

# **LITTLE JUNIORS LEAGUE (AGES 4-6) TRAINING GUIDE**

**OVERVIEW** – The Little Juniors League is designed as an introduction to softball for beginning players ages 4-6 as of January 1, 2007 (although more advanced players may be encouraged to move up to the Juniors League.) The emphasis for coaches in this league is on instruction of basic softball skills as well as teamwork and good sportsmanship.

## **FORMAT** –

- Games are played with an 11-inch rubberized ball.
- **All players may play in the field on defense at the same time.** Although this can create some confusion, we feel it is better to keep all of the players active at this age. It is the coaches' responsibility to place them so that players are not too close to each other. Coaches should also rotate positions every inning. All players are also in the batting order.
- **After 2 weeks of tee ball only, coaches will pitch 3 soft-toss pitches from 25' to 30'.** Unlike slow-pitch softball, pitches should have minimal arc. This type of pitch is vital to help players develop a swing that will be successful in fastpitch softball.
- If the ball is not hit in 3 attempts, a tee is placed on the plate. A player is then given 4 additional swings, if necessary, to hit a fair ball.
- A team's 'at-bat' is over when the defense makes 3 fielded outs or the offense has batted **7 players** whichever comes first. If a player cannot hit a fair ball in the seven total attempts allowed, the out *is not* counted as an out for the team.
- Games are one hour and fifteen minutes in length. The team batting when the time limit occurs should complete their 'at-bat'.
- **It is important that coaches are prepared with lineups for each inning and teach their players to hustle on and off the field.** Game time moves very quickly, so give them as much actual playing time as possible.
- **A coach must back up the catcher at all times to keep the game moving. He or she should be ready with a second ball for the tee, and the soft-toss coach (after the second week) should have 3 balls in his glove so that no time is wasted between swings.**
- As a coach, you should make every attempt to give all players a chance to play in every defensive position during the year.
- There are no umpires. Base coaches should make the calls.
- Bunting and stealing are not allowed.
- There is no infield fly rule in this league.

## **WHAT TO TEACH** –

Be sure to start your season with a parent/player meeting. This gives the girls a chance to get to know each other, and the opportunity to let the parents know what your expectations are for the season.

## **The Game**

At your first practice, assume your players know **nothing** about softball. Make sure they understand basics such as: balls and strikes; scoring runs; running after hitting the ball (and which way); making outs; etc. Once you have established that everyone has some basic knowledge of how to play, you will be able to move on to fundamentals.

## **Teamwork**

- Emphasize positive interaction between players in practice and games. For example, have girls change partners during practice drills.
- Stress that every defensive position is important.
- Encourage support for each other – celebrate successes together.

## **Good Sportsmanship**

- Congratulate opponents after every game.
- Positive cheering from the team – this is a great way to keep the girls involved and have fun. Be sure that the cheers are encouraging toward your players, not negative toward the opponent.
- No “chatter” from the field (such as ‘Hey, batter!’) Players should be encouraged, however, to congratulate and celebrate when someone makes a good play.
- All players (*and parents*) must show respect at all times for teammates, opponents, coaches, and fans.

## **Fundamentals**

- Throwing – Teaching should be done step-by-step. Start with proper grip of the ball, and then follow with wrist snap. Use bow-and-arrow drill to teach proper arm movement, body position, stride, and follow through. **Ensure that they learn to throw off the proper foot!**
- Catching a Ball – Explain the importance of showing a target and using two hands.
- Fielding – At this level, it is important for the players to feel comfortable with the ball. It may be helpful to use tennis balls or Whiffle balls in some drills. Players should learn proper positioning (ready position) as well as how to catch ground balls and fly balls. It is also very important to teach young players when and where to throw the ball after it has been fielded.
- Batting – What players learn about batting at this age will become their foundation for batting as they grow older. It is important that they learn all of the steps necessary to make contact with the ball: Proper grip and stance; where to stand; ‘squashing the bug’; eye on the ball; follow-through; and release of the bat after the swing.
- Base Running – Players should learn the basics of base running: Run through first base; watching the coaches; and leading off. Players at this age should begin to grasp the concept of tagging up if a fly ball is caught. Stealing is not

taught at this level. Sliding should not be a focus at this point, although this is left to the discretion of each coach.

### **WHEN TO TEACH –**

Practices are scheduled prior to the season, and a weekly practice is strongly recommended throughout the season. Using a practice plan, begin with the basics of the game. Add new drills and skills at each practice, but be sure to review what has already been taught. Repetition is the best way to learn a skill. The focus should remain on fundamentals throughout the season. Advanced skills such as pitching and catching may be introduced to interested players as the year progresses, but are not recommended before the season starts.

### **HOW TO TEACH –**

It is extremely important to make practices and games fun for the players. Be creative when planning your practice. For instance, kids love to have contests during practice. Give them an opportunity to compete, especially in a team format (a relay race, for example) that reinforces the team concept. A favorite: Scrimmage against parents and siblings.

- Keep practices and games positive.
- Be Committed; Be Consistent; Be Honest – Give your players a reason to want you as their coach again next year.
- Use drills that work best for your team – generally drills that keep everyone active or have very little down/waiting time. Attention span is *very* short with a 5 year old.
- Have handouts available for parents if they wish to work with their daughters at home.
- Emphasize to parents that practice at home is far more valuable than team practice. Ask your players at the beginning of each practice who has been practicing at home.
- Communication:
  - At practice or a game:
    1. Get their attention.
    2. Keep their backs to the sun and to any distracting activity so they can see and focus on you.
    3. Kneel or sit to be at eye level with your team.
    4. Ask questions to keep players involved and ensure their understanding.
    5. Stay enthusiastic.
    6. HAVE FUN!

With Commissioners:

1. Call or email commissioners with any questions you have about the league, players, drills, expectations, etc. We welcome any feedback in the hopes of improving the OYAA softball experience.

2. Keep the commissioners informed on equipment issues and diamond conditions.

Be sure to attend clinics offered by OYAA and make use of available drills and handouts. If you are looking to work on a particular skill and would like additional drills, let us know and we will send you information on where to find what you need.

Thank you for volunteering to coach in the OYAA fastpitch softball program. It is your dedication and commitment that makes our program one of the fastest growing in the area. The girls who play for you today represent the future of Olentangy Softball... and the future of our community.

## **We couldn't do it without you!**

### **CONTACTS:**

Dana Wisecarver, OYAA Softball Commissioner  
Email: [oyaasoftball@aol.com](mailto:oyaasoftball@aol.com)  
Phone: (614) 433-0652

Little Juniors League Manager: Open

OYAA Web Site:

Click on the softball pages at **[www.oyaa.org](http://www.oyaa.org)**

### **DRILLS AND INFORMATIONAL WEB SITES:**

**[www.y-coach.com](http://www.y-coach.com)** – A youth coaching web site. Instruction, philosophies and drills.

**[www.eteamz.com](http://www.eteamz.com)** – Lots of drills.

**[www.syasoftball.com/coachescorner.html](http://www.syasoftball.com/coachescorner.html)** - This is a great site. It has detailed instruction on fundamentals as well as drills and practice suggestions.

**[www.decatursports.com/softball\\_drills.htm](http://www.decatursports.com/softball_drills.htm)** - Excellent site for drills.

**[www.hueytownfastpitch.com/coaches](http://www.hueytownfastpitch.com/coaches)** - Go to tips and drills link. Also, use main link to find a link for softball cheers.

**[www.positivecoach.org](http://www.positivecoach.org)** – Great overall site for coaches and parents.