



## Between Inning Warm-Up

OK your team has just taken the field for their defensive half of the inning. How do they use that time?

Do they walk onto the field or do they jog? Is the catcher in the dugout looking for his gear and does the pitcher have to warm up by throwing to the third baseman? Why can't the right fielder find his glove? Why do these times in the game often look like a disorganized fire drill before every inning?

Let's go over some things your team should be doing in order to get the most benefit from their defensive half of an inning.

Here is an all too typical youth fastpitch scene: The infielders walk, and sometimes it looks like they're dragging, to their positions and the catcher is in the dugout getting her gear on.

The middle infielders are together on the grass taking ground balls from the first baseman and they are flipping them to her. They are flipping them to her because they are only about 10 feet away. And they are using poor fielding and throwing mechanics. They just bend over and let the ball roll into their gloves because the first baseman just rolls the balls to them.

The outfielders only get in one or two throws because of overthrows and missed balls and the fact they walked to their outfield positions and the fact that all three are playing catch together.

The catcher, after finally getting her gear on walks up to the plate, takes one pitch and the umpire suddenly calls "Balls in." The catcher throws down to second and the ball sails into the outfield where the center fielder who is not paying attention lets it get by her.

The umpire says, "Play Ball". Are your players really ready to **play**?

A team can get in important and needed game-type repetitions if they will take this time in the game seriously.

**10 reps per inning x 5 innings per game x 35 games = extra 1,750 reps. If your player takes an extra 1,750 ground balls or fly balls, will she be a better player?**

Here are some ways they can do it better and improve their pre-inning infield.

- All players should put their gloves in the same place in the dugout, every time. (the reason why in the next tip)
- When a player is left stranded on base his nearest position teammate should 'pick her up.' This means she should bring her teammate's glove with her onto the field so there will be no time wasted. How does she know where that glove is? Because everybody leaves their gloves in the same place in the dugout. (The nearest base coach can bring her batting helmet back to the dugout.)
- Everybody runs onto the field. Coaches have to reinforce this because the tendency in the late innings or when a team is behind in the score is to drag a little bit. When do you most need your players to be alert and lively and ready? In the late innings. They have been sitting in the dugout so it is necessary for them to get the blood flowing. Jogging onto the field accomplishes that. It also looks like they came to play.
- Four (4) girls should grab balls for warm-up (Center Fielder, First Baseman, Reserve Player, and Pitcher)

***“Nothing great was ever accomplished without enthusiasm.”***

They should run to their positions (no walking or light jogging).

- **A coach must be ready to catch with the pitcher.** Let me say that again. A coach must be ready to catch with the pitcher. When your starting catcher is left on the bases at the end of an inning a coach must go to the plate to warm up your pitcher. This will get your pitcher 5 or 6 extra pitches, ones she needs.
- **A reserve player goes to the dugout-side outfield foul line and plays catch with that outfielder.** This gives all outfielders more throws because the center fielder and off outfielder can warm up, just the two of them. It is important for them to work on throwing accuracy. They are not doing this so they can just toss the ball around. It should be done with a purpose.
- **The other reserve player after she jogs in from the coach's box picks up all bats and equipment and puts it in its proper place.**
- **The infielders assume their deepest positions to take ground balls from the first baseman.** The second baseman is in front of the outfield edge of the grass behind the bag, the short stop is on the outfield edge of the grass in the hole and the third baseman is as deep as he can get on the outfield edge of the grass. The toughest play they will have to make may be the farthest so why not have them work on that play in between innings? What does it accomplish to toss balls twenty feet? The first baseman should throw routine ground balls briskly to them and they should use good fielding mechanics and make accurate sharp throws back to her. They should jog back to their positions and await the next throw. All three infielders should make at least one backhand play every inning. The ball doesn't have to be thrown perfectly to their backhand side; they can just wait on the ball and get into a backhand position. Every pre-inning infield should be taken seriously. It is very common to see infielders clowning around and throwing balls all over the place. Teach

them how to do it correctly. Players left to their own devices will invariably do it wrong or with poor technique. They have to be taught and then receive reinforcement.

- The pitcher gets about 8 pitches during her warm-up. She should throw all her pitches. ***She should throw the last two pitches from full stretch.***
- When ump says “let’s play” or after sufficient pitches. **Catcher shouts, “BALLS IN!”** As balls are rolled in to dug out. Catcher then shouts, **“COMING DOWN!”** The catcher then throws the ball to the Short Stop or Second Baseman. Pitcher needs to crouch down. Then the SS or 2b throws back to pitcher.

A coach should pay close attention to their players during the time before every defensive half inning. They should be alert for lack of hustle and poor fielding technique.

It’s another one of those “Little Things that make a team better.”

I use verbal reinforcement at the end of every offensive half inning. You can use your own but these are some of the things I say; “Bullpen catcher get out there”, “Ava, pick up Jenny”, “First baseman do you have a ball?” (I usually make sure they get one when they come into the dugout after getting the third out.), “Jessica finish your pitch” (Reminding the pitcher to warm up using all her proper form), “Good throws ladies”, “Hustle, Adriana.”

I’m sure they get tired of hearing me. I sound like a broken record but I refuse to let my players slack off even a little.

Poor pre-inning infield is as common as poor youth batting practice. Do your team a favor and get them ready to play. You will see a difference.