

# Sandy Plains SOFTBALL

Spring 2012 Season

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**YOU WISH YOU COULD HIT LIKE A GIRL!**

**ONLINE REGISTRATION NOW OPEN!!! Please visit [www.sandyplainssoftball.com](http://www.sandyplainssoftball.com) to REGISTER!!**

From the President:

Greg Viland

As we ring in 2012, the Board of Directors at Sandy Plains Softball anticipates another successful season. Sandy Plains Softball Association has 8 quality fields to provide a safe environment to learn and play softball. From age 4 to age 19, Sandy Plains has it all. Our 6U program offers players the opportunity to develop the basic fundamentals of softball—all while enjoying the game and its friendly competition. Sportsmanship, fundamentals and fun is the emphasis. Our 8U spring program allows the players to be more competitive within the recreational league. Players at this age continue to learn the basic game and have fun with their new friends. After 8U, Sandy Plains Softball Association offers fast pitch softball for everyone ages 9 to 19. Both sports offer great challenges and competition, and our park has an exemplary program to help players continue to learn and improve their game in either sport.

Our coach player development program has made many strong efforts to improve the quality of the players, practices, and skills through additional clinics. We feel this improvement of fundamentals will help many players grow their desire to play in the future. SPSA will offer clinics before evaluations so please keep checking our website to see when the next clinic is offered.

The future of our park looks great. Many new players are starting up and our league is getting stronger every year. Our parks will start incorporating new improvements with SPLOST money designed for a better community through the Parks and Recreation Department. Many smaller improvements require your support through volunteer hours. We will have a couple of days set aside for park clean-up and repairs. Only you as members can make this a better place for your daughters.

We are in need of new board members for the future. Please contact Mr. Steve Cutler if you are interested in helping to grow the park in a positive way with your time and effort as a board member. It does take time, but it is worth it. Steve can be reached at [6u8u@sandyplainssoftball.com](mailto:6u8u@sandyplainssoftball.com).

We look forward to seeing you on the field this spring.

Sincerely,

Greg Viland

## Important Dates to Remember!

### Fundamental Clinics

6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. on  
Sandy Plains field 1

February 13

February 15

February 20

February 22

February 18<sup>th</sup> – Fun Day/  
Walk-up Registration

February 25 – 8u/ 10u/  
12u/ 13u+ Evaluations

March 17 – Opening Day

# Keeping Practice Fun!

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- By Jim McFadden - Softball Director

We all know that practice is the time to work on fundamentals, skills, and situations that need to be learned and mastered in order to perform come game day. The basic fundamentals of throwing, hitting, fielding, and base running all need to be worked on during practice. However, one component that often gets overlooked is... are the girls really learning what we're teaching them?

At the ages of 7 through 12, often the girls learn better and retain more when they're having fun. It's still important for the girls to get in reps of ground balls, fly balls, swings, and base running... But if you can figure out a way to make those reps fun, you will get more out of your practices.

Most girls playing softball love competition. One of the best ways to have fun at practice while you're teaching the fundamentals is to make as many drills and stations into a game. Who laid down the most bunts to first base? Who made the most contact in the cage? Who had the fastest time from 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> on a steel once the ball left the pitchers hand? Who gets the most points for hitting a screen at 1<sup>st</sup> base when fielding ground balls at short stop? The list of games and competitions you can set up during practice goes on and on. Even when you set up stations and move the girls around, you can set up competitions at each station and review the results at the end of practice.

One other thing that is fun for the girls and is also a kind of reward for a good practice is to play a game at the end of every practice. The game can also be another good opportunity to work on skills and fundamentals in a group environment. The relay game with half the team running from home to home and the other half running from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> is a great relay game for the girls and a time where you can also stress good base running to help them get around the bases quicker. That is just one example and there are many more.

If you work at keeping practice fun, I think you will find the kids enjoy practice more and they will enjoy being there. They will also get a lot more out of practice from a skills standpoint. Don't get me wrong, your entire practice shouldn't be one big game or competition, but if done with a good balance of games/competitions mixed in with some good drills, practice will be something the girls look forward to every week.

# Coach and Player Development

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– Jack Cullen

The preseason and weekly **Free Fundamentals 101 Clinics** will be returning this Spring. The clinics focus on the “how-to” of throwing, catching, fielding, hitting and pitching. We break up the girls in groups by age and ability. We then run multiple stations to give the girls as many repetitions as possible.

We will attempt to hold preseason clinics on Mondays and Wednesdays **February 13, 15, 20 and 22 from 6-8pm on Field 1 @ Sandy Plains**. Weather is always a factor, but if the daytime temps are close to 60 degrees and the ground is dry we will hold the clinics. The in-season clinics will be announced via the SPSA website ([sandyplainssoftball.com](http://sandyplainssoftball.com)).

The preseason clinics are a great way to get players prepared for evaluations. We ask that parents/coaches bring your gloves. Historically, the clinics have been well attended. We will need help running stations and keeping the girls organized and moving. Experience is **not** required as we will give you all the training you need.

## Coaches Corner – Want to develop superstars: EASY DOES IT

The goal of the Fundamentals 101 clinics is to give players and coaches a foundation for improving their softball skills. How do we do this? There are two ways; 1) we hold fundamentals clinics, where we work with players on techniques reinforcing them with high quality high quantity repetitions and 2) we assist coaches by supervising/running practices or providing advice as needed.

- 1) Over the years, we have all seen many coaches hit hard ground balls at players who lack the necessary skill set to properly field them, only to see the player “ole” the ball time and time again. Our suggestion: Go easy ... create a No Fear Zone. It is very difficult for a player to use proper mechanics when they are afraid of getting hit by the ball and all they can think of is OMG.

As veterans of the fundamentals clinics can testify we do everything: EASY. Ground balls are slowly rolled, fly ball practice is done by throwing whiffle balls, hitting practice utilizes mini-whiffle balls, etc. Our focus is on the “how”. We teach a skill and give players many repetitions, and each repetition is done Easy. We take care to remove “fear of the ball”.

One of my favorite ways to start my team’s infield practice is to sit on a bucket and roll balls to players from a distance 20’ to 30’ away. I roll balls to them, to their glove side and backhand. I roll slow-rollers to make them charge the ball, and bounce easy one hop tosses to work on charging short hops. The players field the balls and throw to an intermediate target (typically a coach with a bucket). All of which is done up-tempo to keep the line moving and with an easy pace on the ball. The easy pace on the ball allows them to focus on the mechanics of fielding and throwing without

the trepidation of getting hit by the ball. When I finally hit ground balls at them, I keep the No Fear Zone in mind. I suggest that you also apply this strategy to hitting, pop-ups and fly balls, especially with the recreational player.

Good softball is making the art of making the routine play ... well, routine. Players will make more routine plays when you eliminate fear in practices. Find ways to take the fear out of your practices. Use soft-t-balls, whiffle balls, mini-whiffle balls, beach balls, soccer balls, hit from a tee, soft toss from the side, etc.. and your player will be playing like champs very soon.

2) Practice Assistance ... Coach Player Development personnel are available to help you run, assist, or observe practices. We are an excellent sounding board for drills and practice organization. If possible, we would like to observe at least one practice early each season. Please email me once you get your schedule and we can observe, assist, or run a practice for you.

### The Spring Season @ Sandy Plains

One question that frequently arises is: “what is the measure of a successful season?” Well, judging by thousands of girls’ reactions over the years, it is all about the snack!

From the SPSA perspective, a successful season means the girls have fun, learn a lot about softball, and maybe even win a game or two. Notice that “winning” was last on the list.

Regardless of the season, coaches will have done their “job” and have had a successful season when, players want to come back and they have increased their softball skills. The players will want to come back if their time at SPSA was fun and they feel like they improved their game. The “fun” part is achieved by keeping the girls busy, being positive and keeping a smile on your face. The “increasing skills” part comes from a heavy emphasis on fundamentals. Over the years, time has taught us that being able to make the “routine play” leads to good competitive games. The routine play is made by employing good footwork, proper fielding, and throwing techniques. We as coaches need to organize our practices to teach those fundamentals. Then we need to give those players thousands of repetitions to perfect the skills.

At a **minimum**, properly organized practices should include:

- A written practice plan organized around teaching and repeating core fundamentals (examples can be provided – just ask!)
- Multiple work stations ... where groups of no more 3-5 players work on a particular skill for 10-15 minutes at a time, before moving on to a different station. (Parents: if your coach has 12 girls in a queue waiting for their turn at a repetition, the coaches need your help on the field.)
- Briefly teaching a particular skill ... then giving players many, many practice repetitions.
- Working on proper throwing and catching mechanics for at least 10-15 minutes EACH practice.

Please come to the Free Fundamentals clinics to learn a little bit or to lend a hand. It will be fun, rewarding and informative. For more practice ideas please seek out Jack Cullen @ [cullenclan@comcast.net](mailto:cullenclan@comcast.net) .

# Q & A with Steve Cutler - 6u/ 8u Coordinator

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## Q & A Potpourri

Each season I receive many emails from parents asking various questions about Sandy Plains Softball and the correct age group for their child. Below are some of the more common questions.

**Question:** When does softball start and end?

**Answer:** The Spring season starts in February and ends in May. The Fall season starts in August and ends at the end of October.

**Question:** What's the time commitment?

**Answer:** 6u practices on Friday evenings and plays 1 game on the weekend. 8u and up practices 1-2 times a week and plays 2 games a week - 1 weeknight & 1 weekend.

**Question:** What equipment will I need to buy beside a glove?

**Answer:** While Sandy Plains provides loaner bats and helmets, you'll find that most girls prefer to have their own. Cleats are not required, however they are highly recommended, as they will help prevent slipping. In 8u and up, players begin wearing fielding masks at certain infield positions. Sandy Plains will provide each team with 2.

**Question:** What are the main difference between 6u & 8u and 8u & 10u?

**Answer:**

### 6u vs. 8u

1. 8u keeps scores; 6u does not keep score
2. 8u uses an 11 inch 'hard' softball vs. a 10 ½ inch softee ball used in 6u.
3. There is no tee in 8u - the players receive up to 5 pitches and if they don't hit the ball, are out.

### 8u vs. 10u

1. Girls begin to pitch to the batters in 10u; 8u is coach pitch
2. In 10u, the girls are allowed to steal bases.
3. In 8u, the coaches are required to rotate the girls' positions, however in 10u, no rotation is required.

4. While the 10u games are a scheduled to play a little longer, the pace tends to be slower because of 'kid pitch' (as opposed to coach pitch). The games typically last only about 2-3 innings.

**Question:** My child turns 9 (or 7) in January; shouldn't she be playing in 10u (or 8u)?

**Answer:** Sandy Plains moves players up in the Fall each season, so any child who is 8 (or 6) on 12/31 will play in 8u (or 6u) in the Spring season then move up in the following Fall season.

**Question:** I want my child to play in a higher age group than their age allows, is that possible?

**Answer:** Yes. Please note though that if after evaluations, the coaches feel your daughter is not yet ready to play up a level, early, your daughter will be moved back down to her correct age level.

**Questions:** Can I help coach my child's team?

**Answer:** Sandy Plains is always looking for coach volunteers. If you'd like to coach your child, please contact the age group's Coordinator. You can find their contact information on our website - <http://sandyplainssoftball.com/spsainfo>. Each coach will need to fill out a background check form provided by their Coordinator.

**Question:** My daughter wants to play on her best-friends teams, is that possible?

**Answer:** At 6u, since there are no evaluations, we will honor any request made by a parent. For 8u, we try our best to honor carpool requests, but there are no guarantees. In 10u and above, the only request honored will be those to be on the same team as a family member.

If you have any other questions, please feel free to contact me.

Steve Cutler

6u/8u Coordinator

[6u8u@sandyplainssoftball.com](mailto:6u8u@sandyplainssoftball.com)

# Sandy Plains Travel Ball

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-Mark Whittle

As Sandy Plains enters the 2012 season, it's important to note that the Association continues to be one of the best sports programs in the Atlanta Metro area. Our in park recreational program continues to be very strong, averaging over 30 teams each spring, and our travel fast-pitch program continues its very strong growth, with over a 500% increase in fast-pitch players in the Sandy Plains program over the past 5 years. In fact, this past Spring we had 16 travel teams at various levels playing out of Sandy Plains/Bells Ferry Parks. Our 2012 Spring travel teams can be found listed on the SPSA website, and while they conducted their tryouts in September, a few of the teams are still looking to fill their last few roster spots.

I am looking forward to another promising year for the travel program, and certainly anticipate fielding multiple teams in every age group from 10U and up. Our tiered approach to competition, with the park having "A" level fast-pitch travel teams in some age groups, "B" level fast-pitch travel/league teams, and "C" level all star summer teams will continue as has been in years past. This tiered approach, in conjunction with our Georgia Fire elite teams calling Sandy Plains home, make our park a great program for any player looking to have a great softball experience. Sandy Plains has become one of the top fast-pitch programs in the Atlanta area for young ladies to play fast-pitch softball and we are endeavoring to continue that each and every year.

Jack Cullen continues to do a great job as our Coach/Player development coordinator, helping teach the basics to new aspiring players, as well as hone the finer skills for our more established players. These clinics are a great learning tool for the ladies, a lot of fun, and best of all are FREE to the parents and players.

With both Sandy Plains and Bells Ferry parks under SPSA governance, we truly have some of the best facilities in East Cobb for practice, games, and tournament hosting for our teams. A dedicated board as well as energetic and committed parents to the programs put in a lot of hours to keep these facilities in top notch condition, providing ample field availability for all of our teams.

Our alliance with the Georgia Fire organization for fast-pitch continues to be strong and beneficial to both SPSA and the Georgia Fire. Utilizing the Georgia Fire coaches and board members to provide strong support for Sandy Plains coaches and managers provides a great resource to rapidly develop the

SPSA coaching staffs. In addition, numerous Georgia Fire coaches have provided their time to assist Sandy Plains teams with their practices to help accelerate skill development and coach development for these teams.

Our strongest need every season is for COACHES for these young ladies, both for our in-park and travel teams. Our travel teams will need new coaches for the future, and I encourage you to start getting involved now, help assist the coaching staff for your daughter's team and get involved so we will continue to field great travel teams, with quality coaches for years to come. Our board is filled with folks that have coached in park and travel for scores of years combined, so there is always an ear for you to reach out to for questions, support, coach development, and for our park to continue our great successes we need to continue to develop new teams and coaches. . Our quality of play and the quality of the experience for the young players at Sandy Plains is directly related to the quality of our coaching.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions regarding the various travel programs at Sandy Plains.

Mark Whittle

Sandy Plains Travel Director

770-518-3021

[Mwhittle@comcast.net](mailto:Mwhittle@comcast.net)

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# Why our kids play Sports?

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-Paul Neleman

Every kid plays sports for many reasons. The next time you get a chance just ask them. You might be surprised at the answer. In a recent survey of 20,000 kids nationally the following were the top 10 reasons that kids played sports in order of popularity of answer.

1. **To have Fun**
2. To improve their skills
3. To stay in shape
4. To do something they are good at
5. The excitement of competition
6. To get exercise
7. To play as part of a team
8. The challenge of the competition
9. To learn new skills
10. TO WIN

As you can see the number one answer was to TO HAVE FUN.

The least popular answer was to win.

As someone that has now been involved with coaching both boys and girls in the age range of 7-11 with about 20 different teams this just reinforces something that I am starting to realize. If the kids have fun during practice and games the winning will come.

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# How much is too much?

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-Paul Neleman

I moved to Marietta, GA 5 years ago which was about the time my kids first enrolled in sports. As a former multi sport athlete I had dreams of my kids playing in high school and possibly college and maybe beyond. What I had not expected was the culture in Georgia. That was a culture of all-star teams, select teams and travel teams that soon engulfed our way of life. I found myself taking my daughter to batting lessons and working with her on off days and during seasonal breaks; soon after I thought that bringing my youngest son to these lessons would benefit him as well. Surely he with all of his talent at age 7, I could mold him into the hitter I never was and possibly be the next star to come out of the Marietta area.

We fast forward to a year later and my daughter is still going strong working on improving her softball game. She has expanded from just hitting lessons to pitching lessons as well. As part of her commitment to pitching she is doing strength and conditioning work for the next 12 weeks. She cannot get enough of softball. She has a drive in her to continue to get better.

My son however is a different story and as a dad I wish I had recognized this some time ago. He recently told me that he no longer wanted to play baseball and that he wanted to try soccer. When I asked him why, he said he plays soccer at school and it is fun. I continued to probe to want to understand his thinking. He went on to tell me that baseball was no longer fun. He always got yelled at during practice for horsing around and during the games for not making a play. It went beyond that to include what many of the parents saw which was "daddy ball" and a heavy desire to win by the coach. He had put winning above all else. As a parent I made many mistakes along the way. He had played baseball during the spring, then summer all-stars and right back into fall baseball. 70-80 games + practices were just way too much baseball for an 8 year old.

I can tell you that I am thrilled for both of my kids and look forward to my son playing soccer. At the end of the day the most important thing for me is that they are having fun. Youth Sports should teach the kids many lessons about life. I think I learned the biggest lesson of all.

# Sponsors

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Sandy Plains appreciates all of our SPONSORS and we look forward to working with them year after year. Please check our sign board, banners, and website links to find the local businesses that help our softball teams. These businesses supplement the Association's budget in return for advertising. Our girls benefit from this community support and we hope you will support our sponsors.

If you are interested in sponsoring a SPSA team, the sponsor form can be downloaded from our website. Players get registration fee rebates for obtaining sponsors, up to a full rebate for \$400 in sponsorship obtained.

For more information contact Pam Johnson, Sponsor Coordinator.