

# Practice Planning and Organization

Okay, you have practice. What are you doing today? Offense? Defense? Base-running? Pitching? You have a lot to cover, but little time. Here are some ideas that should help you organize your practices.

First thing you need to remember is that you do not want your players standing around during practice. You don't have much time to practice, so every minute is important.

## 12:00 - 12:10

First thing is a warm-up run. Have the girls run a little. Next, have the girls stretch.

## 12:10 - 12:15

**Time to throw. Important tips for throwing:**

- Always catch with two hands.
- Receive the ball over the throwing shoulder.
- Move your feet to receive the ball correctly - don't be lazy.
- Start throwing at a close distance, then move further apart.

## 12:15 - 1:00

Split up groups into infielders, outfielders, pitchers and catchers (minors, majors, seniors). All four groups should be working out at the same time. Remember to rotate groups.

**Infielders should start a with ground balls drill:**

### Partner ground ball

- Pair the girls up
- Stand about 20 feet apart
- One partner rolls the ball to the other partner
- The ball is fielded with proper mechanics

Important tips for fielding ground balls:

- Feet a little more than shoulder width apart.
- Weight on balls of feet. (Softball is not played on your heels.)
- Field balls as far out in front of you as possible.
- Always field ball in front of you - not off to either side.
- Look the ball into the glove.
- Don't just bend at waist when fielding, bend at waist and knees. Thighs should be parallel to the ground.
- Cover up the ball with throwing hand when ball goes into glove.

**Glove positioning** - the back of glove should be on the ground when fielding - not the tips of the fingers of the glove. Give each partner at least 10 ground balls. The key is to field properly. It is not a race.

### **Lots o' balls**

- Put all infielders at SS, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
- Hit a ball to SS.
- Hit a ball to 3B.
- After player fields the ball she should throw ball back to hitter (not a hard throw). Rotate players to the end of the line and/or to other infield positions.
- Continue this cycle until each player receives at least 7 ground balls.

This should get your player lots of grounders quickly without taxing their throwing arm.

### **Live fielding with throws to all bases**

- Position players in the infield.
- Hit grounders to each position-throw to 1B.
- Hit grounders to each position-throw to 2B.
- Keep going with throws to 3B and Home.
- Repeat cycle.
- Most throws in a game go to 1B, so make sure lots of throws go to 1B.

What is the outfield doing while the infielders are working out? Here is a question for you...Where do most outfield errors happen? In my opinion, most errors happen on grounders to the outfield. So, do you spend all practice hitting nothing but fly balls? It is time to change if that is the case. You should at least go 50/50 grounders to fly balls.

### **Fly balls**

- Put outfielders in the outfield.
- Hit fly balls to the 1st player in line.
- She should rotate to the end of the line.
- Repeat the cycle.

Tips for catching fly balls:

- Always call for the ball at least 3 times "mine, mine, mine"
- Always catch with two hands.
- Catch the ball over throwing shoulder.
- Catch ball at or just above forehead level.
- Catch ball on left foot (if player is right handed or vice versa) with weight coming forward - this will help when teaching the crow-hop later.

## Ground balls

There are three ways to field ground balls in the outfield: safety, triangle, or do or die. The player should use the safety method when there is a base hit, but there will be no play made at a base. The purpose is to make sure the ball is fielded in front of the outfielder without bobbling the ball.

### **Mechanics of the Safety:**

- Charge the ball under control.
- When the ball is about 3 feet away, the outfielder will place right knee on ground (assuming the player is right handed) with the right foot placed in the direction of her shoulder not with foot behind her.
- She wants to get as big as possible, just in case the ball takes a bad hop.
- Ball should be fielded in front of body - not to the side.
- Weight should be forward with shoulders square to the field.
- Look the ball in.
- Cover ball up with throwing hand.
- Don't go down to knee too soon or the ball may take a bad hop and get by the outfielder. (We all know that most of the outfields we play on are not very smooth.)

## Communication

Communication is very important. Someone needs to call for the ball and someone has to back up the play.

- Put outfield into 2 groups. Centerfield needs to be one of the groups.
- Remind players that Centerfield has priority over everyone. If she calls for the ball first - then it is hers. Other line backs up.
- The backup player should be at least 15 - 20 feet in back of fielder.
- The fielder should call for the ball 3 times "mine, mine, mine"
- The other fielder lets her teammate know that she heard her by saying "yours", then she proceeds to back her up.
- Encourage your outfielders to call for the ball as soon as they realize it is theirs. That way their teammates have time to back them up.
- On a fly ball do not call the ball on its upward track because the wind may take it somewhere the player does not expect. Call the ball at its pinnacle.

What are the Pitchers and Catchers doing while the Infield and the Outfield are working out? The Pitchers should be pitching to the Catchers. The Catcher can work on framing and blocking while catching. When the Pitchers and Catchers are done working out, rotate them in with either the Infield or the Outfield.

**1:00**

Don't forget water breaks.

**1:05**

**Time for Offense:** Hitting takes some major organization. You have 12 players with about a ½ hour left. You need at least 3 stations to keep them all busy. 4 would be better. Here are some stations you could use:

- **Batting Tee Station** – hitting into a net or fence (use whiffles for fence)
- **Soft Toss** - one person hitting into net or fence and coach tossing balls from the side.
- **Ball Bouncing Drill** - Player gets a ball. Using a bat, see how many times the player can bounce the ball into the air. Eye-hand coordination (this is a fun drill).
- **Belly Button Drill** - Player faces the fence. Place bat against belly button and fence (bat will be parallel to the ground). At that distance player should be able to swing without hitting the fence. This drill is good to make sure the swing is short and compact.
- **Dry Cuts Drill** - Player has a bat and the Coach talks them through a swing by saying "Swing" or "Take". This drill is good to make sure the players are ready to swing at every pitch. On the take, the players should at least be ready to commit, but not all the way. On the swing command, they should be swinging away. Watch for proper mechanics. Repeat the drill.
- **Coach Pitch Drill** - the Coach pitches to player about 20 feet away. Whiffle balls can be used so that the other players waiting can shag the balls – no mitts. I have players use their hands only for better hand eye coordination.
- **Hip Twist Drill** - Place the bat behind your back, parallel to the ground. Hold it there with your arms. Put a batting tee at the height of the bat head, swing, and concentrate on turning your hips - hit the bat off of the T.
- **Blind Drill** - Use whiffle balls. Coach pitches to the players. Batter closes eyes - coach is 15 - 20 feet away. At pitch release or right after (depending on the skill), the coach/pitcher yells "open". The batter then finds the ball and hits it. Use shaggers here too if you like.

**There are many more drills. Other things to cover in practice:**

- Base running
  - a. Leads
  - b. Sliding
  - c. Extra base hits
  - d. Steals
- Bunting
- Signals
- Cheers – we need to hear more cheers in the dugout!

**Remember – Keep the players moving and have fun! Finish with a fun drill if you can!**