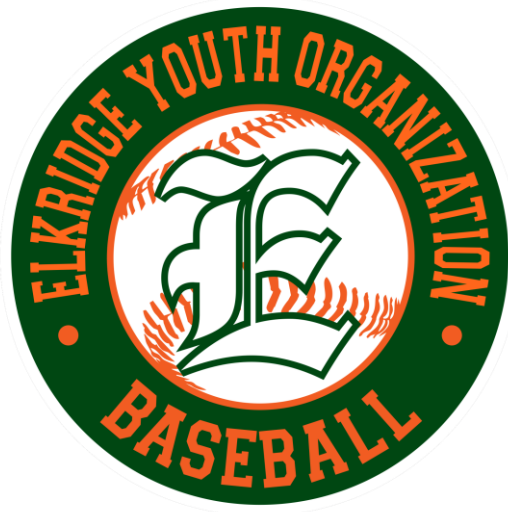


# Elkridge Youth Organization Tee Ball Coach's Manual



# 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 Tee Ball Rules**

### ***Age***

All children ages 4 to 6 may play T-Ball. Baseball age is established as of May 1<sup>st</sup>

### ***Purpose***

To provide a safe, fun, non-competitive environment for kids to learn about and enjoy the game of baseball.

### ***Field Dimensions***

Bases set 45 feet apart; home to 2nd base 63 feet 7 inches.

### ***Umpires***

There are no umpires at this level. All runners are safe.

### ***Pitcher/Catcher***

There are no pitchers or catchers at this level, however, a team should field a pitcher as a defensive position.

### ***Batting***

Each player in attendance will bat in every inning, regardless of the number of putouts. An inning will not end until every player has batted. The last batter up will hit a home run and clear the bases. All batters and base runners must wear a helmet.

### ***Balls***

Foam core, regulation tee-ball balls will be used.

### ***Base Running***

Base runners will move from base to base on a hit ball. There is no advancement beyond the next base at this level.

### ***Scoring***

No score will be kept.

### ***Fielding/Defense***

All players are placed in the field, and are playing defense every inning. Players should be rotated through each position on the field. It is recommended that parents stand in the field to participate with and encourage their child when on defense.

### ***Game Duration***

Each game will last 1 ½ hours. This includes the 45-60 minutes of pre-game practice. Tee-ball practice drills and games are outlined in the Coach's Manual.



## *Tee Ball Key Coaching Elements*

### Key Instructional/Coaching Objectives:

The principal responsibility of a coach at the Tee Ball 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. Begin to develop proper hitting mechanics. Introduce concept of weight shift (more info to come).
4. Keep things simple and basic.
5. 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).
6. 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 (Tee Ball / Novice)**

(more detailed drills by week are listed in the pages that follow)

5 - 10 Minutes:	Base running Drills
10 - 15 Minutes:	Throwing Program/playing catch
20 – 25 Minutes:	Stations – small groups, 10 – 15 minutes per station and rotate A) Batting Drills B) Fielding Drills C) Team Drills
45 Minutes	Scrimmage

**It is requested that every team game/scrimmage should be preceded by a significant amount of practice (30 – 45 minutes).**



## **Fundamentals for EVERY PRACTICE**

The first 20 minutes of practice should be dedicated to running and throwing/catching. These drills add fun to any practice and ensure that the players are moving down the proper path to enjoying the game of baseball.

### **Running the Bases.**

Base running at the beginning of practice serves two purposes. First, it is a great way for the kids to release all of the energy that they brought to practice and loosen up. Second, there are many different base running skills that can be taught to players while they're doing the thing that they love to do – RUN!

The best way to get the most out of any drill is to demonstrate it to your players. Leading the run around the bases can be educational and fun. If you're energetic, when you get to home plate, celebrate as if someone hit a grand slam in the bottom of the 9th inning to win the World Series. The kids will love it!

Among the specific “in-game” base running drills you can do include: 1) the proper way to run to first base on an infield hit (have the players run straight through the base to give the coach a high five about 10 feet past the base), 2) running from home to second, 3) running from first to third, 4) running from second to home, and of course 5) running and touching all of the bases. If possible, time the runners as the run to first – and over any other combination of bases. Making it a competition always increases involvement and interest.

### **Throwing the Baseball**

Probably the most difficult (and important) teaching mechanic for young baseball players is the act of throwing and catching a baseball. Young players are not aware of proper throwing mechanics, and have not developed the eye-hand coordination to properly catch a baseball. Throwing and catching are essential in the game of baseball and should be worked on at every practice. Before you begin, review the proper mechanics of the throw. Break it down into sections and have each player go through it step-by-step during their throws (see “The Throwing Program” for the step-by-step process).

The most important aspects of throwing the baseball that should be emphasized here are: 1) shoulders aligned to the target, 2) glove initially pointing toward the target, 3) stepping to the target with the “glove foot”, and 4) throwing the baseball as we rotate the body. Most people think that we throw with our arms. We, in fact, throw with our lower body.

Throwing mechanics are the most important thing a young baseball player can learn. These motions are the building blocks for the game, and once learned are difficult to alter.

It is important to emphasize that no throw is to be made unless the receiver is giving a proper target. A proper target is when the receiver has both hands up and is ready to catch the throw. Do not allow players to throw a baseball to a player that is not looking at the thrower!

You can structure this throwing in any way you would like. Here are a few ideas:





Kids throw to parents.  
Kids throw to kids.  
Kids throw to targets.  
Kids throw for distance.

### **Catching the Baseball**

Catching a baseball is a very difficult skill for players at this level. There's some scientific research that has concluded that the ability to coordinate both eyes on a target (binocular vision) isn't developed until the ages of 7 or 8. Until both eyes learn to work together, kids lack a keen sense of depth perception, which plays a big role in catching a baseball thrown at them. It is important recognize that, short of a few exceptions, the brains in kids this age have not developed to the point where they can catch a flying ball with much proficiency.

You will need to do your best to improve the ability of your players to catch a thrown baseball. One way is to introduce balls that do not hurt if they are missed by the player. Wiffle balls, tennis balls, or even larger rubber balls (think kickballs) can help kids develop this skill and feel more confident and comfortable with an object being thrown at them.

The best teaching process I've found for tee-batters to learn how to catch a baseball is provided by "Baseball Positive".

*Receiving (catching) a throw has three key action points:*

- 1) *"Ready Position" (moving from a standing position to a Ready Position is an action)*
- 2) *"Move Your Feet to Catch"*
- 3) *"Reach Forward to Catch"*

*Any child on your team can perform these three fundamental skills every time, though they will not likely catch the ball very often. When they perform these actions in their attempt to catch, we can praise those actions and they will remain eager to keep trying ...and will progress faster in their skill development.*

#### **"Ready Position"**

*Instruct players to stand with their feet wider than shoulder width and with their hands (and elbows) held out in front of their body. The ideal position of the hands is 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock with the palms facing in. This stance is difficult for a young child however, because of their lack of leg and shoulder strength.*

*The interpretation of these instructions commonly result with their hands close together at the center of their chest with their elbows pointing straight out or with their elbows close to their body or their hands above their elbows like little football referees signaling 'Touchdown'. Keep working with them to get in a proper position even though some many will not master it at this age. When we see them standing in the positions described, at least we know they are trying.*

*A fun and effective way to train this concept is to tell the kids to pretend they are frogs. Tell them that when you call out "Ready Position" they jump up and land with their feet wide and hands and arms extended in*



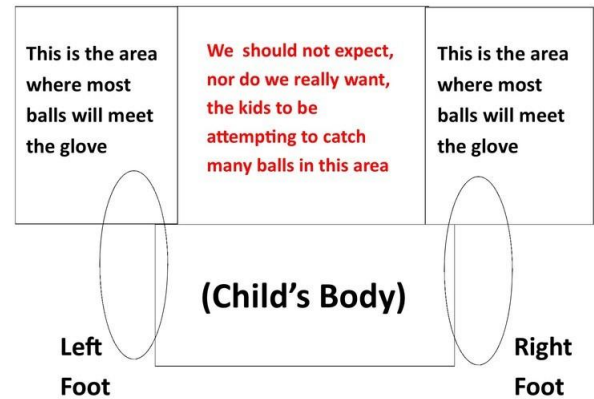
front of them (in a Ready Position) and holler out loudly, 'Ribbit!'. Doing this along with them makes it more fun and engaging.

### **“Move Your Feet to Catch”**

We want to remind our kids that the ball does not always come straight to them. They will need to “Move Their Feet” in order to take their hands to the ball to catch it. We “Move Our Feet to Catch”; we “Catch the Ball with Our Feet”.

### **“Reach Forward to Catch”**

When a player (at any age) extends their arms and hands out in front of them; not necessarily ‘in front of their face’, but in front of the space occupied by their body. The result is they have both the ball and their glove in their line of sight. This positioning of the glove, within the player’s line of sight, and gives the brain a better chance of coordinating the glove with the ball. Most young children, because of the lack of shoulder strength to support the weight of their arms (and the glove), hold their glove (and elbows) close to their body when preparing for, and attempting to make, a catch.



*Important: We will often see the kids position their glove outside their shoulders when attempting to catch. They recognize they will often miss the ball and are smart enough to not stand directly in the flight of the ball. However, a child can still extend their glove out ‘in front’ of where their standing and not have their glove directly in front of them.*

Given the fact that this age group has great difficulty catching the ball, a most efficient playing catch scenario involves each player with an adult (mom or dad) as their throwing partner.

As your player’s confidence builds, consider making a game out of playing catch. Play an elimination game where players who catch the ball stay in, and those who miss the ball drop out.

You can play the “wide receiver” game with a tennis ball. Have your players run across the field about 10-15 feet from you as you toss them the ball. The kids won’t catch the ball, but they’ll have fun trying.

### **Fielding the Baseball**

Here are the basics for teaching players how to field ground balls.

#### Ready Position

- 1) Feet shoulder width apart
- 2) Knees bent - weight should be forward on the balls of feet Their head is up facing the ball.
- 3) Keep eyes on the ball until ball is in the glove.

Proper glove/hand position:



- 1) Glove hand should just be touching the dirt at a 45 degree angle. Throwing hand should be above the glove with the palm facing the ball.
- 2) Once the ball reaches the glove the top hand should cover the ball inside the glove.

Teach the fielders to catch the ball out in front. Do not allow players to field a batted ball between their legs. Hands MUST be in front of their feet.

### Hitting the Baseball

Before beginning any instruction on hitting, make sure that you explain the safety expectations around swinging a bat.

Players must always keep two hands on the bat, never throw it, and stay in their spots so that there are no accidents. Coaches need to designate an area (about a 30 foot diameter) where no players (other than the batter) are allowed to occupy.

In order to properly instruct the players on how to hit a baseball, it's important to understand a few basic principles of the mechanics of hitting. It is critical that the coaches pay attention, direct, and correct the swing of their players. Making contact with a baseball is sheer joy for a tee-ball player. We need to make sure the players are following the process to make this happen as often as possible.

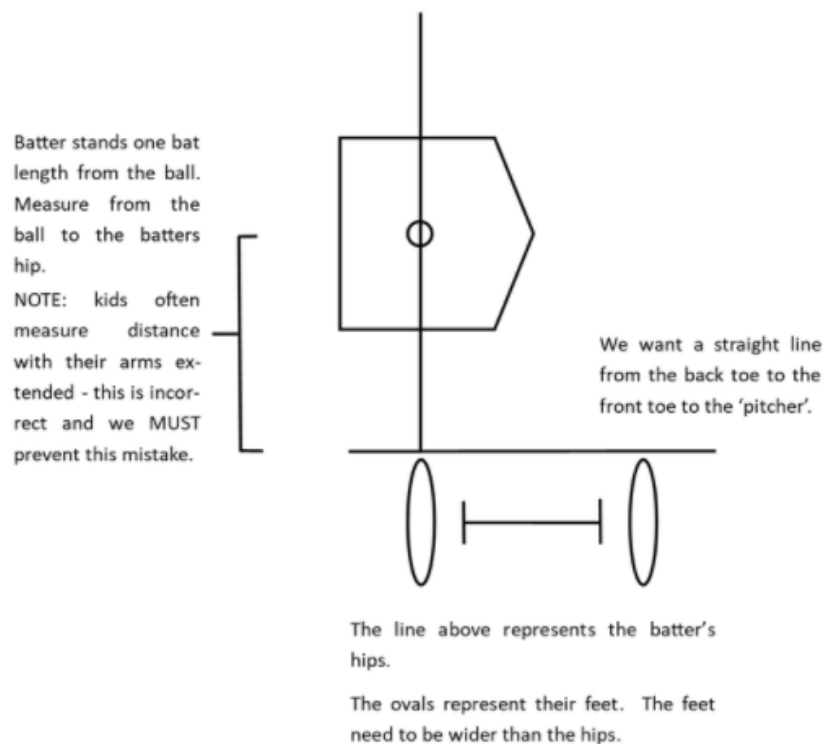
Hitting mechanics - focus on good stance and hand position

- 1) Hands back
- 2) Feet slightly more than shoulder width apart
- 3) Emphasize good hand position (behind the ears)
- 4) Lower body drives the swing and generates power
- 5) Follow through after contact

In order to teach the proper hitting mechanics, consider using the guide.

Have a perpendicular line (or cone, or other marker) running across both batter's boxes, intersecting the tee stem and ball. The batter's front foot is lined up with the ball. This position is important because it maximizes the chances of hitting the baseball and teaches the player to hit the ball "out in front".

The batter's feet are spread slightly beyond shoulder width. A good visual for the kids is to tell them to "have their feet wider than their knees". It's



easy for them to see the difference between their feet and their knees.

Position the batter one bat length from the ball. This is approximately 24 inches from the tee stem. Do not measure this distance with the arms extended. You are measuring this distance from the batter's hip to the tee.

Make sure both feet are lined up parallel with home plate and the shoulders are in line with where the pitcher would be.

The hands should grip the bat in one of three ways: 1) line up door knocking knuckles, 2) offset door knocking knuckles, and 3) knuckles boxed (big knuckles aligned with door knocking knuckles). It's important to note that the bat is to be held by the player's fingers, not in their palms.

Have the players put their index finger of one hand into the palm of their other hand. They should close the hand over the finger as tight as possible. Once the hand is closed, have the players try to get their index finger out. Do this again with the index finger being placed where the fingers meet the hand the second time. Again have them grip down hard and try to take their finger out of their hand. It should be much more difficult to free their finger the second time. This should demonstrate to the players that using the fingers is a stronger grip than using the palms.

Have the players raise the hands behind their ear, holding the bat perpendicular to the ground.

The swing is initiated with a step of the front foot, and/or the movement of the knob of the bat toward the pitcher. The step of the front foot is not necessary, but recommended. Some kids can start adding in a small step to start their swing – doesn't need to be a big step at this age which will just throw their swing off. Try not to allow the player to drop his/her hands prior to the initiation of the swing.

As the swing begins, the batter's eyes are fixed on the ball, and the head movement should be minimal.

Work on the bat coming through hitting zone on a level plane, and with a snap of the wrists (think about hammering a nail into a wall at about waist height - that's the action you want as the bat comes through the hitting zone). Many kids want to uppercut the ball in order to get the ball off the tee, or to travel farther. Try to discourage this. Better to hit line drives and ground balls at this age.

Follow through – wrists flip over after contact, and bat finishes on front shoulder/tricep (ie don't let swing stop out in front of you as with a forehand in tennis – flipping wrists over after contact and bringing bat around to front shoulder/tricep will add power.

You can try to help the players supply more power to their swing by training them to get their lower body into the swing. This is done by rotating the hips during the swing. The hips rotate when the back foot rotates. When this happens, the batter's belt buckle faces the pitcher and the back foot "squashes the bug".

Most important thing at this and any age really – especially in the games – remind them to watch the ball all the way to point of contact!



### **Tee Ball Basics**

- 1) Make sure your players are familiar with the defensive positions (names and locations).
- 2) Review the areas that each position covers – emphasis on fielding balls hit in that area only.
- 3) The players need to know what to do when a ball is hit to them (throw the ball to first base).
- 4) Tell the fielders what to do if the ball is not hit to them.
- 5) Discuss backing up fielders on balls put into play.
- 6) Teach the players to run to first base after the ball is hit off the tee.
- 7) Players move base to base. Teach them to run fast between bases.



## **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**

### **Next Base Drill (practices 1-3)**

Once a player is on first base, they may not always know where they need to go next.

You can set up a couple of stations if you have enough bases. Set up a diamond with the bases as they would normally be set up. Start with a player on first base and a lineup of batters.

This drill starts with a player on first base and one at the tee to bat. Instead of having a real ball, players will ‘show’ coach their great swing and then run to first.

You will also have to explain to the kids on first base, where they need to go next. Another coach, or a parent volunteer can be on second to help direct the players where to go next. Keep going so each player has a chance to bat and run around the bases.

Coaches should watch that the runner understands which base he or she is headed to, and also that they stop right on the base.

This is a basic baserunning drill that helps kids learn where to go during the game.

### **Plastic Ball Tag Game (practices 1-3)**

Explain the game to players. While explaining, demonstrate how they will be tagged and how to freeze. Keep the explanation brief, players will learn by trying.

Have players find a spot to stand in the dirt (personal space) and on “go” the players are to run around the dirt. Each coach will have a plastic ball in hand and tag players. If a player is tagged, they have to freeze. They can unfreeze and run again when they are tagged by a teammate. Play until players look tired. Repeat the game this time using fair territory.

Spread cones along the first and third base foul lines (if there are no chalk lines). Players must stay within the cones boundaries and in the dirt (outfield grass is out of bounds). Repeat game for a third time, as players



freeze they must freeze like a baseball/ softball hitter. Demonstrate what a player looks like holding an imaginary bat.

### **Station-to-Station Drill (practices 1-6)**

Players line up at first base. First player takes his position as the runner on first base. Coach says, “crack!” (simulating a hit baseball). Runner moves from first to second. The next player in line becomes the runner at first. Coach says, “crack!” Runner on second goes to third, runner on first to second. The next player steps in as the runner at first. The coach says, “crack!” Runners move from first to second, second to third, and third to home. Repeat this drill until all the kids have had at least two turns around the bases.

You will want to place coaches at each of the bases to encourage the kids to run quickly between the bases.

### **Run Through the base Drill (practices 1-9)**

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.

### **Catch The Players Game (practices 1-12)**

Speedy baserunning is the key to this fun drill for the kids and lots of work for the coaches!



You can either set up a couple of stations with four bases, or have coaches and parent volunteers alternate. Groups of four runners at a time will go.

The coach will start the four runners, one at a time. Give each runner a five second head start and then send the next runner. After all four runners have gone, the coach heads around the basepath.

The object is for each player to catch the players ahead of them while they are running around the bases. Once it gets to the coach, then the coach needs to run fast to catch the players that are left. If any of the players run off the baseline, or if they go to the wrong base, they will be out of the game.

This will probably be one of the most fun games you and the kids are playing. It teaches them they need to run around the bases as fast as they can, or coach will catch them. It translates well to a game situation.

### **Coach Run Around Drill (and Players Follow) (practices 1-12)**

This is a base identification drill, and the coach gets a little exercise

Make sure all of the bases are intact and in their proper positions. The kids can watch from the middle of the diamond.

At first, get all of the kids attention and go over which bases are which on the field. Then, the coach will stand at home plate in front of the tee and take an imaginary swing at an imaginary ball and then go towards first base. Tell them to yell out which base you are heading to each time.

Once you get to first base, they yell 'first'. Once you round the bag and get to second, they yell 'second'. Etcetera.

After you do this a couple of times, then you can run each player through the bases and have them yell out which base they are on, along with all of the other kids.

Base identification is important to learn at an early age. It is the fundamental for baserunning and should be something you work on regularly.

### **Base Runners Drill (practices 10-12)**

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

You can have the tee set up, with a batter at the tee, but without a bat. The coach will be at first base.

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 he or she 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.

Knowing the coach is going to help them will give some players confidence on the base paths. For others it is a lesson in listening to what the coach says on the field.



## **FIELDING/THROWING DRILLS**

### **Not In My Backyard Drill (practices 1-3)**

Divide the players into two teams, sending one team to half of the playing area and the other half to the opposite area. Spread out plastic balls and tennis balls all over the entire playing area.

On “go”, the players must stay on their side, pick up the balls one at a time and throw them into the other team’s side or “backyard.”

Players from both sides are doing this until time is called (play for a minute or two, whatever seems appropriate for players). The teams then collect all of the balls in their “backyard” and count them. The team with the least amount of balls in their area, or the cleaner backyard is the winner. Repeat. Have players help clean up the game at the conclusion

### **Stomp Drill (practices 1-3)**

When it comes to teaching players how to tag the base, we want them to learn to STOMP on the base!

The definition of “STOMP” is one foot remaining on the ground and the other foot stomps on the base.

Divide the players into 2 or 3 groups. Line the players up about 10 feet from a base. Give each player a baseball. Demonstrate the proper way to STOMP on a base.

On the coach’s command, the player runs with the ball in his/her glove to the bag and STOMPS on the base. The player then returns to the back of the line.

This, as much as anything, is a safety thing. A player has to pretty much come to a stop in order to STOMP. There will be many times, over the course of the season, when a defensive player, who has the ball, will be racing toward the base to tag it, while the base runner is ALSO racing towards the base. Collisions occur and tears are shed and sometimes a fear or dislike for the game is imprinted in a child's mind. Teaching the kids to STOMP on the base to tag it requires that they slow down and stop before tagging the base. This habit will greatly reduce collisions at bases.

### **Underhand Toss Drill (practices 1-6)**

This drill will help players learn the skills for tossing the ball underhand.

Set up the drill with each player about 10-12 feet from the coach. Each player has a glove and a baseball.

On the command, “go”, the player runs toward the coach and executes an underhand toss. The player should continue running during and after the toss. The player runs around the coach, takes the ball back from the coach, and heads to the back of the line.

Key instruction points include making sure the players extend their throwing arm toward the target and that the player continues to run to the target to follow the throw. Do not allow the players to stop to



toss the ball. Do not let the players swing their arms to make the toss. Their body motion should be providing the power to toss the ball.

### **Point, Step, Throw Drill (practices 1-6)**

This drill helps develop younger player's throwing mechanics by helping them understand the basics of a good throw

Line the kids up on the foul line in the outfield, across from their parent. Explain to the players that there are three keys to making a good throw – pointing to the target, stepping toward the target, and making a strong, accurate throw. With the ball in hand, have the player turn the front shoulder so that both shoulders are lined up toward the target. The players then point toward the target with their glove extended, step with their glove-side foot toward the target, and throw the ball to the target. While the players are going through these steps, the coach needs to call out, “point, step, throw”.

This is a simple drill to do with the kids every time they play catch at practice.

### **Infield Grounders Drill (practices 1-6)**

Players form one line just behind shortstop position.

Have one player at a time step up into the SS position.

Roll grounders to the player and have them field ball and throw back to you.

Emphasis the importance of proper stance, keeping glove on the ground, and making a quick but accurate throw back.

For variety, roll the balls left and right of the player to make him move to get in front of the ball. Emphasis the importance of moving to get in front of the ball instead of reaching out with the glove.

### **Plays at First - Grounder Drills (practices 1-6)**

Form one line just behind 2nd base

Have one player at a time move into the 2nd base position, and have a coach/parent stand on 1st base. Roll the grounder to 2nd base. The player should field the ball and make throw toward 1st base.

For a variation, roll the balls left and right of the player to make the player move to get in front of the ball. The player should field the ball and make throw toward 1st base.

Start this drill at 20 feet from the player, and eventually move to 40 feet from the player.

Emphasis the importance of moving to get in front of the ball instead of reaching out with the glove.

### **Alligator Drill (practices 1-6)**



Roll grounders to the kids and have them make an alligator out of the arms. Bottom arm with glove is the jaw and the top arm without glove is the head. When the ball rolls in have them act like the alligator is biting or eating the ball. Both arms come together.

### **Receiving the Throw Drill (practices 1-6)**

Instruct players to stand with their feet wider than shoulder width and with their hands (and elbows) held out in front of their body. The ideal position of the hands is 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock with the palms facing in. This stance is difficult for a young child however, because of their lack of leg and shoulder strength.

The interpretation of these instructions commonly result with their hands close together at the center of their chest with their elbows pointing straight out or with their elbows close to their body or their hands above their elbows like little football referees signaling 'Touchdown'. Keep working with them to get in a proper position even though some many will not master it at this age. When we see them standing in the positions described, at least we know they are trying.

A fun and effective way to train this concept is to tell the kids to pretend they are frogs. Tell them that when you call out "Ready Position" they jump up and land with their feet wide and hands and arms extended in front of them (in a Ready Position) and holler out loudly, 'Ribbit!'. Doing this along with them makes it more fun and engaging.

### **“Move Your Feet to Catch”**

We want to remind our kids that the ball does not always come straight to them. They will need to “Move Their Feet” in order to take their hands to the ball to catch it. We “Move Our Feet to Catch”; we “Catch the Ball with Our Feet”.

### **“Reach Forward to Catch”**

When a player (at any age) extends their arms and hands out in front of them; not necessarily 'in front of their face', but in front of the space occupied by their body. The result is they have both the ball and their glove in their line of sight. This positioning of the glove, within the player's line of sight, and gives the brain a better chance of coordinating the glove with the ball. Most young children, because of the lack of shoulder strength to support the weight of their arms (and the glove), hold their glove (and elbows) close to their body when preparing for, and attempting to make, a catch.

Important: We will often see the kids position their glove outside their shoulders when attempting to catch. They recognize they will often miss the ball and are smart enough to not stand directly in the flight of the ball. However, a child can still extend their glove out 'in front' of where their standing and not have their glove directly in front of them.

### **Slo-Mo Throw Drill (practices 4-6)**

At an early age, coaches often combat players that cannot throw the ball without throwing it as hard as they can.

Set up a target (or a series of targets for several stations), that is about 10 to 15 feet away. It shouldn't be too far for the kids, otherwise they feel like they have to throw the ball hard. Line up the kids in single



file in each station.

In order to get the player to throw the ball normally, you need to help them understand that the ball will go as far as they want with a slow motion throw. This drill works as a method to reinforce the basic throwing skills, but also to learn control.

Teach the players to learn control by asking them to throw in slow motion with just enough force to get the ball to the target. Once they can get the ball to the target with the slow motion throw, ask them to do the same thing with their normal throw.

Younger players will learn to control their throws. This is important to make sure they have accuracy and that they aren't throwing the ball all over the place.

### **Show the Ball Drill (practices 4-6)**

Learning how to properly hold the ball is the first step to throwing it well.

Each player needs to have a ball and a glove in order to work in this drill. Players line up on the foul line (or some straight line), with the coach(es) standing behind them.

Gripping the baseball is essential to throwing properly and accurately. At a young age, learning the proper grip is the best way to help them build the foundation for throwing.

Each player has the ball, and they must grasp the ball with the thumb on the underside, and the two top fingers spread slightly apart over the top. The ring finger and the pinky should be touching the side of the ball slightly on the outside.

When the coach says 'show me', each of the players gets into the proper throwing stance: legs apart (one in front of the other), foot on the throwing side is behind the body, and the arm is up, with the elbow raised to shoulder height and the forearm and bicep at a 90-degree angle (L-shape). From this position, the coach should be able to see the ball being held by the player.

Coaches will be able to watch how their players are gripping the ball as they show them the grip and the throwing stance. Problems can be corrected at this point.

### **Bounce to the Bucket Game (practices 4-6)**

It's good to learn throwing accuracy at an early age – this is a fun game to learn!

Set up a bucket or other target at first base. You can set up more than one station for this drill. Line up kids at each station about 10 feet away to start.

The first thrower steps up and tries to get the ball into the box or bucket – and they get 10 points. If they hit the side of the bucket they will get 5 points. The closest ball to the bucket will get 2 points.

You can increase the difficulty of the drill by increasing the distance that the players have to throw. But,



don't sacrifice the distance for the accuracy. Once the kids gain the accuracy, then in time they will build the strength to throw the ball a greater distance.

The players will begin to develop a sense of how to get the ball to their intended target by aiming at the box or bucket.

### **Block the Ball Drill (practices 4-6)**

This is the first step to getting kids to learn the prospect of fielding the ball.

Set up two or three lines of players so the kids can get maximum repetition. Have a coach or parent volunteer at each line with several balls.

With this drill coaches need to first instruct their players on how to move to get in front of the ball. Start the players off in the ready position (hands on the knees, slightly bent, and with their head up watching the play).

The coaches or volunteers should roll the ball directly at the players at first, but then to either side. The player needs to shuffle to get their body in front of the ball to knock it down. For each ball that the player knocks down they get three points. If the player scoops the ball with their glove, they get five points.

The players will get excited about getting points for knocking the ball down.

To teach players how to use their gloves properly, try using plastic milk jugs with one side cut out to form a "scoop". Have the kids use the scoop to field the ball. This will help them learn to use their gloves to scoop up the ball, rather than trap it.

Learning to knock the ball down and ultimately to try and scoop the ball is the first part of fielding the ball.

### **Catch Contest Game (practices 7-9)**

This is a game that pits the throwing and catching skills of the players against one another. It should be a fun game for all of the kids to participate in.

Pair up the players on the team and give each pair a ball. Each should also have their gloves.

Once you have the players paired up, start them off a short distance apart from one another – probably between 8 and 10 feet. The players should throw the ball back and forth executing overhand throws and catches.

The players need to make good throws and good catches, as each time they miss or drop the ball, the pair has to stop in the game. The game ends when the last pair to keep throwing and catching the ball without dropping it is still in the game.



If the game lasts longer (with improved play), you can move the pairs back a step or two.

The players will gradually build their throwing and catching skills and learn to work with the other players on their team in this manner.

### **Field and Bounce to the Bucket Drill (practices 7-9)**

This puts together the basic idea of fielding a grounder and then throwing the ball to a spot on the field.

You can set up several stations for this drill in order to increase the amount of repetition. You have a line of fielders and a box or bucket at a base.

This puts the original drill of bouncing to the bucket together with fielding the ball. The coach will roll a grounder to the player and they pick it up and throw it to try to get it in the box.

The emphasis is for the player to knock down the ball, gain the proper grip, throwing motion and then aim it to the bucket. Players will get the same points as they would get in the bounce to the bucket drill.

Adding the extra element of fielding the ball may be difficult for some players, but it is an essential skill to master at this level.

This is a step above the basic skill of throwing to a target, by adding the fielding aspect to this drill.

### **Count the Catches Game (practices 7-12)**

This is a good drill to help players strive toward making good catches, and also a drill they can work on at home.

You can either do this as a group drill, or you can make it a drill that has players paired up with each other.

If you do this as a group, you can get two stations going in order to compete against each other, and have a coach or parent volunteer at each station. With a group, the coach will underhand toss the ball to the player in the line and they must make the catch. Everyone yells out, "one!" Then, another toss and "two!" And so on.

Each side goes on until a player in the line drops the ball. Then they start at one again. You can run this drill in pairs, with the players trying to catch the ball between each other.

This drill simply reinforces the skill of the catching the ball.

### **Ground Ball Circle Drill (practices 10-12)**

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.

### **Simple Pop-Fly Drill (practices 10-12)**

Line up your players in the outfield. A coach stands about 15 – 20 feet away with a bucket of tennis balls, or wiffle balls. Throw easy pop flies to the players and encourage them to catch the ball with their arms extended over their heads. Your goal here is to make them feel more comfortable catching baseballs with their palms turned outward (or down). For a simple contest, see how many pop-ups the players can catch in a row.

### **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.

### **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.

### **Learning the Crow Hop Drill (practices 10-12)**

The crow hop is a basic move that is taught at all levels to help a player gain a little bit of momentum on their throw.

Give each player a ball so they can throw it. Or, you can start this drill by using an 'imaginary' ball.

This technique helps younger players learn to generate power and momentum to get the ball a greater distance. Once a player has fielded the ball, they take a short step forward with the foot that is opposite the throwing arm and they shuffle and hop in the direction of the target.

Upon the follow through, the rear leg crosses over in front of the other leg and it lands at a right angle to the target. It would be a good idea to practice this yourself so you can understand how it works and then how you are going to show it to the kids.

Once you show them a couple of times, the kids will usually get the gist of how to do the crow hop.

Once the kids are familiar with the technique, they will quite enjoy the ability to throw the ball further.

### **Soft Fly Ball Drill (practices 10-12)**

Sometimes younger baseball players have a fear of catching the ball because they are afraid it is too hard.



You will need enough softer balls (tennis balls, wiffle balls, puffy balls) for all of the players. The player should have their gloves.

It is tough for some young players to get over the fact that the ball is very hard and they may get hit. This prevents some players from making the effort to catch the ball. They are afraid that if they miss, the ball is going to hit, and therefore hurt them.

Start off by showing the players that the ball is very soft, and even if it hits them in the head, they are not going to get hurt. Then, you can start off with the players in the lines and throw the ball to them one by one. Once the players get the hang of it, they can start throwing the ball to each other to try and catch it.

Younger players will get over the fear of catching the ball by working with the soft ball and eventually moving up to the harder ball.

### **Reach Out Drill (practices 10-12)**

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

Players line up single file with gloves on. 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!



# **BATTING DRILLS**

## **Front Foot Batting Drill (practices 1-3)**

Lining up the player in front of the tee so they are in the proper batting area.

Set up the ball on a tee. Batters should have a bat and a helmet on.

Setting a young player up in the batting area might be one of the toughest things to get them to do when batting. They don't quite understand the concept of a batter's box, so you need to help them understand how to line up through a different method.

Explain to the player they must keep their front foot in line with the tee, and show them how far away they should be from the tee (around 24 inches). If a young player can understand they need to keep their front foot lined with the ball on the tee, then you will have much great success teaching them where to stand in order to hit the ball.

Once you've got the player lined up properly, have them swing at the ball. After the swing is over, remove them from the batter's box for a reset or for the next player. Rotate the players into the box for their turn.

## **Invisible Bat Drill (practices 1-3)**

Teaching the kids the proper swing is important to building a foundation for hitting the ball.

Line the kids up on the first and third baselines, and ask them to get into a batter's stance.

This will be a fun drill for the kids, as they get to show off their swing without the bat as an impediment. When they line up, ask them to assume the batter's stance. They should have heads pointed toward the coach with their arms up, their hands raised to their ears, and their back elbow raised.

When you call out 'swing', all of the kids will show you their swing with the invisible bat. At this stage, you (and assistant coaches) can view the swings of each player and you can make small adjustments to the swings.

Make it a fun time and a game to swing without a bat. Ask them to swing in slow motion. Ask them to hit the ball to right field. Ask them to swing like their favorite baseball player. Make sure the players don't swing too hard, and that they maintain the same fundamentals throughout.

With coaches watching over their swing, better instruction can be given to help the players swing properly.

## **Invisible Ball Drill (practices 1-3)**

Like the invisible bat drill, this is a drill that puts the bat in the hands for a swing without the ball.

Give the player a bat, helmet and then line them up in front of the tee – without the ball.



With the player at the tee, the coach helps them get into the proper batter's stance to make good contact with the ball. The tee should be waist high (or slightly under) and the player needs to focus on the 'imaginary ball'.

The coach will back up, and the player will focus on the spot they are supposed to hit on the imaginary ball. While the other players in the station are waiting, they can pretend they are fielding the ball when the coach says swing, and the player takes a swing.

Batters might swing too high, or swing too low, but this drill will help them focus on the spot they need to swing to make contact.

### **Coach Says Drill (practices 1-6)**

This will help the players learn the different steps involved in a good swing.

This is a batter's version of 'Simon Says' where the players must do what you say in order to demonstrate their understanding of a skill.

You will focus on three key areas: grip, stance and swing. When you say any one of those three words, the player must show you their best grip, stance or swing (after instruction, of course). As the coach, you can watch, and go to individual players to help them with different aspects of their swing.

A proper grip is one where the batter has a "palm up" on the lower hand, and "palm down" on the upper hand when gripping the bat as it makes contact with the ball. The best way to demonstrate this is by placing the bat in the player's hands and allowing the bat head to drop to the floor. At that point, the batter should have palms up on the lower hand, and palms down on the upper hand.

You will be able to help the players with each step of their swing, and sometimes that is more helpful than seeing the entire swing all at once.

### **Beach Ball Batting Drill (practices 1-6)**

Giving the batter a larger target will make it easier for all players to make contact with the ball on the tee and promote confidence as the practices progress.

Set up a tee with a beach ball (or similar) on top of it, and line up a batter in the batter's box.

The players will swing to hit the beach ball the same way they would swing to hit the baseball. This game will be fun for the kids because contact is all but guaranteed.

You can give one point for hitting the beach ball off the tee, and 3 points for hitting the beach ball without hitting the tee.

### **Kiss & Swing Drill (practices 4-6)**



This will be a fun drill for the kids as they try to get the bat to kiss the ball

Place a ball upon the tee, and have a batter with a helmet and bat standing in the proper position to hit the ball. You can have two or more stations for this drill with a parent helper or assistant coach at each station.

Coaches will help the batter assume the correct stance in the batter's box. The rest of the drill is up to the batter. Sometimes, taking a swing in slow motion so a player can visualize where they want to hit the ball is valuable in building memory.

Before the batter takes a swing, they need to slowly go through the batting motion and stop the bat right where they want to hit the ball. This is the 'kiss' the bat will give the ball. The player then brings the bat back up and then takes a normal swing at the ball.

Focusing on the spot they want to hit (the kiss) is a fun way for kids to learn what motion they need to hit the ball where they want. The players will begin to develop the muscle memory and coordination to make consistent contact with the ball.

### **Spot the Ball Drill (practices 4-9)**

Sometimes a visual mark will help a player understand where they need to make contact with the ball.

Set up a tee with a ball on top of it, and line up a batter in the batter's box. You can have fielders to field the ball if you want. The ball will have a black dot the size of a nickel marked on it (with a black marker).

This is a simple batting drill that once again helps the batter to focus on a spot they want to hit. Think of the saying, "aim small, miss small." With the black dot facing back toward the backstop, the player is able to locate and ultimately hit the spot on the ball.

The player will focus on striking the spot with the bat – not just the ball. If a player tries harder to focus on hitting the spot, it can decrease their overall margin of error and make it much easier to hit the ball.

Over time, you can reduce the size of the black mark on the ball, until eventually the black mark is gone and the player is just hitting the ball.

### **Don't Miss Game (practices 4-6)**

This is a game that can be played with the players to try and establish the desire to hit the ball.

Set up a station(s) with one batter and three or four fielders. Set up one base that the hitter will run to.

With a batter at the plate and fielders in the field for each station, the batter will hit attempt to put the ball in play by hitting it. If they miss the ball or if they hit the tee without knocking the ball forward, then it will be considered a strike. This is a perfect opportunity to teach them about how three strikes make an out.



This will be one of the player's first introductions to an 'out'. The player needs to understand the importance of making contact with the ball in order to get to first base and to advance other runners.

Each time the player hits the ball, they must drop the bat and run to first base.

This drill adds a step to the process, after hitting and then running to first base. Making contact within three strikes is the key.

### **A Drop in the Bucket Drill (practices 7-9)**

Sometimes young players have a tendency to throw the bat after they swing. This drill will show them to place the bat down safely after making contact with the baseball.

Set up a batting tee. In front of the opposite batter's box, set up an old tire, large bucket, or cones. This is the area where you want the batter to drop the bat after making contact. It should be in easy access of the batter in order for them to drop the bat once they make contact with the ball.

Once they do make contact, instruct the player to make sure the bat is nicely dropped into the tire or bucket before they keep running toward first base. Repeated work with this drill will reinforce to the player the importance of having to drop the bat when they have hit the ball.

Work on this drill until the batter naturally begins to place the bat into the tire or bucket.

This may not necessarily be a skill development drill, however it is an important one to emphasize, in order to make sure that the safety of all players is at the forefront.

### **Three Tee Batting Drill (practices 7-9)**

This is a good listening drill as much as it is a drill for the player to hit. Coaches need to watch the batters when they swing.

Set up three tees with ball on them and have three batters with helmets and bats.

This helps young players learn to listen to the coaches, and also for the coaches to see their players swing so they can help them with any problems.

Each batter lines up in their batting stance and gets ready to swing the bat. Make sure the players know which tee is number one, number two, and number three. When the players are all ready, the coach will call out one of the numbers and that batter must take a swing and hit the ball.

At this point, the coach is able to watch the individual player and help them with swing technique, but it also keeps the young players excited about hearing their number being called and having it be their turn to take a swing at the ball.

The main result of this drill is for the players to improve their batting technique through the help of coaches. It is also a good drill for the players to learn to make sure they listen to the coaches when on the



field.

### **Offense and Defense Drill (practices 7-9)**

The players are divided into two teams. One team must go behind the line of cones in the field, and the other team is near home plate with a tee and plastic balls (or in line at a tee ready to take a turn).

On “go”, the players at the tees all swing and hit their plastic balls into the field. The players in the field stay behind the cone line to field the balls and then run to place them in the bucket that is also behind the cone line in the field.

The game is continuous and teams should switch sides after a specific time or until all of the balls are gone. All players (or most) are moving at all times.

### **Hit and Field Game (practices 7-9)**

Separate players into two groups. Send half out into the field behind a line of cones and the other half to home plate.

The players in the field must stay behind this line during the game. There is also a bucket out in the field behind the cones. At home plate, have three or four tees (depending on number of players) set out apart from each other. Evenly send the players at home plate to the tees. On “go,” the players at each tee take turns hitting the ball into the field (3 or 4 balls are being hit at once).

The players in the field must collect the balls and put them into the bucket. Players at home plate rotate continuously (quickly) and take turns. Play for a specified time (4-5 minutes) then switch sides.

### **“Home Run” Derby Game (practices 7-12)**

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 on the tee. Once the player gets to the tee, they must get into their batter stance. The coach should help them 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.



### **Target Practice Game (practices 10-12)**

Once players get the hang of hitting, you can attempt to begin teaching them the art of hitting to a spot.

Set up a tee and when the batter addresses the ball, they are facing towards the backstop. The back stop should have certain squares set up, with each square being a number of points.

This is an advanced T-ball hitting drill, but some of your more adept hitters should be able to understand what they have to do to hit the ball to certain areas. This drill will help them work through the understanding awarding points for hitting the squares with point values.

Start by giving a hitter 5 chances to make 20 points (targets can be worth 10 points each). They have to hit selected targets as the coach chooses. As the player becomes more skilled at hitting the targets the coach suggests, then they can increase the number of points needed to succeed in the game.

This drill helps the player become a more skilled hitter by teaching them to hit to certain chosen areas.

### **Knock Out the Catcher Game (practices 10-12)**

Coach dresses in full catcher's gear and sits on a chair or bucket 15 - 20 feet from home plate. The coach tosses the ball to the hitter (or the hitter uses a tee). The objective is for the hitter to knock the coach off the chair/bucket.

This is a fun way to teach the kids to hit the ball up the middle.

### **Tee Hitting for Distance Game (practices 10-12)**

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.





## **TEAM DRILLS**

### **Position Fitness Drill (practices 1-6)**

Players follow along with coach during the activity. Go around the field beginning at the catcher position, announce what position it is, have the players repeat and then do squats (exercise that tries to coordinate with position). Run to the pitcher's plate and do arm circles, run to 1B and do high and low reaches, run to 2B and do windmills, run to SS and do fast feet (running in place) and run to 3B and do pushups. Repeat

### **Guess the Position Drill (practices 1-9)**

As a coach of young kids, you will find that you will be asked more than once, "Where's shortstop?" In an effort to help the players understand where the various baseball positions on the field are located, end your practices with this simple, fun exercise.

Gather your team at home plate. Tell the kids that you want them to shout out the position in the field at which a coach will stand. Send a coach out to the various positions on the field and ask the kids to shout out the positions (having them scream louder the second time is fun). Go through all the positions on the field, making sure each player shouts out the correct position each time the coach moves.

The kids and the parents love this drill, and the players just might learn something.

### **First Base Drill (practices 1-9)**

This is the most basic play in baseball and should be taught early

You can start with the players just in a couple of single file line in the infield, or you can put them at positions. You may want to start them in lines and have them closer to first base to build confidence. Have a coach or parent at first base to start.

This is a basic fielding drill for beginning players. The coach will softly hit or roll grounders to the players and they need to scoop the ball, set, and then make an accurate throw to the coach.

Coaches should focus on making sure the player gains good control of the ball, faces their target and then goes through a good throwing motion to get the ball to the coach or parent on first base.

You can make the drill more challenging by putting players at the infield positions. The players will learn the fundamentals of making an out.

### **Pizza Slice Defense Drill (practices 4-10)**

This helps the players learn to stay in their own area based on the position they are playing.

If you have a chalk liner this works well, or you can use pylons or other markers. Separate the field into 'slices' like pizza, and have it correspond with one of the positions on the field.

This drill is intended to teach younger players the importance of playing their position on the field – to prevent kids from fighting over the ball when it is hit.



Show the players that they each have a 'slice' of the pizza, but they can't have a slice of any one else's pizza. When the ball is hit, or rolled to the players, they must stay on their own slice of pizza when the ball comes out. They cannot go to another player's slice to steal the ball.

Players who go into the other players slice will have someone else come in and take their piece of pizza from them.

Gradually, when players lose their slice of pizza, they will understand that they cannot go into other players' areas to get the ball. This prevents five infielders from going after the same ball.

### **Call The Ball Drill (practices 7-9)**

It is important for younger players to learn that communication on the field is essential.

Line up two single file lines that are about 10 yards apart. One coach will stand in the middle, just slightly away to the side of the players.

With the two players ready to catch the ball, the coach will throw a fly ball in between them. The players will converge on the ball and they will watch for the other player.

Teach the players to understand that the player closest to the ball is to call, "I've got it". They can scream it, yell it, or just say it softly. They will have fun with that – but they must say it.

The player that calls the ball must try to get under it, and the other player should be their back up in case they miss the ball.

This drill will help teach the players basic communication, along with working on their fly-ball catching skills.

### **Go to Your Base Drill (practices 7-12)**

Players need to learn to go to their base when another runner is on base.

You can run this as a two base drill to start, and then run it with three bases, and then all of the bases. Have a player playing second base and first base, with a runner on first base to start. You can have a fielder to shag the grounders.

This drill may take some time for fielders to understand, but it is important to advance the development of the fielding player. With a first and second baseman playing their position, and a runner on first, the coach must teach a player to recognize that they need to go to their bag and wait for a throw to put the runner out.

Help the fielder to understand by telling them they need to protect their base if they see another runner coming after it. They protect the base by catching the ball if it is thrown there.



In time, fielders will understand they have to cover their base when there are runners.

### **Tag Out/Frozen Tag Game (practices 10-12)**

This helps players to learn the importance of tagging with the ball, and also promotes a whole lot of fun.

Mark off an area about 20 yards by 20 yards. The T-ball infield might work if you don't have too many players. Two players will need to have their gloves and a ball inside the glove.

This is a tag game that actually requires the taggers to tag the other players with the ball inside the glove. The two players that are 'it' will chase other players and they will have to tag those players with their gloves.

If the ball comes out of the glove, then the player tagged is NOT frozen. If they don't tag with the ball, then the player is NOT frozen. Players that are tagged must be frozen and they need to get unfrozen by their teammates by going underneath their legs or their arms.

Players will quickly learn the importance of tagging others with the ball in their glove, and maintaining control of the ball when doing it.

### **Triangle Relay Drill (practices 10-12)**

This throwing and fielding drill might be best for more advanced or older T-ballers

What you need – Match up two players and a coach, and if you have parent volunteers you can have several stations for this drill.

How this drill works – This drill works on a player's ability to field the ball (in the outfield for example), and then get the ball back to the relay player and then back to the coach or the parent volunteer.

Start the players out about 30 feet away from each other, and the coach about another 15 feet from the 'relay' player. This drill begins with the coach rolling a grounder to the player that is furthest away. That player must stop the ball, control it, pick it up and make a good throw to the relay player.

The relay player must then grab the ball from the glove and then make a good throw to the coach. Repeat this drill and switch the players.

This is the first chance kids will get to learn how to use teamwork (relay) to get the ball where they want it to go.

### **Batter Out Game (practices 10-12)**

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

Divide the team into three groups: batters, fielders and first base. You will need a tee and a ball, with proper batting equipment.



The batters will try to hit the ball, and the fielders will be in the field and the first base... well, on first base. Give the fielders an 'area' they are to cover, so they are not all chasing after the same ball. The batters will hit the ball and then begin running to first base. The fielders must play their area and get the ball if it goes there. Then, they need to make the throw to first base before the runner gets there.

Coaches should award one point to the runner if he beats the throw and makes it to first base. They should award one point to the fielders for stopping the ball and making a good throw. You can award the first base players one point if they make a good catch with two hands and do not drop the ball. Make it a competition to see which group gets more points. You can switch groups in the same practice or wait until the next one.

### **Get the Out Game (practices 10-12)**

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 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.

### **Fast Fingers Drill (practices 10-12)**

This is an advanced tee-ball drill. Charging the ball to get to it quickly is a great skill to learn in baseball.

Line the players up in four single file lines along the first or third baseline. The coach will stand out in front of them about 15 or 20 feet away.

All of the players will be in their lines and the coach will be in front of them. The coach will point to one of the lines and then roll or hit the ball to them with a slow grounder.

The player needs to run up to pick up the ball and then settle themselves down to throw back to the coach. The object for the kids is going to be to pick up the ball, remember their proper throwing action and make a nice throw back to the coach.

Once the coach tosses the ball, he or she counts out 1001, 1002, 1003... and then stops when the ball gets back to the coach. The object of the game is to have the players get the ball back to the coach as quickly



and accurately as possible. The quickest pick up and throw is the fastest fingers player.

The players will learn to get the ball to the coach quicker by charging it, picking it up, and then making a good throw.



## PRACTICE PLANS

To follow are a list of 12 practice plans you can follow to work your way through your season. These are just suggestions. Feel free to insert different drills and games, as well as re-use them if you feel your team needs additional work, or if they were fun for the kids.

Coaching tip. When addressing small children, it's always more effective to get down to their height. Try to give most of your talks to the players while you're on one knee.

Make sure you add water breaks into your practice. Snacks after the practice are optional, but recommended.

The single most important aspect of any game or practice is that the kids have fun. Make this a priority and you will have kids wanting to come to practice, ready to play and learn.



# Practice Plan Tee Ball Practice 1

## **Introductions**

(10 min)

Sit the players in a circle. Explain the rules for the introduction process. Only the player holding the ball is allowed to talk. Each player tells their teammates their first name and something about them (favorite animal, favorite food, school they attend, etc). Coach should repeat the name of the players as the introduction continues.

## **Warm-up**

(5 Min)

Explain which direction players run around the bases. Point out which base is 1st, 2nd, 3rd and home. Run around the bases. Coaches can lead here for the first lap. Then let them run around one at a time. After the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> time the players should be warmed up and ready for practice to begin.

## **Throwing Drills (full team)**

(15 Min)

Teach: Proper grip and the way to throw a baseball (demo point, step, throw)

- Point, Step, & Throw Drill (with parents, if possible, or into a fence from 6-8' away)
- Not In My Backyard Drill/Underhand Toss Drill



## **Fielding Instruction (full team, small groups)**

(5 Min)

Teach: Proper "ready position" to field (Alligator Drill).

- Alligator Drill (with sound, for fun)

## **Infield Grounders Drill (full team, small groups)**

(10 Min)

- 20' Ground Balls
- 40' Ground Balls

## **Teaching the Role of the Base (full team)**

(10 Min)

Teach: "The base is for the runner, the ball is for the defense." "Ball first, base second." Make sure the players DO NOT TOUCH the base until AFTER they have the ball in hand. The defense has to have the ball before they touch the base.

- Stomp Drill

## **Time to Hit! (two or more groups)**

(20 Min)

- Front Foot Batting Drill

## **Guess the Position Drill (full team)**

(5 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis:** Lots going on in the first few practices. Many skills and drills are introduced. The following will be RECURRING points of emphasis for practices going forward: 1) focus on proper mechanics for all skills – throwing, fielding, catching, hitting and 2) promote safety cues for the players to understand the roles that each position has on defense (ie STOMP Drill).



## **Practice Plan Tee Ball Practice 2**

**Introductions** – Re-introduce everyone to the team

(5 Min)

**Warm-up** - Run around the bases

(5 Min)

- Coach Run Around Drill

**Throwing & Fielding (full team, small groups)**

(20 Min)

- Point, Step, Throw Drill (coaches demonstrate the proper throw first)
- 20' Ground Balls ...using **Underhand Toss to Coach**
- 40' Ground Balls ...using **Overhand Throw to Coach**
- **Teach** – If players miss a ball, or make a mistake fielding, “That’s okay. Let’s make the next play.” It’s okay to make a mistake. Just keep working hard, no matter what!

**Receiving a Throw (full team)**

(10 Min)

- Receiving the Throw Drill (instruction and practice catching)

**Re-teaching the Role of the Base & Stomp Drill (full team, small groups)**

(10 Min)

- **Teach** – “The base is for the runner. The ball is for the defense.” “Ball first, base second.”
- Stomp Drill

**First Base Drill (full team, small groups)**

(10 Min)

- Incorporate STOMP Drill into this drill

**Batting (full team, small groups)**

(20 Min)

- Invisible Bat Drill
  - Invisible Ball Drill
  - Front Foot Batting Drill
1. Use **wiffle balls** for batting. Position Tees and designate a line approximately 30' in front of the Tees behind which the player(s) chasing the balls are positioned. Make it clear to all players that they are not allowed to enter the space between the batters and the 30' line.
  2. It is absolutely critical that, prior to each swing, a batter's feet are positioned in the proper relationship to the ball/tee stem.
  3. Have each batter work at their Tee for 90 seconds - 2 minutes, then rotate other players in to bat. Ideally each player gets 2-3 times batting.

**Plastic Ball Tag (full team)**

(5 Min)

**Run Through the Base Drill (full team)**

(5 Min)

**Guess the Position Drill (full team)**

(5 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis:** Have fun, try hard, be a good sport, and make the next play!





## **Practice Plan Tee Ball Practice 3**

**Warm-up** - Run around the bases (10 Min)

- Home Run Drill
- Next Base Drill

**Throwing Drills (full team)** (10 Min)

- Point, Step, Throw Drill
- Not in My Backyard Drill

**Receiving Throws and Fielding Drills (full team, small groups)** (20 Min)

- Adults throw to players, wide throws - players "Move Feet to Catch"
- 20' Ground Balls ...using Underhand Toss
- 40' Ground Balls ...using overhand throw

To make this drill less intimidating for the players, coaches can substitute plastic balls for tee balls. We want to create an atmosphere that allows the kids to learn to catch without worrying about being hit by a hard baseball.

**Position Fitness Drill (full team)** (10 Min)

**Batting (full team, small groups)** (20 Min)

- Coach Says Drill
- Beach Ball Batting Drill
- Front Foot Batting Drill

Review the proper grip on the bat. Talk about how tight they should hold the bat. They should act like they are holding a small bird in their hands. They need to hold it tight enough that it won't fly away, but they can't hold it so tight that they hurt it.

**Run Through the Base Drill (full team, small groups)** (5 Min)

**Catch the Players Game (full team)** (5 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – Proper grip on the bat an important source of power for the batter. Make sure that the hands are positioned properly as described in the Coach's Manual, page 11.



## **Practice Plan Tee Ball Practice 4**

**Warm-up** – Running to First Base (5 Min)

- Run through the base drill

Here we want to have the players take an imaginary swing and run toward first base. Emphasis is on running straight down the base line, only looking at the base, and running THROUGH first base.

**Pre-Drill work (full team, small groups)** (10 Min)

- Alligator Drill

**Teach** - Athletic position, feet shoulder width apart and knees bent. Glove out and in front. Use two hands like an alligator. Field in the center of the body.

- Receiving the Throw Drill
- Show the Ball Drill

**Skills & Drills** (7-8 minutes per station...consider time needed to rotate) (25 Min)

**Playing Catch Station** (choose the drills you feel are most needed)

- Slo-Mo Throw Drill (or Point, Step, Throw)
- 20' ground balls
- 40' ground balls

**Batting Station**

- Coach Says Drill
- Beach Ball Batting Drill

**Defense Station**

- Plays at First – Grounder Drills
- Block the Ball Drill

**Batting (full team, small groups)** (20 Min)

- Front Foot Batting Drill (with plastic balls)
- Spot the Ball Drill

**Teach** - Bat at fingertips with a loose grip. Feet spread shoulder width apart and in an athletic position. Head looking at pitcher with both eyes. Level swing through the ball. Follow through with both upper and lower body

**Scrimmage** (25 Min)

**Station to Station Drill (full team)** (5 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – Proper fielding position. Hands out in front. Do not field the ball between the feet. Ball is scooped into the glove. Throwing hand on top of the glove.



## **Practice Plan Tee Ball Practice 5**

<b>Warm-up – Coach Run Around Drill</b>	(5 Min)
<b>Throwing Drills (full team, small groups)</b>	(15 Min)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Underhand Toss Drill</li><li>• Slo-Mo Throw Drill</li><li>• Show the Ball Drill</li></ul>	
<b>Skills &amp; Drills (7-8 minutes per station...consider time needed to rotate)</b>	(25 Min)
<b>Playing Catch Station</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Point Step Throw Drill</li><li>• Bounce to the Bucket Game</li></ul>	
<b>Batting Station</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Kiss &amp; Swing Drill</li><li>• Spot the Ball Drill</li></ul>	
<b>Defense Station</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• First Base Drill</li><li>• Block the Ball Drill</li></ul>	
<b>Pizza Slice Defense Drill (full team)</b>	(10 Min)
<b>Don't Miss Game (full team, 2 groups)</b>	(15 Min)
<b>Scrimmage</b>	(25 Min)
<b>Guess the Position Drill (full team)</b>	(5 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – Defensive players need to understand their place on the field and their role in making plays. Ensure that your players understand the responsibilities for defensive positions on the field.



## **Practice Plan Tee Ball Practice 6**

**Warm-up – Run Through the Base Drill** (5 Min)

**Throwing Drills (full team, small groups)** (15 Min)

- Show the Ball Drill
- Bounce to the Bucket Game

**Skills & Drills (full team, small groups)** (25 Min)

### **Playing Catch Station**

- Point Step Throw Drill
  - Play Catch** - Make 'one hop', overhand throws to each other (have ball bounce 10'-15' in front of the receiver of the throw)
- Receiving the Throw Drill

### **Batting Station**

- Beach Ball Batting Drill
- Kiss & Swing Drill

### **Defense Station**

- Plays at First – Grounder Drills
- Block the Ball Drill

**Batting (full team, small groups)** (15 mins)

- Don't Miss Game

**Scrimmage** (25 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – Proper swing mechanics, which include level swing plane. Ensure that the batter's swings are parallel to the ground.



## **Practice Plan Tee Ball Practice 7**

**Warm-up – Coach Run Around Drill** (5 Min)

**Throwing Drills (full team, small groups)** (10 Min)

Point Step & Throw Drill

**Skills & Drills** (25 Min)

### **Playing Catch Station**

- Field and Bounce to the Bucket Drill
- 20' Ground Balls - using Underhand Toss
- 40' Ground Balls - Overhand Throw

### **Batting Station**

- A Drop in the Bucket Drill
- Front Foot Batting

### **Defense Station**

- Call The Ball Drill

To have some fun with this drill, bring balloons. The players will attempt to keep the balloon from touching the ground by calling for it and batting it into the air. No player can hit the balloon twice in a row.

**Pizza Slice Defense Drill (full team)** (10 Min)

**Block the Ball Drill (full team)** (10 Min)

**Scrimmage** (25 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – Safety is a part of baseball. Make sure the players understand the steps you take as a coach to ensure their safety. This will help them appreciate the point of emphasis in the “Drop in the Bucket” Drill.



## **Practice Plan Tee Ball Practice 8**

### **Warm-up - Relay Race**

(10 Min)

Players start at home and second base. You can have the players run between home and second (second and home), or between home and first (second and third). Make it fun for the kids!

### **Throwing Drills (full team)**

(15 Min)

Point Step Throw Drill

### **Skills & Drills (full team, small groups)**

(25 Min)

#### **Playing Catch Station**

- Count the Catches Game

#### **Batting Station**

- A Drop in the Bucket Drill

#### **Defense Station**

- Simple Pop Fly Game

### **Field and Bounce to the Bucket Drill**

(10 Min)

### **Hit and Field Game (full team)**

(15 Min)

### **Scrimmage**

(25 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – Lots of catching in today's practice. Try to help players gain confidence in catching the ball above the shoulders. This is not easy. Demonstrate the skill if you can. Encourage the players to try their best.



## **Practice Plan Tee Ball Practice 9**

**Warm-up** Home Run Drill (5 Min)

**Throwing Drills (pairs)** (10 Min)

Catch Contest Game

**Skills & Drills (full team, small groups)** (25 Min)

**Playing Catch Station**

- Point Step Throw Drill
- 20' Ground Balls (underhand toss)
- 40' Ground Balls (overhand throw)

**Batting Station**

- Spot the Ball Drill

**Defense Station**

- Plays at First Base Drill

**Go to Your Base Drill (full team, 2 groups)** (15 Min)

**Call The Ball Drill (full team, small groups)** (10 Min)

**Scrimmage** (25 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – Encourage your players to compliment their teammates when they do something right. Same for you. Today's practice should focus on the positive moments in practice. Make sure you have 2 positive things to tell each player throughout the practice today.



## **Practice Plan Tee Ball Practice 10**

**Warm-up - Run Through the Base Drill** (5 Min)

### **Throwing Drills (full team)**

One Knee Throwing Drill (10 Min)

**Skills & Drills (full team, small groups)** (25 Min)

#### **Playing Catch Station**

- Point Step Throw Drill
- 20' Ground Balls (underhand toss)
- 40' Ground Balls (overhand throw)

#### **Batting Station**

- Target Practice Game
- Hit off the Tee(s)

#### **Defense Station**

- Catch, Stomp, Throw Drill

Players catch the ball, stomp on the base, and throw the ball back to the coach!

**Hit and Field Game (full team)** (15 Min)

**Home Run Derby Game (full team)** (15 Min)

**Scrimmage** (25 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – The home run derby game is a great opportunity to teach the kids to root for and congratulate their teammates for making great plays. Challenge the kids to motivate each other to keep the ball in front of them.





## **Practice Plan Tee Ball Practice 11**

<b>Warm-up – Catch the Players Game</b>	(5 Min)
<b>Throwing Drill (full team, pairs)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One and Two Game</li></ul>	(10 Min)
<b>Skills &amp; Drills (full team, small groups)</b> <b>Playing Catch Station</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learn the Crow Hop Drill</li></ul> <b>Batting Station</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tee Hitting for Distance Game</li></ul> <b>Defense Station</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ground Ball Circle Drill</li></ul>	(25 Min)
<b>Get the Out Game (full team)</b>	(15 Min)
<b>Tag/Freeze Out Tag Game (full team)</b>	(10 Min)
<b>Scrimmage</b>	(25 Min)

**Practice Point of Emphasis** – Ensure that the players do not change their hitting mechanics during the hitting for distance game. Instead, teach the players the benefit of the weight shift and rotating their hips. A lot to grasp, but some will understand.



## **Practice Plan Tee Ball Practice 12**

### **Warm-up – Bat Spin Relay Race**

(5 Min)

Players spin around a bat three times with their head placed on the knob of the bat, then they run to a designated spot and back.

### **Throwing Drill**

(10 Min)

Point Step and Throw Drill

### **Target Practice Game (full team)**

(15 Min)

### **Batter Out Game (full team)**

(15 Min)

### **Knock Out the Catcher Game (full team)**

(15 Mins)

### **Scrimmage**

(25 Min)

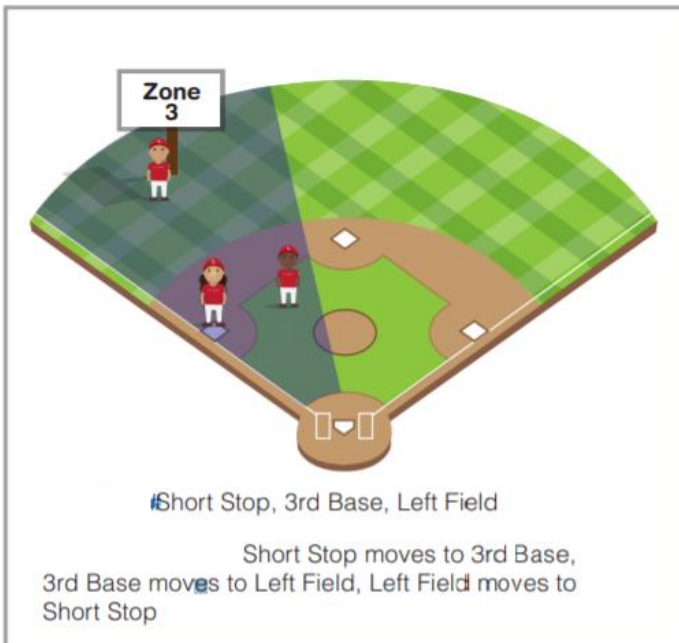
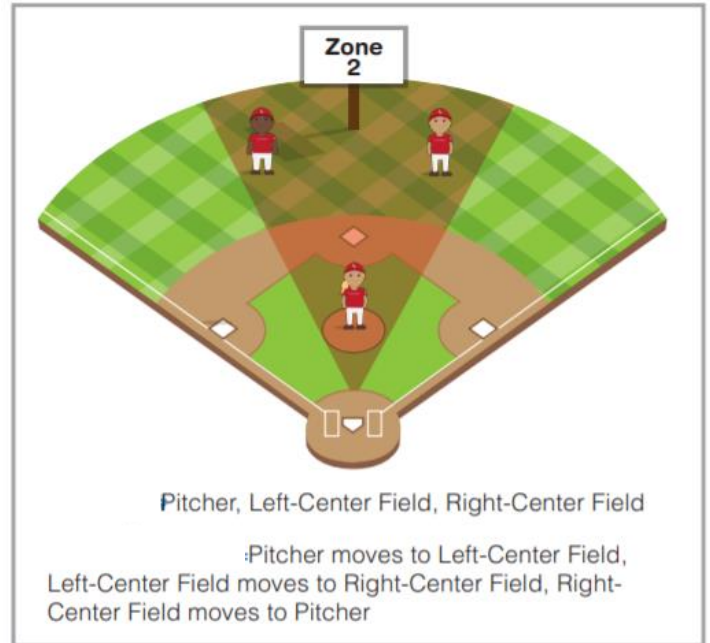
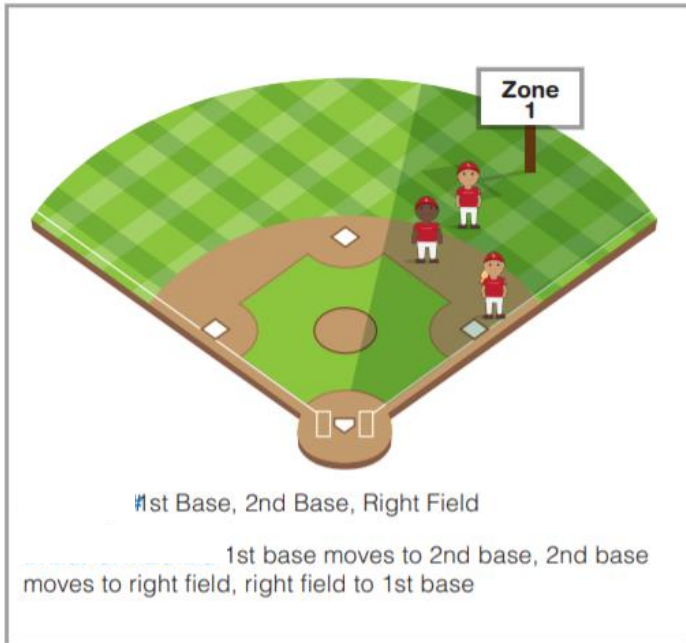
**Practice Point of Emphasis** – FUN! Do whatever you can to make today’s practice special. This is the last practice of the season. Go ahead and play all of the games that your team loved to play over the 11 practices. Water balloons might work well here too. Set the coaches up as targets. The goal is to laugh loud and long today!



# GAME MANAGEMENT

## ROTATE PLAYERS ON DEFENSE

Rotating players during the inning on defense is a great way to keep them engaged. An effective way to do this is to divide the playing field into 2 or 3 zones, assigning a coach to each zone, and rotating players within each zone after every batter (or after a predetermined number of batters). The following sample defensive rotation divides the field into 3 zones and ensures that every player gets to play an infield and outfield position every inning.



Make sure to assign a coach to each zone



- Once players have rotated, have them get in a ready position for each batter
- Consider using a Frisbee or other marker to clearly mark each position on the field

### **UTILIZE COACHES ON DEFENSE**

Utilizing coaches on defense is a great way to keep players engaged in the field. The defensive team's coaches should divide the field into zones and work with players in their area to stay alert and engaged.

Utilizing tactics such as having players get into a ready position, having players call out where they will throw the ball if hit to them, etc. keeps players active and focused. Coaches can also consider taking an extra ball or two onto the field with them to toss to players to keep them engaged during times when the ball is not hit in their direction



# **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.

