

## A Great Christmas Present

So, what is your daughter or your player asking for as a Christmas present? Ipad, computer, cell phone, video game, car (ha)? Maybe you should suggest, or get her, a new glove. Nine out of ten gloves that we look at during our clinics are not broken in correctly for softball—too loose, too dirty, not the right size or, well, frankly, past their prime.

During the fall season, the first thing we look at are their gloves. I do not want to lose a game because of a glove that should be replaced. I have watched enough high school games, while recruiting, where the game has been lost because of an error which was actually on the glove, not the player. If the player is good enough to get the ball into her glove, the ball should stay in it. But how many games have you seen where a player gets the ball in the glove and then it falls out of the glove. It is scored an error and the game may be lost because of that play. Balls should not just come out of the glove. Once they are in, they should stay in. If not, it is time to either rework the glove so that the ball does stay in or get a new one.

So, what do you look for in a new glove?

1. First of all, decide what position you need the glove for: infield, outfield, first base or catcher? Some catchers like catcher's mitts but some prefer a first baseman's glove, a first baseman needs to play with a first baseman's glove, outfielders need longer gloves and I like a shorter glove on an infielder. Some shortstops like a longer glove, which is fine, but I also like a short one since some players have trouble getting the ball out of a longer one during quick plays.
2. Decide on the brand-name-type of glove. This may mean going to a couple of stores to check out the variety of gloves offered by the various companies. There are a lot to choose from and some very good gloves and some that are not as good.
3. Decide the price range, since this could be a very expensive purchase. Parents need to decide a couple of things before deciding on an expensive glove: will the player need a bigger glove later as she grows, is the player responsible enough to take care of an expensive glove or is she careless with it, will she take care of it or throw it around in the dirt? Some Heart of the Hide gloves, which are my favorite, could be \$300-500, and if the player doesn't take care of her glove, then the money is wasted.
4. Decide on the webbing the player likes to use. Many like a basketweave on the infield; some, a six-finger design; some, an H design. Outfielders need something like an H design to be able to see through it at times.
5. Some gloves are hard to break in, if the player is younger, that may be hard for her to do.

So, the age of the player makes a huge difference along with her level of responsibility with her equipment when purchasing a glove.

Breaking in the glove for softball is the most important step in having a glove. As I said, most gloves are not broken in correctly, and instead of being the player's best friend on the field, it becomes her worst enemy. If the ball does not "stick" in the glove, there needs to be a change in the condition of the current glove or a change of the glove itself.

1. This is scary, but my best two gloves were broken in by soaking them in rain water. It doesn't take long, so don't let the glove sit out in the rain for long. Just long enough to get the entire glove wet.
2. As soon as the glove is wet, put a ball deep in the pocket, NOT THE WEBBING. The webbing is the basketweave, H, six-finger, etc., area. Put the ball deep in the pocket, close the glove around the ball and have the thumb and the little-finger slots and finger areas align with each other.
3. Close the glove around the ball and have those two fingers slots come together, and align them from the top of the finger to the base of the finger. Meet them but do not overlap them.

4. Tie the glove around the ball with a piece of rope, and put the glove in a place where it can dry slowly. DO NOT put the glove near a heater or furnace vent—just put in somewhere to dry naturally.

5. When the glove is dry, put a type of leather protector all over it. I do not like to put heavy oils on the glove or to soak the glove in oil. To me, the glove becomes very heavy. I like saddle soap or neats foot oil, which is a lighter type. This is really important because I have seen gloves soaked in glove oil, and I think it ruins the glove.

6. Start playing catch with it to complete the break-in process.

One very important part, to me, is how the hand is put into the glove while playing. I change a player's finger position in the glove by putting the little and ring finger in the last hole (where the little finger usually goes), the middle finger in the second-to-last hole (where the ring finger usually goes) and the index finger where the middle finger usually goes. This leaves the index finger hole completely open. This gives the player a more secure grip on the glove. The hand is actually part-of-the-way out of the glove as a result of moving the fingers down. I feel this strengthens the grip of the hand, allows the glove to snap shut when the ball comes into it and gives the player more range.

Every player that we have changed really likes it and never goes back to one finger in each hole. By positioning the hand in the glove this way, the outside fingers (thumb and little finger of the glove) meet—thus the whole glove can be used to catch the ball. Try it the other way, with one finger in each hole, and shut the glove—you will see that when the glove meets, there is a section that is wasted, where the ball never hits or can be caught.

Glove maintenance:

- Keep it as clean as possible by never throwing it in the dirt.

- Keep a towel in your ball bag to wipe it out, after use.

- Keep your dirty shoes in a different bag so the dirt doesn't transfer to your glove.

- Keep your bag zipped during the game so the dust doesn't get into the bag and onto the glove.

- Keep the laces of the glove that go through the fingers tight so the glove is not loose and floppy.

Be aware of buying a glove online. I never could buy a glove online or by mail order, because every glove, even though the same make and model, will have a little different feel to it. The player has to try the glove on and feel the fit of the glove to see if it is a good fit. This may take going to different stores and trying on a lot of gloves, but a player will know when the glove is the right fit.

Please realize that the glove is a player's best friend or worst enemy, depending on how the player takes care of it!!!!