UP YOUR GAME – January 2026

Topics for our January edition:

- ➔ Conditioning - Stretching
- ➔ Bat Selection
- ➔ Swing Fundamentals

Happy New Year! Believe it or not, the 2026 season is not that far away, so…..if you haven't already it is time to get off the couch and start preparing for softball!!!!

As many of you know, and witness at our games, injuries do occur, especially as we get older! Thankfully many of these injuries are muscle strains and these are somewhat preventable by proper stretching in the off season and certainly before we actually take the field for practice or a game. Here are some routines for your consideration to begin your conditioning;

Conditioning Stretches -> Goal is to provide activity to reduce injury and improve performance

- **Arm Circles:** Start with small circles and gradually increase to larger circles. This helps warm up the shoulders and rotator cuffs, which are vital for throwing and hitting.
- **Leg Swings:** Stand next to a wall for support and swing one leg forward and backward, then side to side. This exercise promotes hip flexibility and prepares the legs for running and fielding.
- **Walking Lunges:**
  Step forward into a lunge, alternating legs. This dynamic stretch engages the hips, quads, and glutes, enhancing lower body strength and flexibility.
- **Torso Rotation:**

  Hands across the chest or hold a bat lightly with hands in front, rotate side to side slowly (15 reps each side)

2. **Static Stretches** (Hold each stretch for about 30 seconds):

- **Quadriceps Stretch**:
  Stand tall, bend one knee, and pull your foot towards your buttocks. This stretch targets the front of the thigh, crucial for sprinting.
- **Shoulder Stretch:**
  Extend one arm across your body and use the other hand to gently press it closer. This boosts shoulder flexibility for throwing.
- **Hip Flexor Stretch**: Kneel on one knee with the other foot in front, pushing your hips forward. This stretch targets the hip flexors, which are important for running and agility.
- **Triceps Stretch**: Raise one arm overhead, bend the elbow, and use the opposite hand to gently push down on the elbow. This helps loosen the triceps, which are used in throwing.

➔ **Lying Knee Rollover:**
Begin by lying on your back. Draw one knee toward your chest, then gently allow it to cross over your body while ensuring both shoulders remain flat on the surface. This stretch is designed to enhance spinal flexibility and facilitate rotational movement.

- **Calf Stretch:**
  Standing straight and facing the wall with a slight upper body lean into the wall with feet flat, raise your feet up onto your toes and hold for 5 seconds, then return to starting position and repeat. (repeat for 20-30 seconds)

- **Squats:**
  Feet shoulder length apart, keeping your back straight as possible, bend your knees and squat low and slow, hold for 10 seconds, then push up to a standing straight position (10-15 reps)

- **Push-ups:**
  The dreaded push up…. should be done as both wide arm stance as well as close arm stance (shoulder width). These can be done with hands on the floor or for those that struggle you can utilize a solid counter or table to complete these (15-20 reps)

These are just a few stretching exercises that you can do to help you with conditioning. The key is to warm up and stretch your muscles so that you avoid injury and improve performance. I'm sure you all have ideas to prepare yourself so feel free to add your thoughts in the comments section.

**** Sources: Top 5 Softball Stretches – SF Network**

Bat Selection:

There are so many choices for Senior softball bats today…..how do you decide which bat is the right bat for you? It is really a decision that you have to make individually as everyone's swing and feel is different.

Factors to consider as part of your decision:

- Bat manufacturer: Suncoast, Miken, Easton, Louisville Slugger, Short Porch, Dudley, and a new one to market, Spartan and probably many more
- Best Weight for you: 25, 26, 27, 28 ounces
- Balanced or End Load
- Barrel size: 12 or 13 inch, one piece or two piece

How many of you decide based on Color and Graphics? (HA)

There is a lot to understand, but one key point is that every bat is manufactured to comply with a standard compression specification. Bats are now being tested for compliance to meet the compression standard at many tournaments. These tests are meant to protect from the use of altered bats which has become a significant issue over the past few years. I raise this point because buying a used bat from an unknown source could become an issue for you, especially if you hit someone. Penalties are severe including being banished from play for 10+ years or even lifetime.

All that said, some legal bats are hotter "out of the wrapper" than others, but they also run the risk of breaking sooner. Typically, a bat company 1st production bat can be a bit "livelier" than other production runs, but these bats largely end up with sponsored players and teams or can become available "if you know someone". I suggest that you avoid chasing down 1st Production bats and make sure if you intend to buy a Used Bat online, you understand the bat condition, history, and know that the seller is not giving you an altered bat!

Here are a few key pointers that may help your decision process as you choose the right bat for your game……keep in mind, this decision process is largely influenced by your personal feel and preference.

- Bat manufacturer:
  - This is truly a personal choice based on your preference, but all bat companies produce similar characteristics mentioned below. Consider durability as a key factor in your decision process.

- Best Weight for you: 25, 26, 27, 28 ounces
  - Swing Speed is the key factor with your decision here
  - Can you generate a swing speed that allows enough power at the lowest ounce bat to match your desired hitting plan
  - Weight to power ratio is the critical factor to finding the right bat for you

- Balanced or End Load
  - If you are a hitter with home run power and can still generate swing speed, then consider an End load bat, but be careful not to allow a larger end load to reduce your swing speed. An End Load bat can enable a more powerful impact to the ball **IF** you have the proper swing speed
  - A Balanced bat allows for more control of the bat and is typically utilized to hit all fields. It can also be a power bat if the weight to power ratio is aligned to the individual swing

- Barrel size: 12 or 13 inch – 1Pc or 2 Pc
  - This is again personal choice but the 13in barrel does provide a larger "sweet spot" and is typically more forgiving if you don't hit the ball in the same or sweet spot every time.
  - A 12in barrel is typically utilized by players that possess a very consistent swing that hits the ball in the same spot
  - Again, 1pc or 2 pc is typically a personal choice I do not believe there is any performance difference in play with either choice.

Swing Fundamentals:

There are many different aspects to this subject, so we are going to take this one step at a time. We will be covering multiple topics in future editions such as **Approach to the plate**, **Positioning for success, Opposite field hitting techniques, and situational hitting.** Many softball hitting videos are available, but this video below covers key mechanics valuable for players of all skill levels. You will have to scroll through a couple of Ads and will only see the full slow motion swing mechanics in the Recap section of the video, but it is worth the 10 minutes to learn these fundamental swing mechanics.

I have had the opportunity to play in a few ASA/USSSA 40 & 45 age group National tournaments with Bob and at several Huntsman tourneys over the years.....let me tell you the man can hit for average as well as some major bombs. He was selected to join the Long Haul Bombers Tour (Google that if you have not heard of it) and at one point I believe he held the record for the longest HR ball ever hit in Milwaukee Brewers Baseball stadium.....503 FT! So he is a legit subject matter expert!

Bob Woldyk: Powerful Hitting Secrets - 5 secrets to the swing

Bob Woldyk: Powerful Hitting Secrets - 5 secrets to the swing

(Click on the link then Hit Cntrl & Click on your Mouse to follow the Video)

In our next edition we will be covering the following topics:

- Training regimens to increase swing speed, power, and stamina
- Hitting fundamentals including Approach to the plate & Positioning for success
- Potential Rule Changes for CCSSL in 2026

Thank You for your continued interest in **Up Your Game**, we hope you have benefited from these topics!

Please feel free to add comments and suggestions for future editions.