

FASTPITCH

Softball

MAGAZINE

ISSUE 55

**WORLD SOFTBALL COACHES'
CONVENTION 2017**

Mitch Alexander

**WINNING THE MENTAL SIDE
OF BASERUNNING**

Aaron Weintraub

BONUS:

VIDEO OF THE MONTH:

INTERVIEW WITH OLYMPIAN LOVIEANNE JUNG

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MARCH 2017

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SOFTBALL ACADEMY

with Mitch Alexander

World Softball Coaches' Convention 2017

Every January we venture out to Mohegan Sun in Connecticut for the World Softball Coaches' Convention. This year was the 11th annual meeting and it was one of the best yet. What did you do this winter to improve your skills, knowledge, and people connections? Here's what we did at the convention in just one day:

- Heard Coach Jen Goodwin, Yale's head softball coach speak about having a hitting plan before stepping in the batter's box
- Saw Jen Schroeder, one of the top catching coaches in the country give a demo about throwing from the knees in the full-size cage assembled inside the convention center
- Attended Coach Sue Enquist's lecture about hitting and we had some time to catch up with Sue for a conversation
- Met AJ Andrews a pro player from the Akron Racers – got a nice picture and autograph too
- Met Lauren Hager a pro player from the Texas Charge - had a conversation with her as well as a picture and autograph
- Met Keilani Ricketts a pro player from the USSSA Pride - had an opportunity to speak with her as well as a picture and auto-

graph

- Attended a lecture with Coach Jen Goodwin (Yale University), Coach Kim Camara-Harvey (Johnson & Wales University), and Coach Larissa Anderson (Hofstra University) about college recruiting
- Saw a demo held by Fastpitch Magazine's own Matt Lisle about hitting drills for power
- Attended a lecture by Coach Kim Camara-Harvey (Johnson & Wales) about calling pitches and setting up hitters
- Attended a lecture about indoor practice plans by Hofstra's head softball coach – Coach Larissa Anderson
- Toured the exhibitor's floor - demoed some new training tools, bought a few shirts for the kids, and shopped for cleats, bats, and gloves.
- Had an excellent lunch with a few other softball coaches

This year, as in past years, the convention was divided into three breakout rooms. This means attendees get to select the topics they are most interested in. It also means you can't attend everything. We use a divide and conquer strategy of having several coaches attend different events and then we share what each of us learned later. There is also a dealer floor with over 90 exhibitors, as well as an exhibition/demonstration batting cage. Coaches from all over the country attend this event. The convention estimates over 1,000 coaches attend each year. We had



many interesting conversations with travel, high school, and college coaches. Most softball programs are unique in one way or another and having an opportunity to discuss how others do things can be eye opening.

Here are some of the key points we learned at the convention:

Hitting: Having a Plan Before You Step into the Batter's Box by Coach Jen Goodwin – Yale University



- Yale is researching the effect of heart rate on batting performance
- What should players be doing on deck?
 - o Working on their timing
 - o Anticipating what the pitcher will throw
 - o Looking for their (the hitter's) best pitch
 - o Identifying what the pitcher's best pitch is
 - o Getting ready to do what they can – and they shouldn't try to do too much
- What players should be doing when they're in the hole
 - o Breathe and relax
 - o Get themselves into the hitting mindset – once they pass a certain point, they are a hitter
- How players can avoid the feeling of failure
 - o Good hitters get on base 3 out of 10 at bats
 - o Missing 7 out of 10 times is a good hitter
 - o Players should focus on the process not the outcome
 - o The goal should be to have a quality at bat

- o Keep things in perspective
- There are expectations for the batting order
 1. Leadoff / sets the tone
 2. Good bunter / good 2nd leadoff
 3. Consistent hitter, makes good contact, has power
 4. Consistent hitter, has good power, good RBI hitter in case #3 doesn't get it done
 5. Clutch/gap hitter
 6. Aggressive, early in the count hitter
 7. Disciplined hitter, tends to only go after good pitches, probably gets walked a lot
 8. Sneaky hitter, probably underestimated by the pitcher
 9. Another leadoff, has speed, sets the table for the top of the lineup
- Positions 9, 1, and 2 are interchangeable depending on who is hot

College Recruiting Q&A with Coach Jen Goodwin (Yale), Coach Larissa Anderson (Hofstra), and Coach Kim Camara-Harvey (Johnson & Wales):



- There's a place for everybody to play. There are different levels in each division – find the place that's best for you.
- Take control of the process. Contact the coach yourself. Don't sit back and wait for them to contact you.
- The more you know, the more you are in control. Ask questions. It's harder to be conned when you know how things work.



- Yale (Ivy) is looking at students who are about to graduate as students have to get through the application process first. At Hofstra (DI), they don't need to wait for academics like the Ivy schools. They currently have one freshman and one sophomore commitment. They are always recruiting. Hofstra also just signed a junior and senior. At Johnson & Wales (DIII), they are always recruiting. DIII has a delayed process compared to the others as they don't offer any athletic scholarships. The coach commented that if a good player comes in during September, they have opportunities available.
- Hofstra is looking to recruit athletes. They look for natural athletes with fast foot speed and fast hand speed. Ivy looks for academics first and Coach Goodwin said she is especially concerned with how the player interacts with her parents and other players. At Johnson & Wales, the coach said she needs players with a lot of skill and knowledge of the game because DIII has less practice time and therefore less time to work with players.
- The coaches suggested that players need to go to school clinics as well as play in showcases. One without the other won't work. Coaches need to see real game play. They also suggested that players should not go to clinics at schools that don't have the player's intended major. Coach Anderson said that she can see specific skills in a clinic setting that she can't see at a showcase, but she still wants to see players in a real game setting.
- The coaches get 100 or more emails a day. Emails need to get the coach's attention. They need to be personalized and should say something like "I want to go to Hofstra because...." Coach Goodwin said that players should always include their



information on every email. For her, she recommended putting the information in the email footer. Coach Anderson suggested the information is best in the subject line of the email. Include: first name, last name, year of graduation, positions played, travel team, GPA and SAT scores should be included for Ivy schools.

- Video clips should be sent including very short segments on hitting (just a few swings), throwing, fielding, and pitching if the player is a pitcher.
- Players can create a YouTube channel of their videos clips. In a skills video, put your best skills first. If showing game footage, be sure to identify which player you are. Do not add music. Save your money – professional videos don't help. If you're a pitcher, use a camera angle from behind the catcher, but also provide footage from the side. If you are throwing to first base, put the camera behind the first baseman.
- Players need to be interested in the process and the coaches look at body language. If the player isn't interested, the coach isn't going to be interested.
- Call and ask coaches if they are interested in you and if they are recruiting for your position.
- Have a college coach evaluate your skills and give their opinion on what level of play you are capable of.
- For Ivy schools, don't take all AP classes – only take ones that are appropriate for your major. Ivy doesn't accept AP credit. Ivy doesn't give academic money or athletic money.
- The coaches prefer emails from players instead of from recruiting services. Directories of potential players are most useful for DIII schools.
- Some programs recruit nationally. Others recruit regionally.



Players need to understand the recruiting philosophy of the programs they are interested in.

Calling Pitches (Setting up Hitters) by Coach Kim Camara-Harvey (Johnson & Wales):



- When calling pitches, you want to focus on getting ahead in the count. When the first pitch is a ball, the weighted batting average is .375. When the first pitch is a called strike, the average drops to .260 (see slide above). Therefore, first pitch has a lot to do with the outcome of the at bat.
- Develop a language to talk to the pitcher so that she knows exactly where you want the pitch to be.
- Cut a strip of wood and screw 7 softballs to it. Number each ball from 1 to 7 and this can be used to determine the horizontal position of where you want the pitch.
- Pitching is more than about strikes. Pitchers need to throw balls with a purpose that keep the hitter guessing.
- Coaches need to know their pitchers. What is she good at throwing? What is she bad at throwing? What pitches does she throw for a called strike – this is especially important when behind in the count. What are her swing & miss pitches? What are her waste/setup pitches? What zones can she throw each type of pitch to?
- Coaches can collect this data: in practices, watch pre-game warmups, ask pitchers and their catchers, and chart pitches during practices, scrimmages, and games.

- Know the hitter
 - o Watch film or hitters in earlier games (scout hitters).
 - o Dig up charts from past games
 - o Watch on-deck circle check swings. If they swing high they probably like high pitches. You can also usually identify slappers.
 - o Does the hitter swing at the first pitch?
 - o Does the hitter have a flat swing? If so, they are probably best at hitting curve and screw balls. Change strategy to rise and drop balls.
- Know the situation
 - o For a strong hitter
 - When ahead in the count
 - Throw pitches the hitter doesn't like and throw for a strike
 - Throw waste pitches to set up next pitch
 - Throw a low change-up
 - When behind in the count
 - Throw pitcher's best pitch
 - Consider an unintentional-intentional walk
 - o Throw chase pitches that are off the plate. If she chases you may get a strike or an easy grounder, otherwise you typically get a walk any way.
 - o For a weak hitter
 - Always go right at them regardless of the count
- Know the umpire's zone. This will determine what you call.
- When the game is on the line – throw the pitcher's best pitch even if you are tempted to call something else because of the situation.
- Create a plan



- o Figure out if you are trying to get the batter out or if you are setting her up for the next pitch
- o Pitch away from the batter's strengths
- o Prevent the situation the other team is trying to accomplish
- o Don't use pitches that aren't working
- o Only use three pitches – these should be your pitcher's best
 - Her other pitches can be used as setup pitches
- o A changeup is best when following an inside fastball.
- When in doubt
 - o If nothing is working, throw opposites: high and out, then low and in.
 - o Have practiced pitch sequences to fall back on
 - For a lefty: drop out, rise in, changeup
 - For an aggressive righty: changeup, screwball, curveball
 - For a lefty slapper: drop in, rise in, screwball
 - For an average righty: curveball, rise in, drop out
- Use changeups more frequently if it's one of your pitcher's best pitches.
 - o Call it early on to establish the changeup with hitters.
 - o If a changeup is not a great pitch for your pitcher, wait until second time through the batting order to call it.
- Catchers are in the best position to call pitches. Coaches have the advantage of more experience and to access past data.

The 2018 World Softball Coaches' Convention will be held at Mohegan Sun in January, 2018. No matter where you live, you should make it a point to reserve some time and attend this excellent convention. Nowhere else can you get so much information in such a short time. Every year we learn very important tips, tricks, and best practices. Our game is constantly evolving and this convention is



an excellent way to stay current. Players will love the extensive dealer floor, the professional player autograph sessions, the live demonstrations in an actual batting/pitching cage, product demonstrations, and the ability to ask questions in the lectures or one-on-one afterwards.



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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.



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