

## Practice Plan Corresponding Drills

### Fastpitch Drills

The fastpitch drills referred to in this list are corresponding drills to the practice plans. Feel free to use these drills or add additional drills as you see fit. The coach is the person who communicates with parents, players, umpires, other coaches and your local associations. You facilitate the team by making sure all the equipment is there when it is needed. Most important are the players. You are teaching more than the skills and strategies of fastpitch. The ability to gracefully deal with success and failure, the persistence to keep trying and the confidence that these young ladies learn from you is priceless.

### Base Running Relay Race

Divide your team into two equal size teams. If you have an odd number, one of the players from the team with one less will have to go twice. Team one lines up on the foul side of first base. Team two lines up on the outfield side of third base. Each player will take turns racing around the bases, making sure they touch each base. The second player in line can not start until the first player has touched each base. The first team to finish wins the relay race.

### Bunting Game

The bunting game is a way to make practicing this skill fun and competitive. Draw two arched lines in the dirt from the 1st base line to the 3rd base line. The first line should be about 4 feet in front of home plate and the second about 8 feet in front of home plate. Now draw a line parallel with and about 2 feet inside the first base line. Draw another line parallel with and about 2 feet inside the third base line. Assign a point value to the 3 zones that you just laid out. The middle zone could be valued at one point for each bunt that your batter gets to stop in that zone. The two zones closer to the foul line could be worth three points. After your regular batting practice, have each player bunt ten pitches trying to make the ball stop in the zones. After everyone has batted, the player with the most points can be proclaimed the winner. Recognize that player as the best bunter of the day. Recognition is free and so valuable. Your players will enjoy this competition and become better bunters at the same time.

### Catcher Blocking

Your catcher should be wearing full catching gear for this exercise. The catcher should assume her regular stance behind the plate. Start by throwing tennis balls in the ground just in front of her. The catcher, without using her hands should center herself on the throw and attempt to block the ball from getting by her. She should drop to her knees and "cup" her shoulders so that the ball will hit her and fall to the ground directly in front of her. When the time is right, switch to regular softballs.

### Catchers Bunt Coverage Drill

We will need someone covering first base for this drill. The catcher gets into her position ready to catch a pitch. A coach standing behind the catcher will roll a softball out in front of the home plate simulating a bunt. The catcher must react to the bunt by coming out of her beginning position and coming around the ball so that her glove hand is toward first base. That means that a right handed thrower would position her body on the third base side of the ball and a left handed catcher will come around the first base side of the ball. She should have the ball centered in front of herself before picking the ball up with her bare hand and making a strong accurate throw to first base. Picking the ball up with the glove and then transferring it to the throwing hand only adds time for the runner. Use the time saved to make an accurate throw to first base. Do this

exercise several times changing how far the bunt is rolled out in front of the catcher and the direction the bunt go.

### **Catchers Developing A Strong Throw To Second Base**

Developing a strong throw to second base is essential if you want to throw a base runner who is trying to stealing second out. The basic steps that a catcher should do are to first set up to receive the pitch with her feet at a 45 degree angle to the pitcher with the throwing side being back. When she receives the pitch, she will pop up to a throwing position moving her front foot only slightly toward the target. When she brings the ball up and back to throw, she should bring her throwing hand with the ball back and up toward her ear while rotation the shoulder up to avoid shoulder strain. This can be done quickly by keeping the elbow bent. She is now in a position to get rid of the ball quickly. The key to throwing out a base runner at second is to get rid of the ball quickly. I know that a new catcher wants to take a couple of steps and make a big wind up for the big throw down, however, the distance that a thrown ball can travel in the time it takes for all the extra movements far out weighs any extra throwing speed generated.

One method to develop this is when catching a pitcher in practice, have the catcher drop to her knees at a 45 degree angle to the pitcher. The throwing side knee will be the back knee. She should then throw the ball as hard as she can at the pitchers head. By doing this, the catcher learns to keep the throw lower and avoid the rainbow throw.

When a pitcher is working on the distance pitch drill, a catcher has an opportunity to work her way up to the long throw to second. The catcher should start by throwing the ball back to the pitcher using the drop to her knees method that we just discussed. When the pitcher starts to get farther away, she can practice popping up to the throwing position and the quick release with limited foot movement. When this drill first starts, the pitcher will be closer and the throw will be easy. The catcher will have to work slightly harder each time the pitcher gets farther away until she is making a quick, accurate and hard throw all the way to second base.

### **Distance Pitch Drill**

Start with the pitcher pitching from the normal distance. When she throws the ball all the way to the catcher, have her back up two steps from the normal starting position and throw another pitch. When she gets it all the way to the catcher, have her throw the next pitch from two steps farther back. We will continue adding two steps of distance each time she gets the ball all the way to the catcher in the air. Here is a little trick to throwing a pitch from farther away. The pitcher will want to take a larger stride creating a little more body lean backwards as she gets farther away. The change in body lean will change the trajectory of the pitch from less of a line drive looking pitch to more of a rainbow as the distance increases. This will make it possible for her to get it all the way to the catcher from a greater distance. When she finally reaches a point where the pitcher can no longer throw a pitch all the way to the catcher in the air, we will start coming closer two steps at a time until she is back to pitching from normal distance. By the time the pitcher has returned to the normal pitching position, she will mentally think that this is a piece of cake and the strike zone becomes easier to hit.

### **Hitting**

The challenge is hitting a fastpitch softball. A fastpitch batter has the same amount of reaction time from the time the ball is released from the pitchers hand and crosses the home plate as a baseball player has. This is based on a comparison of a 60 MPH fastpitch vs. a 90 MPH baseball pitch. Add the rise ball to the pitchers arsenal, baseball pitchers do not have a pitch that rises, and you have one of the toughest challenges in sports. The batter must constantly work on developing a good compact swing.

The coach has to be able to teach the compact swing and in order to do that, the coach has to be able to break the swing down into small teachable components.

## Choose the Right Bat

The batter should pick out a bat that is not too heavy. Here is a good rule to follow. Have the player hold the bat with one hand. Extended the bat and arm straight out in front of her. If she can hold that position for 25 seconds, the weight of the bat should be good for her. There could be other considerations like cost if you are buying. Good bats are not the cheapest bats. Also, if you are spending money on a bat, make sure it is approved by the league. Make sure it is a fastpitch bat and then look for any label that may be required by your league. Example: ASA Approved

## The Grip

The first component of hitting is the grip. When you grip the bat, it should rest in the fingers, not down in the palm of the hand. The best description is to line up the “door knocking knuckles” from both hands and let the bat rest in that area. This is similar to a grip used on a golf club minus the interlocked fingers.

1. <http://youtu.be/DfhCcCWm4GM>

## The Stance

The stance is the next hitting component. The feet should be about shoulder width apart. When the batter steps up to the plate, she should be able to touch the outside of the home plate with the bat. The front upper portion of the arm should be pointed down from the shoulder toward the inside corner of the plate with the front forearm going straight back parallel to the ground. You should be able to see a 90 degree shape from the upper arm to the forearm. The back arm should hang straight under the shoulder also forming a 90 degree angle between the upper arm and the forearm. When relaxed between pitches, the batter should rest the bat on and over the back shoulder at roughly a 45 degree angle. When the pitcher is ready to start her pitch, the batter should elevate the bat off her shoulder an inch or two by simply pointing her front elbow at the outside corner of the plate and her back elbow should also shadow that movement. The batter should flex her knees slightly in a more athletic balanced position with 60% of her weight on the balls of her feet and 60% on her back foot.

As the ball is released by the pitcher, there should be a natural “negative” movement, that is the arms moving in unison toward the catcher maybe an inch. That should be followed by the front foot making a small “trigger” step toward the pitcher. While the barrel of the bat remains back over the shoulder, the hands should start toward the level that the pitch is coming in at. The batter has to rely on her training to feel if this pitch is a ball or a strike and whether she should hold off her swing at this point or continue on with the rest of the swing components in order to hit the ball. If she continues on, she will start to shift her weight to the front foot and rotate her hips toward the pitcher by pivoting on the ball of her back foot. This pivot is sometimes referred to as squishing the bug. The hands continue toward the level of the ball and the barrel stays back until the elbows are nearly straight. It is at this point that the most explosive component of the compact swing comes into play. The barrel of the bat has lagged behind until the arms are just about extended toward the ball and the lower body rotation and weight transfer to the front foot all come together at the same time the barrel releases through the ball all at the same time. The final component of the compact swing is the follow through. Allow the bat and your rotation to go around to where the bat is pointed back toward the catcher. Hitting is just that simple.

The following 3 videos by Sue Enquist will shed a lot of light on the compact swing.

1. <http://youtu.be/sDPLTjuW3co>
2. <http://youtu.be/RMyTtHptNpk>
3. <http://youtu.be/jrKifl0IFeA>