

How To Set A Defensive Lineup

There is an old saying that says good softball teams are “strong up the middle.”

That saying is as true today as it was 50 years ago – in other words, when building your team’s defensive lineup you need to start in the middle and work your way out.

In this report, we are going to discuss some defensive concepts and reveal qualities that you should look for when selecting your players for defensive positions.

So let’s get started!

The Middle Positions

Catcher

A defense that is strong up the middle starts with a good catcher. This player is basically the leader of your defense. She should be skilled with the glove, have a strong arm (for throws to second) and should be vocal and confident. This player should be a team leader who is not afraid to tell pitchers how it is and to use their unique vantage point on the field to make sure fielders are in the right positions for certain hitters.

Pitcher

Besides having a good arm, pitchers must also be good with the glove as they will be required (particularly in youth softball) to field a lot of choppers and soft hits. The main criteria when choosing a pitcher should still be their arm – the ability to pitch with velocity and control – but their fielding skills should be considered as well. A poor fielding pitcher can seriously damage the effectiveness of your defense.

Second Base

Here you are looking for a player who is a good fielder but maybe doesn’t have as strong an arm as your shortstop and third baseman. Second basemen should be quick on their feet and nimble around second base.

Shortstop

This position should be manned by your best infielder. Your shortstop should be good on all ground balls, including using her backhand, and should have a strong throwing arm for balls hit deep in the hole. Generally, when selecting your shortstop you should look for your most athletic player.

Center Field

This position is a good spot for your next most athletic player after your shortstop. Your centerfielder needs to be fast with a good throwing arm. She must also be able to accurately judge fly balls and have good softball knowledge and instincts as they will be required to make fast decisions and instinctively know where to throw the ball when baserunners are trying to advance.

Other Fielding Positions

First Base

This player needs to excel at catching the softball. First basemen are also typically among a team's taller players – this extra size aids them in stretching and reaching for throws to the bag.

Third Base

Your third baseman needs to be good with the glove and have a strong throwing arm. Third base isn't called "the hot corner" for nothing. This position can be called upon to field some very hard hit balls. For that reason, your third baseman needs to have fast hands and good confidence in their fielding skills.

Left Field

In youth softball this position tends to see more fly balls than right field so should be manned by your second best fielding outfielder (after the center fielder).

Right Field

This position is typically thought of as the best position for developing fielders. In more advanced youth leagues, this player needs to have a very strong arm that will allow her to make hard, accurate throws to second, third and home.

Defensive Concepts

1. Don't be afraid to try players at multiple positions.

Youth softball should be about learning and having fun. By trying players at different positions you will enable them to see what they like best and where they feel most comfortable. Playing different positions can also increase their understanding of the game and improve their play at a totally different position.

2. Good defenders know their position AND their responsibilities.

Don't assume your players know what to do. You should go over the responsibilities of each defensive position with the player. For example, they should know when to cover a base and where to throw the ball when runners are advancing.

3. Avoiding the **BIG** Inning

In youth softball, there is a tendency for teams to “fall apart” defensively in at least one inning out of every game. Here are some tips to avoid giving up a Big Inning and increasing your chances of losing:

- Have your team focus on getting that first out – with one out the offense becomes limited and is typically forced into playing “station to station” softball
- Limit the number of walks your pitcher issues! Emphasize throwing strikes instead of trying to increase velocity. Walking runners is one of the easiest ways to give up a big inning.
- Get your players to refocus after two outs. Two-out rallies can be momentum – and game – killers.
- Teach your players to never throw “behind the runner.” They should always throw to the base in front of the runner.

- Teach your first baseman how to field balls in the dirt – as well as wide and high throws.
- Make sure pitchers sprint to cover first base on balls hit to the right side.
- Make sure outfielders understand that the center fielder is captain. Also stress outfield communication – every fly ball should be called by a fielder.
- Teach players to get into ready position and to take “prep steps” (two steps in) on each pitch to improve their readiness.

Defensive Positioning for T-ball, Machine Pitch, Coach Pitch – All Players on the Field

If you are in a youth league that requires all players to be on the field for defense here are some strategies that you can use to ensure players have fun and learn.

- Divide the field into three zones and put a coach or parent in each zone. Zone 1 would be the right side (first base) – positions might include first base, player near first base, right field and right center field, etc. Identify a player who will cover first base on a hit and review their responsibilities at the beginning of the inning.

Zone 2 would be up the middle (second base) – positions might include pitcher (you could have two pitchers - one on each side of the mound), second base, shortstop, centerfield, etc.

Zone 3 would be the left side (third base) – positions could include third base, player near third base, left field, left center field, etc.

Rotate players in each zone after each batter. For example, the player on first base would move to a position off first and everybody else would change positions as well. Also, have players rotate zones each inning.

- You should also teach players the ready position and the coaches in each zone should call out “ready” and have the players get in the ready position with each pitch or swing – this will help them stay attentive during the game.