

Saddle Brook Softball "KinderBats" Division Coach Guide

Goals for the Season:

- Fundamentals of the game: Throwing/Hitting/Catching/Positions.
- Promote a love of softball.
- Make sure the girls have fun.
- Avoid injuries.
- Ultimate Goal: Everyone wants to come back and play softball with us again next year.

Practice Plan:

- Station & Rotation. Use smaller, Coach-led subgroups as much as possible.
- Minimize talking and demonstrate instead.
- Get low, at their level.
- Keep it moving & interesting but be prepared to improvise as the practice moves along.

It is important to recognize that not only is this their first experience with softball it might be their first sporting experience.

It is also important to note that although similar, softball and baseball are different sports especially when it comes to the size of the ball which is the most important thing in the beginning. The size of a baseball is the same from tee-ball all the way to the professional MLB players. A baseball is always 9 inches. Softballs range in size from 10 to 12 inches. Young hands are small so start out with a smaller ball to teach the proper grip and work up to a larger ball. Although 12 inches, the yellow whiffle ball is easier to grip, safer to catch and easier to hit.

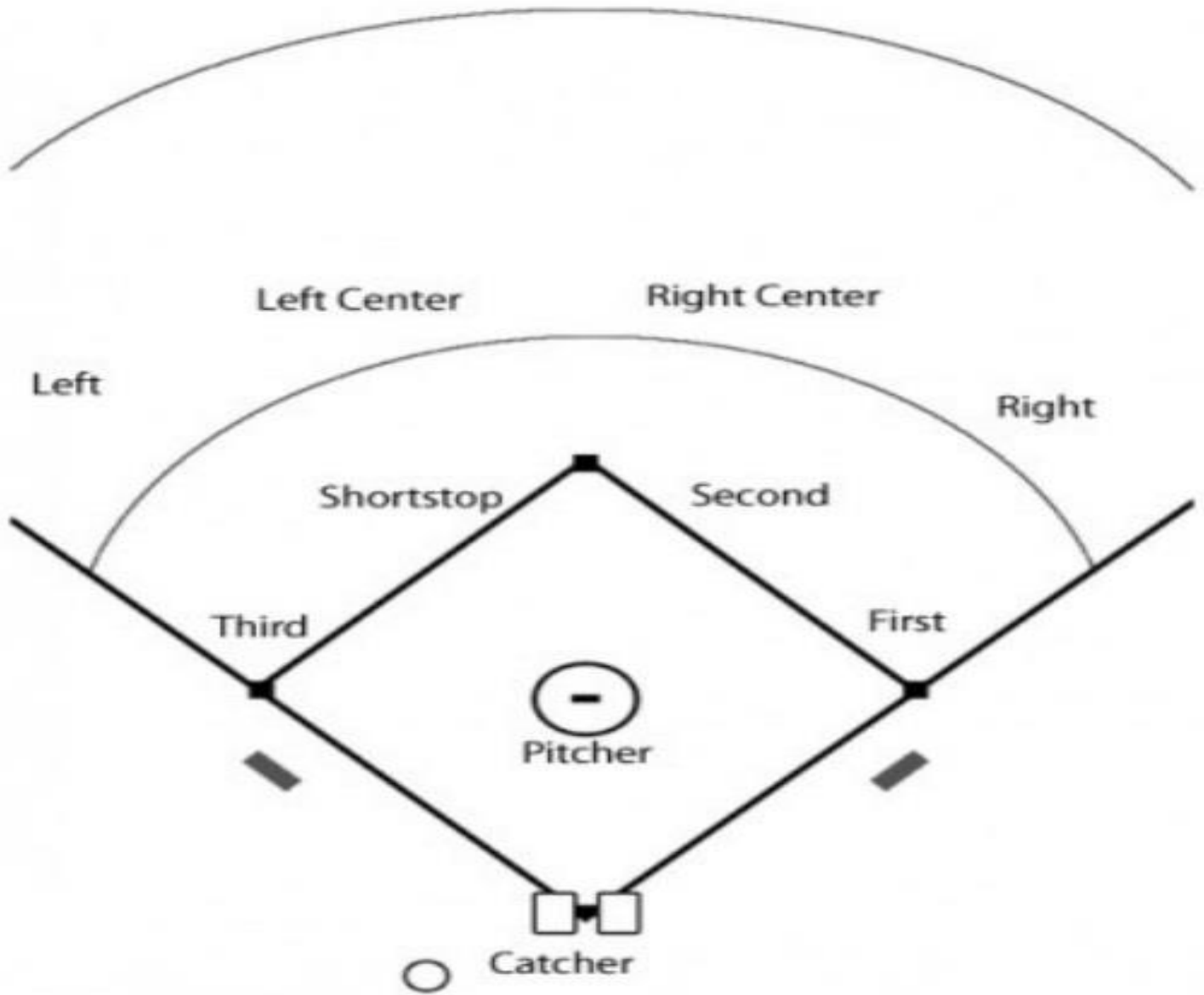
Different types of ball comparison:

Ball	Diameter
Tennis Ball	8 Inches
Baseball	9 Inches
Pink Softball Trainers	10 Inches
Regulation Softball (Age 10-under)	11 Inches
Regulation Softball (Age 11-up)	12 Inches
Yellow Whiffle Ball	12 Inches

The schedule runs about 6 weekends so maximize your time. Think of the schedule as a course syllabus and you want the girls to learn as they go and take the "final exam" (play a game). Remember that certain players may learn faster (or slower) than others so it's important to spend enough time on each skill but not too much time. The faster they learn the skills the more time you have to play games. Additional field times are available upon request. You have the flexibility to add your own drills if needed and the Program has numerous equipment and other games if needed; please just contact us.

Wk	Skill	Note
1	Basics of the game	What are the positions called and located? What are the bases called and located? Safety & Equipment.
2	Proper throwing techniques	Use a Bownet or Hula Hoops to make a target.
3	Proper batting techniques	Hit into a fence to avoid chasing balls.
4	Proper Catching techniques	Start off by catching with bare hands.
5	Play a game of kick ball	Using softball rules.
6+	Play a game of tee-ball using a softball	Use a lineup and keep the same batting order.

FIELDER POSITIONS



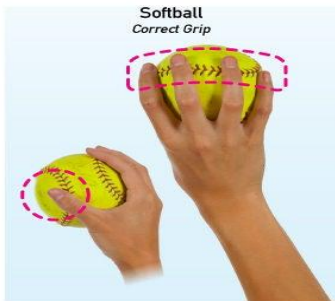
THROWING

Throwing is a key component in the game of softball. Although it may seem easy, many body parts are completing tasks simultaneously in order to have the throw hit the target. Every play in softball requires an accurate throw. Having a catch with a partner is a great way to practice and make your throw more accurate. This guide will provide steps for how to hold the ball, the position of your body and where to point the glove.

Step 1- Putting on the Glove

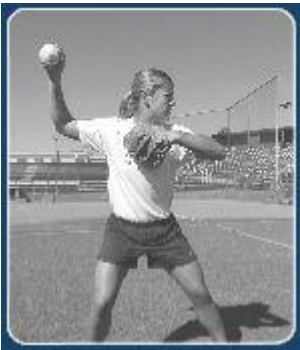
In order to throw a softball, you first need to distinguish which hand you are going to throw the ball with. Your dominant hand is the hand you write with and therefore will throw the ball with. If your dominant hand is your right hand, place the glove on your left hand. If the dominant hand is your left hand, place the glove on your right hand.

Step 2- Holding the Ball



Now, hold the ball in the hand you are throwing with. Turn the ball so that the seams form a "C" in front of you. You will place your index, middle, and ring fingertips across the seams along the top of the "C". Your thumb will be gripping the seams on the bottom of the ball for support. The pinkie is not needed to throw the ball so just leave your pinkie where you feel comfortable. Make sure the ball is being held just by your fingertips, not by the palm of your hand.

Step 3- Body Stance



In order to throw the ball, you must be in a stance that is perpendicular to the target you are throwing at. To attain this stance, have your legs shoulder width apart. The instep of your back foot should be facing the target, and your front foot will be lined up with your back foot.

Step 4- Pointing the Glove



Now as you stay in that stance, point the hand with the glove on it toward the target. This will allow for a more accurate throw.

Step 5- Throwing the Ball



Bring the arm with the ball back by your head. Your palm should be facing away from you. Make sure your elbow makes a 90-degree angle with your upper arm and your forearm is perpendicular to the ground.

Step 6- Throwing



Aspen Photo / Shutterstock.com

Now it is time to actually throw the ball. Bring your arm with the ball forward (toward the target) with momentum. Release the ball when it passes by your head. When you release, make sure you also transfer your body weight to your front foot. After your weight is transferred, pull your glove into your body by bending your elbow and pulling it into your side, while tucking the glove into your chest.

HITTING

To have an effective swing in softball, you need to work on integrating all the component parts of the swing. You need to ensure you have a good grip and stance, and that you move through the swing smoothly. Position your body correctly and keep your eye on the ball as it approaches you.

Part 1: Getting Your Stance and Grip Right

Adjust your stance. To get a nice swing, you first need to have the right stance. You should position yourself in the middle of the batter's box to ensure that you can take a swing at anything in the strike zone. Place your feet parallel to the direction that home plate is pointing towards, and shoulder-width apart. Bend your knees a little, and try to distribute your weight evenly on the balls of your feet.

Check your grip. Take hold of your bat and grip it in both hands. If you are right-handed, the right hand is the top hand and the left hand the bottom hand. It is reversed for left-handers. The hands should be placed against each other, with the middle knuckles (or door-knocking knuckles) in a straight line. Grip the bat fairly loosely, and keep some flexibility in your wrists.

- Hold the bat a couple of inches up from the knob at the end of the bat.
- If the bat seems a little long, heavy, or hard to handle, choke your hands up the handle an inch or two.
- Choking up can increase the amount of control you have as you swing, but will generally mean you hit with less power.

Position your hands and arms correctly. When your grip and stance are set, you are almost ready to swing. First, check your hand position. Don't copy and paste! As you hold the bat, your hands should be quite close to your body, around three or four inches in front of your chest. Ensure your elbows are down and your shoulders are relaxed and free of tension.

- Then move your hands out a little, so they are around five to seven inches in front of your chest.
- Point the bat upwards, and angle it towards you slightly as you turn your head to face the pitcher.

Part 2: Swinging the Bat

Make a small forward movement. Now you are in position and are awaiting the pitch. Once you see the pitcher moving towards the release, you need to make a small movement forward with your front foot. This is known as the stride, or the toe tap, and helps you get forward momentum into your swing. Step your front foot (left if you are a right hander) forward a few inches, and place it at an approximate 45-degree angle to the pitcher.

- The amount you step forward will generally depend on how tall you are. The taller you are, the longer your stride is likely to be.
- For most people your stride will be between 2 – 8 inches. Make sure it is a small and fast movement.
- As you make this movement your front hip and shoulder may turn in a little. Try to keep your hips parallel and your front shoulder slightly lower than your back shoulder.

Start your swing. You should start your swing with a movement in your hips and legs, before moving your hands and shoulders. As the ball approaches, push off the ball of your back foot and begin to rotate the hips forward, while keeping them parallel to the ground. Drive your front shoulder towards the ball, but try to keep a good bend in both your elbows. As you get closer to contact your top hand will begin to rotate. When you make contact, your top palm will be close to facing upwards.

- Your hips should continue to rotate forwards as you swing and transfer the weight from your back foot to your front foot.

- As you swing you should try to keep the knob at the end of the bat's handle inside of the path of the ball.
- Doing this will help you to keep a slight bend in your elbows as you move through the swing.
- Make sure you keep your head and eyes level and still as you move through the swing.

Part 3: Contact

Make contact with the ball. Lead with your elbow, not your hands, as you swing your bat towards the pitch. For a pitch down the middle you should be aiming to make contact with the ball directly in front of your front hip. At the point of contact, both arms should be bent at angles close to 90 degrees, but by the time you have driven the bat through the ball, both arms should be fully extended.

- If you make contact when your arms are already fully extended, you will not get the kind of power you would if you make contact when you have a slight bend in your elbow and wrist.
- When you make contact, your top palm should be facing directly up to the sky. The palm on your bottom hand should be facing down to the ground.
- Make sure you keep your eye on the ball, watch it onto your bat, and hit through it on a level plane.

Follow through. The swing isn't finished when you have made contact with the ball. The follow through is an essential element in a great softball swing. Straight after you make contact, your top hand will take over from your bottom hand as you roll your wrists through the swing. Keep your swing going through your arms so that your hands finish high above and behind your head, and your chest is angled slightly upwards towards the sky.

- When you finish your swing, your front foot should be open at a 45-degree angle to the pitcher.
- Your front leg should be locked, and your back leg bent as the weight is shifted back.
- Keep your eyes focused on where you made contact with the ball.

CATCHING THE BALL

Softball Catching Progression For Young Players

Younger kids the first time they start catching the ball, they are catching glove down, and using their body — or their face! — to make the catch, and all of the sudden, softball doesn't seem like much fun anymore.

But we can't immediately try to train them to catch glove up either, or else they try to catch everything glove up. And when they try to catch low, they are going to miss and the ball goes in the dirt. And all of the sudden, softball doesn't seem like much fun anymore.

Young players need to learn that any catch above the waist is made glove up, and any catch below the waist is glove down. Your job as a coach is to progress them through that learning curve of knowing when to turn the glove over to make that catch. Here are 2 great softball catching drills to help you do that!

Glove Positioning Drill

This is a simple way for you to begin to teach the softball catching progression to your players.

- Begin with the glove up high
- Bring the glove straight down in front of your body
- At about mid-stomach, it is going to feel “weird” in the wrist, and when it feels that way, this is when you flip the glove over.

Backhand or Catch In Front?

After your players are comfortable with turning the glove, you can move on to teaching them which catches should be made backhand and which should be caught in front of you.

- Begin with your glove up high
- Bring the glove down the “glove side” of your body in a circle, with your arm extended the entire time
- Continue down and across your legs, and as soon as it feels “weird”, you flip the glove over, and any catch from the point on continuing the circle would be a backhand catch.

OTHER PRACTICE DRILLS

Some fun, additional practice drills you may want to try. The more fun competitions you can create with drills the more likely the girls will have fun trying to “win” and not realize they are learning. Of course, try to keep the focus on the game and not who actually wins (you can mix up the teams after each round).

- Play a game of “tag” but using the base path (make sure they run the bases correctly). Advanced game: have the tagger hold a ball to make the tag.
- Start the girls on the bench and call out positions (or post a lineup card) and have them “take the field”.
- Relay Race: even teams at Home & 2nd Base and they race around the bases (Team at 2nd runs to Home and the team at Home runs to 2nd). When a girl touches 1st (or 3rd) base, the next girl goes. First team to finish wins.
- Water Bottle Toss: place a water bottle on top of a ball bucket on home plate. Have even teams at infield positions (one girl at a time). Roll a ball and object is to field it cleanly and throw it to knock the water bottle off the bucket. Start out close and move further away each round.
- Use a stopwatch or timer and time each girl as she runs around the bases. Start at home and player must touch all 3 bases and home plate to finish. Make it harder: have the runner yell the base as she touches it. Advanced: have player swing the bat to start (this is helpful to address any bat throwing at the swing).
- Double Tee: position 2 batting tees about 3 feet apart (in front of each other) and set up a ball on each. The goal is to hit off the first tee and knock the ball off the second tee with the batted ball. The object here is teaching to hit the ball straight up the middle and in a line drive.
- Softball is difficult to find on TV (although most college sports channels and ESPNU will televise games) but have them watch some of a baseball or softball game on TV and next practice ask each girl one thing she learned.
- Have the girls meet as a team and watch our SBHS girls play. Home games are at Smith School. Remind them that every one of them started out in Kindergarten just like them and look at them now.
- Emphasize practice at home. Have a catch with Mom or Dad or a friend. If team practice is the only softball they do, they won’t improve.

ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT

The Program has lots of additional equipment and games to use should you need anything. Some fun activities to do include:

- Whiffle Bats.
- String Tee. It’s a tee but with a stringed ball to hit so no chasing after balls.
- Kick Balls.
- Velcro Catch Paddles & Balls.
- Frisbees.