

Villages T-Ball League – Suggested Drills – 2016

This is certainly not an exhaustive list of the things you can do – so please feel free to be creative and to use things that you or other coaches have had success with in the past – but hopefully this gives an idea of some of the types of things a coach can do at this level during practices.

General Thoughts

1. Use stations during practice – Practices work best when kids are kept moving and engaged – to minimize standing around time, one idea that has worked fairly well in the past is to split the kids up into 3 or 4 groups during practice time
 - a. Have those groups rotate through various stations where a coach or two can work on a specific drill/skill(s) with them – see some suggested drills below
 - b. Stations can include the basics – throwing, fielding and hitting – also can occasionally mix in base running, sliding, etc.
 - c. If you have 3 or 4 stations and spend 10-15 min at each, that's a great 45 minute practice!
 - d. You can also bring the team together for a drill or two – see suggested group drills below
 - e. Please try to avoid having one kid hitting and the rest of the team standing around in the field waiting for him/her to hit it – this gets old fast for kids and coaches alike
2. Assistant coaches are key! Being able to conduct these sorts of drills (and to keep things moving generally) is one of the reasons that we suggest “the more the better” in terms of assistant coaches – ideally you would have at least 3 coaches (including yourself) helping at each practice/game

Some Suggested Drills

1. Throwing
 - a. Put kids on the baseline and have them throw one at a time to a coach (catching skills seem to lag at this age) – goal here is to work on proper throwing mechanics
 - i. Start facing sideways with throwing hand away from target, and with hands in ready position, feet shoulder width apart, front hip pointing at target (ball in throwing hand with proper grip ready to throw, throwing hand in glove)
 - ii. Break hands from ready position - throwing hand comes up and back with ball facing away from target, and extend glove hand simultaneously toward target)
 - iii. Step toward target and throw ball, extending throwing arm out and down in front of thrower to extend and follow through
 - iv. Emphasize throwing only when the receiver is giving a proper “target” – ie looking at the thrower with both hands up, and ready to catch the throw - “don't throw to people who aren't looking!”
 - b. Some other ideas
 - i. Start with kids sitting down with legs together and extended straight in front of them, drag ball along ground with throwing hand to proper release position, and then throw and release
 - ii. Same drill – but kneeling on one knee (kneel on knee on your throwing side) – work on hip rotation (first backwards to coil, then uncoil and open hips ending up with throwing hip pointing at target as you release) –goal here is to add power and accuracy through hip rotation
 - c. We suggest working on throwing at every practice – if each kid can learn the basics of throwing (namely proper mechanics), that's a successful season of learning!
2. Batting

- a. Hit off tee – you can do this into a backstop or tall fence to get more reps, or can have the other members of the group fielding and throwing batted balls toward a bucket or coach at the pitchers mound – remember to avoid having all kids standing around in the field while one kid is batting
 - b. Soft toss – also can do this into a fence or backstop – batter hits into the fence, coach is kneeling and faces batter about 5 feet away and directly in front of batter, “soft toss” ball underhanded toward and out in front of batter, who is in stance and in ready hitting position, to swing at ball and hit it into fence
 - c. Also can use a larger ball – eg a kiddie soccer ball or a small beach ball to hit off tee – this emphasizes taking a good hard cut, especially for kids whose swings are tentative
 - d. Hitting mechanics - focus on good stance and hand position
 - i. Hands back
 - ii. Feet shoulder width apart
 - iii. Emphasize good hand position
1. Don't overgrip bat (ie hold it lightly, don't squeeze it)
 2. Line up second set of knuckles (ie the ones just above a ring, if you were wearing a ring) in hitting stance – many kids at this age overrotate their top hand (so that their first set of knuckles are lined up, ie the ones where your fingers start) – a proper grip is key for bringing the bat through the hitting zone properly
 - iv. Work on 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)
 - v. 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
 - vi. 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)
 - vii. Most important thing at this and any age really – especially in the games – remind them to watch the ball!

3. Fielding

- a. Techniques to work on here:
 - i. Work on good ready position – feet shoulder width apart, hands out in front at waist level with palms up (not on ground to start), slight bend in knees and at waist
 - ii. Ground balls – slide laterally to get into position in front of ball, hands drop to ground with both hands out in front (ball should be fielded out in front, not between legs), knees bent, head up – then shift into proper throwing position either by moving feet or by “crow hopping” (a short hop) into throwing position (ie sideways, as described above)
 - iii. Pop flies – tough at this age for many kids – one good drill is to use tennis balls and either throw or hit them with a tennis racket, which helps gets start to judge balls hit into the air and reduces the fear/injury factor
- b. Fielding Drills
 - i. Field ground balls at second base position and throw to first – then graduate to shortstop position over time
 - ii. Another good drill is to have a line of kids at second base position and another line at shortstop – roll ground ball to either one and have other cover second for a force out at second, with fielder working on fielding ball and then making a proper easy underhand or short overhand flip (work on making it catchable)
 - iii. You can use tennis balls for popups, especially for the more tentative kids
 - iv. Unless you're a whiz with a fungo bat it's probably easiest at this age to just throw them the grounders and pop ups

4. Group Drills

- a. Pickle (both individual and whole team at one time – kids love this – you can tag kids out and get them down to one “survivor”)
- b. Baserunning (chasing or being chased by a coach is always fun), sliding practice (kids at this age love to slide)
- c. Stretching, loosening up – a good way to start practice
- d. Ball scramble (throw all balls out of bucket/bag in various directions – time the team for how long it takes for all the balls to be put back in the bag/bucket)

- e. Messy backyard (probably best to use tennis balls for this one) – split kids into 2 groups, one on each side of a line – have the groups start with an equal number of balls on each side, give them 30 secs or a minute to throw the balls back and forth as fast as possible and see which team ends up with less balls on their side (object is to keep your “backyard” clean)
- f. Use your imagination – kids love the variety and anything that gets them moving and working together!