

The Importance of Warming-Up and Cooling-Down

Begin and End Strong

One of the most important aspects of softball that can easily be overlooked is incorporating a proper warm-up and cool-down into practices and games. Often times we forget to execute a thorough warm-up. Some players or coaches may tend to think that things such as hitting or fielding itself is an actual warm-up, but this is not the case.

Doing It Right

A properly executed warm-up will heat up all of your muscles so that they are nice and loose. This will prepare you to carry out the skills within the game of softball. The best kind of warm-up is known as a dynamic warm-up. A dynamic warm-up will contain primarily calisthenic exercises such as running laps, jumping jacks, high knees, karaoke, butt kicks, lunges, Frankenstein kicks— anything where you are in motion and stretching out your body. These types of stretches are better than static stretches for a warm-up.

Dynamic vs. Static

The reason why static stretches are not as effective for a warm-up is because they simply stretch out your muscles. However, your muscles are best stretched when they are already warm. For this reason, a dynamic warm-up works best so your muscles will get warm and loose to avoid injuries such as pulling, tearing, or ripping a muscle. A proper dynamic warm-up is always going to be important anytime you step out onto the field, whether it be for practice or a game.

A dynamic warm-up is going to take anywhere between 15 to 20 minutes. You can accomplish a lot of different things within the warm-up such as agility drills or ladder drills to build quick feet as well as base running.

One thing that I learned from playing overseas is that the Japanese do a really great job of cooling down after a game. A lot of times in the U.S. when the game or practice is over, we just throw our stuff in our ball bag and leave the field. Skipping a cool-down is never a good idea.

The Japanese have really taught me how to take care of my body after practice or a game. It's important to cool down your arm the right way. If you are a pitcher you should lightly throw 15-20 pitches after a practice or game. By throwing at about 50-40% strength underhand you are flushing out your muscles and replacing the blood. This is important for fielders to do as well. Fielders may lightly throw overhand with good form to flush out their arms. It is important to do this and then follow up with static stretches afterwards. Also, if you feel any of your muscles getting sore then be sure to ice them after practice if necessary.

Listen To Your Body

If you have any tight parts in your body, focus on really stretching out those areas. Your cool down should be shorter than your warm-up and should take no longer than 15 minutes. Really focus on stretching out your muscles as best you can without straining them. This is also the perfect time for the coach to get the team together. Your team can stretch in a circle following a practice or game while the coach goes over what went right, what went wrong, and what skills you all are going to work on next time. Just make sure that warm-ups and cool-downs are implemented into each practice and both before and after every game.

For more information on training, warm-ups and cool-downs check out this dynamic training guide:
<http://www.michelesmith.com/Dynamic-Training>