



**LIBERTY SOFTBALL  
COACHES HANDBOOK**



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## INTRODUCTION, MISSION STATEMENT & SAFETY

Liberty Softball is a community driven non-profit organization with a focus on teamwork and parent involvement. Our goal is to provide well-organized & managed softball program that provides a safe, wholesome environment where the children in our communities can enjoy spare time and the sports experience. Liberty will educate, train, and coach all children with focus on the fundamentals of softball, regardless of skill level. The goal is to improve the child's ability and knowledge at all levels.

Our website is <http://www.libertyyouthbaseball.org/>

Liberty Mission: Teaching Integrity, Respect, and Sportsmanship on the Field and in the Game of Life.

### **SAFETY**

**SAFETY** is the number one priority for Liberty Softball. All players, parents, and coaches need to be aware of **SAFETY** at all times. Here are some tips to help coaches reinforce **SAFETY** with the teams:

- No one is allowed in the dugout area except for the players and coaches of the team
- Keep the dugout area clean and obstructions (visual and physical) to a minimum
  - Have helmets and bats hanging from the fences, not lying on the ground where players walk
  - Have bat bags and game bags outside of the dugout or out of the walkways
  - The bench is for the players, not for gloves, bags, water bottles, etc.
- The only player allowed to have a bat in their hands is the current hitter and the current on-deck hitter
  - Players should not be practice swinging in or near the dugouts or benches
- Runners must keep helmets on at all times within the field of play
- Keep players involved in the game and keeping their eyes on the play and the location of the ball
- Recommend face masks be worn on defense as well as helmets
- Walk around the edges of the playing field before practice and games. Point out to the players on the team where fencing is broken, sharp objects are located, holes in the outfield, etc.
- Inspect that the bases and pitchers rubber have been inserted properly
- Recommend that all jewelry be removed prior to practices or games

## **COACHING, REGISTRATION & PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

### **COACHES**

League Commissioners will select and notify Head Coaches for their teams by the beginning of March. They may be assigned assistant coaches who have offered to help at registration, or Head coaches may “recruit” parents of girls on their team to help coach.

A coaches meeting will be scheduled 2-3 weeks prior to the start of the season to review key teachings and focus on the same core fundamentals. The coaches’ meeting is mandatory for all head coaches and voluntary for assistant coaches. Coaches will receive their rosters, schedules, rules, codes of conduct, and information about the organization and upcoming season.

### **REGISTERING AS COACHES / VOLUNTEER**

All coaches, head and assistant, will be required to complete the Volunteer Application PDF on the Liberty website before the season begins. All coaches will be subject to potential background checks as the results will affect our insurance policies. If there is a parent on the team that would like to assist with coaching, please have them register on the website as soon as possible. Any coach that has a background of violent crimes or crimes involving children will not be permitted to coach. Coaching assignments will be determined by the league commissioners.

### **PARENTS**

It is strongly recommend that coaches communicate clearly and in a timely manner to your players' parents. Coordinating a parents meeting at or before the first practice is recommended so as to review player and parent expectations. Signing up a child for a sport is not only a commitment for the player, but it is a commitment for the parents as well. The best way to have your parents exhibit acceptable behavior is by demonstrating it and leading by example

## COACHING TIPS AND DRILLS

### **GENERAL TIPS:**

The following tips will make your role easier and help you enjoy your time with the girls:

- Plan your practices by allocating time slots for each activity
  - Warm-up / Stretch
  - Skill Development / Fundamental work (potential for break-out groups)
  - Game concepts
  - Scrimmage
  - Team Building
  - Q&A
- Arrive early to get the field ready
- Have the girls busy from the moment they arrive. Sometimes, utilizing assistant coaches and volunteers for break-out groups helps keep the focus
- Kids like consistency and skills are built with repetition, so use the same drills/games and expand them when skill levels increase
- Communicate your expectations for each practice and for each drill. Keep explanations to minimum verbally, use demonstration when you can
- End your practice with a fun, team building activity
- Occasionally work in a “take home” exercise that helps the girls learn about the game, its history, etc.

Basic expectations for your parents and your players:

- Arrive on time and be ready to go
- Stop, look and listen when the coach is speaking
- Hustle on and off the field
- Help with the equipment at each practice
- Be positive and encourage others

### **COACHING FOR EACH LEVEL**

There will always be those few players at each level who are exceptional athletes with advanced skills for their age and those that will take more time than the norm to develop. The expectations below are for the majority of the players at each level:

#### **Baby Belles (Tee – Ball) Objectives**

By the end of the season, most players will:

1. Recognize the position names and locations
2. Begin to develop fundamental skills of throwing
  - Full circle arm movement – down, back, up, follow-through
  - Grip with the 12 / 6 seams
  - Pointing shoulder to target
3. Begin to develop fundamental skills of catching
  - Be able to stop a ball most of the time
  - Positioning in front of the ball path, and not to the side

- Be able to turn the glove properly for a fly ball vs. ground ball most of the time
  - Be able to demonstrate the "ready" position consistently
4. Begin to develop fundamental skills of hitting
    - Be able to consistently hit off a tee,
    - Be able to hit coaches' pitches at least 6/10 pitched strikes
    - Know where the foul lines are and what they mean
  5. Begin to develop fundamental skills base of running
    - Running through first base, but not the others
    - Listening to, and picking up her coach when running bases
    - Know which way to run around the bases
  6. Know the difference between "safe" and "out"
    - a. Know the options of tagging a runner with the ball (in the glove) or touch a base
  7. Know that the objective of the defense is to make 3 outs in an inning

### **Little Belles (8U) Objectives:**

In addition to the Baby Belles (Tee – Ball) objectives, by the end of the season, most players will:

1. Know the names of the positions on the field and begin to understand and demonstrate the responsibility of each
  - Outfielders backing up infielders.
  - Where to make a play defensively and the importance of getting the lead runner out
  - Anticipation of where a defensive play should be made
2. Continue to develop fundamental skills of throwing and catching
  - Demonstrate proper glove positioning for fly balls and ground balls
  - Demonstrate the ability to throw the ball from the outfield to an infield position player
  - Demonstrate the ability to throw from base to base
3. Continue to develop fundamental skills of hitting
  - Be able to make contact with a pitch thrown by the coach most of the time
  - Understanding of the strike zone – Swinging at strikes
  - Understand what a ball is and that 4 balls to a hitter results in a walk
  - Understand what a foul ball is and that it counts as a strike
4. Continue to develop fundamental skills of running
  - Understanding when to advance and when not to
    - Ground balls, line drives, fly balls
  - Listen and look to the base coach when running the bases
  - Understanding the difference between holding, rounding and running through a base
5. Begin to understand the difference between a forced and unforced runner
  - a. When/how to tag the runner
  - b. When/how to tag the base

### **Mighty Belles (10U) and Lady Belles (12U) Girls Objectives:**

In addition to the Little Belles (8U) objectives, by the end of the season, most players will:

1. Know the positions on the field and understand most of the responsibilities of defensive positions
  - Understands and demonstrates that every position has a responsibility to move and be somewhere on every play

- Anticipation of where a defensive play should be made most of the time.
  - Understand the difference between a forced and unforced runner and when to tag a base and when to tag the runner
  - Demonstrate relays from outfield to the proper infield position
  - Understand proper positioning in rundowns
  - Understand proper positioning/coverage in bunt situations
2. Continue to develop fundamental skills of throwing and catching
    - Demonstrate proper glove positioning for fly balls, ground balls to either side, backhand, etc.
    - Demonstrate accurate and consistent throws from base to base
    - Continue to improve throwing strength and accuracy (3rd to 1st, Home Plate to 2nd)
  3. Continue to develop fundamental skills of hitting,
    - Be able to hit a pitched strike
    - Be able to differentiate between a ball and a strike by utilizing strike zone coverage
    - Demonstrate proper bunting technique
      - Sacrifice Bunt
      - Bunt for a hit
    - Understands the pitch count
  4. Continue to develop fundamental skills of base running
    - Understanding when to advance and when not to
    - Understand when a runner is forced and when a runner is required to be tagged
    - Look for and listen to the base coach when running
      - Picking up her coach when approaching the next base
    - Begin to develop basic sliding skills
    - Begin to understand stealing bases, techniques, lead-offs, and returning to the base
  5. Catchers - Begin to demonstrate specific position skills
    - Blocking
    - Framing
    - Throwing to the bases
    - Dropped 3<sup>rd</sup> strikes
    - Fielding balls in front of the plate

## Fundamentals

### **Catching The Ball** (general)

- ALWAYS have them in a "ready" athletic position
  - Teach the "1-2" step habit of approaching the hitter before contact
- Catch with two hands and covering the glove with the throwing hand
- Catch the ball in front of the body and step forward with the glove foot as they catch
  - Teach "taking your nose to the ball" concept
- Proper glove position
  - Above waist = fingers up
  - Below waist = fingers down
- Transition to throwing quickly with as few steps as possible between catch and throw

### Ground Balls

- Getting in front of the ball
  - Teach the "4-points" facing the ball
- Receive the ball with the glove out front - knees bent, chest up and butt down
  - Try to receive the ball to the center-left so as to make the transition to the throw easier and quicker
  - Teach to "work through the ball" so momentum is not stopped and re-started. Momentum can be carried through, helping to reduce throwing transition time as well as creating more velocity on the throw
- Fingertips and the backs of the fingers of the glove should be touching the ground to create an entry into the glove pocket
- Throwing hand should be just above the palm, ready to cover up and convert to a throw ("Alligator-hand" or "Pac-Man method")
- Stay low and make the throw to the base immediately once the ball is caught. Popping up takes time and allows the runner more steps.
- Shuffle the feet on slow to medium speed ground balls hit to the left and right. No cross over step.
- Cross over step and turn shoulders on hard hit ground balls to the left and right. No shuffle.

### Fly Balls

- Receive the ball with the glove up and in front whenever possible (advanced players over throwing shoulder)
- Try to receive the ball with your momentum coming towards the infield
  - Right foot slightly in front for right-handed throwers
  - Left foot slightly in front for left-handed throwers
- Throwing hand should be positioned off of the thumb slot on the glove and open
- After making the catch, bring the glove and ball down to your throwing side to ready the throw.
- On balls hit in the gaps or directly over the head of the outfielder, teach the drop step, turn, and run in lieu of back pedaling
  - Turn head and find the ball in the air while running to the spot where the ball will land



## Throwing

- Recommend each girl get their own ball and use black electrical tape to wrap once around the center of (12:00 – 6:00)
  - Teaches proper spin of the ball when throwing. If the player does not see a straight black stripe while the ball is in the air, the throwing mechanics are off
- Hold the ball in the fingertips, not in the palm, thumb and middle finger opposite sides of ball and on the seams if able
- Arms outstretched so glove is pointing toward target, ball hand opposite direction with both palms down (knuckles to sky)
  - Throwing motion starts with weight shift to back foot and front foot stepping/pointing to target
  - Throwing arm comes through with elbow first, at shoulder height with hand over elbow
  - Wrist “flick” and follow-through to opposite hip at the end of the motion
  - Bring back leg around to finish

## Base-Running

- Do not watch the ball, fix eyes on bases and ears on coaches
- Runners must stay in the baseline and may not deviate outside of it by more than 3 feet
- Defensive players making a play on the ball have the right-of-way within the baseline. Runners must avoid contact or “making the defensive player make an unnecessary adjustment”
- Run through first base, do not stop at the base
  - Once the runner steps on the base, they should remain in foul territory, but turn towards the infield and listen for their coach in case of an overthrow or error. This will position them for an easy start towards 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
- Do not overrun 2<sup>nd</sup> base or 3<sup>rd</sup> base, runner needs to stop at the base or slide into the base
- Runners starting on 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> base
  - Left foot is positioned at far right of the front edge of base nearest to next base
  - Right foot is positioned even with the back edge of the base, but not in a position where it has to travel over top of the base. This prevents the possibility of dragging the foot on the base or tripping over the base
  - Runner rocks back on back leg as pitcher’s throwing hand is at its highest peak.
  - Left foot pushes off base and propels the runner towards the next base
- Runners starting on 3<sup>rd</sup> base
  - Left foot is positioned at far right of the front edge of base nearest to home plate
  - Right foot is positioned even with the back edge of the base, but not in a position where it has to travel over top of the base. This prevents the possibility of dragging the foot on the base or tripping over the base
  - Runner rocks back on back leg as pitcher’s throwing hand is at its highest peak.
  - Left foot pushes off base and propels the runner towards home plate
  - Runner stays in foul territory until ball is caught by the catcher or contact is made by the hitter
    - If ball strikes the runner in foul territory, the ball is foul and the play re-starts
    - If ball strikes the runner in fair territory, the runner is out
  - Once catcher catches the ball, runner enters fair territory and shuffles back to 3<sup>rd</sup> base
- On base hits, runner should take a “question mark route” towards 1<sup>st</sup> base. Peel off towards the 1<sup>st</sup> base dugout a bit past halfway so the angle to 2<sup>nd</sup> base is direct and the runner is not going out into right field.

- Always try to hit every base on the inside left corner with left foot and push off towards next base. Do not sacrifice setting up the left foot by stutter-stepping and losing speed. If runner cannot avoid touching with the right foot, this is OK.
- As runner heads towards 2<sup>nd</sup> base, head turns towards 3<sup>rd</sup> to pick up the coach's direction to stop or continue

## **Hitting**

### Grip

- Door knocking knuckles lined up
- Relaxed grip in the fingers, not the palm of the hand

### Stance

- Feet slightly more than shoulder width apart and toes square to the plate
- Close enough to the plate so the meat of the bat covers the plate when arms extended
- Slight bend in knees, knees may be a bit inside ankles
- Both eyes need to be able to view pitcher/incoming pitch.
- Hands are a few inches from the back shoulder and the bat is at 45° angle
- Elbows and angled downward in a "v"

### Swing

- Starts with a "LOAD." Hands move slightly back and majority of weight shifts to back foot
- Set front "trigger" toe to the ground, begin weight shift from back foot. Must keep the firm front side, no collapse, no knee bend.
- Hips begin turn with rotation of back foot, hands begin to move towards the ball to get the barrel on plane, torso begins rotating towards the pitcher
- Keep the hands inside of the ball, bat barrel stays close to back arm, which "slots" into position next to oblique
- Contact is made, elbows extend and hands remain "palm up, palm down"
- Full extension - hands finish high and wrists break

### Sacrifice Bunting (BASIC)

- Position the player towards the front of the batter's box
- Do not turn and squarely face the pitcher. Pivot from you stance so that the back foot toe is facing the pitcher and the front foot is at 45 degree angle.
- Athletic position with ready, flexible knees
- Hands extended, not quite to "locked" elbows. Bat should still be out over the plate in front of the catcher's eyes. Hold bat with the top hand at the bottom of the barrel with your thumb and forefinger and bottom hand on knob
- Start with the bat at the top of the strike zone
- Move the bat up and down in the strike zone with knee flexion only. Do not move arms, bat, hands, etc.
- Deaden the pitch as it contacts the bat by allowing the elbows to absorb the impact
  - Bunts to 3<sup>rd</sup> base – bat head must be pointing pretty close to right down the 1<sup>st</sup> base line and bat head must be above knob

- Bunts to 1<sup>st</sup> base – bottom hand pushes the knob out towards the pitcher. Barrel remains higher than knob
- Avoid bunts straight back to pitcher

#### Bunting for a hit (BASIC)

- Player takes normal stance and does not move until pitcher's arm is at its peak height
- First move is a drop step back with the back foot about 6 inches. Remain on the toe of that foot, because the player needs to be able to push off towards 1<sup>st</sup> base once the bunt is laid down
- Top hand on grip slides up to the bottom of the barrel. Bat is still held with only the thumb and forefingers
- Barrel goes directly over back shoulder into the top of the strike zone. More of an "axe-chop" action down versus a "flatter slice" action across the plate.
  - Bunts to 3<sup>rd</sup> base – bat head must be pointing pretty close to right down the 1<sup>st</sup> base line and bat head must be above knob
  - Push Bunts to 1<sup>st</sup> base – bottom hand pushes the knob out towards the pitcher. Barrel remains higher than knob

## Drills & Practice Ideas

### **Catching the ball**

#### Ground Balls

Consider using tennis balls and/or eliminating the glove, causing the girls to use both hands

- Count how many bounces there were into the glove/catch (watch ball into glove)
- Try to catch the ball with the least number of bounces (charging the ball)

Have the girls walk from cone to cone in the low squat position – knees bent, chest up, butt down, glove out

Receiving the backhand grounder – “Hard backhand” and “Front backhand”

Quick toss grounders

- Staying low while moving laterally
  - Stress quick throws (underhand or overhand)
  - Flip versus throwing a spear

Mouse in the hole- set -up helmets for different lanes and throw grounders into the lanes. Have the girls field the ball before they cross the helmet.

#### Fly Balls & Pop-Ups

For the younger players, simply giving them a ball and having them toss it up in the air to themselves is a good drill for focusing on the ball in the air and following it into the glove.

Get to the spot – have girls about 10-15 feet away from coach. Coach throws the ball right in front of him in the air and the girls must hustle to get under the ball to catch it.

Girls start to the right of coach, come towards him and run around behind him to the other side. Coach throws the ball in the air over their heads and they have to look back to find it while running away from the infield. Teaches how to go back on balls.

Coach stands with ball in his throwing hand raised in the air. Outfielder faces away from him running into the outfield. Coach moves hand right and left so the outfielder has to follow the hand movement (zig-zag). Coach throws fly ball on the 4<sup>th</sup> hand movement. This drill teaches footwork, while keeping eyes on the fly ball.

### **Throwing**

#### Wrist Flick

- Kneel on glove side knee and have glove hand hold elbow at shoulder height. Player flicks the ball with wrist snap into a bucket 3 feet away. Keep track of how many go in
- Standing 5-6 feet away from partner, player has glove hand hold elbow at shoulder height. Player flicks the ball with a wrist snap to partner

#### Kneeling Throws

- Kneeling on glove side knee about 10 – 12 yards apart, throw to partner.

- Full arm motion- down, back, up, follow-through
- Follow-Through to touch the ground – emphasize the stretch

### Standing Throws

- Hit partner in the chest
  - Body Game – If the throw would have hit the partner anywhere on their body above the waist, the thrower gets a point. Keep track of points until you have a winner
- Standing in concrete throws
  - Feet stay stationary, facing target. Teaches getting a good rotation back and following through
- Knock the stuffed animal off of the chair (good for younger groups)
  - Break the team up into 2 even numbered groups, half at the pitcher’s mound, half at 2<sup>nd</sup> base. Hit ground balls to them and have them throw to first to a large stuffed animal sitting in a fold up chair. If the player knocks the animal off, that team gets a point.
- Zig-Zag Drill
  - Players line up opposite one another in 2 straight lines 20 yards apart. First player has all of the balls down by her and starts the challenge by throwing to the player across from her.
  - Girls continue to throw to the next girl until all balls are at the end of the line from where they started. Goal is to get all of the balls from one end to the other without having a bad throw.
- Long Toss

### Quick Transition / Quick Release Drills

- Relay race
  - 2-3 lines of players spaced evenly apart on the base line. Relay the ball to the next player, go up and down the line 5 times
  - Teaches footwork so that the player is positioned to quickly get rid of the ball, once received
  - Also, teaches how to receive the ball as a relay and to turn over the glove side to find your target
- Villanova
  - 4-buckets make a square. Buckets only 8-10 feet apart. Rapid exchanges, all underhand tosses and all quick release. Follow your flip and go to the next bucket. Need at least 2 players at each bucket
  - Move buckets back to form a rectangle. Longer throws are designed to force the player catching the ball to come around the bucket and flip to the next player. Focus is on footwork, especially good for middle infielders.

### Base-running, Throwing, and Catching Drill (all in one)

- Half the team at home plate, the other half in positions on the field. Hit the ball in the outfield and have the defense throw the ball to every player in the field, then back to home plate. The offensive team counts how many girls can round the bases and score before the entire defense touches the ball and returns to coach at home.
  - Defense works on catching, throwing, and accuracy
  - Offense works on base-running skills, touching the inside corner of bases, picking up their coaches, and taking good angles

## **Base–running**

Warm up with a jog around the bases and have the runners yell what base they are on when they touch it.

Touch the cone

- Set up a cone 3 feet beyond 1<sup>st</sup> base, slightly in foul territory. Have the runner run through first and touch the cone.

Home/2B Race

- Half the team at home plate, half at 2<sup>nd</sup> base. One at a time, race around the base back to their start, next player goes and see which team finishes first.

## **Hitting**

### Tee Work

- Hit slightly deflated soccer ball off tee (develop powerful swing and stronger hands)
- Tee work with bat behind back – Helps with proper hip turns
- Rapid tees – Helps to form muscle memory as well as remove any hitches in the swing
- Tee work where the position of the tee is moved from location to location to work on hitting high/low, inside/outside zone strikes
- One handed swings off tee – teaches arm “slotting,” hands extension, etc.
- Karate Kid – Have front knee raised up above waistline while balancing in normal batter’s box position. Stride out and start swing. Teaches balance throughout the entire swing and follow-through

### Soft toss

- Standard soft toss
- Soft toss with colored ball -Soft toss 2 softballs at the same time, one with a dot on it. The batter needs to pick out the one with the dot and swing at that one. A variation is to soft toss 2-3 balls and call out “high” , “ low “ or “middle” and have the batter hit that positioned ball
- Using tennis balls, drop the ball from above the hitter and allow it to bounce once. Once the bounce has occurred, the hitter then swings at the ball. Teaches to wait on off speed pitches and keeping the hands and weight back
- Using standard softballs, drop the ball from above the hitter and the hitter needs to hit the ball before it hits the ground. Teaches bat speed and quick hands to react to the ball.

### Front Toss

- Standing behind a screen, pitcher tosses balls to hitter for live hitting. Work on placing pitches inside, outside, high, and low. Force the hitter to hit to all fields
- Throw balls with different colored dots on them (keeps eye on ball) – place colored dots on a few balls and pitch them to a batter. The batter has to tell you what color dot was on the ball.

Pepper (soft touch for bunting)

## LINKS TO HELPFUL TRAINING VIDEOS

USA Coach Mike Candrea with the women's national team working on infield drills

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDwFdR4gluQ>

Mike Murray of The Virginia Baseball Club teaching "Common Hitting Flaws & Drills"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GS-PcxmaHmQ>

Auburn University Softball Training and Agility

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF-0KX8PF\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF-0KX8PF_o)

Tips For New Softball Coaches

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-MXsgl1UJU>

Coaching Youth Softball Pitchers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7p3GAvX3400>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KC3ZouXDwyw>