



Fastpitch Signals

A very important part of a softball practice: going over signs and signals. Signs and signals deal with communication, which is important in any endeavor. It's important that we communicate clearly and quickly and adequately.

In fastpitch, we communicate with three different systems: touch signals, descriptive hand signals, and verbal cues.

Offensive Touch Signs

There are several different situations you may need a sign for:

1. Steals
2. Bunt
3. Bunt down first base line
4. Bunt down third base line
5. Bunt at pitcher
6. Fake bunt
7. Swing away
8. Swing and run on third strike
9. Take a pitch
10. Hit and runs
11. Squeezes
12. When to take a strike
13. To take off a play
14. To tell the batter or the runner that she's on her own
15. To say don't attempt to steal on this pitch

So we have a need for a lot of different signals to indicate those plays to the players that we coach. The signs from the coach or manager to the players on the field need to be given immediately after the preceding pitch, and they need to be distinct and quick. If we take time to go through all the signs in slow motion, the opposition's going to have a better chance of deciphering what we're intending.

The hitters and the runners need to review the signs frequently during softball practice so that they are sure of what is being intended. And part of that is the

responsibility of the coach. We do a lot of base running drills in softball practice, and we use signs before we run sprints to review the signs that we put on so that players are reminded frequently.

Immediately upon reaching base or after a pitch, the player needs to look to the coach to find out what is going to go on. To have her fool around with her batting gloves or adjusting her socks before she's gotten the sign takes time, and we've got a batter in the batter's box or near the box waiting for what's going on, and we need to have their attention immediately after the preceding pitch.

The batter or runner needs to be sure she keeps her attention on the coach all through the sequence of signs. If one of them takes their attention away before the sequence is finished, it's telling the opposition that the sign has already been given and it might contribute to their picking up signs that way.

Various Systems

There are a lot of systems that we can use in giving signs. All of them work, just as long as they're memorized. We can touch different body parts to indicate what we might want done. We might have an indicator just before we touch that body part that says this is the sign that's coming up next, or we might have an indicator that says it's the second sign coming up after this indicator.

Another system that we could use is a number system where we would assign a number to each of the plays that we indicated earlier, and have the players memorize that number. If we did that, then the player would just count touches. She might count the touches of the right hand or the left hand, or she might count both. If we went through a system of touches with either hand, the player would just count how many times a hand touches a body part, get a number, and then by memorizing the seven or eight or nine different plays that we have in effect, she would know which play we wanted to put on.

Another system that you could use would be based on where the coach stands in the coaching box. She might be standing to the front or to the rear or to the side, or she might be straddling the line of the coach's box. Her position might be the sign that's given and all the touches that she goes through might mean nothing.

So there are a lot of ways to communicate that are very difficult to pick up in softball. You might also have a sign that means ignore whatever I'm doing right now.

The Key to Communication Success

The key to success in giving signs and communicating is simplicity and deception. They've got to be simple and your own players have to be able to understand them.

And they have to be repeated often enough in softball practice and meetings so that there's no uncertainty on your own players' part. If they get so complicated that your own players can't pick them up, then they're useless.

A huge part of softball is the game inside the game. This involves predicting the steals, bunts, and any other trick to win advantages in the game. This is why it is vital to have codes to tell the team when to steal, bunt, etc

Every coach needs to know how to give batting signals. The delivery, variety, and **indicator** determine whether your signs will be successful or easily picked off. There is a systematic approach that must be taken when creating and relaying these signals. They must be easy enough that a batter (in the heat of the moment) can clearly understand and read them, but complex enough that the other team cannot figure them out. Coaches can utilize the **counting system**, the **touch system** (also known simply as "indicators"), or a combination of both. This guide will reveal the process and strategies of all three and give you the tools you'll need to come up with a system of your own!

Indicators

Every coach uses an indicator. An indicator is the signal that tells the batter "the signal is on." After the indicator is touched, the next touch(es) determine what hitting signal is called. In other words, the indicator is simply used to weed out the "fluff" (useless, extra touches) from the actual signals.

When giving signs, it's crucial that your batters stay in the box until you are completely through giving the signal (fluff included) — they can't look away after you touch the indicator. In order to protect the integrity of your signals, you and your batters have to disguise them. If the batter sees the signal and steps immediately into the box — while you are still giving extra signals — she's making it easy for the other team.

Examples of Indicators

You can use practically anything for an indicator — your belt, the top of your hat, the tip of your nose, or even a tap on the right shoulder. The key is flow, meaning you shouldn't hover around the indicator and pause before continuing on to more touches. Doing so tells the other team that where you are pausing is of importance, and it will give them a head start in figuring out your signals.

Batter Ready?

After every pitch, your batters should be stepping out of the box to look at you. Even if the same signal is on and you don't need to repeat it, give the batter a few claps of encouragement and send her back into the box inspired. The most important thing is

that your signals are smooth and clear — you don't want the other team picking them off (especially for bunts and steals), and you don't want your batter to be unsure of what to do in a crucial situation. Just make sure to practice the signals with your team beforehand!

1. Consider having an indicator, such as tapping your chin. This means that you can do any symbol, but the player doesn't actually pay attention until you tap your chin. This will help confuse the other team.
2. Signals are good, but too many can confuse the player. Make sure you only have a code for necessary plays.
3. Don't use all of the exact signals listed on the page. Be creative!

Indicator/ 1 slap on belly

Bunt (sacrifice hit) (bunt only strikes; pull back if pitch is a ball) (first 2 strikes player is to try drag bunting) (If bunt signal is given on 3rd strike, player is to forget drag bunting and only use form of sacrifice bunt) **most important, lay bunt down and towards 3rd base line on first 2 strikes if possible and toward pitcher on 3rd strike

Indicator/2 slaps on belly

Fake bunt (batter is to turn when pitcher's arm is at top of wind-up. batter must make bunt look real.)

Indicator/2 slaps on belly, slap hands on leg

Fake DRAG bunt (Batter is to fake a drag bunt by staying low, running forward out of the box. Batter must make drag bunt look real).

Indicator/skin of hands back and forth

Suicide bunt (Batter must get bat on ball regardless of where pitch is. Batter is to give signal back to coach and the runner on 3b by wiping mouth with her hand as she gets into the batter's box).

Indicator/touch opposite hand, elbow, shoulder

Fake bunt and then swing away--SLASH (Batter must show bunt when pitcher is at top of wind-up to cause corner infielders to come rushing toward home plate. Batter then pulls bat back and slashes--swings hard.

Indicator/swipe hand across chest

Signal wiped off

Take Hat Off (no indicator)

Take Pitch (Indiscreetly crowd plate and look like going to swing, go through "load")

Indicator/shoulder

Steal (straight steal) (Batter protects runner by indiscreetly positioning in back of batters box and going through "load". If batter has no strikes, she swings through the pitch, intentionally missing). If batter has at least 1 strike, she has option of swinging if pitch is a strike and hitting the ball).

Indicator/shoulder to shoulder

Delayed Steal (on throw of catcher to 1B or 2B or 3B) (Base runner must take lead far enough from base to lure catcher to throw to base). (When runner is on First Base, First Base coach will yell "back, back" to fool the First Baseman)

Indicator/swipe hands down legs

Delayed Steal (on throw of catcher back to pitcher) (This is usually done when base runner is on 2nd base) (Base runner breaks hard for next base when catcher releases ball back to pitcher). (If caught in a run down and is about to be tagged out, the base runner is to drop to the ground forcing the defensive player to bend over and tag her out).

Indicator/nose

Delayed Steal (Walk off-run down steal-pickle).(Base Runner gently runs off First Base when Catcher releases ball back to Pitcher, and Base Runner keeps running toward Second Base until play is made on her. Purpose of this play is to lure the pitcher to make a play on the base runner so that the runner on 3rd can break for home plate). (Runner between 1st and 2nd must remain in run-down until play shifts to runner on 3rd. When runner breaks for second, she must continue advancing forward until the defense begins making a play on her. If caught in a run down and is about to be tagged out, the base runner is to drop to the ground forcing the defensive player to bend over and tag her out).

Indicator/hand slides back down arm

Hit and run (Batter swings at pitch attempting to make contact)

Tap both hands to chest (no indicator)

Signal is repeated

Tap under both eyes (no indicator)

Green Light to swing on 3/0 pitch (Batter must choose great pitch to hit. Purpose of green light is not to avoid a walk)

Clap hands together

End of Signals