

Mitch Alexander's
SOFTBALL
 ACADEMY

*10 Holiday Gift
 Ideas for Youth
 Softball Players
 2013*

As we transition from Fall ball to winter workouts, I am starting to get requests for recommendations of holiday gifts for youth softball players. Finding gifts for Fastpitch players is actually quite easy. The following are my top ten gift ideas for 2013!

GIFT #1 – SKILZ Hurricane Category 4 Swing Trainer – \$200 - This hitting machine is like a spring loaded hit stick on a base. It provides variable resistance for beginning batters and experienced batters alike. Just like using a hitting tee, batters need to practice good mechanics. The Hurricane provides two benefits. The first benefit is to build up arms and shoulders via the resistance bands. This will improve the player's strength and should also improve bat speed. The second benefit is to provide a way for players to very easily develop muscle memory for good hitting mechanics. This trainer can be used both indoors and outdoors. Available from many local and online retailers like www.hittingworld.com.

GIFT #2 – Softball Excellence Coaching Certification - \$100 – This is an unusual gift idea, but one that will help older youth softball players (including parents, volunteer coaches, etc.) with their understanding of the game, skill building, understanding the reasons for certain drills, recognizing and correcting problems, understanding what makes a good practice, and improving leadership skills. This gift is perfect for advanced youth players interested in helping out their younger sister or community through coaching. The program consists of online video based training and exams and is taught by Cindy Bristow. Available from www.softballexcellence.com.

GIFT #3 – The Sling Pitcher - \$249 and up – This training tool is a manual pitching machine, infield and outfield trainer. I reviewed this training tool in Issue 15. We used this product for 7 weeks this Fall season and on average increased our team's batting average by 100 points. One batter improved by 365 points! This tool makes virtually anyone a good pitcher. It can be used with foam balls for indoor practices too. Available at www.slingpitcher.com and online retailers.

GIFT #4 – Stash (Markwort) QuickMitt Batting Gloves - \$30 – Does your daughter hit the ball hard but complains of hand pain or blisters? The QuickMitt significantly reduces or eliminates blistering and pain with its specially placed thick padding. The padding also serves to help properly position the bat in the batter's hands for maximum control. My daughter has been using these for the past year and loves them. Available from www.stashsports.com and online resellers.

GIFT #5 – DeMarini CF6 or Louisville Slugger Xeno bat - \$300 – Once again the two hottest youth bats are the DeMarini CF6 and the Louisville Slugger Xeno. For girls 12 and under, the DeMarini offers a lighter weight bat (-11 drop) in the CF6. When optimally broken in, this bat crushes the ball when it hits the large sweet spot. However, off-sweet spot hits tend to not go far. I have found the Xeno to be a great match for players over 12 or those players that have difficulty hitting the sweet spot, as the Xeno can also drive off-sweet spot hits. My experience shows that composite bats typically last about a year to year and a half. Check the age of your bat – it may be time for a new one! These bats are available from many online retailers, including www.softball.com.

GIFT #6 – Pro Power Drive - \$150 – The Pro Power Drive is a softball pitching mound launch trainer. This tool helps pitchers optimize their launch and use their legs to really push off and improve their leap out. Pitchers build muscle memory to develop a longer stride. It even has a drag box to keep the foot from prematurely rotating. The idea with this tool is that many youth pitchers tend to rely heavily on their arms for pitch speed, but do little with their legs to launch off the rubber. Even if they do, they may start rotating their foot which decreases their power by as much as 30%. Available from online retailers, including www.softballpitchingtools.com.

GIFT #7 – Hitting Disks - \$70 – These simple disks (one dozen) can really help youth players develop muscle memory for palm-up / palm-down swing mechanics. The batter holds the disk between their hands in the ready position and then throws their hands towards the pitcher, launching the hitting disk. If the hands are thrown towards the pitcher correctly, the disk will fly straight out up the middle like a line drive. If not, the disk will go high or low or to the side. Players can practice good batting mechanics indoors or outdoors with the hitting disk. It provides immediate feedback that players can use to make swing corrections. Available from www.hittingdisk.com.

GIFT #8 – Attend a Softball Convention - \$75 - \$130 – Buy passes for your special player to attend a softball convention. They are held in most parts of the country. Learn good mechanics, strategy, recruiting tips, and more from some of the top college coaches, current and past top players. Two upcoming conventions in the Northeast are: World Softball Coaches Convention (www.softballcoachesclinic.com) held January 11 at Mohegan Sun in Connecticut, and the Be the Best You Are Softball Coaches Clinic (www.bethebest.com) held January 23-25 at the Crowne Plaza in Cherry Hill, NJ. We have met and spoken with Jenny Finch, Natasha Watley, Monica Abbott, Sue Enquist, Jessica Mendoza, Ashley Charters, Division 1 coaches and trainers, and many more stars of softball at these conventions.

GIFT #9 – Custom Fastpitch Glove - \$250 - \$300 – Does your daughter want a glove like Keilani Ricketts, or a special fit or color to match her uniform? Custom gloves can be configured in many ways to ensure a great fit or look. The process is pretty simple, complete the online configurator to customize standard gloves. You can choose from popular makers like Mizuno, Rawlings, Wilson, and Worth. Pick the glove size, design, webbing, base color, trim color, palm color, and add custom embroidery. Available from online retailers including www.customglove.com.

GIFT #10 – Finch Windmill Exerciser - \$325 - This training tool is great for any serious softball player but especially for pitchers. It exercises the shoulder and arm via a rotational motion, both overhand and underhand. The workout only takes about 4 minutes. One problem with athletes that use one arm more than the other (like pitching) is they can overdevelop one side of their body compared to the other side. The Finch Windmill can be used to help restore balance by developing their non-dominant side. Regular use of the Finch Windmill can also prevent injury and increase endurance. Some pitchers have seen an increase of 5 mph of speed with a few weeks of use. Also great for catchers and volleyball players. Available from www.finchwindmill.com.

Mitch Alexander is the CIO for a major electronics company and coaches both Little League and Travel softball teams and is currently completing his PhD. He is a certified SUNY, ASA, and Double Goal Coach. His wife, Marie was one of the first female student athletes in the country to play Little League softball after Title IX was passed and played in the first Little League Softball World Series. Over the years, both have managed teams together and helped spark a love for softball in their student athletes. In his spare time, Mitch designs websites for fastpitch teams and businesses and can be reached at fastpitch2001@optonline.net.

