

12U Major Division Coach's Handbook (Youth Fastpitch Softball)

A practical, "new coach-friendly" guide for running a successful 12U Major team—covering rules, development priorities, practice structure, drills, and team culture.

1) Gameplay Rules (12U Major) — SCPAS-Specific Highlights

Below are the key rules that most often affect coaching decisions at **12U Major** in **South Central Pennsylvania Softball (SCPAS)**. Keep this section handy for game day.

A. Game Format / Time / Completion

- **Time limit: 1 hour 40 minutes, "finish the inning."** Time starts **immediately after the pre-game plate meeting**.
- **Regulation / official game: 7 innings**, or if the game is stopped (weather/darkness/field), it's official after **4 innings (3½ if home team is winning)**.
- **Ties / ITB:** If tied at end of regulation (time or innings), **ITB is used** unless the game can't continue due to conditions; major games may end in a tie only if unable to be completed.

B. Lineups, Substitutions, DP/FLEX

- **Lineup options:** Major teams may start with **9, 10, or 11 batters** (using up to **two EPs**) and may also **bat all players** (optional).
- **DP/FLEX allowed:** 12U Major may use **DP/FLEX** regardless of lineup size.
- **Same number all game:** Teams must keep the **same number of batters** they started with for the entire game.
- **Free defensive movement:** Players in the batting order can be **interchanged defensively** without using a substitution (sub/re-entry still follow sanctioning rules).
- **Injury compression (if batting all):** If batting all players and someone is injured, the lineup may be **compressed** without penalty; injured players **may not re-enter** after leaving due to injury.

C. Run Rules / Inning Run Limits

- **12U Major run limit: 5-run limit per inning** for the duration of the game.
- **Run-ahead rules:** Major divisions follow the **sanctioning body "run ahead" rules** (SCPAS calls out run-ahead explicitly for minors; majors use sanctioning body rules).

D. Pitching

- **PIAA pitching rule allowed.**
 - Practical note: This affects the pitcher's **start position and step mechanics** (pivot foot on/partially on plate; stride foot behind/contacting plate; step forward with stride foot once hands together).

E. Pre-Game / Post-Game / Admin Items Coaches Forget

- **Lineup card required** at pre-game meeting for **12U Major** (give to plate umpire).
- **Home team provides game balls; 12U uses a 12-inch optic yellow ball** (.47 COR, 375 max compression).
- **Home team warmup field access:** visiting team gets the field **20 minutes before** start.
- **Scores must be reported by home team within 48 hours** or it becomes a **home-team forfeit**.
- **Sportsmanship handshake line** after games is required.

F. Conduct / Safety Emphasis

- **No alcohol/tobacco/vaping;** warning to coach, then next offender ejected.
- **Throwing equipment:** warning first; second offense = removed (disqualified), and umpire can eject immediately if egregious.
- **Zero Tolerance Policy:** arguing judgment calls, taunting, profanity, or demonstrative dissent can lead to warnings/ejections/suspensions.

2) Recommended Skill Development Priorities (12U Major)

12U Major is a “bridge” age: kids can learn *real softball* strategy, but they still need fundamentals reinforced. Your priorities should be:

A. Throwing & Catching (Team-Wide Non-Negotiables)

Goals

- Consistent throwing mechanics (grip, wrist position, elbow path)
- Faster exchanges (glove-to-hand) for infielders
- Confident catches on the move (pop flies, backpedal, angles)

Key teaching cues

- “Side, stride, throw” (simple, repeatable)
- “Thumb to thigh / elbow up / finish” (avoid pushing)

B. Infield Defense

Goals

- Athletic ready position every pitch
- Ground-ball approach (angles, feet, funnel, throw on time)
- Footwork to first/second/third and covering bases
- Basic team concepts: **force plays, tag plays, cutoffs, relays, rundowns**

C. Outfield Defense

Goals

- First step and route efficiency
- Catching above the shoulder
- Throwing to the correct base with a purpose
- Backup responsibilities every pitch

D. Hitting (Most Value Comes from Contact Quality)

Goals

- Consistent contact on good pitches
- Understanding timing (load/stride/launch)
- Situational hitting: move runner, hit behind runner, smart aggression
- Two-strike approach (shorten up, protect)

E. Baserunning & Game IQ

Goals

- Aggressive turns, reading the ball off the bat
- Sliding mechanics (safe, legal, consistent)
- Situational awareness: outs, score, inning, where's the next play
- Communication: coach signals + athlete decision-making

F. Pitching / Catching Development (If You Have Pitchers)

Pitchers

- Repeatable mechanics, strike throwing, composure routines
- 1–2 pitches thrown well beats 4 pitches thrown poorly

Catchers

- Receiving and blocking fundamentals
- Quick, accurate throws

- Leadership: calling time, calming pitcher, directing infield

Coaching reality: At 12U Major, your team will improve fastest by (1) throwing/catching better, (2) reducing defensive mistakes, and (3) running bases smarter.

3) Practice Format Suggestions (High-Impact, Low-Wasted-Time)

The 90-Minute “Major” Practice Template

0:00–0:10 | Athletic Warm-Up

- Dynamic movement (skips, shuffles, karaoke)
- Throwing prep (arm circles/bands if you use them)

0:10–0:25 | Throwing Progression (Daily)

- Short catch → step-behind → long toss (age-appropriate)
- Add **accuracy game** (points for hitting a target)

0:25–0:55 | Defense Stations (3 stations x ~10 min, rotate)

- Station 1: infield ground balls + footwork
- Station 2: outfield routes + throws to bases
- Station 3: catcher/pitcher OR cutoffs/relays

0:55–1:15 | Hitting Stations (2–3 stations)

- Tee work (purpose: inside/outside)
- Front toss / machine (if available)
- Short game: bunting / slap footwork (if appropriate)

1:15–1:28 | Situations / Competition

- “1 out, runner on 2nd” reps
- 5-run inning rules—teach urgency and clean defense

1:28–1:30 | Team Close

- Quick recap: 1 thing we did well, 1 thing to improve
- “Shout-out” a teammate for effort/character

The 2-Hour Practice Template (If You Have the Field)

Use the same structure, but add:

- 10 minutes of baserunning (leads, turns, reads)
- 10–15 minutes controlled scrimmage (coach pitch situations)

Efficiency Rules (Your Practice Will Feel “Pro”)

- **No lines:** stations keep everyone moving
- **Plan the transitions:** whistle/timer every 8–12 minutes
- **Small group reps:** 3–5 athletes per station is ideal
- **Finish with competition:** kids remember the ending

4) Example Practice Drills (With YouTube Links)

Below are drills that work especially well for 11–12-year-olds and early teens. I included drill summaries and at least one good video link for each category.

A) Throwing/Fielding Fundamentals (All Players)

1. **“Triangle Fielding + Throwing Mechanics”**
 - Focus: glove angle, staying low, proper footwork into throw
 - Video: **Dominate The Diamond — “The BEST Drills to Teach Youth Softball Players”**
Link: [YouTube video \[youtube.com\]](#)
2. **3 Quick Infield Drills (Posture/Footwork/Transfer)**
 - Focus: staying low, quick hands, clean exchange
 - Video: **MegRem Softball — “3 Infield Drills For Youth Players/Beginners”**
Link: [YouTube video \[youtube.com\]](#)

B) “Game-Like” Team Defense & Energy Builders

3. **Four Corners (Throwing Accuracy Around the Diamond)**
 - Great for: catchers, infielders, quick decision-making
 - Video compilation (includes Four Corners and more): **MOJO — “10 Best Softball Drills for 11–12 Year Olds”**
Link: [YouTube video \[youtube.com\]](#)
4. **Beat the Ball (Relay + Throws + Sprint Pressure)**
 - Great for: urgency under SCPAS 5-run innings; builds pace
 - Same MOJO video includes “Beat the Ball”
Link: [YouTube video \[youtube.com\]](#)

C) Hitting Stations (High Reps, Low Standing)

5. **Inside/Outside Tee Progression**
 - Setup: 2 tees (inner/outer half), athletes learn barrel path & direction
 - Video: MOJO “Inside Outside” drill segment
Link: [YouTube video \[youtube.com\]](#)

6. “Think Fast” Color-Ball Recognition Game

- Great for: pitch recognition + decision speed (fun, competitive)
- Video: MOJO includes “Think Fast”
Link: [YouTube video \[youtube.com\]](#)

D) Pitching (If You Coach Pitchers)

7. 4 Pitching Mechanics Drills

- Focus: takeoff, drag line, arm circle control, muscle memory
- Video: **MegRem Softball — “4 Pitching Drills To Work Mechanics”**
Link: [YouTube video \[youtube.com\]](#)

8. Beginner-Friendly Arm Path + Accuracy Drills

- Great for: new pitchers or those rebuilding mechanics
- Video: **MegRem Softball — “2 Beginner Softball Pitching Drills...”**
Link: [YouTube video \[youtube.com\]](#)

E) Drill Libraries / Written Drill Lists (Optional Add-Ons)

- SkillShark has age-bucket drill ideas for 12U practice planning. [\[skillshark.com\]](#)
- Mansfield Girls Softball provides a clear 2-hour practice organization example you can adapt. [\[mansfieldg...ftball.com\]](#)
- MOJO’s written drill list matches the 11–12-year-old range well. [\[mojo.sport\]](#)

5) Age-Appropriate Motivation, Team Building & Character Development (12U)

12U athletes want **belonging**, **competence**, and **autonomy** (they want a voice). Your best motivation tools are structure + praise for effort + meaningful team roles.

A. Simple Team Culture Systems That Work

1. Team Standards (“How we do things here”)

- 3–5 short standards:
 - “We sprint on/off the field”
 - “We pick each other up”
 - “We respect umpires/opponents” (matches SCPAS Zero Tolerance emphasis)
- Post them in your team chat and revisit weekly.

2. Role Rotations

- “Warm-up captain,” “Dugout leader,” “Equipment lead,” “Cheer lead”
- Gives every player status and responsibility (especially quieter kids).

3. Process Praise > Outcome Praise

- Praise controllables: effort, hustle, focus, courage, being coachable
- Avoid only praising hits/wins (reduces fear of failure).

B. Motivating Practice Ideas (Fun Without Losing Structure)

- **Turn drills into games:** relay races, throw-to-target points, etc. (keeps engagement high). [\[summersoft...llcamp.com\]](http://summersoft...llcamp.com)
- **Themed practice days** (Superhero/Olympics/Mystery Challenge) to break routine and boost attendance. [\[summersoft...llcamp.com\]](http://summersoft...llcamp.com)
- **Mini-games with constraints:** “three-pitch at-bats,” situational call-outs to build IQ and pace. [\[summersoft...llcamp.com\]](http://summersoft...llcamp.com)

C. Team Building Activities (On-field + Off-field)

Here are options that are easy for volunteer coaches:

On-field

- **Relay race stations** (field → throw → sprint) fosters teamwork and energy. [\[fansonlysports.com\]](http://fansonlysports.com), [\[summersoft...llcamp.com\]](http://summersoft...llcamp.com)
- **Position swap practice** (short, safe versions) builds empathy for teammates. [\[fansonlysports.com\]](http://fansonlysports.com)
- **Team batting goals** (collective quality at-bat targets) creates shared ownership. [\[fansonlysports.com\]](http://fansonlysports.com)

Off-field

- “High/Low” circle (each player shares a weekly high and low—quick, safe, inclusive)
- Service mini-project: team cards for a local community group (teaches values)
- Potluck + wiffle ball parents vs. players (keeps it light)

If you want a longer menu of softball-specific team building ideas, there are several curated lists you can borrow from. [\[fansonlysports.com\]](http://fansonlysports.com), [\[softballtutor.com\]](http://softballtutor.com)

D. Character Development: Weekly “Theme” (Easy Plug-In)

Pick one per week; reinforce with shout-outs.

- Week 1: Coachability
- Week 2: Effort
- Week 3: Ownership (“next play”)
- Week 4: Courage (try hard things)
- Week 5: Respect (umpires/opponents/teammates)

- Week 6: Team-first (celebrate assists, backups, moving runners)

E. Handling Mistakes (The 12U Sweet Spot)

Teach a reset routine:

1. **Breathe** (1 breath)
2. **Body language** (eyes up, shoulders back)
3. **Next job** (where do I go next play?)
4. **Verbal cue** (“Next pitch,” “Next play”)

This reduces spirals—especially with the **5-run inning limit**, where one messy inning can feel “huge” to kids.

Quick-Use Appendices

Appendix A — Game Day Coach Checklist (12U Major)

- Lineup card ready for plate meeting
- Confirm batting option (9/10/11 or bat all) and stick with it
- Review time limit (1:40) + finish inning with assistants
- Identify courtesy runner plan (pitcher/catcher runners are allowed)
- Pre-inning defensive reminders: outs/coverages/cutoffs
- Post-game handshake line
- Home team reports score within 48 hours

Appendix B — “Minimum Effective” Weekly Practice Plan (2 Practices/Week)

Practice 1 (Defense-heavy): throwing + infield/outfield stations + cutoffs + situational scrimmage

Practice 2 (Offense + speed): hitting stations + baserunning + bunting/situations + competitive game