

Tactical Aspects of GAME DAY Coaching: Part 4 Pre Game and During Game Responsibilities

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PRE-GAME ACTIVITIES

- Helps to give framework for your team to establish consistency
 - Use your resources, but remain flexible
1. Pre-Game meeting with Team
 - Review signals
 - Give starting line ups
 - Establish Pitching relief orders
 - Emphasize points of focus for the offense and defense (strategy)
 - Review any basic scouting issues for opponent
 2. Pre-Game Warm-up

At the beginning of the season, coaches need to establish a warm-up routine that will be used before each game. The pregame warm-up will not only get the team warmed up but will create a consistent routine for your players for the entire season. Routines help create confidence in your players. They know what to expect and they are comfortable with how things happen. Although creating routines is very good and helpful for your players, they should ultimately learn NOT to rely on routines completely to gain confidence.

Following are types of activities that you should include in your pre-game warm-up:

Team Stretching

- Light jogging prior to beginning a stretch
- Instruction on proper stretching technique
- Set order of stretches and numbers of reps
- The stretching is lead by an asst. coach, strength coach or team leaders.

Offense

- Warm-up dry swings for all players
- Hitting off of batting tees, off of a machine, or off of a live batting practice pitcher
- Side toss hitting drills
- Utilizing a game of pepper to warm up their hand eye coordination
- Players throw balls to each other for bunting practice
- Batting practice for Pitchers and Catchers first in the order (allow these players to hit first so that they can begin their pitching warm up)

There are numerous offensive drills that can be done to warm up. The most important thing for a coach is to establish and teach the athletes the warm up routine that is expected prior to games. Creating the proper routine for the team should include skills that will warm up all aspects of the game including:

Throwing

- Ideally athletes should utilize some rotator cuff exercises or extra stretching of the wrist, arm and shoulder prior to actually throwing a ball
- Using surgical tubing or Thera-bands is ideal.
- Gradual warm up will keep the athletes arms healthier
- Warm-up throwing drills for all players with specific numbers of reps
- Specific throws for position players to warm up all of the types of throws needed in the game. (i.e. outfielders throw long, catcher make steal throws, infielders warm up tosses, and short quick throws)

Defense

- Footwork practice and running catches for outfielders
- Fielding technique practice and glove work for infielders
- PPF (Pre Playing Fundamentals), these are the above position specific drills which athletes should know and do before every practice or game on their own or with coaches.
- Fly ball practice for outfielders
- Ground ball practice for infielders

3. Pre-Game Infield

Establish whether or not you will take a pre-game infield practice on the field. Sometimes defensive warm up is limited to taking lines for ground balls and flyballs with no full defense on the entire field. If defensive warm up is limited to just hitting lines for the infield and outfield, then it is important to make sure that coaches provide as much repetition for the type of ground balls, flyballs, and throws that may come up during the game. If a Pre-Game is allowed, make sure you have a standard, efficient Pre-Game that the athletes are comfortable and proficient at executing. It should build comfort and confidence on the playing field for that game.

4. Pre-Game Meeting at Home Plate with Officials

- Bring line up
- Establish ground rules
- Clarify any rules that may be in question either for tournament or in general
- Mercy rule or drop dead game times, establish this prior to game time
- Substitution Questions
- Game Ball rotation

DURING GAME ACTIVITIES

1. Coaching Third Base

- The role of the 3rd base coach is not to control the team, but to lead the athletes to a common mission and help create opportunity to score with an OFFENSIVE STRATEGY
- Move to a position that is visible to all runners and hitter when giving the signs
- Read the defensive movement between pitches
- Implement Offensive strategy
- Give clear and defined verbal and visual signals for runners on the bases
- With runners trying to score, move down the line towards home to give the most time to decide.
- Pick up secondary runners after sending a runner home to score
- RUNNING STRATEGIES AT 3B
 - Conservative / wait to see the ball on the ground get thru the infield
 - Read Ball / runner looks for slow roller or ball hit up the middle to break for home
 - Aggressive ball angle Read / Runner on third is breaking for home on any ball hit off the bat that is angled down off the bat. Fair or foul, hard or soft.

2. Substitutions

- Making substitutions during the game is a big responsibility of the head coach. Coaches need to constantly be thinking of how they can utilize the players on their bench to win the ball game. When to make changes can be as important as whom to change. This is why it is a good idea to have a game plan for your substitutes. When to pinch hit, pinch run, make defensive changes, and definitely when to make a pitching change? These are questions that plague a coach. Much of the pressure is taken off when coaches prepare before the game and create a list of options that may come up during a game and what

- situations would be ideal to use specific players that are not starting that game.
- Handling substitutes is more than just making the changes, but also keeping track of those substitutions that have been made. Coaches should create a consistent system to keep track of these changes. Some coaches like to have a line up card or cheat sheet in their pocket. Others like to use dugout cards to keep this information clear. One of the most frustrating situations in a game is when coaches forget or lose track of what subs are eligible to go into the game. Lost opportunity can be frustrating for coaches and players. Bench players will learn to trust coach's decisions when consistent utilization of subs happens.
 - Basic substitution rules generally allow for the starters to leave the game once and then return to the game once in the sport of softball (Re-Entry Rule). Bench players on the other hand are allowed to enter the game once but once they leave the game, they are no longer eligible to re-enter the game. Here are some key ways to use bench players:

Pinch runners

- Use speedy runners that are faster than a current base runner
- Utilize them when they can make an impact on the outcome of the game
- Be careful of using pinch runners too early in the game
- Be willing to lose that player for any other role the remainder of the game

Pinch Hitters

- Utilize them when they can make an impact on the outcome of the game
- Use a hitter's strength against specific types of pitching
- Get a hitter extra at bats when the game is one sided
- Pinch hit for starters that have been unsuccessful in that game

Defensive Specialist

- Utilize players on the bench that can be more consistent or stronger on defense than one of the starters.
- Use these players later in the game when offensive production is less important or to maintain a lead.

Relief Pitching

- Designate which pitchers are in relief prior to the game so they can prepare physically and mentally
- Give them as much warning as possible prior to making the switch
- Make changes when the starter has lost her control or ability to get hitters out
- Make changes when the defense has been struggling to make plays and the team needs a strikeout or ground ball.