



ESSENTIAL SOFTBALL

PITCHING DRILLS

15 Fundamental Drills
for Youth Softball

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INTRODUCTION

There's a saying in baseball, "good pitching beats good hitting," that holds true for softball as well.

If you have a team of good pitchers your chances of having a winning season soar. Good pitching will keep you in games and allow your offense time to break through.

In fact, most people would argue that pitcher is the most important position on the softball field and we would be hesitant to disagree.

The impact good pitching can have on team simply can't be overestimated.

To build your own staff of exceptional pitchers, practice the drills in this guide regularly. There are drills here to improve pitchers' speed, their accuracy and control and drills that will even help them improve their mindset and gain confidence in their abilities.

Keep in mind that good pitching begins with mechanics so teach your players proper grips along with proper windup and delivery. Also, be sure to have your players warm-up and stretch before throwing to prevent injuries.

Once they are warm, make sure your pitchers perform these drills with effort and concentration and you'll quickly build a staff that will carry your team to a successful season.

Best of luck!

DRILL #1 – PITCHING GRIPS

Skill Level: Beginner

Purpose:

Pitcher learns to grip the ball properly.

Setup:

Pitchers line up horizontally in front of coach.

Execution:

1. Coach demonstrates the grips for various softball pitches.
2. Pitchers imitate the coach's grips.
3. Coach makes any corrections that are necessary.

Here are the most common youth softball pitching grips:

Fastball/Change-up – See the photo above for the standard four-seam fastball grip. The change-up is a pitch that looks like a fastball but is actually about 30% slower than the pitcher's average fastball. It is deceiving to batters, who prepare for a fastball, and is effective at messing up their timing. The flip change is most commonly used change-up. The grip is the same for any fastball. The only real difference is the way that pitchers release the ball. On the final down swing, instead of pointing the inside of their wrist to the catcher, pitchers point the outside of the wrist to the catcher and flip the ball.

Drop Ball – This is one of a pitcher's most effective weapons. It should be used when batters are becoming comfortable with a pitcher's style and pitching rhythm to switch things up. For pitchers to throw a drop ball, they must be able to snap their wrists sufficiently at the point of release so that it gets the proper amount of backspin. Pitchers hold the ball with their four fingers on the "U" portion of the seams. The pitcher takes a shorter stride than normal and, upon releasing the ball, pulls her fingers back and up so that the ball "peels" off her hand and gets good spin.

(Continued)



Basic "C" or 4-Seam Grip



Peel Drop Ball Grip

DRILL #1 – PITCHING GRIPS CONT.

Rise Ball – This pitch is only successful for pitchers who can throw over 50 mph. The pitch also has to have intense speed and backspin so that the air breaks properly over the ball so that it rises. To throw a rise ball, pitchers should place two fingers on the narrow part of the ball, where the seams come closest together.

The arm rotation is the same as a fastball, but the release is different. On the final down swing, pitchers turn their fingers so they are on top of the ball at the release. The ball should be released low, near the pitcher's knees.

Curve Ball – For softball, the curve ball works best with a three-finger grip. This comes from two fingers resting on the sides of the seams and the middle finger resting on top of the U or on the leather itself.

The curve ball does not depend on the grip as much as the speed and direction. Pitchers should throw across their bodies, with their pitching arm ending up crossed over their abdomen. For the legs, players should step across their pitching line, to help create the necessary curve for this pitch.

Coaching Tips:

- Remember, the ball should be held with the pads of the fingers and not buried in the palm, unless throwing a change-up as this will cause a loss of speed on the pitch due to friction.



Riseball Grip - Finger Rolled



Curveball Grip

DRILL #2 – WRIST SNAP

Skill Level: Beginner

Purpose:

Pitcher practices the wrist snap she'll need to pitch the ball with speed and accuracy.

Setup:

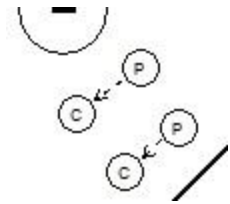
Pitcher stands approximately two feet from her catcher.

Execution:

1. Pitcher stands with feet perpendicular to the catcher.
2. Pitcher grabs her pitching wrist with her opposite hand and cocks the wrist back as far as possible.
3. Pitcher then snaps the ball to the catcher.

Coaching Tips:

- Look for a good, strong wrist snap as building strength in this area can increase the speed of the pitcher's fastball.



Pitchers isolate their wrists and work on improving their wrist snap in this drill.

DRILL #3 – WIND UP & DELIVERY

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Pitcher practices her normal windup and delivery.

Setup:

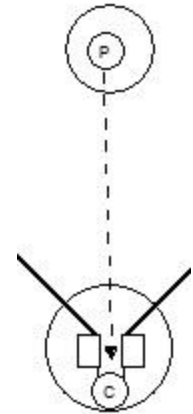
Pitcher stands on the pitching rubber. Catcher kneels behind home plate.

Execution:

1. Pitcher takes her normal windup and throws the ball to the catcher using a fastball grip.
2. Catcher throws the ball back and pitcher goes through the sequence again.

Coaching Tips:

- Pay close attention to the pitcher's windup. It should have all of the following movements: back swing, arm rotation, final down swing, release and follow-through.



In this drill, pitchers focus on both pitching mechanics and getting the ball over the plate.

DRILL #4 – DISTANCE PITCHING

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Helps pitchers develop strength in their throwing arms.

Setup:

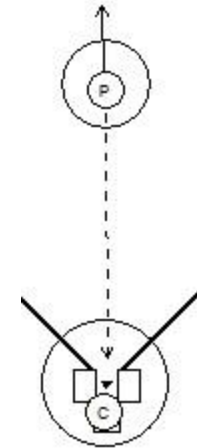
You need a catcher and a pitcher. The pitcher starts out on a pitching rubber.

Execution:

1. Be sure the pitcher is properly warmed up before doing this exercise.
2. First, the pitcher throws 15-20 fastballs from the rubber.
3. Then she takes a step back with each new pitch.
4. The pitcher should continue back until she can barely get the ball to the catcher. Then she should start taking one step forward with each pitch.
5. When back on the rubber, she should throw 15-20 more fastballs from that location to the catcher.

Coaching Tips:

- Watch for proper form, especially on the longer throws as you want your pitcher to build strength not injure her arm or shoulder.



The pitcher throws from greater and greater distances to build strength in her arm.

DRILL #5 – WEIGHTED BALL DRILL

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Builds strength in the pitcher's throwing arm.

Setup:

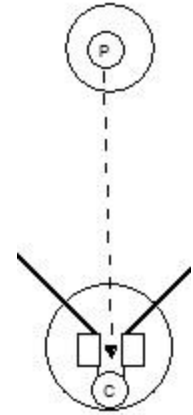
You need a pitcher, a catcher and a weighted ball (9, 10, 11 or 12 ounces).

Execution:

1. After properly warming up, the pitcher takes the weighted ball and throws 15-20 or more pitches to the catcher.

Coaching Tips:

- Again, watch for proper form. Any breakdowns in form could lead to injury for the pitcher.



Pitcher throws a weighted ball.

DRILL #6 – RAPID-FIRE PITCHING

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Builds strength and stamina in the pitcher.

Setup:

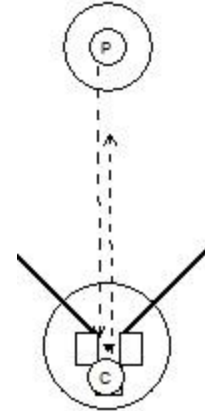
You need a pitcher, a catcher and two balls.

Execution:

1. The object is for the pitcher to throw the ball as fast as possible to the catcher without winding up.
2. As soon as the catcher catches the pitch, she fires the other ball she is holding back to the pitcher.
3. The pitcher should try to make 15 pitches in one minute.
4. Players should rest one minute and then go again.
5. Run the drill 4-5 times.

Coaching Tips:

- This is a good drill to run at the end of practices.



This drill is designed to build stamina in pitchers as it requires them to make 15 fast pitches in a minute.

DRILL #7 – ONE KNEE DRILL

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Increases arm speed and upper body strength.

Setup:

Pitcher sets up about 5 feet from a fence.

Execution:

1. Pitcher kneels on pitching side knee with other knee bent and pointing toward fence.
2. Pitcher throws 25 to 50 balls against the fence in rapid succession be sure to keep arm back straight and weight even distributed.

Coaching Tips:

- Pitcher should have her eyes focused on the target (fence) when throwing.



Pitcher throws off one knee to build arm and upper body strength.

DRILL #8 – TARP DRILL

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Increases pitching speed.

Setup:

Have a pitcher hang a tarp or piece of discarded carpet in their garage or basement or outside off a deck or over a fence. She could also use one of the bounce-back pitching nets that are available today.

Execution:

1. Pitcher stands about eight feet from tarp and just throws the ball as hard as she can against it while using good pitching form.

Coaching Tips:

- As you won't be there to observe, stress to your pitchers that they should always use good form when throwing to guard against injury and to develop good pitching habits.



In this at-home drill, pitchers throw against a tarp or piece of carpet.

DRILL #9 – HIT THE TARGET

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Improves the accuracy of the pitcher.

Setup:

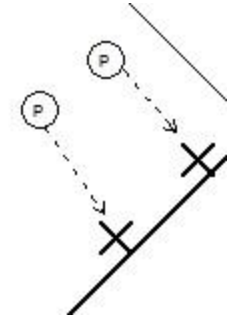
Create a target – it can be tape on a fence outlining the strike zone or a box or a piece of wood or something similar. Have the pitcher stand back at the regulation pitching distance.

Execution:

1. Pitcher throws fastballs at the target using proper windup and delivery.
2. If the player hits the target three out of six times, she strikes out the imaginary batter.

Coaching Tips:

- The pitcher should have her head up and eyes focused on the target.



Pitchers aim for the target.

DRILL #10 – 9 STRIKES

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Improves pitchers' accuracy.

Setup:

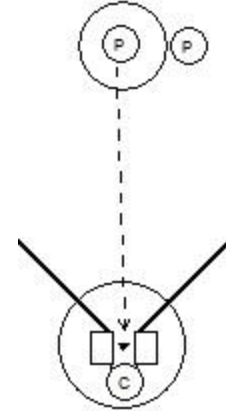
You need two pitchers, a catcher and softballs.

Execution:

1. The first pitcher throws as many balls as necessary to record 9 called strikes as determined by the catcher.
2. The second pitcher then tries to get 9 strikes in less pitches.
3. Players then switch order and go again.

Coaching Tips:

- Tell players that the catcher has ultimate authority over called strikes and that they can not argue or complain about the calls.



Two pitchers compete to see who can throw 10 strikes in less pitches.

DRILL #11 – THE FENCE

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Keeps pitchers from getting long in the back part of their windup.

Setup:

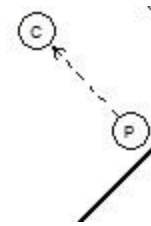
Have the pitcher stand about one foot from the fence with their body perpendicular and their throwing arm closed to the fence.

Execution:

1. Pitcher goes through regular windup and throws the ball to a catcher who is about 40 feet away.

Coaching Tips:

- If pitchers hit the fence with their throwing arm they are too long in the back and need to adjust their delivery.



Pitcher throws from near a fence to ensure they aren't getting too long in the back of their throwing motion.

DRILL #12 – BOUNCE DRILL

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Gets pitcher focused on throwing pitches down in the strike zone.

Setup:

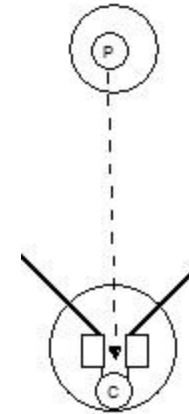
You need a catcher, a pitcher and a ball.

Execution:

1. Pitcher goes through her normal windup only instead of throwing the ball directly to the catcher she wants to one hop it to her.
2. The ball should bounce and hit the catcher's target.

Coaching Tips:

- Most pitchers can more easily hit high targets but lose control when trying to go low. This drill teaches pitchers control when trying to throw down in the strike zone. Watch for good form and focus and once the pitcher is able to consistently hit the target on the bounce it will be time to eliminate the bounce and throw directly to the target.
- The pitcher can also do this drill against a wall and work alone as the ball should bounce back to her if she hits the target.



Pitcher purposely bounces the ball to the catcher.

DRILL #13 – THE 30/5 DRILL

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Designed to help pitchers build their stamina as well as improve their focus when they are tired.

Setup:

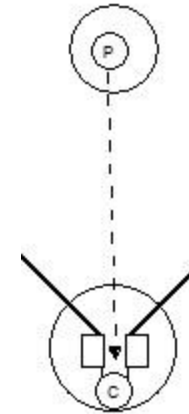
You need a pitcher, a catcher and a ball.

Execution:

1. Pitcher throws as many pitches as she can to the catcher in 30 seconds.
2. Then catcher calls a specific pitch and location five times and the pitcher must execute perfectly each time.
3. If each of the five pitches is not executed correctly, the pitcher must go through the drill again.

Coaching Tips:

- After completing the speed portion of the drill, the pitcher should take a deep breath, get focused and then proceed to throwing the called pitches.



After 30 seconds of rapid throwing, pitchers must execute five called pitches in this drill.

DRILL #14 – WALK UP DRILL

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Pitchers learn to use their momentum to increase their pitch speed.

Setup:

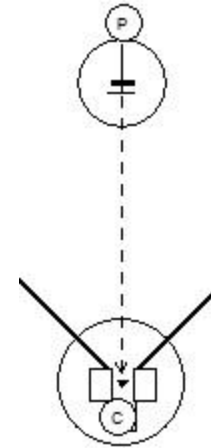
Pitcher stands behind the mound. Catcher sets up behind home plate.

Execution:

1. Pitcher takes one step onto the mound and then throws the pitch, using her momentum to drive the ball toward the plate.

Coaching Tips:

- Look for the pitcher to maintain control in the windup and be accurate with her throws.



Pitcher builds momentum for the pitch to the plate.

DRILL #15 – LIVE PITCHING DRILL

Skill Level: Intermediate

Purpose:

Pitcher learns to face real batters in a game-type situation.

Setup:

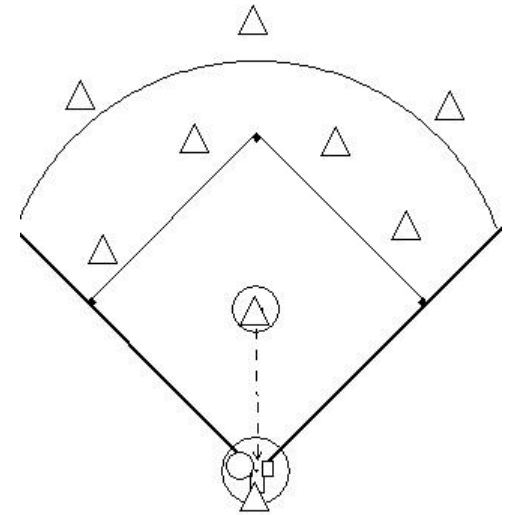
You need a full defensive team in the field and a batter at the plate.

Execution:

1. Pitcher attempts to strike out the batter or get her to hit into an out.

Coaching Tips:

- Look for good pitching fundamentals. Pitcher should have her eyes on the catcher's target and should use good momentum and follow-through to get the ball past the batter.



Pitcher faces batters.

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