

# The Top 15 Softball Fundamentals to Teach

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aka “Avoiding the 15 Common  
Mistakes of Teaching Softball  
Fundamentals”

[and the 15 things you can say to sound  
like you know what you are doing]

# Goals of this Presentation

- This presentation is designed to be an executive summary of the major fundamentals that every coach — especially at the 6U and 8U level — should be teaching
- This is an extract of some of the more important fundamentals that are presented in more detail in the following documents that are found on the Coaches Corner
  - Fundamentals of Throwing and Catching
  - Fundamentals of Infield
  - Fundamentals of Outfield
  - Fundamentals of Base Running
  - Fundamentals of Hitting

# Mistake #1: Not Teaching Proper Grip

- Grip the ball across the large horseshow of the ball, i.e. along the “C” formed by the seams, using a 4 seam grip
  - Place index, middle and ring finger along the seam as shown in the photo below
  - Thumb below middle finger preferably on the bottom seam
  - Pinkie not on seam
  - Don't palm the ball
- This will give the ball proper rotation that leads to more velocity
- It also provides a consistent grip that will minimize the ball tailing away from target



# Mistake #2: Not Teaching “Thumb to Thigh” and “Elbow Up High”

- Take a **jab step** in towards your target with the foot of your throwing arm, with the inside of the foot pointing to the target
- As you take the jab step, take the throwing arm’s thumb and move it in a circular motion, i.e. **“thumb to thigh”**
- The upper arm is now parallel to the ground at shoulder level (**“elbow up high”**) in a “L”
- Ball is facing away from you, as if you were painting a wall behind you with the ball
- Point with either your glove or elbow to the target



Ball is pointing away from target  
eliminates pushing the ball



“L”



Note parallelism of shoulders and elbow point



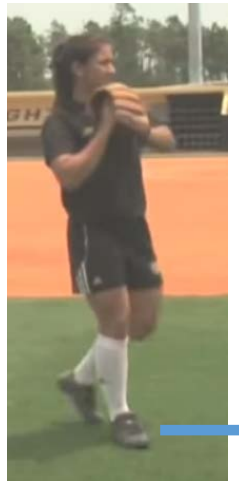
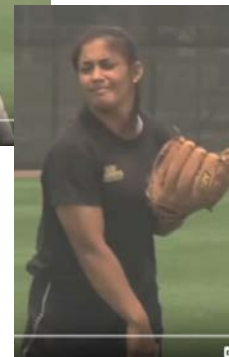
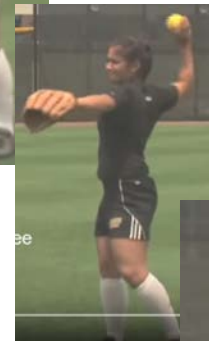
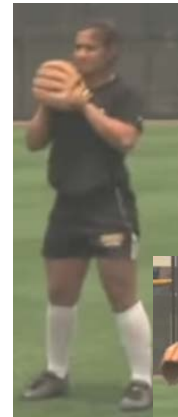
# Mistake #3: Not “Letting it Fly”

- Now take a step forward with your glove side foot, thereby shifting the weight forward
- As the front foot lands, it should be pointing in the same direction as your back foot
- Immediately as your front foot lands, lead with your throwing elbow, i.e. as the weight goes forward the arm goes forward
- Follow through (i.e. **“Let it Fly”**) with your throwing hand ending up near the opposite side hip



# Mistake #4: Not Teaching Progressions to Break Down Throws

- See “Throwing Progressions Drill” (B1) in Infield Drills that can be used to emphasize proper throwing motion while also warming up the players
- Pound home “Thumb to Thigh”, “Elbow Up High”, “Let it Fly”
- Take/review video from your phone (in slow motion) to show girls proper form





# Mistake #5: Not Teaching Proper Ready Position when Fielding

- The ready position is in an **athletic position**, with hands in “**pistol ready**” with both thumbs pointing up



# Mistake #6: Not Teaching the Airplane

- Approach a ground ball as if you were an **airplane** coming in for a landing, vs a helicopter suddenly lowering itself



# Mistake #7: Not Teaching How to Securely Field the Ball

- Think of fielding as if a **triangle** in front of you but the tip/apex of the triangle is more glove side, i.e. field ball on glove hand side
- Secure the ball with your glove out front and throwing hand **alligatoring** the ball (i.e. “covers” the ball), but key is you are using 2 hands
- Alligatoring with your throwing hand has 2 advantages
  - Protects the fielder’s chest and face if the ball were take a weird hop – better to have the ball hit the hand vs. face
  - Makes for a quicker transition to throwing the ball as the throwing hand is now close to the ball in the glove
- Important that throwing hand fingers are pointing to the sky so as not to get fingers jammed
- See the ball go into the glove, i.e. **eyes on the ball**



# Mistake #8: Not Doing Drills that Focus on Approach and Hand Positioning (B2-B4, A4)



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNF1DAGCm1Y> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-BgiappeTZk>

# Mistake #9: Not Teaching Key Concept of Ball/Base/Backup

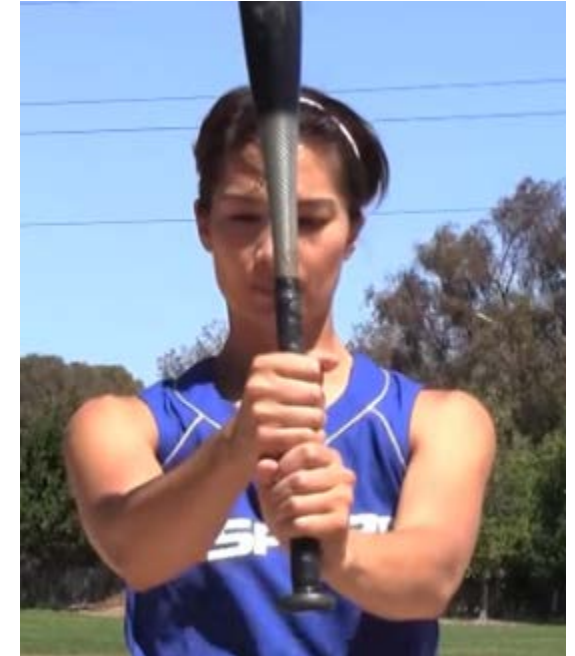
- Once you teach the basics of fielding ground balls etc. then teach the concept of when playing infield to focus on the 3 Bs: Ball Base Backup
- #1 **Ball** – if the ball is hit to you, the fielder should immediately field it and throw to proper target
- #2 **Base** – if the Ball is not hit to you, the infielder should cover the appropriate base. Infielders should be taught under what scenarios they cover which base and have that understanding before the new batter is up to the plate
- #3 **Backup** – if the Ball is not hit to you, and you don't cover a Base, then you should be Backing up. This is clearly applicable to an outfielder (e.g. RF backing up the throw to 1<sup>st</sup> Base or LF backing up 3<sup>rd</sup> base for a play there), but could also apply to the infield (e.g. SS backing up the 2B if a throw is coming from RF into 2<sup>nd</sup> Base)

# Mistake #10: Not Picking the Proper Bat

- See “Welcome to Coaching” for bat size tips, but pro-tips are:
  - Weight: If a player cannot hold the bat outstretched with more than one hand for more than 10 seconds, it is too heavy!
  - Length: knob of bat should go to the players wrist when bat is stood upright on floor and players arm are hanging loose on their sides

# Mistake #11: Wrong Hands on Top, Not Lining Up Door Knocking Knuckles and Squeezing Bat too Tight or Loose

- If player is righty, right hand on top of bat
- If lefty, left hand on top
- Line up **door knocking knuckles**
- Grip with pads of hands, not deep in palm
- Don't squeeze the bat too tight – the hitter should apply pressure with the fingers and not the palms



# Mistake #11: Incorrect Hitting Stance and Wrong Distance from Plate

- **Athletic position**
- Toes, hips and shoulders should be facing plate
- Body weight is on the inside of the legs and the balls of the feet
- Player should check if they can touch outside of plate with their bat ... use lead arm to check (i.e. just one arm, not holding bat with both hands)
- How far up in the box is dependent on how fast a pitcher the hitter is facing (or where the tee is placed for younger players)





# Focus

- Make sure hitter can get a good 2 eye view of the pitcher
- Initially focus eyes on the pitcher's chest or shoulders with a soft focus, and then when pitcher begins pitching motion, shift focus with a hard focus to where pitcher releases the ball (near pitcher's hip aka release point)

# Mistake #12: Improper Bat Placement

- Once you are in athletic position, lower the bat so it is resting on shoulder
- In effect form letter A as shown in pix, with elbows down
- Keep bat on shoulder while pitcher gets ready and hitter is awaiting pitch ... only raise bat up when the pitcher begins pitching motion (otherwise player can get tired holding bat up)
- **Raise bat near ear** and maintain A
  - *Myth* is telling the players to keep the back elbow up; should be in an A
- Bat should be at 45 degree angle
- Don't wrap bat around head or raise back elbow



# Mistake #13: Not Teaching Load Stride Swing

- As pitcher begins motion, begin to transfer weight back = **Load**
  - Probably about 60% of weight is on back and 40% is on front
  - Weight comes off front foot (i.e. slight heel lift) and is now more focused on inside of back leg
- **Stride** represents the shifting of weight forward and toe touching of forward foot, and serves as a timing mechanism for the swing
  - i.e. #1 is negative with weight shifting to back, and then to #2 where weight now shifts forward
  - Note this does not represent a big step forward of the front foot, it is a shifting of weight (Could be a toe tap on the front foot or just shifting of weight or a very short step)
- The **Swing** is the rotational phase of hitting with hip rotations should begin during swing
  - *Myth* of telling players to “Squish the bug” with back foot is not recommended as it (a) throws hips off too much and (b) does not allow the back foot to transfer the weight to the front foot



# Palms at Contact Point

- Top hand should be facing up, bottom hand facing down





Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUa2OEo8HSI>



[Side note: clearly facing a “slow” pitcher as you can see how far up in the box the hitter is]

# Mistake #14: Not Teaching Yes Yes Yes Yes/No

- Good hitters are aggressive and are prepared to hit every pitch
- Batters should stride to every pitch with the intention of hitting the ball
- The adjustment to hold up on the swing should be made at the last moment
- Approach to a pitch is “yes yes yes no” or “yes yes yes yes”
- i.e. Yes to raise bat near ear, Yes to Load, Yes to Stride, and then Yes or No to Swing
- If the batter does not prepare to swing at every pitch, she will not be able to pull the trigger when she really wants to swing
- Lets teach ALL our players to be aggressive, better at a young age to go down swinging then having the bat on the shoulder the whole season

# Mistake #15: Not Teaching Rocking Start and Breaking Down

- For all bases, Palo Alto does the **rocking start** with front foot on top of bag and back foot on dirt
- Time your lead off to start running when the pitchers hand is up in the windup
- **Break down** your lead off





#1 Ball not yet released but ...

#2 ... note runners on 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> base are beginning to move forward (both of their right feet are now off the ground as they move to take their lead)

[Side note: check out the nice athletic position/stance and “pistols ready” of the 1B as the pitch comes (same with player<sup>24</sup> at 3B)]



# All You Need to Know

1. “Thumb to Thigh”
2. “Elbow Up High”
3. “Let it Fly”
4. “Athletic Position”
5. “Pistol Ready”
6. “Airplane”
7. “Triangle”
8. “Alligator”
9. “Eyes on the Ball”
10. “Ball Base Backup”
11. “Door Knocking Knuckles”
12. “Raise Bat Near Ear”
13. “Load Stride Swing”
14. “Yes yes yes yes/no”
15. “Rocking Start and Break Down”

**Pop Quiz:**

Who is the guy on the left?

Who is the guy on the right?

