



## 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 40% 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>

In order to train the young athlete to put this swing together, we must be able to teach each of these components to them in a way that it becomes second nature, that is they do not have to over think every component.

### One hand swinging drill

One of the first drills I use to teach the compact swing is one hand swinging. Because a regular bat is too heavy to be doing this drill, I use a plastic bat and wiffle balls. We are isolating the arm movements including the timing of releasing the barrel of the bat. To do this, we will take the lower body completely out of the drill by having the athlete kneel on her back knee. The front foot should be pointed down the first base line. The athlete assumes the normal starting position with both hands on the bat and the bat over the back shoulder at 45 degrees. Now the athlete will release the bat from her back hand. Wiffle balls will be used for a soft toss that should be 6 inches in front of home plate. The athlete will swing the bat using only her front arm and focusing on keeping the barrel of the bat back until the last moment. After the athlete has several repetitions using the front arm and hitting the wiffle ball, the athlete will switch to the back hand and repeat the drill several times, hitting with the back hand only. Finally, we will have her swing the plastic bat with both hands for several repetitions. Again, our focus is to keep the barrel of the bat back until the arms are just about extended and then combining the full extension with the powerful whip of the barrel of the bat coming through the ball right at the point of hitting it.

### Tee work (Behind the back swing)

The next step is to incorporate the legs and lower body into the swing. For this we use a tee, regular bat and balls. First, we have the athlete trap the bat against her lower back at about belt level. Her arms will be extended down and reach back behind her hips in order to trap the bat to her back. The barrel will extend out as far as possible toward the catcher. She will have to stand relatively close to the tee. From this position, she should flex her knees and take a small trigger step. The trigger step is the movement of her front foot about 3 inches that initiates the swing. She should then start a rotation of her hips to bring the barrel of the bat toward the ball sitting on the tee. In order to get a strong rotation, she will need to pivot on her back foot in what we call the "squish the bug" manor. Several repetitions of this behind the back/squish the bug swing should be done until she is hitting the ball off the tee with confidence and is getting the leg work built into her muscle memory. At this point, she can assume a normal stance with the bat over her back shoulder and hit several balls off the tee. She should let the muscle memory of the trigger step, rotation, squish the bug moves take over and incorporate the arms into the swing. We want to keep the barrel of the bat back until just before the contact with the ball and bringing the timing of the hips, legs and torso into a perfectly timed explosion of power at the point of impact with the ball.

### The Fence Drill

The batter will step up to a fence with her feet parallel to the fence. She should be close enough to the fence to touch one end of the bat to the fence while the other end is touching her belly. Then she assumes the stance with the bat over her shoulder. She proceeds to swing without the bat touching the fence. The only way she will do this is if the barrel of the bat is lagging behind her hands until her hands have reached a position out in front of her front foot where she wants to make contact with the ball. A good swing with good hip rotation and the proper bat lag will insure that she will be putting all of the energy generated on the ball.

### Soft Toss

The batter assumes her starting position. The coach assumes a position across from her and just off her front foot making sure he or she is out of the range of the swing of the bat. The coach gently tosses the ball up in the strike zone in line with the front foot. The batter proceeds to hit the ball using food form.

### Focusing the eyes for the ball (Broom stick and wiffle golf balls)

One drill I like to help the athletes focus is to replace the bat with a 30" broom stick and replace the softballs

with golf ball size wiffle balls. Doing several repetitions of soft toss with the undersized bat and balls make the athlete really have to focus.

## **Infield Practice**

Put the players at the infield positions. The coach lets the players know what the simulated game situation is and hits balls to the different positions. Players should field the ball using good mechanics and make the proper play.

## **Outfield Fly Balls 3 person rotation**

Place two outfielders about thirty yards apart and the third person half way between the two outfielders and the coach. The coach hits a fly ball between the two outfielders. Both go after the fly ball and whoever has the best chance of catching it calls the other fielder off. The other fielder now assumes the roll of the back up person. The outfielder who calls for the ball makes the catch and quickly throws to the third player (like she is the cut off person). The third player throws the ball to the coach. Player three rotates out to outfield position one, player one rotates to outfield position two and player two rotates to the third position or cut off person.

## **Over the head ball pass**

Player one takes off running away from player two, player two throws the ball beyond where she is (leading her). Player one, while running, looks over her shoulder and catches the ball. Player one returns to the back of the line and player two takes off running away from player three... I have sometimes substituted a football and the girls can catch it without their gloves. Sometimes it's good to change it up a bit.

## **Pass Ball**

I like to have the pitcher and catcher work this drill together. This helps the coordination that these two positions need to have. Place five or six balls on the ground by the backstop with about five feet between them with the middle ball straight behind the catcher. The catcher and pitcher assume their starting positions and the pitcher simulates throwing a pitch. The pitcher trains herself to react to a pass ball by charging home to cover home plate. The catcher turns and quickly gets back to the first ball, dropping to a knee, she picks the ball up with her bare hand (saves time) she will then pivot on her knee and make a quick forehand or backhand toss toward home plate. Things to avoid are picking the ball up with the glove, standing back up after getting the ball and making an overhand throw. All these things take time and increase the likelihood of the runner reaching home safely. The pitcher will catch the ball low to the ground and quickly position the ball, protected by her bare hand inside the pocket of her glove on the third base side and a few inches up the line from home plate. The attempted tag should be almost on the ground and directed at the feet sliding home. An attempted tag off the ground or to the upper part of the base runners body will probably result in the runner being safe by getting to home plate under the tag. After doing that with the first ball, start over again with the second ball and continue until they have completed doing it with all five or six balls.

## **Pepper**

Divide the team into groups of four or five player each. Each group will start with one batter who will stand someplace with a fence a few feet behind her. The other players will form a straight line parallel with the fence and about eight to ten feet in front of the batter. The batter is going to be bunting the ball. The players in front of her will field the ball and immediately toss the ball back into the batters strike zone. If the batter misses a ball that is in the strike zone, she is out and assumes the last fielding position in the line. The player in the first fielding position now moves up to become the batter. If the batter pops the bunt up and one of the fielders catches it for an out, that fielder automatically jumps to the batter position and the batter

moves to the last fielding position.

## Star Drill

Put players in the following positions. Catcher, first base, second base, shortstop and third base. The catcher throws the ball to the shortstop, shortstop throws to first base, first base throws to third base, third base throws to second base and second base throws to the catcher. Work on quickly transitioning from catch to throw.

## Throwing

The most basic elements on defense is throwing and catching a ball. When teaching your players these elements, it is worth the time to make sure they are doing it right. Done the wrong way can lead to injury. The speed and accuracy of the ball, how quickly a player can get rid of the ball from the time it is caught and knowing that they are going to the right base for the situation are key to getting outs.

### Wrist Snap

Developing a strong wrist snap is key. We can do that by isolating the wrist while the athletes are playing catch. Have two athletes face each other from about 8 to 10 feet. Bring the ball up to about eye level with the elbow at a 90 degree angle and pointed at her target. If needed, use the glove hand against the forearm to prevent it from moving. Using the wrist and fingers only, flip the wrist so that the ball rolls off the tips of the fingers to the other athlete.

### Form Work

The new softball players should be taught good form right from the start. Have the team partner up and form two lines for catch. Have the person with the ball all on the same side and slowly walk them through each step. First step is transition feet, hips and shoulders so that they are lined up with the target and the ball hand is away from the target. Step two would be getting the arms to the "T" position with the glove pointed at the target and the ball away from the target. Make sure that the shoulder is making a circular motion coming up to get to the "T" position. Step three would be a small step with the front foot and a push of the back foot, forward motion of the arm accompanied with a shoulder rotation. Step four would be the wrist snap and the ball rolling off the end of the fingers and the fingers pointing right at the target. Step five would be a nice follow through with the hand pulling down toward the opposite thigh and the back leg coming forward to square the hips and shoulders up to the target. Take your time and get the mechanics correct while they are young.

### Crow Hop

The transition can be accomplished quickly with a crow hop, moving your foot on your glove side toward target and the foot on your ball hand side back. This is a drill I will use with someone who is not getting the concept of the crow hop. Lay a bat on the ground in front of the players toes. Roll them a ground ball; they should be fielding it with the glove out in front of their feet. When they field the ball, have them "pop" up and turn their shoulders, hips and feet all at the same time to line up with the target. When they "pop" up, they should focus on the glove hand/foot being in front of the bat and the ball hand/foot being behind the bat.

Coach Renee Luers-Gillispie, Head Coach University of Central Florida, demonstration of drills using proper throwing techniques

1. <http://youtu.be/gcN3azy8GDY>

## Throw Down to Second

With the infield positions all covered by players, the pitcher throws a pitch, the catcher catches the ball and makes a throw down to second base. The catcher should be setting up with her feet at an angle parallel with the base line in order to be partially in the throwing position. After she catches the pitch, she should do an abbreviated reach back by circling her elbow back while keeping it bent. Snap the ball up to her ear area, a small step if any and aim the throw about one foot over the pitchers head. The shortstop should be covering the base and the second base person should be backing her up. After a few trys at second base, practice a few to first and third.

## Throwing Relay Race

Form two lines of equal number of players (if an odd number of players, a coach may jump into the short line). A line of five or six players could stretch from home plate to the outfield fence. The line should have equal distance between each of the players. When the coach says "GO" the first player should throw to the second player, the second player should catch the ball and throw to the third player and so on all the way to the end of the line. Once it reaches the end of the line, the ball should be sent back one player at a time. The first team to get the ball all the way down and back is the winner. If a player does not catch the ball when it is her turn, she must be the one to pick it up and throw it to the next person in line. No skipping a player is allowed. The players quickly learn that an accurate throw is the most important element. The next thing they should learn is that by throwing to the glove hand side of the next person, the next person can make a quicker pivot and transition to the throwing position quicker.

**Coach writes:** "I've used this one a lot. I usually add in having the last player to catch the ball running all the way to the start of the line. Every other player moves up one spot. When the run puts everyone in their original spot it's finished. If things go right, you have a great foot race at the end. Boys and girls both seem to enjoy it, regardless of ages."

## Toss Circle

Form a circle made up of players standing about six to eight feet apart. Start with one ball and have the player make an underhand toss to the player on her left. Make sure that they do not toss the ball if the player on her left is not looking. Continue to pass the ball to the left all the way around the circle. Once every player has had one toss, add another ball or two or three to the circle. Players should treat this toss like it is a hot potato, quickly moving the ball but only after making sure the receiving players is looking. Now, stop the exercise and with only one ball, start up again going to the right. Add more balls and have a ball.

## V-Drill

Arrange the players into groups of three forming a triangle with each player about twenty feet apart. One of the players will be the base of the "V" shape and will be the one getting the work out. One of the players at the top of the "V" throws the ball to the player at the bottom. That player will catch the ball and quickly transition to throw to the other player at the top of the "V". The other player then throws the ball back to the one at the bottom who again catches the ball and quickly transitions to throw to the first player. For one catch/throw, the person at the bottom should have their feet positioned pretty good to make a quick throw, but from the other side the player at the bottom will have to re-adjust her feet to line up the next throw. This can be done quickly with a crow hop. After several throws, a different player can rotate into the bottom of the "V" position. This exercise creates many repetitions quickly. You can also throw ground balls to the person at the bottom of the "V" and she can work on fielding the ground ball and making a throw to both her left and to her right. Another variation is for the person to the left side to throw the ground ball to the player at the bottom of the "V"s left so that she will have to field it with a backhand or forehand, transition and throw it to the person on the right who then throws a ground ball to the right side. WOW, what a workout!!

## Walk Through Drill

The pitcher starts three steps behind the pitching plate. The pitcher begins by walking toward the pitching plate starting with her pivot foot. When she gets to the pitching plate, her pivot foot should land on the pitching plate and her next step should bring her into the power position and her pitching arm starting the circular motion, that is with her toes, hips and shoulders lined up with second base and home. As she continues to walk and pitch at the same time, her next step is to bring the pivot foot forward toward the catcher as the ball is delivered to the catcher. This will help the pitcher in learning to "close the door" by bringing her hips and shoulders back to square with the catcher. The pitcher may find this a bit awkward at first, but in short order it will become easier. When the pitcher becomes comfortable with this drill, she can start generating some real drive of the pivot foot and pitching plate. The goal of this drill is not only to work on good mechanics, but to bring the speed of the pitch up dramatically.