

Preparing for Games

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Game On!

- Congrats ... you made it through your practices and now you are ready for the Games to begin!
- This Guide will give you some tips on how to make your Games an even more enjoyable experience

Day Before Tips

Tip #1: Use TeamSnap to Track Availability and for Refreshment Sign-ups

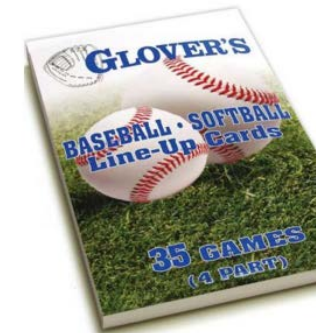
- As discussed in the “Welcome to Coaching”, TeamSnap is the tool your team uses to track availability of players
- Instill in parents at the Parents Meeting that they need to mark availability at least a day before the game otherwise it makes it harder for you to create your line up cards and/or determine if you need guest players to field enough players
 - Remind them that emails are automatically sent by TeamSnap before an event, so parents just have to click yes or no ... so trivial for them to do that
- Also use TeamSnap to set up Refreshment schedule and remind parents at the Players Meeting to sign up and cover each game
- So ... the night before a game check if you have enough availability to form a team and that the snacks are taken care of
 - Also use TeamSnap as the way to email and nag parents who have not marked availability
 - If no one has signed up for a refreshment for a given game, ping parents who have not signed up for a refreshment

Tip #2: Create Lineup Cards the Night Before a Game

- Don't wait until game time to figure out your batting order and who plays what position during what inning, sometimes this takes a while to figure out and you want to make sure you are evenly distributing positions vis a vis positions played in prior games
- For 6U and 8U, just use the "Game Plan by Inning" PDF

http://assets.ngin.com/attachments/document/0050/6096/Game_Plan_by_Inning.pdf

- For 10U and above
 - Use Lineup card to create batting order
 - For "who plays what position during what inning", either
 - Use Game Plan by Inning PDF for positions by inning, and put on clip board that you will hang in dugout (put lineup in same order as batting lineup) OR
 - Write using an erasable marker on a lineup board that will hang in the dugout
- Keep past "game plan by innings" so you can track and load balance who has played prime fielding positions in past games, so you can be more comfortable that you have evenly "shared" the prime fielding positions throughout the season



Tip #3: Get Parents to Help

- There is a lot of stuff going on before, during and after a game, so ask parents for help, e.g. they can help you by ...
 - Throwing and catching with a player during warmups if you have an odd # of girls
 - Overseeing a batting station as part of warmups
 - Hanging out near the dugout and help the catcher get their gear on between innings
 - Scoring (for 10U and above) using scorebook
- Set expectations at the Parents Meeting that you want and need that help during games! Most of the time they are just standing around waiting for the game to start anyway 😊
- At the parents meeting also remind parents how they can further help
 - Tell them to try to refrain and not yell out directions to the players (e.g. “Throw the ball to third!” or “Choke up on your bat”) while they are playing – you are the coach. Remind the parents that no one at their work does that to them.
 - Instead tell them to shout out encouragement vs. instructions
 - Tell the parents to not dwell on mistakes or the score after the game in the car ride home
 - Point them to the parents code of conduct

<http://www.paloaltogirlssoftball.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/PAGS-Parent-Code-of-Conduct-2016.pdf>

Tip #4: Clearly Document and Articulate When You Want Players Showing Up Before a Game

- Many parents many parents may incorrectly believe if the game starts at 1pm, they roll in with their kids at 12:59
- That does not work, as players need to warm up and players need to get into game mode
- At the Parents Meeting and in Team Snap, clearly articulate how far in advance a player **MUST** show up before a game
- Recommendations
 - 6U and 8U – have players show up 30 minutes before game time
 - 10U and 12U – 45 minutes
 - 14U – 1 hour
- Make it clear this means that players need to be 100% ready to go at the time (e.g. cleats on and tied, ready to warm up etc.)

Tip #5: Be Sure to Know if you are Home or Away

- Double check the schedule the night before and figure out if you are home or away
- Clearly write that down on the “Game Plan by Inning” document to remind yourself
- Home teams
 - Sit in the dugout on the 3rd base side
 - Bats second (i.e. bottom of the inning)
- Away teams
 - Sit in the dugout on the 1st base side
 - Bats first (i.e. at the top of the inning)
- Knowing this ahead of time avoids the hassle of having to switch dugouts after you have taken out your gear, or debating with the coach or ump who bats first (note older teams with umps will have coin toss to determine who bats first, so home field just dictates which dugout you get)

Game Day Tips

Tip #6: If Raining or Rained the Night Before, Check the Rain Hotline an Hour Before Game

- To determine if fields are open, Palo Alto has a rain hotline
+1 650 329 2697
- Use the rain hotline as the neutral arbitrator to determine if a game should be cancelled due to rain
- If the rain hotline says fields are cancelled, you cannot use field (we run risk of losing field privileges with violations, plus there is always player safety issues)
- Publicize the rain hotline with your parents and on TeamSnap as the way to know if game is cancelled due to rain
- If game is cancelled due to rain, contact opposing coach and send out notification via TeamSnap

Tip #7: The Coach Should Show up 5 Minutes Earlier than When the Players Show Up

- Coaches should show up an extra few minutes before everyone else
- This gives coach the opportunity to ensure nothing is amiss with logistics (e.g. is there a dog show on the fields) or the field itself (e.g. scan field for safety issues such as pools of water) and act accordingly without the distraction of arriving players
- Also gives time for coach to set up the gear and batting stations – see next slide for what needs to be set up

Tip #8: Pre-Game Equipment Set Up

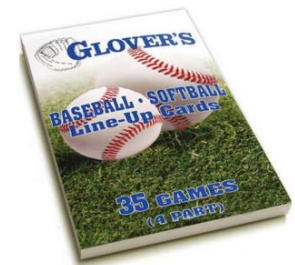
- The coach should put into the dugout the following items from their big equipment bag
 - Team bats
 - Team helmets
 - Catching gear
 - Hang the clipboard or lineup card (with the positions by inning and batting lineup) in the dugout so players can see it
 - Put 4 extra balls for between innings warmup
 - For 6U and 8U the team's Tee should be set up and ready to go
 - Put the coaches water in the dugout
- Coach should then set up hitting stations that are spaced out from each other, e.g.
 - Station #1: Tee and Bownet
 - Station #2: Whiffle ball and plastic homeplate
 - Station #3: Hitting stick

Tip #9: When Players Arrive, Have Them Immediately Set up Their Gear in Dugout

- When players arrive have them get their gloves, bats and helmets out, as well as their waters, and arrange them in the dugout
- Girls with softball bags should hang them on fence either inside or outside of dugout – parents should help

Tip #10: As Your Players Are Doing Warmups, Intro Yourself to Opposing Coach and Swap Line Up Cards

- Once your dugout is set up, and your players are doing their thing by doing warmups, this is a good time to introduce yourself to the opposing coach
- For coaches of older teams (e.g. 12U and 14U) ...
 - Give a copy of your lineup card (that has batting order) to the opposing coach, and ask for a copy of theirs. For spring games, you do not have to supply fielding position information, just the batting lineup
 - Then give your line up card and opposing team's lineup card to your scorer (opposing coach will do same with their scorekeeper)
 - Ask for both lineup cards back from your scorer after they transfer the information into the scorebook



Tip #11: Step Back and Remember to Be a Responsible Coach

- The game is about to start in 30-45 minutes, this is a good time to clear your mind and think about the following
 - The game is about the kids, not about me
 - Mistakes will be made, that's how they learn
 - Winning at this level is not about the final score
 - Remember: Sandwich
 - Count to 10 before reacting or saying anything re: a mistake or poor call
 - You are here to have fun
 - This is a game, not practice ... detail instruction is meant for practices, not games with everyone watching
 - Remind the girls to be good sportsmen
 - And of course tell the girls to have fun and you as coach should make it fun!
- Remember at practice it is just you and your players, but with games you may be in the spotlight with opposing teams, opposing coaches, umps, parents, etc.
 - Get out of the spotlight and don't be "that jerk coach"
 - Instead be the good sportsman whose players were having a lot of fun

Pre-Game Warmups

Tip #12: Implement a Consistent Game Day Warmup Regimen

- Each game day warmup should be the same so players have a rhythm for each game
- For 6U and 8U, their 30 minutes should breakdown into
 - A few minutes of light stretching and/or jogging
 - 5-10 minutes of throwing and catching (e.g. divide girls into parallel lines and throw with partner)
 - 10-15 minutes of batting stations
 - If you have time (probably not), do a few grounders by having girls line up single file line in foul territory near 1B or 3B (based on what dugout you are in), and you gently hit or roll to them while you are standing near Home plate area and they are standing in the coaches box area. They field and throw back to you, and go to end of line
- For 10U and above, warmups should be
 - A few minutes of light stretching and/or jogging
 - Throwing and catching via formal progressions – see upcoming slide
 - Batting stations
 - Fly balls (if you have time)
 - Infield (see above)
- For 10U and above, pitchers should start warming up with a catcher or coach after batting stations, and should be the first to do batting (i.e. pitcher skips fly balls and infield)

Tip #13: Do NOT Use Infield for Warmups

- Do NOT go into the infield at all to do warmups
- Do your catching and throwing warmups (including progressions for older girls), hitting stations and fly ball warmups in outfield – you can use your half of the outfield (i.e. half of outfield nearest your dugout)
- Do grounder/infield warmup in the foul ball territory near your dugout (e.g. near home and 1B or 3B depending on which dugout you have) by rolling or hitting the ball to players lined up near the base (but again in foul territory – where the coaches box is) while you stand near Home plate area

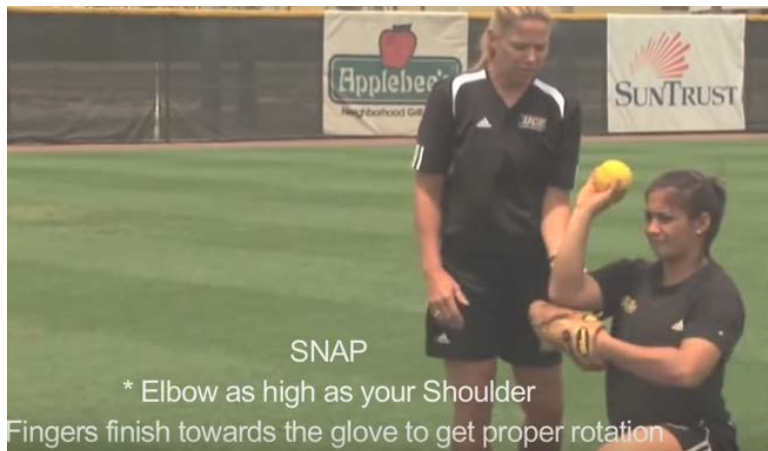


Tip #14: Throwing Progressions for Older Teams

- For older girls (10U+), instead of warming up by just doing standard throwing and catching with partner, the players should do throwing progressions with their partners as part of the warm up process

- See

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmJQoLK4Vos> (:40 to 2:40)



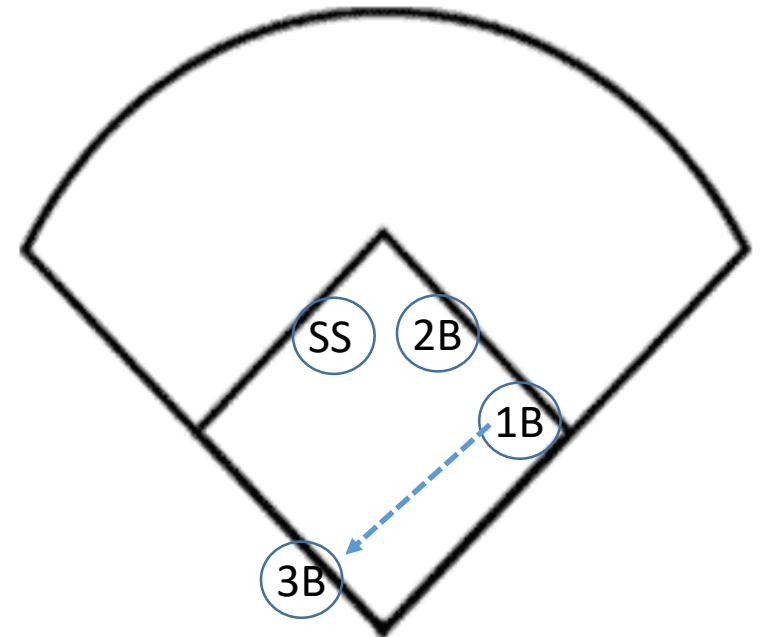
Tip #15: Your Final Pre-Game Ritual

- Before your team is about to hit or take the field, quickly bring out the entire team outside your dugout
- No pre-game speeches are needed, just take the clipboard from the dugout with the batting lineup
- Tell the girls after they hear a name, they all do a single clap
- Slowly read off the batting lineup by first name of the girls. i.e. name, clap, name, clap, etc.
- When that is done, say one positive sentence (e.g. “it’s a beautiful day and lets have fun out there”), and either have the girls get their helmets on (if your team is batting first) OR then announce who is playing what position in the 1st inning and have the players take the field for fielding once they hear their names

Between Inning Warm-ups

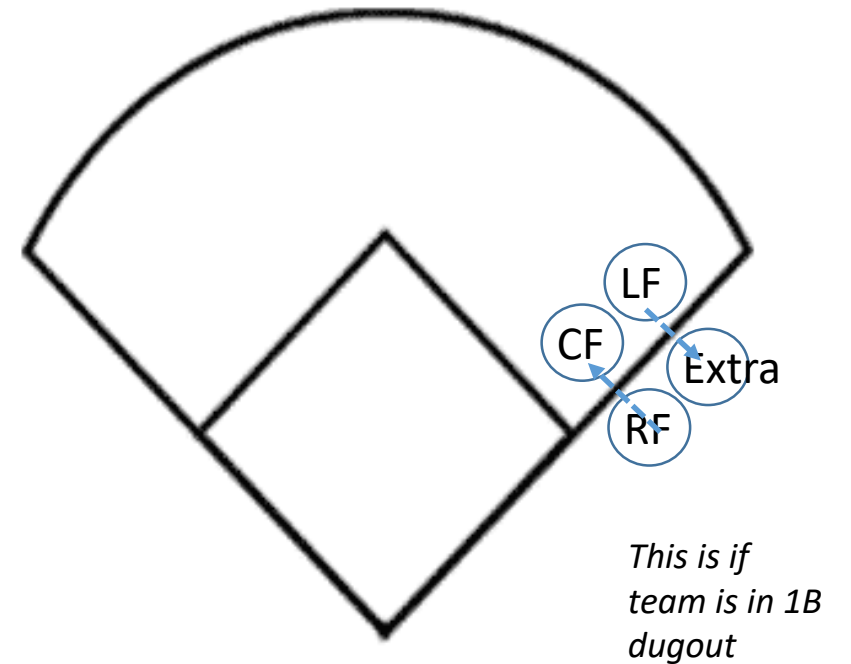
Warming Up the Infield

- Players should know their position for a given inning by looking at the clipboard or a coach yelling out who plays which position
- Whomever is playing 1B should grab one of the balls in the dugout for warmups
- Infielders take their normal positions except the 3B who should position themselves $2/3^{\text{rd}}$ between home and 3^{rd} base so as not to be in the way of pitcher and catcher warming up
- 1B should roll ball to 2B, SS or 3B, they throw ball back to 1B, and repeat
- When ump or coach yells “Balls in”, if team is in 1^{st} Base dugout the 1B should receive ball and then flip ball to coach, or if team is in 3^{rd} base dugout the 3B should get the next grounder and then flip the warmup ball to coach near 3^{rd} base dugout



Warming Up the Outfield

- The 3 (or 4 outfielders if 6U or 8U) should line up just outside the 1st or 3rd base line (depending on which dugout) inside the outfield, about 10-20 feet away from the base
- Each outfielder should grab a warmup ball from dugout
- Any players sitting out this inning (i.e. not fielding that inning) should also grab their glove and warm up the outfielders
- So you have the players in 2 parallel lines, throwing to their partners, just as if it was warmups
- Point is even bench players should be doing warm up between innings, either to fielders or to themselves
- If odd # of players, then assistant coach can also throw but should stand in foul territory
- If dugout is on 1st base side, make sure outfielders are not warming up near 1st base
- When ump yells “balls in” the fielders should flip balls to the bench players or coach, and should run to their positions



Warming Up the Pitcher

- The pitcher warms up using the game ball that should be left at/near the pitcher's mound between innings
- If the catcher is not in gear, a coach with glove should go out and warm up pitcher until the catcher shows up in their gear
- A glove to glove high five is always good to do when the catcher replaces a coach during pitcher's warmup
- For 6U and 8U girls who are not pitching, it can be simple throw and catch between pitcher and catcher
- If the catcher is likely not due up in an inning in which her team is batting, they can also start to get their catcher gear on (i.e. just the knee/shin guards) while their team is still batting to save time
- Catchers who are on deck or in the hole with 2 outs should wear their knee guards, even while in the on deck circle (they take them off from the on deck circle if the batter ahead of them gets on base)
- During warmups, when the coaches or ump calls "Balls In", the SS should cover 2nd, and the next pitch from the pitcher should have the catcher throwing the ball to 2nd base, and the SS swipes the ground to signify a tag on the sliding runner
- After the SS catches and swipes, the infielders should *quickly* run to the mound, give glove slaps to the pitcher and wish her good luck pitching that inning, and run back to their positions

Other Game Time Coaching Tips

Tip #16: Always Respect the Umps ...

- Umps' names are "Blue", e.g.
 - "Hey Blue, I need a timeout to talk to my pitcher"
 - "What's the count again Blue?"
- For high school girls that ump 10U or 12U games, show extra respect and never embarrass them
 - This could be your daughter doing that in 4-5 years and you would not want someone chewing her out!
 - Don't question any calls unless really blatantly wrong, and only then talk in low voice to ump and be extra diplomatic
- If there is a questionable call, don't go charging out of the dugout. Call timeout, collect your thoughts, slowly walk to the Blue, step aside from the home plate area and have a quiet conversation that none of the players or parents can hear, and be diplomatic, e.g.
 - "Hey Blue, my scorer told me we thought we had 2 outs here, so that makes it the third out, maybe we should check with the official scorer to confirm that, as I think it is 3 outs"
 - "Hey Blue, with that last out at 3B, it looked to me that the third base was actually interfering with my runner, so there was no way she could get to the base. Can you consider overturning that call, or if not, maybe talk with the opposing coach to not have their infielders block the bases moving forward?"
- Everyone makes mistakes ... teach your kids that umps are human too, and sometimes a bad call will be made
- Because we don't care up wins and losses for Spring season, blaming the ump on a loss is not teaching the right approach to softball (or life) ... our players are not victims

And Realize that Sometimes Calls Can Go Either Way ...



Was this play called safe or out by Blue?

See last page



Tip #17: Gather the Players Quickly Before Your At-Bats and Do a Mid-Inning Cheer

- Starting with the 2nd inning and beyond, when your players are leaving the field after getting the opposing team's 3rd out (i.e. your team will be coming up to hit), have the fielders quickly run to the area outside your dugout (“lets go ladies, hustle in here, gather up near me”)
- Also have the girls who sat on the bench also come out
- Give a quick sentence of motivation (e.g. “great job getting that third out”) and a sentence of advice for the upcoming inning (e.g. “remember this pitcher is throwing it all over the place, so let’s be picky”) and then ask the team in unison to gather in and do a quick cheer, e.g.
 - Coach: “On the count of three, rip rip rope. 1 2 3” Players: “Rip Rip Rope”
 - Coach: “On the count of three, hit run score. 1 2 3” Players: “Hit Run Score”
 - Coach: “On the count of three, Palo Alto. 1 2 3” Players: “Palo Alto”

Tip #18: Encourage the Players to Organically Do Some of their Own Cheers

- You can do this mid-season, but at the end of a practice hand out a print out of a few cheers from a site like this

<http://www.softballspunk.com/Offense.htm>

(found by doing a google of “softball cheers”, not an endorsement of the site as the author has not fully reviewed)

And encourage the girls to do think about doing one or two of them at the next game (and leave at that)

- Girls will also start hearing cheers from other teams and will mimic them
- At the very least make sure the players are encouraging their team mates when they are up to bat

Tip #19: Keep Track of Outs and Runs and Even Opposing Player's Hitting Locations

- [Only applicable If you are playing 10U or above]
- After your scorer has entered the lineups in your scorebook, get the lineup cards back and put them in your pocket and have a pen handy
- Make notes on those pieces of paper on what opposing players did hitting location-wise in each inning or at the very least track outs and runs
 - E.g. For older teams, knowing that an opposing hitter previously hit the ball to 2B will allow you to shout out to your 2nd baseman that the last time the hitter was up they hit it to 2B
- Looking down and making a note while in the 3rd base coaches box just after a hitter strikes out in a key situation is also a good way to channel your frustration 😊

Tip #20: Have Parent(s) Help the Coaches

- Parents can help with getting catching gear on
- They can remind players of the batting order, who batted last in the prior inning, etc.
- They can remind players to hydrate or keep focused on the game vs. goofing off
- For older teams, another parent can keep the scorebook and can be consulted on # of outs, what an opposing player hit in their last at bat, etc.

Tip #21: You Do Have Timeouts

- If a hitter does not understand what you want them to do, you can call an offensive timeout but note you only have 1 per inning
- You have 2 defensive timeouts per inning, with the second one being to replace a pitcher
- If a player appears injured or shaken up, you can also call for an injury timeout. Remember safety first.



After the Game

Tip #21: After the Last Out Congratulate The Opposing Team and Blue

- After last out immediately gather the players outside your dugout and have them do a cheer at the count of 3, e.g.
 - “Good game Mountain View, thank you Blue”
 - “2-4-6-8 who do we appreciate? Green Frogs! Green Frogs! Yeah!”
- Then have your players and coaches line up on the 1st or 3rd base line near home plate (based on where your dugout is)
 - Typically your catcher should be first in line
 - Coaches should be last in line, with head coach very last
- When the other team lines up, have the players slap hands with opposing players and say “Good game” and the coaches should shake hands with the opposing coaches and compliment them on game
- Head coach should also find Blue and shake their hand

Tip #22: No Snack Until Dugout is Clean and Quick Team Meeting

- After congratulating the team, have the team completely clean out the dugout
 - Make it clear that your team leaves the dugout cleaner than you found it
 - Make it clear that even if a player gets their own geared packed up, they should help others
- Younger teams can get their snacks
- For older teams
 - Have the team congregate in an area outside the dugout (be sure not to be in the way of another team taking the dugout for the next game) and away from the stands (but ok for parents to eavesdrop)
 - Without taking too much time, gather the girls around and briefly talk about the game, and hand out kudos, and ask for feedback in terms of who showed great effort – this meeting is the bread of the sandwich so make it positive
 - Again make it short and sweet, more of a pep talk, and focus on the positive
 - Use the next practice to discuss areas of weaknesses or areas for improvement
- Always remind the players to thank whomever brought the snack

As The Season Progresses ...

Tip #23: Layer on New Game Strategy As Season Progresses

- For older teams that are starting to learn how to bunt and/or slide, teach them in practice your signals for bunting or stealing, and start experimenting with both bunting and stealing
 - Mixing things up makes things more interesting
 - Consider changing your signals mid-season so opposing teams in our league don't recognize them
- Have your pitchers try new pitches in games (e.g. change up etc.)
- Rotate players to new positions so they get to taste positions they have not previously played etc.

Summary

- Spend the night before getting your lineup and positions by inning sorted out so you are not “winging it” as the game is about to start
- Make sure the team knows when to arrive
- Set up a consistent warm up regimen
- Get parents to help
- Remember it’s just a game
- ... and have fun!

On slide 27 ... Blue called the runner SAFE