

FASTPITCH

Softball

MAGAZINE



higher eight seasons in
's Superior, before

MEMBER



California
consec
Nationa
while th
won thr

unt
atur,
n-back N



Vita Ferrambal also played for the
USA Softball team in the National

... consecutive Bertha
... Awards (1986-88) as the outstanding
pitcher in the Women's Major Fast Pitch National
Championship.



Dot Richardson earned the Evi Lind Award as the top
defensive player in the National Championship four times
(1981, 1984, 1986-87) playing for the Orlando, Florida
Rebels and the Raybestos Brakettes of Stratford,
Connecticut.

Rick "The Crusher" Schen, smashed
2,985 home runs and drove in 6,021



TO REMEMBER

... Silver Bullets of
... National Title (1983-84)
... books of Anoka, Minnesota, led by
... Farmer Carol Bemis and Linda Polley

UNSELFISHNESS

Keri Casas

EARLY RECRUITING

Robby Wilson

DIY HOME BACKYARD BATTING CAGE

Mitch Alexander

BONUS:

VIDEO OF THE MONTH: VIDEO HISTORY OF SOFTBALL WITH DOT RICHARDSON & MICHELE SMITH

produced by



CONTENTS

COVER PHOTO

Video History of Softball with Dot Richardson and Michele Smith



The Pitching Link
Deconstructing Pitching Lessons
By Abby Hanrahan



Bridging the Gap
Routines
By Aaron Weintraub



Guest Writer
Tryouts
By Bill Boles



Softball Academy
DIY Home Backyard Batting Cage
By Mitch Alexander



Video of the Month
Video History of Softball
Dot Richardson & Michele Smith



Windmill Wisdom
Breaking Down Windmill Pitch: Timing
By Sherry L. Werner, PhD



To Coach or Not to Coach
Unselfishness
Keri Casas



Interview of the Month
Dionna Harris
By Gary Leland



Recruiting in the Fastpitch Lane
Early Recruiting
By Robby Wilson



Planning for Success
Season End
By Shannon McDougall



School of Strength
Back to the Basics of Training
By Michelle Diltz



Drill of the Month
The Ten Strike Game - Pitching Drill
By Gary Leland



The Fastpitch Book
The Moment
By Lisa Iancin





SOFTBALL ACADEMY

with Mitch Alexander

DIY Home Backyard Batting Cage

Players seem to always want more batting reps. Whether it's in a cage, front toss, or soft toss. Players love to hit. There never seems to be enough time to give my own kids (3 softball players) the reps they want. I've been toying with the idea of constructing a batting cage in the backyard. I looked at various products available with a very wide range of prices. Most were over \$1,000 for cage and net. I then searched the Internet for plans on building the frame, acquiring materials, and then of course the netting itself. After several weeks of comparing the various possibilities, I settled on a rather inexpensive offering from Trend/Heater Sports called the Xtender Home Batting Cage.

I chose this product for the following reasons:

- Low cost – my reasoning was that if the cage should only last a few years, I would still get a good return on my investment.
- Ability to be installed on a slightly irregular yard.
- The cage is a full 12 feet wide and 10 feet high
- The cage is expandable or collapsible in increments of 12



feet.

- Ability to be quickly shipped
- Has a small hole size for the netting and can be used for baseballs, golf balls, and softballs.
- I found some very good reviews on the Internet. I also found some not so good reviews too, but I felt that the reasons for the bad reviews could be adequately mitigated.
- The installation looked relatively easy and could be done in less than a day.
- The cage can be taken down in the event of severe weather and then put back up rather easily.

I decided to go with a full-size softball cage of 48 feet. I wasn't sure it would fit and spoke with a salesperson who ensured me that I could only deploy 36 feet if necessary as each section of the cage is 12 feet long. I ordered the cage from an online store. There are many that offer this product. The site I used offered free shipping. I paid just under \$600 for the 48-foot cage. Two boxes arrived within a few days. Each box contained a 24-foot section of the cage. One thing that's not apparent about the product is that there is no starter cage and add-on extender cages. They can all be connected together. In theory I guess you could make a cage that is a mile long by just interconnecting many cages together! The manufacturer offers cages from 24 feet long to 72 feet long. All materials needed are included in the box.

The first step is to gather your tools (See Figure 1): A tape measure long enough to fit the length of your cage, a small sledge hammer, and a block of wood. I also later found that I needed an 8-foot step ladder. Next, choose your location. I have a relatively flat section of



yard in front of a wooden playset in my backyard. I used the same tape measure I routinely use to make sure the pitching rubber is



the correct distance from the plate. I measured out the 36 feet and saw that 48 feet would fit reasonably well in the area. I opened the boxes and quickly browsed through the instructions.

Figure 1: Materials Needed

The next step (first step in the instructions) is to install the ground stakes that forms the foundation of the cage. The stakes are essentially upside down “U’s” with a section of pipe welded to the topmost part of the “U.” The most important aspect of installing these cages is to make sure that the ground stakes are installed correctly. I started at the end closest to the playset and just placed the stakes on the ground at approximately the correct distance. I tried to make sure that the placement of the stakes looked like the cage would be straight with respect to the fence and path next to it. I sunk the first stake (1) by hitting the block of wood on top of the stake legs. I was careful to make sure that I did not hit the tube sticking out of the stakes. Sinking the stakes can take a lot of effort, as each stake needs to go into the ground about a foot. I then measured 12 feet center-to-center to the next stake (2) down the long side of the cage and sunk that one too. I went back and sunk the first stake on the short side of the cage (3) by measuring 12 feet center-to-center. I sunk the fourth stake (4) that completed the first “box.” I re-measured both dimensions from the first stake and



ensured that they were 12 feet long. I then made sure that the box was square by measuring diagonally across the box and compared the measurement for both sides. I found that my box was slightly lopsided and moved stakes 3 and 4 until the box was square and each stake was 12 feet apart from the other stake. I repeated the process until I had all of the stakes in the ground. One word of caution – when you are measuring the next set of stakes, always measure back to the first stake on each side. This will ensure that you do not have any issues with cumulative error. Once all of the stakes were in the ground (see Figure 2) and the pipes attached to each stake was square to the ground, I moved onto the next step.



Figure 2: 10 Stakes correctly put in the ground

The next step is to assemble the “arches.” The arches are made out of fiberglass rods with metal joiners. These get assembled rather quickly by following the instructions: “A pieces” are in the middle. “B pieces” are attached to the A piece and so on all the way through “D pieces.” The joins between the sections get taped together to keep the rods from spinning. As the sections get assembled, be sure to have the loops for the guide ropes all facing the same direction. In my installation I had 5 arches. The instructions show 6 arches, but the picture on the outside of the box show the assembly with only 5, so I chose to do that. Figure 3 shows the 5 arches assembled.



Figure 3 – The 5 arches assembled.



Figure 4 - The arches inserted into the ground stakes

Next, insert the arches into the ground stake tubes, being careful not to break the fiberglass rods by flexing them too far. Figure 4 shows the arches installed into the ground stakes.

After the arches are all inserted in the ground stakes, guide ropes for the nets are attached between the loops found on the arches. This also creates the structure of the cage and ensures that each arch cannot fall to one side or the other. The instructions say to connect all of the guide ropes while the arches are on the ground but I found this to be counterintuitive, and attached the guide ropes once the arches were up, using my 8-foot ladder.



The next step in assembling the cage is to install the netting. This step can be a bit difficult and requires two people. The netting is not an exact fit over the arches. The ends are a bit larger than necessary to accommodate a low-end pitching machine that can be placed through the access hole at the end of the cage. I chose to use some cable ties to help keep the netting taught and not sag between the arches. I cable-tied the netting to the end arch first and then pulled the netting towards the middle of the cage to remove the slack. The net must first be centered and in place before making it tight. Since the 48-foot cage is actually two 24-foot cages connected together, the second net can be installed from the other end and pulled towards the middle again. The manufacturer recommends “sewing” the two nets together with an extra guide rope and then cutting the extra off. I chose not to cut anything, and instead tied the extra netting to the middle arch using cable ties. This worked very well and I did not damage the netting by cutting it. The final step is to add two stakes and tension ropes to both ends of the cage. The total time to complete the installation was about 6 hours. Figure 5 shows the completed batting cage.



Figure 5: Completed 48-foot batting cage.



Although there is plenty you can do with just a backyard batting cage, I chose to add a softball pitching machine. After some research, I decided to buy the FirstPitch Original Softball Pitching Machine. It's advertised to hit speeds of 80mph. I purchased it from the same vendor, who also did not charge for shipping. Since it's not the model made to attach to the cage, the pitching machine is placed on the inside of the cage. For about \$1,500 I have a full size batting cage with a machine that can throw softballs and baseballs any time my kids want to practice.

I use a standard pass-through Bow-Net as a pitching screen to stay safe while feeding balls into the machine. Although the machine says it can work with standard softballs, the repeatability isn't great. I ordered up some Juggs Sting-Free 12" dimple balls and now the machine just hums through 3 dozen balls with virtually every "pitch" on target.



Mitch Alexander is the creator of www.varsityfastpitch.com, a new web site to help students play softball in college. His area of focus is on youth sports and college recruiting. 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 World Series. Over the years, both have managed and coached Little League and select/travel teams at all levels and helped spark a love for softball in their student athletes. Mitch can be reached at Fastpitch2001@varsityfastpitch.com.

