

## **Why I Enjoy Coaching Youth Girls Softball**

### **By Gus Vazquez**

I began coaching girl's softball in 2006 when my oldest daughter was 6 years old. I now coach both of my girls; my oldest now 10 years old and my younger daughter who is 7. I started coaching to help out our league in our new community and to spend additional time with my oldest daughter outside our home.

The league I signed my daughter to play in was in its first season and thus they were looking for someone to manage a team in her division. I agreed to do it as long as I was able to select the days I held my practices because of my busy work schedule and I had some support from other coaches. I had no previous experience managing softball but I had played baseball between the ages of 8 and 25. Coaching softball became a new challenge but one I was determined to take on. The challenge was not only to get them to catch a ball, hit a ball, and throw a ball the proper way but also understanding that every girl on the team had a different personality and recognizing that not every girl responds the same to my style of coaching.

This year I am coaching two teams, 8u and 12u. The ages range between 6 and 12 years old. The 6 year olds are fun to teach. They are sponges and quick learners. The 10-12 year olds are more of a challenge since they are set in their ways and are not as open to change. I have several drills I use with both of my teams. The following are some of the more effective ones.

- Cross fire – divide your team in half. Place half of the girls at shortstop and half between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> base. Have one coach hit balls to the girls at shortstop from between home plate and 1<sup>st</sup> base. A second coach hits balls to the other girls from between 3<sup>rd</sup> base and home. The hitting happens simultaneously from both sides hence the name “cross fire”. The girls must field the ball and make a strong throw to the coach hitting the ball (note: a catcher can be used to catch balls the girls are throwing back). The girls awaiting their turn must backup the girl fielding the ball. If the ball gets through to the grass, all girls on that side must run to a designated area (usually a light pole). Each girl gets a turn fielding the ball once and then returns to the back of the line. Keep this going for about 5 minutes and then switch the teams so that they now field ground balls from the opposite side. This skill teaches several things: proper fielding technique, making accurate throws, focus, and backing up teammates.
- Soft hands – divide your team in half. Place half of the girls at shortstop and half between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> base. You will need a flat glove that has no pocket. You can find it at any sporting goods and it costs around \$15. Roll soft ground balls to each girl (about 5 each). The key is that they field the ball by placing the non-glove hand on top of the ball as the ball lands in the flat glove. Both hands must then come up toward their belly button. When making the throw back to the coach make sure they set their feet by pointing their non-throwing shoulder toward the coach they are throwing to. This drill can also be accomplished using

two bare hands. We usually call that the alligator drill since both hands close on the ball similar to an alligator biting on its prey. The second team can do this drill while the other team uses the flat glove. This drill improves their ability to field a ground ball effortlessly and teaches them to use both hands when fielding a ground ball.

- Quick Feet – Place two cones about 30 ft. apart. Line up one girl in the middle of the cones. The coach must have two balls and one glove for this drill. The coach rolls a ball toward one of the cones. The girl must run toward that cone, field the ball, set their feet and throw it back to the coach. As the girl is throwing the ball back, the coach begins to roll the second ball toward the opposite cone. Be sure to roll the ball so that the girl is able to catch up to it. You can increase the range as the girl gets better. Repeat this until you see the girl is too tired to keep up. It usually takes about 5-8 balls to each side. This drill improves the girls' ability to get to a ground ball quickly.

Throughout the years I have learned from other coaches, read books, and learned from what went well and what failed. I am now in my 5<sup>th</sup> year of coaching and enjoy every minute of it. Coaching girls' softball provides me with an outlet from constantly thinking about work. My biggest reward is seeing how much my team has improved from the beginning of the year until the final game.