

First Season Managing Softball

By

Neil Davis

I started coaching softball because I was a little frustrated with the way my daughters' teams were being coached. My daughter is very good. She is 8 years old and has developed into a very good pitcher and made the all stars this year. But because she is good, every season she was being drafted by the new coach because the new coaches get to draft first and was not being drafted by the coaches who have years of experience and are better coaches who teach the skills needed. While I respect those new coaches for volunteering their time I was still frustrated at their lack of effort. I did help and coach for two seasons prior to being manager but all my suggestions went unheard, so I finally decided to make the commitment to manager, managing in the 7-8 year old division. And I do not regret it one bit. I really enjoyed being out there, making decisions, and teaching the girls the skills they need to learn to be better players. In my one season as manager I covered more skill sets than any of her previous coaches, but also didn't overload them with skills they just are not ready to learn. For example the crow hop; now my daughter knows the crow hop, I have taught her that, but the girls in the outfield (as most coaches will do at this age) are first year players and not the girls with any experience. So just to get them to relay the throws in without running with the ball or holding onto the ball is a success which we managed to do. So I kept it at a very age appropriate level skill set and I believe we were very successful at teaching the girls the correct skills.

Some of the drills we worked on in the field were of course throwing skills. The biggest thing I emphasized throughout the season was for the girls to throw hard and snap their wrist when throwing. We did a lot of different throwing drills but as the season went on and during our warm up throwing drills I was always telling them throw it harder and snap your wrist, if you snap your wrist you will get a nice straight throw to your partner. I did a lot of grounding drills but added the footwork into the grounding drills. Footwork is always going to be important when throwing the ball off a grounder and also using your body to help you throw the ball well. I also did a lot of "game" drills where we would split the practice up into two groups and they would compete in drills to see who wins. The girls loved it too. They loved the competition of it; they were learning as well, and having a lot of fun doing it. One drill I really liked was the around the horn. You set up the infielders at each base and they throw around the bases. Home to 3rd to 2nd to 1st to home and do it again. Then go the opposite direction. It was a very effective drill.

Some of the highlights of the season were that our team had six girls make the 25 player list for all stars based off of batting and OBP stats. They all to try out for the all stars of which three of the six made the final all star team. Another highlight was the last game of the season. We had six girls on the team that were all first year players and then our pitchers were first year pitchers including my daughter who was our starting pitcher. The last game of the season we played one of the first place teams and we won. She pitched a two hit 5 inning shutout against this first place team. We won 2-0. The girls were hitting in this game against a very good pitcher. They fielded the hits and got the girls out at first base. It was a

total team effort and went to show how much they learned and improved on the season from what it was in the beginning. I was very proud.

The two biggest lessons for me as a manager from the season are first; I never realized how much pitching can decide these games. I know pitching is important of course, but as a manager and being in this position it gave a different perspective. The teams that have the best pitchers win. That's pretty much the bottom line, especially at this age. In our 7-8 year old division we are not coach pitch and the pitchers can pitch 10 innings a week so it is all about pitching. Now I think once the girls get older and face better batters as their opponents get better this will change somewhat. It will still be about pitching because it's softball and that's where it all starts but especially at this age when you have 6 first year players that have never been at bat and they face a girl that can throw a fastball, a change up and sometimes a riser...it is very confusing for some of these first year players and many times for the experienced players. The second lesson I learned is that as a manager I needed to put more hitting practice into the practices. I was so focused on fielding in the beginning I neglected batting. Not completely but I should have had the girls batting more in the beginning. I learned this within the beginning of the start of games for the season but preseason we didn't do enough batting.

I absolutely loved managing. I do plan on taking a team again next season. I am coaching on the all star team right now. I have been chosen as the first assistant coach to the manager. It has been a good year all around and I can't wait for next season.