

## In the Circle with Michele Smith



### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE POWER POSITION PHASE

In fastpitch softball, the power position is one of the most talked about parts of the pitching motion. It is also one of the most misunderstood. The body moves in natural, basic patterns. Getting into and out of those patterns properly will enable you to use your body more efficiently. Efficiency can loosely be defined as putting the least amount of energy in and getting the most amount of performance—or power—out. Getting into a proper power position will help you to minimize the amount of energy needed to produce the most powerful—or fastest—pitch. Your goal should be to pitch as efficiently as possible. You do not need to over tax your body to be a good pitcher. Good pitchers understand the importance of the power position and know that it will help them to efficiently transfer power to the ball.

Let's go over getting into that power position and the correct movements from that position to release:

To get into a proper power position (sometimes referred to as an "X" position), you will need to begin with a good 'load' in your pre-motion, followed by an aggressive 'explosion' off the rubber. Your stride leg should land on the 'power line' or 'straight line of force' at a 45 degree angle. Your glove arm should be extended toward the target and your throwing arm should be fully extended in the opposite direction (a slight bend in the elbow is acceptable). At this point, you should resemble an "X." This is your power position.

It is very important that you explode off the rubber so that you can create what I call 'a hard opposite side.' As the stride leg lands, you want to build a wall with that side of your body. This hard opposite side, or 'firm right side' for lefties and 'firm left side' for right-handers is often referred to as 'blocking.' Blocking is a movement pattern used in many sports. It is defined as "using opposite sides of your body to create energy." It is commonly seen in throwing sports, but a good example of blocking in a non-throwing sport is a high jumper who blocks on one side of her body to create force that will propel her up and over the bar. The block in fastpitch creates a lot of force, as well. But, instead of blocking to create force that will propel us up and over a bar, we want to create force that will be transferred to the ball in the form of speed.

During this motion, it is important that you keep your head over your belly button or 'center of gravity.' This will naturally put your weight slightly back which will help you to create a good 'block' or build a good wall with the front half of your body. If your weight is too far forward, you will not be able to create that 'hard opposite side' and you will lose a great amount of power.

Now that you are in your 'power position,' you want to start driving all of your extended body parts back together. As you do this, that driving force will be transferred to the ball, creating a powerful release. Your glove arm should pull straight down and to the side of your body. Be careful not to let your glove arm and glove get too far away from your body. If your arm pulls away from your body, it will close your shoulders. If your shoulders begin to close, your hips will follow and this will result in problems at release.

Your throwing arm should also move down and into your body. As you pull your hand down and close to your body, you will have a slight bend in your arm. That is normal. It is very important that you keep your throwing arm loose and relaxed. The more relaxed you keep your throwing arm, the faster it will move. And, the faster you are able to move your arm, the more velocity you will be able to create at release.

At this point, the back leg—or throwing arm leg—should be driving into the front—or gloveside—leg that is firmly planted on the ground as a result of the 'hard opposite side' you created after striding off the rubber. As your back leg 'pinches' into your front leg, it should remain in contact with the ground the entire way. To accomplish this, you should drag the inner part of your

# Get Game with Linda Derk

## Balance in the line up includes the short game!

big toe on the ground. If done properly, this pinching action will put your legs in a 'figure 4' position at release. This will keep you balanced and in the proper position into the release phase.

Now that you have all of your extended limbs driving back into your body, your hips should be 'sliding' forward--NOT ROTATING. Improper hip movement is one of the most common mistakes that pitchers make. It is very important that you keep your hips at a 45-52 degree angle. If your hips rotate beyond this point, they will be 'closing' (like a door). Not only is that very harmful for your shoulder, but you will also lose the ability to whip the ball with the greatest amount of velocity through the release zone.

Along with your hips, your belly button should also be at a 45-52 degree angle. If your belly button is facing the catcher at release, your hips are over rotated and you are in danger of injuring your shoulder. Young, flexible pitchers may not realize their hips are over rotated and in a bad position, but after years of pitching incorrectly, they will almost certainly have damaged their shoulder joints. *(The picture of me shows the proper form at release. Notice the angle of my hips, the direction of my belly button and the drive of my back leg.)*

Your release, or snap, should whip your arm in front of your hips (with the hips remaining at a 45-52 degree angle) and only after release should you rotate around to get into a good defensive position. To get a good feel of how your shoulder joint naturally works, stand with your hips in the proper position and rotate your arm around and around. You will see that as long as you are not over rotated, you can twirl your arm around for as long as you want and not cause any harmful stress on your shoulder joint. The moment you get slightly over rotated, you will be able to feel an impingement in your shoulder. Be very aware of this and be very careful to not let your hips become over rotated (or closed).

Keep in mind that your upper body is also very important when moving from the power position into the release phase. If your shoulders are over rotated, you will have a tendency to pull your hips closed. The shoulders and hips follow each other. Let's face it, none of us walk down the street with our hips facing forward and our shoulders facing to the right or left! So, be careful not to muscle the pitch and pull your shoulders closed. This will only result in your hips becoming closed as well and getting in the way at the release point. By keeping your shoulders and hips open, your arm will be able to enter into the release zone in a whipping movement. It is that whipping snap that will create a great deal of velocity.

You can't just begin and end your pitch correctly. Using your body correctly in the middle of your pitch is just as important. Start with a good 'power position' and remember, the body moves in natural patterns and only when you use those patterns efficiently will you become the best pitcher possible. Good Luck!

Keep up with Michele and Michele Smith, Inc., clinics by going to [www.michelesmith.com](http://www.michelesmith.com)!

The beauty of sport is that any

given day, any team can win. But, most successful teams in softball have a similar characteristic... that is BALANCE! A defense that plays well behind solid pitching and an offense that has speed, power, and an effective short game.

I have been around the game for many years and have seen first hand the challenges and evolution that has brought us the game we know today. In this article, I would like to discuss the importance of a balanced line-up and how to make one.

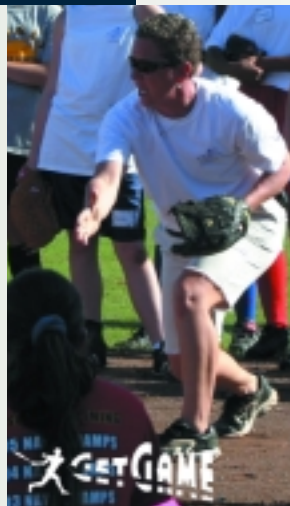
**•Teams that have an effective short game will score runs!**

When considering a line up it is important to have players one through nine that can, at some point, bunt effectively! If a coach is trying to have a consistent offensive attack then the coach needs to stress the importance of the short game to all players through effective practices. A one-dimensional offense makes life predictable and easy for the defense.

**•Practices should be set up so that each player has the opportunity to show what she has to offer to the line up!**

Spend the time at first to explain exactly what the expectations are and the standards. There has to be a reward and consequence depending on the level of execution. Supervised station work is always a great way to have quality repetition, view a player's work ethic, make adjustments with players quickly and effectively, and to help promote self-motivation!

Make sure that practice includes hitting and base running everyday. A controlled scrimmage is ideal to view the player's abilities during a game situation. It also allows the coach to set up various situations to work on strategies. Bunt/slap offense and defense scrimmage should be an everyday part of practice. Even if it is just the last fifteen minutes to brush up! This should include runners and it should be game speed all the way around! This is the time to incorporate the offensive and defensive signals so the players are familiar with them! If you are having difficulty figuring out where to put a player in the lineup



practice is the time to mix it up a bit and provide them the opportunity at several positions and various parts of the line up! If umpires can be incorporated to the scrimmage it will make the scrimmage even more game like and a learning opportunity for everyone involved!

**•Balance and consistency are important considerations when making the lineup - I have put together a guideline for a successful line-up:**

**LEADOFF:** a player with above average speed, good game sense and discipline at the plate.

Mentally, is always one that doesn't care how she gets on base.

Ideally, lefty who can hit and slap.

**BEST AT MOVING RUNNER:** Player who

has discipline (a good eye), Can hit behind the runner and is patient. Ideally a lefty that can slap; **EXTRA BASE HITTER:**

Player that is not afraid to swing the bat, Aggressive and smart. Consistent contact hitter with high on base percentage;

**POWER HITTER:** Player that has good contact, power to all fields and not afraid to swing the bat;

**SIMILAR TO #4:** This player should compliment the #4 hitter

She needs to be a threat at the plate to help the number four hitter she gets better pitches;

**SPEED AND CONTACT:** A good time for another lefty that knows

how to get on base. If you don't have a lefty, then a player with a "get on anyway you can" mentality;

**SPEED AND CONTACT:** Same as number six batter;

**WEAKEST HITTER:** Find a way to make this player a productive part of the line-up;

**SAME AS THE LEADOFF:** triple threat player: good speed, good sense, Can slap or hit and gets on base anyway she can.

With the above mentioned in mind, it is a good idea to put together a consistent line-up through effective practices. Making changes in the line-up every other game does not help the confidence of the hitter. But, on the other hand, if a player has been given the opportunity to perform and is having difficulty getting the job done a change has to be made.

Making a balanced line-up can be a challenge. But, if a coach can have a plan, set standards through effective practices, be positive and consistent the results will be a productive offensive attack!

For more information on Get Game, Inc., check out the website at [www.getgame.org](http://www.getgame.org).