

Things to Remember During Your High School Season

By Celeste Knierim

After a day at school when you might be a little tired, it is easy to take the team that you are about to play lightly. Please work hard at not doing that. Work very hard at maintaining your 100% effort, don't allow yourself to go down to any other team's level if you know that you should win against them.

Everyone has the ability to be a team leader and when you start your HS games, you may see that some of the kids on your team will need leadership to get them through the games. This is where leadership takes over. Teach them to be intense and **think pitch by pitch**. Be positive when you speak to them, encouraging but firm when you need to be. Pump them up as much as you can and I am not talking about being a rah-rah person. **Actions speak louder than words so lead through your positive actions**. Everyone will make an error at some point in the season, the player feels bad enough without her teammates walking away from her or hanging their heads. Pump your teammate up, go smack her hand and tell them to stay up and get the next one.

No matter what there is **no pouting** in softball—stay positive and make it a great year. The coaches may do things differently than other coaches but it is their team and there is more than one way to be successful. Please do not argue with the coach and give them one of those "but my other coach said..." or "but my Mom or Dad said..." **Don't do that, please!!!**

Here are some important things that you need to remember about some of the skills.

Bunting

- **Be on the run** and work on getting the **back foot off the ground** since you should be running out of the box. Two feet on the ground is not running out of the box.
- Keep the bat high and **level**—keep the hands split for better leverage. There are a few players who can keep them together and make it work, but the majority need the hands split. For those few, if you cannot control the bat, it is time to split the hands.
- Keep the bottom wrist down, if not, you will foul the pitch off.
- Get the bat out in front of you and in front of the plate.
- Right-handers, push the left hand out straight to go to first, right hand **way** out to go to third, you have to get your hands and bat **way** out in front of you to be on the run and be able to put the ball down the third baseline. Bat should be level but angled down the third baseline. You have to get your left elbow out of the way of the end of the bat the best way possible for you.
- Lefties, push the right hand straight out to go down the third baseline while you are on the run. To take it with you as you run down the first baseline, put the left arm out **straight** from the shoulder with the **bat against your arm** and pull the ball down the line as you run to first. One-handed is easier than using two hands on the bat going to first, but the bat has to be **against your whole left arm**—not hanging out into space—keep it against your arm and pull down the line. If you have a problem keeping the bat against your arm, pull the inside of your left hand toward your wrist/arm and that will keep the bat against your arm.

Slapping

- Read the defense and go where they are not:
 - 3B on the line and SS back, soft slap to SS
 - 3B off the line, take low or high outside pitch right down the line
 - Infield back, bunt
 - Infield up, read the D and hard slap to the holes
 - Infield and outfield in, pop the ball over their heads
 - 2B over toward first, pull a hard slap in the hole on the right side of 2B
 - Infield dirt hard, slam the ball into the ground for a high bounce
 - Wet ground, muddy, bunt

Infielders

- Toes in for quickness.

- Give a small hop as the pitch reaches the batter.
- Keep your hands out in front with the glove open to the hitter not down towards the ground or facing you—open it to the hitter. Plus the throwing hand is not on touching the glove, we are seeing too many infielders holding their glove top with their throwing hand (makes you slower.)
- Corners are down, middle infield are standing up (if the middle infielders get too low, it cuts your range down—so stand up in a good athletic position.)
- Judge the speed of the runner, the speed that the ball gets to you and the strength of your arm and get the lead runner whenever possible. **Do not be satisfied getting the second runner—get the lead runner if at all possible.** Read the speed of the runner and ball and you will always know if you can get that lead runner. Be positive and determined—feel the power you have inside yourself to make any play.
- Always look for the second play, don't be satisfied with getting just the first play.
- Check the depth of your outfielders often. If a good hitter is up and the outfield is playing deep, tell the outfielder that you will get the bloop. Don't assume everyone knows who will get the ball—**always communicate** with the outfielders to make sure everyone knows who will go after any type of ball.
- Hand off the glove (makes you slower.) Try putting two fingers in last glove finger and then one in each—keep the first finger hole open. Try it for a couple of weeks and you will not change back. The glove will shut on the ball a lot easier.
- Do not stop going after the ball to allow a runner to go in front of you. You have the right to the ball not the runner—go to the ball and if she hits you, she is interfering with you and is out. Take charge and don't stop.

Outfielders

- Stand up, don't crouch over—crouching over makes you slower.
- Hand off the glove—same hand positioning as infielders.
- Keep the feet moving—if the feet are planted on the ground, you will be slower getting to the ball—**keep the feet moving on the pitch.**
- If someone is on base, catch the ball on the throwing hand side of your body.
- If someone is on base, turn so that you are facing the way you are going to throw the ball.
- If someone is on base, take a few steps back and run in to catch the ball—if you are at a dead stop when catching the ball, you will have no momentum on the ball to get the runner.
- Talk to the other outfielder next to you and the infielder in front of you about the hitter.
- **Read the hitter's stance, length of bat, hands on bat and type of bat to get a tip off on where the ball will go if it is hit.**

Hitting

- Be aggressive but in control—sting the ball—attack the ball.
- Attack the ball but don't try to kill it or you will throw off your entire swing.
- **Don't go for homeruns**—it rarely works for most hitters—attack the ball and it will go.
- Get the bat **out of the V** of your hand (between your thumb and first finger)—your shoulder will automatically drop leading to an uppercut swing
- Look the pitcher in the eye and mentally tell her to throw you the ball.
- Never get into the box unsure of yourself—stay out of the box, regain your composure and get back it determined to hit.
- Work the pitcher, 2-0 or 3-0 count, hug the plate and get your body close to the plate so that it gives the illusion that the plate is smaller. Try to get another ball thrown to you.
- If the pitcher is faster than your ability: open your stance, lay the bat back a little more but not parallel to the ground or below that point.
- Check your bat to make sure it is not too heavy or long. Choke up a little, especially if the pitcher is faster than you can handle.
- If the pitcher is slow and you are having trouble hitting her—stay loose, stand up a little and relax. If that doesn't work, a slap bunt is very effective with a slower pitcher, **BUT**, the form has to be correct—**bat level out front, bat stays level to the ground all the way back and forward. The weight is shifted to the front—to the back and explodes to the front foot. DO NOT GO INTO A HITTING STANCE AND DO NOT ALLOW THE BAT TO COME UP TO A PERPENDICULAR POSITION TO THE GROUND—KEEP IT FLAT AND PARALLEL TO THE GROUND AND ATTACK!!!**
- Don't try to pull everything, go with the pitch—take it where it is thrown, especially left-handers, you have a tendency to start running to first, so slap the ball into left. A lot of times it will hug the left-field line and you can get a double instead of just a single.

Situation—runner on third and you are up—**you want the RBI!!!** Everyone wants to hit a screamer down the left field line to get the runner in. That might work especially in HS but might not. A simple base hit will get the runner in, it doesn't have to be a screamer, just a bloop over the infield **WINS THE GAME**. Best pitch to look for is on the outside corner, just poke it out to the outfield and you will have the RBI.

Baserunning

- Be aggressive.
- Get a good jump off of the base.
- Keep feet moving, hands at your waist in an athletic position.
- Keep breaking off the base very aggressively so that the catcher keeps an eye on you. This harasses the pitcher who is watching the catcher and it makes the infielders nervous—**PUT THE PRESSURE ON THEM BY BEING AGGRESSIVE ON THE BASES**.
- Take the extra base whenever possible. If the catcher bobbles the ball and you have speed, take the next base.
- Never run into an out—if you know you will be out, turn around and run back. It is better to get into a rundown than give yourself up as an out. Keep in the rundown and after the third throw by the defense the advantage changes to you. Try to put them in obstruction—you are in a rundown, look for a player who is slow getting out of the way. Set them up by turning around very quickly after she tosses the ball and run into her—that's obstruction as long as you do not go out of a direct line to where you are going.

Sliding

- Never slide into a tag.
- Use the avoidance slides.
- Headfirst avoidance is the fastest when stealing.

Always sprint on and off the field. Always smack everyone's hand. Always be encouraging.

Attitude is everything—be positive, support your teammates even if it is hard and it will be hard at times. Do everything possible not to contribute to any type of team problems—try to eliminate them.

I don't care if you are the star of the team or the last one on the bench—everyone can contribute. Everyone on the team has worth and no one is indispensable (if they are a negative force on the team.) The team will always go on—negativity will not.

Do not be a selfish player—it's not all about you, and it certainly is not always about STATS—this is a TEAM SPORT, do it for the team and your reward will come!! Please pass that on to your parents.

Have fun, have a great season and play like it is your last game.