

## FUNDamental Softball skills – developing fundamental skills

### Learning outcomes

At the completion of this Module the candidate will be able to:

Identify the fielding positions in Softball and the responsibilities and key qualities of each position

Outline how to select and get familiar with a fielding glove

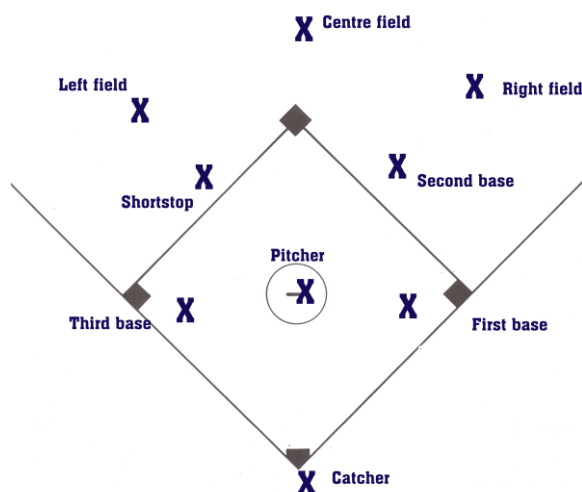
- Teach and correct catching a thrown ball
- Teach and correct an overhand throw
- Teach and correct fielding of ground balls
- Teach and correct fielding of fly balls
- Teach and correct basic pitching technique
- Teach and correct basic catching technique
- Teach and correct basic hitting technique
- Teach and correct basic base running technique

The focus of the FUNDamentals of Softball (Level 1) Coach Accreditation Program is on the proper mechanics and execution of the fundamental Softball skills of: catching a thrown ball, executing an overhand throw, fielding ground balls and fly balls, basic pitching, catching, hitting and base running technique. The purpose of this focus is to assist coaches to correctly develop fundamentals Softball skills in beginner level players.

### Fielding positions

#### 1 Field positioning

The diagram overleaf represents where players should stand for each fielding position. However as players' skill and confidence progress, they will become more aware of the cues available to them during the game which may impact on where they stand.





## **Infield**

The infield is the first line of defense behind the pitcher and will generally make more defensive plays than the outfield. Key positions that make up the infield include the:

- Pitcher
- Catcher
- 1st Base
- 2nd Base
- Third base; and
- Shortstop

Infield players are responsible for fielding ground balls, catching fly balls, throwing to various bases, covering bases, backing up and tagging runners. Whilst it is important for all players to develop the basic fundamentals in any position to be successful, there are usually four common qualities that characterise a good infielder. These include the ability to be alert on every pitch thrown and make the right play, an eagerness or aggressiveness to go after the ball rather than waiting for it to come to them, good reflexes and the ability to move quickly in all directions and no fear of hard hit balls or oncoming baserunners.

## **Outfield**

The outfield is sometimes considered less demanding than the infield, however a strong defensive outfield will execute important outs, and like the infield, will make a valuable contribution to the game. Key positions in the outfield include:

- Left Field
- Centre Field; and
- Right Field

Outfield players are responsible for catching fly balls, fielding ground balls, throwing to infielders at various bases including home plate, covering bases from time to time and backing up. Whilst it is important for all players to develop the basic fundamentals in any position to be successful, there are usually three common qualities that characterise a good outfielder.

These include the ability to position themselves properly for different batters and different situations, react to the batted ball quickly and possess a strong accurate throw.

## **Selecting a fielding glove**

There is a tremendous range of gloves available for players to choose from. They vary in size and style to suit players needs and positions played. When making a selection it is important that the player can control the glove, so the weight and size of it are important criteria to consider.

### Fielding mitt

(can only be used at 1st Base and catching positions)



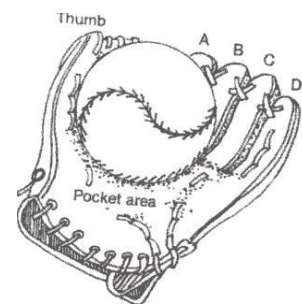
### Fielding glove

(can be used for any position)



### Getting familiar with a fielding glove

- For a right handed thrower the glove is placed on the left hand (see the gloves pictured)
- For a left handed thrower the glove is placed on the right hand
- Place the thumb in the section marked Thumb
- Place the index and middle fingers in the section marked C
- Place the pinkie and ring fingers in the section marked D
- Catch the ball in the pocket of the glove
- On impact squeeze the thumb and fingers in D together to close the glove around the ball



**Note:** Using the fielding glove is explained in terms of the glove pictured which is a glove for a right handed thrower.

### Catching a thrown ball

#### Catching sequence

- Hold the glove open in front of the chest with the palm facing the thrower
- After the ball is released, move the body in line with the thrown ball
- Adjust the glove position depending on the location of the throw:
  - If the ball is above the waist, fingers of the glove point up
  - If the ball is below the waist, fingers of the glove point down
- Watch the ball into the glove
- Catch the ball in the pocket of the glove, not the fingers
- Squeeze the glove closed and cover the glove with the throwing hand
- As the ball enters the glove 'give' with the hands and arms to cushion its impact and draw the ball and glove towards the body
- Take the glove and ball to the throwing shoulder as the throwing hand reaches into the glove to grip the ball ready to throw



## Ready position

### Body position

- Face the thrower
- Feet are shoulder width apart and parallel
- Bend the knees slightly with weight evenly distributed
- Hold both hands chest high with the glove open to the ball, fingers up and thumbs together

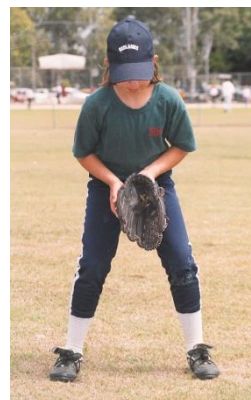
### Body movement

- Move the body behind the ball using a shuffle step or cross over step depending on the accuracy of the throw

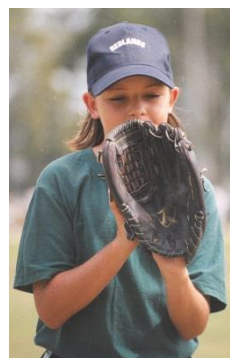
### Catching technique

- Catch the ball in the pocket of the glove
- Draw the hands slightly back towards the body to 'soften' the impact of the ball into the glove
- Catching below the waist – the fingers are pointing down with the little fingers together
- Catching above the waist – the fingers are pointing up with the thumbs together
- Watch the ball into the glove
- Secure the ball by squeezing the glove around the ball after impact and covering the glove with the throwing hand

### Catching below the waist



### Catching above the waist



### Preparing to throw

- Once the ball is secured take the glove and throwing hand to the throwing shoulder
- Turn the glove towards the body
- Use the throwing hand to reach in the glove and grip the caught ball
- Bring the body to the 'Set Position' for throwing by using either a crow hop or crossover step



**Gripping the ball**



**'Set Position' for throwing**

### Executing an overhand throw

#### Throwing grip

- Hold the ball in the fingers not the palm
- Hold the ball with 2, 3 or 4 fingers on top of the ball
- Fingers are placed across the seams
- Aim to have the thumb on the seam directly under the ball
- Hold the ball firmly but not rigidly



### Set position

- Stand side on and point the glove hand shoulder and elbow at the target.
- Feet are slightly wider than shoulder width apart
- Head is over the belly button
- Throwing hand is extended back with the elbow above the shoulder
- Fingers and ball are pointing away from the body
- Head remains still and level with eyes looking at the target



### Throwing technique

- Throw starts with an extended walking step using the foot opposite to the throwing hand
- Step should be straight at the target
- Rotate hips, then body and then shoulders to the throwing side as weight is driven off back foot and transferred onto the front foot
- Weight transfers to the front foot as arm comes forward and over the top. Fingers are behind the ball
- Ball hand trails the elbow until the shoulders are square
- As the arm comes forward the wrist is under the ball and wrist is kept cocked
- Ball is released at a 'high five' position with wrist snap toward the target



### Follow through

- After release the body continues forward rotation until the throwing shoulder is pointing at the target and weight is on the front foot
- Throwing hand continues down and past the opposite hip and knee



## Fielding a ground ball

### Fielding sequence

- Move behind the path of the ball and set feet slightly wider than shoulder width apart
- Bend the knees and lean from the waist with the weight on the inside part of the balls of the feet
- Lean forward from the waist so that the glove touches the ground in front of the body. (Players should be able to see their elbows)
- Hold the glove wide open facing the ball with the fingers of the glove pointing down
- The throwing hand is close to and beside the glove
- Watch the middle of the ball into the glove
- Close the glove and cover it with the throwing hand to secure the ball firmly
- In one continuous motion grip the ball and transfer the glove and ball to the throwing shoulder ready to throw

### Ready position

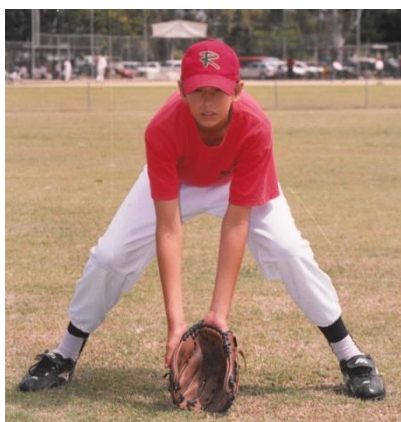
#### Body position

- Have the feet slightly wider than shoulder width apart
- Weight is forward, but spread along the inside part of the balls of the feet
- Bend the knees with the bottom low to the ground (like sitting on a milk crate)
- Keep the head up with eyes focused on the batter
- Keep the upper body relaxed



#### Hand position

- Keep the hands low
- Glove touching the ground
- Have the elbows out in front of the knees and not locked in



## Fielding technique

### Body position

- Get into the path of the ball
- The body must stay low, with knees well bent and bottom low
- Feet should be at least shoulder width apart
- The striding foot should be slightly ahead of the pivot foot
- Move the head only to enable you to watch the ball into the glove
- Body should be directly facing the oncoming ball

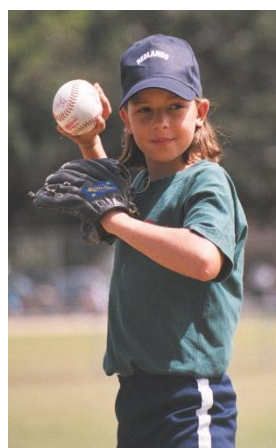


### Hand position

- Keep hands well out in front of the body
- Glove should touch the ground
- Field the ball from the ground up
- Hold the glove wide open facing the ball
- As the ball hits the glove elbows 'give' with the ball
- Once secured, use the throwing hand to grip the ball inside the glove
- In one continuous motion take the glove and ball over the throwing shoulder ready to throw

### Preparing to throw

- Bring the ball in the glove straight up from the ground to the belly button/stomach. This is sometimes coined 'up the funnel'.
- Turn the body side-on to the target using either a crow hop or crossover step
- Take the ball and glove directly to the overhand throwing position (no windup)
- Point the glove side elbow to the target
- Commence throwing progression





## Fielding a fly ball

### Fielding sequence

- Move feet and body under the ball
- Hands are above the head and in front of the line of the body
- Hold the glove wide open facing the ball with the fingers of the glove pointing up
- The throwing hand is close to and beside the glove to secure the ball
- Watch the middle of the ball into the glove
- On impact close the glove and cover it with the throwing hand to secure the ball
- Let hands and arms **give** to soften the impact as the catch is made
- Bring the glove to the throwing shoulder ready to throw

### Ready position

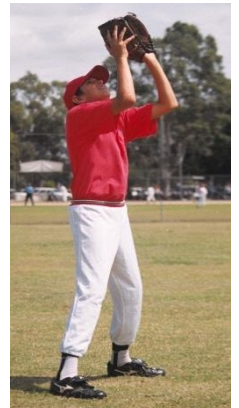
#### Body position

- Have the feet shoulder width apart
- The body is more upright for outfielders than for infielders:
  - knees are bent less
  - hands are further from the ground
- Keep the head up with eyes focused on the batter
- Keep the upper body relaxed



#### Body movement

- Run to get under the ball as quickly as possible
- If the ball is hit beyond the fielder avoid running backwards to get to the ball
- If the ball is hit to the left turn to the left to get to the ball
- If the ball is hit to the right turn to the right to get to the ball



#### Catching technique

- Watch the ball all the way into the glove
- Catch the ball as close as possible to the throwing shoulder
- Catch the ball with the fingers of the glove pointing up
- On impact close the glove and cover it with the throwing hand to secure the ball
- Let hands and arms **give** to 'soften' the impact as the catch is made
- Once the ball is secured prepare to throw using either a crow hop or cross over step



## Basic pitching technique

### Pitching grip

- Hold the ball in the tips of the fingers and not in the palm
- Grip the ball comfortably but do not strain
- Hold the ball firmly to avoid slipping from the fingers
- Place the fingers in contact with the seams whenever possible
- Release the ball off the ends of the fingers



### Pitching sequence

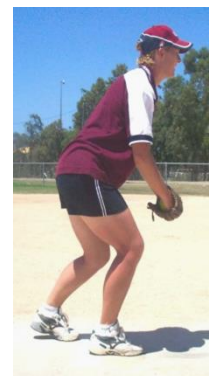
#### Stance

- Ensure both feet are in contact with the plate
- Feet are approximately shoulder width apart, with the pivot foot at the front of the plate and the stride (leg) foot at the back
- Shoulders and hips must be in line with first and third base
- Hold the ball in both hands in front of the body
- The entire body must remain motionless for at least 2 seconds but not more than 5 seconds



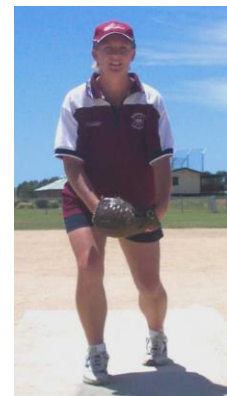
#### Pump (drive phase)

- Weight is transferred back on to the stride leg
- Glove and pitching hand extend down as the body moves over the front leg and into a sprint position
- In this position the weight is loaded onto the front leg
- Glove and pitching arm are usually in the middle of the body or slightly towards the throwing side



#### Stride

- Take an explosive stride straight towards the catcher by driving the stride leg up and out with the glove arm and pitching arm
- Accompany the stride with a hard push off the plate by the back (pivot) foot
- During the stride the pitching arm reaches the top of the arm circle (above your head) and the back foot pivots (squash the bug) allowing the hips and shoulders to rotate away from the batter (right handed towards Third base, left handed towards 1st Base).
- Point the toes of the stride foot almost towards the catcher (45 degree tolerance)
- The back leg continues to maintain weight as it drives forward off the plate
- The body moves from a forward lean (pump) to an upright or very slightly back
- For beginners use an exaggerated or extended walking step



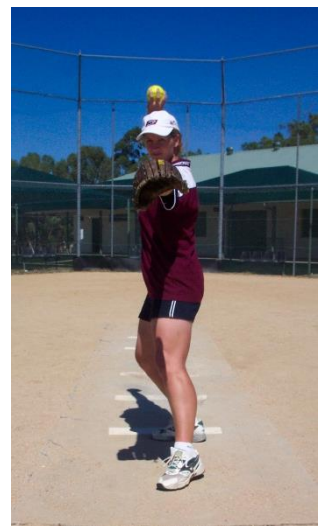
### Pitching arm action

- Move the pitching arm in a complete circle by bringing it straight up the front and straight down the back of the body
- Extend the arm but keep it relaxed
- At the top of the circle, have the arm close to the head by brushing the ear as it passes the head
- Ensure the arm makes the largest circle possible for maximum force
- Point your glove to the target to maintain balance and direction



### Delivery phase

- Drive the total body weight towards the catcher
- Stride foot lands on the ground with knee flexed to absorb shock
- Toes should be at about a 45° angle
- As the stride foot is planted drive the back (pivot) foot forward directly to the target
- This causes the hips to rotate back towards the batter, followed by the trunk and the shoulders
- At this stage the pitching arm has come from above the head and is well on the way down with the ball still facing out and the wrist cocked
- At this point ensure that the shoulders are back in line with the hips. This is achieved by ensuring the glove arm remains at shoulder height and out in front of the body whilst pointing to the target.



- Whilst the hips and the shoulders remain open with the glove arm coming down, snap the wrist alongside the thigh region to release the ball
- It is important to keep the pitching shoulder back during release

- At this time the back leg is beginning to straighten in order to drive the hips square immediately AFTER the release of the ball
- If the hips square up too soon this will prevent the pitching arm from staying in line to the target and inhibit the speed of the wrist snapping action

### Follow through

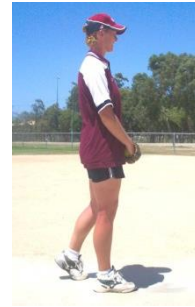
- Allow the pitching arm to continue forward naturally
- Allow the back (pivot) foot to come forward naturally to a position parallel with the stride foot
- The body should be well forward with the weight over the toes and distributed evenly on both feet



## Summary – basic pitching technique

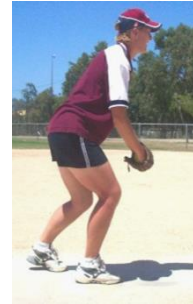
### Stance

- Ensure both feet contact the plate and are shoulder width apart



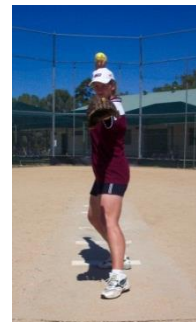
### Pump

- Weight is loaded on to the front leg (pivot foot) leg with hands and glove in front of the body



### Stride

- Take an explosive stride but ensure weight is maintained on the back (pivot) leg



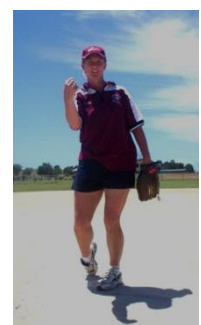
### Arm circle/delivery

- Hips and shoulders remain open
- Snap the wrist at the thigh region



### Follow through

- Back (pivot) foot and pitching arm comes forward naturally
- Body well forward and weight over toes



## Basic catching technique

### Catching equipment

Full protective equipment must be worn at all times. This includes:

- Face mask
- Chest protector
- Leggings
- Helmet
- Throat protector

### Ready position

#### Positioning in the Catcher's Box

- Wait for the batter to set up
- Set up about one bat length behind the back foot of the batter and directly behind home plate

#### Stance

- Squat like a frog.
- Trunk is forward.
- Weight is on the inside part of the balls of the feet.
- Glove is in front of the body.
- Throwing hand is hidden behind the back (experienced players) or behind the glove (beginners).



#### Receiving the ball

- Knees and shoulders are square to the pitcher
- Do not reach for the ball
- Catch the ball in the centre of the body
- Catch the ball out in front of the body
- Watch the ball into the glove
- 'Give' with the arms on impact
- Stay low

#### Blocking the ball

##### When the pitch is in the dirt over home plate:

- Keep the eyes on the ball
- Directly face the ball
- Bend the upper body slightly over the ball
- Place the glove between the knees
- Drop the knees to the ground as the ball is about to reach the glove





**When the pitch is in the dirt to the left of home plate:**

- Keep the eyes on the ball
- Step sideways with the left leg first and drop both knees to the ground
- Bend the upper body slightly over the ball
- Place the glove between the knee and the foot

**When the pitch is in the dirt to the right of home plate:**

- Keep the eyes on the ball
- Step sideways with the right leg first and drop both knees to the ground
- Bend the upper body slightly over the ball
- Place the glove between the knee and the foot



**Note:** Blocking is explained in terms of the catcher's view from behind home plate.

## General hitting

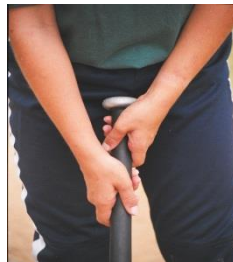
### Selecting a bat

There is a tremendous range of bats available for players to choose from. They vary in length and weight to suit players' needs. When making a selection it is important that the player can control the bat, so the weight and length of it are important criteria to consider.

### Batting grip

- Place the hands together on the bat at a comfortable distance from the knob
- Right-handed batters place the left hand closest to the knob of the bat (as shown in the photos below)
- Left-handed batters place the right hand closest to the knob of the bat
- Wrap the fingers around the handle
- Hold the bat in the base of the fingers and not in the palm
- Centre the knuckles of the fingers (door knockers) so that they are in a straight line up the handle of the bat
- The grip on the bat should be relaxed but firm enough so that the bat does not slip from the hands

- If the bat is too heavy slide both hands away from the knob until the bat can be swung comfortably (this is known as 'choking the bat')



### Batting grip activities

**Activity 1** (as demonstrated in the above photos)

- Stand with the knees together and rest the bat against the knees
- Reach down with both hands and wrap the fingers around the handle of the bat (photo on the left)
- Close the hands around the bat to form a 'V' between the thumb and index finger. The V should point down the line of the bat (middle photo)
- Lift the bat straight up to their shoulder (photo on the right)

### Activity 2

- Place the bat on the ground in front of the player
- Have them pick the bat up off the ground using both hands at the same time
- Check to see if the grip matches the key points described in Activity 1

### Basic hitting technique

#### Ready position

##### Stance

- Take a comfortable and balanced position with weight distributed on the inside part of the balls of feet
- Feet should be shoulder-width apart and parallel to each other
- Head is over the belly button
- Bat is held roughly over the shoulder
- Knees are flexed
- Head and eyes are level





## Sequence

### Stride

- Take a soft step towards the pitcher (this is a trigger to commence the batting sequence)
- Front foot and knee are closed and feet are parallel to home plate
- Keep hands and eyes level
- Head remains over the belly button

### Hip rotation

- Hip rotation commences after the stride
- Pivot on the ball of the rear foot after the stride foot is in position (squash the bug)
- Back leg forms an L shape in line with the back shoulder
- Front knee is flexed slightly (shark fin effect)



### Swing

- Shoulders commence rotation after hip rotation
- Belly button points to the ball
- Head is over the belly button
- Head and eyes remain level looking at the contact point
- Arms are well extended
- Throw the bat head at ball
- Extend the bat through the path of the ball



### Follow through

- Shoulders continue to rotate
- Maintain a balanced position
- Knee, hip and shoulder are aligned
- Bat finishes above the shoulder
- Head is over the belly button



- Head and



eyes &

**Note:** Make sure your players always wear a helmet when practicing batting or bunting. The coach in these photographs is demonstrating the segments of the hitting action for teaching purposes only.

## Summary – basic hitting technique

### 1 Stance

- Take a comfortable and balanced position with weight distributed on the inside part of the balls of feet.



### Stride

- Take a soft step towards the pitcher (this is a trigger to commence the batting sequence).



### Hip rotation

- Hip rotation commences after stride.

### Swing

- Bat extension



### Follow through

**Note:** Make sure your players always wear a helmet when practicing batting or bunting. The coach in these photographs is demonstrating the segments of the hitting action for teaching purposes only.



## Basic base running technique

### Batter-base runner

#### Digging out of the batter's box

- Take the first step with the back foot (the one farthest from the pitcher)
- Initially take short wide steps to gain power and momentum
- Lengthen the stride and pump the arms to maximise speed for running to 1st Base
- Running to first
- Run in foul territory within the tramline markings
- Continue running straight down the line and contact the base at top speed
- Don't break stride when contacting the base
- Focus on the base (do not watch the ball)
- Contact the front corner of the safety base (the one in foul territory)
- After contacting the base bend the knees, take short pumping steps and shift weight back to facilitate coming to a stop
- As speed is reduced glance left and/or right to look for the outcome of the play
- Turn to the left, toward the field of play, without making any attempt to go to 2nd Base
- Go directly back to the base in fair territory NOT the safety base
- Never slide into 1st Base unless avoiding a tag



### Base runner

#### Leading off on the pitch – rolling start

- Front foot is beside the front of the base
- Rear foot is behind the base
- Bend the knees and lean forward from the waist to take up a sprint position
- Watch the pitcher and take up this position when they are ready to pitch
- When the pitching arm reaches the highest point of the arc, begin the rocking movement
- Transfer body weight to the back foot to enable an 'explosive' drive from the sprint position
- Take the first step with the rear foot at the time the pitcher takes the stride
- Players should always remain alert and take cues from the pitcher, the defence and the coach.

## Rolling start



## Leading off on the pitch – track start

- Rear foot is on the front of the base
- Front foot is extended in front of the base and points in the direction of the next base
- Bend the knees and lean forward from the waist to take up a sprint position
- Watch the pitcher and take up this position when they are ready to pitch
- When the pitching arm reaches the highest point of the arc, begin the rocking movement
- Transfer body weight to the back foot to enable an 'explosive' drive off the base
- Take the first step with the rear foot at the time the pitcher takes the stride
- Players should always remain alert and take cues from the pitcher, the defense and the coach

## Track start



**Note:** The Rules of Softball prevent a runner leaving the base before the pitcher releases the ball (or in tee ball before the batter hits the ball). If a runner is caught leaving the base early they will be called out.

Information on the following skills is provided for general interest only and is not an official or assessable part of the FUNdamentals of Softball (Level 1) Coach Accreditation Program.

## Basic bunting technique

### Ready position

#### Body positioning using pivot stance

- Pivot early (as the pitcher commences wind up)
- Pivot on both feet:
  - Front foot is closed slightly (approx 45° angle)
  - Back foot pivots on ball of foot (squash the bug)
  - Knees are slightly bent
  - Body is bent at the waist
  - Eyes are looking over the bat for the ball at the release point of the pitcher
  - Weight is on the inside part of the balls of the feet



#### Hand and bat positioning

- Slide the top hand up the barrel of the bat (about one third of the way).
- Form a 'V' with the index finger and the thumb of the top hand, with the remaining fingers underneath and closed in a fist.
- Rest the bat in the 'V'.
- Arms are extended in front of the body with the elbows relaxed.
- Hold the bat loosely yet comfortably.
- Hold the barrel of the bat over home plate at the top of the strike zone and away from the body.
- The barrel of the bat should be slightly higher than the knob of the bat.



### Executing the bunt



- Select a good pitch to bunt (see pictures above)
- Bend the knees to take the body and bat to a ball that is pitched in the lower part of the strike zone (bat remains in the same position)
- As the ball hits the bat, draw both hands slightly back toward the body to 'soften' the impact
- Try to contact the top of the ball
- Put the ball on the ground in fair territory

### Bunting a ball in the lower part of the strike zone

Note how well the batter pictured below bends her knees to get down to bunt the low pitch



### Executing a bent leg slide

#### Safety considerations

- Coaches must address the safety considerations and be clear about the correct execution of the highly technical aspects of sliding before beginning coaching
- Make sure that all players have long pants or knickerbockers on before starting any sliding drills
- Players should practice in bare feet or socks until the technique is mastered
- A grassed area is preferable to use when working with beginners
- Model the finishing position, and then WALK through the sequence of the slide first with players
- Practice in this way until players feel comfortable with the technique. The more relaxed players are the easier it will be to slide and the risk of injury is reduced.

### Timing the slide

- Players should start the slide about one and a half body lengths from the base, depending on their weight, running speed and ground conditions

### Sliding leg

- Have players sit down from a standing position
- They will naturally tuck one leg underneath the other
- The leg that is tucked under is their natural sliding leg
- Emphasise to players that sliding is a natural motion

### Body position

- The sliding leg is bent at about 90° and **tucked under** the other leg, which is extended over the top
- Weight is well back and on the side of the sliding leg
- Chin is **tucked** to the chest
- Hands and arms are **raised above the head** to prevent the head hitting the ground. (Hands should stay clean)
- In the event that beginners hit their head on the ground whilst sliding, as a progression, allow them to cross their arms on their chest rather than throwing their hands back as they slide
- The extended leg is slightly bent and foot is kept **off the ground** approximately 10-15cm with toe pointed up (although not vertical)
- Base is contacted with the **extended** leg

### Finish position

- As the base is contacted with the **extended** leg, the upper body lays back
- The back and side of the player's uniform should get dirty
- Players should stay alert for the outcome of play

