

# FASTPITCH

ISSUE 18

# Softball

## MAGAZINE

### WHO GOT CUT?

Cat Osterman

### ARM MOTION

Sherry L. Werner, PhD

### RECRUITMENT SEASON

Robb Behymer

## BONUS:

**EXCLUSIVE VIDEO:  
PITCHING CLINIC WITH AMANDA  
SCARBOROUGH**

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# SOFTBALL ACADEMY

with Mitch Alexander

## *World Softball Coaches Convention*

Last month I attended the World Softball Coaches Convention <http://www.softballcoachesclinic.com/> as I have been doing for the past few Januarys. It's held at the Mohegan Sun Casino/Resort Complex near Norwich, Connecticut. The convention consists of guest speakers giving lectures and Q&A sessions in three breakout rooms, a live batting/pitching cage for demonstrations, and a dealer floor to see some of the latest softball items out there as well as purchase apparel and equipment. The convention is not just limited to coaches, anyone can attend including softball players. Every year we go, we come away with some useful information, whether it's about batting, pitching, fielding, coaching, college recruiting, conditioning, or game strategy, this is one convention we don't want to miss. We have met and had conversations with some of the top minds and athletes in the sport, including: Jennie Finch, Natasha Watley, Monica Abbot, and Ashley Charters.

This year there were some regular favorites in attendance, including Sue Enquist (NFCA Hall of Famer & Legendary UCLA Coach), Denise Davis (Planet Fastpitch), and Jen Hapanowicz (USA Elite Training). The convention also featured Jessica Mendoza (USA Softball Star Outfielder, World Champion & ESPN Analyst), Bill Edwards (NFCA Hall of Famer & Hofstra University Head Coach), Michelle Gascoigne (2013 National

Champion University of Oklahoma Pitcher), and Rachel Hanson (Dartmouth College Head Coach). We arrived just before the convention kicked off and found that each adult attendee received a goody bag which was a Louisville Slugger string bag loaded with literature and a bottle of water. Players received Louisville slugger pink backpacks!

We attended all of Bill Edwards' lectures and found him to be easy to follow, direct, and a very good speaker with a good sense of humor. His lectures were focused on the Hofstra coaching program. The first described how Hofstra takes a "playground approach" to their practices. He is a big proponent of his players being well versed in game strategy so they can figure things out in real time. He stated that "the speed and direction of the ball dictates everything." There are three types of ground balls: those that are ripped, those that are routine, and those that are slow rollers. Players need to think about where the ball



Coach Bill Edwards

is taking them, what the game situation is, and then quickly decide what their options are. For fly balls, it's the depth and distance they need to first be concerned with. Then they also need to think about where the ball is taking them, what the game situation is, and what their options are.

The "playground approach" comes in with the many drills that are run.

Coach Edwards has "silent practices" where base runners are not coached, and the defense plays the whole game without talking. He has found that this method teaches the players to see the field and make decisions on their own. He also has 5 on 5 on 5 inter-squad practices where the teammates compete with themselves by receiving points for properly executing defensive and offensive plays correctly. He detailed the point system used as well as a few other drills and challenges used to keep his practices fun and the players constantly thinking and learning.

The second of Coach Edwards' lectures described Hofstra's "Sequential Practice" methodology. His definition of sequential is that he has pre-planned practices or sequences that he can choose as desired/necessary. The team is familiar with these sequences and they provide lots of reps in a short period of time. He stated that "a good defense wins championships" and then described the fundamentals of this system, including teaching throwing, catching, and footwork as they apply to every position, teaching the rhythm of the game, and making every player fundamentally perfect. His system includes the following levels of instruction:

- Individual - teaching each player the fundamentals
- Positional - teaching a particular position
- Semi-group - teaching the player to work with nearby players, i.e. a shortstop working with 2nd and 3rd basemen
- Group - working with the entire infield
- Team - working the system as a team

Examples of these sequences are:

- Short Game Sequences
- Slap Sequences
- Infield Sequences
- Straight Steals and Pick-offs Sequences
- 1st and 3rd Sequence / Rundown Sequence

- Game Winning Sequence
- Hit and Run Sequence
- Special Situations Sequence

Coach Edwards provided video examples of many drills used in his sequences. The audience received some very specific ways to train their teams and got some insight into how Hofstra does it.

The third and final lecture Coach Edwards gave was entitled, "If You Can't Throw & Catch, You Can't Play Softball!" He remarked that many new recruits can't throw and catch correctly even at the Division 1 level. He broke down the process of throwing and catching into 3 steps: Catch the ball, footwork to throw, and then actually throwing the ball. This sounds very basic, but he has a system for each sub step and breaks each down further. For example to correctly catch a ball, the player must first be in the correct receiving position – an athletic stance. Next, the player steps towards the ball with their glove foot and maintains the rhythm of the game when the ball hits the glove as their glove foot hits the ground. Players keep the knuckles of their glove hand in line with their nose (see the ball in), their head extended in front of their body (or as he called it – turtle position), and finally players need to keep their butts below the ball. Coach Edwards showed many video clips that detailed the many types of footwork required to play defense. As a 12u travel/select coach, this lecture was the most interesting to me. We regularly work on many of these same drills in the same ways that Coach Edwards does. However, we picked up a few new ones to add to our own sequences!

The always excellent, Coach Sue Enquist gave two very interesting lectures we attended as well. The first was entitled, "Hitting Mechanics: What, How, and Why." This lecture was done in tandem with Jessica Mendoza and featured some in-depth hitting mechanics analyses using Right View Pro. The audience was amazed to see the comparison of several softball batters to baseball batters and that the softball swing is in fact the SAME as the baseball swing!

Coach Enquist's second lecture was to teach coaches about hitting slumps and how to get an early warning that a slump may be coming and how to get batters out of a pre-slump or an actual slump. She detailed that there are three types of slumps, all made up of mental and/or physical issues. For the mental component of hitting slumps, Coach Enquist suggested the solution is to get the player to talk about her issues and what she is feeling. Further, the player should take a "hitting vacation" and document the slumping player's successes so they have something to fall back on that they know works. Physical issues can be resolved by discussing what they are physically feeling is wrong, breaking down the player's swing using video analysis and comparing the slumping player's swing to known good swings, implementing controlled drills such as Tee work, side and front toss.

We received a lot of information in a short amount of time. My 12u player/daughter bought some nice softball apparel to add to her ever expanding collection of softball-related tee-shirts, sweatshirts, and sweatpants. We had some good conversations and some good food as well. If you are interested in attending this convention next January and you have a Facebook account, search for and like the World Softball Coaches Convention to keep updated on dates, guest lecturers, and even softball equipment discounts! You don't need to wait until next January to learn something - you can order a CD with Coach Edwards' three lecture slide decks including all of the video examples of the drills and sequences he runs for \$50 today! For those interested, please email Hofstra Assistant Coach, Kate Stake at [kate.stake@hofstra.edu](mailto:kate.stake@hofstra.edu) for more information.

*Mitch Alexander is the CIO for a major electronics company and coaches both Little League and Travel softball teams and is currently completing his PhD. He is a certified SUNY, ASA, and Double Goal Coach. His wife, Marie was one of the first female student athletes in the country to play Little League softball after Title IX was passed and played in the first Little League Softball World Series. Over the years, both have managed teams together and helped spark a love for softball in their student athletes. In his spare time, Mitch designs websites for fastpitch teams and businesses and can be reached at [fastpitch2001@optonline.net](mailto:fastpitch2001@optonline.net).*