

Notes from Wednesday's Game

from Coach Bill

I think everyone did very well in Wednesday's game. Did you have fun? I did. I was proud of you. We scored eight runs against last year's championship team. I think we did very well for our first game.

Don't be afraid of the ball.

Many of us are still afraid of the ball. Now this is perfectly understandable because even though we call it a softball we all know that the ball is actually pretty hard. If the ball is traveling fast towards you, and it hits you, it's a pretty safe bet that it will hurt. However, unless it hits you right in the face or possibly the soft part of your head, you will not get injured. It might hurt, it might sting, it certainly will not be any fun, but, you will not be injured. The sting will go away after a few minutes.

If you are going to be a good softball player, you have to get past the fear of the ball hitting you. Fear of the ball is perfectly natural, but it's something that we need to work on and eliminate. We can work all day long on drills on how to catch the ball, on how to keep your glove down, but if the ball is hit to you in the game and you step aside and shy away from it then not only do you hurt the team but you're not going to be growing as a softball player. In everything we do we want to strive to do the very best that we can. This includes playing softball. We all have to work on not shying away from the ball.

The most important tool that you have as a fielder is your glove. Once you build up confidence in your ability to use your glove to catch the ball, the fear of the ball hitting you will go away. So while it makes perfect sense to be afraid of being hit by this large round heavy object flying at you at 30-40 mph, it also makes perfect sense that if you have a glove that you can use to catch the ball so it doesn't hit you, there's no good reason to be afraid of the ball.

So the key is to have confidence that you're going to be able to catch the ball when it comes to. Your glove is your friend. Give it a name. Give it a hug. Take it to bed with you put it next your pillow. It is your trusty friend who will save you from that mean ball hitting you and causing you pain.

Try to get a friend or call up another teammate and practice throwing and catching the ball many times each day. If you want to become a really good softball player, you cannot just practice when the team does its practice. You have to practice every single day. If you play pass with a friend, try to concentrate on putting your body in front of the ball. Purposefully place your body in the direct path of the ball so that if you didn't try to catch it and you didn't have a glove the ball would actually hit you in the chest. But not to worry, you have your trusty friend, your glove. Think of your glove like a little superhero. Your glove is your best buddy and he wants to save you from that mean nasty ball.

What we can wear and what we can't wear.

When we come to a game you have to be sure to take off all of your jewelry. You cannot be wearing anything metal, no earrings, etc. The reason for this is to keep you safe. You don't want the ball to hit you where you have a piece of jewelry and turn something that might just sting into something that could become an injury.

What to do when you're on base.

When you are a runner, there are a few things that you must remember to do.

1. Look at the third-base coach before every pitch. I may give you the signal to steal on the third pitch but not the second pitch. You never know when I will give you the signal to steal. You might look at me before the first pitch and I don't give you the signal to steal. But, I might give you the signal on the next pitch. So it's very important that when you're on base to look at the third-base coach for any possible signal to steal. Don't look just once. Look before every single pitch.
2. Just after the pitcher pitches the ball, as soon as the ball leaves the pitcher's hand, the rules say that you can take the lead. Why is it important to take the lead? It's because we want you to be ready to run to that next base as fast as possible. We want to get you to that base sooner rather than later. If you start running when you're closer to the next base then you'll get there sooner. You'll have a much better chance of getting to that next base safely, without being called out.
3. When you take the lead how far should you go? Good question. You should probably try to go maybe six to 10 feet from the base. A good way to measure this is by looking at the infielder who is covering your base. For example, if you're a base runner on second base, it's okay to take the lead almost all the way over towards the shortstop.
4. If you're a base runner, and I give you the signal to steal, you must understand that the signal is not a suggestion. It is a commandment. You've heard of the 10 Commandments? While there's a reason why God made them commandments, and not suggestions. He meant it.

If I give you the signal to steal, you will steal on the next pitch as soon as the ball leaves the pitcher's hand. You will turn and Sprint as fast as you possibly can to the next base and you will slide into that base and lastly you hear one of the base coaches tell you to stand up.

We will practice stealing and sliding at our next practice, so don't be too concerned. But, we have a signal for stealing for a reason. It means that you are ordered to steal on the next pitch. It doesn't matter what kind of pitch it is, it doesn't matter if the batter swings or not, it just means that as soon as the ball leaves the pitcher's hand on the next pitch you take off and run to the next base as fast as you can.

Running to first base.

When you are the batter, and you hit the ball into the infield, you need to run as fast as you can to first base. Now, of course, we all know that. Right? But should you stop when you get to first base? The answer is: no. If you stop when you get to first base, you have to slow down as you're approaching first-base. If you slow down, then you're not making it to a first-base as fast as if you didn't slow down.

As you know, first base is a bit of a funky base. It's the only base that has that weird orange base. That orange base is there so that you can run as fast as you can and not have to worry about colliding with the first baseman. As long as you run real fast and touch your foot to that orange base you're good to go. So if you hit the ball in the infield, meaning that it doesn't go out into the outfield, then consider yourself in a race. And if you're in a race, you're not going to slow down when you get to the tape. You need to keep running as fast as you possibly can. So it's okay to overrun first-base, that is to run as fast as you can past first base to ensure that you don't slow down as you approach the base.

Now if you're the batter, and you hit the ball really hard and it goes into the outfield, then that's a little bit different. Instead of running really fast past first base, you are supposed to round the base, so that you're in a position to run to second base if the first base coach tells you to. I know that's a little tricky, because we want you to not look at the ball after you hit it. We want you to focus on running as fast as

you can't go to first base but it's a good idea to take a peek at where you hit the ball especially if you hit the ball pretty hard to look and see if it's stayed in the infield or if it went out into the outfield. Also, the first-base coach will tell you to round the base if it went out into the outfield. In fact, the first-base coach will tell you to run to second base if he thinks that you can make it to second base. So again, it's very important when you're running the bases to listen to the base coaches.

Another thing to remember is, "When in doubt, run it out!". We noticed that a few of you hit the ball, maybe not terribly hard, and you weren't really sure if you should run or not. Well, the best thing to do is not to really think about it. Just run. Run as fast as you can to first base. If it's a foul ball, the umpire will yell out pretty loudly, "foul ball"! It's much better to run and be called back for a foul ball, then to not run and then realize that "oh my gosh it's a fair ball and I should have ran."

What to do with the ball.

Now as we've gone over before, I think we're all beginning to realize how important it is to know what we're going to do with the ball if it's hit to us before it's hit to us. We noticed a few times where someone fielded the ball but they were not sure where they are supposed to throw it or what they were supposed to do with it.

Softball and baseball can be confusing if we haven't played very much or in some cases if we haven't played the game at all before. Don't worry. Even professional baseball players sometimes make what's called "mental errors". It happens to the best of us. It takes a lot of practice and to some extent lots of study to understand where and what you should do with the ball in any given situation. I will try as your coach to yell out before the pitch what you should do with a ball if you get it.

I'll usually tell the infield where the play should go. This'll all will come for you naturally with practice and with time. So don't worry about it, but, be aware that it's very important to try to anticipate and know what are going to do with the ball when you get it. I will try to put together some homework for you to help you learn what you should do in given situations.

Cutoffs

Sometimes a batter will hit the ball out into the outfield. Sometimes it may get past us or it just might be hit deep into the outfield and we have to run and go get. Now when the outfielder gets the ball, the goal is to get it back into the infield as soon as possible. We don't want the outfielder to hold onto the ball. If you have any doubt as to which base to throw it to, it's a pretty good bet that if you throw to second base you'll be okay.

However, what we want to do is set up what's called a cutoff. A cut off is when either the shortstop or the second base person comes a little ways out into the outfield and gives the outfielder with the ball a bit of a shortcut so instead of having to throw the ball all the way into the infield themselves the outfielder should throw it to that cut off person and then the cut off person throws it into the infield. By doing this, we maintain control of the ball and we can get the ball in to the infield quicker. We will practice doing cutoffs at one of our next practices. So for now, what I want the shortstop to do, if it's hit out into deep left field or deep center, is to go out and be the cut off person so that the outfielder gets the ball and throws it to you. If the ball is hit to deep right field, I want to second baseman to go out and be the cut off person.

Outfielders: where to throw the ball

If you're playing in the outfield, and the ball is hit you, where should you throw the ball to? This is a very good question. The general rule of thumb is that you want to throw the ball ahead of the runner. This means that if the runner is running to first base you throw to second base. If the runner is already on their way to second base, you throw the ball to third base.

In 95% of the cases, we will not get a runner out by having the outfielder throw the ball to a base where the runner is almost at that base. Sometimes that will happen and we will be able to get that runner out. But, in most cases, the runner has already made a pretty good effort to get to that base and it would take a miracle throw to get the runner out at that base. So rather than risking an error by throwing the ball to that base and having the infielder possibly miss the ball and having the ball go past the infielder which would allow the runner to go to the next base, we want to try to have the outfielder throw the ball ahead of the runner to the next base. This will prevent that runner from going any farther.

So, for example, if there is a runner on first base and the ball is hit to the right fielder, the right fielder should throw it to third base. That runner on first is probably going to already be on second base or pretty darn close to second base so there's no chance that you're going to be able to throw out that runner at second base. But, if we're not careful, that runner might go to third base. We don't want that. To prevent the runner from going to third base, simply throw the ball over to third base. With the ball in the third base person's glove, the runner on second is not going to run to third.

Look for the bunt single.

When you are at bat, you need to take a look at the third-base coach before each pitch. You don't have to stare at the third-base coach for very long, but look just long enough to see if you're going to get the signal to bunt.

Now you want to be sure to look at the third-base coach before you step into the batter's box. The batter's box is the rectangle that is drawn out with a white chalk that's just next to home plate. It is where you stand when you're hitting. If you are in the batter's box, then the pitcher can pitch to you. If you're not in the batter's box, then the pitcher cannot pitch to you. Stepping out of the batter's box is kind of like calling a timeout. It's okay to do that if you like. What I recommend is that you take a quick look at the third-base coach before you step into the batter's box. Then you know if you're going to bunt or if you're going to hit away before you get in the batter's box.

Keep your foot on the base.

If you are playing an infield position, that is, first base, second base, third base or shortstop; if you are covering your base, you must have your foot on the base and then catch the ball when it is thrown to. We noticed a few times that the infielder caught the ball and then touched the base with their foot. When you're covering the bag, you want to have your left foot on the bag and your right foot stretched out towards the person who is throwing the ball to you so that you can reach out with your glove and shorten the distance between the player who's throwing it to you and yourself.

Catchers

If the ball is hit in the air, it looks like it's popped up in the air near you, rip your helmet off so you can see the ball. And then go catch it. Sam did a great job, but that was one thing I noticed that we can work on in practice.