to catch the ball that is traveling on a gradual incline to it rather than throw over the top and have it end up at your knees. If you can release the ball between your knee and waist height and the receiver can catch it between chest and face height, you have made a perfect toss.

LONG TOSS PROGRAMME

What is Long toss?

Long toss is a throwing development program which will ultimately allow players to develop stronger and more accurate throws. A typical long toss program will commence prior to the season and tapper off as the season progresses, however the more the programme is undertaken the better the results.

Outcomes of the long toss programme:

1. Increase overall strength in the players arm strength.
2. Improve throwing mechanics
3. Increase mobility and stability in proper areas of the body

Long Toss Programme

1. Throwing on an Arc (Separation Increases)
   - 20 Metres (2 Minutes)
   - 30 Metres (2 Minutes)
   - 40 Metres (2 Minutes)
   - 50 Yards or longest possible distance (1 Minutes)

2. Throwing on a Line (Separation Decreases)
   - 50 Metres (1 Minutes)
   - 30 Metres (1 Minutes)
   - 20 Metres (2 Minutes)

Key Points

- Setup cones for the above distances to use as a reference.
- Pair up players that have similar arm strength
  - Outfielders with Outfielders
  - Infielders with Infielders

DEFENCE

MINI DIAMONDS – SUPER TOOL!

One of the most valuable tools a coach can use is the Mini Diamond. Any drill in which the focus of the teaching is something other than working on full on overhand throwing technique can be run on a Mini Diamond. Use of the Mini Diamond should be used where necessary to ensure players get the maximum amount of time to work on drills and skills.

A Mini Diamond is 6 ï 8m square, but can be modified larger or smaller depending on the activity. It can be constructed using cones, throw down bases or similar. Anytime we compact the teaching/learning environment we reduce distractions, improve communication and the players get many more repetitions during a drill.

Examples of drills that can be run using a Mini Diamond include relays, backing-up and base coverage responsibilities, and first and third defense. Keep in mind that for most activities the throwing and catching aspect is the last skill that needs to be mastered (and we take care of that during 'Playing Catch Practice'). Proper movement, positioning and communication need to be understood and mastered to some extent before we add the throwing aspect to cement the execution of the activity.

The Mini Diamond is also useful for teaching how a drill is supposed to run before going to the full size diamond.

SETUP MECHANCIS

All players must take the ready position prior to every pitch. The purpose of this set position is to ensure that players are ready to field any ball hit within their range, and to focus their concentration.

As the ball is being pitched the fielder stays in the ready position.

Infielderôs ready position is lower than outfielders since the balls received are usually ground balls.

Body position

- Feet are shoulder width apart with the glove side foot slightly ahead of the other.
- Knees are bent slightly with chest bent slightly forward.
- Head is up and eyes are focused on the strike zone.
- Upper body is relaxed.

Weight distribution

- The weight is forward, but spread along the entire foot. Weight moves to ball of your foot to allow for a quick reaction to the ball.
- Athletic stance is important (stay balanced).
- Flat back, butt out, when in athletic stance.

Hand position

- The hands are low, with the glove close to the ground.
- Elbows should be out in front of the knees.
- Fingers pointed down, palms facing the batter.
- It is easier to go from low to high than it is to go from high to low. Infielders should start low.

Glove inside left foot.

Setup - Middle Infielders and Corners

There is one key difference between First/Third Base (Corners) and Second Base/Short Stop (Middle Infielders) and that is ótimeô Middle infielders have more time to react to the ball of the bat as opposed to the corners.

The key differences in the ready position set up are:

Middle Infielders (2nd & Short Stop)	**Corners (1st & 3rd Base)**
• Glove is open with throwing hand above the glove. • Glove is off the ground.	• Glove is touching the ground. Bending knees while keeping your bottom down is key. • Elbows bent.

As the ball is being pitched the fielder stays in the ready position.

GROUNDBALLS

After getting in the path of the ground ball, the infielder should use the following technique for fielding the ball:

Body Position

- Stay low, with the knees well bent and tail down.
- The head should move only to enable the fielder to watch the ball into the glove.
- The body should be directly facing the oncoming ball.

Feet Position

- Feet are at least shoulder width apart.
- Glove side foot placed slightly in front to keep your weight on the balls of your feet.

Hand Position

- Hands should be well out in front, and should touch the ground creating a triangle (e.g. the base of the triangle is from toe to toe. Your glove hand should be extended forward towards the batter

	as the tip of the triangle). • The ball is fielded from the ground up. • The glove is held wide open facing the ball.

GROUNDBALLS – SHORT STOP

Every shortstop needs to be able to handle whatever comes at them with both grace and ease.

Four types of grounders:

1. Hits right at them
2. Hits to the left
3. Hits to the right, and
4. Slow rollers.

These hits may also be long bouncers or short hops.

Mechanics

Hits right at you - Charge the ball (if you need to), then set the feet and throw.

Hits to the left - Hits to the left will lead the player toward second base. Player should be able to field these balls in front or just outside the left foot. Then set feet and throw.

Hits to the right - If the hit is to the right, player needs to hustle to try and field it in front of the body. If they can't get there in time, allow the right foot to cross over the left as they bend their knees and field the ball with the backhand. Once secured the ball, take a step toward the target with the right foot to initiate the throw, bring the hand into throwing position, and then step toward first with the left foot and throw. Especially because they're using their backhand, this play has to be quick.

GROUNDBALLS – SECOND BASE

Mechanics

If the play is at first base and the hit is to the second baseman's left, the player will need to move their feet to get in front of the ball. If they absolutely cannot field the ball in front of them, they may field it on the inside of their left foot or dive if necessary.

The hit will lead them towards first base. If they are close enough, make an underhand toss to first base or take it themselves to finish the play.

If the ball takes them further to their left and the play is at second

	base, the job is a little more difficult because they will likely have to field it outside of their left foot. Pivot the feet, cross over, or shuffle to field the ball. As the second baseman fields the ball, step through with the right foot, turn the back to the infield by pivoting the left foot (turning towards the left side), while completely turning the hips around to make the throw. If a grounder leads a player to the right, always try to get the body in front of the ball. Second baseman should only use the backhand as a last resort. Once player gathers the ball into their stomach, they should then take a small drop step with the left foot to square the hips towards first to make the throw. If the play is at second base, it will be somewhat easier for the second baseman to make the play. The grounder will already be leading the player to second base so all they need to do is cleanly gather it into their stomach, and continue their momentum towards second base. Make a quick toss to finish the play.

SLOW ROLLERS

For an infielder, a slowly hit ball, or a "slow roller," can be one of the most difficult plays to make.

Getting the footwork down when making the throw is the toughest part of fielding slow rollers, but it's also the most crucial.

Mechanics

Player must charge the ball hard, field it and deliver a strong, accurate throw while on the run.

If the ball is still bouncing, use the Two-Handed method. You will field the ball inside the left leg (usually no lower than mid-shin), in order to transfer quickly and make the throw on the next step, using the right foot to plant.

Bare-handed technique is used in a last-chance situation or a do-or-die play where the fielder wants to get to the ball as quickly as possible.

When fielding slow rollers bare handed, use the entire hand to pick up the ball, which provides more margin for error. Once the ball is fielded, find the grip and make the throw the next time the right foot hits the ground.

One handed charging plays are considered by many coaches as ñshow boatingò They are not. They are skills that are required by good infielders. They help players with other skills from doubles play feeds to run downs. At the highest level players that make these plays fluidly are referred to as acrobatic or being able to dominate a game with their glove.

RECEIVING THROWS AT A BASE

Throws to a base at the Under 13 level are often off the mark. In order for kids to consistently catch throws at a base, they will need to leave the base a fair amount of the time in order to catch the ball.

Before we can teach kids how to receive a throw at a base we need to understand what is going on in their minds. Young players' exposure to this play is dominated by seeing the game at high-levels and seeing most plays being made at first base.

The result is kids develop two misconceptions about what is involved in receiving a throw at a base:

1. One foot is anchored to the base before their teammate makes a throw.
2. The other foot is extended out towards their teammate making the throw. They think the player at the base is supposed to stand in a 'Stretch' position (even on tag plays).

These invariably lead to kids not being able to adjust to, and catch, off-line throws. The info below address reprogramming kids perception of what is going on in preparing to take a throw at a base and how to properly prepare to receive a throw at a base.

We do not want players at the U13 level to straddle the base. Given their misconception of what is going on in this situation kids often (subconsciously or consciously) place a higher priority on being at/on the base than on catching the ball. They see the game played at higher levels and come to believe that all thrown balls will be on target at the base. The fact is that in many instances throws are not on target, which requires the player at the base to leave the bag to get to the ball.

The problem is the base serves as a 'magnetôand kids are resistant to moving away from the base.

Solution

At this level of play instruct players to stand on the side of the base the ball is coming from (if the ball is coming straight to the base in line with the base line they stand on the side of the base that places their glove between them and the base).

One they understand where to position their feet they follow this sequence when receiving a throw:

1. "Move Your Feet to Catch"
2. "Ball First, Base Second"

COMMUNICATION

Fly Ball Priority System	Mechanics	Key Qualities
A fly ball is hit to left-centre, who calls for it? How do the two players determine who has priority? This situation can occur in many places on the field involving any position on the field and can sometimes result in a collision or more often having two players looking at each other as the ball drops to the ground between them. A more difficult situation is a ball hit over the shortstop or second baseman's head. Now you could have 3 players involved. How about a pop-up to the infield around	The priorities for a fly ball start with the centre fielder having complete control over everyone on the field and then moving in. The basic premise is to have the player moving in on the fly ball have control and the ability to call off the other player. If you look at the diagram below you'll see the arrow pointing from each player to the other players	Players must be able to communicate confidently and clearly.

the pitching circle? Maybe 3 or 4 players could make the play. Evert team needs to be prepared for these, this is where a communication system is required.	that he can call off. All outfielders have the ability to call off all infielders. The shortstop has the ability to call off all other infielders but not outfielders. If they are moving back into the outfield then they have to give up priority to the outfielder coming in on the ball. All infielders (catcher excluded) have the ability to call off the pitcher.	

POSITION QUALITIES

FIRST BASE

- Ideally a first baseman should be a taller person with mobility allowing a greater target for the infield. Quick reactions will allow the first baseman to react quicker to balls in the field of play.
- Being able to scoop the ball on a short throw to 1st is a

SHORT STOP

- Communication and confidence are important for this position as there are many balls either in the air or on the ground that come through the middle.
- The shortstop needs to be one of the strongest and most vocal players on the field.

SECOND BASE

- The first thing to look for in a second baseman is their stance and how they get into it. They always need to be moving, light on their feet, and mentally prepared for anything.
- This position also includes lots of movement side to side covering the bases and for balls that are hit up the middle. Good mobility and quick reactions are important because there is a lot of ground to cover.

OFFENSE

HITTING FUNDAMENTALS

Door knocking knuckles

Grip

The Knowing how to grip the bat is essential. Correct grip gives more control when swinging at the plate and hitting the ball.

Grip fundamentals:

- Bottom hand controls the bat.
- The top hand supports the bat loosely.
- Arms should not be crossed.
- Wrists are flexible.

Knuckle Alignment

There are two options, depending on personal preference.

1. Top hand and bottom hand middle knuckles aligned (door knocking knuckles).

   This option provides wrist flexibility and allows the hitter to adjust easily to different pitches. Allows the hitter to get their hands to the ball more freely. The disadvantage is that it forces the top hand to roll and therefore take the bat head out of the strike zone early.

2. Top hand big knuckles lined up with bottom hand middle knuckles.

   Allows the hitter to be in a stronger position on contact and keep the bat head through the strike zone longer and hence make more contact with the ball. The disadvantage is that having the bat handle in the palm of the top hand is a little more restrictive and therefore the hitter is unable to move their hands as freely to the ball.

Stance

Correct stance will balance the player and position them correctly for the swing. There is no right or wrong stance. Combining both grip and stance will prepare the batter to hit the ball.

Parallel stance

- Both feet are aligned parallel with home plate.

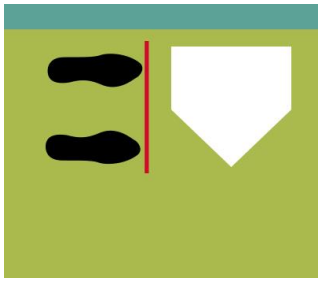
Open stance

- The back foot is closer to home plate than the rear foot.

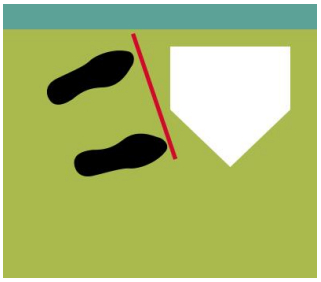
Closed stance

- The front foot is closer to home plate than the rear foot.

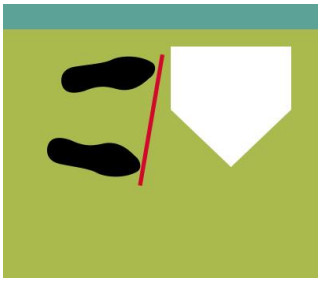
Note: Every stance should get back to parallel immediately before initiating the swing for balance and plate coverage.



Parallel stance



Open stance



Closed stance

Load

What is Loading?

Loading is a shift in weight from the back inside leg to the front allowing the batter to build momentum and power.

Loading allows the hitter to gather momentum from the backside to prepare for an explosive swing. It's like a snake coiling to strike, or pulling back the string of a bow and arrow.

How does it work?
As the pitch is being delivered, hitters should be moving from their stance into a ready-to-hit position.

1. Elbows load with back elbow moving to 9 o'clock, front elbow is at an acute angle and pointing to the back foot when loading weight back.
2. Weight should start on the back inside leg and move forward as the pitch is thrown.

Step

The forward step (or stride) enables the batter to generate momentum, and develop maximum force in the swing. The stride should be short, smooth, and consistent.

The inner part of the front foot should touch the ground first, the heel follows. Front foot should land at a 45 degree angle.

The Slot

When swinging, drive the back elbow into the hip, 'the slot'. This forces the hands inside the ball and brings the bat into the hitting zone.

Why is staying inside the ball so important?

- Stops the hands from drifting away from the body and causing a long slow swing
- Maximises bat quickness and bat velocity

Hip rotation

Hip rotation is executed with an explosive weight transfer from the back leg to a braced front leg.

As the front hip opens up the back side (hip) drives towards the pitcher. The drive from the back side should pull the back foot off the ground.

Contact & Extension

On contact the ball should meet the middle/barrel of the bat.

The hitter should be in a strong and balanced position with the palm up and palm down.

When our hands are palm up and palm down more we are stronger and can stay through the ball better driving the ball with power.

Follow through

After full extension we complete the swing by following through.

When following through, the shoulders rotate and the arms and hands complete the arc with the bat ending up behind the body.

HITTING THE INSIDE PITCH

Hitters need to be ready to swing on the close inside pitches. Below are a number of tips to make better contact on the inside pitches here are a few tips:

Keep your hands inside

When hitting an inside pitch it is important to keep the hands inside the ball and the swing compact. This will prevent pulling the ball foul. It will also get the hands to the ball quicker. By keeping the hands inside on an inside pitch it will allow for good contact and keep the hit in fair territory.

Keep your lower half in a straight line

Keep the legs and feet lined up in a straight line. The front foot should not move back just because an inside pitch is coming. The body should stay in the correct batter's stance with the lower half of the body lined up as if standing on a straight line.

Shift weight forward to make contact

Shift the body weight from the back leg to the front to make contact, leaning back will result in a loss of power.

Rotate your back leg

Rotation of the back leg is important especially when hitting an inside pitch. Rotating the hips during the swing on an inside pitch will allow the hands to get to the ball faster.

BASERUNNING

Base running is probably the most neglected part of softball. This is unfortunate, because intelligent, aggressive base running can often be the difference between winning and losing.

Running Mechanics

- High knees to front.
- Foot to bum on back kick.
- Make your steps fast and ñquietòé less time on the ground is more speed.
- Drive with arms in straight line (not swinging arms across the body).
- Arms are kept at 90-degree angle when they swing to front.
- Look where you are running.
- Relaxed muscles go faster.

Exit from Batter's Box

- Have batters practice dropping the bat behind them once they have completed the bat swing to facilitate a quick getaway.
- Whether left or right handed, the batterôs first crossover step is always taken with the foot furthest away from the pitcher. This allows them to take advantage of the momentum generated by the swing.
- To get a fast start, the player stays low, leans forward, head up, drives the elbows down and explodes out of the box with quick short steps to start with before lengthening the stride.
- Drive straight down to first base on the outside of the first base line.
- If the ball is hit to the outfield, sneak a quick peek at where the ball went to help gauge whether two bases is possible on the hit.

Running Through 1st Base

On a ball hit to the infield, the batter must focus attention on speed, i.e. getting to first base quickly. To do this, emphasise the following points:

- Run in a straight line on the outside of the first base line towards the safety base.
- Do not watch the ball.
- Take a quick look at your first base coach for signals.
- Run through the base at full speed, aiming for a spot five to six steps beyond the base.
- Do not lunge or extend the final step, stride naturally.
- Touch the base on the part closest to home plate (do not aim specifically for the middle of the bag).
- Sliding into first base is not ideal unless avoiding a tag.

Braking

- Once through first base it is important to slow down (brake) as quickly as possible in the event there is a possibility to advance to second base.
- Continue straight down the line past first base.
- Slow down with short choppy steps.
- Body weight on the back of heels.
- Lean backwards with arms stationary (not pumping).
- Always pivot towards the infield on the foul ball line to save time and to see where the ball is in case there is an opportunity to run to second base.
- Return directly to the 1st base (not the safety base) with NO motion to go to 2nd base.

The Safety Base

- A batted ball hitting the fair portion of the base is declared fair. A ball hitting the foul portion is declared foul.
- On infield hits the batter base runner must touch the foul portion of the base as they run through, but must return to the fair portion.
- It a runner returns to the foul portion of the base then it is considered not in contact with the base and the runner shall be called out if (1) he/she is tagged with the ball, (2) he/she leads off from the foul portion on a pitched ball.
- On balls hit to the outfield, the batter-runner may touch either portion of the base.
- On any live ball play made from first base foul territory, the batter-runner and the defensive player may use either base.
- The defensive player must use the fair portion of the base at all other times.

The Rolling Start

This figure illustrates the rolling start. It provides the advantage of momentum, wherein the runner can take an extra step before leaving the base. There is some research to support this as the quicker technique. Often people refer to this method as better because the foot is still in contact with the base whilst at the same time gaining momentum. The key to learning this technique is proper practice using cues from the pitcher.

WARM DOWN

"Warming up and cooling down are good for your exercise performance – you'll do better, faster, stronger – and for your heart since the increased work on the heart ósteps upôwith exercise,ò said Richard Stein, M.D., professor of cardiology in the Department of Medicine at New York University and co-director of Cardiology Consult Services.
ñStretching also makes many people feel better during and after exercise and in some people decreases muscle pain and stiffness.òWhen done properly, stretching activities increase flexibility.

So what's the big deal?

A good warm-up before a workout dilates your blood vessels, ensuring that your muscles are well supplied with oxygen. It also raises your musclesôtemperature for optimal flexibility and efficiency. By slowly raising your heart rate, the warm-up also helps minimize stress on your heart.

ñWarming up before any workout or sport is critical for preventing injury and prepping your body,ò said Johnny Lee, M.D., director of the Asian Heart Initiative at the New York University Langone Medical Centre and president of New York Heart Associates in New York City.

ñStretching allows for greater range of motion and eases the stress on the joints and tendons, which could potentially prevent injury. Warming up, such as low-heart rate cardio, prepares the circulatory and respiratory system for the upcoming óage- and type-appropriate target heart rateô exercising, whether itôs endurance or sprint type of activities.ò

The cool-down is just as critical. It keeps the blood flowing throughout the body. Stopping suddenly can cause light-headedness because your heart rate and blood pressure drop rapidly.

Warm up

Before you exercise, think about warming up your muscles like you would warm up your car. It increases the temperature and flexibility of your muscles, and helps you be more efficient and safer during your workout. A warm-up before moderate- or vigorous-intensity aerobic activity allows a gradual increase in heart rate and breathing at the start of the activity.

Tips:

- Warm up for 5 to 10 minutes. The more intense the activity, the longer the warm-up.
- Do whatever activity you plan on doing (running, walking, cycling, etc.) at a slower pace (jog, walk slowly).
- Use your entire body. For many people, walking on a treadmill and doing some modified bent-knee push-ups will suffice.

Cool down

Cooling down after a workout is as important as warming up. After physical activity, your heart is still beating faster than normal, your body temperature is higher and your blood vessels are dilated. This means if you stop too fast, you could pass out or feel sick. A cool-down after physical activity allows a gradual decrease at the end of the episode.
Itôs good to stretch when youôre cooling down because your limbs, muscles and joints are still warm. Stretching can help reduce the build-up of lactic acid, which can lead to muscles cramping and stiffness.

Tips:

Walk for about 5 minutes, or until your heart rate gets below 120 beats per minute.

Stretching:

- Hold each stretch 10 to 30 seconds. If you feel you need more, stretch the other side and return for another set of stretching.
- The stretch should be strong, but not painful.
- Do not bounce.
- Breathe while youôre stretching. Exhale as you stretch, inhale while holding the stretch.

So do your body a favour. Take time to gradually progress into your workout and cool down when youôre done being physically active.