

## Softball Shape-Up Program

By Kent Pegg

Softball season is approaching quickly! Are you ready?

Hopefully you've been on a good, off-season strengthening program that's provided you with overall conditioning and addressed any areas of weakness or imbalance. But even if you haven't, there's still time to prepare your body for the season ahead.

As with all conditioning programs, your training should include three major components: cardiovascular training, flexibility/stretching exercises, and strength training.

For cardiovascular training, get your heart rate up and keep it up for at least twenty minutes, two to four times per week. Check the heart rate charts available in most gyms or consult with a fitness professional to determine your target heart rate.

For flexibility, consider taking a stretching or yoga class to ensure that you get the best permanent stretch without risking injury. Over-stretching can damage not only the muscles but the tendons which attach the muscles to bones.

As for your strength training program, there are exercises which should be performed by all players as well as position specific exercises.

The most important areas of the body for everyone on the field are the shoulders and the rotator cuffs. The throwing motion places tremendous stress on these areas and proper conditioning and warm-up are essential for injury prevention. Before doing any upper body workouts and before each practice or game, perform these three warm-up exercises for the shoulder and rotator cuff.

First, place your hands at your sides and turn your hands inward so your thumbs are pointing down. Now, from your shoulders, raise your arms, not to the front or the side, but 45 degrees to the front until your hands are at waist height. Repeat this for fifteen reps and two to three sets. You can perform this exercise with no weights or with small (three pound or less) dumbbells.

For the second warm-up exercise, with your hands at your sides, bend at the elbows until your hands and elbows are at the same height and your forearms are parallel to the ground. Keeping your elbows at your sides, rotate your hands outward and then back toward the center for fifteen reps and two to three sets, again with only light weights.

For your final warm-up exercise, raise your arms to the sides until your arms are horizontal. Bend your arms 90 degrees at the elbows so your hands are facing forward. Keeping your elbows and shoulders on the same level, rotate from your shoulders until your hands face upward and you look like a goalpost. Again, repeat for fifteen reps and two to three sets with only light weights.

These are three great warm-up/rehab exercises for the rotator cuff and shoulders. Do these before practices and workouts and you'll prevent many injuries to the inherently weak shoulder area.

Additionally, you can build strength and provide a strong support structure for the shoulders by performing front, side, and rear shoulder raises. The strength you gain will allow you to increase both the distance and rate of speed of your throws.

Other exercises that are beneficial for players at any position include abdominal exercises, rotational exercises and leg exercises.

Catchers should emphasize leg strength and flexibility. Squats, stationary lunges, leg extensions and leg curls should be included in your workout program. Additionally, hand and wrist strength are more important for catchers, as is abdominal strength.

Pitchers should focus on cardiovascular endurance as well as leg strength and endurance. Emphasis should also be placed on the previously mentioned shoulder exercises as well as exercises to increase wrist strength.

Infielders and outfielders need to maintain overall flexibility and upper body strength. Compound upper body exercises as well as exercises for shoulders and wrists should be emphasized.

Your preseason time should be spent lifting heavy to increase your strength. As you get into your season, adopt a program of lighter weights and higher reps (approximately fifteen reps per set) to maintain your strength and endurance.

As with every sport, your ability on the field will increase as your strength, endurance and conditioning increase. A little time in the gym will go a long way toward producing results on the field. If you need any help with the exercises in this article please feel free to call me at 662-5232.

So have fun, stay injury free, and, this year, play the best softball of your life!

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