

U13 ROOKIE SOX

Pitching & Catching Guidelines

HAVE A GO



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Introduction

This coaching resource is designed to help those coaching softball at the Under 13 age group.

Rookie Sox is the Softball NZ name for the U13 year old softballer. There are two levels of the Rookie Sox pitcher and catcher. The starting point is the Rookie Novice player who has never tried pitching or catching before. There are guidelines in this booklet to advise how to coach the player who has never experienced softball before and the player who is in transition from T Ball to real softball. It's an exciting challenge for players to have a go at pitching and catching and hitting a moving ball.

Opportunity to "have a go" at pitching & catching is a crucial part of the Softball NZ Junior Plan. The most important thing you can do as a coach with the Rookie Novice Pitcher & Catcher is to encourage all your players to "have a go" at both pitching & catching. Some players will not yet have the motor skills, strength or confidence to pitch or catch; it might take them another year or two. Others will take up the challenge readily and will include pitching & catching in their free play time, and start to develop some real skills in these positions.

Pitching is a very coordinated motion. The beginner pitcher will struggle with control and accuracy and won't know when to release the ball. This is why we encourage a big strike zone. The pitching rules need to be relaxed for the novice pitcher so that pitching is easier. Once the player is more familiar with the feel of the pitching motion, then the correct techniques can be developed. Pitching rules and key points of technique are listed in the latter part of this booklet.

As a Rookie Sox coach you play an integral part in ensuring that all players have at least had the opportunity to "have a go" at both pitching & catching in the U13 Rookie Sox years.

By the time a player is 13 years old we expect their knowledge, skills and attitude to have been developed to such a level that they are ready to handle the next stage of development as an U15 Raw Sox pitcher catcher combination. Official FastPitch softball rules are applied in the U15 grade.

An U13 Rookie Sox Pitching & Catching demonstration DVD is available. The DVD also highlights the key technical points for the more capable Rookie Sox pitcher. Contact the Softball New Zealand office on the email below to purchase a copy of this resource.

The Softball New Zealand Pitcher Catcher Development Pathways on the back of this booklet depicts the different stages of development.

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Key tips to help coaches understand the characteristics & needs of players in the U13 Rookie Sox age group (9-12 years)

Encourage fun and learning together.

This age group sees some players reaching puberty; they are becoming more independent, sometimes moody and are capable of developing leadership skills. They react badly to being compared to others in their group as this is regarded as a form of failure, but they are easily motivated and will happily take risks and try to adapt or find ways around rules to achieve success.

- Make sure you include a high level of activity in your activities along with rotation of positions– give everyone the opportunity to play and give players the variety and opportunity to try out all the positions, as this allows them to be more involved and interested.
- In your activities you can start to take a step away from skills that are purely fundamental based and start incorporating activities or situations that are more sport specific
- Continue with modified versions of the game, but modify the playing size to make the activity harder or easier
- Make sure that your activities will mimic situations in game play and allows players to have the opportunity to increase their decision making.
- Competition becomes more important at this age group, but make sure that you encourage the way to win is via improvement not luck. This age group understands that if they work hard or try harder there is the likelihood that they will improve which means success
- Players at this age group like to have a coaching environment that is consistent, fair and is safe emotionally, environmentally and physically. Make sure you don't compare players to each other and allow a lot of positive feedback to all individuals. Remember to acknowledge not only the more able players, but the players that are showing some kind of improvement for their own level of ability. You can start to incorporate role models (if you have some available) to motivate players,
- Make sure your sessions have a big variety keeping them mentally and physically stimulated
- This age group starts to show leadership characteristics, so incorporate leadership into your game sense activities and make sure you change the leader allowing all the opportunity to take on this role and feel accomplishment
- Encourage your athlete centered questioning and get the players to learn through mistakes they have made and giving them the opportunity to take on challenges
- Remember to make your drills/activities/games one where players need to cooperate with each other and reinforces the enjoyment with playing with others. This age group likes group activities and to feel included in a group.

The big 'no no's'

- Don't allow players to feel isolated and bored
- Do not provide negative criticism or compare players abilities
- Don't take away any decision making opportunities

Remember

- Players will start to identify or want to be in groups with their friends or those of the same gender

Progression of the Junior Club Softball Game in NZ

T- Ball  Softball  FastPitch

| SNZ Junior Progression | U5 Peanut League | U10 T- Ball | U11 Rookie Sox Novice Softball | U13 Rookie Sox Softball | U15 Raw Sox FastPitch Softball |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| Pitcher | n/a | n/a | Parent/ Coach or Player pitch | Player Pitch | Player Pitch |
| Catcher | n/a | No Equipment | Equipment | Equipment | Equipment |
| Umpire | No Equipment | No Equipment | No Equipment | No equipment and stands behind the pitcher or Wears equipment and stands behind the catcher | Equipment SNZ rules knowledge. |
| Ball Type | Sponge ball 11" | Flexi-ball 11" | Flexi-ball 11" | Flexi-ball 11" or 12" | Softball 12" |
| Rules | modified | modified | modified | modified | As per SNZ rulebook. |
| Homeplate | 432mm Standard | 432mm Standard | Standard but extended to 600mm Rookie Zone | Standard but extended to 600mm Rookie Zone | 432mm Standard |
| Strike Zone | n/a | n/a | Extended & Generous Rookie Zone | Extended & Generous Rookie Zone | Softball NZ Rulebook |

The U11 Rookie Sox **NOVICE** Pitcher

How to Coach the Rookie Sox Novice Pitcher

Fast Spin



Encourage and develop the confidence and self belief of your young pitchers by ensuring there is a level of success.

Creating a fast spin on the ball is one of the things a novice pitcher can achieve.

Show the player how to grip the ball with 3 or 4 fingers on the Letter C seam.

Use the fingers and the wrist to create a fast spin.

Fast Arm



Create the right “have a go” environment.

Encourage all the players in the team to “have a go” at pitching at practice. Do this at every practice for 15 minutes. Practice time is needed more than game time at this age.

Encourage your pitchers to have a go for it attitude.

We do not want pitchers to be careful.

Pitch it hard with an extra fast downswing from 12 o'clock, the top of the pitching motion.

BIG Strike Zone



Be realistic with your expectations and provide lots of encouragement with their efforts.

The novice pitcher will always pitch more balls than strikes, so don't expect too many strikes.

The umpire on junior games should have a generous strike zone. Use of the Rookie Zone extended home plate will help.

If the pitch is hittable call it a strike.

Batters should be encouraged to hit the pitches they can reach.

Game Plan



“Share the load” of pitching in games

Have 5-6 players try pitching in each game. Don't expect one player to pitch the entire game.



Players can change defensive positions at anytime during the game.

Most players are keen to have a go at pitching in a game, but not if they have to pitch the whole game.



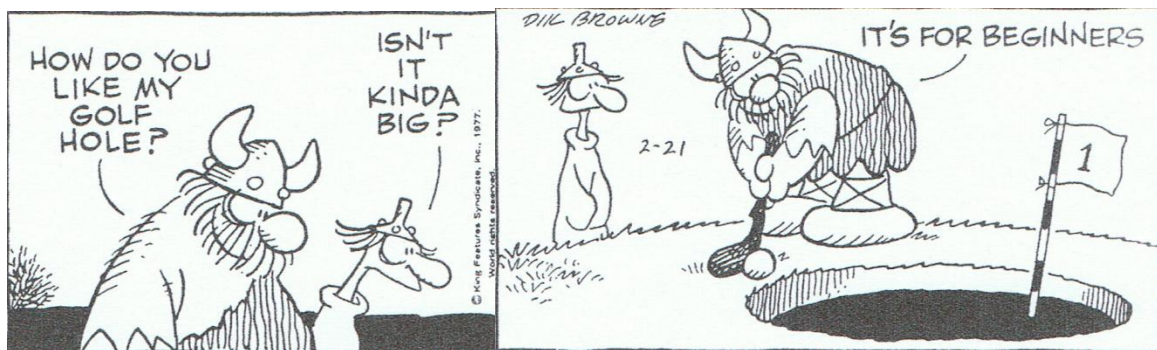
Make sure you change the pitcher if they are struggling eg: if they walk 3 batters in a row, give the pitcher a break.

Tips for the U11 Rookie Sox Novice Umpire

Make the game easier for the pitcher and the batter by calling anything hittable a strike.

The more success a young pitcher has, the more likely they will want to pitch.

The novice batter is not sure which pitch to swing at, so instead of restricting them, allow them to explore and learn which pitches are hittable.



The effect of calling a BIG strike zone at the Rookie Sox age is huge.

A players feeling of self belief will be enhanced toward both pitching and batting.

The U11 Rookie Sox **NOVICE** Catcher

How to Coach the Rookie Sox Novice Catcher

Get The Gear On



Safety is a priority

Mask, Chest protector, Leg guards

Your equipment must fit the child properly in order for them to feel safe

The combo facemask and helmet is recommended for children

Encourage all players to try the catchers equipment on and experience the position of catching

Have A Go



Practice at training with all the catchers equipment on so the child can get familiar with the gear

Start by tossing some easy pitches to the player in the gear

Get your Rookie Sox Novice Pitcher to pitch to the catcher in practice

Practice with a batter in the batter's box at practice

Set up a game situation at practice

Game Plan



Have a game plan of playing 3 or more players at catcher in each game. Don't expect one player to catch the entire game.

Make sure these players have had enough practice time at receiving a pitch with a batter and all the gear on.

The full catcher's equipment must always be worn by the catcher in a game.

If the catcher is really struggling, change them during the inning; otherwise change them when the new innings starts.

Softball New Zealand Skill Sets

| U11 Rookie Sox Novice | Key coaching Points | Teach your players these few points and let the Rookie Sox Novice get out and “Have a Go” |
|----------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Pitching Checklist: | | |
| | | Refer to the Rookie Sox Pitching DVD and written information for photos indicating these points. |
| Velocity & Mechanics | Grip | 3-4 Fingers on Letter C seam |
| | Set up | Feet comfortable, Hands rest on body. Breathe in, blow out longer. |
| | Stay tall | Body is upright |
| | Fast Arm | Pitching arm is quick |
| | Fast Spin | Use fingers and wrist |
| Movement | Fastball | Throw hard |
| Mental Approach | Encourage | Encourage to ‘Have a Go’ |
| Rules | Relaxed/Lenient | Make it easy. |
| Game Plan | 5-6 pitchers | Inclusive approach to pitching |
| Catching Checklist: | | |
| | | Refer to the Rookie Sox Catching DVD and written information for photos indicating these points. |
| Equipment | Gear | Mask, Chest Protector, Shin Guards, Glove or Mitt. |
| Squat | Set up (square) | In crouch behind the home plate, safe distance from the batter (a good bat length away). |
| Receiving | Catch the ball | Catch & hold, Keep eyes open. |
| Tagging | Set up | When to tag. Where to stand. Tag with two hands |
| Fielding | Pass balls to fence | When the ball gets past you, get after it quickly |
| Mental Approach | Encourage | Encourage to “Have a Go” |
| Game Plan | 3-4 players | Inclusive approach to catching |

Some Practice Routines for Pitchers and Catchers:

For Pitchers:

One of the best ways for a novice pitcher to practice outside of team practice times is without a catcher. Instead, try pitching against a large wall or turn a trampoline on its side and pitch into it. Alternatively, have your pitcher pitch to a standard wheelie rubbish bin with a line painted across it depicting the bottom of the strike zone. All pitches should be above the line and the target is the bin itself.

For Catchers:

The coach or parent tosses the ball underhand from a close distance to the catcher in the squat. The catcher gets used to receiving the ball out in front, watching the ball all the way into the glove and catching and holding.

From U11 Rookie Sox Novice to the More Developed U13 Rookie Sox Pitcher & Catcher.

Who are the best players to pitch in games?

Any player with a "Go for It" attitude. We want players who are prepared to pitch with a fast arm and fast spin. We do not want careful pitchers who guide the ball in for a strike!

Generally the best pitchers are those players who are doing some of the points shown in the pitching sequence photos. Often the physically stronger players in the team will find they have more success in pitching. Some players may never have the coordination or the desire to pitch. Being tall is a particular advantage in pitching as an element of strength is needed in order to pitch with speed.

Who are the best players to catch in games?

Anyone who likes to wear the gear can catch the ball that comes near them and enjoys the position.

Who is the best person to coach at Rookie Sox level?

The best coaches include all players and make the game fun. It is not about win at all cost! It is about encouraging the right attitude first and then developing the skills of their young players. The coaches game plan is to always "Have a Go" and "Share the Load" of pitching and catching at Rookie Sox level in every game.


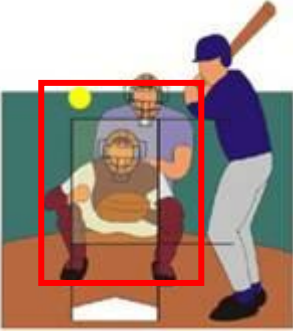
Who is the best person to umpire at Rookie Sox level?

The Rookie Sox umpire needs to be a person who is prepared to call a BIG strike zone. It is very important that the umpire always has a BIG strike zone for this age group.

As well as helping the pitcher, this BIG strike zone will also encourage batters to be aggressive and swing at any pitch they think they can hit. The overall game will be more successful and more enjoyable for all players.

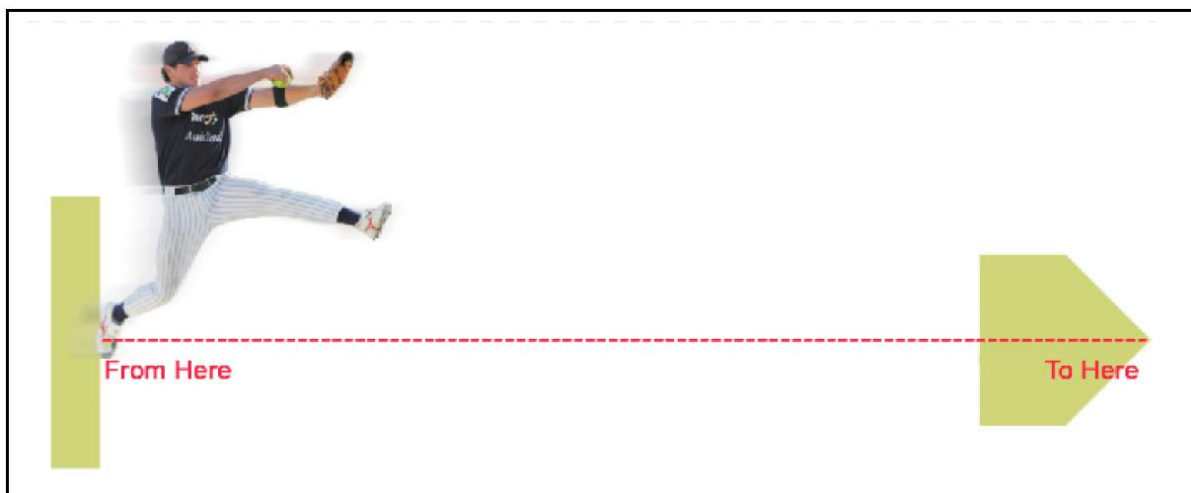
Tips for All Rookie Sox Umpires

Big Strike Zone

| The Official Strike Zone | The Rookie Sox Extended Strike Zone |
|---|--|
|  <p>The official strike zone in the softball rulebook is when any part of the ball is pitched over the homeplate and between the batters armpits and the top of the knees when the batter is in their natural batting stance.</p> <p>The official strike zone is too small for the U13 Rookie Sox age group.</p> <p>The smaller the player, the smaller the strike zone. It is difficult for an U13 player to pitch consistently to a smaller area.</p> <p>A child's strike zone is much smaller than an adult's strike zone.</p> <p>The success of the game is very dependent on the umpire's strike zone.</p> |  <p>The Rookie Sox extended strike zone will ensure that there is more action in a game.</p> <p>If a pitch is hittable, the umpire should call it a strike.</p> <p>Call the game so that the homeplate is wider and the height of the zone is stretched lower and higher.</p> <p>This will mean the pitcher will have more success at pitching strikes, and batters will be encouraged to swing at more pitches.</p> <p>As a consequence there will be less walks in the game and more action and more enjoyment.</p> <p>Use of an extended home plate (600mm) will help with the calling of pitches.</p> |

U13 Rookie Sox Pitching Distances

| Boys | Girls |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| U10 = 10 metres | U10 = 9 metres |
| U12 = 11 metres | U12 = 10 metres |
| U13 = 12 metres | U13 = 11 metres |



The U13 Rookie Sox Pitching Sequence

| Description | |
|---|--|
| <p>Set Up</p>   | <p>Stand on the mound with hands apart and feet comfortable shoulder width apart.</p> <p>Put hands together with arms resting on the body Pause for a 2 second count.</p> <p>Breathe: Breathe in and blow out longer.</p> <p><u><i>Pitching Rules for the set up:</i></u></p> <p><u><i>Hands apart:</i></u> <i>Once the batter has stepped up to the plate, the pitcher must firstly stand on the mound with both hands apart.</i></p> <p><u><i>Hands together:</i></u> <i>Then the hands are put together and the pitcher must pause for a minimum of 2 seconds and no longer than 5 seconds.</i></p> <p><u><i>Step & pitch:</i></u> <i>The next move is to step forward and pitch.</i></p> |
| <p>Use Both Arms</p>  | <p>Use both the glove and the pitching arm in the pitching motion.</p> <p>When the pitcher strides out, both arms also go out in front.</p> |

Stay Tall

The pitcher will bend to start the pitch but once the arms are out in front of the body the torso should be upright and remain upright until after the follow through.

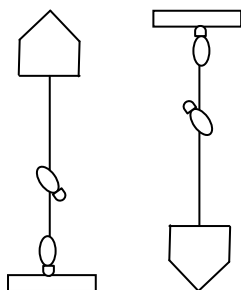
Up & Close

The pitching arm will continue up and close to the ear.

Letter K

At the top of the upswing the shoulders have turned and the body has opened.

The body and arms have formed the Letter K.

Power Line

Step on a direct line toward home plate with the stride foot on a 45-degree angle.

This is called the powerline

Landing with the front foot at 45 degrees helps to open and close the hips better.

It also keeps flex in the knee, which is a safer option.

Fast Arm

Fast downswing from 12 o'clock.

Fast Spin

Use the fingers and wrist to create a fast spin and keep the pitching arm fast at the bottom of the motion.

Slide & Follow Through

Slide the back leg in behind the front leg quickly to add more power to the pitch.

The back toe of the back foot should be pointing into the ground.

Allow the pitching arm to follow through up to the chest.

Coach Notes:

- Fast spin and a fast arm are skills that a young pitcher can easily accomplish.
- The emphasis is on pitching speed rather than control.
- Encourage the pitcher to have a “Go for It” attitude.
- The beginner pitcher will always throw more balls than strikes.
- We need more players to try pitching.
- Praise the child for effort and attitude, with less importance on strikes.
- Encourage several players in your team to try pitching at practice and on game day.
- Your job as a coach at this level is to encourage self-belief, enjoyment and participation.

Suggestions:

- If the child is throwing a number of balls, bring someone else in for a turn.
- The game plan should be around “Sharing the Load” and not leaving a child on the mound for too long when they are struggling e.g. 3 walks in a row, give the pitcher a break.

Softball New Zealand Skill Sets

| Pitching Checklist: | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| U13 Rookie Sox Pitcher | Key Coaching Points | Rookie Sox players who have a <u>Go for It</u> attitude and naturally do some of the points below are the best suited to pitch |
| Velocity & Mechanics | Grip | 3-4 Fingers on Letter C seam |
| | Set up | Feet on mound, hands apart, then hands together resting on body, pause 2 sec. Breathe in, blow out longer. |
| | Use both arms | Both arms out. |
| | Stay tall | Body is upright. |
| | Up & Close | Pitching arm close to ear. |
| | Letter K | Body has opened at top of upswing. |
| | Powerline | Where you step. |
| | Fast Arm | “Go for It” attitude. |
| | Fast Spin | Use fingers & wrist. |
| | Slide | Back leg & pitching arm follow through. |
| Movement | Fastball | Throw hard. |
| Mental Approach | Encourage | Encourage to “Go for It”. |
| Rules | Learn | Learn more about the pitching rules. |
| Game Plan | 5-6 players | Inclusive approach to pitching |

The U13 Rookie Sox Catcher

Squat & Receive

Position in Crouch



Feet under the knees and shoulder width apart.

Knees are pointing straight ahead toward the pitcher.

Throwing hand is behind the back or behind the leg for safety.

Catch with the glove hand only.

Bring the throwing hand around only when the ball is in the glove to avoid being hit by a possible foul tip.

Position the catcher a safe distance directly behind the home plate a good bat length away from the batter.

Catch the Ball



Catch the ball out in front of the knees where you can see it.

Catch & Hold



When the pitched ball is close to the strike zone, hold the ball in the glove for a moment and wait for the umpire to call it a strike.

If the pitched ball is nowhere near the strike zone, just catch it.

Eyes Open

Watch the ball all the way into the glove.

Try to keep eyes open when the batter swings and misses the ball.

Coach Notes:

- Encourage a number of your players to “Have a Go” at catching in training time.
- Create opportunities at practice where the child can experience catching with all of the equipment on.
- Do not place a child into a game as catcher without them having experienced the position at practice.
- Allow the pitchers and catchers time to work together as a unit at training.
- We need more players to try catching.

Softball New Zealand Skill Sets

| Catching Checklist: | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| U13 Rookie Sox Catcher | Key Coaching Points | The Rookie Sox players who enjoy “Having a Go” behind the plate can be taught some of these points below. |
| Equipment | Gear | Mask, Chest Protector, Shin Guards, Glove or Mitt. |
| Squat | Set up (square) | In crouch behind the home plate, safe distance from the batter. |
| Receiving | Catch the ball | Catch & hold, Keep eyes open. Drop to the knees on a dirt ball. |
| Throwing | Heads up | Be alert with runners on base |
| Tagging | Set up | When to tag. Where to stand. Tag with two hands. |
| Fielding | Pass balls to fence | When the ball gets past you, get after it quickly. Bunts. Pop Flies. |
| Leadership | Talk | Tell everyone how many outs. |
| Mental Approach | Encourage | Encourage to have a go. |
| Game Plan | 3-4 players | Inclusive approach to catching. |

The Softball New Zealand Pitcher Catcher Development Pathway

Offers a plan to help coaches nurture the development of our pitchers and catchers and to help players realise and reach their potential from beginner to adult.

| CATEGORIES | AGE GROUP | AGE NAME | SKILL LEVEL | COACHING TIP |
|-------------|-----------------------|--------------|--|----------------------------|
| Pre Teens | Under 13 year olds | Rookie Sox | Beginner | Encourage self belief |
| Early Teens | Under 15 year olds | Raw Sox | 2+ years experience in these positions | Develop self belief |
| Mid Teens | Under 17 year olds | Emerging Sox | 4+ years experience in these positions | Nurture self belief |
| Late Teens | 17, 18 & 19 year olds | Silver Sox | 6+ years experience in these positions | Convinced of self belief |
| Adults | 20+ years | SOX20+ | 8+ years experience in these positions | Self belief is an absolute |

Softball New Zealand

Pitcher Catcher Development Pathways



**A long term commitment to produce top athletes in
key defensive positions**