

Elkridge Youth Organization 13-18U Baseball Coach's Manual



Elkridge Youth Organization

Coach's Manual

This Coach's Manual is a compilation of a number of sources – websites, authors, and personal experience – provided to all coaches within EYO to use as a guide to help instruct and develop our young baseball players. This detailed guide provides insights on proper mechanics and teaching strategies used by successful coaches.

Some of the information contained in these manuals represents advanced training techniques and skills. It is up to each individual coach to tailor the drills and teaching strategies in this manual to the team that he/she is coaching. Further, each coach needs to understand the needs/ability of each individual player to make sure that the game remains simple and fun, and that each player learns at a healthy pace.

The primary objective of this manual is to make our leagues better by making our coaches better. The ideas presented in this coach's manual are only as good as each coach's commitment to bringing them to practice each day. We encourage you to read through this manual on a regular basis, discuss your thoughts/ideas with your fellow coaches, and implement the teaching strategies contained within.

Thank you for your time and commitment to our baseball program. Good luck, and have a GREAT SEASON!



Chris Jakubek
EYO Baseball Commissioner



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Elkridge Youth Organization 13-18U Rules

(note: If EYO participates in the HOCO Alliance League, the rules for the Alliance League would apply)

Age

All children ages 13 to 18 may play in these leagues. Baseball age is established as of May 1st. Exceptions can be made to the age restrictions by contacting the League Coordinator. Typical age groupings are 13/14 and 15-18.

Purpose

To provide a safe, fun, competitive environment for kids to learn about and enjoy the game of baseball. Hitting, fielding, running the bases, and baseball strategy are the primary coaching objectives of this league

Field Dimensions

Standard major league diamond. 60' 6" for the pitcher and 90' bases.

The Game

There will be a maximum of 6 innings per game. The team with the most runs at the end of the game will be the winner. All games that end in a tie score at the end of six innings or official games that are ended prematurely due to inclement weather with the score tied shall be reported as a tie game.

In the playoffs, additional innings will be played to determine a winner. We will use the International Tie Breaker rules for extra inning play (no out, last batter in the previous inning starts on second base).

No inning shall start after 1 hour 45 minutes past the scheduled start time of a game. No play may be continued after 2 hours past the scheduled start time of the game. If a game has to be stopped between innings due to time limits, the score will revert back to the last full inning played.

A game is considered an official game if at least 4 full innings have been played with the home team trailing, or 3 ½ innings with the home team winning. If a game in progress is called due to inclement weather or nightfall and is not an official game as described above, the game will resume from the point of interruption. Coaches should mark and sign each other's scorebooks with the exact details of innings, outs, runners on base, and count on the batter. If a player is unavailable for the rescheduled game, the player's spot in the order will be skipped.

The Championship game will be a full 6-inning game, regardless of time limits.

Any warm ups or infield practice should be complete before your scheduled game time so the game starts on time. **MAKE SURE YOUR PARENTS KNOW TO ARRIVE EARLY FOR WARMUPS.** If your game starts late, your end time does not change.

Each team should take about five to ten minutes of infield practice if time permits.



Game results are to be reported to the League Coordinator by the winning team. It is the responsibility of the League Coordinator to enter the results on the EYO baseball website.

Scorebooks **MUST** be maintained to allow player eligibility in any post-season tournament. Scorebooks should contain FULL NAME and UNIFORM NUMBER for each player.

Pitcher/Catcher

A pitcher cannot pitch more than four (4) innings in any game.

If a pitcher pitches one (1) pitch in an inning he shall be charged for one (1) inning pitched.

A calendar week for 13-18U Baseball is Monday through, and including, Sunday. A pitcher may pitch seven (7) innings per calendar week. Innings pitched in Sunday only travel league games do not count toward this total.

A pitcher must have two (2) calendar days rest between pitching assignments if he pitches in more than two innings in any one game. NOTE: This means if a pitcher pitches three (3) innings on Saturday he **IS NOT** eligible to pitch Monday.

A pitcher must be removed if he hits three (3) batters in one game.

Once removed for any reason, a pitcher cannot return to pitch later in the game.

Balks will be called.

All catchers must wear a protective cup.

Balls

Cushioned cork center balls will be used for game play.

Batting

Major League Baseball rules apply.

Each player on the team will be placed in the batting order.

Bunting is permitted.

Infield fly and dropped third strike rules are in play.

Batters may only use bats with a maximum barrel size of 2 5/8 inches. A barrel size of 2 3/4 inches may be used only if it is a "USA Baseball" sanctioned.

For 13/14 games, bats can be -8.



For 15-18 games, bats must be BBCOR -3.

All batters, on deck batters, and base runners must wear a helmet at all times.

Base Running

Major League Baseball Rules apply.

Baseball rules clearly spell out the meaning of dead ball. Coaches are strongly encouraged to teach their players how to stop the lead runner.

A catcher may be replaced on the base paths in order to “speed up” the game, with two outs.

Leading off base is permitted.

Scoring

An inning is over when 5 runs have been scored in the inning or 3 outs have been made. There is a 5-run rule for each inning, with no continuation. If the 5th run scores during an at bat, the play will continue until an out is made or all the runners cross home plate (including the batter-runner). Any runs scored over the 5-run limit will not count.

There is unlimited batting/scoring in the last inning. In the case of an abbreviated game due to darkness, coaches should predetermine the last inning prior to its beginning. In the event of an extra inning playoff game, the 5-run rule does not apply to the extra inning(s)

Fielding/Defense

There will be a maximum of 9 players on defense.

There will be unlimited substitutions on defense (with the exception of pitchers as defined in the pitcher/catcher section).

A game may be played with as few as 8 players. Any less than 8 players and the game will be considered a forfeit. There is no penalty for playing with 8 players.

It is strongly recommended that all players be given the opportunity to play both the infield (1st, 2nd, 3rd, or pitcher) and the outfield, unless a coach feels that the safety of a particular player could be an issue if he/she is placed in the infield. Each player must play a minimum of 3 innings on defense, unless the game ends early due to darkness, weather, etc. Failure to place a player on defense for 3 innings will result in a forfeit.

Umpires

Umpire will be provided for each game.

Teams should wait no longer than 10 minutes following the scheduled game start time to play a game in the absence of an umpire. A team’s assistant coach or trusted member thoroughly familiar with the rules of baseball should act as the umpire.



ONLY THE HEAD COACH SHOULD HAVE COMMUNICATION - RELATED TO THE GAME AND ON FIELD ACTIVITIES - WITH THE UMPIRES. PLEASE ADVISE YOUR PARENTS AND PLAYERS NOT TO GET INTO DISCUSSIONS ABOUT CALLS ON THE FIELD WITH THE UMPIRE.

End of season standings will determine post-seasons seeding. Tie breakers will be established as follows:

- 1) head-to-head games played
- 2) won/loss record within division
- 3) total runs given up
- 4) total run differential
- 5) coin flip



13-18U Baseball Key Coaching Elements

Key Instructional/Coaching Objectives:

The principal responsibility of a coach at the 13-18U Baseball level is to provide a safe, fun, and organized learning environment.

1. Keep the practice/game fun. Keep things moving. Keep kids interested.
2. Teach correct throwing and catching techniques (more info in pages to come).
3. Develop strategic defensive thinking (where's the play?)
4. Develop proper hitting mechanics. Use soft toss and tee work.
5. Develop an understanding of the strike zone.
6. Develop good, instinctive base running skills.
7. Help players understand and follow the rules of the game.
8. Encourage fair competition.
9. Teach and reinforce baseball strategy.
10. Keep things simple and basic
11. Help kids understand that baseball is played "out in front" (ie. ball is caught out in front, ball is fielded out in front, ball is hit out in front, etc).
12. Get support from parents and recruit several assistant coaches.

Coaching Recommendations:

Get help nobody does it alone – Find parents that are willing to help out during practice – it makes your life a lot easier.

Accomplish 3-4 Objectives for the season – Realistic objectives help you focus so your team can focus.

Write it down – Make a plan for your season/practice/game and stick to it.

Make them move – Soccer and lacrosse are fun because players are moving more than standing.

Consider pre-practice baserunning – Kids are full of energy when they come to practice, getting them to run the bases like big league players releases that energy so they can be more focused during practice.

Make it competitive – Healthy and fair competition develop good competitors and kids love it. Make a game out of any activity/drill that you can. Kids love to play games and try to win.

Make throwing/catching a priority – No longer just to warm-up. Create games and teach throwing/catching. More games are won when the ball is thrown/caught well, than when the ball is hit well.

Change every 15-20 minutes – Attention spans are short. Variety is the spice of life.

Divide players into smaller groups – Smaller groups means more reps, and less of an opportunity to lose focus or get distracted. Remember suggestion #1 (get parents involved), give each player more rep's and keep them moving.

Encourage kids to watch other games - Listen to the announcers during games on TV, the game itself is a great teacher.

Play wiffle ball –It's a safe alternative to a hard baseball and it's great for hand eye coordination.

Talk with each player individually each day – It doesn't have to be about baseball. It doesn't have to be warm and fuzzy. Kids look up to their coaches. They are thrilled to share info with their coach!

Be positive – Celebrate the game of baseball at every opportunity. Grow the enthusiasm for the game among your players.



Have a rule of the game or a philosophy point to discuss for every practice – Sesame Street has a word of the day – it works for big bird, why not for you.

Make things look easy/fun – At this level, you want to break things down into only a few simple parts. Use kid-like visuals to help increase understanding.

Explain why, ask why – Help kids understand why they should perform a certain skill. Ask them to tell you why (or you can tell them why)!

Have high expectations during practice and a true sense of reality during games – Talent level is not an issue during practice. Teach the proper way to do things. Perfect practice makes perfect.

Practice time is for coaches, games are for the players – Make the practice time meaningful and skill-driven. Don't over-coach during a game. Let the kids play, and stay positive.

Keep a copy of your practice plan - It helps evaluate and plan for the next practice.

Be prepared for your game before you step on the field – Have a lineup and defensive rotation ready. Be flexible, but be prepared.

Understand the basic tenant of coaching youth sports – Boys feel better when they play better. Girls play better when they feel better. Understand this principle and you will be able to make the experience more enjoyable for young boys and girls!



Notes on Drills

In the pages that follow, skill development drills and games will be presented. Insert these drills into a practice plan to keep your players moving and keep their interest. As you coach your team, you may find that some drills and games are better suited for your team than others. The key at this level is to make sure that the players are having fun. Skill development, although important, is sometimes secondary to kids having fun and wanting to come back to the next practice/game.

In order to effectively communicate and execute these drills, a coach needs to do 2 things: 1) properly describe the skill being taught (ie what you are looking for the player to do – the objective), and 2) demonstrate the proper way of doing the drill. It can't be overemphasized how important #2 is to the overall success of the drill. If for some reason the coach is unable to demonstrate the drill, find another coach, parent, or player that can.

General Sample Practice Plan (13-18U Baseball)

5 - 10 Minutes:	Warm Up Drills/Base Running
10 - 15 Minutes:	Throwing Program/playing catch
25 – 30 Minutes:	Stations – small groups 10-12 minutes per station and rotate A) Throwing Drills B) Batting Drills C) Fielding Drills
15 -20 Minutes	Game Situations / Team Fundamentals
10 – 15 Minutes	Team Drills/Favorite Drills
30 – 45 Minutes	Hitting/Team Games

Pick your drills for the practice you want to run based on the table below.



Drill Scheduling by Practice

Drill/Game	Practice #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Base Running Drills													
Run Through the Base		X	X	X	X	X	X						
Home Run Drill		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Four Corners		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Base Runners								X	X	X	X	X	X
Dive Backs								X	X	X	X	X	X
1st to 3rd, 2nd to Home								X	X	X	X	X	X
Two Base Drill								X	X	X	X	X	X
Fielding/Throwing Drills													
Long Toss		X	X	X	X	X	X						
Reach Out		X	X	X	X	X	X						
Underhand Square		X	X	X	X	X	X						
First Base Stretch		X	X	X	X	X	X						
First Base Mechanics		X	X	X	X	X	X						
Relay Shuttle		X	X	X	X	X	X						
Lateral Pick Up		X	X	X	X	X	X						
Ground Ball Circle		X	X	X	X	X	X						
Bucket Drill		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Fly Ball Priority		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Rundown					X	X	X	X	X	X			
Knock Down Game					X	X	X	X	X	X			
Follow the Throw					X	X	X	X	X	X			
Hit and Cover					X	X	X	X	X	X			
Drop Step					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Partner Long/Short Hop								X	X	X			
Backhand/Forehand								X	X	X			
Speed Throw								X	X	X	X	X	X
Pepper								X	X	X	X	X	X
Charging								X	X	X	X	X	X
Communication								X	X	X	X	X	X
Quarterback											X	X	X
Over the Shoulder											X	X	X
One Knee Throwing											X	X	X
One and Two											X	X	X
Dive for the Ball											X	X	X



Drill Schedule by Practice

Drill/Game	Practice #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Pitcher/Catcher Drills													
Pitching Drills		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Catching Drills		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Batting Drills													
Wiffle Ball Batting		P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Broomstick		P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Front Toss		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
What's the Count		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Two Strike		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
High Hands					X	X	X						
Hip Turner					X	X	X						
Tee Hitting for Distance								X	X	X			
Colored Ball								X	X	X			
Opposite Field								X	X	X	X	X	X
Outside Pitch											X	X	X
Team Drills													
Infield Rotation		X	X	X	X	X	X						
Home Run Derby		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Batter Out		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Get the Out								X	X	X	X	X	X
Star Drill								X	X	X	X	X	X



Proper Throwing Mechanics

Throwing properly is the most important skill in the game of baseball to learn. Players that do not throw properly will struggle with the game of baseball, will be overlooked by coaches, and may develop bad throwing habits that may cause injury. Implementing a throwing program at the start of playing baseball is vital. In the paragraphs that follow, we will define a simple throwing program that we want our young players to use as much as possible. Proper throwing for 10 minutes 5 days a week in season and 2 - 3 days a week in warmer weather out of season will be sufficient to develop a strong throwing arm, and good technique.

Throwing the baseball correctly is the key to a enjoyment and success in the game of baseball.

The Target

Giving a good target, and demonstrating proper receiving technique, is very important to the overall training of the thrower. A target should be given with both hands separated and in front of the body. The target is important for several reasons, but most-importantly, to make sure the thrower is throwing TO a target, not AT someone. The catch is made with two hands, ensuring that the ball, when caught, is held on to.

Make sure that both the thrower and receiver are actively involved in the Throwing Program. As is the case with all of baseball, there needs to be a purpose to the action. Throwing aimlessly AT someone is a recipe for poor technique and poor results. Furthermore, throwing TO a target promotes safety, making sure that both the thrower and receiver are engaged in playing catch.

Warming Up

Completing a proper warm up is an essential part of the Throwing Program. This warm up can consist of a combination of stretching and mild aerobic exercise.

“Warm up to throw. Don’t throw to warm up”

Suggested Stretching

1. Arm windmills – Start by extending the arms out at the side. Make small forward circles with the arms, gradually making larger and larger circles. Complete the circles by making full windmills (full circles) with the arms. When finished, repeat the stretch by doing reverse circles.
2. Scratch the back – Reach back over the shoulder with one hand touching your spine. Use the opposite hand to pull down on the elbow causing a stretch of the tricep muscle. Hold for a 10 count. Repeat on other arm.
3. Arm crossovers – Allow the arm to hang across the body to the opposite side. Turn the opposing arm toward the body and pull the opposing arm toward the body, using the front of the wrist. The player should feel a stretch of the shoulder. Hold for a 10 count. Repeat the stretch for the other arm.
4. Jumping jacks
5. Easy jog/run
6. Toe touches (wind mill)



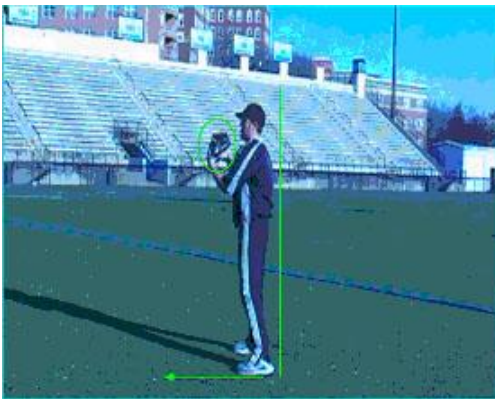
The Throwing Program

Part 1: Shoulder to Shoulder (10 – 20 Throws)

(this drill focuses on upper body mechanics, allowing the thrower to concentrate on hip rotation, elbow placement and arm slot)



- 1) Grip = 4 Seam or C Grip (fingers across the seams, fingertips touching the seams)



- 2) Toes pointed to target, feet parallel
- 3) Glove in front – like a pitcher



- 4) Break arms down and in a circle motion to the highest point





- 5) Front elbow pointed at target
- 6) Back elbow in straight line to target
- 7) Back of the hand facing the target



- 8) Drive front elbow across the rib cage
- 9) Release $\frac{3}{4}$ or over hand to target (keeping throwing elbow above shoulder)



- 10) Follow-thru to the glove side hip pocket

- 11. During this drill, no step is taken toward the target



Part II: Feet in Straight Line Drill (10 – 20 Throws)

(this drill focuses more on lower body involvement, allowing the thrower to feel the impact of the legs in the throwing motion)



1. Side of feet facing the target
2. Hands in front, middle of the chest – like a pitcher



3. Break hands circle motion, raising throwing elbow at or above shoulder level
4. Weight distribution 60 percent backside/40 percent front-side
5. Front elbow facing target
6. Back of the hand to the target



7. Explode weight forward, no more stride
 8. Arm across rib cage
 9. Finish follow-thru to glove side hip pocket
-
10. During this drill, no step is taken toward the target prior to the throw.



Part III: Step & Throw (10 – 20 Throws)

(this drill puts it all together and allows the thrower to perfect the throwing mechanics)



1. Start the feet parallel to the target (same as in Part I)
2. Step with the “throwing arm leg first, in front of the glove arm leg” – foot is perpendicular to target
3. Keep the hands together still at this point
4. Notice that the step is turned in - this will provide the drive because the weight will transfer from the outside of the foot to the inside of the foot allowing for maximum push to the target.
5. Make sure to step in a straight line and not off to the right or left
6. The glove leg will explode through and now land the same as in Part II of the throwing program
7. The break of the hands happens as the glove arm leg lands to the ground
8. Notice as the follow-through happens, weight is still moving forward to the target.
9. We like to tell players to keep their feet moving to their target after the throw, this will also keep them in a straight line headed in that direction.



Teaching the Infield

The Infielder's Mitt

With the young age groups (beginner level baseball), the glove should be larger to increase confidence with catching and fielding baseballs.

How to break-in the infielder's mitt?

1. As an infielder, we want as much surface area on the field when trying to field the baseball. In order to accomplish the desired surface area, the thumb and little-finger of the glove need to be flared outward or away from the palm of the mitt.
2. We need to keep the palm of the mitt flat, meaning no ripples or creases.
3. Rarely use oil (once every three months), use shaving cream (no scent) with lanolin to soften the glove.

Infield Mechanics

Safety

1. Proper Mechanics = Safety
2. Proper Repetitions = Confidence
3. Confidence = Aggressiveness
4. Aggressiveness = Safety

Mentality

1. Be aggressive in the infield, do not be afraid of making errors
2. Objective needs to be to stop the ball.
3. Teach kids to “play their position”.
4. Be aware of the situation (where are the runners, how many outs are there). You should be asking each fielder, “if the ball is hit to you, where is your play”. We want to encourage fielders to think strategically and make decisions on where to throw the ball.
5. Teach the infielders that it is okay to make physical mistakes if they are making good mental decisions. Reinforce the positive.
6. Coaches should lead by example and make comments to “pick up” players when an error is made.

Ready Positions & Key Points

To make the ready position easy to understand and execute, we want to use visuals to help the defensive player understand the proper stance. At this level, we want to teach the kids the ready position using basic illustrations.

- Gorilla stance – have players bend their knees and waist with their hands in front (palms up) and close to the ground. Instruct them to move from side to side on the balls of their feet and grunt like a gorilla.
- Linebacker position – same as above, but add the mean face.

The key here is to force the hands out in front, keep the glove close to the ground and have the players in a “fielding position” (ie. already down, with palms up), prior to the ball being batted. At this level, the side-to-side reactions may be limited. We want to teach the players to field the balls that are hit to them, or move in on those that are hit slowly.



Fielding Position



1. Butt low
2. Knees bent
3. Feet parallel or with left foot slightly open
4. Back parallel to the ground
5. HANDS IN FRONT
6. Glove hand at 7 o'clock and throwing hand at 1 o'clock
7. Glove is still in peripheral vision while looking at the baseball
8. Keep the weight on the balls of the feet

To reinforce the fielding position, simple drills should be incorporated into pregame work
Roll grounders to each player using balls provided

- Ensure proper fielding position is utilized by each player both prior and during the fielding of the ground ball
- To make the drill more challenging, require that the player make a throw to first base

Exploding to the Throw

(these are advanced techniques, and are only provided as a reference)



1. Ideally, the ball should be caught in the middle of the body or slightly to the left in-step.
2. The following keys are crucial to proper throwing mechanics, which result in greater accuracy:
 - Exchange of ball from glove to throwing hand should occur in the midline of the body. (This allows the arm to catch up and work with the feet properly.)
 - Only two steps should be made after the catch and before the release of the throw. Remember: **right, left, field, right, and left, throw**. ***Note left-handed players we want to left, right, field, left, right, throw**
 - Right foot in front of left or replace feet if infielder has enough arm strength. Right over left often an increase arm strength but slows release. This is opposite for a left handed player, so it will be left foot in front of the right foot.



- **Avoid right foot behind left on all throws.** Right foot behind left causes the infielder to open his upper body and lead with the shoulder which leads to a poor release point as well as throwing across his body causing the ball to sink and tail.
- Arm slot should be in 3/4 position with an 'L' formed with the elbow at shoulder height with the fingers on top of the ball gripped across the wide seams.
- Lead or glove arm should be up with the elbow pointed at the target with the palm of the glove facing the infielder's chest. This helps the infielder stay closed and give direction to throw with the upper body. ***NOTE THROWING PROGRAM**
- Follow your throws – meaning after the throw run two steps
- See the Throwing Progression:



Teaching the Outfield (catching balls in the air)

Positioning

1. Stance

- Picture a tennis player returning a serve
 - Athletic stance, flexion in the knees, on the balls of your feet (not on your heels), feet are square towards the target



1. At this level, 99% of the balls in the air that are caught by a player are hit/thrown in front of him/her. This is because the players are unsure of their catching ability and are generally afraid of the ball. We want to use instructional techniques that 1) teach the FUNdamentals catching a fly ball, and 2) minimize the fear of getting hurt by a baseball.
2. A fly ball drill at this level should make use of either a tennis ball or a waffle ball.
3. Make sure the sun is not directly in the eyes of the players (this may mean moving the drill to another part of the diamond). Put the sun behind the players.
4. Each player will show a different aptitude for catching fly balls. Tailor any outfield drill to meet the abilities of each individual child.
5. Quick pop-up drill:
 - Toss a ball into the air so that it requires little movement on the player's behalf to catch the ball.
 - Each player should scream, "I got it, I got it, I got it", prior to catching the ball.
 - Teach the players to separate their hands above their shoulders and "look through the window" to find the ball.
 - Encourage them to catch the baseball over their glove-hand shoulder. If done correctly, the ball should be caught with the palm facing up. Basket catches should be the exception, not the rule.
 - See how many pop-ups they can catch in a row, or how many they can catch out of 20 thrown to them.



- You can make the drill more difficult for the more skilled players, making them move from side to side to make a catch. You can assign point values prior to the catch so that the kids know what to expect. Kids love to earn more points!



Teaching Hitting

Note: Every player will have a different batting stance and approach to hitting. For example, there are many successful batting stances out there – just look at the major leagues. What is important is the fundamentals of hitting – what happens during the swing phase of hitting. THAT is what we want to emphasize here.

Even though we are introducing coach pitch at this level, we still want to make use of the tee for instructional and developmental purposes. Even major league ballplayers use a hitting tee as part of their batting instruction. It is the best way to isolate and correct swing issues.

How to Pick the Proper Bat

Figure 8 Drill

1. Take the bat and hold it out in-front with one hand and create a figure 8 in the air with it. If the player cannot accomplish this smoothly and semi-quickly, he should choose a lighter bat
2. Try this with both hands

Hammer Drill

1. Hold the bat against the knob in a right angle pointing above the head and the barrel point away while being parallel to the ground
2. Take the bat and drive it down in a hammering motion to the ground and try to stop the bat around knee height.
3. If the player has difficulty stopping the bat semi-firmly then choose a lighter bat.

Grip

Proper Grip

1. The Bottom Hand is referred to as the “guide hand”
 - The bottom hand should grip the bat in such a way that point the logo of the batting glove faces the pitcher
2. The Top Hand is referred to as the “power hand”
 - We want to see the logo of the batting glove or the back of the hand facing the catcher
3. Place the bat in the fingers – where the fingers meet the hand – not in the palm of the hand
4. The top hand should be a little looser than the bottom hand grip – until contact
5. When looking at the grip in its entirety, we want the top hand and bottom hand “knocking knuckles” to be SLIGHTLY OFF CENTERED

Common Flaws

1. Gripping the bat too tight hence white knuckles.
2. Over rotating or choking the bat with the top or bottom hands.
3. Holding the bat too deep in the palm – causes a slow and weak contact point.
4. Literally lining up the knocking knuckles – causes players to have their elbows. Uncomfortably placed too close together, and causes players to be too “wristy” with the swing.



Batting Stance



Feet Position

1. The feet should be placed in such a way that the front foot of the batter is behind the ball on the tee.
2. The feet should be placed in the batter's box on the balls of the feet
3. The feet should be parallel, slightly more than shoulder width apart
4. We want spring in the back foot, so in order to achieve this place all the weight of the back foot on the inner-half, ball of the foot, this should slightly elevate the back heel off the ground, just enough to sneak a small finger underneath the heel.

Knees

1. The knees should be slightly bent in a athletic position
2. We want the knees inside the ankles

Chest

1. The chest should be in-line with the knees
2. Make sure the chest does not lean forward over the knees
3. Make sure the chest does not lean backward

Hand Position & Bat Position

1. The hands should be relaxed
2. The top hand should be in-line with the earlobe
3. We do not want the hands too close to the neck and/or head, nor do we want the hands extended too far away from the neck as this will create a stiff (ARM-BAR) with the bottom hand.
4. The bat should be a 45 degree angle over the back shoulder.

Head Position

1. The head and eyes should be level to the pitcher
2. Make sure the head does not lean or tilt so that the eyes are on angle, this will make it difficult to pick up the ball as it is released and in flight to the plate.

Weight Distribution

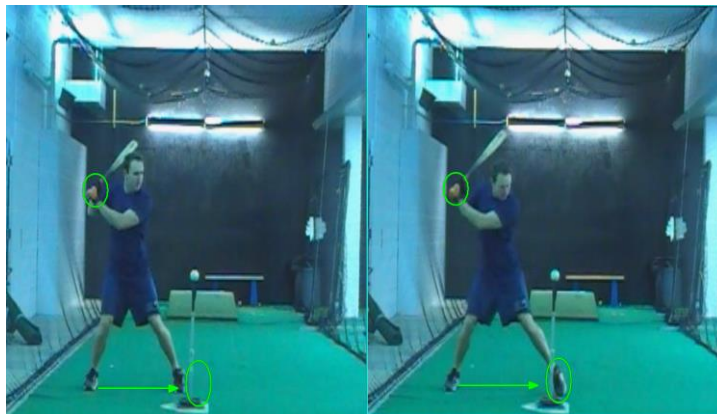
1. The weight in the stance should be 60% on the back side and 40% on the front side
2. Be sure to keep the knees inside the ankles and do not lose sight of the feet position above



Common Flaws

1. Feet are turned outwards – typically an issue of lack of focus when players get in the box, they neglect the stance and setup.
2. Knees are over the feet or outside the ankles – this will reduce explosiveness dramatically in the swing.
3. The chest leans too far forward over the knees
4. The hands are often too low or too far away from the proper position
5. Head tilts or is placed in an uncomfortable position
6. Weight is too far backward 80%
7. The bat lays too flat
8. The bat lays too tall

Launch Position



Stride & Load

1. The stride and load is one of the most important pieces of the swing and is often overlooked as coaches are often concerned with the actual bat path.
2. A good bat path is a direct result of a proper stride and load.
3. The stride foot (front foot) and the hands have to have some separation away from one another, often times we tell players think of this like a rubber band, if the rubber band only stretches in one direction it will have less tension than if the rubber band is stretched in opposite directions.
4. The stride foot needs to move forward no more than 4-6 inches from the stance position
5. When the stride foot lands it should land “heel to pitcher and raised on the ball of the inner half of the foot”
6. The heel is elevated at the landing of the stride foot
7. The hands should create the “Nike” check mark in the swing and/or the baby “u”. Note that the hands move slightly back and up, no more than in a 2 inch radius.
8. Weight Distribution is a key:
 - The weight in the stance was 60/40 and at stride and load it should reach 50/50.
 - This is called weight transfer, not to be mistaken for the weight shifting during the swing, that would be a negative and it would be called swaying.
 - The front foot leading the stride stops the weight from moving too far forward



The Five Eyes

1. This is a good key phrase to tell the players about the attack to the pitcher
2. The “Five Eyes” are:
 - One = The front foot
 - Two = The front knee
 - Three = The front hip
 - Four = The front shoulder
 - Five = The head and/or eyes
3. They all move equidistant to each other and stop once the front foot lands at the stride position
4. Make sure they do not continue after the stride = swaying into the pitch

Common Flaws

1. Poor weight distribution or weight transfer
2. No attack with the five eyes
3. Hand load is too large and out of control
4. BAT WRAPS
5. Hands Drop as stride foot moves forward
6. The bat angle drops from 45 degrees to about 20 degrees
7. Players “step in the bucket” meaning they step back almost out of the box
8. Players “step into the plate” meaning they do not stride straight but rather into the plate, this will cut the hips off and cause poor swing path mechanics to the baseball.



Stations/Drills/Games

Running a successful tee-ball practice revolves around 3 themes: 1) organization, 2) energy (from players & coaches), and 3) fun. Remove any one of these legs from the “three-legged stool”, and you will have a practice that will fail to capture the attention of your players. If you lose your players, no one will enjoy practice – including you.

The drills and games that follow can be inserted into the practice plan at any point after the run/throw/catch portion of the practice. Breaking the players into smaller groups and keeping the drills to 5-10 minutes in length will keep the players moving and the practices interesting.

BASERUNNING

Run Through the base Drill (practices 1-6)

Early on in their baseball careers, young players need to be reminded to run through first base on a ground ball. This drill will help them understand this point.

Line up your players at home plate. Position coaches on the right field foul line beginning about 5 feet beyond the bag at first base – about 3 feet apart from each other. Explain to your players that you expect them to run past first base every time they hit the ball, and that in this drill, the coaches want to give them a “high five” if they do the drill correctly. Demonstrate the drill for them.

The player simulates a swing at the plate and runs toward first base. Once he passes first base, the coaches encourage him to continue running to first base and give the player high fives when he passes the coaches.

This drill can be run with multiple “first bases”. Simply line up 2 other bases parallel to first base. Set up multiple “home bases” parallel to the field’s home base. In that way you can have multiple players running to first base at the same time to keep practice moving.

During the scrimmages/games for the younger players, have your first base coach stand just beyond the bag at first. Encourage your players to run past the coach at first. They can give you a high five during the games too!

Home Run Drill (practices 1-12)

Kids love to be timed running around the bases. Grab a stopwatch, line your players up at home plate, and watch the fun and competition begin.

At the younger age groups, it is not important that the players use good base running mechanics. At the older age groups, the coach will want to demonstrate the proper way to run around the bases, and point out the players that execute the base running skills properly.

This drill can be used as a practice starter, or ender. It is a fun drill for the kids.



Four Corners Game (practices 1-12)

This drill teaches kids about team competition and cooperation, base running and rounding, and throwing progressions. It also reinforces the skills of receiving while offering kids a fun way to get better conditioned.

Start by dividing your team in half. Line up one team at the home plate and the other at second base. Hand the first player in each line a baseball.

Tell them to run three consecutive bases. So, those starting at the home plate will end on third base and those starting on second will end on first base.

Once they've reached the right base, they must stop, set their feet, and throw their ball to the next player in line. The next player up catches the ball and repeats the activity.

If the player doesn't catch the ball, they must retrieve it. Touch their starting base. And then run the sequence.

Players must finish by sitting in a designated area you assign before the drill begins. Whichever team finishes with all of its members seated in the right spot first wins.

Base Runners Drill (practices 7-12)

Players need to learn to listen to what their coaches say when they are running the bases.

The player will take an imaginary swing with the imaginary bat and then run as fast as they can to first base. As the runner approaches the base the coach will call out to the runner to either stay at the base, or to keep running.

Run each player through the drill differing each time what you are going to say to the player. They will begin to learn through the repetition to listen for their coach's voice when they are running the bases.

The same drill can be done with the players running from 1st to 3rd or 2nd to home.

The key is for the player to understand that they are to run as hard as they can until the coach tells them to stop. This is especially important when the ball is BEHIND THE RUNNER (ie a ball in right field with the runner heading to 3rd, or any ball hit to the outfield with a runner heading home).

Dive Backs (practices 7-12)

The players start out at Home Plate and run around first base, making an aggressive turn, and then dive back into the bag. After diving back they get up as fast as they can and head to second base to do the same thing. They do this also at third then slide feet first into home plate to end their round.

Besides basic conditioning, this drill helps to build the players speed and quickness back to the bag. Also, it is helpful to work on quickly leaving the bag as well as helping the players to recognize how big of a turn they can make around a bag to make sure that they get back in case of a throw.



A good way to prove the get back theory is to have an outfielder and a second basemen trying to get a player out every couple of times through. I usually only make the players do this drill twice before they are finished.

First to Third, Second to Home Drill (Practices 7-12)

The two most important running skills for a player to develop are rounding second to head to third on a ball hit to the outfield, and scoring from second on an outfield single.

Line up your team at first base. A player steps up and becomes the runner. Coach yells, “go!” Runner attempts to go from first to third base, making sure to properly round the base at second. You can place cones on the base path, or have a coach stand in the base path to have the player go around him.

The drill is repeated for the group at second base.

For a variation, you can add defensive players to make the throws to third base and home plate on outfield singles. You would need outfielders, a cutoff man, and a third baseman and/or catcher.

Two Base Drill (Practices 7-12)

This drill teaches your players the to run the bases properly and master the two-base skill.

Line your players up behind home plate in two lines. Tap the first player on the right and shout, “go!” This player will run from home to second base. One second later, tap first player on the left and shout, “go!” This player is to run straight through first base.

The second, “go!” sends the player at first base to third base, the player at second to home plate, and the player to the right of the coach to second base. A subsequent, “go!” one second later, and the player on the left sprints to first base.

Continue this drill for as long as you would like, making sure of two things: 1) the players get out of the way of oncoming runners to the plate, and 2) the players switch lines once they have crossed home plate.



FIELDING/THROWING DRILLS

Long Toss (practices 1-6)

The best way to build arm strength is by long tossing. Players should gradually move back until they have to put a little air under the ball to get it all the way to their partner. Once the players get to the point where they can barely get the ball there or they can only get it there on once bounce, they should make several throws from that distance before shortening up and finishing. It's okay for players to involve the body by taking a big step toward their target or shuffling their feet. Long toss should be done by young players at every practice with the main goal of being able to throw the ball farther as the season progresses.

Reach Out Drill (practices 1-6)

This drill teaches players to get and keep their hands in front while fielding ground balls.

Players line up single file. Place a bat on the ground about 6 – 8 feet in front of the players – perpendicular to the player's feet (you can use a 2x4 instead). The coach rolls a ball toward the bat. The player must advance up to the bat, assume a good fielding position with the hands in front, and field the ball before it touches the bat. In order to accomplish this, the player must reach out in front of the bat and field the ball – exactly what you want the player to do on every groundball.

The players return the ball to the coach with an overhand throw, and return to the back of the line.

This is a fast-moving drill that the kids will have fun with and will learn good fielding habits. See how many the kids can get in a row!

Variation of the Reach Out Drill (practices 1-6)

Another important aspect of fielding is getting the ball into the throwing hand as soon as possible. Combining the Reach Out Drill with a quick release is a great way to teach the kids this skill.

Set up the Reach Out Drill as described above. Position two coaches on either side of the bat – about 8 feet from the ends of the bat.

The coach rolls the ball to the players and they approach and field the ball, reaching over the bat with their glove to do so. When the ball is fielded, the player grasps the ball out of the glove and flicks the ball backhand to one of the coaches on the side – to the right for right-handed throwers, to the left for left-handed throwers.

Challenge the players to get the ball out of the glove quickly, while making an accurate backhand toss to the coaches.

Final Progression of the Reach Out Drill (practices 1-6)

Now that the players have found the correct fielding position, and figured out how to get the ball out of the glove quickly, we want to have the players incorporate these skills while making an accurate throw to first base.



Set up the drill as outlined above, except this time make sure that the bat is placed in such a position that when the player fields the ball, he is in a good position to make the right, left, throw to first base.

The ball is rolled to the player as he/she approaches the bat. Hands are extended to field the ball. After the ball is fielded, the player needs to step over the bat with the right foot to begin the right, left, throw process.

This is a great way to teach the kids to get their momentum going toward first base when making a throw.

Underhand Square Drill (practices 1-6)

This drill teaches players the correct way to underhand the ball to a make a play at a nearby base.

Five players are needed to conduct this drill. Four players are positioned in the formation of a square, approximately 15 - 20 feet apart. There are no gloves used in this defensive drill. One of the four players has a baseball in his/her hand. The fifth player lines up behind the player with the ball.

When the coach says, "go!" the ball is tossed underhand to the player to the right – using a flat-wristed technique. After the throw is made, the thrower immediately runs toward the player to whom he/she has thrown the ball, and takes his place. The player who receives the underhand throw turns to his right and throws the ball to the next player, and follows his throw, replacing the player to whom the ball has been thrown. This pattern continues until the ball is dropped and the players reset.

In order for this drill to be effective, the coach must insist that the players use a flat wrist to underhand the ball to the next player. The player receiving the throw must use two hands to catch the ball and release the ball quickly. Accuracy and speed are the name of the game here.

To add some competitiveness, have the players keep track of how many throws are made in a row by counting each successful throw and catch out loud.

First Base Stretch Drill (practices 1-6)

First base is a pride position. First base is a guts position. As the father of a middle infielder, nothing drives me crazier than an infielder making a stellar play, throwing the ball low to first (as I teach them), then the first baseman waves at it, trying to "pick" it and the infielder gets the error.

Very little time is spent on attempting to improve the first baseman's skills. If you watch infield practice the first baseman invariably makes very little effort to "pick it." They come off the bag on anything that isn't right to their chest.

If you want to improve your infield productivity, spend some time challenging the first baseman to have some pride and guts and vow that "nothing is going to get by me! I will catch everything"! Then drill him! Have him place both his feet on the bag and stretch as far as possible (keeping his throwing side foot on the base). Then have him reach out as far as possible and make a mark with his glove. Get back 30-40 feet and throw balls softly at that spot (with younger players, I suggest you use Incrediballs to overcome any fear factor). Have him begin each drill with both feet on the bag and stretch out as far as possible to either catch the ball in the air or "pick" it. Do this drill 20 or so times each practice and I assure you his



legs will be quivering and, more importantly, your defense will improve immensely.

First basemen will catch almost all balls they reach in the air. They will catch many, if not most short hops, and the long hop is not difficult. It is the in-between hop that is tough. If they discipline themselves to stretch, they take away the difficult “tweener”, catch more in the air, and handle the short hop.

First Base Mechanics Drill (practices 1-6)

This drill develops proper mechanics when receiving throws at first base.

You’ll need a bucket of balls, empty bucket, player or coach to throw, first basemen.

Players line up in foul ground. A coach positions himself in the middle of the infield with a bucket of balls. An empty bucket is placed near first base. The first player comes to first base and puts the heel of the throwing-side foot on the base. The coach throws a ball to player, who sees the ball coming across the diamond and takes the glove and glove-side foot directly toward the ball together. The ball should hit the glove and the foot should land at the same time, preventing the first baseman from stretching too soon. Stress that the first baseman gets to the bag quickly, stands tall, squares the shoulders to the infielder making the throw, and takes the glove and glove-side foot toward ball once the flight of the throw is determined. Make sure that they don’t stretch too soon! Coaches also can have players work on receiving errant throws and short-hops. Players receiving throws should place balls in the empty bucket.

Relay Shuttle Drill (practices 1-6)

This drill is great for teaching a number of skills. The fielder learns the correct position to receive a relay throw, how to catch it with both hands in front, and which direction to turn to throw. This drill can be adjusted for a variety of skill levels.

- 1) Get 3-4 players 45-50 feet apart in a line with one baseball to start with.
- 2) Each player in the relay assumes the position of the receiver – throwing hand shoulder pointed toward the thrower, glove and hand pointed toward the thrower, and bent slightly at the knees and waist in an athletic position.
- 3) One of the players on one end throws the ball to the next player in line concentrating on the other player’s glove hand/shoulder.
- 4) The receiving player catches the ball with both hands in front and turns into his glove hand to throw the ball to the next player in line etc.
- 5) This continues there and back.

Lateral Pick Up Drill (practices 1-6)

This drill improves the players overall conditioning, and improves the player’s ability to move laterally and to assume a good defensive position in fielding a ground ball.

The drill has one tosser and one player, who are 6-7 feet apart facing each other. (Pairs) Drill can have as many groups as desired.



The tosser rolls a ball about 5-6 feet out to the side. The player moves on a semicircular path to field the ball. Make sure the fielder is fielding the ball by lining up his chin with the ball, with his hands extended. Do not allow the player to field the ball between his legs. He must field the ball in front of him. After picking-up the ball, the player throws the ball back to the tosser using a flat wristed, underhand throw, and returns to the center position. The tosser then rolls a ball about 5-6 feet out to the opposite side, and the player fields the ball in a similar manner. The drill sequence is repeated from 10 – 20 times depending on the player's conditioning level.

The number of repetitions is increased as the players conditioning level improves. It is important for the player to field the ball by moving on a semicircular path (not in a straight line) in order for the drill to be effective.

Ground Ball Circle Drill (practices 1-6)

Players (without gloves) form a circle. Each player assumes a good ready position.

One of the players begins the drill by rolling the ball to a teammate in the circle. The player that receives the grounder uses his hands to push the ball toward another player in the circle.

A player who lets a ball go through his/her legs gets one point. Once a player reaches 3 points, that player is out of the game.

This drill is effective if the players are focused and use proper fielding form. Coaches want to make sure that player's hands are in front of them when they push the ball toward another player.

Bucket Drill (practices 1-12)

This drill can be pulled out and used at any time. It is the best way to get the most ground ball practice for your team.

The drill is incredibly simple.

Place a work bucket on second base and you have the kids line up at the shortstop and the second baseman positions. One coach hits (or rolls) ground balls to shortstop, the other to second base. The players field the ball, run toward the bucket, and place the ball in the bucket. The player continues running to the other defensive line (ie shortstop to second base, and second base to shortstop).

Continue this process until all the baseballs are hit or the bucket is full. Rinse, repeat.

Fly Ball Priority Drill (practices 1-12)

Safely fielding flyballs should be a major point of emphasis for any coach. This drill will help you establish a defensive "pecking order" for plays on balls hit into the air. Your team will make more plays and have less injuries if they understand the premise of this priority system.

The defensive pecking order, or FLYBALL PRIORITY is set up to ensure fielders yield to a player with a higher priority. For example, a fielder with a 3 priority ALWAYS yields to a fielder with a 1 or 2 priority.



The fielding priorities are as follows:

Priority 1 – Centerfielder

Priority 2 – Right and left fielder

Priority 3 – Shortstop and second base

Priority 4 – First and third base

Priority 5 – Pitcher

Priority 6 – Catcher

Make sure each player knows and understands the priorities for their position(s).

The idea behind having fielding priorities is to let fielders know when to stop chasing fly balls. Each fielder is trained to track flyballs with reckless abandonment unless they are called off by another fielder (with a higher priority).

To start, establish a key phrase for outfielders to call for the baseball. I like “Mine” or “Ball”. It should be something mono-syllabic. Then, establish the same for the infielders. Any phrase like, “I got it” will work, but make sure it’s noticeably different from the outfielder’s call. This will help your infielders know when the outfielders are calling for fly balls.

To help your players understand how to execute their fielding priorities, set fielders at 1st, 2nd, 3rd, Short, Left and Right field, pitcher’s mound, and catching position (you don’t need a centerfielder for this drill).

Have two coaches, one along the 3rd base line and one along the 1st base line near home plate hit baseballs to fielders on the opposite sides of the field. The best fly balls are those that are hit in between the fielders. The best of the best are fly balls hit behind the 3rd baseman, where the 3rd baseman, shortstop, and left fielder converge. Make sure to allow time between flyballs for the players to reset to realistic fielding positions.

Primary point of emphasis: Helping players understand the priority system and their roles within it. It is also helpful to explain why fielders have priority over other fielders. If players are told why they have a priority over another fielder – based on the position, not on their ability – they will have a better appreciation for this strategy’s application and execution.

Secondary points of emphasis: One of the things we always teach our players is, “you’re either going to the ball, or going to a base.” If a player is called off of a flyball, or is not involved in the catch of the flyball, that player must go to a base. Make sure your players understand this so that your team is never caught with an open base.

You can run a similar drill in the outfield, using all 3 positions (two centerfielders would work here). Two coaches can hit baseballs between the centerfielder and right and left fielders. It’s the corner outfielder’s ball until he’s called off by the centerfielder. Make sure your outfielders know to communicate LOUDLY when catching flyballs.



Rundown Drill (practice 4-9)

Pre-drill exercise: Line up players – one behind the other at first and second base. One player with a baseball rises the ball above shoulder level and runs toward the player on the other base. The player without the baseball moves slowly toward the player with the baseball with his hands and glove extended in front, making a good target for his teammate. When the players are within 30-40 feet of each other, the player without the ball calls out, “Now.” Upon hearing the call, the player with the ball throws it using a dart-like throwing motion. The player who received the throw removes the baseball from his glove, raises it above his shoulder, and continues toward the base to which he is running. The player on the opposite base moves slowly toward him – hands and glove out in front – waiting to receive a throw. Upon the call out of “Now”, the player throws the baseball using a dart-like throwing motion. This process repeats for as many throws as possible.

See how many consecutive throws the players can successfully make. Set targets and have fun with it.

The Rundown Drill: Position fielders on first and second base, and on third base and home plate. Place a runner (with a helmet on) in the middle of the bases. Two players (with baseballs) stand at the sides of the pitcher’s mound, facing the runner. The play begins when the defensive player with the baseball runs toward the baserunner, forcing the baserunner to make a choice on where to run.

After any throw is made during this drill, the player throwing the ball must “follow the ball” to get to the position to replace the player to whom he has thrown the baseball. The rundown continues until an out is made, remembering always to follow the ball after every throw.

Note that once an infielder makes a throw to a base, he becomes the back up for that base and is part of the rundown.

The primary defensive objective is to get an out. The secondary defensive objective is to get an out with the runner moving toward the preceding base. The objective is for the runner to reach either base safely.

If the defense gets the out, it receives one point. If the offense causes the defense to make more than 3 throws, it gets one point. If the runner can safely make it to any base, the offense gets two points. First team to 10 wins.

Key points of emphasis

- 1) Ball is removed from the glove and transferred to the throwing hand quickly (unless a tag is imminent) and is raised above the shoulder so his teammate can see it.
- 2) Defensive players are positioned 3-4’ IN FRONT OF THE BASE to receive any throw at the base.
- 3) Defense continues to “squeeze the runner”, closing the running gap between the bases. You can teach the players to request the throw by saying “Now”, or let the defender with the baseball read the intention of the runner.
- 4) No pump faking throws during this drill.
- 5) Throws between teammates are dart-like, with a forward arm motion only.
- 6) Fielders always “follow their throw” to assume the defensive position of the player to whom they’ve



thrown the ball.

- 7) Make sure if a tag is made, it is made in a clear and obvious manner. No soft tags allowed. You can apologize after the umpire calls the runner out.

For safety, coaches may want to use a tennis ball for this drill until the coach has confidence that the drill can be done successfully with a hard ball.

Knock Down Game (practices 4-9)

Arrange 3 batting tees in a row about 10 feet apart from each other.

For beginner players, place a large ball on each tee (playground ball, soccer ball, etc.). For more experienced players, place a baseball on each tee.

Group players into three lines about 20 feet in front of each batting tee. All players should have a ball and glove.

Players work on their throwing accuracy by trying to knock a target off a tee.

The object of this drill is for players to try and hit the ball off the tee with a square throw. First player in each line throws ball at the target. If they hit the target, they need to run out and reset the batting tee with the ball for next player in line then return to the end of their line. If they do not hit the target, they should return to end of the line and wait for their turn again.

Make it easier: Increasing the size of the ball on the batting tee makes this drill easier. For example, a beach ball can be used for little ones! Alternatively, you can move players closer to the batting tee.

Make it harder: The smaller the target on the batting tee, the harder this drill becomes. Another way to increase the difficulty is to have players throw from farther back.

Follow the Throw Drill (practices 4-9)

The keys to a strong, accurate throw are lining your shoulders up with the target, exploding with a crop hop towards the target, and following the throw towards the target. This drill targets all three skills.

Set up orange cones in an “L” shape, with the top of the “L” pointing towards the coach at first base. The players stand in line in the ready position (knees and waist bent, weight on the balls of the feet, hands in front). The coach rolls the ball to the player who steps in and fields the ball. The player then lines up the shoulders to the target, springs into a crow hop, makes the throw to the coach at first base, and follows the throw – taking about 2 – 3 steps toward the coach at first. The ball is then thrown back to the player. The player catches the ball and returns it to the coach who rolls the grounders. The player returns to the back of the line.

Hit and Cover Drill (practices 4-9)

With the infield in position hit a ball to the third basemen who makes the throw to first. First base brings the ball home and the catcher throws it back to the third basemen covering the bag. The third basemen



catches the ball, makes a swipe tag, and fires the ball home again. Repeat the activity around the infield with each new base throwing to the previous one i.e. hit to first comes home back to first then to second third and home again. If proper throws are not made then start the drill again. We have found that this help get the infielders set and used to making good throws.

Drop Step Drill (practices 4-12)

In order to catch a ball that is hit behind them (or over their head), outfielders must be able to move back as quickly as possible. The drop step allows outfielders to range backward without back peddling.

Players line up. First one steps forward, tosses ball to coach and assumes ready position. Coach says go and player performs drop step (drop one foot back, turn body and cross the other foot over in the direction of the ball). Coach throws ball directly over player's head, high and close enough that he can catch with two hands above the head. Have players take time to get footwork correct before tossing. Stop players and have them do it correctly before throwing ball if step not done properly.

Partner Long Hop / Short Hop Drill (practice 7-9)

This drill is used to prepare the fielder for short hops and longer hops. Two athletes will get on both knees about 15 to 20 feet apart facing each other. They will then play catch by throwing hops at one another, varying between short and longer hops.

The key to the athlete fielding the ball is to understand where their hands need to be. What is most critical is that the throwing hand is on top of the glove to prevent the ball from popping out, as well as keeping the glove out in front. This can be done in correlation with the Hat in Mouth drill, which stresses keeping the glove out front.

The coach needs to emphasize that on the short hops, the fielder presents his glove in a manner so that he can field the ball out front. On the longer hop, the ball will bounce higher in its trajectory as it closes in on the fielder, therefore the fielder's glove will not be out in front so much. On short hops make the fielder force the hands out front and not into his body to field the ball, and then just the opposite for a longer hop. This drill also allows the fielder to recognize different hops in relation to where they bounce in front of the fielder. Make sure that the athlete who is throwing the ball doesn't just lob balls in; make him throw them hard. If they just lob it, you aren't helping the fielder at all.

Backhand/Forehand Drill (practice 7-9)

Line the players up in a straight line about 10-15 feet from the coach on either the right (for backhands) or left (for forehands). The player squares in the ready position, facing the coach. The coach rolls the ball so that the player has to move to in the direction of the ball, executing a crossover step while moving toward the ball.

When fielding the forehand, the player plants the glove-hand foot when reaching for the ball. The player continues moving in the direction toward the ball, regains balance, and tosses the ball back to the coach. It is important for the player to field the ball in front of him.

When fielding the backhand, the player plants the glove-hand foot when reaching for the ball. The



player takes an additional step with his throwing hand foot, plants it, and tosses the ball back to the coach. It is important that the ball is fielded in front of the infielder, not behind him.

Speed Throw Drill (practices 7-12)

This drill teaches players how to achieve a quick catch and release of the baseball, which is important for any position on the field – including outfield.

It also teaches – when done correctly – the concept of the “replacement step”. The replacement step is the most common and fastest method to release a caught ball toward its target.

With the receiver squared to his/her thrower, the left foot is placed slightly in front of the right foot (for right-handed throwers). Both hands are placed in front, glove open to the thrower – ready to catch a thrown ball. When the ball is caught, there is a release of the front foot (left foot) toward the intended target. The throwing hand’s foot (right) is placed where the front foot (left) used to be (replacement) and the front footsteps toward the target. This is more easily executed than written down.

Run this drill in any large open area (a field or a gym). Divide the team into as many groups of two as possible. If an uneven number of players are present use a coach to fill out the last group.

One member of each group lines up on one side of the area, the second member opposite on the other side. Space players an equal distance apart along each side of the area to allow room for safety.

Each group should have a ball. On the word “GO” each team begins throwing the ball back and forth across the area. Each time a team completes one throw and catch they count one point. If the throw is bad, or the ball is not caught, that team's score goes to zero.

Allow between thirty and sixty seconds for a round then call “STOP.” Each team then gives its score. The team with the highest score wins and each of those two players gets one point. Then rotate to the left so that all teams are different.

As soon as all teams are set and have a ball, start another round as above. Run as many rounds as the time allotted for the drill will allow. At the conclusion the player(s) with the most points win.

Watch out for...

Some players have a tendency to throw softly so as not to make an error and have their team score go to zero.

It is important to stress that the objective is to throw as hard and fast as possible and develop good throwing skills, not simply get the best score in this drill. Concentrate on developing a good rhythm of moving to the ball to catch it and continuing on with the throwing motion. This is also a good time to watch your players and see who uses two hands and catches the ball properly.

After running this contest for several practices, the best fielders will almost always end up with the highest number of points.



Pepper Drill (practices 7-12)

Break up the team into smaller groups of 3 – 4 players. Line them up with their gloves on against the fence. A coach with a bat stands about 15 – 20 feet away from the players. The coach hits the ball toward the players; the ball is fielded and thrown back to the coach so that he can hit the ball back to the players. The objective is for the players to field the ball cleanly, or at least keep the ball in front of them. If the ball gets by a player (hits the fence), the player loses a point. A player is eliminated after 5 points. See who is the last player remaining. This is your pepper champion.

This drill develops quickness and reaction skills.

Charging Drill (practices 7-12)

This drill improves the player's ability to charge a softly hit ground ball and make a strong and accurate throw to first base.

A coach stands at home plate and one at first base. The players begin by lining up at third base. The coach rolls the ball about midway between home and third, forcing the player to have to charge the ball. The player must charge the ball, set his feet correctly, use two hands to field the ball, gather the ball, point his shoulders toward first base, crow hop, and make a strong accurate throw to first base. Run the drill for 10 turns at each base (third, short, and second).

Make sure the players are not taking shortcuts to this drill by fielding the ball to the side, or running through the ball when fielding it. We want to teach the proper fielding mechanics. See how many the players can do successfully in a row.

Communication Drill (practices 7-12)

Outfielders form two lines at least 20 feet apart. First players in each line step forward. Coach throws fly balls in between the two fielders, who must communicate and make the play. Player fielding ball should yell, "I got it!" at least three times while waving his arms. Other players should back up. A strong, accurate throw should be made to coach or cutoff man (another player who rotates out of the drill) after ball is caught. For younger players you can use soft baseballs or tennis balls.

It is important for the outfielder to give both a verbal and visual cue to the other outfielder to make it clear that the ball is his to catch.

Quarterback Drill (practices 10-12)

Outfielder is 10 feet away from the coach with both feet pointing toward the coach. The coach uses the words "drop step and go" and points in the direction to where he wants his player to drop step and go.

As soon as the outfielder hears the coach's command the player uses the drop step and cross over in order to turn his body and sprint in the direction to where the coach has pointed. If the coach points to the player's right – the player will drop step with his right foot and cross over with his left. If the coach points to the player's left – the outfielder will drop step with his left and cross over with his right.



Once the player has sprinted approximately 20-40 yards (depending on skill and age) the coach will throw a high fly ball, and the outfielder who is sprinting must try to get under the ball in order to make the catch on the run. Once players get comfortable with the drill and make several catches you can increase the difficulty by throwing the ball further in order to make outfielders run harder and possibly make a diving catch.

To make the drill easier and work the players harder, have each player line up with a ball in their glove. When it is their turn they will toss you the ball and wait for your command. Once they have caught the ball they will jog back to the line up with the ball in their glove.

Over the Shoulder Catch Drill (practices 10-12)

This drill improves the player's ability to catch a fly ball over the shoulder.

The drill can have as many tossers as desired. The drill can have 4 or more players in each line. Each player has a ball.

The tosser stands on the left side of the player. The player hands the ball to the tosser, runs out, and the tosser leads with a fly ball so that the player has to reach to catch the ball over the left shoulder. After catching or retrieving the ball, the player turns to the left, and jogs back to the end of the line.

A variation of this drill would be to work the players in a rotation of tosser, fielder, and end of line. Make sure to have all players also work on fielding fly balls over the right shoulder.

One Knee Throwing Drill (practices 10-12)

This helps players learn the upper body action of throwing, without using their legs. Also builds throwing strength.

Each player needs to have a ball to perform this drill. To start, you may want to give the players a softer ball, like a tennis ball.

This drill emphasizes the upper body action: right from the grip, to the raised arm and elbow, the L-shape between the forearm and bicep, and then turning the body and following through towards the intended target.

The player starts with the body facing the target and the ball raised. The player can throw at a target, a fellow player, or a coach. The proper throwing mechanics should be watched for as the player throws the ball toward the target. A good follow through toward the target is important.

This drill helps the player learn to upper body action for throwing, along with building throwing strength and accuracy.

One and Two Game (practices 10-12)

Award points to the players for throwing and catching the ball at shoulder level or above.

Pair up the players and give them each a ball. (You can get a softer ball to start).



This drill helps players to understand the importance of accurate throws and catches that are at the shoulder level. It makes it easier for kids to throw and catch if they have something to aim for. It makes it especially better if it becomes a game and there are points at stake.

If the pair throws and catches at shoulder height, then they get two points. If they throw the ball and then catch it at waist level, then they get one point. If it is lower than the waist, they get no points.

This will help the players learn to keep the ball up where their teammates can catch it much easier.

More accurate throws and players can compete against each other in a game-like setting.

Dive For the Ball Drill (practices 10-12)

This drill gets all the players to work on their range and diving.

Have coaches and a bucket of balls on the 3rd base line. Have one or more players at first base to receive a throw.

The coaches will roll the ball to the player at third - just far enough to the left or right so that the players have to extend to dive to field the ball. The player then rights him/herself and makes a good throw (from third to the shortstop covering 2nd, and from the second baseman to 1st base).

If the players are shy about diving for the baseball, start them on their bellies with their glove extended. The coach will then roll the baseball to the glove, the player will catch the ball and push up to make the throw to first base.

To work on their forehands hit the ball to the left, to work on their backhands, hit the ball to their right.

Key coaching points include: 1) staying low to the ground, 2) extending fully when diving, 3) taking the proper angle to the ball when diving, and 4) using the correct form and procedure to right him/herself in order to make an accurate throw to first base.

This drill will make the players feel comfortable about “righting themselves” prior to making a throw to first base.



PITCHER/CATCHER DRILLS

PITCHER DRILLS

Comebacker Drill

Pitchers line up behind the mound with first basemen lined up at first. The first pitcher throws a pitch from the mound to the catcher. A coach is at home plate with a fungo bat and ball. After ball crosses the plate, the coach hits or rolls a ball back to the pitcher, who fields it, steps toward the target, releases the ball and follows the throw. This drill can be used to practice double plays started by the pitcher as well, with the shortstop covering the bag the majority of the time. Stress to your pitchers that even when attempting to turn a double play on a comebacker they have plenty of time to relax and make an accurate throw. Make sure that they don't get lazy with their footwork and always move their feet in the direction of the intended target.

Pitcher Communication Drill

Pitchers lined up at the mound. First basemen at first base. 2nd basemen at the 2nd base position.

Pitcher simulates a pitch to the plate. Coach rolls (or hits) a baseball on the right side of the infield. Pitcher moves toward the ball (or the base, depending on depth of batted ball). ONE OF THE INFIELDBERS MUST CALL FOR THE BALL, "Mine!"

If the pitcher calls for the ball, either the first baseman or 2nd baseman must cover first base.

If the first baseman calls for the ball, either the pitcher or 2nd baseman must cover the base.

If the second baseman calls for the ball, either the pitcher or the first baseman must cover the base.

Each player must react to the ball, listen or make the call, and cover the base if necessary.

This drill takes time to get it right.

One Man Drill

This drill helps pitchers gain comfort and strength in the balance position, while teaching them proper pitching mechanics.

With the pitcher standing on the mound in the stretch position, place one ball on the ground behind the pitching rubber near his contact foot. The drill begins with the pitcher lifting up his front knee and holding the balance position for a count of 3. The pitcher then reaches down (with his front foot still off the ground), picks up the ball behind the rubber, and returns to the balance position for a count of 3.

When the count is finished, the pitcher continues his pitching motion from the balance position and throws a pitch to the catcher or coach at home plate.



CATCHER'S DRILLS

Shadow Blocking

Coach stands behind the catcher. Catcher assumes their stance. The coach tells the catcher what pitch is thrown and where. The coach will give the catcher a few seconds to get ready. When the coach claps their hands, the catcher will assume the blocking position and hold. The coach or other players will check their form to make sure the catcher is in a good position. The drill can be varied by giving the catcher less time between pitch and location and the clap, or the catcher will go on verbal commands only.

Receiving the ball

Catchers assume the position behind a plate to receive a pitched ball. Coach throws tennis balls toward the catcher from a distance of about 10-15 feet. Catcher frames up the thrown ball and sticks the catch, catching the outside of the baseball to keep the ball as close to the strike zone as possible.

Points of emphasis: Catcher must learn the proper way to catch a pitched ball based on ball location. For inside pitches (to a right-hand batter), the catcher's thumb should be pointing up. For pitches over the plate, the thumb should be horizontal to the ground. For outside pitches, the catcher's thumb should be pointing down.

Sit and Get Hit

Coach gets on one knee from a short distance. The catcher assumes the blocking position. The coach will throw the ball (use wiffle balls at first) in the dirt and off the chest of the catcher. The catcher gets the feeling of balls coming off their body.

Medium Toss

Coach stands halfway between the mound and home plate. The catcher assumes their stance. Coach will throw balls in the dirt and the catcher will block, retrieve, and get their body in a position to throw.

Standard Toss

Coach stands on the mound. The catcher assumes their stance. Coach will throw balls in the dirt and the catcher will block, retrieve, and get their body in a position to throw.

Up-Downs

Lay out five balls five feet apart. The catcher will shuffle to each ball, assume the blocked position, get up and shuffle to the next ball. The object is to work on quickness down to the ball and up from the ball. Make sure the catcher's hands are moving in the correct position on the way up. The drill can be varied by having the catcher not only go down all five, but moving to the other side and returning to where they started.

Hands Drill

The catcher should start in the down position with a ball placed in front of them. When the coach says go, the catcher fires their hands out to the side and away from the ball, gets to their feet quickly, rakes in the ball and gets their body in a position to throw the baseball.



Zone Blocking

Acceptable activity for when practice is getting monotonous and the catchers need a change of pace. Assign three zones and points for each (5, 3, -5). The first zone should be 3 feet by 3 feet starting at the catcher's feet, the second zone should be 5 feet by 5 feet starting at the catcher's feet, the third zone is anything outside zone two. Catcher assumes stance while the coach stands on the mound. The coach will throw balls in the dirt. The catcher should block, retrieve the balls in a zone and then get their body in a position to throw. Each catcher gets an established number of trials. Add up points and assign a winner.

Batting Practice

There is no substitute for blocking live during an established period of time during batting practice. This prevents the catcher from sitting back and creating bad habits during batting practice.

Bullpens

The bullpen should be utilized not only by pitchers preparing to enter the game, but also by catchers as well. The catcher should report to the bullpen in full gear and have their game face on. No balls should ever get by a catcher in the bullpen. Take pride in your abilities.

Shadow

Catcher starts out in their stance. Coach holds a ball in front of the catcher and moves it around the strike zone. The catcher follows the path of the baseball and frames the area. The catcher should work on body movement and catching the ball in halves.

One Knee Underhand Toss

Coach gets on one knee five to ten feet from the catcher. The coach will underhand toss a ball to the catcher. The catcher will work on body movement and catching the ball in halves. The benefit of this approach is that the coach is close enough that they can be more accurate with their toss and work all areas.

Medium Toss

Coach stands up and throws pitches to a catcher from 40-50 feet. This allows the catcher to track the ball from a longer distance. The catcher will still work on body movement and catching the ball in halves.

Three ball

Place one ball near the first base line, one up the middle, and one near the third base line. Catcher will assume their stance. Coach will stand behind and call out which ball to field. Catcher will attack the ball, field it, and make a strong and accurate throw to a base.

Over the shoulder toss

Catcher will assume their stance. Coach will stand behind the catcher with a ball. The coach will toss the ball over the catchers shoulder. The catcher will field it and throw to a base. A variation can be used by telling the catcher that the runner has great speed and they must hurry. Also, the coach can throw it far enough that a throw to first would be late. The catcher will execute a full arm fake and throw out the lead runner who may have drifted off a base.



Catcher with ball

The catcher starts out with the ball in their glove. Coach will be in front of the catcher. The coach will instruct the catcher to use either load and throw or jump pivot. The catcher will execute the footwork and throw to a partner. Make sure to work both methods of throwing footwork.

One knee partner/coach toss

Catcher at home plate. Partner or coach a few feet in front on one knee. Partner or coach will toss ball to catcher who is already in their stance. The catcher will catch the ball and execute proper throwing footwork and throw to another partner. Being on one knee and tossing the ball will allow the partner or coach to put the ball exactly where they want to work. Also, this will assist the catcher in working on both types of throwing footwork.

Medium/Full toss

Coach will stand halfway or on the mound and throw pitches to the catcher who has already assumed their stance. The catcher will execute footwork determined by the pitch and throw to a partner behind the coach



BATTING DRILLS

Whiffle Ball Batting Drill (pre-practice drill)

Instead of allowing players to play catch when they arrive, set up a whiffle ball batting practice (the best type of ball to use is a 'pickle ball').

One coach can throw to two kids at once; two coaches can throw to four kids, and so on. A coach who has gained proficiency at pitching in this environment can pitch to three kids at once.

Have half the kids batting and half chasing balls (they love this!). Give each player 8 swings then switch. Note: No "one mores". This can turn into 4 or 5 more, and eat up a lot of valuable time. If a player swings and misses on their eighth swing we tell them, "Good Swing!! ...now switch to chasing balls". Suggestion: tell the batter when they have two or three swings left, so they understand they soon will be done batting.

Make it crystal clear to the kids that running through the space between the pitchers (coaches) and batters. Call this space 'Interstate/Hwy 95'. There is no way they would run across a major highway filled with cars and trucks. ...and there is no way we will allow them to run through this space; it is absolutely prohibited. They have to go around the outside. When a player runs through this space, they potentially will run next to another player in the middle of swinging a bat; we do not want this to happen

Making this rule stick is not as simple as telling them one time; even though we point out the safety hazzard. It will take some time, and discipline (on our part as coaches), to train them that there are no exceptions to this rule.

Make it a rule that there is to be no swinging of a bat except when at the 'plate' and when a coach is pitching. Kids will want to pick up balls and try to hit them back to the coaches when picking up balls during or at the end of the drill. Be ready to squash this activity the moment it starts. Make it clear this will not be tolerated under any circumstance.

The origination of Whiffle Ball Batting was to give the players something to do between their arrival at the ballpark and the official start of practice, so to not play catch unsupervised. However, since this is such a fun activity and is only available prior to the start of practice, it becomes an incentive for kids to arrive early. Ultimately this leads to practices starting on time with all or most kids ready to go.

Broomstick (pre-practice drill)

Make a couple of bats from broomsticks about 30" for little league. Purchase practice plastic golf balls at any sporting goods store. Have players break up into two groups of four, one player pitching, one hitting and two others for retrieval. Coach should position himself about 20 feet from the batter. The coach throws the balls to the batter while on one knee.

At first players will have difficulty making contact but with concentration on point of contact they will begin hitting consistently.

This drill can be done anywhere. Prior to practice or prior to a game.



Front Toss Drill (practice 1-12)

Set up a bow net or some other target for the kids to hit into (do not use a fence for this drill).

Players assume their batting stance perpendicular to the net. Coach takes a knee about 4-6 feet from the batter alongside the net. Coach underhand tosses the ball to the hitting zone. Batter attempts to make contact and drive the ball into the net

Give each player 5-10 swings, then rotate batters.

What's the Count Drill (practices 1-12)

Take a round of batting practice, again with the players broken up into small groups, in which the count is different every time the players come to bat. The first time up the count is 0-0. They stay in until the at-bat is complete, with the coach mixing up pitches in a manner consistent with the pitch selection common for that age group. As soon as the player either hits a fair ball or strikes out, a new hitter steps in.

Subsequent at-bats can start with counts of 0-1, 0-2, 1-2, 2-0, 3-1, etc. to simulate different approaches that should be taken. A two-strike swing is protective, while a 2-0 or 3-1 swing should be more aggressive if the pitch is a good one.

A variation on this drill would be to give each batter 16 pitches with different situations. The first 4 could be 0-0 count, the next 4 could be runner on third, the next 4 could be 3-0 count, the last 4 could be swing away.

Two-strike Drill (practices 1-12)

At the end of a specific group's batting practice round, have the kids go through a two-strike drill before they head to another station or return to the field. This is a rapid-fire drill designed to teach them how to protect the plate with two strikes. Again, the coach should mix up pitches. If the player takes a strike or swings and misses, he or she goes to the end of the line. If the player takes a pitch that definitely is not in the strike zone or makes contact in any way, he or she stays in until strike three is recorded. After a couple of times through the line, eliminate the players who strike out until only one remains.

High Hands Drill (practices 4-6)

One of the most common mistakes young hitters make is to drop their hands as the ball approaches. This tends to lead to a long, upper-cut swing in which the shoulders don't remain level (back shoulder drops) and the bat crosses through the same plane along which the pitch is traveling for only a very brief time. The bat head actually seems to come around the ball in a sweeping motion rather than being taken directly to the ball. This problem can become very evident when players hit off of the tee, because they tend to drop their hands and back shoulders in an attempt to elevate the ball.

A variation of the basic tee drill can help correct this problem. Place a ball on the tee and raise it to the top of the strike zone. Will the ball in that position, have the players shift his weight back and then come forward, attempting to swing down to the ball. The object is to hit a hard line drive by staying on top of the ball. To accomplish this there is no way that a batter can drop the hands.



Hip Turner (practices 4-6)

This drill develops quicker hips and the relationship of hip speed to the entire swing.

Place a bat behind the waist, horizontal to the ground, and use a glove as home plate. While holding the ends of the bat in the hands, assume a normal batting stance and watch an imaginary pitch being delivered. Execute a stride and quick turn using the bat to help turn the hips faster. Finish in the proper contact point position.

Tee Hitting for Distance Game (practices 7-9)

Players use proper fundamentals to see how far they can hit a ball off of a tee. Use weight shift (“go back to go forward”), winding up almost like a pitcher to take the weight to the back side before exploding forward. Head should stay on ball and front shoulder and stride should be directly toward the pitcher until contact. Batters who drop the back shoulder and try to hit ball high intentionally are eliminated. Line drives are best, but hard ground balls count. Set up a point system or designate a home run line on the field.

Make sure that the batters are using proper mechanics when striking the ball.

Colored Ball Drill (practices 7-9)

Paint several baseballs with different bright colors (solids, of course). Pitch the ball (or soft toss) to the batter and have the batter call out the color of the ball prior to hitting it. The batter can only swing at the ball if the pitch is in the hitting zone.

Variation- Soft toss two balls at once. Just before tossing, coach tells batter which color to hit.

If you only have white baseballs - tell batter to hit top or bottom ball, or simply ask the batter to pick one of the two balls to hit. The objective is to force the hitter to concentrate on the ball, and place the bat squarely on the ball

Opposite Field Drill (practices 7-12)

There will be some games when the opposing pitcher throws very slowly. This will cause your players to over-swing, swing too soon, or change their hitting mechanics in order to hit the baseball. It can be very frustrating for hitters and coaches alike.

Here is a simple drill to combat that, and to teach your players the proper way to take the ball to the opposite field.

Coach behind L-screen soft tosses pitches to the batter. The batter attempts to hit the baseball to the opposite field by allowing the baseball to travel deep into the strike zone.

In order to hit the slowly pitched ball the other way, the batter must “keep his hands back” to allow the ball to travel over the plate. No change in swing mechanics is necessary.



Throw 10 pitches to each player. Batter gets a point for hitting the baseball to the opposite side of second base. Foul balls don't count.

Outside Pitch Tee Drill (practices 10-12)

Another common mistake young hitters make is pulling their front shoulders away from the ball ("pulling off" the pitch) as it approaches home plate. Many times this is a result of fear.

We want the players to focus on shifting their weight back before coming forward. Often times, however, when the kids come forward they take their stride, their front shoulder and, ultimately, their energy away from the pitcher. This will cause them to lose power when hitting any pitch except one on the inside part of the plate. Or it will cause them to miss the pitch on the outside half altogether. The best weight shift in the world can be rendered meaningless if the movement forward isn't a short, soft stride toward the pitcher.

If you try the short toss drill with a player who is experiencing this problem and it still doesn't seem to help, consider going back to the batting tee. Move the entire tee in such a way that it simulates a pitch on the outside half of the plate. Have the batter assume a normal stance, shift the weight back before coming forward with a short stride toward the pitcher (or slightly toward the ball) and attempt to hit a line drive to the opposite field. If the player is pulling weak ground balls or hitting the ball off the end of the bat, he or she is "pulling off" the ball and needs to concentrate on taking the stride and the front shoulder more toward the pitcher or the ball. Before correcting players who are struggling with this, be sure that they aren't simply taking their eyes off the ball before contact.

One word of caution before trying this variation of the tee drill: Most coaches don't understand the proper tee placement for hitting the outside pitch. It's not good enough just to move the tee to the front part of the outside of the plate. If you look at still photos of the great hitters, they hit the inside pitch well out in front of home plate, the pitch down the middle slightly in front of home plate and the outside pitch several inches behind the front edge of home plate. Hitting these pitches in this manner allows the bat head to take the most direct path to the ball, which means that the hitter's mechanics are fundamentally sound. This increases the batter's chances of driving the ball up the middle or the opposite way.

So, when setting up the tee to simulate an outside pitch in the location that it should be hit, move the entire tee so that the ball is over the outside part of the plate about four to six inches behind the front edge (toward the catcher).



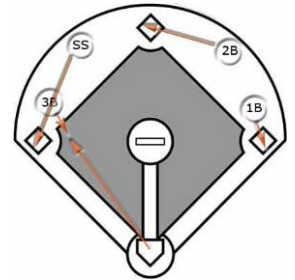
TEAM DRILLS

Infield Rotation Drill (practices 1-6)

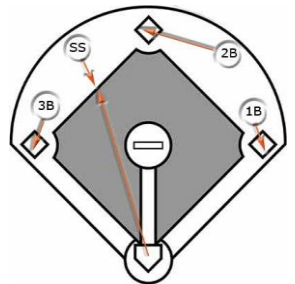
This drill teaches the players infielder's (second and shortstop) responsibility on an infield ground ball. Conceptually, you want the shortstop and second baseman to think about "following the ball" when the ball is put in play in the infield.

With players at third, short, second, and first, the coach hits the ball to any position in the infield. The players are asked to execute the proper infield rotation to be in position to make a play on a runner at any base.

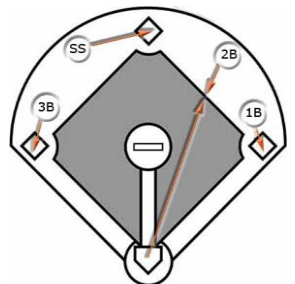
If a ball is hit to the third baseman, the shortstop follows the ball (covers third), the second baseman moves toward the ball (covers second). The first baseman covers his base.



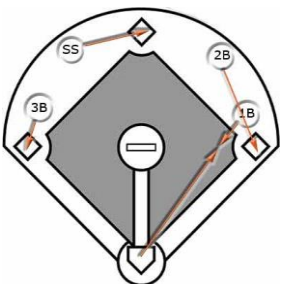
If a ball is hit to the shortstop, the second baseman follows the ball (covers second). The first and third basemen cover their bases. The shortstop can either make the play at third, second, or first.



If the ball is hit to the second baseman, the shortstop follows the ball (covers second). The first and third basemen cover their bases. The second baseman can either make a play at second or first.



If the ball is hit to the first baseman, the second baseman follows the ball and covers first base; the shortstop follows the ball and covers second base. The third baseman covers his base. The first baseman can either make a play at first, second, or third base.



You can run this drill with only the infield, or add the outfield. Each position has a responsibility when a ball is put in play. The players are either moving toward the ball or moving toward a base.

“Home Run” Derby Game (practices 1-12)

This is a basic batting drill to help a player work on the contact they make with the ball and for the defense to make plays

Divide your team in half (or have the player pick teams – choose 2 captains to pick players). One team will bat, while the other team plays the field.

Each player on offense gets 5 swings at the ball pitched by the coach. The coach should help the batter set up properly so they can increase the chance of good contact.

The players in the field are spread along the basepath and assume defensive position.

The objective for the offense is to hit the baseball (fair) past the infielders. The objective for the defense is to keep the ball in front of them by any means possible (ball does not need to be fielded cleanly, just kept in front).

The offense gets a “home run” for each ball that gets past the infielders. The team with the most home runs, wins the game.

Batter Out Game (practices 1-12)

This is a good game that works on three critical areas: hitting, fielding and catching.

Divide the team into two teams. Make sure that you have a catcher and first baseman on each team. You can use either a tee, or allow the coach to pitch. Make sure the batter has a helmet on.

If you have more than 5 fielders, that’s ok. Spread them out in the infield. Make sure they understand the area that they’re supposed to cover. There are no outfielders in this game.

The batters will try to hit the ball, and the fielders try to make a play to first base. The offense is awarded 1 point if the batter beats the throw to first base, or if a fair ball leaves the infield (not caught). The defense receives one point if they throw out the runner at first, catch a pop fly, or the batter strikes out. You can allow each player on the team to bat 2 or 3 times.

The team with the most points wins.

Get the Out Game (practices (practices 7-12)

This is a variation on the Home Run Derby game. It incorporates a lot of the same fun competition as the HRD game, and will help teach the kids where to make plays in the field.



Divide the team into two separate teams. One team bats while the other takes the infield positions. The objective of the offense is to score runs. The objective of the defense is to get outs.

Establish how many 3 out innings you want to play before you switch positions in the field. A coach (or machine) pitches to each batter. The objective of the batter is to put the ball in play to force the infield to make a play. The batter runs out the hit ball, while the infield tries to make a play (the coaches want to ask the defense, “where’s the play” before every batter gets up). If the batter is out, he leaves the base path. If the batter is safe, he retains his position on the bases, and is ready to advance based on the next batter’s hit. The inning/game continues until the all the outs are made. The offense receives a point for each run scored.

Based on the level of play, you might want to encourage the offense to take extra bases, or simply move station to station.

Star Drill Game (practices 7-12)

Your team will most likely struggle with this drill initially. It puts a ton of pressure on the defense to catch throws, transition to a throw, and make accurate throws. As you run this drill more often, the players will become more comfortable with it and you will be able to add throws to the drill.

Divide your team in half. Half of the teams are on defense, half on offense. Line up the offense at home plate with their helmets on. The defense takes positions at pitcher, catcher, first base, second base, shortstop, and third base. If you have more players than positions, double up at some bases.

The objective of the drill is for the defense to throw out the runner at home, after throwing the ball to each of the players in a specific order.

The drill begins when the pitcher throws the ball to the catcher. Once the ball is released, the runner begins running around the bases. The catcher throws the ball to the shortstop covering second base. The shortstop makes the swipe tag. The shortstop then throws the ball to the third baseman covering third. He also makes a swipe tag. The third baseman throws the ball across the diamond to the first baseman. The first baseman makes a swipe tag, then throws the ball to the second baseman covering second. The second baseman makes the swipe tag, turns and fires the ball to the catcher covering home plate. The catcher makes the tag on the runner headed toward the plate.

This drill can be done with and without the swipe tag. If the defense executes the throws quickly, they should be able to throw out the runner at home. If the defense gets good at this drill, and consistently throws out the runner by a wide margin, you can add a throw or two to the defensive task.

This drill helps the runners with their base running skills, as well as teaches the defense to make good throws under pressure.

You can modify the throws during this drill, but do not throw the baseball toward a runner (ie from 2nd to 1st when a runner is between 1st and 2nd base). When improvising this drill, you can call out the next base prior to the ball being received by the fielder. In that way you can work on throws to other bases and keep the game interesting. The speed of the runner also dictates where and how many throws you make.



COACHING STRATEGIES

Base Running General

Basic Principles: think "getting to the next base". Avoid wide turns. Coaches STOP runners. Default is to keep going hard. Avoid "base to base" mentality. Players read breaking ball pitch count (0-2, 1-2) and anticipate a ball in the dirt.

Teach your players not to avoid making mistakes on the basepaths. Teach them to play the game hard.

Two outs, two strikes, look to run on the swing.

Make sure your players understand what they are to do with 2 out and 3-2 count.

Slow runners should take a short lead and aggressive secondary lead. Be ready to return to the base on a ball not hit by the batter.

Runners at first MUST look at the 3rd base coach when approaching second base, then again when approaching third base. Base runners run until coaches stop them.

Remember to tag up on foul balls as well as fair balls. Tag up on all obvious foul balls. Runners should "go halfway" on batted balls which will be easily caught and offer no opportunity to advance.

Picked off? Keep running and slide. Run on inside of line. Draw throws from the outfield ALWAYS.

Left foot and drive on the base when rounding bases.

Runner On First Base

First base checklist

- 1) Lead is 2 steps prior to the set position, get an additional step or two after set position.
- 2) Draw a throw to see pitcher's move (if the runner's speed allows for a potential steal)
- 3) Coach reinforces situation and strategy.
- 4) Check outfielder's position.
- 5) Advance if the runner ahead of you advances.

Lefty on mound – first lead is "big" but look to get back; next pitch shorten lead, go on first movement and slide into second no matter what.

Righty on mound – lead is aggressive. Focus on feet of pitcher. Pivot foot moves get back to the base. Take off on first movement of front foot.



On batted balls that leave the infield – balls hit in front of the runner (left and centerfield), runner decides whether to advance to third. If they don't see the ball (right center and right field), coach decides whether to STAY. Runners need to pick up the coach 2/3 of the way to 2nd base.

First and third with 0/1 out – when stealing, runner on first MUST slide to outfield side of bag. IF "dead out" slide past bag and avoid tag.

Balls hit to right field thinking about getting to third.

99% of the time in a 1st and 3rd situation the steal will be on. Look for the steal sign!

Runner On Second Base

Second base check list

- 1) Know the outs and the situation.
- 2) Take normal primary lead, secondary lead in motion during the pitch.
- 3) If no one is holding you on, you should steal third (verbal sign).
- 4) Know where the 2nd baseman is. The coach will help you with the shortstop.
- 5) Advance if the runner ahead of you advances.
- 6) Advance immediately on ground balls hit to right side.
- 7) Advance only after the throw to first on balls hit to left side.
- 8) Read all fly balls to establish correct distance from the base. Tag up only on bombs to outfield – especially to right.

Signal to the batter if you know the signs: Tap on the helmet; Hands on knees = breaking pitch; Hands OFF knees equals fastball.

Runner On Third Base

Coach's instruction less than 2 outs (always remind the player):

- 1) Conservative primary lead
- 2) Aggressive secondary lead (with momentum moving toward home on the pitch – NOT stationary)
- 3) Lead in foul territory. Back to the base in FAIR territory.
- 4) Read ball down and past pitcher with contact play on (coach's instructions)
- 5) Freeze/go back on line drives
- 6) Back to the base on fly balls (fair or foul)
- 7) Read passed ball – look for hitter's signals
- 8) Do not steal home if you hesitate

First and third situations – fake 3 -4 steps home to protect runner. Read throw from catcher. If the throw passes the pitcher, take home.

Lead off the base in foul, back to the base in fair. Runner turns back to catcher and RUNS back to third base. Coach says, "clean" if there is no throw. Coach says "down" if there is a throw from the catcher.



I. DEFENSE

General Defense

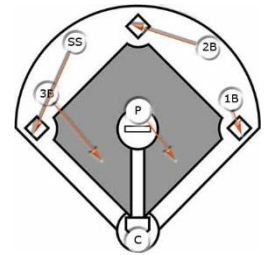
Give up the run to get the out – in a loss, 75% of the time the opposing team scores more runs in one inning than your team did in the entire game.

Bunt Defense

Play calling based on the side of the field that the PITCHER covers.

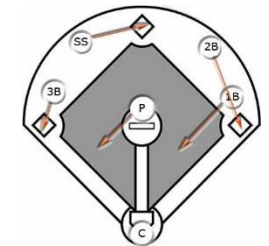
“B-1” – Pitcher covers first base side. Third baseman charges. First baseman stays at first. Second baseman to cover second. Shortstop to third base.

When to use: Runner on first base in obvious sacrifice situation.



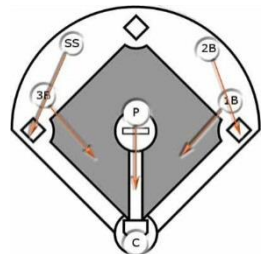
“B-3” – Pitcher covers third base side. First baseman charges. Third baseman stays at home. Second baseman to first base. Shortstop to second base.

When to use: Runner on second, or runners on first and second. This play does not allow the offense to get third base free when the batter squares to bunt and the third baseman charges, leaving 3rd base open.



“B-4” – Pitcher covers area in front of pitcher’s mound. Third baseman and first baseman charge. Shortstop to third base. Second baseman to first base. Center fielder to second base (optional)

When to use: Any sacrifice bunt situation where you are willing to give up a play at second base to get an out on the corners. Make certain that if you use this rotation with a runner on second base the shortstop covers 3rd and beats the runner to the base.



To defend the suicide squeeze play, the third baseman charges with the runner on third base and alerts the defense by yelling “squeeze”. Pitcher covers first base side. If bunt is successful, get the out at first.

Pitcher Pickoffs

A verbal sign given by coach during pitch calling.

Pick off at First – Coach gives the visual pitch selection sign, followed by naming an east coast city (New York, Boston, Miami, Baltimore, etc). Catcher’s signal to the pitcher is his pinky extended toward first base.

Pick off at first (double throw from right handed pitcher) - Coach gives the visual pitch selection sign, followed by naming an east coast city twice (New York New York, Boston Boston, Miami Miami, Baltimore Baltimore, etc). Catcher’s signal to the pitcher is his pinky extended twice toward first base. Catcher signals



to first base with palm up. Pitcher uses “B” move to first base and walks toward first base to get the ball. On his way back to the top of the mound, the pitcher touches the rubber with his right foot and throws the ball quickly back to first.

Pick off at Second – Coach gives the visual pitch selection sign, followed by naming a mid-west city (Detroit, Chicago, Kansas City, Dallas, Milwaukee, etc). Catcher’s signal to the pitcher is a fist.

Pick off at Third - Coach gives the visual pitch selection sign, followed by naming a west coast city (Los Angeles, San Diego, Portland, Seattle, etc). Catcher’s signal to the pitcher is a thumb extended toward third base.

Pick off plays

Pick off at second – Shortstop positions himself directly behind the runner and out of the runner’s line of sight, with a clear view of the catcher. Shortstop opens his closed glove when the pitcher looks back at the runner. Pitcher counts to two, begins the windup and turns his front leg back to second base. The shortstop breaks to the bag. Centerfielder breaks to back up the play. The pitcher throws the ball to the third base side of second base. Shortstop makes the tag.

Catcher’s pickoffs

Pick off runner at third – Coach gives visual pitch selection sign followed by the color “red”, “white” or “blue” – where red =1st base, white = 2nd base, and blue = 3rd base. Catcher makes eye contact with the fielder and throws dirt toward the base to which he will throw. Defensive player acknowledges with causal kick of the dirt.

First and Third Defense

“1X” (where “X” is any number) – Coach gives verbal signal to the field. Pitcher delivers the pitch. Catcher throws the ball to the pitcher. Pitcher can turn and throw to either second, third, or home, depending on what the offense does.

“4X” (where “X” is any number) – Coach gives verbal signal to the field. Pitcher delivers the pitch. Catcher throws the ball to the second baseman who has taken several steps inside the base path. Second baseman reads the play to see if there is a throw to be made to third base or home.

“5X” (where “X” is any number) – Coach gives verbal signal to the field. Pitcher delivers the pitch. Shortstop or second baseman covers second base. Catcher fakes the throw to second base and throws the ball to third to attempt to pick off the runner at third.

“6X” (where “X” is any number) – Coach gives verbal signal to the field. Pitcher delivers the pitch. Catcher throws the ball to the shortstop who has taken several steps inside the base path. Shortstop reads the play to see if there is a throw to be made to third base or home.



“2X” (where “X” is any number) – Coach gives verbal signal to the field. Pitcher delivers the pitch. Shortstop or second baseman covers second base. Catcher throws the ball to second base in an attempt to get the runner going from first to second.

Runners on 1st and 3rd

Standard Play – No verbal signal. Pitcher delivers the pitch. The shortstop is to cover second base. The second baseman moves between the pitcher’s mound and second base. The catcher throws the ball through to the shortstop covering second base. The second baseman reads the throw and the runner on third. The second baseman has three options:

- 1) Cut off an errant throw made by the catcher.
- 2) Allow an accurate throw to go through to second base if the runner on third is holding.
- 3) Cut off the throw from the catcher and make the play on the runner headed home from third.

See above for other plays to be made by the defense.

Fly ball Priorities

Fly ball priorities are as follows:

Outfield – Center fielder has priority on all fly balls. Left and right fielders must yield to a center field call.

Shallow fly ball – All infielders yield to a call from any outfielder.

Infield pop ups – Shortstop and second baseman have priority over every other infielder. Each infielder should go aggressively toward the baseball until called off. Make sure someone is covering the bases in the infield on pop ups.

Holding Runners

Never hold trailing runner at second base.

First base – first baseman must be in fair territory. Right foot against bag.

Second base – general rule is 2nd base holds with a right-handed batter, and short stop holds with a left-handed batter. Infielders move off second base prior to the pitch. No need to be “on the bag” to hold runners at 2nd base. Eight to ten feet from the base – with an occasional feign toward the bag – should be sufficient.

Third base – defense “lays off” the runner. It is more of a “casual hold”. Better to be in good defensive position than to hold runner. This is also a better position to pick off the runner with a throw from the catcher. Hold runner on third only to keep runner from getting a jump on a passed ball – used late in the game if the game is close.



Miscellaneous Coaching Signs (verbal and non-verbal)

“Let’s go COLOR” defense – used for pick off at second base with bases loaded.

“Let’s go COLOR” offense – used to alert base runners to a base running opportunity.

“99 [insert name]” – used to alert player to call time out and tie shoes so that coach can give offensive instruction at close quarters – make sure that when you leave the player after helping him tie his shoes that you remind the other players to tie their shoes.

“Red”, “White”, “Blue” – used to designate the base to which the catcher will make a throw. Verbal signal is given during the pitch calling sequence by the coach. “Red” = 1st base, “White” = 2nd base, and “Blue” = 3rd base. Catcher’s signal to the position player would be palm up to the base. Defense acknowledges with casual kicking of the dirt.

In general, use a COLOR to alert players that something special is going on. For example:

“Here we go Green” – used to signify to the batter that a fake bunt has been called for. This play is used with a runner at second. If the third baseman charges, the runner on second base takes third.

“Let’s go Orange” – verbal signal given by the coach with runner on 3rd base to signal a safety squeeze.

Hawaiian “Hang Loose” sign – given by the base coaches to signify to the trail runner to get into a rundown.

1st Base coach swipes hand across chest during a walk to a batter with a runner on third – signals to the batter to run through 1st base and, without hesitating, take second base.

Pitching

Based upon its expertise and review of existing studies, the USA Baseball Medical & Safety Advisory Committee (<http://www.asmi.org/asmiweb/usabaseball.htm>) makes the following recommendations for minimizing a pitcher’s risk of future serious arm injury and maximizing his chance of success:

- Coaches and parents should listen and react appropriately to a youth pitcher when he/she complains about arm pain. A pitcher who complains or shows signs of arm pain during a game should be removed immediately from pitching. Parents should seek medical attention if pain is not relieved within four days or if the pain recurs immediately the next time the player pitches. League officials should inform parents about this consideration.
- Pitch counts should be monitored and regulated in youth baseball. Recommended limits for youth pitchers are as follows:
 - Recommended limits for 13-14 year old pitchers:
 - 75 pitches per game



- 125 pitches per week
 - 1000 pitches per season / 3000 pitches per year
-
- Pitch count limits pertain to pitches thrown in games only. These limits do not include throws from other positions, instructional pitching during practice sessions, and throwing drills, which are important for the development of technique and strength. Backyard pitching practice after a pitched game is strongly discouraged.
 - The risk of throwing breaking pitches until physical maturity requires further research but throwing curves and sliders, particularly with poor mechanics appears to increase the risk of injury.
 - Pitchers should develop proper mechanics as early as possible and include more year-round physical conditioning as their body develops.
 - A Pitcher should be prohibited from returning to the mound in a game once he/she has been removed as the pitcher.
 - Baseball players – especially pitchers - are discouraged from participating in showcases due to the risk of injury. The importance of “showcases” should be de-emphasized, and at the least, pitchers should be permitted time to appropriately prepare.
 - Baseball pitchers are discouraged from pitching for more than one team in a given season.

Baseball pitchers should compete in baseball no more than nine months in any given year, as periodization is needed to give the pitcher’s body time to rest and recover. For at least three months a year, a baseball pitcher should not play any baseball, participate in throwing drills, or participate in other stressful overhead activities (javelin throwing, football quarterback, softball, competitive swimming, etc.).

Hitter averages (2007 major leagues).

From the chart below, it can be concluded that it is in the best interest of the pitcher to throw strikes to get ahead of the hitter.

0-0 = .344	0-1 = .324	0-2 = .166
1-0 = .341	1-1 = .327	1-2 = .178
2-0 = .351	2-1 = .338	2-2 = .195
3-0 = .394	3-1 = .368	3-2 = .233

Pitch selection

- 1) 0-2 count, fastball up
- 2) After a fastball is pulled, throw change up next pitch.



Pitching basics

8U & 9U – speed doesn't matter as much as strikes do.

10U & 11U – strikes and speed variation matter. Introduce change of speeds (lob change). Coaches begin calling pitches.

12U – speed variation and strikes matter. Change up with proper grip is introduced.

Teach cutter and curveball if the pitcher is ready. Proper mechanics is a must.

Increase expectations for pitch location.

13U & up – fast ball and curve ball are must pitches. Location is significant factor.

Pitching with runners on 11U & up

1) Vary pitch cadence – time between set position and pitch varies

2) Understand what objectives are for pickoff moves. Righty – keep the runner close. Lefty – pick off the runner.

Umpire Management

Rule #1 – Don't ever yell at an umpire. You're never going to win a screaming argument with an umpire. It may make you feel better, and will certainly get the attention of the umpire, opposing team, spectators, and players, but you will rarely win your point if you argue and scream at the umpire. In fact, the umpire will most likely conclude that you're a jerk and could decide to stick it to you later in the game.

Rule #2 – Don't argue judgment calls. Umpires, players, and coaches make mistakes – it's part of the game. While simple statements from time to time are acceptable ("hey blue, I think you missed that one"), constant bickering at an umpire over balls and strikes, safe and out, etc, won't get you anywhere.

Rule #3 – Always ask questions. If you want to "win" an argument with an umpire you have to ask questions in a normal adult voice. Getting the umpire to answer questions for you will help him realize that he might have made a mistake. Lead the umpire with the proper questions to help him understand the rule. If you're civil in your questioning, you might even get the umpire to change his ruling on a non-judgment call. Golden Rule: You need to understand the rules in order to ask questions.

Rule #4 – If there is a second umpire, request that the umpire "ask for help" on the call. If you've followed rules 1-3, you'll have a great chance to get the umpire to ask his partner what he saw. At the end of the day, you just want the umpires to get the call right (and so do they).



COACHING

Coaching Youth Baseball

*This excerpt is from the book, **Coaching Youth Baseball the Ripken Way (Human Kinetics, 2006) by Cal and Bill Ripken with Scott Lowe***

Baseball gets serious enough fast enough. As coaches, we need to recognize this and do our best not to put too much pressure on young, developing baseball players. These days it's not uncommon to see 8-, 9- and 10-year-old kids playing 40 or more baseball games in a summer for their local travel teams. In some ways this is great. Youth players today have opportunities to play baseball that we never had. If the kids wake up every day and all they talk about is that day's game or practice – if they're truly excited to get out on the baseball field that often without being pushed – then, by all means, let them have at it.

The truth of the matter, however, is that for most kids that's too much baseball. When kids get to be 11 or 12 years old, they begin forming their own likes and dislikes. Kids at this age start making their own decisions on what they want to do. If they don't want to play that many games, they won't; it's as simple as that. Younger children are not so independent in their thinking, however. Most of them still want to do what makes mom or dad happy. So, the danger is that there will be kids who really do enjoy the game of baseball on a recreational level and will keep going out there to play on a travel team every day because it's what their parents want. At some point, usually then they turn 11 or 12, these kids will get sick of the sport and look for other ways to spend their recreational time. This is dangerous for the future of baseball.

You also have the other extreme, which is just as dangerous. Many kids enjoy baseball or are at least curious about the sport. They want to be part of a team and to learn and enjoy the game in a structured environment. We call these kids recreational or in-house players. However, if you look at these kids as the seeds representing the future of the game, it's very important to nurture them properly, just as you would water the grass seed in your front yard or the seeds for the flowers you've planted in your garden.

Children don't mature at the same rate physically. Plus their interest levels and attention spans vary considerably from age group to age group. If a player is interested in baseball at a very young age, but is not as physically prepared to play as some of his or her peers, that player's interests and needs must be considered. If that player has a positive experience, he or she is likely to stick with the sport. At some point he or she is going to mature and might turn into a heck of a ballplayer. If he or she is neglected or has an otherwise negative experience early on, the sport of baseball loses out on a potential superstar, or at the very least, a potential lifelong fan. Neither of these outcomes is good for the game.

Similarly, if a player is only moderately interested in the sport, it's important that his or her interest be cultivated and maintained. There are a lot of activities competing for the attention of the young people in this country. If I'm an active 10-year-old and can play basketball, baseball, football or soccer, I'm probably going to give them all a try to find out which ones I like. Initial experiences and impressions significantly influence how a child feels about something. If football practice is more exciting than baseball practice, I'm probably going to make sure I make it to football practice every time. I'll go to baseball practice when I feel like it or if it fits into my schedule.



With all this in mind, it's easy to see that youth baseball coaches – most of them volunteers trying to balance their own work and family lives with coaching – play an enormous role in shaping a child's on-field experience. Almost all male adults played baseball at some point in their lives. It's one game that everyone seems to think they know something about. So, when our kids decide to play T-ball or baseball, we feel confident that we can get out there for a few hours a week and make a positive impact by coaching their teams.

Unfortunately, it's not that simple. Baseball is a game that lends itself to some standing around. A lot of the strategy and thinking involved in baseball takes place in between the actual game action. As we get older, the strategic part of the game becomes very appealing to us. Younger kids are not built that way, however. Attention spans are short at the younger ages, and energy levels are high. If these factors aren't considered by the youth baseball or T-ball coach, their players' earliest experiences can be negative.

So, as you can see, there's a fine line to walk as a youth baseball coach. Again, think of the kids as seeds that need to be nurtured. Every seed is a little bit different and needs its own personal attention. You're not going to treat grass seed the same way that you treat a pumpkin seed or a geranium seed. If you treat them all the same way, some will grow and others will die. Likewise, if you try to handle every kid at every age the same way, you're going to kill some of the kids' interest along the way, and participation will decrease.

Motor skill development is age specific. Sure, you're going to find some advanced 5-year-olds who can catch thrown and hit balls pretty regularly. But, for most kids that age, catching is one of the hardest skills to develop. As coaches, we need to be able to cater to the needs of the kid who can't catch one ball and still make baseball fun and exciting for the kid who can. It's a difficult balance, but one that's important to understand at all age levels.

A list of a youth baseball coach's responsibilities:

- Be an effective communicator
- Create a safe, enjoyable environment
- Be a role model
- Be organized



Coaching Your Own Child

*This excerpt is from the book, **Coaching Youth Baseball the Ripken Way (Human Kinetics, 2006) by Cal and Bill Ripken with Scott Lowe.***

Many, if not most, coaches get involved with youth baseball because they want to make sure that their children have a positive experience. The local league might be short on coaches and be looking for volunteers, or perhaps a parent who has a busy work-week sees coaching as a way to spend some quality time with his or her child.

Some of these parents have a lot of baseball experience, and others have very little. Some have coached before, and others have never set foot on a field. All of them want their children to have a great experience, and none of them wants to show favoritism. This seeming contradiction can lead to some difficult situations for these coaches.

For parents coaching their own children, the golden rule is to treat your child just like everyone else on the team, in good times and in bad. It doesn't matter if your kid is one of the best players or one of the lesser-skilled players. On the one hand, don't give your child preferential treatment when it comes to playing time or a spot in the batting order. On the other hand, don't weigh your child down with unfair burdens that aren't placed on the other players. For example, don't ask your kid to always carry the team equipment or to make sure the other players are doing the drills correctly. And, finally, be very careful not to discipline your child in a way that separates him or her from the others. You want your child to look forward to being on the baseball field, not dread what punishment you might inflict if practice isn't going well.

Balancing this dynamic can be difficult. The natural instincts are to protect your child, whereas the fear is that other parents will think that you are playing favorites. If your policy is to not argue with umpires – as it should be – make sure you don't question an umpire if your child is on the short end of a close call. If you reverse the batting order each inning, make sure that your child has to adhere to that rule. If every player sits out two innings, your kid should, too. Make sure that any personal disagreements that arise are handled at home and not in front of the team, and that your child is not disciplined at practice because he or she did something wrong at home.

There is always time before and after practices and games to give your child extra attention and to help him or her improve. But when the team is together on the field, make sure that you do the best that you can to give everyone equal attention and treatment.

As players get older and things such as designating team captains and handing out team awards become more a part of coaching, continue to go out of your way to treat your child the same way you treat the other team members. If you think that your kid is captain material, instead of appointing captains, let the team vote and be willing to stick with those selections. You can do the same thing for team awards, or you can even let the parents vote on these. By handling difficult situations in this manner, no one can question you, no matter what happens. The parents and team members can't accuse you of favorable treatment if your child is chosen, and your son or daughter can't accuse you of going out of your way not to acknowledge him or her. In the long run, recognition from teammates will mean more to your child than recognition from you.



Another thing to be wary of is singling out your child for mistakes made by the team or for overall lackluster play. Everyone is responsible in these situations. If you feel like you need to be a little more stern than usual to get through to your team, pull them aside away from everyone and address the situation. Don't let your need to have an outlet to release your pent-up frustration cause you to unfairly discipline your child.

Remember, when it comes to having your son or daughter on your team – no matter what level you are coaching – live by the golden rule: Treat your child the same way as every other team member. If you can manage to do that, your life will be easier on and off the field.



Evaluating Your Coaching Experience

By Cal and Bill Ripken

Even the most successful youth baseball teams have concluded their seasons at this point in the year. Unfortunately, many volunteer coaches see the end of their seasons as a relief – an opportunity to do something else during their free time. They've put a lot of time and energy into helping the kids on their teams get better and now it's time to hit the links or go fishing. Before you pick up the golf clubs or put your boat in the water, however, we would recommend taking a few minutes to review your season.

We understand that most volunteers make a great sacrifice in giving up some of their personal free time to help kids learn the game of baseball. We also understand that there are many challenges involved in coaching youth sports and that after a season of coaching, just like with any activity, it is natural to look forward to taking a break. However, a review is much more effective and accurate if it takes place as close to the end of the season as possible.

While it may not be clear in your mind as to whether you will be coaching again in the future – we certainly hope that you will – if you do end up coaching, you owe it to yourself to evaluate your season as accurately and objectively as possible. If you wait too long to do this you run the risk of forgetting many of the details that made your season either frustrating or rewarding.

It also would be helpful to your players and their parents to provide an evaluation of each player's progress and what each one needs to work on to become a better ballplayer. Finally, if you don't end up coaching and turn the team over to another coach, a formal review of the season could prove to be extremely helpful to the new person who will be taking over the program.

A thorough season review should consist of three parts. Part one should be a review of your performance as a coach; part two should be based on team accomplishments and progress; and part three should be an evaluation of each individual player. The first two components are a necessary part of any review, while the third is optional (although your parents would be appreciative). In no way should any of these three areas be based on wins and losses or statistics, and the entire evaluation should be as positive as possible.

When evaluating your performance as a coach, the key components to look at are:

- Did you enjoy the experience?
 - o If you didn't, there is very little chance that the kids did. Why did you enjoy it or not enjoy it, and what can you do in the future to ensure that you enjoy coaching more?
- Did you lead by example?
 - o Were you positive at all times?
 - o Did you single out kids for mistakes?
 - o Were you patient?
 - o Did you deal with umpires in a professional, courteous manner?
 - o Did you handle parental complaints and issues in a polite, professional manner?
 - o Did you interact appropriately with opposing team coaches and players?
 - o Were you consistently on time?
- Were you organized?



- Did you develop appropriate team goals for the season and create practices that focused on achieving those goals?
- Did you run fun, effective practices?
- Did you emphasize fun and learning over winning?

When evaluating your team's progress, consider the following:

- Did the players have fun?
 - o Were they as excited at the last practice as they were at the first?
 - o Did they talk a lot about next year or next season and seem excited about it?
 - o Were they sad to see the season come to an end?
- Can you pinpoint one area in which each of your players improved?
- Did the team improve as a unit?
- Did the team achieve the goals that you set prior to the season?
- Did the team surpass the goals that you set in any particular area?
- Was your team competitive on a regular basis?
- Did your team display good sportsmanship and proper behavior toward opposing coaches, opposing supporters and umpires?

When evaluating each individual's progress, take the following into consideration, remembering to keep the comments positive in all instances:

- What were each player's strongest attributes in each of the following areas?:
 - o Throwing
 - o Catching
 - o Fielding
 - o Hitting
 - o Baserunning
 - o Knowledge of the game
 - o Pitching (if appropriate)
 - o Sportsmanship
 - o Team play/Being a good teammate
- What can each player do to improve in each of the following areas?:
 - o Throwing
 - o Catching
 - o Fielding
 - o Hitting
 - o Baserunning
 - o Knowledge of the game
 - o Pitching (if appropriate)
 - o Sportsmanship
 - o Team play/Being a good teammate
- Create a list of season highlights and achievements for each player

Our dad, Cal Ripken, Sr., used to say, "If it's worth doing, it's worth doing right." Keeping that in mind, as a coach it is important to bring your season to closure. Your job as a coach is to help your team members



develop into better all-around baseball players. Simply concluding the season without giving the kids and their parents any feedback about their progress and what they need to improve upon would be leaving part of the job unfinished. Reviewing your team's performance will take a little bit of time, but in the end it will reinforce your commitment to helping the players on your team improve and may eliminate a lot of one-on-one phone calls and conversations that could take up even more time during the off-season.

An end-of-the-season party in which you acknowledge each player's contribution to the team, thank the parents for their support and hand out any awards that you might have to present, affords a great opportunity for coaches to bring the season to a close. It also is the perfect venue to pass out the team and confidential individual season reviews.

During the season there are times when a coach must raise his or her voice to reinforce a point, communicate over a great distance or to discipline team members. Realistically, even the calmest of coaches is going to have moments when tensions run a bit high. It's something that we all try our best to avoid but still happens. The end-of-the-year fun get together, combined with a positive season review, can help reinforce how much you care about each player and demonstrate to them that you are committed to providing them with a positive experience and helping them grow as athletes. Parents will be impressed and appreciative, and hopefully everyone will leave with a good feeling about the season and the future.

