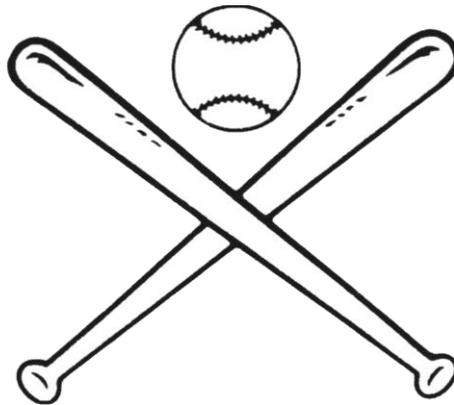


Youth Baseball

Coaching Manual & Practice Drills



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Coaching Tips

- Lead by example. The team will reflect your attitude, if you are positive, the players will be too. If you are negative, the team will act similarly. Be aware of your influence.
- Prepare for your practice in advance, start on time, and stick to your timeline
- Set expectations for the practice and the season – we encourage all teams to have a parent’s meeting at the beginning of the season.
- Ask for help (the more volunteers the better), and don’t be afraid to tell coaches and volunteers how you want drills organized and executed
- Keep the kids moving, for example, run multiple stations to limit time waiting in line. If necessary, break the kids up into smaller groups to maintain their attention.
- Reinforce routines, for example, start each practice with a warmup and end with a cheer
- Keep it fun by incorporating games and non-instructional scrimmage time
- Focus on the basics and skills development as individuals and a team.
- Try to incorporate “situations” at each practice to teach the kids the game.
- Don’t sweat the small stuff, we want to encourage kids to grow in a positive learning environment.

Good luck!

T-Ball Practice Stations & Instructions

Station 1: Hitting

(whiffle balls, bats, and tees) Each player has a tee; separate left and right handed hitters

- Knuckles are lined up or close to it; loose grip; hands maintained at the top of strike zone; knob of bat pointing to opposite batter's box (bat at 45 degree angle); elbows are down; hands are lined up over back foot
- Feet are shoulders-width apart, in a straight line with toes pointing forward; knees slightly bent and weight of body is on balls of feet
- Weight is back (65% back foot, 35% front foot); stride is soft, slow, straight, short, and shallow – the "5 S's" – and the stride is always towards the pitcher.
- Hands stay inside the ball through the swing; knob of the bat leads the way; head stays down and moves from front shoulder to back; pivot on the back foot ("squish the bug")

Station 2: Pop-ups

(tennis balls) Form at least two lines (ask for volunteers)

- Start without gloves, then progress to using a glove
- Both hands should be held out high with palms facing up
- Emphasize the triangle shape both hands make, i.e., hands should be relatively close to one another
- Head and shoulders should be directly under the ball when catch is being made
- Throwing hand covers the ball as it enters the glove

Station 3: Throwing mechanics

(taped tennis balls) Pair players together or work in small groups

- Introduce a variety of throwing drills that are intended to train and reinforce the proper throwing motion, e.g., flick, arm drag, one-knee, and two knee drills (see Coaching Drills Summary)
- Show players how to hold the ball, i.e., cross-seam grip
- Introduce "breakdown" drill (aka, "set, break, throw") after one or two practices
- Stress importance of aiming glove at target, then tucking during follow-through
- Players should always step towards their target (many younger players have a tendency to drift or step towards the "glove side" of target)

Station 4: Fielding ground balls

(taped softies) Work in small groups of two or three

- Demonstrate the proper fielding position (knees bent and butt down, hands out in front, head down, bring ball into belly with both hands, pop up into throwing position)
- Start with ground balls without gloves at relatively close distance; introduce gloves and lengthen distance
- Stress the importance of fielding ball out in front of player and using two hands (alligator arms drill); if ball is bobbled and dropped, teach players to push ball into ground with bare hand then pick up and throw.

Station 5: Base running

(bases, balls)

- Infield hit: players first find ball then keep head down and run through first base (i.e., no sliding or lunging)
- Ground ball through infield: players find ball then begin turn (the "question mark") once they see it go through the infield; teach players to step on inside corner of bag then make short choppy steps as the ball is fielded cleanly
- Clean base hit: players begin turn (the "banana") out of the batter's box
- First to third and second to home: teach players to find coach and look for signal to advance or stay; waive some players, hold others

Station 6: Pop-ups

(tennis balls) Form at least two lines (ask for volunteers)

- Depending on skill level, either repeat Station 2 or introduce "left and right fly ball" or "football" drills
- Demonstrate the drop step technique and how to run to a spot
- Players should still attempt to position themselves under the ball and use two hands

Station 7: Fielding ground balls

(taped softies) Work in small groups of two or three

- Depending on skill level, either repeat Station 4 or introduce other fielding drills (e.g., "roll back and forth", "shuffle", and "rapid fire" drills)
- Continue to focus on proper fielding form, including moving feet to ensure ball is fielded in front of player (i.e., limit diving and lunging for balls)
-

Station 8: Throwing mechanics

(taped tennis balls)

- Work on drills not covered in Station 3

Station 9: Live pitching

(helmets, whiffle balls, bats)

- Arrange players in one to two circles and pitch whiffle balls from one knee
- Continue to focus on mechanics (stance, hands/feet positioning, stride) and introduce concepts of timing and tempo for more advanced players (e.g., they begin stride as you bring arm back in throwing motion)
- Players should be in "ready" position while waiting (no swinging!)
- Pitch three to four balls to one player then move on to the next
- Ask parents to help collect balls and keep kids separated

Station 10: Fielding and hitting

(helmets, bats, and tees)

- Let the kids enjoy themselves at this station
- Split kids up into two groups; one group hits balls off the tee while the other fields and tosses back to hitting area

Practice Plans: Rookies

Rookies Practice Plan I

- Warm Up (10 minutes) Jog around bases or to fence and back
- Play catch Throwing (15 minutes)
 - Flick drill (5 minutes)
 - Arm drag (5 minutes)
 - Two-knee drill (5 minutes)
- Fielding – infield (15 minutes)
 - Alligator arms (5 minutes)
 - Shuffle (5 minutes)
 - Breakdown (5 minutes)
- Fielding – outfield (10 minutes)
 - Pop flies (5 minutes)
 - Left and right fly balls (5 minutes) **Game**
- Base running (10 minutes)
 - Run through first – no sliding! (5 minutes)
 - Making the turn (5 minutes)
- Hitting (30 minutes) Players rotate amongst stations
 - Station A: Soft toss
 - Station B: In the field (fielding BP)
 - Station C: Batting practice

Rookies Practice Plan II

Warm Up (5 minutes) □ Jog around bases or to fence and back. Play catch

- Throwing (20 minutes) □ Flick drill (5 minutes)
 - One-knee drill (5 minutes)
 - Play catch – hit the target (5 minutes)
 - Back `em up three (5 minutes) **Game**
- Fielding – infield (15 minutes)
 - Roll back and forth (5 minutes)
 - Ready, set, go (5 minutes)
 - Rapid fire (5 minutes)
- Fielding – outfield (10 minutes)
 - Pop flies (5 minutes)
 - Football drill – (5 minutes)
- Base running (10 minutes)
 - First to third (5 minutes)
 - Second to home (5 minutes)
- Hitting & Pitching (30 minutes) Players rotate amongst stations
 - Station A: Soft toss
 - Station B: Pitching (on the side)
 - Station C: Batting practice
 - Station D: In the field (fielding BP)

Rookies Practice Plan III

Warm Up (5 minutes) □ Jog around bases or to fence and back, Play catch

- Throwing (15 minutes)
 - Flick drill (5 minutes)
 - One-knee drill (5 minutes)
 - Throwing relay drill (5 minutes) **Game**
- Fielding – infield (15 minutes)
 - Roll back and forth (5 minutes)
 - Four square – rotate positions (10 minutes)
- Fielding – outfield (10 minutes)
 - Pop flies – in groups (5 minutes)
 - Ground balls – in groups (5 minutes)
- Base running (10 minutes)
 - Diamond relay (10 minutes) **Game**
- Hitting & Situations (35 minutes)
- Hitting Stations (15 minutes)
 - Soft toss (or tee)
 - Whiffle circle (two groups)
- Situations (20 minutes)
 - Four, four and four (or three, three and three)

Rookies Practice Plan IV

Warm Up (5 minutes) □ Jog around bases or to fence and back

- Throwing (10 minutes)
 - Arm drag (5 minutes)
 - Play catch – hit the target (5 minutes) **Game**
- Fielding – infield (20 minutes)
 - Ground balls – throw to first, rotate positions (10 minutes)
 - Middle infield drills (10 minutes)
- Fielding – outfield (10 minutes)
 - Fly/Pop fly ball priorities (10 minutes)
- Hitting & Situations (35 minutes)
- Hitting Stations (15 minutes)
 - Soft toss (or tee)
 - Whiffle circle (two groups)
- Situations (20 minutes)
- Four, four and four (or three, three and three) **Game**

Practice Plans: Minors/Majors

MINORS/MAJORS Practice Plan I

- Warm Up (10 minutes) □ Jog around bases or to fence and back
 - Stretch
 - Play catch
- Throwing (15 minutes)
 - Arm drag (5 minutes)
 - Flick drill (5 minutes)
 - One-knee drill (5 minutes)
- Fielding – infield (15 minutes)
 - Roll back and forth (5 minutes)
 - Shuffle (5 minutes)
 - Breakdown – “ready, set, go” (5 minutes)
- Fielding – outfield (10 minutes)
 - Pop flies (5 minutes)
 - Left and right fly balls (5 minutes) **Game**
- Base running (10 minutes)
 - Run through first
 - The banana
 - The question mark
- Hitting (30 minutes) Players rotate amongst stations
 - Station A: Soft toss
 - Station B: In the field (fielding BP)
 - Station C: Batting practice

MINORS/MAJORS Practice Plan II

- Warm Up (10 minutes) Jog around bases or to fence and back
 - Stretch
 - Play catch
- Throwing (20 minutes) Flick drill (5 minutes)
- Two-knee drill (5 minutes)
- Play catch – hit the target (5 minutes)
- Back 'em up three (5 minutes) **Game**
- Fielding – infield (15 minutes)
- Roll back and forth (5 minutes)
- Shuffle (5 minutes)
- Rapid fire (5 minutes)
- Fielding – outfield (10 minutes)
- Pop flies (5 minutes)
- Football drill (5 minutes)
- Base running (10 minutes) First to third (5 minutes)
- Second to home (5 minutes)
- Hitting & Pitching (30 minutes)
- Players rotate amongst stations
- Station A: Soft toss
- Station B: Pitching (on the side)
- Station C: Batting practice
- Station D: In the field (fielding BP)

MINORS/MAJORS Practice Plan III

- Warm Up (10 minutes) □ Jog around bases or to fence and back
 - Stretch
 - Play catch
- Throwing (15 minutes)
 - Flick drill (5 minutes)
 - One-knee drill (5 minutes)
 - Throwing relay drill (5 minutes) **Game**
- Fielding – infield (15 minutes)
 - Roll back and forth (5 minutes)
 - Four square – rotate positions (10 minutes)
 - Coaches note: Pull 2-3 players aside to work on catcher’s drills
 - Stance
 - Blocking balls
 - Framing pitches (start with tennis balls/bare hands)
 - Stealing – footwork and throwing
 - Fielding pop flies
- Base running (10 minutes)
- Diamond relay (10 minutes) **Game**
- Hitting & Situations (35 minutes)
- Stations – rotate players (20 minutes)
 - Soft toss, in the field, use pitching screen (5 minutes)
 - Hitting off tee (5 minutes)
 - Fielding soft toss (5 minutes)
 - Pitching, on the side (5 minutes)
- Situations (15 minutes)
- Four, four and four (or three, three and three)

MINORS/MAJORS Practice Plan IV

- Warm Up (10 minutes) □ Jog around bases or to fence and back
 - Stretch
 - Play catch
- Throwing (10 minutes)
 - Play catch – hit the target (5 minutes)
 - Long toss (5 minutes)
- Fielding – infield (25 minutes)
 - Four square – rotate positions (10 minutes) **Game**
 - Middle infield drills (10 minutes)
 - Hot corner situations (5 minutes)
- Fielding – outfield (15 minutes)
 - Pop flies (5 minutes)
 - Ground balls (5 minutes)
 - Do or die – throw home (5 minutes) **Game**
- Hitting & Situations (35 minutes)
- Batting practice (15 minutes)
 - Use live catcher
 - On-deck batter does soft toss
- Situations (20 minutes)
 - Players at positions
 - Use live runners

MINORS/MAJORS Practice Plan V

- Warm Up (10 minutes) □ Jog around bases or to fence and back
 - Stretch
 - Play catch
- Throwing (10 minutes)
 - Play catch – hit the target (5 minutes)
 - Throwing relay drill (5 minutes) **Game**
- Fielding – three groups (15 minutes)
- Infielders
 - Ground balls/four square
 - Double plays
- Outfielders
 - Fly balls
 - Football drill
- Catchers
 - Blocking balls
 - Framing
 - Footwork
 - Fielding pop flies
- Base running (15 minutes) □ Through first
 - The banana
 - The question mark
 - First to third
 - Second to home
- Hitting & Situations (25 minutes)
 - Four, four and four (or three, three and three)
- Infield and outfield pre game routine (20 minutes)
 - Infield
 - Throw to first
 - Double play
 - Progressive
 - Throw to home
 - Slow roller – throw to first
 - Fly/Pop fly ball priorities
 - Outfield
 - Throw to second
 - Throw to third
 - Throw to home
 - Do or die – throw to home
 - Follow the throw home
 - Fly/Pop fly ball priorities

Practice Drills Summary

Throwing Drills

Flick drill

Elbow in glove, use wrist only to throw ball to partner. Elbow height equal to shoulder. Emphasize wrist snap at release to improve velocity, carry and accuracy.

Arm drag drill

Players sit Indian style holding ball on ground next to them. Drag ball back on ground as far as possible and then up to the throwing position. Throwing elbow height should be even with shoulder and elbow should be bent at 90 degree angle. At the throwing position (the "T") the ball should be facing away from the player (seams out) and the glove pointed at target. Player throws ball to partner, emphasizing follow through and glove tuck.

One-knee drill

Throwing side knee is on ground. Glove side leg is out front at 45 degree angle and in line with throwing side knee, pointed at partner. Foot is closed to 45 degree angle. Glove arm is up and pointing at target with a slight bend in the elbow. Throwing arm is in ready position with elbow equal to shoulder, at 90 degree angle and ball pointed away. As player throws, glove is tucked into chest/armpit, and after ball is released, throwing hand/arm crosses front side leg.

Two-knee drill

Both knees are on the ground and player is facing partner. Glove arm is up and pointing at target with a slight bend in the elbow. Throwing arm is in ready position with elbow equal to shoulder, at 90 degree angle and ball pointed away. As player throws, glove is tucked into chest/armpit, and after ball is released, throwing hand/arm crosses front side leg ("taking candy out of the pocket").

Play catch – hit the target

Play catch. If player hits partner in face/head area they get 2 points. If player hits partner above belt in the upper torso area, he gets one point. First person to ten wins.

Back `em up three

Form two lines with players facing one another in pairs. Players play catch. If the ball is caught, one partner backs up three steps. Continue with one partner backing up three steps each time ball is caught. A partner team is out if the ball is dropped. Winner is last team standing.

Throwing relay drill

Line players up in groups of three or four players, approximately 20-30 yards apart. Player "A" throws to player "B", who in turn throws to player "C" (the "relay"), and so. If ball is dropped, it must be returned to the thrower before it can be advanced to the next player. First team to return the ball to Player A wins. Emphasize throwing to a target and giving the "cutoff man" a throw he can handle. Receiving player should provide a target and position himself (moving forward or backwards if necessary, i.e., to avoid short hops) to receive the ball and make the proper turn and throw to the next player.

Long toss

Form two lines with players facing one another in pairs. Players should be separated enough such that it is difficult to reach one another with a line drive throw. Emphasize the line drive throw – a throw that bounces once or twice is acceptable. This drill builds arm strength and improves the accuracy of longer throws.

Infield Drills

Alligator arms

Break the team up into groups of three or four. Before starting the drill, explain to the players how an alligator jaw works – the ball is its food. Make sure player is in the proper fielding position (knees bent, butt down, hands out front). Roll the ball to the player. When the ball enters the glove, the bare hand covers the ball to secure it. The player's head should remain down, and emphasize bringing the ball into his belly. You can perform this drill with or without gloves.

Shuffle

Break the team up into groups of three or four. Player assumes proper fielding position. Roll balls to the left or right of the player. Player shuffles once or twice to field the ball and tosses back to coach while maintaining the proper fielding position. Coach receives the ball and rolls again forcing the player to shuffle in the opposite direction. Repeat 4-6 times for each player. Emphasize moving feet quickly so player can field the ball in front of him. Introduce rolls at greater distance from the player so he is required to pivot, cross over and run a few steps to ensure ball is fielded in front of him.

Breakdown

Line players up along the foul line and request they assume the fielding position. Say "go". Players run until you say "field", at which point players break down into fielding position. Repeat.

Ready, set, go

Line players up so they are facing each, approximately 10-15 yards apart. Players in one line have the ball. When you say "ready", players breakdown into fielding position, holding the ball in their gloves with their hands out front. At "set", players bring ball into their belly then pop up into throwing position, with front foot and glove hand pointing at their partner. At "go", players throw ball to their partner. Emphasize follow through and glove tuck.

Roll back and forth

Line players up so they are facing each, approximately 2-3 yards apart. Players proceed to roll ball to another. Players should remain in fielding position throughout the drill and employ proper fielding mechanics (hands out front, head down, bring ball into belly). Perform drill for 20-30 seconds, give players a brief break, then start drill again.

Rapid fire

Empty a bucket of balls. Line up players in single file, or separate into small groups. Put empty bucket next to the players. Coach rolls balls to the players rapidly. As the player is catching the ball, the next ball is rolled so the players are forced to move quickly. Fielded balls are placed in the bucket. You can use this format for the shuffle drill as well.

Four square

You will need at least four coaches/volunteers to perform this drill. Place players at infield positions (2-3 players at each position). Two coaches stand on third base line and hit balls to first and second baseman. Two coaches stand on first base line and hit balls to shortstop and third baseman. Hit ground balls and instruct players to make good throws back to the coach. Rotate players amongst positions every 3-4 minutes. Make a game of it. Player must field the ball cleanly and make good throw back to the coach, otherwise, they are eliminated. Last player standing wins.

Middle Infield / Double play drills

Break players up into two groups, one at the shortstop position and one at the second base position. A player or coach can play first.

- 4-6-3 double play:
 - Hit or roll balls directly at the second baseman, emphasizing a pivot move and making accurate throw to the shortstop covering second base.
 - Hit or roll balls to left of the second baseman so he is required to run or shuffle a few steps to field the ball. Instruct player to make a spin move (turning body so back is facing home plate) and accurate throw to second base (shortstop covering).
 - Hit or roll balls to right of the second baseman so he is required to shuffle feet to field the ball. This play should result in a flip throw or toss to the shortstop covering the bag. Instruct players to say "flip" so the shortstop knows it will be an underhand throw or soft toss.
 - Second baseman should "follow the toss" to ensure an accurate delivery.
- 6-4-3 double play:
 - Hit or roll balls directly at the shortstop, emphasizing pivot move or drop step, and making an accurate throw to the second baseman covering the bag.
 - Hit or roll balls to right of the shortstop so he is required to run a few steps to field ball. Instruct player to make drop step and an accurate throw to second baseman.
 - Hit or roll balls to the left of the shortstop so he is required to shuffle feet to field the ball. This play should result in a flip throw or toss to the second baseman covering the bag. Instruct players to say "flip" so the second baseman knows it will be an underhand throw or soft toss. Stress the importance of first making an out ("make sure of one") – the double play is the bonus. If fielded ball is bobbled or dropped, play is to first. Tell players covering second base to always give a target (hold hands up together in upper torso area) and to expect a bad throw (players should take short choppy steps as they approach second base so they can react to off target throws). Demonstrate pivot moves at the second base bag (e.g., the straddle, cross over, step-back). For balls hit far to the left of second

baseman/right of shortstop, the player covering second becomes a first baseman (i.e., stretches when receiving the ball). Tell players covering second base to hold ball if there is no reasonable chance of turning the double play (avoid errant throws).

Hot Corner Situations

Break players up into three groups - third basemen, first basemen, runners.

- Man on first, less than two outs:
 - Hit or roll baseballs to third baseman. Hard hit balls at or to the left or right of third baseman, play is to second base. If ball is hit softly to the third baseman (i.e., a slow roller), play is to first base.
- Man on first and second, less than two outs:
 - Hit or roll baseballs to third baseman. Hard hit balls to the left of third baseman, play is to second base. Hard hit balls at or to the right of the third baseman, player steps on third and throws to second or first base, assuming there is a play to be made. If ball is hit softly to the third baseman (i.e., a slow roller), play is to first base. Again, stress the importance of making an out. If ball is bobbled or dropped, play is to first base. If no play can be made, hold the ball.

Outfield /Pop Fly Drills

Pop flies

Break players up into two or three groups. Throw or hit fly balls to players (a tennis racquet works nicely too). Demonstrate the proper technique, for example, both hands should be held out high with palms facing up. Head and shoulders should be directly under the ball when catch is being made. Throwing hand covers the ball as it enters the glove.

Left and right fly balls

Break players up into two or three groups. Player stands facing coach. Throw the ball over the left or right shoulder of the player. Stress the importance of the drop step with the foot closest to the ball (i.e., if ball is hit over left shoulder, the player should drop step with left foot). Teach the players to run to the spot where they think the catch will be made, turning their back, if necessary. Discourage back-pedaling.

Football drill

Break players up into two groups. Player stands facing coach. Explain to players that you will either raise your right or left arm. If right arm is raised, player drop steps with his left foot and sprints to his left at a 45 degree angle from starting point. If left arm is raised, player drop steps with his right foot and sprints to his right at a 45 degree angle from starting point. Lead the player with a throw as you would a football to a receiver. This drill teaches players how to maintain focus on the ball and catch while in a full sprint. Have some fun with this drill and break out the football!

Ground balls

Break players up into two or three groups in the outfield. Throw or bat ground balls. For slower hit balls, instruct players to charge ball then break down as they would when fielding a ground ball in the infield. For harder hit balls, show players how to drop to one knee to ensure ball does not get past them. After fielding the ball, players should pop up and throw ball to coach or cut off man.

Do or die

This drill is designed to teach players how to charge and field balls hit into the outfield and throw players out ("do or die") or prevent them from advancing a base. Break players up into two groups. Throw or bat ground balls to the players. Instruct players to charge the ball and field it while maintaining a stride. Players should position themselves such that they field the ball on their glove hand side. After fielding the ball the player takes crow hop and throws to coach or cut off man.

Fly/Pop fly ball priorities

It's important that players understand who has priority when there is a pop or fly ball. When practicing infield/outfield drills, spend 10-15 minutes simulating various situations, for example, fly balls to right-center or left-center, pop flies in shallow center, pop flies in the infield, etc.

Also, explain the hierarchy, as follows:

- Not only is your center fielder is the "captain" of the outfield, but he also has priority over all other positions in the field. Teach your center fielder to take control, and if he can catch a fly ball or pop fly in right, left or shallow center, he should call all other players off.
- Outfielders have priority over infielders. On balls hit to the shallow outfield, instruct your outfielders to call off infielders (it's easier to make a catch running as opposed to running back), but only if they think they can make the catch.
- Your shortstop is the captain of the infield and should call off all other fielders, provided of course he has the ability to make the catch.
 - *Coach's note: As soon as one infielder calls for a catch, all other infielders should be taught to run to cover their respective bases.*
- The shortstop and second baseman have priority on pop flies behind third and first base, respectively. It is much easier for a shortstop or second baseman to catch a ball running to his left (e.g., into shallow right field) or his right (e.g., into shallow left field) than it is for a third or first baseman trying to catch a ball over their shoulder. Also, remind the shortstop or second baseman that outfielders have priority.
- The third or first baseman have priority on short pop flies between them and the catch in fair or foul territory. Again, it's much easier to make a catch running in than it is running back.
- For pop flies around home plate (fair or foul territory), teach your catchers to turn with their backs facing the infield and to take a couple of steps back. This type of pop fly will naturally drift towards fair territory, so using this technique will increase the likelihood that the ball will be caught.
 - *Coach's note: On pop fly foul balls by left-handed batters, teach catchers to look over their left shoulder first. Left handed-batters will rarely hit a pop fly ball to the first base side in foul territory. If a right-handed batter hits a pop foul ball,*

catchers should look over their right shoulder first. When practicing these drills, get the players to form a habit of either calling for the ball ("I got it, I got it!") or "acknowledging" that a teammate is clear to catch the ball that they have called for ("you, you, you!"). Players fielding fly balls should also "waive off" their teammates.

Base Running Drills

Straight through first

The objective is to teach players the proper way to run to first base on a groundball to the infield. Line the players up a home base. Simulate a ground ball hit in the infield. Instruct players to find the ball within the first few strides towards first base then keep head down as they run through the base (looking for the ball slows them down). Discourage sliding into or lunging towards first base bag. Players should practice stepping on the home-plate side of first base (i.e., not the middle or back portion of the bag) to improve speed to bag and reduce injury.

The question mark

The objective is to teach players to identify when a batted ground ball makes it through the infield and to make the proper turn towards and through first base. Line the players up a home base. Simulate a ground ball hit in the infield. Instruct players to find the ball within the first few strides towards first base (they are still on the first base line at this point). When they see the ball has made it through the infield, they initiate a turn and proceed to and through first base. The resulting running path should resemble a question mark. Emphasize stepping on the corner of the bag facing the inner-diamond and taking short choppy steps after they pass the bag. Players should keep their feet moving so if the outfielder bobbles the ball, they are prepared to take the extra base. If ball is fielded cleanly, instruct players to quickly return to first base.

The banana

The objective is to teach players how to exit the batter's box properly on a clean base hit (or fly ball to the outfield), and to make the proper turn towards and through first base. Line the players up a home base. Simulate a base hit to the outfield. Instruct players to exit the batter's box at a 45 degree angle in foul territory then begin making turn towards inner part of the first base bag. The resulting running path should resemble the shape of a banana. Emphasize stepping on the corner of the bag facing the inner-diamond and taking short choppy steps after they pass the bag. Players should keep their feet moving so if the outfielder bobbles the ball, they are prepared to take the extra base. If ball is fielded cleanly, instruct players to quickly return to first base.

First to third

This drill teaches players running from first base how to “pick up” the third base coach on a base hit to the outfield, and to make the proper turn around second base. Line the players up at first base and place a coach in the third base coach’s box. Simulate a base hit. Instruct players to run hard and pick up the third base coach approximately half to two-thirds of the way to second base. The third base coach either waves (windmill motion) the player to third or holds (both arms up, palms facing out) the player at second. If the player sees that he is being waved to third, he should begin making a slight turn and step on the corner of the bag facing the inner-diamond.

Second to home

This drill teaches players running from second to home how to pick up the third base coach on a base hit to the outfield, and to make the proper turn around third base. Line the players up at second base and place a coach in the third base coach’s box. Simulate a base hit. Instruct players to run hard and pick up the third base immediately. The third base coach either waves (windmill motion) the player home or holds (both arms up, palms facing out, player makes the turn around third; or pointing to the bag, indicating player should stop on the bag) the player at third. Again, player should make the proper turn and step on the corner of the bag facing the inner-diamond.

Note to third base coaches: If you want the player to advance home or at least make the turn, leave the coach’s box and position yourself a one-third or halfway to home (in foul territory). If you want the player to stop on third base, remain in coach’s box and point to the bag with one hand and with the other, hold up indicating player should stop. Also, never touch the player as he is rounding the bag.

Diamond relay

This is a fun drill but it also teaches players how to make the proper turns around the bases, including stepping on the right part of the bag (see drills above). Split the players up into teams of two. Half of the players go to second base, and the other half remains at home plate. At “go” players begin to sprint around the bases. After they’ve completed their tour around the bases, they tag the next player in line, relay style. First team to complete the relay wins.

Hitting and Situations

Soft toss

Position player perpendicular to and approximately 2-3 yards away from fence or batting cage screen. If possible, use a portable home plate so the player knows where to stand in relation to the plate. The coach takes a knee and positions himself approximately 2-3 yards from the player and at a 45 degree angle from the player’s mid-section. The coach proceeds to underhand (“soft toss”) tennis or whiffle balls towards the player’s mid-section. The player hits the ball into the fence or screen. Reinforce all the basic hitting fundamentals during this drill, for example, proper stance, hand positioning, weight shift, stride, swing plane, and hitting the top half of ball. Teach the players how to time the toss. For example, lowering your hand before the toss is similar to a pitcher breaking his hands before a pitch, in which case the player should begin his weight shift and stride. For older or more advanced players, toss the ball higher (player must still wait for ball to drop down to mid-section) so the player learns to keep hands

and weight back, or with more velocity towards his mid-section so he is forced to make a quicker swing (“throw your hands”).

Whiffle circle

Arrange players in one to two circles and pitch whiffle balls from one knee. Continue to focus on mechanics (proper stance, hand positioning, weight shift, stride, swing plane, and hitting the top half of ball) and introduce concepts of timing and tempo for more advanced players (e.g., they begin stride as you bring arm back in throwing motion). Players should be in “ready” position while waiting (no swinging!). Pitch three to four balls to one player then move on to the next. Ask parents to help collect balls and keep kids separated.

Four, four and four

This drill is a combination of batting practice and situations. Break teams up into three teams of four, or three, if necessary. Also, attempt to evenly distribute your skilled players amongst the teams. One team takes batting practice while the other two teams take positions in the field. Throw five to six pitches to each player and on the last one, have the player “run it out” and the fielders make the play. Proceed until the batting team has made three outs. Rotate teams, and the team with the most runs (or hits) wins.