



# SOFTBALL ACADEMY

with Mitch Alexander

## *USSSA Elite Select All American Tryouts*



2015 marks the first year that USSSA held tryouts for 14 and under for their Elite All American teams. Tryouts were held across the United States in 23 cities for eight different regions, including: Far West, Northwest, Central, Midwest, Northeast, Atlantic, Great Lakes, and Southeast. About 3,500 players attended tryouts hoping to be selected as one of fifteen players to represent their age group and



region. In all, five teams are selected to represent each age group, from 10-14 in each region. The tryouts cost \$125.00 per player.

We attended the tryout in the greater Pittsburgh area held on Sunday, May 3rd. The physical location was in Harrison City at the Penn Township Municipal Park. The venue was adequate for the event. Four tryouts were held for the Northeast region: Bloomfield, CT on Saturday, January 24th; Baltimore, MD on Saturday, Feb 28th; Pittsburgh, PA on Sunday, May 3rd; and Quakertown, PA on Friday, May 8th. The Pittsburgh tryout had registration at 3:00pm on Sunday. This schedule required us to drive down from New York on Saturday (it takes about 8 hours or so from where we live to reach Pittsburgh) and then stay over both Saturday and Sunday nights, as the event ended about 8:30pm.

We arrived at the park prior to 3:00pm. There were a couple of tables set up but the players could not register until 3:00pm. Several lines formed at 3:00pm and the registration went smoothly. Each player received a shirt to wear during the tryout along with a sticky label with a tryout number printed on it. Players were told to remember this number as it would be the only way they can identify their scores posted on a website. One hitch in the registration was that they did not have size large shirts. Looking around at the players registering, more than half required a large shirt. They either had to accept medium or extra-large. Players then had their pictures taken by Hannah Rogers in front of a USSSA Elite backdrop.

At approximately 4:00, the players were instructed to join Hannah Rogers and Breja'e Washington from the USSSA Pride professional team on a large grassy field. Parents soon figured out they should gather nearby to hear the Pride players give their "Building your leg-



acy” speech. After about 20 minutes, the players were instructed to move to another part of the field for stretching. At this time, parents were addressed by representatives from the National Scouting Report (NSR) about college recruiting. While some of the information was useful, I found most of the talk to be a sales speech for parents to hire NSR services. I didn’t find this speech to be very helpful and may have been very confusing and somewhat scary to parents who do not understand the recruiting process.

Once the warmups were over, the NSR talk ended. The players were directed to move their equipment to different fields by age group. The first field we attended was for hitting. Most of the players took their gloves and took up a position in the outfield to shag balls. A note to players, you don’t get any credit for making catches in the outfield, so you may want to find a spot where the balls are infrequently hit - like right field. You can also decide to pick a spot with a lot of action to help you warm up, like just behind the shortstop in the shallow outfield. 2 players at a time were called to go to the back of left field where two Bow-nets were set up. 2 players took turns hitting off of a tee into the net and two others had their bat speed clocked with a Jugs radar gun. From there, the players got in queue for live front toss hitting. A coach behind a screen slowly lobbed softballs to the batters in an almost arc-pitch style. Although I didn’t count, it seemed like each player got about 10 swings. Some players consistently hit the balls over the outfield fence at the 13-14 level. Others grounded to the infield. It was overhead that the NSR staff wasn’t looking for shots over the fence. Rather, they were looking for good solid contact.

Next, we went to another field for pitcher and catcher testing. Pitchers paired up with catchers and warmed up. Once a pitcher was



warmed up, she threw in front of another NSR scout. Two required pitches were fastball and changeup. The pitcher was allowed to throw one or more pitches of their choice. Pitches were clocked with another Jugs radar gun. From there, catchers performed pop tests and were timed.

After pitchers and catchers were done, they went to another field for testing in their alternate positions, either infield or outfield. For infield, players assumed the shortstop position. A coach hit grounders out and players were expected to field the ball and throw to either first base or home. This is a standard drill performed by most coaches so almost everyone should have been familiar with it. However, the field used was not in great condition and the ball often took nasty hops fooling the players. Outfielders took a position in shallow right field. Another coach hit pop flies and some grounders to players trying out as outfielders. Once the ball was fielded, the player threw the ball back in to a catcher near home plate.

The last station was baserunning. This was held on the same field as the infield/outfield testing. Players were asked to run through first base and then from home to home. They were timed at each station. Next up was a 5-10-5 shuttle. The player stands in the middle then runs 5 yards to their left and touches a cone. They then switch directions and run all the way past center and 5 yards to the right of their original starting point and touch a cone and then back to center. Players were timed on this drill as well. Finally, they were timed running a 10 yard sprint. The last station on this field was an overhand throwing speed station. Players threw a ball into a net while they were clocked with a Jugs radar gun.



Best Times/Speeds for Northeast Tryout												
Age	10 yard sprint in sec	20 yard sprint in sec	5-10-5 Shuttle in sec	Home to Home in sec	Catching Pop Time in sec	Fastball mph	Curve mph	Screw mph	Rise mph	Drop mph	Over hand mph	Bat mph
10	1.6	3.09	5.66	13.75	2.4	52	39	-	41	40	47	61
11	1.53	2.85	5.25	12.66	2.0	53	47	43	-	44	49	70
12	1.4	2.68	4.87	12.16	2.06	53	51	51	50	53	54	66
13	1.41	2.6	4.88	12.06	2.06	56	56	52	52	54	54	68
14	1.38	2.72	4.87	12.22	2.31	63	60	58	51	60	57	71

Above is a table of the best times at one of the Northeast tryouts. If you're considering trying out next year, these numbers might be helpful in understanding what it takes to make the USSSA Elite All American team. It's hard to tryout 150 players in one afternoon. Much of the time, players were standing around waiting their turn. Less than 15% of the players attending the tryouts are picked for the All American teams. Players that are picked receive 2 jersey tops, a headband, and free admission to watch the USSSA Pride vs. the Chicago Bandits pro softball game each of the four nights of the tournament. However, players need to provide their own white pants, socks, and belts. In addition, families must purchase passes for \$68 per person to the Osceola Softball Complex and ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex. Players and families must pay for their own transportation, hotel, and food.

So what's in it for the other 85%? Well, they get a shirt. They get to meet and get autographs from two USSSA Pride professional players. They get to experience a high pressure tryout and then get numerical results to see how they did in comparison to the other players in their age group. They get to meet other high performing athletes while they are waiting their turn to tryout.



The USSSA Elite Select site states that players get showcase experience from this tryout. However, the event was strictly a tryout. Players were not involved in any game situations where they could showcase their skills. There were also no learning or training opportunities. This was only a tryout. In all, the tryout including registration took over 5-1/2 hours. It was an exhausting afternoon/evening for both players and parents. Most parents we spoke with thought it was a well-run event and worthwhile for their daughters to experience.

*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).*



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