

Development Progression: 14U

Features of this age group:

- Fine motor skills are developing.
- Learn better by breaking a skill into components.
- May have difficulty adapting to body changes (hormonal and growth).
- Sense of competition developing.

Principles:

- Focus on developing more intricate motor skills.
- Emphasize development of teamwork, cooperation, and importance of practice.
- Increase attention to mental skills.
- Review base of fundamental skills.
- Increase competitiveness, still keeping it in perspective.
- Ensure good practice/learning habits.

Softball Skills:

Physical Skills:

Ensure the players can correctly perform the most fundamental skills in softball. Most will learn new skills better by breaking them down into components.

Throwing:

- By this age players should have the basic mechanics - but review and check periodically.
- Teach crow hop and leg drive to add power to throw.
- Stress the importance of accuracy.
- Do not allow sloppy throwing mechanics during warm ups.
- Introduce “dart throw”.

Fielding:

- Ensure proper fielding “ready” position and move to get in front of the ball (don’t allow reaching for the ball)
- Teach lateral movement: review shuffle step and introduce crossover step.
- Introduce backhand and forehand catch.
- Introduce “quick release” - (glove is only a transfer mechanism).
- Expect anticipatory movement on every pitch.
- Review body and hand position on fly.
- Pointer finger glove slot open for “bigger pocket”.
- Practice running with glove.
- Ensure lots of practice judging fly balls.
- Introduce and practice diving for balls to side and in front.

Defensive Play:

- Teach and practice defensive play:
 - Bunt coverage.
 - 2b coverage of 1b.
 - RF play at 1b.
 - Making a tag.
 - Relay (more advanced may introduce cut off).

Catching:

- Review catching positioning and umpire view.
- Teach:
 - Strong throw to 2b.
 - Quick throw to corners.
 - Blocking balls in dirt.
 - Blocking plate and making tag.
 - Framing the ball.
 - Retrieving passed balls or wild pitches.
 - Pop-ups - usual direction and behavior.

Pitching:

At this level, pitchers should be able to throw strikes about 50% to 80% of the time.

- Focus on pitching to corners.
- Teach pitchers mainly by breaking components down - sequential.
- Introduce leg drive for power.
- Check the following:
 - Body rotation (slam open > close).
 - Pitching arm in correct plane (straight up and down - ear and hip).
 - Release point at hip: do not allow to lean forward on release (to aim the ball into the strike zone).
- Introduce and practice change up.
- Advanced pitchers should be developing a drop ball.

Running and base running:

- Review running fundamentals.
- Teach how to round bases.
- Teach lead off and introduce retreat slide.
- Practice bent leg slide; introduce “fade away” or “back door” slide.

Hitting:

- Ensure proper rotational hitting fundamentals.
- Teach strike zone and “smart hitting” (but reiterate that a hit is preferred to a base on balls).
- Introduce strategy of hitting based on count and “umpire’s strike zone”.

- Introduce running slap to left handers.
- Slapping for quick players.
- Hitting the opposite field.

Bunting:

- Introduce bent leg or drag bunt.
- Introduce fake and slap.

Fitness:

- Continue to focus on flexibility and speed.

Mental Skills:

- Expand strategy: delay steal, bunt and steal, tag up on fly balls.
- Emphasize on the importance of teamwork and sportsmanship.
- Ensure mental prep for each play.
- Continue to develop and practice imaging/visualization.
- Expand concept and use of self-talk.
- Expand pregame preparation:
 - Introduce concept of ideal performance state.
 - Encourage keeping a journal.
- Continue individual goal setting (skill development).
- Begin team goal setting.
- Expect 100% in practices and games.

Rules:

- 1st and 3rd plays (run downs).