



Practice Tips

- **Develop a Practice Plan** – Always come prepared with a thoughtful and timely practice plan. Have the warm up and the meat of the practice build upon one another. Always start with basic fundamentals as a warm up and move into more advanced drills. (College coaches still roll the balls for infield warm up, glove work and feet work; crushing hard hit grounders when warming up does not teach fundamentals to young players or older more experienced players – quick, fast, small group warm up stations)
- **Tailor Drills to Player’s Level** – When working with young players of different ability levels, be sure to recognize who can do what based on athletic ability. Never incorporate too many fundamentals into one drill for younger players in large groups. If you expect to coach more than two fundamentals in one action, then you will need to utilize more than one drill and also use smaller groups based on ability levels. Section groups correctly for more advanced drills and recognize accomplishments of those players who move above their current ability despite where the rest of the players are.
- **New Players** - New players will have difficulty with advanced drills. New players on an intermediate level team will benefit from some individual work on basic skills. This does not mean that new players should be segregated throughout the practice. Simply recognize them for their own individual improvement.
- **Always Try to Issue a Challenge for Drill or During a Practice** - This allows players to track improvement and FOCUS!



- **Keep ‘Em Busy** – Standing around quickly zaps the intensity out of the practice. Always incorporate stations and activities for small groups. For younger ages a coach may recruit additional coaches for a specific practice, using parents. Roles should be specifically defined for that practice and good direction provided to any parent helping that day.
- **Promote a Sense of TEAM** - Winning and losing is a team effort. Players need to support each other with words and actions. The coach takes the lead here: put a quick stop to exclusionary behavior. Change partners for warm-ups, share treats with everyone, sharing of equipment (everyone or no one). Share your expectations with both parents and players.
- **Recognize Something of Value in EVERY Player** - Kids quickly tune-in to who’s the “best” batter, “fastest” pitcher, etc. Try to recognize each player at some point for their special quality – communicator, cheerleader, sliding, speed, always on time, always ready to go, focus, hitting, athletic, etc.
- **Hitting Practice and Base Running Should be Concentrated** – Be sure to always have dedicated hitting and base running practices with stations and tee work. Hitting can be one of the most sensitive areas of softball. Take it seriously

The baseball swing and softball swing are different in many ways, please don’t make the mistake of coaching a softball player to hit and bunt like a major league baseball player, as it will take years to change bad hitting fundamentals.

If your players go to hitting coaches make sure you know about it and are in sync with the fundamentals being taught, talk to the hitting coach and make a relationship. The worst thing in the world for any players is to be coached by two different coaches at the same with both saying different things. This will make the player very very frustrated.



- **Make time to work with pitchers and catchers** - Pitchers are typically working at home in addition to team practices. Keep updated on the pitching progress of your players and find out what their specific warm-ups are. Often a pitcher that is in lessons will surprise everyone by coming on strong midway through the season. Understand catching fundamentals and spend extra time with your catchers. Pitchers and catchers should arrive early and or stay late for extra concentrated practice.
- **Communication** – Introduce communication at the youngest age. Introduce communication into every drill and every ounce of practice. Communication comes from talking about where to throw, calling for balls, encouraging your team mates, etc. Also communication is the best way to keep kids focused. Note: Even throwing warm ups can have required communication and even standing in a short line can and should require communication of all players at all times – Incorporating communication into all drills makes players focused and makes them stand out as athletes.
- **Mix it Up** - Allow players to experiment with new positions at practice. This lets them (and their parents) see that you are still developing them at additional positions, even though they may not yet be strong enough to play that position in a game. If parents complain about infield playing time, invite them to observe the players at practice and have a discussion about the position they are playing versus the positions they are not. All positions are critical in softball. There are no weak positions in softball!
- **Start and End as a Team** - Always start practice in a quick circle for a chat as to what to expect and always end practice in a circle with a chat on how you did, review, give complements, let the players talk, tell them what to expect next practice or remind them of game information, etc.
- **If Your Players are Playing on a Travel Ball Team** – These will be the more advanced players so make sure to have good communication with



parents and other coaches, realize they may be being coached different styles and different ways of doing things. Be respectful of this and communicate as much as possible about changes with players, parents and other coaches.

- **Be fair and consistent** - Make sure the same rules apply to both your “star” players and your entry-level players.
- **Avoid the “Coach’s Kid” Syndrome.** Often coach’s kids are very good players and more advanced than others; and then sometimes they are not.

Demand the same respect from your child, and treat your child with the same respect that you show every other player on the team. Pay attention to this and be extremely thoughtful about this concept, all the other parents and players will notice your professionalism and it will create a long lasting coachable relationship for you and your child. It will also make your child more coachable.

If you would like assistance in coaching your own child and best practices let the Director of Coaching know and arrange time to talk. If it wasn't for great parents who coach, we wouldn't have great athletes!