

MAJOR LEAGUE (age 12 and under) TRAINING GUIDE

OVERVIEW – The Major League builds on softball fundamentals and game strategy in a competitive environment. It is geared toward players with softball experience, but first-time players are eligible as well. Umpires and modified ASA rules are used. Coaching emphasis is on developing the team concept and softball knowledge while refining player skills.

FORMAT –

- Games are played with a regulation 12” softball.
- Defense consists of 10 players, which includes 4 outfielders. However, all players will be in the batting order, even when not playing in the field.
- The pitcher’s rubber is set at 40 feet.
- Games are played under ASA 12u rules. This includes: dropped 3rd strike, batter may advance if 1st base is empty; stealing home is allowed; batter may advance to 2nd at her own risk after a walk.
- To speed the games up, **each batter begins with a one strike count.**
- Umpires will be scheduled to umpire all games.
- A team’s ‘at bat’ is over when they acquire 3 outs or score 6 runs, whichever comes first.
- Games are one hour and fifteen minutes or 5 innings in length, whichever comes first. The team batting when the time limit expires should complete their ‘at-bat’ only if they are trailing.
- 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.
- As a coach, you should make every attempt to give all players a chance to play in any *appropriate* defensive position during the year. However, advanced players should be encouraged by playing more time at the positions they seem best suited for (i.e. pitching, shortstop, catching).
- Pitcher’s circle is 16’ in diameter.
- Bunting is allowed and encouraged.
- Stealing is allowed. Only one base may be stolen during each trip on the base paths.
- The infield fly rule is in effect.

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, establish what your players know about the rules and concepts of softball. One of the main goals at this level is developing softball knowledge and encouraging players to think and anticipate on the field. This league introduces full competition for the first time. It is important for players to understand their roles and responsibilities.

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 players to commit to learning 2 or 3 positions, rather than try to play everywhere.
- 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, umpires, coaches, and fans. (See ‘Code of Conduct’ handout.) If you have a concern over a call, rule, or an opponent’s strategy, please ensure your team, coaching staff, and fans set a positive example during the game. After the game, contact an OYAA commissioner for clarification.

Skills

- Throwing – Coaching 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.
- Catching – Explain the importance of giving a target and using two hands.
- Fielding – Players should learn proper positioning (ready position) as well as how to catch ground balls and fly balls. Most players will be playing with a regulation softball for the first time. It may be helpful to use tennis balls, rubber balls, or Whiffle balls in some drills, but they will need to get used to the harder ball.
- Batting – What players learn about batting at this age will become their foundation for batting as they grow older. It is important that they focus on 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. Players should also be developing good pitch selection.

- Bunting – A player that can bunt well may be the most critical offensive weapon a team has in competitive softball. It is important that players learn proper form and gain confidence at an early age. Also, it is just as important for players to learn how to defend a bunt. Both bunting and defense of the bunt should be incorporated into practice and used judiciously in games. Introducing the slap and left-handed drag bunt is also encouraged.
- Pitching – As a coach, it is important to learn the basics of pitching to be able to teach your players properly. Become familiar with the grip, stance, wrist flip, 9 o'clock position, 12 o'clock position, 'opening the door', 'closing the door', and follow through. Use drills and handouts to teach the progression of pitching. Make sure parents and players know that pitching takes many hours of practice before they will be able to throw with speed and accuracy. **** PLEASE BE SURE THAT YOU HAVE A COACH OR PARENT THAT IS WILLING TO WORK ON HIS OR HER PITCHING SO THAT BATTERS RECEIVE GOOD PITCHES FROM THEM IN PRACTICE. ****
- Positions – Teach the skills needed at each position as well as responsibilities and coverage. Give players opportunities to play different positions, but focus on players' strengths and what positions they may be best suited for.
- Signals – Basic signals should be used at this level. Generally, signals to bunt, swing away, take a pitch, and steal are all that most teams will need to use, but coaches may expand this at their discretion.
- Team and Individual Strategies – This is a very important step in the growth of a player. Each player should be able to recognize situations (how many outs, runners on base, bunting situation) and anticipate her next move before each pitch (if ball is hit to me, if ball is hit away from me, if runner is stealing). Players should learn that *every fielder* should be moving on *every play*.
- Base Running – Players should become familiar with the basics of base running: Running *through* first base; making a turn; watching the coaches; and leading off. They should be able to grasp the concept of tagging up if a fly ball is caught. Stealing of home is introduced for the first time. Proper sliding technique should be taught as well. Players need to be able to think when they are running the bases.

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 developing skills throughout the season, but must also include the strategies and concepts of competitive softball.

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 throwing contest, for example) that reinforces the team concept. A favorite: Scrimmage with 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 can still be fairly short with a 12 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. Make it a source of pride.
- 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. Ask questions to keep players involved and ensure their understanding.
4. Stay enthusiastic.
5. 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:

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OYAA Web Site:

Click on the softball pages at **www.oyaa.org**

DRILLS AND INFORMATIONAL WEB SITES:

www.y-coach.com – A youth coaching web site. Instruction, philosophies and drills.

www.eteamz.com – Lots of drills.

www.syasoftball.com/coachescorner.html - This is a great site. It has detailed instruction on fundamentals as well as drills and practice suggestions.

www.ehow.com/list_1077.htm - Practice suggestions; info on defensive positions.

www.decatursports.com/softball_drills.htm - Excellent site for drills.

www.hueytownfastpitch.com/coaches - Go to tips and drills link. Also, use main link to find a link for softball cheers.

www.positivecoach.org – Great overall site for coaches and parents.