

Softball
Developmental Progression
(Draft 2)

Developed by the
St. Albert Angels 85's

Under 8 years old

Features of this age group:

- Starting to develop self concept
- Learning social skills and how to interact with peers
- Starting to understand the idea and arbitrariness of rules of a game or sport
- Fine-muscle motor skills NOT developed
- Limited ability to react quickly to stimulus
- Primary method of learning physical skill is imitation.

Principles:

- Focus on large muscle and simple motor skills
- Emphasize development of confidence, self esteem, team work and cooperation
- Emphasize having fun and making 100% effort
- Focus on major, fundamental skills
- Simplify the rules
- Focus on developing good practice/learning habits.

Softball Skills:

Physical

Focus on the most fundamental skills in softball: throwing and catching the ball, and running. Hitting should deal only with the most basic technique, focusing on development of hand eye coordination and ensuring bad hitting habits are not developed (e.g. swinging up.) Try to teach the whole motion of a skill. Break down the components only to correct a specific problem.

Throwing:

- Focus on “full motion” (body rotation, big “C” or “pet the dog” with the arm)
- Check the following
 - Stride with correct foot
 - Elbow higher than shoulder
 - Eyes on target - Throw at a specific target, not just towards it (e.g. at the receiver’s glove or chest.)

Catching a thrown ball:

- Focus on safety and confidence (they go hand in hand.)
- Work without gloves frequently
- Check the following:
 - Facing the thrower (square)
 - Using both hands
 - Never point fingers at the ball (glove should always be perpendicular to path of the ball)
 - Move to the ball, trying to catch it in the vertical center line of the body

Running:

- Practice running for speed over short distances (e.g. home to first.)
- Emphasize “fast feet”(feet touching ground for least amount of time).
- Check:
 - Running in straight line to target
 - Arms moving fore and aft (not to sides)
 - Arms in sync with legs (opposite limbs)
 - Push with toes.

Hitting:

- Focus on developing hand eye coordination (contact rather than power) - emphasize watching the ball all the way.
- Develop a desire to hit (no bases on balls).
- Check:
 - smooth swing directly to ball (no hitches or dropping of hands)
 - “level” swing to produce line drives (avoid swinging up.)

Fitness:

- Develop flexibility skills (how to stretch)

Mental Skills

- Teach the basic rules of the game
 - How to score a run
 - How to get an out
 - Fair/Foul
- Focus on importance of teamwork (usually takes two players to get an out)
- Focus on sportsmanship
 - appreciation of opponents and officials (cheers and handshakes with opponents and umpires)
 - support of teammates (no put downs)
- Teach why and how to practice
- Introduce and practice concept of focus
- Introduce importance and techniques of warming up, general fitness, and nutrition.
- Develop ability to give 100%

Under 10 years old (Mites)

Features of this age group:

- Developing self concept
- Learning social skills and how to interact with peers
- Starting to understand the idea and arbitrariness of rules of a game or sport
- Fine-muscle motor skills NOT developed
- Limited ability to react quickly to stimulus
- Primary method of learning physical skill is imitation.

Principles:

- Focus on large muscle and simple motor skills
- Emphasize development of confidence, self esteem, team work and cooperation
- Emphasize having fun and making 100% effort
- Focus on major, fundamental skills
- Simplify the rules
- Focus on developing good practice/learning habits.

Softball Skills:

Physical

Focus on the most fundamental skills in softball: throwing and catching the ball, and running. Hitting should deal with the basic technique, focusing on development of hand eye coordination and ensuring bad hitting habits are not developed (e.g. swinging up.) Try to teach the whole motion of a skill. Break down the components only to correct a specific problem.

Throwing:

- Focus on “full motion” (body rotation, big “C” or “pet the dog” with the arm)
- Give players homework to watch baseball pitchers on tv and imitate their motions.
- Check the following
 - Pivot step with correct foot
 - Stride foot pointing to target
 - Elbow higher than shoulder
 - Eyes on target - Throw at a specific target, not just towards it (e.g. at the receiver’s glove or chest.)

Catching a thrown ball:

- Focus on safety and confidence (they go hand in hand.)
- Work without gloves frequently
- Check the following:
 - Facing the thrower (square)
 - Using both hands
 - Never point fingers at the ball (glove should always be perpendicular to path of

- the ball)
- Move to the ball, trying to catch it in the vertical center line of the body

Fielding:

- Demonstrate and practice the basic fielding “ready” position.
- Emphasize moving to the ball and cradling the ball up to the belly (practice without gloves as much as possible)
- Move quickly into throwing position
- Check:
 - good throwing mechanics
 - eye following ball into glove (or hands)
 - ready to field on every pitch.

Pitching:

At this level, the “real” pitchers of the future will not likely throw many strikes so coaches will probably have to use some temporary “pitchers” to keep the game moving.

- Emphasize the long term nature of learning to pitch, the necessity of constant practice. Encourage/require parental commitment to daily practice. Teach parent the fundamentals.
- Focus on teaching the full motion, breakdown components only to fix problems.
- Check:
 - body rotation (open > close)
 - pitching arm in correct plane (straight up and down - ear and hip)
 - release point at hip: do not allow to lean forward on release (to aim the ball into the strike zone.)

Running and Base Running:

- Introduce “running start” from a base.
- Practice running for speed over short distances (e.g. home to first.)
- Emphasize “fast feet”(feet touching ground for least amount of time).
- Check:
 - Running in straight line to target
 - Arms moving fore and aft (not to sides)
 - Arms in sync with legs (opposite limbs)
 - Push with toes.

Hitting:

- Focus on developing hand eye coordination (contact rather than power) - emphasize watching the ball all the way.
- Develop a desire to hit (no bases on balls).
- Check:
 - smooth swing directly to ball (no hitches or dropping of hands)
 - “level” swing to produce line drives (avoid swinging up.)
 - “head down”, “shoulder to shoulder” (follow ball all the way to the bat.)

Bunting:

- Introduce the basic sacrifice bunt.

Fitness:

- Develop flexibility skills (how to stretch)

Mental Skills

- Expand on the basic rules of the game
- Introduce the role and positioning of different positions (e.g. 3b plays up to cover bunt.)
- Focus on importance of teamwork (usually takes two players to get an out)
- Focus on sportsmanship
 - appreciation of opponents and officials (cheers and handshakes with opponents and umpires)
 - support of teammates (no put downs)
- Teach why and how to practice
- Introduce and practice concept of focus
- Introduce importance and techniques of warming up, general fitness, and nutrition.
- Develop ability to give 100%

Under 12 years old (Squirts)

Features of this age group:

- Fine motor skills are starting to develop
- May learn better by breaking a skill into components
- May have difficulty adapting to body changes (hormonal and growth)
- Sense of competition developing

Principles:

- Focus developing more intricate motor skills
- Emphasize development of concepts of team work, cooperation, and importance of practice.
- Ensure base of fundamental skills
- Increase competitiveness but still not intense competition.
- Focus on developing good practice/learning habits.

Softball Skills:

Physical

Ensure the players can correctly perform the most fundamental skills in softball: throwing and catching the ball, and running. Some players may learn better by imitation (teach the whole motion of a skill) whereas others will learn better by breaking a skill down into its components.

Throwing:

- By this age players should have the basic mechanics - but review and check periodically.
- Teach proper grip and wrist snap to get backspin on the throw.
- Teach leg drive to add power to throw.
- Stress the importance of accuracy.
- Do not allow sloppy throwing mechanics during warm ups.

Fielding Ground Balls:

- Review and practice the basic fielding “ready” position.
- Emphasize moving to the ball and cradling the ball up to the belly (practice without gloves as much as possible)
- Introduce lateral movement: shuffle step.
- Check:
 - eye following ball into glove (or hands)
 - catching ball in front (not between legs)
 - keeping low while moving to ball
 - ready to field on every pitch.

Fielding Flys:

- Introduce proper body and hand position.
- Focus on running hard to ball and waiting for it.
- Practice running with glove (ensure proper running mechanics, NOT running with glove out.)
- Ensure lots of practice judging fly balls.

Catching:

- Teach
 - position, umpire view.
 - setting up, target.
 - receiving ball
 - blocking balls in dirt
 - retrieving passed ball/wild pitch

Pitching:

At this level pitchers should be able to throw strikes about 50% of the time.

- Emphasize the long term nature of learning to pitch, the necessity of constant practice. Encourage/require parental commitment to daily practice. Teach parent the fundamentals.
- Teach pitchers components only to fix problems, most will learn better using whole motion (“walk through”)
- Check:
 - body rotation (open > close)
 - pitching arm in correct plane (straight up and down - ear and hip)
 - release point at hip: do not allow to lean forward on release (to aim the ball into the strike zone.)
- Teach pitching to the corners.
- Advanced pitchers should begin developing a change up.

Running and Base Running:

- Require “running start” from a base.
- Practice running for speed over short distances (e.g. home to first.)
- Review running fundamentals.
- Introduce bent leg slide.:

Hitting:

- Start checking on components of hitting:
 - grip, stance
 - trigger, stride
 - attack: pivot, hands to ball, head down, braced front leg.
- Develop a desire to hit (de-emphasize bases on balls)

Bunting:

- Teach the basic sacrifice bunt - add directing ball down both baselines.
- More skilled bunters can work on showing bunt later.

Fitness:

- Develop flexibility skills (how to stretch)
- Develop speed (short distance drills)

Mental Skills

- Introduce basic strategy: stealing, bunting
- Develop the role and positioning of different positions (e.g. middle infielders have 2 bases to cover.)
- Teach principle of coverage (all plays have a backup.)
- Emphasize importance of teamwork and sportsmanship.
- Practice different types of focus, mental prep for each play.
- Introduce and practice imaging/visualization.
- Introduce concept of self talk.
- Introduce concept of pre game preparation:
 - mental: focus
 - physical: what to eat/not eat before or during a game
 - Review importance and techniques of warming up.
- Begin individual goal setting (skill development.)
- Expect 100% in practices and games.

Under 14 years old (Peewees)

Features of this age group:

- Fine motor skills are developing
- Learn better by breaking a skill into components
- May have difficulty adapting to body changes (hormonal and growth)
- Sense of competition developing

Principles:

- Focus developing more intricate motor skills
- Emphasize development of concepts of team work, cooperation, and importance of practice.
- Increase attention to mental skills.
- Review base of fundamental skills
- Increase competitiveness, still keeping it in perspective
- Ensure good practice/learning habits.

Softball Skills:

Physical

Ensure the players can correctly perform the most fundamental skills in softball. Most will learn new skills better by breaking them down into components.

Throwing:

- By this age players should have the basic mechanics - but review and check periodically.
- Teach crow hop and leg drive to add power to throw.
- Stress the importance of accuracy.
- Do not allow sloppy throwing mechanics during warm ups.
- Introduce “dart throw”

Fielding:

- Ensure proper fielding “ready” position and move to get in front of ball (don’t allow reaching for ball.)
- Teach lateral movement: review shuffle step and introduce crossover step.
- Introduce backhand and forehand catch.
- Introduce “quick release” - (glove is only a transfer mechanism)
- Expect anticipatory movement on every pitch.
- Review body and hand position on flies.
- Practice running with glove.
- Ensure lots of practice judging fly balls.
- Introduce and practice diving for balls to side and in front.

Defensive Play

- Teach and Practice defensive play:
 - Bunt coverage
 - 2b coverage of 1b
 - RF play at 1b
 - Making a tag
 - Relay (more advanced may introduce cut off)

Catching

- Review catching positioning and umpire view.
- Teach
 - strong throw to 2b.
 - quick throw to corners.
 - blocking balls in dirt.
 - blocking plate and making tag
 - framing the ball.
 - retrieving passed balls or wild pitches
 - Pop ups - usual direction and behavior

Pitching:

At this level pitchers should be able to throw strikes from 50% to 80% of the time.

- Focus on pitching to corners.
- Teach pitchers mainly by breaking components down - sequential.
- Introduce leg drive for power.
- Check:
 - body rotation (slam open > close)
 - pitching arm in correct plane (straight up and down - ear and hip)
 - release point at hip: do not allow to lean forward on release (to aim the ball into the strike zone.)
- Introduce and practice a change up.
- Advanced pitchers should be developing a drop ball.

Running and Base Running:

- Review running fundamentals.
- Teach how to round bases.
- Teach lead off and introduce retreat slide.
- Practice bent leg slide; introduce “fade away” or “back door” slide.

Hitting:

- Ensure proper rotational hitting fundamentals.
- Teach strike zone and “smart hitting” (but reiterate that a hit is preferred to a base on balls.)
- Introduce strategy of hitting based on count and “umpire’s strike zone”.
- Introduce running slap to left handers.

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Bunting:

- Introduce bent leg or drag bunt.
- Introduce fake and slap.

Fitness:

- Continue to focus on flexibility and speed.

Mental Skills

- Expand strategy: delay steal, bunt and steal, tag up on fly balls.
- Emphasize importance of teamwork and sportsmanship.
- Ensure mental prep for each play.
- Continue to develop and practice imaging/visualization.
- Expand concept and use of self talk.
- Expand pre game preparation:
 - Introduce concept of ideal performance state
 - Encourage keeping a journal.
- Continue individual goal setting (skill development.)
- Begin team goal setting.
- Expect 100% in practices and games.

Under 16 years old (Bantam)

(Draft 1)

Features of this age group:

- Body approaching full growth
- Learn better by breaking a skill into components
- Sense of competition developing
- Role of parents diminishing

Principles:

- Focus developing more intricate motor skills
- Begin moderate strength training
- Increase attention to mental skills.
- More intricate strategy and tactics
- Increased competitiveness
- Ensure good practice/learning habits.

Softball Skills:

Physical

Ensure the players can correctly perform the most fundamental skills in softball..

Throwing:

- By this age players should have the basic mechanics - but review and check periodically.
- Review crow hop and leg drive.
- Teach different throws: sidearm/scoop, shovel, backhand
- Do not allow sloppy throwing mechanics during warm ups.

Fielding:

- Expect “quick release”
- Expect anticipatory movement on every pitch.
- Practice running with glove.
- Ensure lots of practice judging fly balls.
- Teach reading wind and blocking sun with glove.
- Practice diving for balls to side and in front.

Defensive Play

- Players should be settling into 1 or 2 positions.
- Teach position specific play.
- Teach and Practice defensive play:
 - Run downs.
 - Getting the lead runner
 - Double play at 2b.

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- Defending against runners at 1b and 3b.
- Catchers should be calling pitches

Pitching:

At this level pitchers should be able to hit corners from 50% to 80% of the time.

- Focus on strategic pitching.
- Continue to develop speed, control and change up
- Introduce and practice a drop ball.
- Advanced pitchers should be developing a roll over drop ball and rise ball.

Catching:

- Able to block balls in dirt.
- Continue to work on quick release to 2b.
- Begin study of batter weakness and pitch selection
- Discuss catcher - umpire relations

Running and Base Running:

- Practice bent leg, fade away, and retreat slides.
- Introduce head first slide (???)

Hitting:

- Expect “smart hitting”.
- Introduce/practice running slap to left handers.

Bunting:

- Practice bent leg or drag bunt and fake and slap.

Fitness:

- Introduce core strength conditioning in off season and specific strength training in very early pre season.
- Continue to develop flexibility and speed.

Mental Skills

- Expand strategy: hit and run, squeeze and suicide squeeze, r1/r3 defense.
- Ensure mental prep for each play.
- Continue to develop and practice imaging/visualization.
- Expand concept and use of self talk.
- Introduce and practice “relaxation” and “energizing” techniques.
- Encourage keeping a journal.
- Continue individual goal setting (skill development.)
- Team goal setting and planning (reduce role of parents)
- Players take on more administrative and set up responsibility.
- Players should be coaching each other.
- Expect 100% in practices and games.