



COACHES GUIDE

Suggested Benchmarks for Players 6U-12U

PGSA Board of Directors



Plainedge Girls Softball Association

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PGSA Mission Statement

The PGSA is setting out to provide a competitive but developmental approach to teaching all the girls of the PGSA the game of Fastpitch Softball. The PGSA is looking to provide an alternative to extensive travel and select team programs, which set the bar too high for most kids playing in the 6U-12U divisions. These environments, which at the price of both time and money, exclude many kids who just want to play.

Our mission at the PGSA is simple, teach our players the game the right way in a fun, safe environment. As an organization, we aim to train all our players to respect the opposition, both players and coaches, along with the umpires. Teaching our players, the correct, fundamental way to play softball starts at practice. The PGSA's goal is to teach proper technique program wide and have a great deal of fun while doing it. The following packet is designed to assist our coaches at the PGSA in reaching these goals.

As coaches, we preach to all players to practice to better their skills. Coaches should take the same approach. As coaches, we should strive to improve our own skills and knowledge of the game. Taking a little extra time to plan and organize practices will lead to increased repetition for your players. Time determines how much your players and teams grow. Its best to create an effective practice plan ahead of time and work towards executing it. The internet is a powerful tool for obtaining drills, practice concepts, coaching methods and strategies for success. The newly created PGSA website can also be used as a source for recommended coaching drills, methods and strategies. Please visit our website @ plainedgegirlssoftball@gmail.com and familiarize yourself with the site. We, the PGSA Board, encourage each coach to take some time to research and improve your coaching skills. This will begin the domino effect that will ultimately trickle down creating stronger coaches, players and ultimately a stronger league.



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INTRODUCTION

Starting at 6U and finishing at the 12U level, we aim to provide benchmarks that players should work towards throughout each season. These benchmarks will be built upon one another to prepare our players for the competitive 10U/12U divisions and beyond. This coaching guild aims to better equip our coaches at the PGSA on what benchmarks, players at each level, should strive to achieve, each level building on the prior. We are offering coaches guidelines on how to approach these goals and our goal is to implement them program wide. If we, as an organization, can all work together towards these common, fundamental goals, which strive towards the individual player's growth and success, this in turn will lead to team success. Each girl's love and desire to play Fastpitch Softball will greatly increase. Success in this endeavor means we, as an organization, have successfully accomplished our jobs as volunteer coaches.

This coaching packet contains suggestions on what fundamentals coaches should strive to achieve from their players at each level, 6U-12U. We understand that books have been written on the elements touched upon in this packet. Regardless of what level you coach, please take the time and read each section as each set of benchmarks leads to the next level. Any drill, guideline or benchmark we've presented can be applied to any and all players as their individual skill sets increase. Also, included in this packet, you will find the Umpire Interaction Policy of the PGSA along with the Parent Interaction Policy with Umpires. In addition, for the coaches, we included tips on how to deal with parents that promotes and sustains the continued positive relationships the PGSA has built with our community.

The PGSA Board is introducing a player evaluation form that is included in the back of this packet. We are asking that all managers, after each season, complete this form. This form is designed to rate individual players on an assortment of skills. This will allow us to better create well balanced teams moving forward in future seasons. The form will be kept confidential and we ask that the managers be as objective and honest as possible.



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6U

At the 6U level, it is all about basics and keeping the players engaged. The best formula to keeping young players engaged at practice is to separate into two groups for a substantial portion of the practice. Two smaller groups provide each player with more repetitions, increases activity and participation. Regardless of what the focus of a particular practice is, always remember to teach each player the “why” before teaching the “how.” Once the “why” is covered (i.e. throwing or fielding) in this manner, demonstrate the skill. Whether your teaching proper hitting technique, fielding, throwing etc., younger players tend to learn more by seeing through demonstration and repetition rather than explanation. It is best to keep the “why” short and concise to keep the player’s attention. Keeping the demonstrated skills simple and focused on basics is the key to the player’s ability to learn, retain and their overall success.

Teaching the concepts of how to hustle and what it is, is a big part of the game that often goes understated or even forgotten. Players should be taught and later expected to run on and off the field, run on the base paths etc. in games, along with constant hustle in all phases of practice. Successfully instilling the hustle mentality now, will stay with the player for a lifetime. Finally, and most importantly, creating a fun comfortable environment for our players to learn and grow is always priority one, regardless of the level. High energy, enthusiastic praise for success, and a reassuring, understanding, nurturing attitude when the player is having difficulty or comes up short.

HITTING:

- Teaching the players how to consistently get into the batter’s box with every at bat.
 - o Starting with the “back” foot first, followed by stepping into the box with “front” foot that is in line with the front corner of home plate.
- Players should have an athletic stance, knees slightly bent, a little more than shoulder width apart.
- Start the hitting motion by leaning back or “loading” their lower body slightly on the back foot to promote a short, rotational swing working towards the “squish the bug” movement with the back foot.
 - o Consistently remind players to keep head/eyes on ball at all time through the entire swing.
 - Demonstrate what a player cannot see, they cannot hit.
 - o Teach the player to get hands through the strike zone moving forward towards the ball/tee as the first movement of the player’s hands. Player’s at this age tend to move the hands back first, then come forward towards the tee.
- At this level, it is considered counterproductive to try to introduce or teach further any type of stride towards the pitcher or tee with the batter’s front foot.



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- Focusing on the basics of the swing, body and hand movement mentioned above introduces the muscle memory necessary for batters to progress properly as they mature.

FIELDING:

- The key to success when teaching proper fielding fundamentals at this level is building each players' confidence while decreasing their fear of the softball.
 - o Softly hitting ground balls to start, then steadily increasing the velocity of the ground ball is vital to the player's success and increasing confidence.
- Softball ready position:
 - o Athletic, well balanced stance, feet should be shoulder width apart with a slight bend at the knees. Throwing hand and glove hand extended in front of a player's body just below the waist.
 - o Teaching players how to aggressively charge a ground ball, following it and seeing the ball into their glove, fielding with both hands, "Alligator Mouth" technique, followed by setting themselves into a throwing position.
- POP-UPS:
 - o Coaches should start teaching fundamentals of catching pop-ups/fly balls by using a tennis ball at first and players not wearing gloves.
 - Standing 10 Ft. from the players, gently throw a pop-up, promoting the use of two hands to catch the ball over their head.
 - As the player's progress, change to a softy softball and add gloves into the mix.
 - Using tennis ball followed by the softy softballs at first will give the players time to get accustomed to judging the ball while greatly limiting the chance of harm.
 - As the player progress's further, introduce game balls, distance and some height.
 - As the season progresses, separate players into two groups, stronger players and weaker players using this technique. This allows players to progress at their own pace without holding back stronger players.



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THROWING:

- Coaches should promote proper throwing technique by keeping it simple.
 - o Step towards and point to the target with glove hand, throwing the ball and following through, while exaggerating the follow through by pointing to the target with the throwing hand after release.
- Simply have players pair up to have a catch with one another at the beginning of each practice.
 - o It is vital to teach each player to provide a target for players to throw to.
 - Targets should be the glove hand extended out even with the top of a player's shoulder.
 - Coaches should increase distance to build arm strength as the season progresses.
 - o Coaches must promote the importance of accurate throwing. Players should focus on successfully throwing the ball back and forth to their partner.
 - Making this a game by seeing how many times in a row each pair can successfully make an accurate throw and catch the ball adds enjoyment for the players and keeps them focused on the task at hand.

These 3 fundamental skills of hitting, fielding and throwing should be the focal point of practice, as each season begins, taking at least half the practice, if not all. Using different drills to promote these techniques is vital to keeping the players engaged as the amount of practices held increase. As the season progresses and players become more proficient at these basic skills, coaches should only then introduce basic infield plays to 1st base and so on. At this point, coaches also start to teach the basic rules of the game and build each player's understanding of the positions in the field.

Ending each practice with a relay race, timing player's base running around the bases or "Catch the Rabbit" is always a positive and productive way to teach base running and simple base rounding techniques without putting too much emphasis on it during a practice. Teaching the players these skills without drawing attention to it effectively gives the coaches a reference point later down the road to teach these skills, whether it be later in your season or at the next level. Most importantly, any type of race is enjoyable for the players at this age and will have them leaving practice looking forward to the next one.



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8U

At the 8U level, coaches should reinforce the baselines and fundamentals covered in the 6U section of this packet in addition to what will be introduced in the following section. Repeatedly cover the fundamentals such as proper throwing, fielding and hitting techniques. At 8U, keeping the players engaged and attentive is of the utmost importance. Breaking the team into two smaller groups to practice the fundamental drills is essential to reinforcing the players already established skill sets. More importantly, this gives the individual player more repetitions and involvement in practice.

Keep in mind, 8U is the doorstep to the competitive divisions of Fastpitch Softball. Coaches should begin to focus on team defense, the positions in the field and begin to instill how to play softball as a team. This includes, but not limited to, the players beginning to learn the basics of positional responsibility along with basic base running techniques. It is also vital for coaches to stress the importance of player communication with one another on and off the field. An old softball adage is, “a quiet softball team is an unsuccessful one.” Teaching communication not only includes players understanding where the play is going to be made, but supporting each other, whether it be at bat, in the field or eventually on the pitcher’s mound. Along those same lines, constant hustle in all phases of the game and practice should be a top priority for the coaching staff. Coaches should also focus on furthering each player’s hitting and throwing skills.

Finally, and most importantly, creating a fun comfortable environment for our players to learn and grow is always priority one, regardless what level. High energy, enthusiastic praise for success, and a reassuring, understanding, nurturing attitude when the player is having difficulty or comes up short. Employing goal orientated drills provides instant gratification, while improvement and successes mount.

FIELDING: Team Oriented

- On any batted ball, teaching MOVEMENT of all defensive players (regardless if players are on base) is the centerpiece of defensive instruction.
 - o Every player beginning to learn and understand positional responsibility on every ball put in play.
 - 3B covering 3rd, SS/2B covering 2nd, 1B covering 1st etc.
 - Players learning and understanding the concepts of backing up, whether it is on a throw, batted ball etc.
 - RF backing up throws to 1B, LF backing up throws to 3B, RC/LC backing up throws to 2B
 - Outfield backing each other up on balls in play to the outfield.
 - Outfielders backing up balls in play within the infield



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- Infielders/Outfielders understanding the basic concepts of hitting the “cut off “on balls hit to the outfield.
- Improve each player’s understanding regarding where and how to make outs.
 - o Understanding the difference between a force out, regardless of what base and when players need to make a tag.
 - Teaching players how to properly tag a runner out.
 - Both hands on the ball, tagging the opposing player either on the foot if sliding or the chest if running, emphasizing not to tag the opposition above the shoulders.
- The overall goal at the 8U level is to ultimately lay the ground work for skills needed for an easier transition to the 10U level. 8U is a difficult division to coach, players often have difficulty retaining the information mentioned above. Constant drills at practice is the key to success.
 - o 6 vs 6 game: (pitching machine or coach pitch)
 - 4 infielders and 2 outfielders.
 - The other team is at bat.
 - All 6 players hit in succession (regardless of outcome of the at bat) then, switch.
 - Each time a team takes the field, change the players in each position.
 - This game allows players to react to game situations naturally as they happen and offers coaches a variety of coaching points to reference to in real time.
 - o Star Drill (see page 12) is an effective drill that promotes player communication with one another and improves fielding and throwing skills.

BASERUNNING:

- Again, coaches should stress the importance of hustling out of the batter’s box regardless of where the ball is put in play.
- Proper technique on how to run on the base paths.
 - o Show players how to hustle down the 1B line and properly run through the 1B bag.
 - o Proper base rounding technique.
 - Players touching the bottom left corner of each base while rounding.
 - Always keeping their head up, always aware of where the ball is at all times.
 - Listening to the base coach’s direction of whether to advance or not.
 - o Taking a proper stance while standing on the bases.



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- See Fig 1 for proper lead-off position, regardless of what base a player is on.



○ Fig 1 "Rocker Lead-off Position"

- Coaches should allot time to teach the elements of fundamental sliding techniques.
 - Players should start the slide 4-5 strides from the base.
 - Shift weight to left side of the body.
 - Bend the left knee, making the shape of a "4" by tucking left leg under the right
 - Fall or drop with weight on a player's backside while leaning back to finish the slide.
 - Coaches can hold a long broom stick at first to give players something to grab on to so that coaches can assist in the beginning stages of the drill.
 - Coaches can also request mats used by the cheerleaders that can be used to pad the impact at first, to allow players to get accustomed to the proper technique of sliding.
 - Above is just a quick synopsis on the fundamentals of sliding. We suggest coaches google proper sliding techniques to further advance their own knowledge and apply it to their practices.



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HITTING:

- Please review the 6U section of this packet and build upon the fundamentals covered.
 - o Consistently entering the batter's box in the same manner.
 - o Stress the importance of taking the same stance while at bat and having players reset their bodies/stance after every swing.

These cannot be stressed enough. Teaching players to take the same stance promotes the individual players muscle memory, which is paramount to the player's advancement.

- Advance the player's understanding and ability to load their lower body to the 60%/40% ratio on back leg before each pitch.
- Train players to have a short rotational swing, hands leading the body, developing a unison motion with waist/hips to generate power.
 - o Stress the importance of the hands getting through the zone moving forward first.
 - Players tend to move hands back as the first movement, this is the coaches biggest challenge to eliminate.
 - o At this level, it is at the coach's discretion on a player by player basis whether to introduce a short stride towards the pitching machine/pitcher to begin swing.
 - If a player is not proficient in loading before the pitch or getting their hands to lead the body through the swing, the short stride is NOT recommended.
 - o As always, train players to track the ball all the way through the process of the swing, hands moving forward first will naturally allow the players body to keep their head/eyes on the ball.
- Developing the hitters muscle memory begins to take shape at this age group.
 - o Repetition and reinforcement of proper technique is essential to each player's development at this age. Bad habits developed now will be harder to break down the road as the player matures.
 - Splitting teams in half and doing soft toss and tee drills using hitting nets allows for more repetitions per player and more coach instruction will smaller groups. It is more effective for coaches to communicate with a group of 5/6 players when teaching mechanics rather than an entire team.
 - All players on deck should be standing off to the side acting as if they were hitting to practice their own swing. Standing around, doing nothing leads to unorganized and unproductive practices.



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- When coaches hold batting practice, it is essential for the coach to pitch at the same level/height the player will see in a game. Taller coaches should take a knee while throwing during batting practice to give the vantage point players will see in a game.

THROWING:

- Please review the 6U section of this packet and build upon the fundamentals covered.
- Introduce the proper power “L” angle of the throwing arm with hand holding ball facing away from player’s head, followed by the natural follow through and step towards the target.
 - Teach proper technique of tucking the glove arm into the midsection as player throws the ball. See Fig 2 Below.



Fig 2 Power “L” arm angle

- Coaches should emphasize the importance of accurate throws, NOT hard throws. Velocity will always follow accuracy. Coaches should pair players up to have a catch that focuses on simply and successfully throwing back and forth to one another, emphasizing hitting the target.



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***** STAR DRILL** (Used especially with younger teams as they play multiple positions and older teams for conditioning, communication and promotes versatility around the diamond working on different aspects of fielding no matter what position they specialize in)

*Drill is set up with at least two players at shortstop, then one at 1st base, second base, third base and home. (If you only have 5 players in the station, run through the drill about 4 times, then rotate to the next position. If you have 6 or more players, players will follow their throw to each base. In the event of 4 players for any reason, coach will serve as Catcher while players rotate around field, with the guy at second going to SS after making throw home) Coaches must make sure they have a couple of baseballs on hand in case of an overthrow. Let the players know that in the event of an overthrow that gets by the back-up man, immediately look to coach for another ball to keep the drill crisp.

***Execution of Drill:**

- Coach hits Ground ball to SS
- SS fields and throws to 1st
- 1st gets force out at first and throws to third.
- 3rd baseman makes tag play at base while straddling base, squares shoulders immediately to second base, and makes strong throw to 2nd baseman's chest.
- 2nd baseman straddles the base and makes quick transfer throw Home (Uses legs if younger)
- Catcher will set up in front of home plate on the third base side, catch the throw and apply tag dropping right knee blocking the plate. (Catcher will then go to SS going around the third baseman so that the coach can hit the next ball to the SS waiting so the drill stays crisp)
 - *Players will follow their throws to the next base if enough players. If not enough, follow above's rules.
 - *When receiving throws offline, it is important that the fielder receiving the throw gets off the base to save the ball from going out of play.
 - *If multiple players at bases, the player waiting will be always backing up the throw. If ball gets passed the back up man, then coach will throw a new ball to the fielder to keep the drill going.



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10U

Welcome to the first level of truly competitive Fastpitch softball. For coaches who have never coached at this level, prepare yourself for a completely new environment of game play. Setting the difference in game play and the introduction of player pitching aside for a moment. At times, although rare, you will encounter less than friendly opposing coaching staffs, opposing parents and umpires. There are coaches who will play to win and not be shy about the manner in which they achieve that victory. You and your players may be faced with vocal parents and coaching staffs that will have no care or concern for the words they use nor how it effects your players. The friendly confines of the instructional environment of 8U are behind you during game play. This new environment in conjunction with the new competitive game play, will influence your players. As a coach, anticipating this and being ready to combat this challenge can prove to be difficult.

Never forget, at the PGSA, we look to sustain the coaching approach mentioned earlier in this packet. Coaches should always create a fun, comfortable environment for our players to learn and grow, regardless of the level. High energy, enthusiastic praise for success, and a reassuring, understanding, nurturing attitude when the player is having difficulty or comes up short. Coaches who successfully establish a fun, stress-free environment have success more often than not. Understand that mistakes will happen, laughing while teaching is a great tactic to combat any nerves the players will likely have. It takes some players time to adjust to this environment, especially pitchers, while others will adjust seamlessly. From the 1st practice to the last game, the message to the players should always be to have fun, learn from any mistakes made and truly enjoy playing on a team with friends. Constantly keeping the atmosphere light is the environment the coaching staff is directly responsible for, regardless the nature of the opposition. Creating this atmosphere will assist every coach to alleviate most of the pressure the players inevitably put on themselves.

The 10U level has a drastic difference in game play. 10U introduces players to stealing bases, which the players love and look forward to, along with increased outfield and catcher involvement. Finally, and most importantly, the true introduction of player pitching. Please review the 8U section of this packet and build upon the fundamentals established and covered.

FIELDING: Infield:

- To adequately prepare players for both infield and outfield, coaches should split teams in half, one group working on infield drills and the other group doing outfield drills, this gives each player more repetitions and increases player involvement and coach instruction.
- Positional responsibility should be the focal point of each defensive practice.
 - Players are softball ready before every pitch.
 - Aggressively charging ground balls, fielding with two hands followed by transitioning into the proper throwing position.
 - Focus on accurate throws
 - SS/2B should begin to understand who covers 2B on a ground ball.



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- Understand the concepts and executing proper “cut off” responsibilities on balls hit to the outfield.
- The 3 Cone Drill is an effective, simple drill that teaches players how to aggressively charge a ground ball and quickly transition into the throwing motion.
 - Set 3 cones at any position in the field except 1B about 4-6 feet apart going towards home plate.
 - Players line up behind the farthest cone.
 - Coach hits a ground ball, the player starts at the ready position at the farthest cone, should charge ball and field by 2nd cone and pivot step and throw to 1st base by the last cone.
 - Although this drill is used to advance the players ability to charge, field and throw the ground ball, accurate throws should always be the focal point.
- At 10U, 1B aside from the pitcher, is one of the most important positions defensively. Having one of your best ball catchers is the cornerstone for defensive success.
 - Coaches should not put players at 1B who struggle to consistently catch the ball.
- Coaches should, as the season moves forward, start to get each player familiar with playing 2 positions in the infield and 2 positions in the outfield.
 - This strategy gives coaches flexibility on defensive alignments, keeping in mind all players get to play the infield and outfield each game.
 - This increases and hones in on each player’s specific skill set, allowing players to become comfortable with certain positions in the field along with gaining a greater understanding of positional responsibility.
- Coaches should stress the importance of on-field communication players should have with one another.
 - Team supporting the pitcher on every pitch.
 - Players communicating with one another on a live ball, communicating where the play should be made, given the game situation.
 - Star Drill (see page 12) is an effective drill that promotes player communication with one another and improves fielding and throwing skills.



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FIELDING: Outfield:

- It is a common misconception to hide weaker players in the outfield. This thought process is outdated.
- Coaches will still have to battle the player's fear of the fly ball or pop-up, please review the 8U section of this packet for some suggested drills to combat this during early season practices.
- Coaches should begin to teach players on how to take proper angles to cut off ground balls and fly balls hit to the outfield.
 - o Teaching players how to take proper angles on any hit ball is an extremely difficult task for any coach. Repetition with ground balls and fly balls is the best way to get players more proficient at this skill.
 - Coaches should deliberately hit balls away from players in practice repeatedly to increase the players' ability to judge the ball and ultimately make the play.
- The 3 Cone Drill (page 14) can also be applied to outfield practice using the same method, however coaches are to increase the distance between each cone to 8-12 feet apart.
 - o Outfielders should understand all back up assignments.
 - Corner outfielders backing up throws to 1B and 3B.
 - Center outfielders backing up throws to 2B on a ball hit within the infield and a catcher throw on a steal.
 - Understanding the concepts of hitting the infield cut off.
- Remember, there will be a lot of growing pains in the outfield. It is a lot of new information for players to digest. Repetition and constant drills is the best way to promote a player's development.
 - o Coach-hit simulated game:
 - Team takes defensive positions.
 - Coach hits, with two players as runners.
 - Coach hits balls to defense where he chooses. Introduce game situations such as a runner on 1B, no outs, runners at 1B and 3B with one out and so on.
 - Hit the ball where you want to so the defense is forced to react. Use results of the defensive play as a teaching point.
 - Once the team makes 3 outs, switch out the runners and rotate the defensive players to different positions.



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- Coaches should keep score each inning played to demonstrate how errors effect the game. This also gives new players to 10U a preview of the competitive nature of the game play.
 - o A “results oriented game” such as this one is very enjoyably for the players. It demonstrates how individuals contribute to the team.

BASERUNNING:

- At the 10U level, teams are allowed 2 steals per inning, no stealing home and base-runners cannot advance on a catcher's overthrow on a steal.
- Players should understand when to run through 1B on a hit ball and the when to round the base on a hit ball.
 - o Players should be taught to always watch the field of play while running the bases and never to turn their back to the ball when returning to a base.
 - o Coaches should teach the “Banana” angle when rounding a base.
 - Players start their turn 5-7 steps before the base, taking a banana shaped angle around each base, demonstrating by doing so, puts the player directly in the baseline of the next base.
 - Coaches can use mini cones to demonstrate the angle around a particular base and have players run to practice.
 - Coaches should demonstrate the proper technique of where the player should tag each base while rounding.
- Players should always be prepared to advance to the next base by using the “Rocker Lead-off Position”. (see Fig 1, page 9)
- Coaches should promote secondary leads.
 - o Once the pitch has passed the batter, players should take a secondary lead then return to the base once the pitcher has the ball back in the circle.
- Coaches should reinforce proper sliding technique covered in the 8U section of this packet.

CATCHING:

- Catching is one of the most vital positions on the softball field. It is important for coaches to quickly determine which player has the desire and ability to play catcher.
 - o It is best to train a minimum of two catchers due to the physical demands of the position.



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- Catching Stance:
 - Feet should be a little wider than shoulder width apart.
 - As catchers squat down into the catching position, the players should slightly lean forward so they stay on the balls of their feet.
 - Promote a balanced position with the throwing hand either behind their back or tucked behind the knee.
 - Blocking techniques
 - Catchers transition from the squat position to blocking position
 - Fall forward to knees, throwing hand behind glove between legs, chest slightly leaning forward so a blocked ball will tend to stay in front of the catcher. See Fig 3 below



- Fig 3 Blocking Technique
 - Catcher must understand the importance of communication, and they have the best view of the field and play in front of them. As a play develops, catchers should act as a “field general” and direct the play.
- Catcher throwing techniques (to 2nd base)
 - Catchers (right handed) should go from the squat position, up, right foot planted toes facing towards the 1st baseline, step forward with left foot while throwing to 2nd base.



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- Teach the quick movement: UP-PLANT RIGHT-LEFT-THROW, have catcher repeat motion over and over to get proper footwork down.

PITCHING:

- The Fastpitch motion is by far the most challenging technique to teach and learn in the game. First and foremost, put the fundamentals of the motion aside and always remind the pitchers to have FUN, relax and truly enjoy what they are doing. Pitchers tend to place unnecessary pressure on themselves and combating that is always a big challenge for any coach.
 - Coaches should always set time aside for players to get repetition at practice. Using Bullpen sessions on the side as well as pitching to live batters.
 - For players who have never pitched before, a simple 3 step method for teaching the windup to beginners can be found on page 19.

Hitting:

- Hitting at the 10U level is a continued progression covered in the 8U section of this packet.
 - With the introduction of live pitching, teaching players to track the ball from the pitcher's hand is the first step in a successful hitter's progression.
 - Advance the player's understanding and ability to load their lower body to the 60%/40% ratio on back leg before pitch.
 - Train players to have a short rotational swing, hands leading the body, developing a unison motion with waist/hips to generate power.
 - Stress the importance of the hands getting through the zone, moving forward first.
 - The overall goal for a hitter at this level is to mature to the point that they start to recognize and select good pitches to hit and lay off the bad pitches.
 - Hitting off a tee and short toss drills are always effective ways to advance a hitter's skills.
 - Holding batting practice vs. live pitching is all around a strong method for both the pitcher and hitter to advance their individual skills.
 - This offers the coaches an opportunity to sit back and evaluate their players during practice.
 - Coach pitched batting practice is also effective. Coaches should change velocity and location consistently to work the hitter's ability to become a selective hitter.
 - When coaches hold batting practice, it is essential for the coach to pitch at the same level/height the player will see in a game. Taller coaches should take a knee while throwing during batting practice giving the vantage point players will see in a game.



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TEACHING THE FASTPITCH WINDUP to 7/8 and 9/10 year olds

Here is a simple 3-STEP METHOD, for teaching the windup to beginners.

STEP ONE:

Players all **get down on one knee** (right knee down for right handers), facing about 10 feet away from the backstop boards. Spread them all out so they each have one section of fence to pitch at, all at once.

They each take their ball and swing their arm around and around in circles, in the direction of the fence, underhand. Get them all doing circles, then say "Roll it !" into the fence. This is a wrist snap drill, so after they can get it rolling on the ground, not pitching it up into the air, then tell them to "Flick it" or "Snap your Wrist" quicker. Same thing, rolling it, not up into the air.

Next they simply need to learn to Start with "presenting" the ball – putting their hands together, ball in the mitt, in front of their body.

Then, count "One, Two, Three", as you show them to swing arm once back.

Then around in the circle they already learned, and snap it on the ground, rolling it. Every time you pass the hip, you count.

One is the back swing,

Two is on the way forward and up, Three is the wrist snap and the release, right at the hip. This is a rhythm that will help them with their timing of their release point for the rest of their pitching career!

Now they are pitching, just without their legs.

STEP TWO:

Players all stand up now and will pitch the ball into the fence, low at the boards, so it bounces back to them.

HAVE THEM STAND WITH **BOTH FEET PARALLEL**, shoulder-width apart.

Then, just like on the ground, start with "Present", "and, swing, ONE, TWO, THREE". Count out loud for them as they all pitch in unison into the fence.

THEY DO NOT TAKE A STRIDE, OR A STEP. Just pitch standing up, using only the upper body.

Get their balls, feet and stance ready, then again, "Present,"

They will need to do this about 10 times.

STEP THREE:

To learn the step forward and the finish:

Start with feet parallel, as in step two, and just have them put their

LEFT FOOT BACK (like behind the pitching rubber). This is their actual "Present" stance, or Presentation, before starting the windup. It is a rule.

Now with their left foot back, it is very natural to just tell them to swing on ONE, then walk forward on two and pitch. Their left foot will naturally be the one to walk forward. So the cadence then is: "Present, and, Swing, Walk, Pitch!" Alternate saying, "One, Two, Three" and Swing, Walk, Pitch". They will need about 10 repetitions of this to have it down.

IT IS VERY, VERY, VERY, IMPORTANT after the release to **FINISH AND HOLD**. If the boards or the wall rebound the ball back to them as it should, they will be in a good ready position with feet wide and knees bent, to field the grounder coming back at them.

This **FINISH** position obviously helps them field the ball and be ready for line drives coming back at them. But more importantly, **for their pitching consistency, it creates BALANCE, and the same body position every pitch.**



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12U

Welcome to 12U Fastpitch Softball, truly “no holds barred” softball. At this point, players should be accustomed to the competitive nature of game play. It is getting the players accustomed to the new rules of 12U that will provide coaches a difficult challenge. There are no steal or run limits per inning, including stealing home, bunting, dropped 3rd strike and the overall increased pace of game play are just some of the challenges coaches face at this level. As always, despite these factors, coaches should always create a fun, comfortable environment for our players to learn and grow, regardless the level. High energy, enthusiastic praise for success, and a reassuring, understanding, nurturing attitude when the player is having difficulty or comes up short.

At practice, in addition to the fundamentals of hitting, throwing, base running and defense, this is the time when coaches should focus and build the softball IQ of each player individually, along with the collective team’s softball IQ. In the fast-paced game environments of 12U, a player’s situational awareness and their ability to make the “right” play, whether it is at bat, in the field defensively or on the base paths, is the next step in the player’s individual development. Coaches should determine each player’s limits and understanding of the game and put all players in the best possible position for individual success. Keep in mind, in no way does this mean players should be limited to playing one position in the field. All players in the PGSA should play the infield and outfield every game. Coaches must build on each player’s individual successes, and promote learning from, for lack of a better word, their failures. Achieving this balance will ultimately elevate each player’s and each team’s softball IQ.

PITCHING:

- Coaches must keep a delicate balance at practice, allowing time for pitchers to work on their craft, while keeping focus on the team as a whole. Coaches must give pitchers time at practice. However, coaches cannot be expected to take up valuable practice time attempting to teach some individual players how to pitch or to work on a pitcher’s mechanics.
 - o Coaches should allow player pitched batting practice.
 - This gives valuable work to both the pitcher and hitters.
 - o Established pitchers must understand the importance of fielding their position.
 - Pitchers should understand when they are responsible for covering 1st base.
 - Pitchers should possess the ability to field a bunt.
 - Most importantly, pitchers must understand how to control and keep base runners in check between pitches.
 - The importance of getting back to the pitcher’s circle to eliminate the runner’s ability to advance.
 - Pitcher’s should never turn their back to any base runner.



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HITTING:

- Hitting at the 12U level should be a continued progression of the benchmarks and drills covered in the 10U section of this packet. Please take time to review them.
 - Players should be taught the theory of a productive out, and such outs should be celebrated by the coaches and the team alike.
 - Players understanding, for example, that they moved a runner into scoring position with less than 2 outs is productive from a team perspective, this will increase a player's confidence.
 - Ability and importance of a sacrifice bunt.
 - Bunting
 - Bunting is a vital skill for softball players. Teaching this skill helps player's in multiple ways. It can help a struggling hitter benefit the team or even break out of a slump. It is also a great way to put pressure on the defense.
 - Teach the player not to "show" a bunt until the pitcher begins her windup.
 - (For right handed hitters), front leg opens up towards the pitcher taking a ½ step back towards 3B, along with the back leg and waist rotate towards pitcher with a slight bend at the knees.
 - Simultaneously with the body movement, players should slide top hand to the beginning of the "fat" part of the bat.
 - See Fig 4 below:



▪ Fig 4 Bunting Stance

- It is vital for players to understand not to try to hit the ball as it is pitched, rather meet the ball at the plate by extending their arms out towards the ball.
- Any pitch low in the zone, players should bend knees to attempt the bunt, not lower arms to reach the pitch.
- Players should be taught, any pitch above their shoulders should be taken.



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- Teach players how to properly pull the bat back towards their chest to take the pitch.
- As player's progress, teach how to properly angle the bat down the 1st or 3rd baseline for direction.
- (For left handed hitters), the movement of squaring the body is the same principle as right handed hitters, just reversed. For example, front leg opening up towards the 1st base line, etc.
- Coaches should line entire team up and go through the bunting motions as a team. Stress first the movement of the legs and body, followed by the hands.
 - Use a coach-pitched batting practice to have players practice bunting. Once players advance, coaches should allow live pitching for bunting practice.

FIELDING:

- At 12U, situational awareness and advanced positional responsibility should be the focal point of defensive practices. Please review the 10U section of this packet.
- It is vital for coaches to have players understand 2 positions in the infield and the outfield.
 - This strategy gives coaches flexibility on defensive alignments, keeping in mind all players get to play the infield and outfield each game.
 - This increases and hones in on each player's specific skills, allowing players to become comfortable with certain positions in the field, along with gaining a greater understanding of positional responsibility.
 - Infield ability to defend against the bunt.
 - Bunt down the 1st base line, the 1B charges while the 2B covers 1st.
 - Bunt down the 3rd base line, the 3B charges while the SS covers 3rd and the 2B covers 2nd.
 - Outfielders executing proper back up assignments.
 - Catchers understand their role as field general and directing the location of the play.
 - The importance of team communication should be drilled into the players. Every player should understand before the pitch is thrown, where the play is going to be made and then communicating with one another as the play happens.
 - Remember the old softball adage, "a quiet softball team is an unsuccessful one."
 - Players should understand the importance of getting the lead runner out when possible.
 - Defense should understand the concepts of tagging-up and the defensive assignments that come along with it.
 - 1B and 3B players understanding their cut off responsibilities for a ball thrown from the outfield to home plate.
 - Coaches should teach outfielders to get their bodies into a throwing position before they field the ball.
- Preparing for this advanced game play, understanding and technique is easily simulated at practice by playing simulated games.
 - Set a 10-player defense, with 2-3 players as a hitter and base runners. Coaches hit to the defense and create the game situation they want to practice, such as runners on 2nd and 3rd, 1 out etc.



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- Coaches should intentionally put pressure on the defense and force players to make decisions on the spot. This gives coaches reference to teach points and builds the players' knowledge necessary for success.

BASERUNNING:

- At the 12U level, having players that understand the ability to take an extra base or steal without being told to do so is an important aspect of a player's development. It is a challenge for a coach to instill this freedom into players.
 - This is difficult to teach. In most cases, players either have the instinct or they do not. Coaches must approach these base running situations by first understanding that giving this base running freedom to players is going to open the door to outs. THIS IS OK, once players are allowed to relax and be aggressive without a coach becoming upset, players will learn their own limits in practice and games, thus they will begin to make sound base running decisions on their own.
 - Players understand how to properly tag up.
 - See "Rocker Lead-Off Position" Fig 1 page 8.
 - When to steal home, and understand the importance of the secondary lead on all bases.



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UMPIRE INTERACTION POLICY OF PLAINEDGE GIRLS SOFTBALL ASSOCIATION ADOPTED 03/02/2017

Plainedge Girls Softball Association (PGSA) has a zero tolerance policy for behavior that is disrespectful, discourteous, or may in any way be construed as intimidating towards its umpires. The League must develop a strong Corps of Umpires and PGSA must develop a policy which supports our umpires and helps our team of umpires grow. With this policy, we hope to maintain an environment in PGSA that is both umpire friendly and that teaches our players to have respect for those in positions of authority. Violations of this policy will result in disciplinary actions including suspensions and potentially expulsion from PGSA. The type of disciplinary actions that will be applied to an incident will vary due to the nature of the interaction.

Players, coaches, and fans should understand that any critical behavior towards umpires (the kind that is all too common at professional sporting events and some other youth sports programs) will not be tolerated in PGSA. Basically, we want every coach and parent to treat the umpire the way they would want their son or daughter to be treated if it was their son or daughter that was the umpire. It is far more productive for a player, coach, or team to react to disadvantageous umpire calls by focusing on how to overcome those "bad breaks," rather than focusing on the umpire who is just doing the best that he/she can.

Coach Interaction with Umpires:

- You should recognize that your actions on the field are viewed by both parents and players on both teams and therefore they should set the highest standard of behavior. Any and all communications with umpires should be done in a respectful and deferential manner.**
- Coaches are also expected to exercise control of their players and parents. Failure to be proactive in this regard will also place coaches at disciplinary risk. We know that coaches can't guarantee parent and player behavior however, coaches are expected to take responsibility for proactively intervening early in situations that could put a player or parent at disciplinary risk.
- Judgment calls by an umpire can never be questioned.
- Interpretations of a rule may be questioned but only in a quiet and respectful way by requesting to approach the umpire. If something cannot be resolved on the field refer to the protest rules.
- Always speak directly to the umpire who made the call you are unclear of. You may not demand that an umpire seek help from another umpire. Umpires, are not allowed to "over rule" each other on the field. They may, at their discretion, consult with the other umpire for help. If they do consult with each other their final judgment will be accepted as the final ruling on the field.



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•Yelling across the field at an umpire over a call is not acceptable. Yelling can come across as hostile even when you don't intend for it to. Request a time out to approach the umpire and discuss the situation in a respectful and conversational manner.

Finally, there will be absolutely no touching, bumping, or other kind of physical or verbal abuse of any umpire. Any physical altercation with or verbal abuse of a league umpire will in most cases lead to severe disciplinary action.

Any comments regarding a PGSA umpire can be submitted by email to the Umpire in Chief and to the Division General Manager.

Parent Interaction with Umpires:

•Parents should enter every game with the understanding that at least one "bad" call will likely be made and that some of those calls could possibly influence the outcome of the game. Even in the professional umpire ranks, including the World Series, critical calls are missed, so they will more than likely be missed at the Little League level. Over the course of a season these calls tend to even out. There should be:

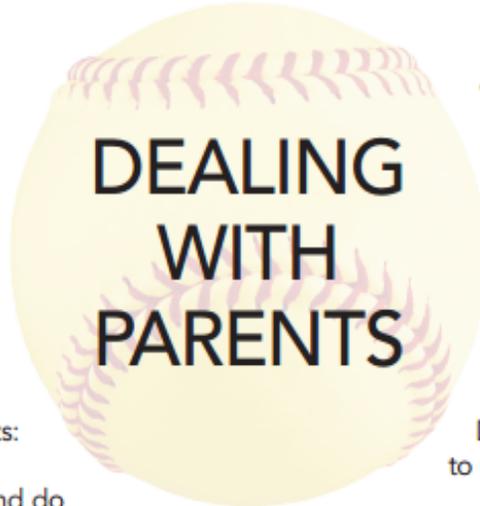
•No questioning or comments from spectator areas regarding umpire calls.

•No direct questioning by parents of umpires during or after games – questions should be directed to your coach at a later time.



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Coaching a youth league team is exciting and rewarding. But from time to time, you may experience difficulty with parents. Some may want their children to play more, or they might question your judgment as a coach. This is normal, so don't feel that you're alone if this happens. Here are a few thoughts to remember when dealing with parents:



- Know what your objectives are and do what you believe to be of most value to the team, not the parents.
- Encourage parental involvement. Always listen to their ideas and feelings. Remember, they're interested and concerned because it's their children who are involved.
- Express appreciation for their interest and concern. This will make them more open and at ease with you.
- No coach can please everyone. Don't try.
- Most importantly, be fair. If you treat all players as equals, you will gain their respect.
- Resist unfair pressure. You are the coach and it's your responsibility to make the final decision.
- Don't blame the players for their parents' actions. Try to maintain a fair attitude.
- Make certain all parents know your ground rules. Have your rules, regulations, philosophy, practice dates and times, etc. printed and distributed to all parents. If necessary, have a parent meeting before the season begins to discuss your operating procedures.

- Be consistent! If you change a rule or philosophy during the season, you may be in for trouble. If you do change something, make sure the parents are informed as soon as possible.

- Handle any confrontation one-on-one and not in a crowd situation. Don't be defensive.

Don't argue with parents. Listen to their views and be thankful.

- Don't discuss individual players with other parents. The grapevine will hang you every time.

- Ask parents not to criticize their children during a practice or game. Don't let your players be humiliated, even by their own parents. Explain that you as the coach must be given complete control of your team when they are on your "turf."

- Parents must accept the fact that umpires, coaches and other league officials are volunteers and should not be subjected to public criticism.

Always remember that you will be dealing with children and parents with different backgrounds and ideals. One of your main challenges as a coach is to deal with these differences in a positive manner so the team's season will be an exciting and enjoyable experience for all.



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PGSA Season Ratings Form:

Unrated Players Rating Sheet

Ratings Points	Designation
1	Poor
2-4	Average
5-7	Above Average
8-9	Superior
10	Best in League

**** IMPORTANT! **** Remember to properly indicate whether the player is a Pitcher (P) or a Catcher (C) in the Pitcher/Catcher column, and also make sure to properly class them as A, B or C in the P/C Class column.

Player Name	Grade	Pitcher Catcher	P/C Class	All Star	Games Played	Fielding	Throwing	Hitting	Base Running	Overall Knowledge	Total Score	GM's Score	Current Rating
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PGSA CONCUSSION GUIDELINES

As a manager / coach of PGSA, it is important that you recognize the signs of a possible concussion and handle it in an appropriate manner. Please familiarize yourself with the information below in the event one of your players is hurt and has a possible concussion.

NOTE: ** All potential incidents must be reported to a member of the Board of Directors by the Manager or Coach.

HOW CAN I SPOT A POSSIBLE CONCUSSION?

Athletes who show or report one or more of the signs and symptoms listed below— or simply say they just “don’t feel right” after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body—may have a concussion or other serious brain injury.

SIGNS OBSERVED BY COACHES OR PARENTS:

- Appears dazed or stunned
- Forgets an instruction, is confused about an assignment or position, or is unsure of the game, score, or opponent
- Moves clumsily
- Answers questions slowly
- Loses consciousness (even briefly)
- Shows mood, behavior, or personality changes
- Can’t recall events prior to or after a hit or fall.

SYMPTOMS REPORTED BY ATHLETES:

- Headache or “pressure” in head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Balance problems, dizziness or double / blurry vision
- Bothered by light or noise
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy
- Confusion, or concentration/ memory problems
- Just not “feeling right”, or “feeling down”.

NOTE: Concussion signs and symptoms often show up soon after the injury, but it can be hard to tell how serious the concussion is at first. Some symptoms may not be noticed or may not show up for hours or days.

WHAT ARE SOME MORE SERIOUS DANGER SIGNS TO LOOK FOR?

In rare cases, a dangerous collection of blood (hematoma) may form on the brain after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body and can squeeze the brain against the skull. Call 9-1-1 or ensure an athlete is taken to the emergency department right away if, after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body, he or she has one or more of these danger signs:

- One pupil larger than the other
- Drowsiness or inability to wake up
- A headache that gets worse and does not go away
- Slurred speech, weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination
- Repeated vomiting or nausea, convulsions or seizures (shaking or twitching)
- Unusual behavior, increased confusion, restlessness, or agitation
- Loss of consciousness (passed out/knocked out).

NOTE: Even a brief loss of consciousness should be taken seriously.

CONCUSSIONS AFFECT EACH ATHLETE DIFFERENTLY.

While most athletes with a concussion feel better within a couple of weeks, some will have symptoms for months or longer. Talk with an athlete's parents if you notice their concussion symptoms come back after they return to play.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK AN ATHLETE HAS A POSSIBLE CONCUSSION?

As a coach, if you think an athlete may have a concussion, you should:

- 1. REMOVE THE ATHLETE FROM PLAY.** When in doubt, sit them out! **KEEP AN ATHLETE WITH A POSSIBLE CONCUSSION OUT OF PLAY ON THE SAME DAY OF THE INJURY AND UNTIL CLEARED BY A HEALTH CARE PROVIDER.** Do not try to judge the severity of the injury yourself. Only a health care provider should assess an athlete for a possible concussion. After you remove an athlete with a possible concussion from practice or play, the decision about return to practice or play is a medical decision that should be made by a health care provider.

Note: As a coach, recording the following information can help a health care provider in assessing the athlete after the injury:

- Cause of the injury and force of the hit or blow to the head or body
- Any loss of consciousness (passed out/knocked out) and if so, for how long
- Any memory loss right after the injury
- Any seizures right after the injury
- Number of previous concussions (if any).

- 2. INFORM THE ATHLETE'S PARENT(S) ABOUT THE POSSIBLE CONCUSSION. ASK FOR WRITTEN INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE ATHLETE'S HEALTH CARE PROVIDER ON RETURN TO PLAY.** These instructions should include information about when they can return to play and what steps you should take to help them safely return to play. The brain needs time to heal after a concussion. An athlete who continues to play with concussion has a greater chance of getting another concussion. A repeat concussion that occurs while the brain is still healing from the first injury can be very serious and can affect an athlete for a lifetime. It can even be fatal. **SOME ATHLETES MAY NOT REPORT A CONCUSSION BECAUSE THEY DON'T THINK A CONCUSSION IS SERIOUS.** They may also worry about:
 - Losing their position on the team or during the game
 - Jeopardizing their future sports career
 - Looking weak
 - Letting their teammates or the team down
 - What their coach or teammates might think of them.

Note: *Under no circumstances allow the player back on the team without written authorization from the player's health provider.*