

# Lighting the fire at a beginner/intermediate level!

Creating a positive culture that fosters a love for softball!

“As a coach, build relationships- Don’t be busy, be present.”

-Diane Miller

University of Nebraska Assistant Coach

-Practice not talking about softball until they bring it up, get to know your players, help your players get to know each other.

Building team culture:

Make a question of the week, not a yes/no question.

- What makes you a good teammate?
- What does care for your teammate look like?
- What does leaning into the tough times look like?
- What are you doing that creates a dogpile- not a one person being lifted up at the end of the game effect.
- A song or a moment that has impacted them.
- 3...2...1 GO! For hard conversations

Nebraska Coach Lori Sippel from NFCA Convention 2025

Books Recommended: Culture Code- Daniel Coyle and Legacy- James Kerr

Another Idea: Create “soul sisters”- or a pair that will run and warm up together for the week, switch it up, draw names from a hat, have fun with it!

“Culture drives behavior, and behavior drives habits,” Jon Gordon

*Atomic Habits* by James Clear

Book Notes:

*Atomic Habits* teaches you to make small, 1% improvements or "atomic habits" in your daily life. Personal example- If I stand on one leg every time I brush my teeth alternating legs at 1 minute, I will have stronger legs. By creating positive habits you create a consistent system, which turns your daily routine into long-lasting life-changing results.

- 1) When making a new habit, link it to a habit you already maintain.

- 2) Make your new habit appealing and rewarding.
- 3) Tell yourself to stick with it for two minutes a day for at least a week.
- 4) When breaking bad habits, make them less appealing and inconvenient

### THE 4 LAWS FOR BUILDING / BREAKING HABITS



Building Good Habits	Breaking Bad Habits
1. Make it obvious	1. Make it invisible
2. Make it attractive	2. Make it unattractive
3. Make it easy	3. Make it hard
4. Make it satisfying	4. Make it unsatisfying



### FORM GOOD HABITS WITH 4 KEY STEPS



For the first 15-25min of practice, create a routine- poster board visible cue.  
 0-5min Check in/ soul sisters habit attractive- partner question- connection  
 5-15min Dynamic warm up (written out on paper/laminated) steps easy  
 15-25min Warm up throw/ grounders followed by short game Instant Satisfaction

### Setting up practices

Bryce Neal, Louisiana State University, Assistant Coach

### Training for the transfer-

1. How representative is the task?
2. What is the cognitive load- concept vs. what will it obtain
3. Does the activity provide the feedback?
4. Can we introduce variation?

### Game Day vs Growth Day Environment

1. Know your goal for the day.
2. Purple dot (growth) vs yellow dot (pace)  
 - Know your pace for each practice day.

“Offense with your head and defense with your heart.”

Christy Connoyer- Saint Louis University, Head Coach

How your prep impacts team defense- validate or inspire?

- Steady tempo, quick pace- high intensity, adversity, competition
- Be organized
- Cut manageable down time. (water bottles with them so they don't have to run to dugout)
- 3x week with drills for 15min.

Adversity:

Change the normal- Eyes closed, no talking, wet ball, dim lights, mix it up- different field.

Compete:

Creative Freedom-Work against the clock, 2 bunts to be able to hit, groups vs each other/ you.

“When the time to perform has arrived, the time to prepare has passed.” -Carol Hutchins

Fundamentals First:

Can have a good plan but need to execute.

\*Breakdown skills in split groups.\*

\*Take what you need for practices on a 5x5 card\*

\*Copy individual group drills\*

-Laminate and give coaches rings

Get pitcher into motion all defensive drills

Chose 3-5 players that need to execute 3 plays

Coaches Mentorship:

Julie Pratt from Oberlin College and Sean Cotter from Barry University

- 90min practice structure
- 1 pitch scrimmage, if they ask 0
- Working full game- multi-positional

Game Winner- one opportunity to make the play- high fives (touch is an important part of OUR program) If riled- Once player takes glove off/ helmet off, has time to reset, re-approach. \*If you permit it, you promote it\* If negative attitude- pull.

Nicole Newman, Florida Atlantic University (Pitching Coach) @ NFCA Convention 2025

Help players understand the purpose of the drill= buy in. Goal, why, result

Pitching

For pitching explosive start, generate force and create momentum.  
Have pitchers challenge each other- ex. first to get so many pitches- create competition.

Tony Holler's approach-  
Speed training coach

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire" William Butler Yeats

-We want kids to feel pulled, not pushed into a sport. Prioritize speed, health, culture.



Stop doing stuff that makes you slow. Be intentional, limit what you teach/do and have fun. Make practice the best part of a kid's day!

Gamify Practice, Situationals, Measure Outputs, Record stats, Celebrate wins!  
Promote strength training by giving tokens, stickers or prizes for winning.

---

3...2...1 ACTION!

Gamify Practice

- How many throws in a minute
- # of catches in a row
- Partners catch/ get it on a one hop/ not let it past them to the furthest distance? (If recording have them throw starting with one foot on fence- see who can get it past pitching rubber, past 2nd, infield, outfield, fence etc. give them all a time limit)
- Choose one teammate to line up on foul line to hit off tee (everyone else cheer in dugout- use 5 tees everyone looks for your signal to hit, x2 balls distance measure distance by fence posts from home)
- Both partners run home to first (combined times)

### Create Challenge partners

- same partners compete 2-3 times per season
- have them do the above drills but record stats!
- (16 kids (8 stations)-rotate to open station) Encourage parent involvement!

### Other Measurable Outputs (individually)

- Record speeds through first & home to home
- Partner front soft toss in dugout with tennis ball- how many caught?
- Card's dealt in other dugout, how many were caught?
- Grip strength (tool in dome) best /3.
- Fielding grounders front and sides how many balls stopped /3?
- Throw into the hoola hoop
- Distance of ball off tee or thrown, throwing speed (pocket radar must be +25mph)

Very wordy but you get the idea, be creative! Use the full space and dugouts and even the grassy area in between fields if needed.