

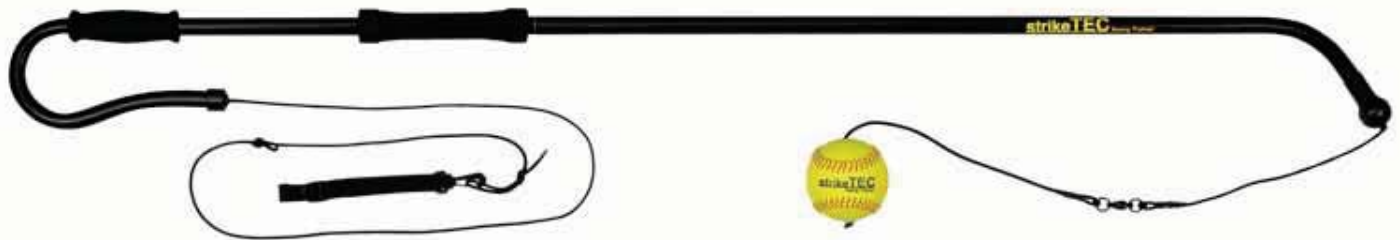


SOFTBALL ACADEMY

with Mitch Alexander

10 Holiday Gift Ideas for Youth Softball Players 2014

It's that time of the year again..... we're about to start winter training, and the requests have started coming in for holiday gift ideas for youth softball players. This is my third annual column of gift ideas. Great Fastpitch gifts are not in short supply this year! The following are my top ten gift ideas for 2014!



GIFT #1 - StrikeTEC Pro Swing Trainer - \$150

This unique hitting tool is my favorite of the year. It's a very versatile training and warmup tool. It consists of a long pole with a cord and cord locking mechanism inside. Attached to one end of the cord is a 12" softball on a swivel. For training, a coach/parent/teammate can place the ball anywhere in or out of the strikezone and ask the player to hit the ball. The ball will fly out a few feet and is then restricted by the tethered cord. Both the player and coach can see exactly how the ball was hit and how it reacted. Pitch selection



drills can also be quickly run with this tool. Coaches can do more than just static hitting by moving the ball into the zone and have the ball rise, drop, cut left, cut right, and combinations. Now, hitters can work on simulated spin pitches, change-ups, inside, outside, high, and low pitches in seconds. This tool can also be used to warmup batters before games. Take the StrikeTEC challenge: 15 minutes a day for 30 days can potentially add 100 points to your player's batting average!

GIFT #2 - Zepp Electronic Swing Tracker - \$150

We've all heard of or used one of the smartphone based video analysis programs. Well here's something innovative and the next generation of swing analysis software. This one makes use of a sensor that temporarily mounts on the end of a bat handle and works in conjunction with a smartphone to collect and analyze the data. Things like swing path and swing plane are graphically shown in 3D. Stats like attack angle, bat speed, hand speed, time to impact, and vertical angle are also shown. Video can also be analyzed and compared to professional models. Currently, the software includes access to a Jennie Finch hitting model. The software includes tips for each stat to help your player improve their hitting. Actual stats are compared with goals that were set and the progress made is tracked.



GIFT #3 - DeMarini CF7 - \$300

DeMarini has come back with an even hotter bat this year with their CF7 line of Fastpitch bats. They have a -11 drop for younger players, a -10 drop for stronger players, and a slightly endloaded -10 drop in the Insane model. Older players can also enjoy the benefits



of the CF7 in -9 and -8 drop models as well. We've been using the -11 this year on our travel team and I've never seen so many balls go over the fence! There is minimal break-in required, and the new handle design seems to control vibration better than previous models. The sweet spot on this bat is quite large and can really drive the ball. This bat uses a double barrel wall design as in previous models. Available at many online retailers.

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GIFT #4 - Worth Liberty Advanced Glove - \$170

Worth has created a great glove this year. It comes in several different colors and sizes, including a white Keilani Ricketts model. These gloves have a huge scoop! We've tried many other gloves and so far this is our favorite. It's made from high quality leather that isn't too stiff or too soft. Break-in takes a few days instead of weeks. The glove holds its shape well and is comfortable to wear. Sizes from 11.75" through 13" are available. If your player needs a new glove, this is one to check out. Available at many online retailers.

Photos by Frank McKee



GIFT #5 - Preparing to Play Softball at the Collegiate Level 2014 Edition by Catharine Aradi- recruiting book - \$35

This book is the bible when it comes to playing softball at the college level. It's never too early to start thinking about this topic. We start talking about college softball at the 12u level and start ramping up the discussion at 14u. If your player wants to play at the college level, this book is a requirement! It's packed with the best up-to-date information on scholarships, the recruiting process, and how to work with coaches.

GIFT #6 - Markwort Lightweight and Weighted Softballs - \$11-\$16 each

How do players build up their throwing arms? By carefully using weighted balls. Pitchers can also benefit from using lightweight balls to get their arms moving faster. A 5oz lightweight 12" ball is perfect for this. Pitchers can also benefit from using 9oz weighted balls as well. A standard softball weighs about 6-1/2 oz. Catchers trying to improve their throwdown times can also benefit from carefully using weighted balls and slowly building up their arm strength. Available at many online retailers.

GIFT #7 - Softball Core Conditioning Training Program DVD - \$40

We've been hearing a lot this year about core training. Top travel teams and many college teams have implemented core strength training to their programs. Here's a way to add it to yours as well. Presented by a trusted expert in sports strength training and conditioning – Barry Lovelace. Most of the exercises can be done without any additional equipment or can be done with things you already own like a bat. Core training is great for improving bat speed, endurance, lateral movement speed, power, and reaction speed.



GIFT #8 - Louisville Slugger Personal Radar - \$100

Here's another variant of a personal radar gun. This one by Louisville Slugger has a small tripod so it can be placed near a catcher or in other strategic places to capture throwing speed, bat speed, etc. It measures speeds up to 150mph and even can announce the speed with a computerized voice. Pitchers can practice at home with a regular practice net and work on their pitch speeds. Catchers can work on their throwdown speed with this tool as well. The great thing about this product is it doesn't require a person to pull a trigger or push a button to capture the speed. Available at many online retailers.

GIFT #9 - Tee Stacker - \$15

Sometimes the simplest things work the best. This is a simple plastic invention that lets you stack two or three softballs on one tee. It makes tee work more interesting and forces players to focus on what they're doing! It gives immediate feedback on swing plane issues. If the ball is hit cleanly, the other ball or two remain on the tee. If the first ball is hit incorrectly, the others fall to the ground. This tool can be used for all ages and is quite challenging. Looking to get your player to spend more time on tee work? This may be your answer. Available at many online retailers.

GIFT #10 - X-iser Sprint Trainer - \$300

One issue we struggle with on every team, is to try and increase the sprinting speed of our players. Here's a unique tool that can help your player increase their sprinting speed and decrease their time to first base. This mini-stepper is used by most NFL teams and many colleges. It's a unique design that actually increases the resistance as more force is applied. The secret is high intensity interval training - Brief periods of very intense work. The X-iser is specifically designed for this purpose.



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.

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