



Pre-Game Warm Up

*Make sure your pre-game warm up is getting your team **confident**, prepared and ready to win!*

Everybody has to have a pre-game warm up, but not everyone has a good one. It seems like coaches are always looking for a better one, but what makes a good pre-game warm up? And how do you know if your warm up is good, no matter what age or level of team you coach?

The biggest thing your pre-game should do is prepare your team for the game. While that sounds obvious nothing in that statement says it has to take a certain amount of time, or involve specific equipment or space, but only that it prepares your team for the upcoming game.

Let's look at what needs to happen in order for your team to be prepared for the game:

1. Get your Players Stretched and Warmed Up
2. Get your Players Physically Ready (throwing, defense, hitting)
3. Get your Players Mentally Ready (**CONFIDENCE!**)
4. Get your Pitchers Physically and Mentally Ready
5. Deal with Game Details (position assignment, checking out the playing surface, wind direction and how it might effect pop-fly's, sun and how it might effect offense or defense, fence and backstops, review signals, pitch calling details with your catcher/pitcher, discussing special coverages with your infielders, and any signal or key changes, etc...)

How long these things take will vary based on factors such as the age of your team, the number of games you've played that same day and the stage in your season. Once you figure out a warm up that successfully gets your team ready to play then you'll want to stick to it and simply adapt it to the time & space you have that day.

Very few teams have awesome facilities to use for warm ups. Space and Time are the 2 factors that will influence your pre-game warm ups the most so remember to be as creative as possible when it comes to these.

- **Focus:**

You and your players will enter warm ups with broad focuses coming out of life and entering the game so the idea of warm ups is to take that broad focus and narrow it by the time warm ups are over.

- **Throwing:**

Consider having your players warm up their arms closer to actual game time instead of always doing your throwing warm ups at the beginning and then letting their arms get cold.

Instead of always throwing back and forth in pairs and getting lazy feet, consider doing a drill like Zig Zag as a throwing warmup and either crowding in or spacing out based on how much room you have.

- **Hitting:**

Have the focus be building **confidence**. Remember that you're warming your players up to hit in a

game which means they'll be hitting balls coming at them in the air, not worrying about back elbows or specific parts of their swings, so minimize the number of hitting drills you do or eliminate them all together.

If you feel like you must do some hitting drills then only do 2 or 3 and let each player pick their favorite ones - again, pre-game warm ups are about getting ready for the game by building confidence and getting warm, it's no longer the time to try and build swings and make mechanical corrections.

To get them ready to hit pitched balls do whatever form of front toss your space & facilities allow, but remember - **BUILD CONFIDENCE!** Give them good pitches to hit and easy pitches or tosses that let them hit it hard. Now is a time when it's ok to "end on a good one" and to have "just one more". Front tossing whiffle balls from about 5-7 feet in front of your hitters is great if that's all the space you have. Be careful not to go 100 miles an hour with your tosses! It's not about speed of the toss or how many tosses you can do in 30 seconds! Letting your hitters have 5 good, solid hits does way more for their confidence than quickly giving them 20 crappy tosses of which they barely hit 6. Think about it - how long should it take for each of your hitters to have 5 good front toss hits? Maybe 10 minutes! We don't need to warm up forever and we don't need to do it at 100 miles an hour!

- **Defense:**

Space may not let you actually hit grounders and flyballs to your players but that doesn't mean they still can't get defensively ready. Have your players split up into pairs and roll grounders or toss flyballs to each other to get themselves ready.

- **Pitchers:**

Each pitcher should know how long it takes her to get warm so they should start warming up separately from the team to ensure they are completely warm 3-5 minutes before game time.

- **Other:**

Leave time at the end of warm ups (if you're not allowed on the field) or else at the beginning of warm ups (if you're warming up on the field) to have your players check out the playing surface. Outfielders should walk the outfield and see how long or short the grass is (fast or slow grounders), how smooth or bumpy it is and finally, what the fence is like and how balls bounce off the outfield fence. Infielders should walk the infield to see how hard or soft the surface is and remove any small rocks in their area. Catchers should throw balls against the backstop to see how they bounce off, and they should also notice how far away the backstop is.

Go over any strategic factors that will impact the game in the first few innings, announce the lineup and any signal or key changes and then let everyone chill for a bit.

Leave the speeches for the politicians. A **smile** is an amazingly powerful message to let your players know you're **confident** and that you believe in them!

Now let's look at a pre-game warm up:

12U and Younger Time	Warm-up Activity	Details
5 min	Review Field (Coach)	Need 1 coach: This can be a coach and discuss with team prior to game at team meeting. Review field conditions for fielders (infield/outfield), wind direction for positioning, and sun reflection (remind them to wear sunglasses) for offense and defense.
5 min	Dynamic Stretching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run to outfield fence glove tucked in • High knees (half field) • Karaoke footdrill (half field back) • Arm Circles/Windmills (in line) • Jumping jacks (10) 	Player led: Have a player lead. Gets the body and footwork warmed up. Have them clap hands after each set completion.
10 min	Hitting Warm Up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Front toss drill (sand balls or whiffle balls) • Bunting (whiffle balls) • Soft toss (net) 	Need 2-3 coaches: Have pitchers go first. Rotate 2 players at a time. Front toss: Throw meatballs & build confidence Drills: 2-3 drills for each player
10 min	Warm up arms and throwing	Player led: Throw to each other calling out each other's names after each throw. Zig Zag Drill and Lightning (4 lined up one throws short grounder, next throws pop-up out, etc.)
10 min	Defensive warm up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If limited on time groundballs for infielders and flyballs for outfielders 	Need 1-2 coaches (1 to hit balls, 1 to receive ball): Groundballs should be reminding them of 5 step to fielding. Flyballs should pay attention to footwork and chasing down the ball.
25 min	Pitcher's warm up	Need 1 coach (to set-up, monitor, and correct pitching mechanics), 2 pitchers, and 2 catchers: Happens while hitting defense warming up.
2 min	Warm up wrap up team meeting	All: Line-up, opponent pitcher summary, field notes, review signals, pick captains. Have girls get in circle ready for cheer waiting for captains to come back.

For our age groups, your pre-game warm up should take anywhere from 35 to 45 minutes. Warming up for 2 ½ hours not only seems extreme, but might be a sign of inefficiency. More isn't always better, and that's especially true when warming up for a game.

Some final thoughts:

- Youth teams can still do a field check, but since you can't get onto the field until the game before yours is finished you'll have to schedule your field check at the end of warm ups and right before your game starts. Break your team up and have outfielders check out the fences and grassy area, infielders look over the infield dirt in their specific position area, and catchers check out the backstop for amount of rebound and direction.
- The more tired your team is the less your team will need to warm up. This might be a result of having played a lot of games already that same day, or maybe it's extremely hot or humid, or it could be really late in the season and your team is just physically tired. Keep your finger on the pulse of your team and when they are tired, they can still do the same things, just don't do them as long - shorten up your usual warm up.