

Questions of the Month

■ 1. MARK FROM EL CAJON, CALIFORNIA

Mark: "What type of conditioning would you recommend, a lot of running or strengthen or direct contact, hitting, fielding etc.? My daughter is a junior in high school and her coach runs them to death. How do you feel about a lot of running in softball?"

Coach Candrea: "Mark, running is an important aspect of our game and over all conditioning. We must first remember that in softball, we run more 10 to 20 yard spurts vs. long distance. We have lots of time for recovery and therefore, I would suggest that your conditioning program uses 20-30 minutes sessions for cardio and overall fitness. The most important conditioning that you can do for our game is 5, 10, 20, 30 yard shuttles that force you to change direction. I have always liked lots of agility work (ladders etc.) as the most important step in our game is the first step. Developing the skill set in our game (hitting, fielding, throwing, and receiving) is the foundation!"

■ 2. BOBBY FROM ALVIN, TEXAS

Bobby: "I currently coach ASA 18 Under Gold. The main problem that I have experienced over my 35 years with hitters is the dropping of the hands at some point in their swing causing a pop up or being late to the ball. Can you help?"

Coach Candrea: "Bobby, dropping of the hands is very common in poor swing mechanics. Young hitters must realize that when the front foot arrives at the hitting position (Toe Touch or stride), the hands must also arrive at their strongest position to initiate the swing. In softball, it is very common to see hitters start with high hands but usually their hands will drop and cause problems. Good hitters move their hands very little and if they move at all, we try to make that movement minimal or up. The most common problem in young hitters is moving their hands too far back which causes their hands to move in the opposite direction of their lower body. Keep the hand movement minimal and if anything up versus down."

■ 3. KERI FROM STOCKTON, CALIFORNIA

Keri: "Coach, I am a coach of a 16u travel ball team and also coach for a high school. Many of my counterparts teach the girls that it doesn't matter where you start your swing, only where you finish. While I don't get too caught up with the stance, I do believe that beginning from the load/hitting position all the way through the stride and finish of the swing should be the same in order to have proper upper and lower body rotational movement and timing of the transfer of weight. I have experienced that if a player is not set correctly in their load position, more than likely their timing and rhythm is off throughout the remainder of their swing. 2 questions: 1: Can you help me understand at what point of the preparation phase is important and what can differ between hitters? 2: What is the proper ratio of weight balance between the back foot and front foot in the beginning and end of a swing?"

Coach Candrea: "Keri, if we could break down the swing in the following manner, I think you understand some key points. First of all the stance is where you will see the most variety (Open, Closed, Square), hands high, hands low etc. Therefore, the purpose of the stance is to see the ball, assure plate coverage, and generate some rhythm to get to the hitting position. I break down the swing into two parts: 1) Preparation phase which begins with the stance and ends with Toe Touch which is our hitting position.

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Coach Candrea (Con't): "This is all preparation because our knees, hips and shoulders are still facing home plate and this is the linear portion of the swing. The second phase 2) Swing phase begins with our weight transferring into our front side and rotation begins as our back elbow begins the swing. The key positions are heel plant, connection, bat lag, contact, extension and finish. The weight distribution in the stance varies from 50/50 to slightly more weight on your back side. At Toe Touch (Hitting position) the hitter is in an attacking posture and as they transfer their weight into their front side, their head is over their belly button (center of gravity). At contact, the posture reverses and their weight is slightly back."

■ 4. JOHN FROM ALPHARETTA, GEORGIA

John: "I'm an assistant coach on a 16U "A" travel team. I have 2 questions: 1. We've read the pros and cons on metal vs. plastic for cleats and wanted to get your perspective of which is the better option. Do all girls at the college level wear metal? If so, when do you make the transition? 2. What is the best foot positioning for the SS when covering 2B on a steal? The 2 methods we've been debating were either the SS's left foot up against the side of the bag facing home plate or the SS straddling the bag with the left foot facing CF and the right foot facing home plate. We feel option 1 is safer for the SS but option 2 has a better chance getting the runner on a hook slide."

Coach Candrea: "John, all of our players wear metal cleats which give you superior traction on dirt surfaces. Regarding your positioning at second base on the steal, I agree with you 100%. If you have a strong catcher, there are benefits of straddling the bag although if your catcher does not have a strong arm, front of the bag will save some short hops."

■ 5. KEVIN FROM ORLANDO, FLORIDA

Kevin: "I Manage a 14U girls fastpitch softball team. Our team is a very strong hitting team, however we struggle at times adjusting to hit well off of teams that pitch slower pitchers to use than we are used to or alternate pitcher speeds in the same game (ie fast pitcher, then slow then fast again). What hitting drills do you suggest we consider to prepare our girls for these type of ballgame situations so their bats stay hot!"

Coach Candrea: "Regarding hitting slower pitching, the first and easiest adjustment to make is to not try to pull the ball. The slower the speed, the more you want to think about going opposite field. Another key element in making adjustments to speed is keeping pressure between your knees when the hitter arrives at their hitting position. As long as the knee stays inside the foot, the hitter is able to wait and explode. When the knee opens and you lose pressure, the hitter has to swing or stop their swing immediately. There are some training balls (3dx) that we use to teach hitting the off speed. They look identical but one is lighter than the other so when you throw them, the light ball acts like a changeup. You can find information on line or email me if you have problems finding them."

I hope you find my thoughts on your questions helpful this month. If you want more information, I suggest reading more in the [Responsible Sports Coaching](#) section. I will be answering more questions from you next month, so keep submitting me this great feedback. [Submit your question](#) to be answered next month!

- Coach Candrea