
Chapter 4

Throwing

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It's the seventh inning, the score is tied with two outs, and the winning run is on second. A routine grounder is hit to the shortstop . . . and she overthrows the first baseman. The runner on second scores, and the game is over. Like many games, this game was lost because of one simple throwing error.

Practicing and perfecting the throw is obviously essential to the game of softball. Coaches must focus on throwing consistency during warm-up and through drill work. The fundamentals of the game should be taught and reinforced daily in practice. A student of the game can't improve on her ability if she doesn't practice the skills of her sport. If your pitcher makes one ill-advised throw to the plate, if your catcher makes one wide throw to second base, or if your normally reliable shortstop sails her throw over your first baseman's head, the game can be over. When it comes to softball, there's not much worse for a coach than seeing a game end this way. Making consistently accurate throws is as big a part of the game as any.

It is always interesting to watch high school and summer ball teams conduct their warm-ups and practices. It seems every player wants to hit or field the ball, but no one wants to work on perfecting throws. Although throwing is a basic skill of the game, it's often ignored or skipped over during practice. Some teams spend little time throwing when warming up prior to a game or practice. Of course other teams, the more organized and structured teams, go through an elaborate throwing procedure before taking the field. These are the teams that win championships.

Every player must learn to execute the task of throwing from all playing positions, and this is especially important when working with younger players. Coaches must focus teaching drills and the explanations of the drills to the level of the player they're working with. For example, some coaches tend to forget about the size of a young player's hand. Very young players will need to practice with smaller balls, such as tennis balls or soft baseballs. With proper techniques and consistent training, throwing is a skill that can easily be performed by players of all ages.

Challenging your players as they progress will help them stay involved in practice and keep their heads in the game. As you continue in this chapter,

remember to be creative when teaching each drill. Each player is unique and needs to be treated so. You can modify the drills to challenge your more advanced players and to allow your lower-skilled players a better chance for success. Learning a skill can be quite a challenge for novice players, but they seem to pick things up more quickly when the rest of the team is performing the same or a similar task. Always emphasize proper mechanics when performing these drills. Make some of them competitive. Competition always seems to work like magic.

This chapter includes many throwing drills, from novice to advanced. It also covers different types of throws, from the outfield to infield to underhand tosses. Use these drills daily in practice. Each one provides a different gamelike setting to give your players the experience they need to avoid being caught off guard in game situations.

Purpose

To work on proper grip when throwing a softball

Organization

Each player stands across from a partner, no more than eight feet (2.4 meters) apart (shorten the distance for beginning players). When all players are standing across from their partners, two parallel lines should be formed: line A and line B. For safety, make sure that players in each line are two to three feet (about a meter) apart. The partners in one line start with the ball in their throwing hand using a proper grip.

Execution

Using a proper grip, players in line A snap their ball to their partners in line B. When players have the proper grip, they can snap the ball to their partner focusing on the rotation of the seams. Partners continue to snap the ball back and forth for a total of 10 throws.

Variations

Use tennis balls for younger players or players with smaller hands. Increase the distance between players to challenge them more and to multiply the revolutions of the ball. Players can work on this drill alone, without partners, by lying down on their backs with their throwing arms in front of them at a 90-degree angle (see next drill).

Coaching Points

Make sure that the pads of your players' fingers are on the seams. Emphasize the ball rolling off the fingertips; players should not grip the ball in their palm. The wrist should be cocked back and snap with a 12 o'clock to 6 o'clock rotation—a movement similar to shooting a free throw in basketball. Make sure your players are using only their wrists to make their throws. If balls seem to be tailing off, players are probably turning their wrists to the left or right. You want the ball to have a slight flight pattern during the throw (i.e., throws should not be line drives).

