



IN THE CIRCLE

with Michele Smith

Indoor Softball Practice Ideas for Winter Months

One of the questions I hear often is “how to train for softball during the winter months?” Here are a couple of ideas to keep you fit, in form and having fun while working on your softball game! Enjoy.

A.) Partner throws or Wall throws: partner up and work on your throwing for accuracy and precision. If you don't have a partner, tape a box on the wall. With or without a partner keep count of how many good throws you make and chart your progress over the winter months. Do five sets of 20 throws.

B.) Dry swings: Find a mirror, window or an area of reflection so you can watch yourself as you perform dry swings. This is one of the best ways to learn and understand your swing and the correct movements of a proper swing. Visualize inside, outside and change up pitches to challenge yourself. Do six sets of 25 dry swings.

C.) Pitchers should use winter months to hone their mechanics and learn a 'new' pitch. When learning new pitches, I recommend the change up and drop ball first. Pitchers should throw 100 pitches [+/- 50 depending on age] at least 3 days per week. For the truly serious athlete, weight training is a must during winter months as well...for both pitchers and non pitchers alike.

D.) Fielding ground balls inside a gym is a wonderful time to get comfortable with your skill work, soft hands on receiving the ball, and quick release for a speedy throw. Let's face it; there shouldn't be any 'bad hops' on a gym floor! With or without a partner do four sets of 25 ball rolls to each other. If you don't have a partner, throw against the wall so the ball rolls back and you can field it.

E.) Footwork is one area that players and coaches overlook. Athletes with quick feet will have the tools to take their game to the next level. Here are some 'Ladder' drills to quicken your feet and are bound to be fun as well. Don't have a ladder? Tape one down on the gym floor! Perform each drill 3 times.

Agility Ladder Drills

*Can make a ladder: full length = 10 yards with 18" boxes (forms 18 total squares); short ladder = 5 yards with 18" boxes (forms 9 total squares)

- Run Through - 1 Foot in Each Box

- Run Through - 2 Feet in Each Box

- In-In-Out-Out (Forward): Say the name to yourself to follow the pattern “in-in-out-out” through each box. It means first foot in, other foot in, first foot out, other foot out moving forward with each step.

- In-In-Out-Out (Lateral): Same as above but face sideways to the ladder. Have your inside foot start the drill. Perform the drill back in the other direction so you train both directions.

- Hopscotch: Start with your feet straddling the ladder. Jump so both feet land in the ladder then jump out so that both feet straddle the ladder again. Move forward jumping in and out of each box and continue to the end of the ladder.

F.) Sacrifice Bunting is a very important skill in Fast pitch softball and should be learned and practiced frequently during the off season. Teams that move runners into scoring position efficiently are often more successful than teams that do not execute the sacrifice bunt. In order to score a runner from first base it takes at least two, maybe three base hits. When a runner is in scoring position, it takes just a base hit, or two at the most, to get her across the plate. There are many ways to move runners, and the sacrifice bunt is just one of those. In order to bunt the runner into scoring position, the bunt must be executed properly. Many teams are not taught to bunt properly, and therefore fail to move runners-again using the off season to learn this important skill is taking advantage of using your time wisely. I have bunted using the following form for many years. I can promise you it makes sacrifice bunting an easier task to accomplish. Almost 100% of the time we take the sign for the Sacrifice Bunt while outside the batter's box. Therefore when we enter into the batter's box, we want to enter as if we are going to take a normal swing at the ball. In other words, we don't want to give away too early that we are going to Sacrifice bunt. Giving away the bunt too early would give the pitcher and catcher time to adjust the pitch they are throwing and for the defensive corners to charge in early. We will step around into bunting position early, but only after the pitcher has set and is at the start of her wind up.

“Back Leg Step Around” into Proper Bunting Position

Many times bunting failures are due to bad form. I have developed a simple “back leg step around” that is easy to

(TRAINING ROOM)

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learn and allows the batter to get into the proper bunting position. I use this method myself, and it helps me get the majority of my bunts down while advancing runners.

- The first movement is with the back leg. For lefties it is your left leg, for righties it is your right leg. While pivoting on your front foot, take a full and long step forward with your back leg. This will put your back foot, once it is down and planted, in front of your forward foot, with both feet in front of home plate. My left leg and foot are now in front of my right leg and foot. This puts me in front of home plate which is very important. [Many young athletes incorrectly step on home plate while bunting. This is an automatic out when seen by the umpire.] -This "step around" method also puts my weight forward which is very important. This will help me get more bunts down and in fair territory. Many bunt failures are due to bunting the ball foul. Weight forward bunting gives you more of a chance to bunt the ball fair, and gets you out of the batter's box quicker and down the line toward first base. This form will also give more advanced players the ability to slap, bunt and push bunt as well. This makes it harder for the defense to defend this play or get the lead runner at second base.

- While I am stepping around with my back leg, my top hand is sliding up the bat for control. My fingers remain behind the bat so they don't get pinched between the bat and ball at contact. My bottom hand remains at the bottom of the bat, and the angle of my bat is slightly upward so I will bunt the ball down. We do not want to pop up bunts. Popping up bunts can be an easy double play for the defense.

- My arms remain at the top of the strike zone. I only want to bunt balls from my arms down. Do not try to bunt pitches above your arms or the bat. This will cause pop ups.

- My arms remain relaxed and are not straight. They have a slight bend at the elbow. This keeps the arms acting like shock absorbers, and puts down a soft bunt. Tight or straight arms will result in too hard of a bunted ball. This will create a bunt that is easier for the defense to play.

- My head and eyes are looking over the bat, as if the bat is a site. Keep your head down and looking over the bat. During the off season while working out inside or outside, you should bunt 50 balls each practice. They can be tossed at you overhand, or underhand...live or from a machine....it is a simple practice task that will improve your game tremendously over the winter.

G.) Pick up games with your friends. Don't be afraid to organize a pick up game and play indoor with a JUGS "Lite Flite" ball. You can use a glove or not, the Lite Flite balls fly well, are easy to pitch but yet you can catch them with or without a glove. With a glove is actually better because you really have to focus on keeping the ball in your glove and not letting it 'pop' out. Taping down the bases is better than throw down bases as the latter have a tendency to slide out from under your feet. Playing games like this will help get you in the competitive spirit and ready for the spring season!

For an even more intense workout and training schedule, check out my website and information on my Dynamic Training DVD and Year Long Dynamic Training Guide-guaranteed to get you in the best shape of your life! All at www.MicheleSmith.com.

Good Luck and enjoy your winter training!! You'll be 'thankful' you did when spring rolls around!

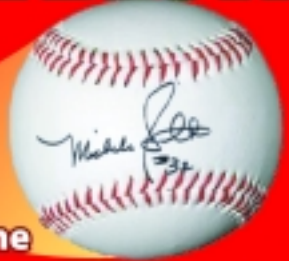
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