

Question and Answer Session

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There are times at games or tournaments that coaches and parents will come up and ask me questions about softball. Here are some of those questions that I am asked a lot.

Q: My daughter has an OK arm but sometimes the ball just dies before reaching the base.

Answer: When you watch your daughter throw, focus on her throwing hand leg and foot. Does her foot stay in contact with the ground even if she drags it and does her leg stay behind her hip? If so, she has no follow through. The follow through propels the ball to the target. Have her practice lifting that foot off the ground and pulling the leg through (pivoting the hips) while throwing. The ball should have more zip on it and will get it to the target quicker without dying.

Q: My daughter plays the infield but seems slow getting to the ball on defense.

Answer: The first thing you should look at would be her toes while she is in her defensive stance. Are her toes pointing in or out? If they are out, her weight will be on her heels and she will be slower getting to the ball. If her toes are pointed in, she will be quicker and off her heels. If she already has her toes pointed in, then check the rest of her stance. I like the middle infielders standing up with toes in and their hands around the area of their waist, gloves forward of the body towards the hitter. If she plays the corners, toes should be pointed in but she needs to be down with her hands and glove out in front of the body towards the hitter. I see a lot of gloves pointed toward the ground. All infielders need to give a small hop when the ball is almost to the hitter. This puts their body in motion before the ball is hit. They are in place when they do this not breaking one way or the other. If their feet are “nailed to the ground”, it will take them more time to get to the ball. They will first have to get their body in motion before going after the ball. That’s the difference between a hit and an out.

Q: My outfielders are having trouble catching up to the ball and I know they are faster than that?

Answer: I like outfielders and middle infielders to stand up instead of crouching or having their hands on their knees. Their toes are turned in for quickness, hands and glove in front of the body and the feet are moving versus being stationary on the ground. If they do that, they will be quicker to the ball. Crouching or no movement on the pitch results in the fielder being slower to the ball.

Q: My team cannot get a sacrifice bunt down in fair territory.

Answer: Watch as they attempt to bunt in practice. Where is the position of the bat and their body when they attempt to bunt? Is the bat as high as their chin? Is the bat level instead of angled? Is their wrist on the bottom hand below the bat instead of above? Is the bat out in front of the plate? Is their weight on their front foot? Does the barrel of the bat cover the width of the plate? If those are not done, then it is likely that the bunt will not be successful.

Q: What type of an offense do you like?

Answer: I like to run a fast offense but a balanced offense. I like to read the pitcher and the defense and then pick it apart. We teach and practice ways to be able to counter the defenses we face. We will attempt to hit, bunt, slap, steal, double steal, steal third, delay steal home, squeeze, tag up to advance on most fly balls, score from second on a bunt and more. We like to create runs by beating the defense. Some pitchers are better than some hitters. So by creating the runs, you are taking the game out of the pitchers hands and putting the pressure on the defense to stop the offense.

Q: How many players do you think a team should have?

Answer: I like to have a large team of around 18-22 players. I have been on the short end of a small team and it cost us at Nationals one year when a player went down with an injury. I feel that every player on the team has a place and a job. Everyone needs to know their job and sometimes that job may change if others don't do theirs. I use a lot of pinch runners, hitters, bunters and defensive switches if called for. Having a large team with let you do that. It also helps to have more players in case of injuries. This allows players with injuries to rehab thoroughly without rushing them back. It also gives a coach more options at each position. I am also a believer of depth charts and teaching players multiple positions. That allows the coach and team more consistency on defense.

When a player is ill or injured and another can go in who knows how to play that position, the team will be stronger.

Q: Why can my daughter get to the ball but then she drops it?

Answer: It may not be your daughter's problem, but her glove. Look at her glove and answer these questions. Is the glove flat? Do the fingers for the thumb and little finger fit together top to bottom or does the thumb finger line up with the second last finger of the glove? Are the strings at the top tight? Does the glove have a deep pocket below the webbing that the ball will fit into? Is the glove dirty or slick on the inside?

The glove needs to be clean and free of dirt. It needs to be formed with the thumb and last finger of the glove lining up top to bottom. The glove should be broken in with the pocket below the webbing not just in the webbing. The strings at the top should be tight not loose. The player's glove is their best friend and worst enemy depending on how it is broken in.

Q: My team lacks confidence and mental toughness, they look so timid at the plate and on defense. What can I do?

Answer: Build their confidence by constantly being supportive in what you say to them. Instead of saying "No, that's wrong" which is a negative way to say things, turn it into a positive way like "ok, but let's try doing it this way". Show them the correct way and practice it with a lot of comments like "You can do it", "Almost, try again", "Keep going, you will get it", "That's it!!!". Even when they are batting, talk to them in a positive way. "Sting it", "Attack", "You can do it" and so on. Their confidence will come from the coach. If they know the coach believes in them, they will believe in themselves.

This is just a sampling of questions. Never be afraid to ask an older coach or a coach that has a history of being successful. Watching and talking to these coaches will teach you a lot about the game and also stimulant your thoughts on how to be successful. Good luck

