



CGAA SOFTBALL STRIKE ZONE NEWSLETTER

MARCH 7, 2010

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 3

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A letter from the Vice President

A call to all coaches!

I recall a time last Spring during registration. We received a lot of interested girls signing up and excited to play the game of Softball. We had so many girls sign up that we did not have enough coaches to field the number of teams that were created. We sent a request to our association members for coaches and were eventually able to field coaches for all of our teams.

You may be interested in coaching but think that you don't know enough to be effective or to teach the girls how to play the game. These are things that we can and would be thrilled to work with you on and help you develop. There are clinics that are in place now or that will be coming up that you can attend and observe or ask questions and especially help. We are working with Bob Loshek, the Head Coach of the Park High School team, to put together a coaching clinic to help show you the basics and get you started in the right direction.

To be an effective coach you need few things. To have a desire to teach the girls and help them learn how to play the game of softball. The ability to encourage the girls to play hard and give their best in all situations. And most importantly to be able to make it FUN for the girls to learn.

What a great way to spend time with your daughter(s) during the Spring and Summer. Please consider this possibility and let us know if you are interested at coach@cgaasoftball.com.

Thank you,

Duane Lindahl
Vice President and Senior League Director
duane.lindahl@cgaasoftball.com

Did you know...

- FREE In House Clinics are coming in March at the Cottage Grove Armory?
- You can register online or in person for the SAME LOW PRICE?

New Age Groups in Junior League

- **Wee Tees**
Age 4
- **T-Ball**
Age 5
- **Pitchball**
Age 6 – 7
- **Peewees**
Age 8, 9 & 10

New Age Cutoff for all Leagues

Players grouped by ages
as of
January 1, 2010

Check out all
registration
information at
www.cgaasoftball.com

In House League Headlines

In house registration is underway! We are offering both online and face to face registration. We encourage all of those that are interested to register early so we can prepare effectively for another successful year. We are joining forces on a few dates of the face to face dates with CGAA Baseball to allow you to do your "one stop shopping" to register your children. Our face to face registration dates are:

- Thursday, March 4, 5:00 PM – 7:00 PM (Youth Expo at River Oaks)
- Saturday, March 13 12:00 PM – 3:00 PM

The location for the Saturday dates is the Youth Service Bureau. The Youth Service Bureau is located at 7064 S. West Point Douglas Road, near the former Rodeo Nightclub. Thursday, March 4 is part of the annual Youth Expo at River Oaks. We will be accepting Visa, Master Card and Discover at each of the registration sessions to make payment more convenient for you and at no additional charge.

Please recall the Junior League changes that were mentioned in the previous newsletters:

In the Junior League we will be making some changes to our age groups. Our goal is to have the girls moving through the program with an opportunity to develop and challenge themselves. Our age groups for the Junior League will be:

- T-Ball Age 5
- Pitchball Age 6-7
- Peewee Age 8-10

We are again offering some basic skills clinics to our In House players. Clinics will take place at the Cottage Grove Armory. For each clinic, T-ball and Pitchball players will attend from 6:00 – 7:00 and Pee Wee and Minors players will attend from 7:00 – 8:00. The clinic dates are as follows:

- Wednesday, March 17
- Friday, March 19
- Wednesday, March 24
- Friday, March 26
- Monday, March 29
- Wednesday, March 31
- Monday, April 5
- Wednesday, April 7

These clinics are your chance to receive the basic instruction you will need to get started on the fundamentals of the game or build on the skills you have already learned. They are the perfect way for any player to get ready for the upcoming season.

There have also been several questions regarding the spring rec. soccer program. We have been assured by soccer that they will be scheduling practices on a day opposite of the softball schedule and games on Saturday, so that there will not be a conflict and the kids would be able to participate in both sports, if they so choose.

With all of the exciting things coming for this season, we can hardly wait to get started! We'll see you on the field soon!

Duane Lindahl
Senior League Director
duane.lindahl@cgaasoftball.com

Upcoming Events

- **In House Clinics**

- **T-Ball & Pitchball**

- 6:00 – 7:00 PM

- **Pee Wees & Minors**

- 7:00 – 8:00 PM

- Wednesday, March 17
 - Friday, March 19
 - Wednesday, March 24
 - Friday, March 26
 - Monday, March 29
 - Wednesday, March 31
 - Monday, April 5
 - Wednesday, April 7

- **Winter Catching Clinics**

- March 21
 - March 28

- **Coaching Clinics**

- March 20

- **All Skill Development Clinics**
6:00 – 8:00 PM
Park Activity Ctr.

Check out the full calendar at www.cgaasoftball.com

Treasurer Tidbits

As we look forward to the warmth of the 2010 softball season, we are experiencing higher levels of excitement, anticipation, and anxiety. Along with that, commitment and perseverance are increasing as our girls get more comfortable and competitive with each other - all healthy measurements of our love of the game. These I am experiencing from a different perspective: parenting vs. coaching.

I coached for five years. Held the reins, so-to-speak, for five years. Now, I am learning a lot about sitting in the stands, letting go. Believe me, this a tough learning process. It is as difficult as stepping up to coach a team for the first time.

This perspective change is good for me, though, as I learn to relinquish control of my daughter to her coach[s] for those few hours per week. Learning to step back, allow the coach to instruct, discipline, and reward my daughter. Yes, I will still remain part of her game, as a parent, because parents do that. But at practices and games, when the coach is present - they get the stage. We still learn with our daughters but, at the same time, support the coach's instruction and fundamentals. As a coach, I appreciated that. As a parent, I respect that.

As I step from Fields Director and coach [on open stage] to Treasurer and parent [behind the curtain] I still feel the enjoyment working with all of CGAA board and membership. I am proud to be a part of your Softball family.

Verna Witzany
Treasurer

Communications Comments

I have been talking about it for several months and it is finally here, the new and improved www.cgaasoftball.com is now up and running. We have created a fresh new look and some new bells and whistles, with more still being added. Look for the new and improved CGAASoftball.com to provide more player and coach tips, more parent links, such as where to buy quality softball equipment at a reasonable price and new streaming videos to help teach and train your young athletes. Keep checking back for constantly changing content.

One of the pieces to that redesign is a new online registration provider, sportssignup.com. Not only are there added features, but they are also at a much lower cost than our previous provider and we are passing that savings on to you by charging the same low price online or in person for registration. Registration is now open!

It hardly seems possible that the 2010 season is nearly here. As we did last year, we are going to bring as much information as possible right to you. We will be distributing the "parent packet" with all of the team information and league rules directly to you, once teams are established and set. We will also continue to send updates on cancelation of games when there is bad weather to make the job of our volunteer coaches even easier.

Although there are still subzero temps and there is plenty of snow on the ground, we have spent the winter thinking softball. For the 2010 season, we have made some great improvements and can't wait to get started.

Brad Strom
Communications Director
brad.strom@cgaasoftball.com

Registration Dates for In House:

Thursday, March 4

Youth Expo
River Oaks Golf Club
5:00 PM – 7:00 PM

Saturday, March 13

Youth Service Bureau
12:00 PM – 3:00 PM

Register Online at
www.cgaasoftball.com

Watch for details about
the upcoming season
in coming editions of
Strike Zone or at
www.cgaasoftball.com

PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

Thank you for taking the time to submit your photos. You made the selections very difficult.

Congratulations to our photo contest winners:

- Best Action Photo – Jacki Mallot
- Best Individual Photo - Amelia LaCasse
- Best Team Photo – Gina Tester
- Most Creative Photo – Gina Garcia

The contest winners each received a \$25 gift card to Archiver's to find some supplies to preserve these and other precious photos.

To see the winning photos, go to www.cgaasoftball.com/contest_winners

Special Events Entry

We will have many volunteer opportunities and needs during the 2010 season. We will do our best to post dates as soon as we have them and we will certainly be sending emails to solicit volunteers. Some of the events we typically need assistance with:

- Picture Day
- Strawberry Festival Parade
- All Star Game and Coaches Tournament
- In house tournament
 - Setup
 - Concessions
 - Tear down
- Traveling State Tournament
 - Setup
 - Concessions
 - Tear down

We really need everyone to just give a little of their time. We are not asking for a lot of time from everyone but for each family to at least volunteer once during the season while their child is playing or in their child's off season.

As we have been saying in the last few newsletters, many hands make light work. We all are in this for the children and with a little time from everyone we can make this program even more successful.

Kristie Schulz
Special Events Director
Kristie.schulz@cgaasoftball.com

Overcoming Game Day Jitters

Key thoughts for using butterflies to your advantage:

1. Staying Calm
2. Peak Training
3. Player Focus
4. Mental Preparation

Coaches Corner

From Candrea on Coaching...

Mike Candrea is the ASA Director of Coaching Education as well as a two-time Olympic team coach and writes a monthly newsletter Candrea on Coaching. Enjoy the excerpts from recent issues and hopefully you can find some pieces to use in your next game or practice.

Overcoming Game Day Jitters

We have discussed in past articles the importance of preparation, keeping your mind clear, and having positive self talk. This month as we prepare for the upcoming 2010 season, I would like to share with you some thoughts on how we can maximize our chances for success and overcome the game day jitters that all athletes face and must learn to conquer.

As you prepare for the big game and your game face is on, anxiety suddenly comes in many shapes or forms. The pre game butterflies begin to roll and the more you think about the anxiety you are feeling, the more it begins to haunt you. Butterflies are a good thing for all athletes, but the ability to control the moment is the difference between performing at a high level and falling on your face. Let's take a look at some key thoughts that will allow you to be in control and use the butterflies to your advantage.

Staying Calm

Athletes that perform under pressure are very good at knowing their own body. Your ability as an athlete to stay in the present moment and control one of the basic skills we all need is breathing. Count up to four or five as you inhale and out to five or six as you exhale. This will help you relax and stay in your body

Peak Training

The most important part of preparation is our ability to trust our training. Once an athlete understands the effect of quality practice on their performance, they will begin to trust their skills and decision making on game day. You cannot expect to play well if you do not practice well! By training well, you can go into competition knowing that you have earned the right to celebrate your skills on game day. Don't try something different at the last minute. Trust that your body and mind are ready to compete. Game time is the moment that we celebrate and enjoy our training sessions.

Player Focus

Great athletes understand that a big part of performing is the ability to handle distractions. These may come in different forms like weather, conditions of the field, who the opponent might be and what the team record is. Control the things you have control over and do not worry about anything else. Distractions take energy away from you. Conserve that energy for the game and stay on task by visualizing yourself playing a great game. Play the game one pitch at a time.

Mental Preparation

Our ability to move on during performance lapses is another important skill to acquire. Great athletes do not predict their next move or action based on their last failure. They stop, do a little positive self talk, replay a great play in their head and then perform to their peak level. Hanging on to a bad at bat or defensive mistake will not only affect your performance, it will affect the team as well. Along with this thought is to rehearse in practice your recovery plan when mistakes happen. Part of preparation is to not only prepare for success but also to have a plan to handle failure. Your ability as an athlete to see yourself recover quickly can become a powerful trait to consistency in your overall performance. Check out what Responsible Sports calls "**Mistake Rituals**" and see a youth softball coach use "brush it off" as a way to help her players move on from a play and re-focus.

Catching Basics

Protecting the throwing hand:

- Tuck thumb into your hand
- Wrap fingers around your thumb
- Keep fingers relaxed to absorb shock

Where to "hide" your throwing hand:

- Don't tuck the hand behind your back, too slow to get to a throwing position
- Don't tuck the hand behind your knee, first reflex to pull hand out leaving it vulnerable.
- "Hide" the hand behind the glove with the thumb tucked in as detailed.

CGAA Softball
PO Box 337
651-458-6086
info@cgaasoftball.com
Visit our website
www.cgaasoftball.com

Players Page

"Catching Basics" – First in a multi-part series

Most fundamental mistakes, though certainly not all, begin at one's connection to terra firma, the feet. From there, the most common mistakes move up to the general stance though many of these are caused by the positioning of the feet. Then, there are the little nagging habitual nuance type problems that plague most, if not all, players. The Catching position is no exception to this rule.

There are a number of common mistakes catchers make. Today, I want to go over some of these. But rather than start with the feet and work upwards, I want to do the reverse. I want to go over some finer points and then drop back into the larger fundamental issues because I believe this is the right way to have you really consider some of the important issues.

First of all, I start with the fist. Many coaches say to their catchers, "make a fist with your throwing hand and put it behind your back or knee during the pitch so that you don't break fingers on foul tips." The motivation is right. They don't want their catchers out with a broken finger or two. And that particular problem is a common one. But the advice is actually quite wrong.

To begin with, the phrase "make a fist" implies that one does what one would do when throwing a punch, close the four fingers tightly and then wrap the thumb into the fist. That does not work to preserve a catcher's hand on a foul tip which strikes the throwing hand. What you want instead is to close the thumb and then wrap the fingers in behind it. If you did that and punched someone, chances are even that you would break your thumb. But you're not throwing a punch. You're protecting your thumb, arguably the most important digit for playing softball. Secondly, if you try this, you may notice that it is almost impossible to make a tight fist thumb first. That's a good thing because the tighter you make the fist, the more likely you are to experience a broken finger. There must be some give in the closed hand so that there is a shock absorber to the impact of the ball. A fist with the thumb on the outside is tighter than one with the thumb inside. That creates the give or shock absorber effect we need. The primary goal of making a fist is to preserve the thumb and also to preserve all the other fingers by not leaving them hanging out there to be broken by a wayward ball.

Next, if you advise your catchers to place their closed fist behind their back or knee, perform a long study using videotape. Videotape every catcher you can find who puts their hand behind their back or knee. At the moment the ball is about 5 feet from the hitting zone, note where the catcher's hand is now located. At least 90% of the time, the catcher will have pulled her hand out from behind her and brought it towards the glove. This is a natural human reaction. Most people cannot be trained to keep the hand back because it is a natural motion to put both hands in front of you in order to protect oneself. Catchers are ill advised to put their throwing hands behind them as they are to make a punching fist. The first reaction is to pull the hand out from behind you. And when the ball is fouled, you are more likely to be struck. If you have a punching fist, that strike is going to break a finger. Catchers would be better off if they made the catching fist and then placed the throwing hand behind the glove by a few inches. If you watch a catcher who does this, what you will most likely notice is the throwing hand moves in tandem with the glove hand. The "fist" remains behind the glove and protected. You do not want the hand right up against the glove because it will absorb shock on hard pitches, rather keep it back those few inches so that when the pitch is caught, it won't be struck by the shock absorbing glove and so that as the glove slows down, the throwing hand will be right there next to the glove. Lastly, the catching fist, with the thumb on the inside, is a much more natural way for the hand to go into the glove to get the ball. Because the four fingers are not tightly wrapped and because the thumb generally springs open immediately upon releasing the fist, it is just a hair quicker.

Next time – To save knees or not save knees...