

Development Progression: 12U

Features of this age group:

- Fine motor skills are starting to develop.
- May 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
- Ensure base of fundamental skills
- Increase competitiveness but still not intense competition.
- Focus on developing good practice/learning skills.

Softball Skills:

Physical Skills:

Ensure the players can correctly perform the most fundamental skills in softball: throwing and catching the ball, and running. Some players may learn better by imitation (teach the whole motion of a skill) whereas others will learn better by breaking a skill down into its components.

Throwing:

- By this age players should have the basic mechanics - but review and check periodically.
- Teach the proper grip and wrist snap to get backspin on the throw.
- Teach leg drive to add power to throw.
- Stress the importance of accuracy.
- Do not allow sloppy throwing mechanics during warm ups.

Fielding ground balls:

- Demonstrate and practice the basic fielding “ready” position.
- Emphasize moving to the ball and cradling the ball up to the belly (practice without gloves as much as possible).
- Introduce lateral movement: shuffle step.
- Check the following:
 - Eye following ball into glove (or hands).
 - Stiff wrist.
 - Push to the ball.
 - Catching the ball in front (not between legs).

- Keeping low while moving to the ball.
- Ready to field on every pitch.

Fielding Flys:

- Introduce proper body and hand position.
- Focus on running hard to the ball and waiting for it.
- Practice running with glove (ensure proper running mechanics, NOT running with glove out).
- Ensure lots of practice judging fly balls.
- Relays from outfield.
- Knee down on grounders.

Catching:

- Teach:
 - Position, umpire view.
 - Setting up, target.
 - Receiving ball.
 - Blocking ball in dirt.
 - Retrieving passed ball/wild pitch.
 - Throwing down to 2nd/3rd/1st.

Pitching:

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

- Emphasize the long term nature of learning to pitch, the necessity of constant practice. Encourage/require parental commitment to daily practice. Teach the parent the fundamentals.
- Teach pitchers components only to fix problems, most will learn better using whole motion (“walk through”).
- Check the following:
 - Body rotation (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).
 - Teach pitching to the corners.
 - Advanced pitchers should begin developing change up.

Running and base running:

- Require “running start” or “leading off” from a base.
- Practice running for speed over short distances (e.g. home to first).
- Review running fundamentals
- Introduce leg bent slide.

Hitting:

- Develop a desire to hit (no base on balls).
- Check the following:

- Grip, stance.
- Trigger, stride.
- Attack: pivot, hands to ball, head down, braced front leg.

Bunting:

- Teach the basic sacrifice bunt - add directing the ball down both baselines.
- More skilled bunters can work on showing bunt later.

Fitness:

- Develop flexibility skills (how to stretch).
- Develop speed (short distance drills).

Mental Skills:

- Introduce basic strategy: stealing, bunting.
- Develop the role and positioning of different positions (middle infielders have 2 bases to cover).
- Teach principles of coverage (all players have a backup).
- Emphasize on the importance of teamwork.
- Practice different types of focus, mental prep for each play.
- Introduce and practice imaging/visualization.
- Introduce concept of self-talk.
- Introduce concept of pregame preparation:
 - Mental: focus.
 - Physical: what to eat/not eat before or during game.
 - Review importance and techniques for warming up.
- Begin individual goal setting (skill development).
- Expect 100% in practices and games.

Rules:

- 1st and 3rds
- Run downs
- Bunt coverage for defense