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Alaskan Rules Softball:

Increase Activity Time and Incorporate Critical Thinking

By Loren L. Butler, Jodie D. Leiss and Damon P. Leiss

This is a difficult time to be a teen. Adolescents have their own world that is shaped by their social relationships (Seema & Kumar, 2018). The widespread usage of cellphones is much more than a “passing fad or frivolous activity” that will fade as did the hula-hoop, pet rock or fidget spinners (Thompson & Thompson, 2017, p. 3). Smartphones have become an essential part of everyone’s life and have had a tremendous impact on how young ones live their lives (Thompson & Thompson, 2017). Thought to be a device that enables us to connect with anyone anywhere, allowing us to reap the benefits of social interaction, even when we are alone, these same devices distract us from everyone (Dwyer et al., 2017). The bottom line, according to Dwyer et al. (2018), is this increased distraction may undermine the emotional benefits people derive from social interactions. Good social relations are a major factor in positive social well-being (Seema & Kumar, 2018). These social relationships are what dictate students’ self-esteem, which is important to their success.

However, the question is how the use of cellphones has created a new dimension in social relationships. Relationships that can now connect anyone, anywhere, to whomever they want. Although one can communicate with anyone any time, has that taken away from the quality of face-to-face social interactions? Rotondi et al. (2017) found through a large and representative sample of Italian individuals from 2010 to 2014 that time spent with friends is worth less, in terms of life satisfaction, for individuals who used their smartphones. One way to get students to experience the emotional benefits of communication is through a team activity, using Mosston’s Spectrum of Teaching Styles.

Mosston’s Spectrum of Teaching Styles

Mosston’s Spectrum of Teaching Styles embodies a process that consists of very structured approaches that progressively formulate a path of autonomy on the subsequent



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teaching styles (McIntire, 2017). The Spectrum has guided teaching and research in physical education for 50 years and consists of a continuum of 11 landmark styles of teaching (Chatoupis, 2018). These 11 styles are grouped into either reproduction styles or production styles. Reproduction styles include command, practice, reciprocal, self-check and inclusion. Production styles include guided discovery, convergent discovery, divergent discover, learner-designed, learner-initiated, and self-teaching style (Mosston & Ashworth, 2002).

The reproduction style is the most commonly used in games because the purpose of instruction is to replicate specific skills and knowledge; in this case, face-to-face communication. The teacher specifies the subject matter of the lesson, indicates the learning conditions by identifying this teaching style, and defines the criteria for correct task completion within the game. The class climate is one of performing the proposed model, repeating the task, and reducing errors. Feedback is specific, often corrective, and there is an acceptable way of performing the selected task (Chatoupis, 2018; Mosston & Ashworth, 2002). Providing students feedback is necessary for higher quality task- and role-related performances and allows students to assume more self-responsibility (Byra et al., 2014). This article describes a unique game to illustrate the reproduction style: Alaskan Rules Softball.

Alaskan Rules Softball

The game of softball has long been a staple of physical education programs. The game incorporates social interactions with aspects of teamwork, critical thinking, and situational communication. Members of the team work together to win, encouraging one another and deciding on what is needed to be victorious. Furthermore, when situations arise that call for the need to plan ahead and then enact the plan to get an out, advance on the base paths, or to score a run, decision making is needed. For example, with a runner on first base, fielders must think about what to do if the ball comes to them. Fielders must also consider what to do if the ball goes to someone else. These and other processes are constantly being evaluated by the players in an athletic contest. However, in a physical education setting, skill levels and time may not allow for higher-level critical thinking or situational decision making. In fact, many players may just go through the motions, standing around hoping the ball does not come to them or, if it does, the player may just throw it in, not having appreciated the finer parts of the game.

On the surface, softball appears to be a good physical education unit. However, when really analyzed for academic learning time (ALT), students are actually *not* getting much time during the class to perform at a moderate level and be moderately successful, which are both part of the definition for ALT. Many students may choose to go to right field and “stand around.” This standing around may actually evolve



into what this author terms “the pose.” The pose is visible when students begin standing around and eventually get “stuck” in one spot with their arms crossed. The pose, if unaddressed by less than enthusiastic physical educators, may progress into “the lean.” In the lean, the student has the characteristics of the pose, limited area of movement or no movement, the arms are crossed at the chest, but the student will begin to lean, first on one leg, then on the other. This is caused by boredom and not being taught better. When a physical educator sees the pose or the lean, immediate attention must be enthusiastically directed toward increasing activity time, critical thinking, time on task, fun and movement. If allowed to continue, dis-physical education may occur for the student(s). Dis-physical education happens when students learn that movement and the fun and benefits of activities are not necessary, and student coping skills replace physical education outcomes. Furthermore, these coping skills go on from day to day, semester to semester, year to year until the student has been fully allowed to become dis-physically educated.

Getting Students Involved, Engaged and Moving

Simple variations to the wonderful game of softball are all that are needed to get all students involved, engaged and moving. One variation is Alaskan Rules Softball. Imagine playing softball in Alaska—players are not able to go outside due to the adverse weather, especially during winter. Being indoors means less space, so the game of softball must be modified. Furthermore, conscientious physical educators are always looking for ways to increase activity time, reduce lines, and get more students involved at one time. Alaskan Rules does all this and more. When done properly, it can involve student input regarding decisions about rules and further variations to the game. Alaskan Rules Softball has countless variations that are only limited by imagination.

The basic configuration of offense and defense is described next. Common variations are suggested in italics following each main bullet point. A diagram is provided in [Figure 1](#).

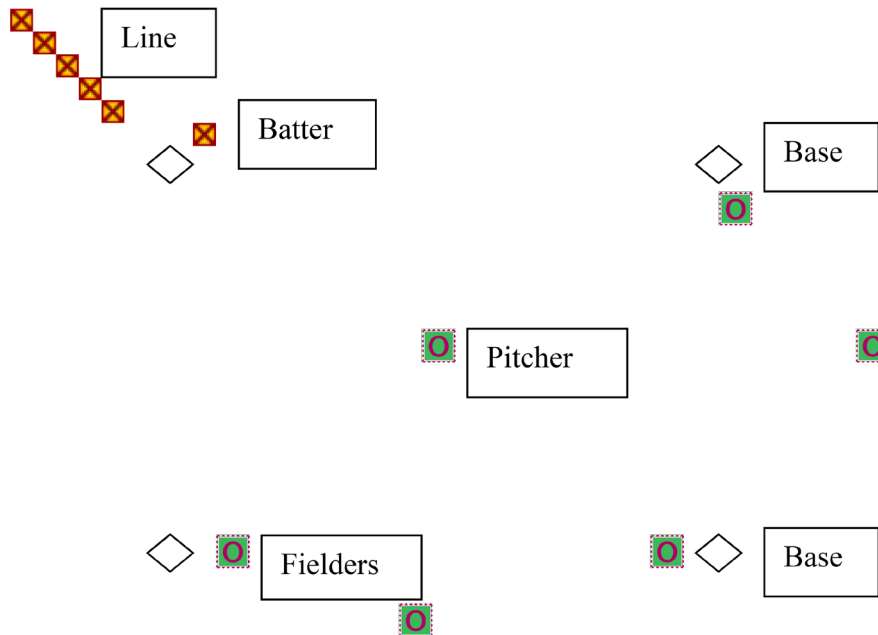


Figure 1. Diagram of basic offensive and defensive positions with bases and descriptors.
Notes. Xs are the batter and the line of next batters. Os are the fielders, including the pitcher.
Four bases are shown.

Offense: Batting

- All team members form a line behind the first batter, usually directly behind home plate, or approximately where the umpire may stand. Take caution to leave enough room between the batter and the line. Discuss the importance of not throwing the bat. Teachers may need to have students place the bat in a circle, hula hoop or clean trash can.
 - *Variations: Form lines to either side; allow students to form the most efficient grouping, perhaps in a circle or pyramid; allow strategies to change from inning to inning or even within an inning.*
- Once the ball is put into play, the batter runs in circles around the line of teammates.
 - *Variations: Create a small infield with tightly grouped bases and run around as many times as possible. (smaller is better because there is more running involved). Smaller children may enjoy skipping, hopping or other fundamental movement skills instead of running.*
- Each time the batter circles back to home plate the team counts the runs together out loud so that the other team may hear.
 - *Variations: count in, for example, Spanish, French, German, Japanese, American Indian, or Congan; use multiplication to reinforce learning across the curriculum.*
- The batter continues around the line until the fielding team has accomplished its task.

- *Variations: How many push-ups, crunches, lunges or squats can be accomplished instead of running? All team members may participate.*
- Batters must make a full circle for the run to be counted.
 - *Variations: Allow runners to slide as they try to get back to the front of the line, usually as they are trying to beat the last fielder's task before having to stop. Teammates could assist by coaching the runner as to when to slide, if needed.*
- Everyone hits and runs around the line during an inning.
 - *Variations: Use three, four, five or more outs, depending on class size, to end an inning. Outs usually come in the form of a caught ball in the air. Outs may be used to stop the runner, allowing no runs to score.*
- Allow students to decide how best to get around the line and how the line should be formed to allow for the most runs.
 - *Variations: Allow for student creativity and/or brainstorming about how to make the grouping more efficient for run scoring.*
- Teams should keep a running total from batter to batter and inning to inning. Final scores may be in the 30s, 40s, 50s and higher.

Defense: Fielding

- The fielding team takes the field evenly distributed. Remember to watch out for the lean or the pose. There should be one person at each base and a pitcher.



Image. Learning through cooperation, discovery and problem solving. Credit: Used with permission from author.

- *Variations: Use the actual positions of a traditional baseball or softball team rather than an even distribution of players.*
- Once the ball is put in play, the fielding team must get the ball and throw it to each member of the team.
 - *Variation: The order of who to throw to next could be boy, girl, boy, girl. Tell the teams that everyone must “touch” the ball and return it to the pitcher, then watch them run to the first fielder, touch the ball, and give it to the pitcher. The pitcher must return to the mound before saying STOP!*
- After everyone has caught and thrown the ball, the pitcher is the last one to get the ball and must yell STOP! At this point, no more runs count for that batter and halfway does not count.
 - *Variations: Have the fielders do five to 10 push-ups, crunches, lunges or squats after they have caught and thrown the ball.*
- Repeat for each batter
 - *Variations: Allow fielders to change strategies between batters. This may take a minute to allow them to huddle,*

discuss, agree and implement any needed changes to make the fielding more efficient.

- Outs are usually not recognized
 - *Variations: Count outs when the ball is caught in the air and the runner scores no points and/or the outs count toward ending the inning. Remember that allowing four, five, or more outs is acceptable.*

Other variations

- Set up plastic bowling pins scattered throughout the field. All fielders must continue to throw and catch just as before. However, they must now also knock down all the pins before returning the ball to the pitcher. Not everyone has to knock down a pin, but everyone should get a turn. Let the students decide how to knock the pins down and what strategies are needed to complete the task; there are many ways to complete these tasks.
- Use different types and sizes of bats and/or balls.



Teacher-designed and -directed questions enable students to make decisions about the topic, and engage students' reasoning, questioning and logic, which allows students to make connections about the content to discover answers.

- Allow for student decision making for the other team per inning.
- Play Alaskan Rules Cricket where the batter runs to second base and back to home as many times as possible. Remember that a smaller field works the best for such a variation.

Unlimited Possibilities

Countless other variations exist and are only limited by the imaginations of teachers and/or students. The overall idea is to increase activity time. Traditional softball has only about 10% to 20% moderate activity time, whereas Alaskan rules allow for 50% to 75% moderate activity time. With the childhood obesity epidemic, these increases in activity time are critically important.

Furthermore, student decision making may be enhanced, as encouraged by Mosston and Ashworth (2002) and set forth in their Spectrum of Teaching Styles. Students must be included in decision making unless the goal of education is to control, limit and expect students to follow rather than lead. Start out with simple decisions and as students show that they are capable of greater responsibility, then reward them with increased decision-making and critical-thinking opportunities. Teacher-designed and -directed questions enable students to make decisions about the topic, and engage students' reasoning,


questioning and logic, which allows students to make connections about the content to discover answers.

Remember to always watch out for “the lean” and “the pose” and do not allow for dis-physical education to occur. Last, and most important, teach students a love for movement, physical activity, games, competition, cooperation, fun and the rewards of such healthy behaviors.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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