

SOFTBALL TRYOUTS

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Softball Tryout Secrets

The cuts can be tough; you have to make a decision between a good hitter and a good fielder. Tryouts are one of the most difficult times of being a coach – you have the chance to decide the athletic futures of some of the players that are coming out for your team.

Further, what makes this decision so demanding is that the players you select now are going to be the players that make up your team for the course of the season. You may not get a chance to change your roster until next season.

That is why it is important to do it properly now!

Softball Tryout Secrets is designed to help take some of the gamble and guesswork out of selecting players for your team. You never really know how a player is going to turn out in the end, but you can make a good assumption based on what you see in your tryouts.

To help you along in the selection of your team, here are some resources:

- A strategy for choosing who the right players are for your team, and the characteristics that make up great team players.
- A **Selection Matrix** that is going to help you decide which players have to go and which players to keep. It also gives you an opportunity to provide players who are on the bubble, a little coaching direction to help them over the top.
- In keeping with the **Softball Drills and Practice Plan**, included are a few different practice plans that you can use for your tryouts.

Coaching isn't easy – especially at tryout time. You have to end up hurting players dreams and making others come true. This plan is meant to aid you in making the best overall decision for your team.

Building Your Team

How many players do you take? Here are some ideas on coming up with the numbers.

- How many players can I have (are there restrictions)?
- Are you going to have a couple of pitchers who only pitch?
- How many players do you want on your roster that are “projects” and you are building for future years?
- Is your team reliable in making practices and games?

Documenting the Tryouts

Many associations have attempted to equalize the playing field and have adopted a strict “documentation” process for the coaches to follow. This attempts to ensure that everyone gets a fair shake on the field during tryouts, and forces the coaches to be accountable. Why did you make the choice to cut one player and keep another?

It will all be down in the documentation. That is why there is a Selection Matrix included in this package. It provides a great opportunity for you to evaluate the players that have come out for tryouts and it provides you with the necessary documentation to make sure you are selecting the right players.

Team Selection Matrix

The system allows the coach to make fact-based decisions on their team. Here is how it works:

- List all of the tryout players from top to bottom on the Matrix.
- Decide on the 3 or 5 most important selection criteria for your team. (3 examples are below)
- Apply each selection criteria with different weighting, based on what you think are the most important traits.

- Each of the criteria is scored between 1 and 10. These scores are multiplied by the weighting percentage.
- The scores, after the weighting, will be added together to get a final tally that is used to choose the team.

You may come up with different selection criteria on your own, but here are three examples you can start with:

- Player skills and positions
- Attitude and coachability
- Athleticism and potential

Players and their Positions

You may want to group players by position, with each area having the weighting different. For example, you may not need your 1B to have the same fielding skills as your SS – but you want them to be the good batters in your lineup. So, for the 1B, you choose to weight your score a little differently.

Here is a short piece on what you might want to look for in each position player on your team. This is just a guideline and it may not apply to your coaching philosophy.

First Base

This player doesn't necessarily need to have great range to shag ground balls through the holes, but he or she must have a great anticipation of where the ball is going to go when it is thrown to them.

Oftentimes players (especially younger levels) will errantly throw the ball, or their arms aren't quite strong enough to reach first. The 1B needs to be able to anticipate the bounce of the ball, and must not be afraid to knock it down.

This player is traditionally one of the stronger hitters on the team, because what they may lack in outstanding range and speed, the usually make up for in hitting power. But this isn't always the case.

Keys to a good First Base

- Good glove (for throws)
- Good bat

Second Base

Aside from your SS, this player needs to be the best infielder on the team. They need to be able to track the ball through large holes – especially when there is a runner on first.

They don't necessarily need to hit for power, but consistency in getting on the base is a good trait.

Good fielding awareness is also important – meaning that they need to know what is going on, and where to throw the ball. It isn't just about playing the grounders and making the throws to first base. There are double plays, being a cut off, etc. that a good second baseman must possess.

Keys to a good Second Base

- Good fielding range and awareness
- Consistent bat

Shortstop

This player should be your best infielder. They should have a combination of speed, intuition, and ability to make the right play. The shortstop also needs to have a strong arm in the infield, because many throws will be made on the run, and when the infield plays deep.

Like the 2B, the shortstop doesn't need to be a power hitter, but to utilize their speed, they should be good percentage hitters. Further, they should have excellent field awareness, knowing where the ball should be every time it is hit.

Keys to a good shortstop

- Great range, glove and awareness
- Consistent on base hitter
- Strong arm to make longer throws

Third Base

A strong arm is a must. The best third base can throw the fastest players out with a powerful and accurate arm. Precision is also a must, because the third baseman has the longest distance to throw, and the most room for error.

Because many players are right handed hitters and many players hit the ball naturally to the left side of the field, this player needs to be brave when the ball is hit hard to them. They will see their fair share of grounders and line drives. This player isn't afraid of the ball.

A third bas is also usually a strong hitter, with a great deal of power in the batting order.

Keys to a good third base

- Strong arm
- Fearless ball handler
- Good power hitter

Catcher

A good catcher is one that can stop the balls from getting by him or her – not necessarily the one with the golden arm from behind the plate. Far more runs are going to be scored and bases stolen on passed balls, then they will be on stolen bases in youth Softball.

Stopping the ball is important. With that said, a strong arm is also imperative. If a team does steal, the catcher should be able to get the ball to 2B instantly.

What both of these skills come down to is reaction. A good catcher has good reaction time.

Most catchers seem to be the best hitters on the team, so focus on the defensive talent, and if they can hit, then it is a bonus to your team.

Keys to good catcher

- Good reaction time (for throws and stopping the ball)
- Fearless of the ball and the bat

Fielders

Fielders have a lot of ground to cover in the outfield, so it is a good idea if they are speedy. Some coaches will make their player with the most range the CF – because of the potential amount of ground to cover. A strong arm is also a good trait of a fielder – especially if they need to make long throws from deep in the outfield. It can save a lot of runs on advanced bases from a sacrifice fly.

The RF in particular needs to possess a lot awareness of their team mates so that they can be that second infielder at 1B. He or she can prevent that extra base on an overthrow or a missed ball.

As far as bats, this is where you may want to have a few good ones.

Keys to a good fielder

- Strong, accurate arm
- Fast in the outfield
- Good judge of the ball in the air
- Good hitter

Pitchers

This can vary from team to team. Not many teams below midget level will have a dedicated pitching staff. In order to keep numbers appropriate, the pitchers usually play different positions on the field as well.

Finding any pitcher who exhibits a good power and control combination are the most valuable pitchers. Pitchers that are also valuable fielders would be the next best thing, and then the pitchers that have overwhelming power, or great control, but not at the same time.

Note: In the Selection Matrix, the players and their position and skills have been weighted at 60%.

Attitude and Coachability

This is one area that a great deal of importance should be placed. You can have a player with average skill and a great attitude – and they can improve their skills with practice; and at the same time you can have a player with good skill and a bad attitude that is hard to change. That is why coaches may lean towards the players with a good attitude.

A good attitude sets an example for the rest of the players on the team. The best players usually have the best attitudes. It is that simple.

Since Softball is a team sport, everyone needs to be working together when they are on the diamond. If you have a few players who think they are above the team, or they don't need to put out the same effort as other players on the team, they can affect an entire line-up.

You can select players who have questionable attitude in the hopes that they will be swayed by the other players that have a good attitude. You can choose to also keep a close eye on these players so that they don't become a distraction the other players. However, spending too much time on these players doesn't benefit anyone in the long run. Is a big attitude problem something that you as a coach want to take on your team?

The players with good attitudes are great motivators for the players that do have the better skills and they can be valuable in pushing those players to greater heights.

When there are positions to fill. Do you pick attitude over skill?

Note: Attitude and coachability have been weighted at 30% on the Selection Matrix.

Athleticism and Potential

This is hard for some coaches to gauge, but it is important. All you have to do is think about a player that can throw the ball 100 miles an hour, but can not hit the broad side of a barn. Or think about a player that can hit it over the fence every time, but misses more than he or she makes contact.

Athleticism is an important tool in determining the quality of a player. Some players have skill, but very little overall athleticism. You are going to have to do a balancing act. There seems to be more potential in players with excellent athleticism and lower skills, than there is with players with the skill and little athleticism.

Potential is a funny thing. But, identifying it can be a gold mine for a coach. Uncovered talent is all over the place, but some players need a little more coaching than others.

Every coach wants to find that diamond in the rough. So, put some stock in potential and see if you can cultivate a new player or two.

Note: In the Selection Matrix, 10% is on athleticism and potential.

Making your selections

After the 3 main criteria (players & positions, attitude & coachability, athleticism & potential), you may want to add more to make the process more specific. But this will get you started.

The key to making the **Selection Matrix** work is being honest about a player's skills. Don't count anyone out unless they are really not up to par in three skill areas. Some players may surprise you and others may not. But they all deserve the same chance.

The next page is an example of how the **Selection Matrix** works. You may alter it and adjust it if you wish. There is a sample matrix, and then a blank matrix that you can use.

Sample Selection Matrix:

Name	Pos'n	Positional Skill 1 to 10	Skill Weighted 60%	Attitude Coachable 1 to 10	A & C Weighted 30%	Athleticism Potential 1 to 10	A & P Weighted 10%	Total Score (Weighted)	Decision	Comments
1	C	6	3.6	8	2.4	3	0.3	6.3	YES	great attitude, can work on being in shape
2	SS	4	2.4	5	1.5	8	0.8	4.7	NO	on the fence with her attitude
3	3B	9	5.4	4	1.2	6	0.6	7.2	YES	can work on attitude
4	LF	3	1.8	9	2.7	9	0.9	5.4		diamond in the rough
5	2B	8	4.8	8	2.4	6	0.6	7.8	YES	could be our star player
6	P	5	3	6	1.8	6	0.6	5.4	YES	cannon for an arm
7	SS	9	5.4	2	0.6	6	0.6	6.6	YES	poor attitude - can it change?

Blank Selection Matrix:

Name	Pos'n	Positional Skill 1 to 10	Skill Weighted 60%	Attitude Coachable 1 to 10	A & C Weighted 30%	Athleticism Potential 1 to 10	A & P Weighted 10%	Total Score (Weighted)	Decision	Comments

Sample Practice Plans for Tryouts

Tryout #1

0-10min: warm up throwing
10-20min: Stretching
20-25min: warm up run
25-40min: Infield practice (Make the Play or Know Where to Go) Outfield practice (Catching Flies or Catch & Throw)
40-45min: water break
45-55min: Hitting from the tee (watch for good batting skills high and low balls)
55-1:15min: Hitting from machine
1:15-1:20min: Base Running Relay
1:20-1:30min: Star with 2 and 4 (base running skills)
1:30-1:40min: Pepper to elimination
1:40-1:50min: cool down and end of session talk

Tryout #2

0-10min: warm up throwing
10-20min: Stretching
20-25min: warm up run
25-40min: Infield practice (Make the Play or Know Where to Go) Outfield practice (Catching Flies or Catch & Throw)
40-45min: water break
45-55min: Hitting from the tee (watch for good batting skills inside and outside balls)
55-1:15min: coach pitching and hitting practice
1:15-1:35min: scrimmage
1:35-1:50min: scrimmage with different scenarios for players to react to
1:50-2:00min: cool down and end of session talk

Tryout #3

0-10min: warm up throwing
10-20min: Stretching
20-25min: warm up run
25-40min: Infield practice (Make the Play or Know Where to Go) Outfield practice (Catching Flies or Catch & Throw)
40-45min: water break
45-55min: Hit the Relay (outfielders) Make the Tag (infielders)
55-1:15min: Swing Down (batters) with Make the Play (make it a contest)
1:15-1:25min: Star with 2 and 4 runners (base running skills)
1:25-1:40min: Hitting from the tee (batting practice when in a tired mode)
1:40-1:45min: Base Running Relay
1:45-1:55min: cool down and coach wrap up talk