

Top 10 Pieces of Advice for Coaches

1. **This game isn't about you so Leave your PRIDE at the door.** This will be a lot easier if you can remember two simple things: 1. You have no WIN-LOSS record because you aren't playing, you are simply facilitating the girls playing. 2. The girls activities on the field do not represent your ability either positively or negatively, they represent themselves ... period.
2. **Make the team about YOU.** Sounds like the complete opposite of #1 but it is actually very different. This means that you should figure out who you are, and what makes you unique and utilize those talents/gifts/strengths to put YOUR touch on the team and don't just try to be like the "winningest coach" in the league. Remember these girls have years and years to learn this game, teach the things that you know better than anyone else so that they don't miss out on that during their career.
3. **Understand and recognize the difference between PHYSICAL and MENTAL errors.** Physical errors come when the player is trying to do the right thing but her body makes a mistake in not judging something correctly. Mental errors are those where the player does the wrong thing. She picks up the ball in the right field and throws it to her friend in center field, or after stealing 2nd base keeps running right on into the outfield and doesn't stop at 2nd base. Before calling out a player on either kind of error go through a thought process like: 1. Was she trying to do the right thing? 2. Did we cover what just happened on the field multiple times? 3. Was this player at the practice when we covered it? 4. Does she already appear to know she did the wrong thing and can explain to you what she did wrong?
4. **Fairness – This politically correct term really has no place on the ball field.** Each girl is completely unique from all others. Your job as a coach is to develop each girl to the best she can become. Sally Sue may be sensitive and afraid of the ball, while Amberleigh is tough and aggressive. You better believe Amberleigh will need you to be "tougher" on her and "challenge" her a lot more than Sally Sue will.
5. **Don't get in a trap of rotating girls around** – That really started by people wanting to be fair. Is it fair to play a girl with no reaction time at 3rd base and take the chance that she gets killed by a sharply hit line drive? Is it fair to have a first year player play 7 positions and never get comfortable with any of them and have no confidence in her ability? Is it fair to put a girl in to pitch who only practices when you force her to and then destroy 9 other girl's abilities to enjoy the game while she walks everyone? I have included a "working" list of criteria for positions that you can share with players/parents at the beginning of the season. Help them realize that while it is "just a game" it is "a competition" and there are skills that each position requires to "fairly" compete. This doesn't mean that Amberleigh is the only girl who ever gets to play Shortstop during the season. It does mean that until Sally Sue proves she can safely field a hard hit ball and make a throw all the way to first base she isn't going to play that position.
6. **Help the girls establish good habits now** – Look at each girl and picture her playing the last ball game of her life, whether that be pro, college, high school or whatever level. Now identify the things that you would like to see her doing in that last game and start helping her develop those habits now. If you wouldn't want her to be benched her last game for showing up late, then encourage her and her family to show up early. If her family won't help out, then at least encourage her to have her cleats on and sprint to the field the minute her mom shows up late for the 10th time. She can't help the car arriving late, but you can build the habit of her personal responsibility. If you wouldn't want her to pass out from malnutrition the last game of her career then don't let her nachos and drink a 32oz Monster Drink in YOUR dugout. If you want to see her give 100% the last game of her career, then make her give you 100% in your practices now. That 7 year old on your team now, is really a college player in the making and she will be made into whatever you shape her in to.

7. **Plan for practices** – One of my favorites quotes is “If you don’t know where you are going then any road will lead you there.” Basically that means if you don’t want to accomplish anything then you don’t need a plan for where you are going. But if you do want to accomplish something with/for these incredible young ladies you will need a plan. Here is 1 way to get started: Start at the end of the season and write down what you would like to see the girls being able to accomplish. Then you start working backwards. “I’d like Victoria who has never gotten a hit in her life to hit the ball.” Great start. Now how is that going to happen? You will have to have practices that let Victoria see herself hitting the ball and running so that she builds up some confidence. Even though you are coaching 12U why not have 1 practice in which the girls hit off of a tee or with you soft tossing from the side? Your defense gets work, and Victoria gets confidence swinging in a safe environment and running all at the same time, but that won’t happen unless you plan for it to happen. You will have to have other practices with the ball coming at her in a way that helps her not be afraid of the ball. You aren’t just going to be able to “WISH” Victoria into hitting the ball. She’s going to have to develop a confidence and get over her fears and that takes time.
8. **Let girls learn the game** – It is vital to understand that there are 8 different learning styles that have been identified by those that define that type of thing. That means that some are more adept at learning by reading. Others by seeing. Others may be more inclined to learn through music, Etc. So don’t expect that you can teach a team of 12 girls in 1 way and that all of them will learn it. You could “talk” about something 1 time and the girl who learns audibly will get it immediately. The girl who is a visual learner will look at you like you are from mars as you rant and rave 10 times. But if you put your glove on and show her 1 time she’s likely to get it then. The one who learns from reading, will love it if you give handouts before each practice identifying what you will be practicing and then after each practice going back over it in a written form. The problem comes in when we as coaches try to just stick to the style that we are most comfortable with and ignore the fact that each player may just need a different “format” for our teaching. Secondly, it is important to understand that we retain much more by doing than by hearing or seeing. So don’t spend 20 minutes talking about something or demonstrating for them and then give them 1 minute to practice and expect that they get it. Give them ample time each practice to actually “apply” what you want them to learn, then review it next practice and practice it again. Lastly, allow them the freedom to make mistakes. If a girl is perfect every time, that means she isn’t trying anything new. If she allows herself to try something new she will make a mistake. She is going to be far more comfortable not letting go and trying anything if she’s in an environment where she gets criticized for each mistake. Look at mistakes as a good thing in practice and that she’s finally letting go, and encourage that growth cycle to gain momentum.
9. **Raise your expectations of what the girls can do, and vocalize them** – 99% of the girls on your team will want to please you and meet your expectations once you have earned their respect. If you make it clear that you don’t expect much out of them you won’t get it. If you set reasonable expectations for them as ball players, and not as precious little girls, you will get a lot more out of them.
10. **Don’t bust their balloon** – It can take you all year to encourage/inflate one of these precious little angels and it will only take 1 stupid remark by you (from your mouth or your body) to discourage her or pop her balloon. If you are the kind of person who tends to speak from emotions then get in the habit immediately of writing down your thoughts on paper, then go over them with players after the practice/game. That will at least give you 1 step as a filter between your emotions and the players’ ears/hearts.