

# WCSA Coaches Handbook

*“Building competitive teams  
through structured fundamentals and  
positive reinforcement”*



*WCSA Board*

*Edited by Nick Houtz, Analy Varsity Softball Coach*

## **Welcome...**

First and foremost, thank you for deciding to coach youth softball for the WCSA. Volunteer coaches are a vital aspect of West County Softball or any league association. It is the coaches that are responsible for teaching the players the necessary fundamentals of the game, the value of team work, and structured discipline to play the game. It is within this framework that we, the WCSA board members and involved parents, feel that the foundation of building a competitive league starts with this simple philosophy.

Whether you're a first time or returning head coach, the objective of this hand book is to establish a unified system of teaching and coaching girls to play softball. It is not possible for this handbook to fit the ability and skill level of every individual nor is it intended to be a "how to" set of directions or to take away from your personnel experience of coaching your team in a way you feel is appropriate. It is intended to provide an equal platform of instructional material designed to be used among all age groups, providing a structured format encompassing everything from common coaching language and practice plans to practice drills and pre-game warm-ups.

It has been through intense observation and experience over the past four seasons that our league has fallen into a common coaching theme of individual ideologies. And though that isn't necessarily a wrong way to approach coaching, it has created an imbalance among our league that can be seen in the skill levels across each age group. By maintaining a parallel style of coaching, we can begin to provide a type of balanced instruction of the necessary fundamentals.

The WCSA's goal with this approach is to establish a structured system within the player ranks that carries a redundancy from 6U to 14U. Whether the player is in her first or sixth year, they will all learn what is expected of them from the minute they step on the playing field and carry that same expectation into the next season. Coaches will have the confidence knowing that returning players will already have the basic foundation established from the previous year. In time, a structured approach by coaches and players will have established itself, and from it, a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate efforts. This handbook provides guidelines for coaching skill development at different age levels of young player's. It provides each coach with a basic lesson plan for teaching the skills and fundamentals of playing softball.

Together, let's re-establish WCSA as one of the premier leagues in Sonoma County preparing our young women, not only as fundamentally sound softball players, but for life outside the game as well. Thanks again and good luck with your upcoming season.

## **Taking On the Role of Coach:**

*It can be debated what it means to be a “softball coach” and what it takes to be a successful coach. What can’t be debated is the influence and impression you leave upon your players at seasons end from the effort you put in to your role. **Kathy Strahan, author of “Coaching girls’ softball”***

Coaching involves more than just showing up to practice and games. It’s a position which requires commitment, dedication, and an overall enjoyment of athletic competition. Coaches, like players, should always be looking for ways to get better. There are different ways to improve your skills such as practice drill videos, youth and/or coaching clinics, reading material, or sharing ideas with other coaches. It’s your responsibility to take full advantage of what’s available to become a better leader and educator on the field. The hard truth is, if you’re not prepared, your players will see it. If you are unsure in your approach or are unorganized, your players will not respect your coaching and in turn, not play hard for you. Remember, they want to become better players and are looking to you to teach them.

### ***Coaches and Players Code: Nick Houtz***

*Play the game for games sake!*

*Be generous when you win!*

*Be gracious when you lose!*

*Be fair always, no matter what!*

*Obey the rules of the game!*

## **“Hello, I’m your head coach...”**

Starting from your “Meet the Parents Night”, this meeting sets the tone for the entire season. Having an organized talk addressing specific points and your outlook and expectations for the season, you will immediately have the respect and attention from both fronts. This is one of those really important things for you to do well. Meeting the parents for the first time is as important a day as any mainly because it’s your First Impression! Within the first 5-10 minutes, you are already being judged on your organizational skills, appearance, communication, and demeanor. There is no reason to not treat this day any differently than you would treat your practice or game plans. It’s all softball related.

Things you need to discuss:

- Practice Info: Location, time & date, length of practice. What time do you want to arrive and be picked up!
- Handouts of team roster and any other information pertinent to your season ahead.
- Volunteer Parents: You’re going to need help so put it out there. Elect someone to start a call tree. You will struggle without parent assistance, you cannot do it all.
- Let them know what you expect from them. Getting players to practices and games on time, no coaching from the sidelines or yelling at the ump, there kids or you. Encourage and stay positive.
- What do you expect from them?
- What can they expect from you?
- Questions?

## **I Love Emailing...**

Communication is probably one of the areas of coaching that new coaches don't place as much of a priority on in comparison to other responsibilities. Just accept the fact that it is, very much, an integral part of the coaching spectrum. Emailing is no doubt a pain, but is really the only form of communicating changes in schedule and general updates in an efficient manner. You do not want parents showing up at a canceled practice or the wrong field on game day, it reflects poorly on you as well as the league. Apologize in advance for the onslaught of emails about to fill up their inbox over the course of the season. The weather wreaks havoc on practice and game schedules, so it isn't unusual to send out multiple emails as the conditions change. In the end, they'll appreciate you for the effort.

## **Continued Education...**

As a coach you have to be willing to learn before you can teach. If a player knows more than you, you have a problem. The success an individual obtains at their craft correlates with the time spent training in that craft. We as coaches should never live under the idea that some simple practice drills and making a batting line up are the hall marks to coaching. Like many things, as the times change, so does technique and fundamentals. You must spend the time seeking out new concepts and ideas and be willing to incorporate those into your practices. Reading books written by successful coaches or watching training videos on YouTube, it's a great way to prepare yourself and gain the confidence of leading your players in a successful direction. But also, it's fun! So have fun with it and use this tool to self-correct yourself or to validate how

you're teaching a particular fundamental or drill. Its FREE education being taught by credible coaches and players, why not use it!

### **The Practice Plan...**

Scenario: Coach A shows up for his/her first practice of the season. They have the gear, the roster and have the fields ready to go. They have an idea what they want to do and how they want to go about it. So why were they only able to fit in a couple drills in an hour and a half and then have no time left for any end of practice games or talks? Answer: No practice plan. The one thing any coach will admit is that there seems to never be enough time to accomplish everything you set out to do in one practice. But the reality is (especially when you involve the weather), you only have so many practices and so much time with your players so you better make it count! Your first game comes quick, so the more efficient you plan and execute your practices, the quicker you'll see the results on the field. Courtesy of Nick Houtz (Analy Varsity Softball Coach), attached is a comprehensive packet of various practice drills that are applicable for all age groups. As mentioned earlier, our goal is not to detail how you coach, not at all, only to create a symmetry and synergy among our league coaches so we can ensure our kids are being instructed the proper fundamentals in what's most beneficial for that particular age group. Before the season begins, it's helpful to work on the first couple practice plans by taking ideas from whatever sources you chose to research and compiling a list of drills that are applicable to what your players need to know to be successful. When creating your first practice plan, prioritize your drills and attach times to them to avoid being overwhelmed by the lack of time.

**STICK TO YOUR TIMES THE BEST YOU CAN!** It might seem difficult at first while trying to maintain the attention span of your team, but your practices will begin to flow if you stay disciplined with your schedule. Board members, including Nick Houtz, will be checking in on practices on occasion to ensure things are working out and for added support and any questions you might have regarding anything softball. Our league goal comes down to this single idea: *We want our players to know what to expect from their coach, from each practice and seasons to come, in turn they'll learn what you expect from them.* Practices should incorporate both offensive and defensive components, for individuals and the team as a whole. **REMEMBER, EVERYTHING YOU DO AT YOUR PRACTICES NEEDS A GOAL TOWARDS SOFTBALL!**

- Start warming up immediately with an emphasis on lower body strength and endurance. Use the bases when applicable for cardio. Loosen up those shoulders!
- Efficiency! Try to structure your drills and keep the pace moving so your players aren't standing around. Breaking them into groups can be effective at times but be sure your assistants are operating under your guidelines.
- Keep your instruction positive and have a little fun while you're at it. Instructional games can be a very productive training tool in an array of areas. Maybe for the older players (12U, 14U) you can play some music at practices once they really have everything down.
- Only use a bat when situation calls for it. More time is wasted trying to hit grounders to your players then simply rolling them grounders from 10' out. You'll accomplish the same goal with twice as many reps.



- At the end of every practice, leave 5 minutes or so for an end of practice team talk. Share your thoughts and give them a chance to share theirs. Before calling it a day, a quick all hands in shout out always leaves the day on a high note!
- Choose areas around the infield to run your drills from and give them names so you don't spend time always having to tell them where to line up.
- Try to have them line up in the same order for all your needs. It helps create structure and discipline with having to do anything.

Remember, if they don't understand what you're trying to teach them, it's not them, it's YOU! Softball is a team sport, make sure you coach this way. Remember that unwritten rule about putting your most inexperienced player in right field? You can't do that anymore. It's easy to work with and around your best players, but a successful coach works with his weaker players to bring them up to a higher level as much as possible.

### **Game Day!!!!**

Game day has finally arrived! No matter how well you prepared yourself for this day, it can still be chaotic. Control what you can control, you're going to have enough to deal with as it is. You should be one of the first to arrive (barring life, otherwise have your asst. coach step up) on the field. The time between your arrival and first pitch moves fast and it is not any fun for you or the players if you're skipping things within your game plan because you are running out of time. It helps to get all your equipment out, organized and ready ASAP. Make sure you have your lineup card ready (helps to work that out night before), score keeper and team mom established and

any parent related information that needs to be addressed. It's essential to put your focus into your team once you start referring to your game plan. Regardless if all your players have arrived at your requested time, activate your game plan at your scheduled start time. You can't let all the little things matter, don't sweat the small stuff. Your game plan should essentially be a countdown of events leading up to first pitch. This warm up routine is what we referred to, at the beginning of this handbook, as being one of the examples of creating that synergy among all the coaches. The core aspects of pregame warmups can be universal so it's our hope to create a style that is adopted and implemented by every coach. Our universal plan would look something like this:

### **60 min to game time:**

**10 min Sprints and Stretching**

**10 min Ball Drills**

**10 min Soft Toss and Hitting Drills**

**15 min Pitcher Warm up Time and Infield/Outfield Drills**

**10 min Head Coach Goes To Umpire For Team Meeting, Line Up Card, Misc. Questions. Assistant Coach gives pre-game talk (short, sweet and to the point)**

**5 min Team Cheer!**

Your goal is to create a foundation you can operate from for every game. During warm ups, never stop coaching! Make sure your players are using good technique when playing soft toss or during ground ball drills. If you need to multitask, then incorporate as many parents as you need to make things easier. Free yourself when you need to but **do not abandon your team to focus**

**on things that are not directly associated with your Team!** Here are some other tips to keep the players focused:

- While in the dugout, have your team watch the opponent's pitcher warm up, her wind up, speed, accuracy. Get your team involved early.
- Make sure every player removes their equipment from their game bag and puts it in the appropriate place as they arrive. This should become routine and not have to be mentioned at every game. When the umpire requests to see equipment, you don't want to be scrambling for these kind of things.
- Take notes down from observations during the game you feel need attention at your next practice.
- Balls and strikes will vary game to game, so don't waste your time arguing over them. Do not argue over judgement calls! Do not get involved with an opposing coaches/umpire argument (especially if it's in your favor). Do not shout at the umpire from your dugout, wait for the inning to end or call time out if you think a rule was called incorrectly. Be sure to have the rule in front of you at the time of your meeting.
- As a league, we need to develop better relationships with the umpires who serve us. Unfortunately, the WCSA has developed a poor reputation over the last couple years as not being familiar with the rules. Please know your age division rules prior to the season.

Again, coach your team through positive reinforcement. When they commit an error, let them know what they did wrong but congratulate the attempt and aggressiveness. If necessary, meet them before they get to the dugout and let them know how to make that play next time.

Showing frustration or anger over a mistake will only create a situation where the player will be afraid to make a mistake! That's a losing situation, mistakes should be embraced as learning opportunities, not seen as anything negative. Disciplining your players negatively on the field of play will rarely every get you the results you seek. Disciplining for unsportsman like conduct or a constant lack of paying attention is something entirely different and should be handled away from the team during the game. Lastly, it's important for your team to develop a team chant. It's the most traditional activity surrounding girls' softball today and something the players will embrace. This is there day, so let's treat it that way.

### **Wrapping it up...**

The WCSA (board members, coaches, parents and players) is in its first year of this newly established coaching program. It's going to take 100% cooperation from everyone involved, but that doesn't mean there won't be disagreements or difference of opinion with any part of this handbook. Like our players, we can't improve unless we build on our mistakes so we look forward to any constructive criticisms, ideas and/or changes that you feel would help continue to build the strongest league in Sonoma County. As a coach, you are only as good as the time you put in to your team. They're play on the field will be a reflection of your efforts. Make yourselves and your team proud. GO WEST COUNTY!