

Lions Softball: Playing Basics

Basic batting tips

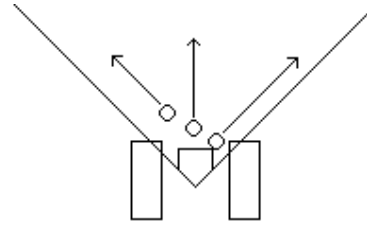
A good stance

- Feet close together
- Knees slightly bent.
- Belly button facing the plate.
- Head facing the pitcher (chin on the front shoulder).
- Front foot opposite the middle of the plate.
- Bat held in the fingers.
- Able to reach both sides of the plate.

A good swing

- Keep eyes on the ball.
- Back foot 'squishes the bug'.
- Hips rotate, belly button facing the pitcher at the end of the swing.
- Head stays level.
- Fingernails facing up at contact.
- Flat swing.
- Finish with chin on back shoulder.
- Hit through the ball, follow through so bat finishes behind the body.

THE POINT OF CONTACT



Hitting it where it's pitched

is good advice for a batter but what does it mean ? It means hit a pitch down the middle back over the pitchers head, an outside pitch is hit to opposite field, an inside pitch down the line closest to the batter. The diagram shows how a right handed batter should look to hit the ball. The closer the ball is to the batter the earlier, further in front of the plate the batter should hit the ball. When in a slump or after a lay off many batters concentrate on just hitting the ball back through the middle of the diamond. Only once they are making good contact will they do anything more ambitious.

Hitting with control

A batter should aim for a strong flat controlled swing. Try to hit through the ball with a good follow through. Don't try to knock the cover off the ball. Keep under control, swinging at 95% with control will yield far better results than trying for 105% and missing entirely, popping up or grounding out.



Base coaching and base running

Introduction

Softball teams use base-running coaches stationed near the first and third bases to help runners as they move round the bases. The coaches have a much better view of the play than the runner. Their presence allows the runner to concentrate on running. Coaches should use dramatic gestures as well as words to tell the runner what to do. It's often easier to see what a coach is doing than it is to hear them. Good base running is a partnership between the runner and the coaches.

Fly balls

One of the most important tasks the base coach has is to tell the runner what to do when a fly ball is hit. If there are two outs the runner should run in the same way as they would if the ball was on the ground, as a catch will end the innings. If less than two outs the runner may have to tag up on a fly ball and they must do as the coach tells them.

The coach will tell them one of ...

Go - there is no chance the ball will be caught.

Wait - the ball is going to be caught and the batter will be out. The coach may send the runner once a fielder touches the ball.

Go halfway - the ball may be caught but if it is dropped the runner would not have time to get to the next base, going halfway allows them the choice of returning to their original base if the ball is caught or running forward if it is dropped.

There are no hard and fast rules on what the coach and the runner should do, it depends on the speed of the runner, the quality of the fielding side, the state of the game and the direction height and speed of the fly ball. One important factor is whether the fly ball is in the infield or the outfield:

Infield

If the ball is popped up in the infield any runner who is not forced should stay on their base, A runner on first may want to advance a little way to give themselves a fighting chance of getting to the next base if the catch is dropped, but they must be close enough to the base to be able to get back to it if the ball is caught. (If there are runners on first & second they should stay on their bases as the umpire should call the batter out under the 'infield fly' rule).

Outfield

Whether the runner should tag up depends on a whole variety of things (how deep the ball is hit, where it is hit, what the score is, how fast the runner is, how good the fielder is etc. etc.), but the most important factor is which base it is that the runner is advancing towards: Going from first to second the runner will normally be advancing towards the fielder catching the ball, going home from third the runner will be moving away from the fielder. A simple set of rules to use as a guide is:

- A runner on first goes part way to second, then returns if the ball is caught.
- A runner on third **tags up** until the ball is caught.
- A runner on second tags up if the ball is hit to right field but goes half way if the ball is hit to left or centre field.



Fielding Basics

Before the pitch

Before each play a fielder (usually the shortstop) will call out the number of outs and which base play is on. Before the pitch is thrown each fielder should think:

“What play do I make if the ball comes to me ?”

“What play do I make if the ball goes to someone else ? “

Fielders should ask themselves both these questions before the ball is pitched, and not just ask the questions but also know the answers.

As the pitcher prepares to pitch all the other fielders should get into position to field the ball if it comes to them, the '**ready position**'.



Infielders set up in a crouched position with their hands in front of their body and with their feet slightly more than shoulder width apart. The pitcher should also get into a ready position after releasing the pitch.

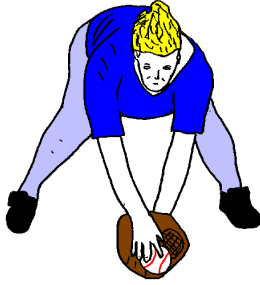
Inexperienced infielders, or fielders facing a heavy hitting team may wish to set up with their glove held slightly higher protecting their face.



Outfielders have more time to react to the ball after it is hit so the outfield ready position is more upright. Again the feet are slightly over shoulder width apart and the hands in front of the body. All fielders should be watching the batter as the pitch comes in so that they can 'read' the hit as it comes off the bat.

Fielding a ground ball





Bend from the knees not just from the waist. Field the ball well in front to keep the ball in sight. Feet more than shoulder width apart to keep balanced. Field the ball in front of the middle of the body. The bare hand should cover the glove to trap the ball.

Catching a fly ball

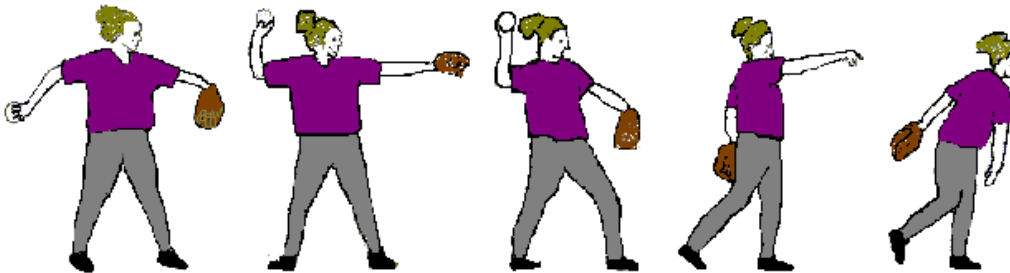


Field the ball well in front to keep the ball in sight. Field the ball in front of the middle of the body. The bare hand should cover the glove to trap the ball and to allow a quick throw.

NOTE: When catching a fly ball the fielder should shout 'My Ball, My Ball' and wave off other players trying to catch the ball. Outfielders have priority over infielders when going for a fly ball because a player coming in to catch the ball can see both the ball and the other player. A fielder moving out to catch the ball cannot keep their eye on the ball and on a player moving in.

Throwing the ball

- Draw back the arm.
- Point the glove at the target, ball behind head, elbows at shoulder height.
- Start forward, lead with the throwing elbow, pull the glove down.
- Snap the wrist on release, pull down on the seams.
- Follow through until the throwing hand touches the glove-side leg.



Fielders in motion: Backing up

Backing up in the field is universally agreed to be a Good Thing but what does it mean in practice ? At it's most general it means that all fielders should be alert to the fact that other fielders make mistakes and be ready to deal with the results of other fielder's mishaps. It's a baseball cliché that there's no play called standing around. Every fielder should be active when the ball is in play, fielding the ball, covering a base, preparing to receive a throw, or backing up another player who is fielding or receiving the ball. All fielders must be alert and ready to recover an errant throw or dropped or mis-handled ball.



Fielding by position

A trip round the team & the special defensive aspects of each position...

Pitcher

The pitcher should be ready to field mis-hits and pop-ups within the diamond as well as any hits straight back at him. The pitcher should be ready to cover first base when the ball is hit to the right of the first baseman. When the ball is hit into the outfield the pitcher should back up the infielders as the ball comes back in. The pitcher is usually well placed to call the play, telling the cut off man where (and if) to throw the ball when it is thrown in.

Catcher

Catcher is a common hiding place for a weak or inexperienced fielder but a good catcher is a plus for a team. The catcher should be ready to catch pop ups behind or immediately in front of the plate and to gather and throw mis-hits that come to rest just in front of the plate. The catcher should be ready for both forced and tag plays at the plate. A common play is when the play is on first but there is a runner on third who will look to come home on a ground ball to the infield. The catcher should be ready for the throw home from first after the out at first on an infield hit.

Just catching pitches cleanly and returning the ball efficiently to the pitcher will help the pace of the game and help the pitcher maintain a good rhythm. The catcher should check that the other fielders are in position and paying attention before the pitcher releases the ball, telling the pitcher to wait if necessary until the other fielders are in place.

First base

First base needs to field the ball when it is hit towards them but the biggest part of their job is catching throws from other infielders to get the force outs at first. The fielder must realise that catching the ball is more important than staying on the bag. If pulled off the base towards home the baseman can often still get the out on a wild throw by tagging the base runner. When the ball is hit onto the outfield and there is no play on first the first base should move into the diamond, watch the batter to make sure they do touch first on their way past, and be ready to back up play on the other bases. When the play is on first but there are other base runners first base must anticipate the need to throw to home or third to prevent the runner(s) advancing after the out is made at first.

Second base and shortstop

The 'middle infielders' should work as a team. With a runner on first they should be looking to get two outs on any ball hit up the middle. The more the pair of them practice turning the double play the easier it will become. The pair need to agree beforehand which of them is covering second base on any ball hit to the pitcher.

Relaying throws from outfield to infield is an important part of both these roles. If the ball is hit to right field the second baseman goes out to act as the cut off and the short stop covers second base. If the ball is hit to left field or centre the short stop acts as the cut off and the baseman covers second.

Both these middle infielders should be ready to back up the corner infielder when a ball is hit up the line to first or third. In particular the middle infielders are well placed to move across behind first or third to take pop-ups. It is usually an easier catch for them than for a back-peddalling first or third base man.

Third base

Right handed batters tend to hit the ball hard through 'hot corner' so the fielder should have quick reactions. The longest throw in the infield is from third to first so a strong arm is an asset. If the third baseman does have a good arm then with runners on first and second and less than two outs the 'third then first' double play can be easier than 'third then second' as the third baseman doesn't have to spin round as far to throw to first and the batter is usually slower to set off running than the runner on first. When a weaker batter comes to the plate the third baseman should field inside the diamond. This can intimidate a nervous batter and it also makes fielding weak infield hits a lot easier.



Outfielders

Outfielders should back each other up and call loud and early when they intend to field the ball. It is easier to judge the flight of the ball when off to one side so the outfielders on either side of the fielder to whom the ball has been hit can tell them whether to move in or out to field the ball.

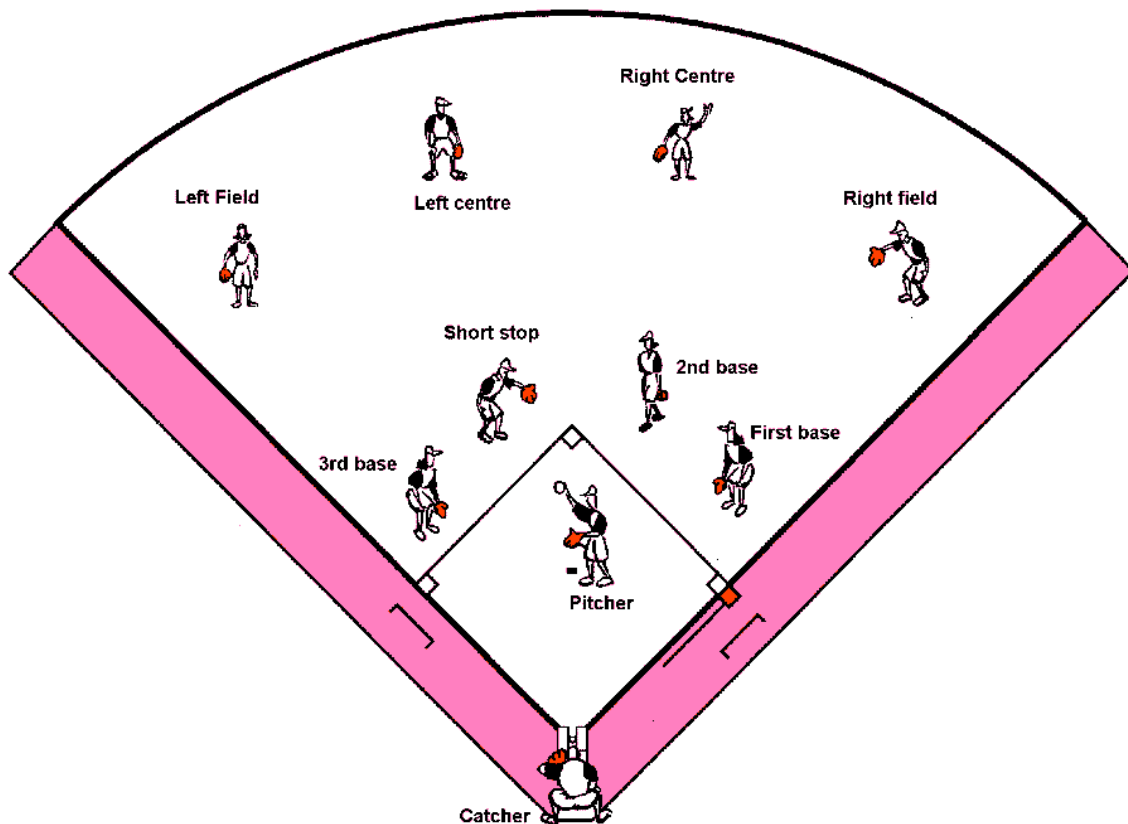
When the ball is hit to the opposite side of the diamond or within the infield the outfielders should move in towards the infield so they are in a position to retrieve any wild throws. When returning a fielded ball the outfielder should always throw the ball to a team mate. Don't just lob the ball back in the general direction of the diamond. Ideally the outfielder aims to throw the ball at the cut-off fielders head.

As a general rule outfielders should play deeper with runners on base than when the bases are empty. With empty bases look for the catch, with base runners look to keep the runners from scoring.

In pro-ball the best corner outfielders play in right field because the throws to third and home are longer than from left field but in recreational softball the strongest outfielders usually play left field because the ball is hit there more often than to right.

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A team in the field



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