

An Open Letter to All Prospective Parents/Players

Written by Joe Birchfield

Open Letter to all Prospective Softball Parents looking for Softball Teams

As the season ends and a new one begins, you will notice several teams, name, and options that will post openings on the various social media outlets about tryouts.

Here is what you need know about our organization to help you with your team decision and whether the Knoxville Explosion could be your forever home.

Why we are different from other teams and organizations:

At the Knoxville Explosion, we specialize in the proper development of our players on and off the field. There are many great organizations and coaches in the East Tennessee area, which is why the sport of softball has steadily improved over the past 10 years in Tennessee.

This talent has enabled many colleges in the area who have acquired these local players to win their respective conference titles.

At the conclusion of the 2021 we had a total of 31 signees that are or will attend 17 different colleges in 7 states.

With all the great options in the East Tennessee area, it can be a difficult and confusing process selecting a softball team for your daughter. We believe in direct, honest communication to help you see if the Knoxville Explosion meets your player's needs.

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Fit (Does the team you are considering fit your players psyche?):

The most important aspect of selecting a team for your player is fit. You know your player the best. What does she like and how does she respond to hands-on coaching?

At the Knoxville Explosion, all of our coaches are Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA)-double goal coach certified, meaning each coach is required to successfully complete a training course on how to effectively deliver critical softball knowledge to players, not what to coach.

If your player responds best to high pressure, harsh verbal correction or beratement, and negative reinforcement, we are most likely not a good fit for you and your player.

Safety (Does your prospective team provide a safe environment for your player?):

Unfortunately, not all coaches provide a safe environment for players to play the game they love. The vast majority of all coaches are involved to help aid in the development of their players, but unfortunately sometimes individuals find their way into dugouts and onto the field only to smear the good reputation of all of those coaches working honestly to help the players.

Our program has adopted a rigorous background screening program from the National Center for Safety Initiatives (NCSI), which conducts a thorough background check, working diligently to screen out individuals with past infractions and unwholesome intentions.

All Knoxville Explosion coaches have cleared NCSI background checks.

Our program has also established several abuse policies and reporting procedures that are communicated to our families via the coaching staff of each team.

We have an open-door policy that allows our member families to contact Joe Birchfield,

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Organization Chief, directly if any instances or questionable actions are observed.

Stability (Is the team you are considering established and have at least a 5-Year operating history?)

It is estimated that 98% of all startup teams (no operating history) will fail to maintain a team through graduation (18u). Do the research before you commit! We were established in 2005 and grew steadily, adding teams in various age groups, as interest and needs arose.

Our model is simple -

Put together a group of great parents and players and keep them together in a family environment.

This includes providing each player with the necessary support from the organization to complete their softball journey throughout high school and ending in college, if pursuing a collegiate career is the player's choice.

Many players known as "tweeners" are selected by teams to ensure a team survives to play a Fall or Spring season, only to find out the next season they will not be allowed to remain with the core team due to their age.

This is detrimental to player development because they cannot stay on a given team or within an organization and must start the team selection process all over.

This provides undue stress on both the parents and player.

We have 13-15 teams any given year and all players can remain with their respective team or move onto other organization team rosters, removing the stress of "What about next year?"

Family Oriented (Is the team you are considering a family?):

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The Knoxville Explosion is a family-based organization, meaning we support all of our teams from 8u to 18u. Many younger and older sisters play on multiple Explosion teams and travel together to the various tournaments. When our teams need players due to injury, vacations, etc., our coaches coordinate with sister teams not playing and utilize available players. At the end of spring seasons, players that must either move up or remain down due to their ages are evaluated and contacted by the Explosion coaches in their age group for available openings.

Every attempt is made to keep our Explosion family members together so that players that join us can remain with the organization.

Paid vs. Volunteer Coaches (How much are you paying for your coach?):

Our coaches are non-paid volunteers who generously volunteer their time to help our players reach their on and off the field goals. Many of our coaches are mothers and fathers of players on the various teams. However, there is a big difference from how we coach vs. "Daddy Ball."

Daddy Ball is simply defined as coaches who put the needs of their own daughters above the needs of the team.

This simply does not happen in our organization.

The Knoxville Explosion has an open-door policy by which parents can contact Joe Birchfield, Organization Chief, directly to report any issue.

Any and all reports are vetted with coaches, parents, and even umpires that call our games.

Using our model, this keeps quality travel softball costs affordable (Many times less than \$500 per player), as opposed to thousands of dollars for paid coaches.

Because of softball's explosive growth over the last decade, our sport has unfortunately been the target of profiteers that aim to make easy money with the promise of making your player an elite D1 softball prospect.

In reality, if parents spent half of the money they spend on hitting and pitching lessons on ACT Preparation Courses for college, your player would receive \$10,000-\$80,000 more in academic scholarship money when they are ready for college!

Quality Coaches (Is your coach an off the field role-model?):

Our coaches all have extensive coaching experience. Not only are they PCA-double goal-certified and NCSI background checked, they are leaders in real-world professions.

Our coaches are doctors, lawyers, law enforcement, fire fighters, utility company operators, environmental cleanup specialists, physical therapists and a whole host of other professions. So your players may call them Coach, but more importantly, they are life mentors.

Remember, just because a coach was a great player in their past doesn't necessarily mean they are or will be a great coach. Check out our coaches bios here:

<http://www.knoxvilleexplosion.com/images/documents/ExplosionCoachesProfiles.pdf>

Program (Does the team you are considering have a player development program that is successful?):

The Knoxville Explosion has implemented a player development program with an associated timeline to help our coaches craft practice plans to meet timeline expectations. Our coaches use player development plans (PDPs) to provide feedback to all players to address needs in off-season workouts and training sessions.

Our program is extremely successful resulting in 23 USA, SEAA, ISA and USFA Tennessee State Championships, 9 World Series Titles, 8 National Titles and 10 Showcase Titles.

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Player Success (How does your team further develop your player's on/off the field success?):

The Knoxville Explosion utilizes the Deming-Shewhart Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) model for our player improvement. We also utilize state-of-the-art training equipment, computer software and exclusive (Explosion Player Only) camps used in conjunction with our program, resulting in the accelerated development of our players. All of this is FREE OF CHARGE to all of member families!

Check out our equipment available to all of our teams:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaW6EMI1CTLbW_8fN3xoC0A

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We celebrate our players' off the field successes with an Academic Honors Page solely dedicated to our players' academic and community leadership success.

Reputation (Does your prospective team have a solid reputation?):

Our program has steadily built a reputation for developing players that are not only formidable on the field, but also dependable, high character individuals. Why is this important? Because when college scouts and coaches begin their evaluations of needs, they want exactly the kind of player the Knoxville Explosion produces - versatile, dependable, smart players.

Remember, colleges are spending their money on players that want to remain at their school for the duration of their eligibility without any drama or headaches.

Our program has this reputation.

We have produced over 31 softball players at 17 different colleges in 6 states from D1 to Junior College in the past 5 years. Check out our current list of signees here:

<http://www.knoxvilleexplosion.com/images/documents/OurProgramGraduates.pdf>

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Community (Is your team involved in their community?):

Community service projects are also a big part of our organization, not only helping those less fortunate in our community, but also teaching our players about real life and appreciating the gifts that they enjoy daily. This results in well-rounded individuals. It is extremely important that players are not only leaders on the field but also off the field.

Our annual community services projects enable this skill to be learned and passed on as they grow older.

It is our way of “paying it forward.” Check out our community service organizations that we support here:

http://www.knoxvilleexplosion.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=468&Itemid=203

We truly hope that this information helps those looking in the community for a new softball home, even if it isn't with our organization, and we wish you the best in making your choice!

Sincerely,

Joe Birchfield

Knoxville Explosion Organization Chief

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