

CENTERING

COACHES: Here's a simple skill you can teach all players that will stand them in good stead in many circumstances over their entire lives. Softball offers many opportunities to practice and apply the process.

WHAT IS CENTERING

Centering is a procedure for controlling arousal and for sustaining or regaining focus when distracted. It is a technique for ensuring one does not lose concentration and stays focused on the task at hand. This is a critical element in maximizing any type of performance.

CENTER OF MASS

Centering includes both a physical and a psychological component. The physical part relates to the "*center of mass*", which refers to the point where a person's weight is evenly distributed around its precise center. To understand this, draw an imaginary vertical line from the head to the toes, dividing the body into two equal parts. The line should run through the naval. Next, draw a horizontal line through the body so that the weight is 50% above and 50% below that line. Where those two lines intersect is the *center of mass*.

You are physically centered when your body weight is distributed around this center of mass in a way that is totally comfortable and where you are in absolute and perfect balance.

From a psychological standpoint, centering involves pulling one's energy resources, both mental and physical, together within that center, so they can be focused and applied to a task with maximum efficiency.

MENTAL CENTER

Being mentally centered means having control of your arousal level, with the mind completely free of distraction and totally focused on whatever you have to do next.

Centering then, is the procedure followed to centralize energy sources through the center of mass and control one's tension levels and mind focus. It is achieved through controlled breathing, muscle relaxation and directing concentration.

The following instructions in "How to Center" are also in the Pee Wee Player Manuals. Players who apply this skill regularly will experience an improvement in their intensity and ability to stay focussed during the game.

HOW TO "CENTER"

Once proper breathing technique and rhythms are established and you experience a degree of relaxation from that, the next step is to learn the "Centering" procedure. Use the process whenever you feel jittery or anxious, or become distracted from the immediate task. Study this illustration.

FOLLOW THESE STEPS.

1. Stand with the feet about shoulder width apart and the knees slightly flexed. Relax completely with controlled breathing into your abdomen.
2. Consciously relax the neck, arms and shoulder muscles. Reduce jaw tension by smiling slightly.
3. Focus attention on the abdomen. Notice its movement with each breath. Then visualize a small light bulb inside the stomach.
4. Take a slow, deep breath, using the diaphragm. Feel the stomach extending. See the light bulb grow brighter as the oxygen enters.
5. Consciously relax in the chest and shoulders. There should be minimal chest movement.
6. Exhale slowly. Let yourself go....relax See the light bulb grow dimmer as the air is exhaled.
7. Repeat several more breaths. See the light bulb grow brighter and dimmer with each inhale and exhale.
8. Focus on your job right now. Use your pre-planned cue word to focus....."***ALL I HAVE TO DO NOW IS..***"



YOU SHOULD NOW BE CENTRED AND FOCUSED.