

BLAINE BENGALS

Youth Baseball

Coaching Manual



Guidelines and strategies to help develop baseball players with age specific goals and techniques

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Dear Coaches, Parents, Players & Fans:

I first want to thank-you for choosing the time to look through this booklet and for your commitment in helping make Blaine baseball the best program around. Since taking over as the head baseball coach at Blaine High School I have seen much change and support for the program at all levels. Changes for the better and it is my belief with the people we have, the facilities we have and most importantly the kids we have that together we can help make Blaine baseball a tremendous experience for our youth.

I wanted to put together some information that could be used by all coaches in the Blaine area including: the Blaine Area Little League, the Soderville Athletic Association, the Blaine Area Traveling League, and others. Some of this information includes giving all coaches in the area a guideline as to goals for baseball players at each level. We need to know as coaches what we should be teaching our players so they can succeed at the next level. I have included age appropriate goals we want players to accomplish as they make their way through the program, all of which fit each age level very well. The goals range from 4 years old to 15 and over. I have also included sample practice plans for each age group. Many of the goals I have used through researching Ripken Baseball, an organization started by Cal Ripken Jr. and Billy Ripken, which holds baseball camps and leagues all over the country.

In this booklet you will also find skills we teach at the high school level and as we break down different aspects of the game from hitting, catching, fielding, base running and throwing including pitching. I have also included a few drills that we do at the high school level that I hope will be very helpful to you.

By working together and being on the same page we can accomplish a great deal. I do not claim to know it all and am always willing to learn more. My hope is that the Blaine High School Baseball program can be a research tool for you. Have a great season!

Tim Sukalski
Head Baseball Coach
Blaine High School

Coaching Philosophy

- Have fun
- Be positive
- Make baseball important to you, your team, and students you teach
- Teach life lessons along the way
- Be willing to learn more about baseball and coaching
- Loyalty & belief in what we do
- The answer to these three questions will determine your success or failure.
 - o Can people trust me to do what's right?
 - o Am I committed to doing my best?
 - o Do I care about other people and show it?

If your players can answer yes to those three questions above they will be willing to do whatever it takes to be successful.

Program Philosophy

- Have Fun
- Become the best baseball program we can
- Represent Blaine H.S. with class
- Help develop successful people off the field
- Fundamentally sound
- Play hard "Control attitude & effort"
- Hustle & respect the game
- Emphasis on academics
- Emphasis on strength training
- Emphasis on multi-sport athletes

AGE APPROPRIATE PROGRESSIONS

Baseball Goals

4-6 Years Old

GOALS:

1) Learning the basic rules:

- The right direction to run when the ball is hit
- Where the bases are and runners must touch the bases
- How to record outs (catch the ball in the air, throw to first, or tag the runners)
- Running past first base
- Concepts of TEAM
- Three outs constitute a half an inning

2) Throwing Mechanics:

- Turn the body so the front shoulder points toward the target
- Keep the throwing elbow above the shoulder
- Step toward the target with the non-throwing foot and release the ball

3) Tracking:

- Follow the ball with the eyes into the glove
- Whether on the ground or in the air use softer balls
- Use two hands to catch and field
- Try to catch the ball out in front of the body

4) Hitting:

- How to hold and swing a bat
- Batting safety! When not to swing bats and wearing batting helmets
- Hitting off a tee
- Hitting softly tossed pitches

5) Learning Position Play:

- If the ball is hit to a teammate let him or her field it
- Proper fielding position (down and ready)

AGE APPROPRIATE PROGRESSIONS

Baseball Goals

7-9 Years Old

GOALS:

1) Learning the basic rules:

- Concept of TEAM
- Force outs
- Tagging up
- What is a double play
- Base running
 - When you don't have to run
 - Not running into or past teammates on the base paths
 - Always keep running after ball is hit with two outs
- Balls and Strikes
- Good Sportsmanship

2) Throwing Mechanics

- Introduce the four-seam grip
- Point the front shoulder, step and throw
- Introduce the concept of generating momentum to the target and following the throw.

3) Catching and Fielding

- Thrown and hits balls
- Fingers up versus fingers down
- See the glove and the ball
- Use two hands
- Forehands and backhands
- Introduce the underhand flip
- First-base fundamentals
- Cross over and drop steps

4) Hitting

- Choosing the right bat
- Proper grip
- Hitting pitched balls
- Introduce drill work (tee, soft toss, short toss)

5) Learning Position Play

- Learn the positions and the areas each player should cover
- Cover the nearest base when the ball is not hit to you.
- Basics of cut-offs and relays

AGE APPROPRIATE PROGRESSIONS

Baseball Goals

10-12 Years Old

GOALS:

1) Learning the Basic Rules

- Infield fly
- Balks

2) Base Running

- Leads
- Stealing
- Extra-base hits
- Tagging up and going half way
- Proper Sliding techniques

3) Pitching & Throwing Mechanics

- Wind-up versus stretch
- Four seam grip
- Shuffle, throw, follow
- Pitcher covering first

4) Hitting

- Repetitions
- Drill Work
 - Tee
 - Soft toss
 - Quick Swings
 - Stick Ball
- Bunting

5) Learning Team Fundamentals

- Cut-offs and relays
- Basic bunt defenses
- Basic first and third situations
- Double plays
- Defending the steal
- Infield and outfield communication and priorities
- Backing up bases

AGE APPROPRIATE PROGRESSIONS

Baseball Goals

13-14 Years Old

GOALS:

1) Throwing Mechanics and Pitching:

- Emphasis on generating momentum toward the target and following the throw.
- Curveballs/breaking balls
- Change-ups
- Pitching Mechanics and using the body effectively
- Pick-off mechanics
- Drill Work
 - Chair drills
 - Towel drills
- Introduction to long toss

2) Hitting

- Introduce situational hitting
 - Inside-out swing
 - hitting behind runners
 - hit and run
 - productive outs
- Sacrifice bunting versus bunting for a hit
- Understanding the count

3) Base Running

- First and third situations
- Steal Breaks
- Delayed Steals
- Reading situations and reacting to them

4) Fielding

- Generating Momentum back toward the target on throws when necessary
- Cross over and drop steps
- Backhands and when to use them
- Double play depth
- Pitcher covering first
- Infield communication

5) Learning Team Fundamentals

- Pick-off plays
- Full bunt defenses
- Full first and third defenses
- Pop-up and fly ball priorities
- Double plays and underhand flips

AGE APPROPRIATE PROGRESSIONS

Baseball Goals

15 Years and Older

GOALS:

1) Throwing Mechanics and Pitching

- Long toss
- Balance drills
- Continue mastering breaking and off speed pitches
- Throwing for accuracy
- Generating momentum toward the target and following the throw
- Pickoff mechanics

2) Hitting

- Mental aspects
 - Hitter's count versus pitcher's count
- Two strike hitting
- Aggressive versus defensive swings
- Situational hitting
- Productive outs
- Advanced game situations and defenses

3) Base Running

- One-way leads
- Going on the first move
- Reacting to batted balls
- Tag-up situations
- Third-base rules
- No out, one out and two out rules

4) Fielding

- Understanding and adapting to playing conditions
- Fence drill (outfield)
- Crossover and drop steps
- Do or die plays at the plate
- Preventing runners from taking extra bases
- Communicating between pitches

5) Learning Team Fundamentals

- Cut-offs and relays
- Advanced pickoff plays and when to use them
- Double plays
- Advanced game situations and defense

HITTING

Hitting



Main Points

1. **Selecting a bat**-pick a bat that feels right and that is light enough to generate good bat speed.
2. **Stance**-starting point; need vision, balance, and plate coverage.
3. **Weight shift**-weight shifts to backside, generating energy, before being taken forward; verbal cue: "You have to go back to go forward." (Load Phase).
4. **Stride**-short and soft or pick up and place foot back down. Toward the pitcher.
5. **Swing**-short and quick, using hands, wrists and forearms. Head down, rotating at the hips as back foot "crushes the bug."
6. **Follow-through**-one or two hands; takes care of itself if all elements of swing are in place.

Soft Toss

Objective

To use a proper grip and understand how that helps improve bat speed, verbal cue: “Loose hands, quick bat”

Setup

Bucket of balls, coach, player or toss machine to toss; net screen, or fence to hit into

Execution

This is a standard hitting drill that can be done virtually anywhere. Teammates can toss to one another, or a coach can toss to a player. The batter takes his or her stance; the tosser kneels across from the hitter, slightly in front of home plate in foul ground, not in the direction that the ball will be hit. The ball is tossed underhand so the batter can hit it out in front of the plate. The hitter wants to concentrate on having a loose grip in the fingers with the “door knocking” knuckles lined up. This will allow the wrists to unlock, promoting a quicker swing using the hands, wrists, and forearms. Batters should think *loose hands, quick bat*. This drill works best if done into a screen with a target, but it can also be done into a fence if plastic balls, tennis balls, or rubber balls are used. Never hit baseballs into a fence.

Coaching Keys

If players seem to be getting jammed quite a bit, take a look at where the tosses are coming from and are being hit. A lot of coaches try to soft toss from a position directly across from the batter. When the ball is coming directly at the batter, he or she actually has to drag the bat to the ball, hitting it at a location that's not in front of home plate. The toss should come from an angle slightly in front of home plate and be struck slightly in front of the plate. This allows the wrists to unlock and the barrel of the bat to get to the ball.

Tee Work

Objective

To develop proper weight shift; verbal cue: “You have to go back to go forward”

Setup

Batting tee, bucket of balls, net, screen or fence to hit into

Execution

Players adjust the batting tee to a height that makes them swing down slightly to get the barrel of the bat to the ball. Players hit into the screen or a net with a target. Work strictly on weight shift (“Go back to go forward”). Take all the weight to the back side before exploding forward. Keep the head down and eyes on the ball. Take the front foot and front shoulder directly toward pitcher. Try to hit the ball at the target each time. Avoid an uppercut swing. If you don't have a net, plastic balls, tennis balls, or soft rubber balls can be hit into a fence. Never hit baseballs into a fence.

Coaching Keys

To help keep players from dropping the front shoulder, tell them to focus on hitting the ball into a target directly in front of the tee. If they're pulling the ball weakly, remind them to go straight back first before striding straight forward toward the pitcher (“Go straight back, then straight forward”). If they hit the tee, top ground balls, or swing and miss often, have them pick a spot on the ball and focus on that spot until they make contact.

Short Toss From the Front

Objective

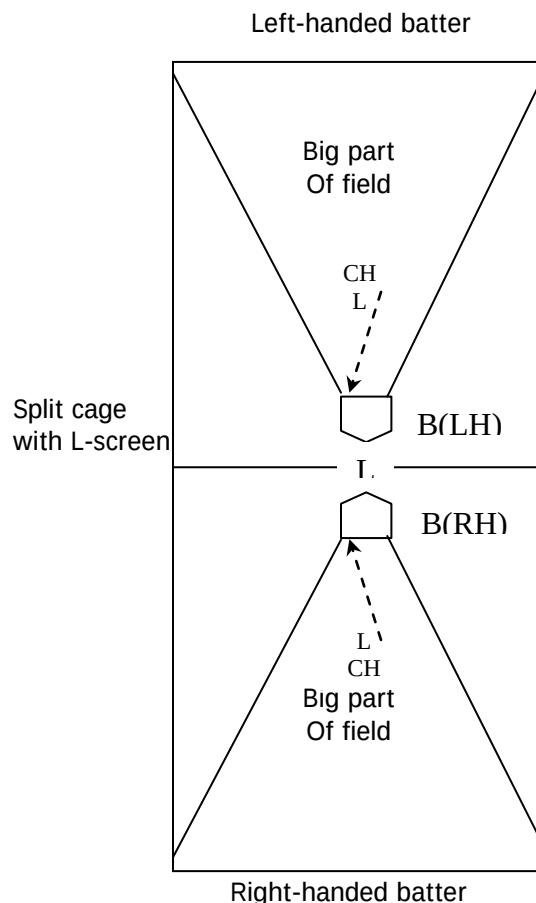
To use the big part of the field by keeping the front shoulder in long enough to hit balls tossed to the outside part of the plate up the middle or the opposite way

Setup

L-screen, stool or bucket for coach to sit on, coach to toss, bucket of balls

Execution

This drill stresses using the big part of the field. Coach sits on a bucket or chair behind a screen about 10 to 12 feet out in front of home plate. Coach tosses pitches underhand, but firmly, to outside part of plate. Batter tries to keep the front shoulder in and drive the ball up the middle or the other way. Some batters naturally will pull the pitches, which is okay if that's their natural swing and they hit line drives. Weakly pulled ground balls are what we're trying to avoid.



Bunting

Objective

To work on keeping sacrifice bunts away from the pitcher

Setup

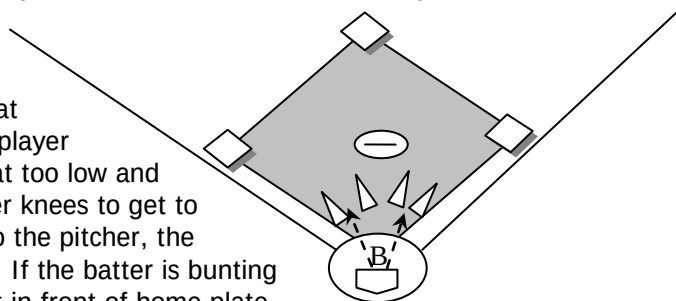
Four cones, bucket of balls, coach or player to pitch

Execution

Set up two cones down the first base line about halfway between home plate and the mound. One should be about 3 feet inside the baseline, the other about 8 to 10 feet inside the line toward the mound. The same thing should be done on the third baseline. A coach can throw from a shortened distance with players taking turns bunting. The idea is to stop or push the ball between the cones. Try not to make the bunts too perfect. Make the pitcher come off the mound to field the ball. Stress that players pivot both feet instead of squaring to bunt. Have them start with the bat at the top of the strike zone and the barrel of the bat above the hands at an angle, bending their knees for lower pitches and leaving pitches above the hands alone. Players should give with the pitch to deaden the ball and use the bottom hand to guide the bat and push the ball in the desired direction. Give the players five tries each; see how many each one can get between the cones.

Coaching Keys

If the ball is being popped up quite a bit, the barrel of the bat probably is below the hands at the moment of contact. The player may be either bunting a pitch that's too high, starting the bat too low and then bringing it up to meet the ball, or not bending his or her knees to get to lower pitches. If the ball is being bunted consistently back to the pitcher, the batter is not using the lower hand to angle the bat correctly. If the batter is bunting a lot of foul balls, he or she is most likely not placing the bat in front of home plate.



Tee Hitting for Distance

Objective

To show how a good weight shift can generate power and that a level or slightly downward swing is best for driving the ball farther

Setup

Batting tee, bucket of balls, players in the field (optional), cones, markers or stakes (optional)

Execution

Players use proper fundamentals to see how far they can hit a ball off of a tee from home plate. 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. The head should stay on the ball. The front shoulder and stride should go directly toward the pitcher until contact is made. Batters who drop the back shoulder and try to intentionally hit the ball high are eliminated. Line drives are best, but hard ground balls count. Have players run out and stand next to their best hits or mark them with stakes.

Coaching Keys

Any time young players hit off a tee, especially if you tell them that they're hitting for distance, they'll tend to drop the back shoulder and swing with a visible uppercut. If players are hitting under the ball and getting a chunk of the tee with their swings or topping ground balls, the back shoulder dropping is likely the cause. Explain to them that the high fly balls they hit by doing this are really just pop-ups, not home runs, and that by swinging down and taking that barrel of the bat straight to the ball they will hit harder line drives and fly balls that will turn into home runs as they get bigger and stronger.

Hitting Contests

Objective

To add a competitive angle to regular hitting drills to make them seem less like work

Setup

Depends on the drill; usually a bucket of balls and a coach or pitching machine to feed or pitch

Execution

Almost any hitting drill can be turned into a contest using a point system. Award a point for a hard ground ball up the middle, 2 points for a line drive up the middle, and 5 points for a line drive up the middle that reaches the back wall of a cage or the outfield grass (depending on where you're hitting). Develop your own point systems for whatever concept you're teaching. Stress proper hitting mechanics at all times. The scoring sheet included here is designed to help you track individual and group totals for two rounds as well as the team total. Keep a record and compare results over the season to see how your team is progressing.

Player/group	Round 1	Round 2	Total
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
Group 1 total _____	Group 3 total _____		
Group 2 total _____	Team total _____		

THROWING

Throwing



Main Points

1. Use a four-seam grip.
2. Take the ball down, out, and up out of the glove (circular motion).
3. Hand above the ball at first, shifting to behind the ball as release point approaches.
4. Elbow above the shoulder.
5. Point front shoulder toward target.
6. Step toward target.
7. Release ball.
8. Follow through.

Cutoff Relay Race

Objective

To work on catching with two hands, making a quick transfer, and proper footwork when receiving and making throws

Setup

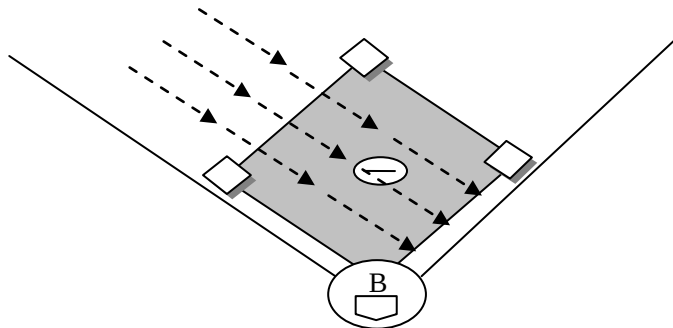
Bucket of balls, small groups of players

Execution

Create groups of three, four, or five players to race. Players stand in a straight line with the others in their group, beginning at the spot where the ball is picked up, spaced evenly. All groups go at the same time. An outfielder picks up a ball lying on the warning track next to the fence and throws to his first teammate. That teammate turns his body, catches, generates momentum, and throws to the next teammate. This continues until the ball reaches the last player. The team that finishes first wins.

Coaching Keys

The most common problems you'll find when executing relay throws are with kids who turn the wrong way before throwing (they turn toward the throwing side instead of the glove side) and kids who catch the ball flat-footed. Remind these players to turn toward the glove side as the ball approaches and to start moving toward the next target as they receive the ball. When they receive the throw, they'll already be moving in the right direction, so all they'll have to do is throw the ball and follow the throw.



Twenty-One

Objective

To improve throwing accuracy

Setup

Two players and a baseball

Execution

This is a game played by baseball players at all levels. As players play catch, 1 point is awarded to the thrower for each ball caught at chest level. Two points are awarded for a ball caught at head level. Points can be deducted for uncatchable throws. If a throw is accurate but the receiver misses it, points are still awarded to the thrower. The first player to 21 wins. Stress proper mechanics. Set up a team competition in which winners move on and losers are eliminated. To speed things up, play to 15 instead of 21.

Other Throwing Games

Objective

To make basic throwing drills more fun

Setup

A bucket of balls and a target

Execution

Just about any throwing drill can be turned into a contest by adding a target. Players can throw at a painted, taped, or drawn target on a fence, wall, or screen. Or they can try to knock a ball off a batting tee. Try anything that makes players concentrate and attempt to throw with accuracy. Stress proper mechanics at all times: four-seam grip; get the ball down, out, and up; elbow above the shoulder; point the front shoulder; step toward the target; follow the throw.

Coaching Keys

When players are struggling with their accuracy, check for a proper four-seam grip, that the front shoulder points toward the target, that the step is toward the target, and that the elbow is staying above the shoulder. Remind players to follow their throws toward the target after releasing the ball.

First and Third Drill

Objective

- Works First and Third situation
- Works both the offense and defense

Setup

Baseball field, baseballs

Execution

- Split up your team into two teams with complete infield
- One of the teams will play defense in the field, while the other team runs the bases
- The team running the bases will begin with a runner on both first and third, with the object being to score a run
- Defensively, the object is to stop the runner from scoring while also attempting not to give the runner second base on an easy steal

Coaching Keys

- The catcher calls the play before the pitcher pitches the ball
- The runner on first has only three pitches in which he must attempt to steal second base
- A successful steal of second base will be worth one point, and a run scored will be worth three points
- You need to work on defensive and offensive strategies before running this drill

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PITCHING

Pitching



Main Points

1. **Feet**-take a small step back with non-throwing side foot, keeping the weight over the stationary foot, which is turned parallel and touching the rubber
2. **Balance Position**-non-throwing side leg comes up, is at waist level, torso is slightly forward so that the weight is centered over the pivot foot.
3. **Power Position (Power T Position)**-hand above the ball, take the ball down out of the glove and up (circular motion) as the front foot strides toward home plate.
4. **Rotation**-hand goes from above the ball to behind it as the release point is approached; elbow is above the shoulder.
5. **Follow-through**-end up in a good fielding position; the follow-through takes care of itself if mechanics are correct; don't be too picky about a perfect follow-through if the results are consistent.

One-Knee Drill

Objective

To introduce players to proper throwing mechanics, particularly arm action (getting the ball down, out, and up)

Setup

Two players (or a player and a coach) and a baseball

Execution

This drill breaks down the player's arm action and works on keeping the elbow at the proper level. Players drop their throwing-side knee to the ground with the opposite knee up and play catch at a short distance using a four-seam grip to throw. Concentrate on taking the ball down, out, and up from the glove and keeping the elbow above the shoulder. The hand is on top of the ball as it's taken out of the glove, shifting to behind the ball as the arm comes forward. Players don't throw hard. Have them check their grip, hand, and elbow position after bringing the ball down, out, and up. Hand should be on top of the ball with fingers pointing away from the target just before the arm comes forward. From there, the player points the front shoulder toward the target, rotates the hips, brings the arm forward, and releases the ball, keeping the elbow above the shoulder. Younger players can use soft baseballs or do this drill with their coaches.

Coaching Keys

Many young players turn their hand so that it's under the ball before they bring the arm forward. Some people call this "pie throwing". Think of how you have to hold a pie to throw it at someone; the palm is facing up so that you don't drop the pie. This is the opposite of how you should throw a baseball. For players who do this, have them stop their motion just before they bring the arm forward and check to see that the hand is on top of the ball and that the ball is pointing straight back. Other players will let their elbows drop below shoulder level at the release point. To fix this problem, try the Tee Drill.

Tee Drill

Objective

To help players learn to keep the elbow above the shoulder when throwing

Setup

Two players (or a player and a coach), batting tee, a baseball

Execution

This drill helps prevent players from dropping their elbow when throwing. Players assume a one-knee position, as described in the One-Knee Drill. A batting tee is placed on the throwing side, close enough so that if the elbow drops it hits the tee. Players take the ball down, out, and up – checking their grip as necessary before rotating forward and releasing the ball. The presence of the tee will force players to consciously think about not dropping the elbow below shoulder level. Over time this will develop muscle memory that leads to proper throwing mechanics.

Power Position

Objective

To develop a proper grip and arm action

Setup

Two players (or a player and a coach), baseballs, a pitching mound (optional)

Execution

Variations of this drill can be done at all levels. The drill can be simplified for the youngest age groups to stress which direction to face when throwing; the proper four-seam grip; getting the ball down, out and up; keeping the hand above the ball prior to rotation; keeping the elbow above the shoulder; pointing the front shoulder toward the target; stepping toward the target; and following through. For older and more advanced players, the drill can help troubleshoot mechanical problems often experienced by pitchers. Players create a wide base with their feet and hold the ball with a four-seam grip. Weight shifts to the backside before moving forward. Hands break, and the weight goes back. Power position is assumed (check as necessary): hand above the ball with fingers pointed away from the target. Weight is back; elbow is above the shoulder. Front shoulder points toward the target. Hand shifts from above the ball to behind the ball as the arm moves forward through rotation. Ball is released (does not have to be thrown hard). Follow-through takes place with the trail foot staying in contact with the rubber. Players rotate on the back foot so the hips turn. Front toe points forward.

Coaching Keys

The Power Position Drill can be used to troubleshoot the following mechanical flaws:

Short-arming. Start in the finish position with the throwing arm extended forward as if following through. Take weight all the way back through the power position before finishing to stretch out the throwing motion.

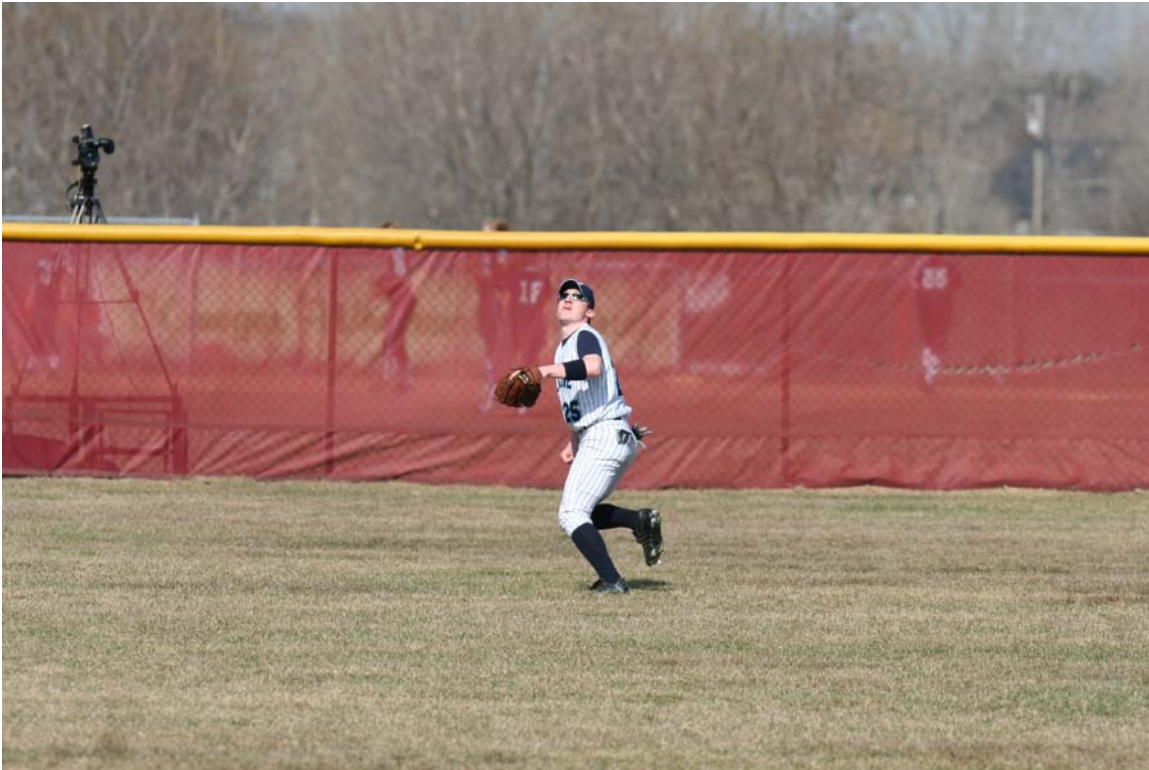
Getting pitches up. Have the catcher shorten up with the pitcher throwing from a mound. To throw downhill from the power position, the pitcher must get the elbow up and stay on top of the ball.

Long-striders. Again, have the catcher shorten up with the pitcher throwing from a mound. If the stride is too long the pitcher won't be able to compensate to get downhill in time to throw a strike.

Breaking balls or off-speed pitches. Between starts, pitchers struggling with their grips, mechanics, or control can practice their breaking balls and off-speed pitches from the power position on or off a mound from a shortened distance to get a better feel and make corrections.

OUTFIELD

Fielding Fly Balls



Main Points

1. Get to the spot where the ball will land quickly; do not drift.
2. Watch the ball into the glove and catch the ball above the head using two hands whenever possible.
3. Try to move forward slightly as the catch is made.

Lite Flite Elimination

Objective

To develop the proper technique for catching fly balls in a fun, competitive setting

Setup

Soft or sponge rubber balls, pitching machine (optional), coach to throw fly balls or to feed machine

Execution

Use soft or sponge rubber balls. Each player is thrown a fly ball (or fed a fly ball through a pitching machine). Younger players can use their gloves. Balls are so light that players have to catch the ball with two hands over the head. Older players and more advanced younger players can use bare hands. If players catch the ball, they stay in, but if they miss, they're out of the drill. This competition can also be done using the pass-pattern drill that follows or with real baseballs (when appropriate). When not using gloves, players should attempt to catch the ball with the glove hand only over the head. This makes them focus on proper hand positioning and watching the ball into the hand.

Coaching Keys

Players who miss fly balls regularly usually aren't using proper technique and are likely taking their eyes off the ball. Make sure they catch the ball above their heads so they can watch the ball travel all the way into the glove or hand.

Pass Patterns

Objective

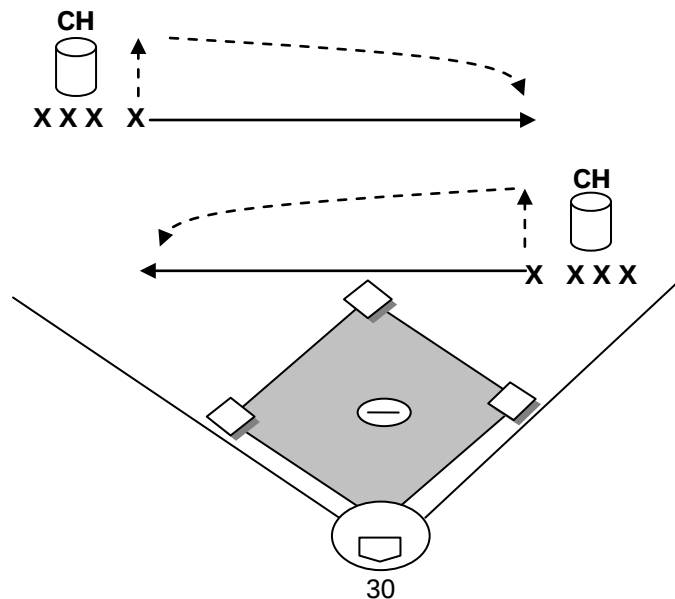
To develop proper crossover steps and drop steps and learn to catch fly balls on the run

Setup

A bucket of balls, a coach to throw "passes"

Execution

A coach or player (this can be long toss for pitchers) serves as quarterback. The fielding player tosses the ball to the quarterback and then uses a crossover or drop step in the appropriate direction before running a "pass pattern". The quarterback throws the ball high enough for the "receiver" to run under the ball and make a one-handed, over-the-shoulder catch. Have the player start over if the initial step is not executed correctly.



Pass Patterns (cont.)

Coaching Keys

The crossover step is the most efficient method of moving laterally on a baseball field. The crossover should be used by base runners, infielders, and outfielders. To execute the step, a player pivots the foot nearest to where the ball is traveling while at the same time crossing the other foot over the first foot in the direction of the ball. If players are picking up the foot nearest the ball first and then crossing over, stop them immediately without throwing the pass and start over.

The drop step is a combination of a step back toward the ball hit over a player's head followed by a crossover in the direction of the ball. Again, stop the drill immediately and begin again if a player does not execute the initial step properly.

Thrown Fly Balls

Objective

To learn to catch fly balls with two hands above the head in a controlled environment

Setup

A bucket of balls and a coach to throw balls to players; soft or sponge rubber balls for younger players

Execution

To prevent injury and embarrassment, players must be comfortable catching fly balls properly before fly balls are hit to them. The proper way to catch a fly ball is with two hands above the head so that eyes can follow the ball into the glove. The simplest way to teach proper execution is to throw fly balls to players and force them to do it correctly. Start with short, easy tosses and then adjust the height of throws to the skill and comfort level of players. You can start younger players out with soft baseballs or sponge rubber balls to avoid injury and build confidence. You can turn this drill into an elimination contest for the youngest players. Stress getting to the spot where the ball is coming down and catching with two hands above the head.

Coaching Keys

Players who regularly miss fly balls are most likely not watching the ball and should perform the drill again and again, attempting to catch the ball with two hands above the head so they can see the ball travel all the way into the glove. Many players catch fly balls while backpedaling or moving away from the infield. Try to get them to learn to catch the ball while moving slightly forward when executing this drill.

Thrown or Machine Ground Balls

Objective

To learn how to field ground balls properly in a controlled environment

Setup

A bucket of balls, a pitching machine (optional), a coach to feed machine or throw balls

Execution

Like infielders, outfielders should field a ground ball with a wide base, the butt down, and the hands out in front of the body. Get wide by stepping toward home with glove-side leg forward and glove in front of that foot. Players should get comfortable with proper fundamentals before fielding hit balls. It's okay to use a pitching machine for outfield ground balls right from the start. Roll or feed players ground balls one at a time. Have them get to the spot quickly, get under control, field properly, generate momentum toward the coach, and throw. Don't allow players to walk or run through ground balls. They need to slow down and get under control to field properly.

Thrown or Machine Ground Balls (cont.)

Coaching Keys

Young outfielders have a tendency to “run through” ground balls. That is, they try to get to the spot quickly and then try to field the ball while still running at or near full speed. Remember that their main goal is to field the ball quickly and throw it to the proper cutoff or relay person to prevent base runners from advancing. Thus, fielding the ball cleanly is the most important responsibility. Players should come to almost a complete stop if they have to so that they can be sure to field the ball cleanly.

Communication Drill

Objective

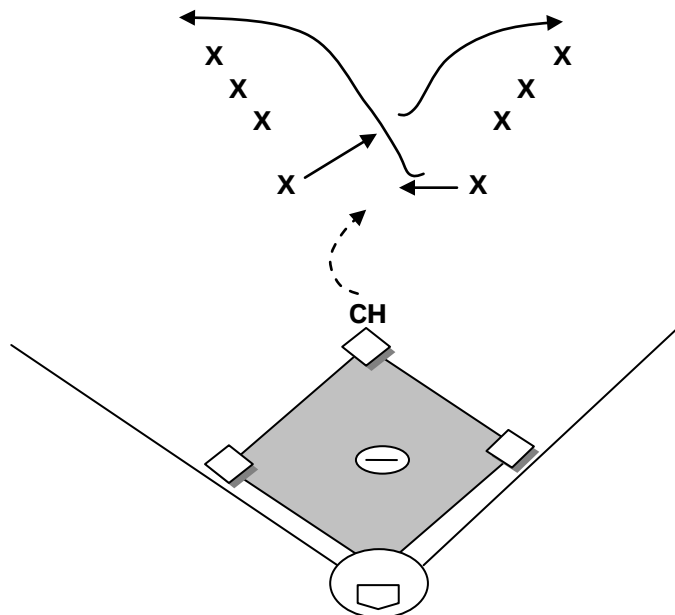
To understand the importance and mechanics of proper communication in the outfield

Setup

A bucket of baseballs, a coach to throw fly balls, soft or sponge rubber balls for younger players (optional), pitching machines (optional), a player to serve as a cutoff for throws (optional)

Execution

Outfielders form two lines at least 20 feet apart. The first players in each line step forward. The coach throws fly balls in between the two fielders, who must communicate and make the play. The player fielding the ball yells, “I got it!” at least 3 times. The other player then backs up the other player. The player who catches the ball should deliver a strong, accurate throw to the coach or cutoff player (a player who rotates out of the drill). For younger players, use soft baseballs, sponge rubber balls, or tennis balls. Use pitching machines to throw higher fly balls to more advanced players, ensuring the ball with reach about the same height and distance each time.



Coaching Keys

The age-old outfield communication problem arises when two players call for the ball at the same time. Teach players that if there's any uncertainty as to who will make the catch, they should continue to call for the ball. If two players call for the ball at the same time and then one continues to call for it, that player should make the play. As players get older, this drill can be done by designating one player as the centerfielder, who has priority over any ball that he or she calls. In this format a third player can be added to simulate a game situation in which there are three outfielders. Again, the centerfielder is the quarterback and should call for any ball that he or she can easily get to.

Drop Step Drill

Objective

To develop a fundamentally sound drop step

Setup

Bucket of balls and a coach to throw them

Execution

This drill is much like the drill for the crossover step but a bit more advanced. Players line up. The first player steps forward, tosses the ball to the coach, and assumes ready position. The coach says “Go!” and the player performs a drop step (drop one foot back, turn body, and cross the other foot over in the direction of the ball). The coach throws the ball directly over the player’s head, high and close enough that he or she can catch it with two hands above the head.

Coaching Keys

Have players take time to get footwork correct before tossing. As with Pass Patterns, stop this drill and start over if players do the drop step incorrectly. The goal of this drill is to force the player to get to the spot quickly and catch the ball with two hands over the head. More difficult over-the-shoulder catches are practiced using Pass Patterns.

INFIELD

Fielding Ground Balls



Main Points

1. Create a wide base with the feet.
2. Butt stays down; bend at the waist, hips and knees.
3. Hands are out in front; see the ball into the glove.
4. Relax wrists; fingers point down and barely touch the ground.

Bunt Defense Drill

Objective

To perfect the infield's ability to defend the bunt play

Setup

Baseball field, baseballs, bats, batting helmets

Execution

- Place a defender at each infield position, including one pitcher on the mound. The remainder of the pitching staff will be in foul ground, ready to take their turns on the mound. Use your outfielders to run the bases.
- Direct the drill from one of the batter's boxes
- The drill begins with the pitcher on the mound throwing a strike
- The coach responds by rolling a simulated bunt to various parts of the infield and observing the defense accordingly

Coaching Keys

- Depending on the location and speed of your "bunts", you can create any situation you desire
- Work on the most common situations first and foremost
- As a variation, you can use outfielders or extra players to do actual bunting, depending on their abilities and roles as hitters. For best control, a coach works just fine.

Rolled Ground Balls

Objective

To help infielders become comfortable with the proper mechanics of fielding a ground ball

Setup

A bucket of balls and a coach to roll them

Execution

This drill is simple and appropriate for all ages. Balls can be rolled as soft or as hard as necessary; the type of hop the ball takes can be controlled. Players assume the ground ball position with a wide base, butt down, and hands out in front (the glove-hand wrist is relaxed so the coach can see inside the glove and the fingers are pointing down). Use a flat surface to prevent bad hops, and bad habits. At first, the ball should be rolled directly into a player's glove from about 10 feet away. Have players hold the ground ball position for five reps so that they can feel a little burn in their thighs. As players get comfortable fielding ground balls properly, the coach can move back and roll balls harder. For conditioning, older players can be asked to hold the position for more reps. The ball must be caught out in front so that the eyes can follow the ball into the glove.

Coaching Keys

If the ball doesn't stay in a player's glove or if the player seems to be getting handcuffed quite a bit by bad hops, check if the player's glove positioning and angle. The glove should be out in front of the body with the wrist relaxed to the point that the fingers of the glove are pointing almost straight down. If a player is having trouble getting the glove into the proper position, have him or her reach back between the legs and scrape dirt forward with the glove until it's in the proper position in front of the body. If the glove is out in front and the wrist is relaxed, a player is more likely to see the bad hop early and move the glove to a position in which the ball can still be caught.

Throwing After the Catch

Objective

To understand and apply the concept of using the body's momentum to make a stronger throw

Setup

A bucket of balls, a coach or player to receive throws, a coach or player to roll ground balls (optional), a target (optional), three cones or markers

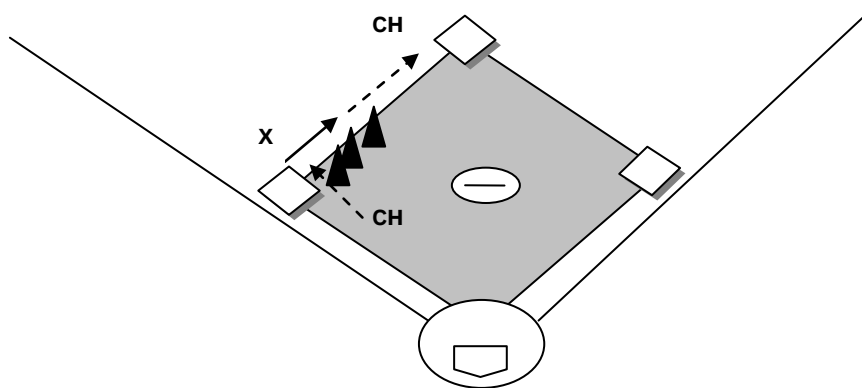
Execution

This drill reinforces the concept of catching the ground ball first, generating momentum toward the target, throwing the ball, and following the throw. Set up three cones several feet apart, placed in a line toward the target to where the throw will be made (easiest to set up as a simulation of the 5-4 force out at second base). Cones should be placed so that the distance is appropriate to accomplish the intended result for the age group involved. A player sets up with the right foot next to first cone and assumes the ground ball fielding position (wide base, butt down, hands in front). A ball is rolled by the coach to the player, who fields it, or the player starts with a ball and simulates the fielding position. The player shuffles the feet to the second cone, releases the ball, and follows the throw past the third cone and toward the target. Emphasize the four-seam grip. Ball can be thrown to a coach or another teammate. The player should stay low and not stand straight up after fielding the ball. This drill can be turned into a contest by placing a chest- or head-high target at second base with a net or screen behind to catch errant throws. Players who hit the target stay alive, and those who miss are eliminated. If there's nobody to roll the balls, players can get a ball out of the bucket, assume the ground ball fielding position, and then execute the drill.

Coaching Keys

Players who aren't throwing the ball accurately are likely dropping the elbow below the shoulder or are peeling off away from the target before following the throw all the way past the third cone. For players making the latter mistake, set up another cone about five feet to the left of the third cone and make them follow the throw all the way through the last two cones before peeling off.

Players who are throwing the ball high or low are likely standing up before shuffling and throwing. Remember: stay low and go low. The first movement upon catching the ball is toward the target. Players should shuffle in that direction, keeping the knees bent in an athletic position instead of standing straight up. This keeps the head, shoulders, and eyes level, which makes it easier to stay focused on the target.



High Five (Underhand Flip)

Objective

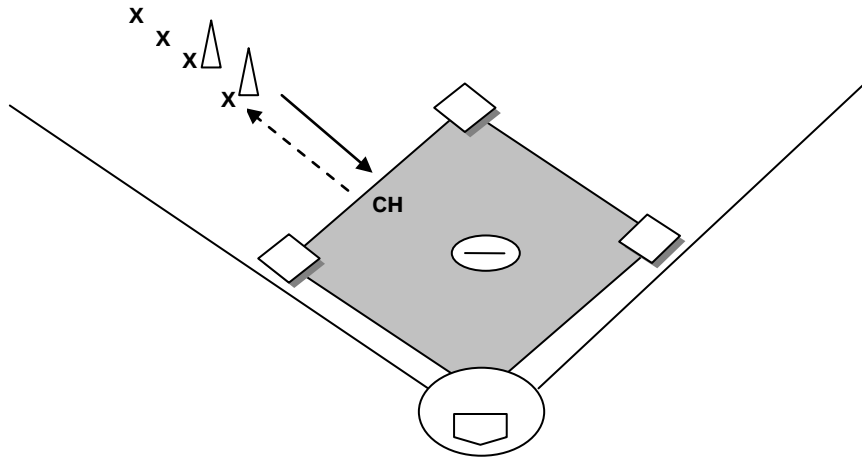
To understand and apply the concept of generating momentum toward the target when executing an underhand flip and to develop the habit of leaving the hand at face level after the flip

Setup

A bucket of balls, a coach to roll balls, cones or markers (optional)

Execution

The underhand flip is used by virtually all infielders at some point, so it should be introduced at a young age and practiced. Players line up opposite the coach, 10 to 15 feet away. One at a time, players assume basic ground ball position (wide base, butt down, hands in front). The coach rolls balls to the first player. The player catches the ball first, generates momentum toward target, uses an underhand flip, and finishes by following the flip toward the coach with the hand held high at the head level. When the player gets to the coach, he gives the coach a high five (hand should not drop below head level until high five is completed). Player uses body momentum to carry the toss to the target. Wrist remains stiff. Avoid letting the ball roll off the fingers.



Coaching Keys

This drill reminds players to keep the hand held high after the flip. Failure to keep the hand high is one of the most common mistakes when it comes to executing the underhand flip. Generally, wherever the hand ends up is the direction in which the ball is going to travel, and it's easier for the person receiving the flip to catch the ball if it's at chest or head level.

First Base

Objective

To develop proper mechanics when receiving throws at first base

Setup

A bucket of balls, a player or coach to throw, first basemen, an empty bucket

Execution

Players line up in foul territory near first base. The coach sets up anywhere in the infield with a bucket of balls. An empty bucket is placed near first base. The first player comes to first base and puts the heel of the throwing-side foot on the base. The coach throws the ball to this player. The player sees the ball coming across the diamond and takes his or her glove and glove-side foot directly toward the ball together. The ball should hit the glove at the same time the foot lands. This prevents stretching too soon. Stress that first basemen get to the bag quickly, stand tall, square shoulders to the infielder making the throw, and take the glove and glove-side foot toward the ball together. Remind them not to stretch prematurely. You can also have players work on receiving errant throws and short hops.

Coaching Keys

If players are stretching too soon, make them exaggerate the step with the glove foot so that the foot lands on the ground at the exact same time the ball enters the glove.

Hitting Ground Balls

Objective

To get a more realistic sense of fielding ground balls coming off a bat

Setup

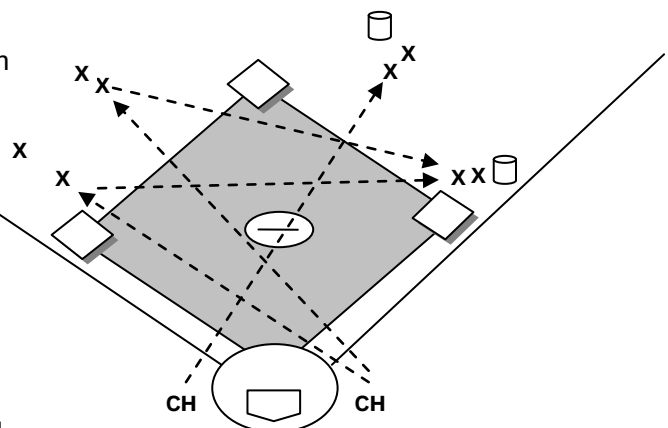
A bucket of baseballs, a fungo bat (or another type of bat), a coach to hit balls

Execution

At some point it becomes necessary to hit ground balls to your team. Before you do this – at any level – make sure you have introduced the players to the basic ground ball fundamentals and given them a chance to get comfortable fielding balls the proper way. Use common sense when hitting ground balls. If the field is not in good condition, take it easy. Adapt the speed of the balls to each player's skill level. Players getting beaten up with bad hops in practice are not getting better.

If you have more than one coach who can hit ground balls accurately, here's a way to maximize repetitions: One coach hits to the third basemen and shortstops from the first-base side while the other hits to second and first from the third-base side.

After a few minutes, one coach goes "live", with the players fielding his or her balls throwing to first. The other players just lob the balls back to their coach on one hop or place the balls in a bucket. The first basemen take throws and stop fielding ground balls at this point. Each position gets to go "live" before the drill ends. As players get older, they can hit ground balls to each other if there aren't enough coaches. Having one person hit to each position is ideal but not always possible.



BASE RUNNING

Base Running



Main Points

1. Know how many outs there are.
2. Take signs from coach on the base.
3. Get a lead (step and a dive).
4. Get a good secondary lead.
5. Be aggressive but smart (Make the defense make plays).
6. Know when to tag up.
7. Know when and how to slide.

Base Running Relays

Objective

To learn how proper turns at each base can help players get to their destination faster

Setup

Field with bases (preferably pegged bases), a stopwatch

Execution

Have groups of two or four players compete by running around the bases to see who can finish with the fastest combined time. One player circles the bases and then as soon as he or she touches home plate, the next player in the group starts. You'll find that the groups that run the bases the best fundamentally can and will beat the groups with the faster players. You can use cones to show the path for the proper turns at each base.

Big League Base Running

Objective

To work on various base running situations and conditioning

Setup

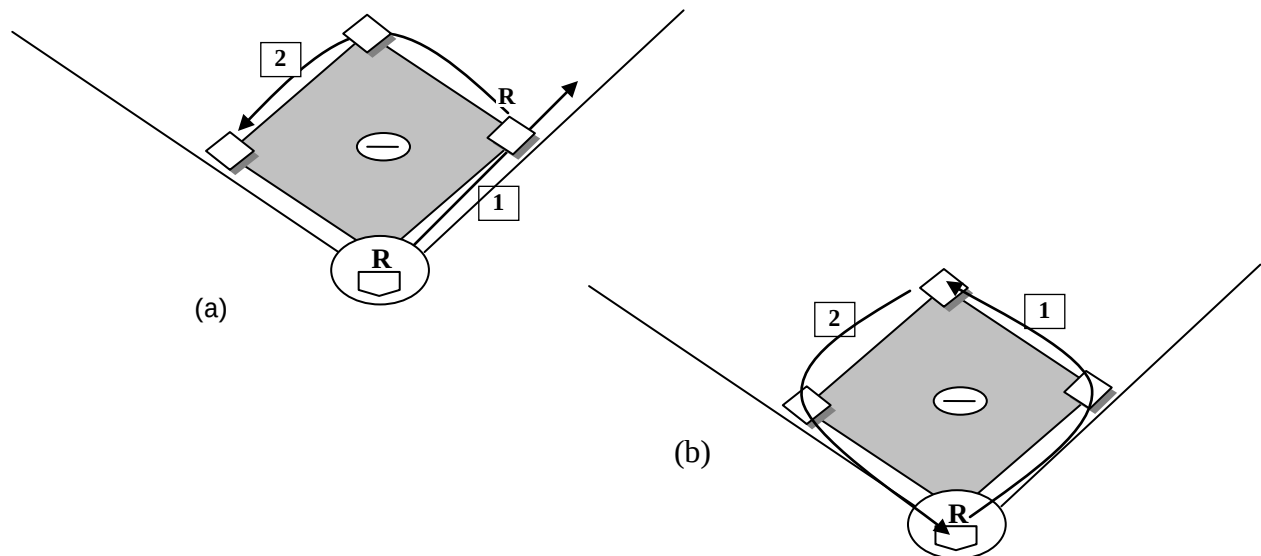
Field with bases (preferably pegged bases)

Execution

Players line up at home plate and run home to first, all the way through the bag. Then they shuffle off of first, take a crossover step and run first to third before jogging to home plate (a). Players line up at home again and run out a double. They then simulate scoring from second on a hit (b). Then have them run out a triple or a home run, if you wish. Emphasis should be on making a proper turn at each base as well as stepping on the inside of the base and using the bag to push off (like a starting block) toward the next base.

Coaching Keys

If players are having trouble making correct turns and taking a proper route to the next base, set up cones to mark the proper path. Players will take a path to the outside of the cones.



Head to Head

Objective

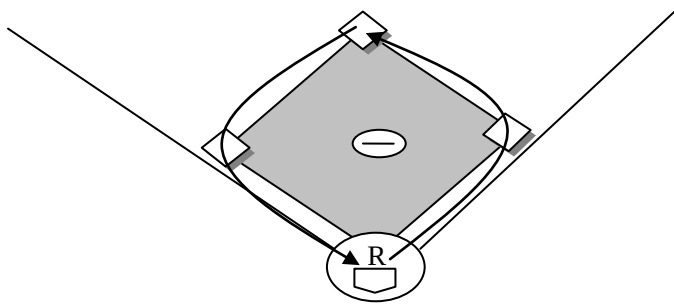
To demonstrate that the fastest player isn't always the best base runner; to understand how to make a proper turn when going from home to second and second to home

Setup

Field with bases (preferably pegged bases)

Execution

One player starts at second and the other starts at home. The coach stands on pitcher's mound and yells, "Go!" Player from second is simulating scoring on a hit. Player at home simulates running out a double. Whoever gets to his or her destination first wins. Point out players who adhere to proper fundamentals when running the bases well.



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PRACTICE PLANS

PRACTICE PLAN
Ages 4-6

5 min	Run the bases
	➤ Explain that first is the only base you can run past ➤ Explain that you must touch the bases or be called out ➤ Play follow the leader
5 min	Stretch
	➤ Stretch in a circle around the pitcher's mound. The routine should be quick and simple ➤ Lay out the day's practice plan
30 min	Practice in stations, 10 minutes per station, then rotate
	➤ Hitting off the tee and tossed balls ➤ Fielding and catching ➤ Throwing
15 min	Play a scrimmage or other instructional game
5 min	Run the bases and review
	➤ Sprint around the bases. Incorporate races or chases ➤ Let kids slide into home to finish

THREE-DAY SAMPLE PRACTICE GUIDE
Ages 7-9

Practice Plan Day 1

5 min	Dynamic warm-up
	➤ Skipping, high-knee skipping, high-knee jogging, bounding, backward running, jogging
5 min	Base running
	➤ Big League Base running (controlled, follow the leader)
5 min	Stretching
	➤ Hamstrings, quads, groin, back, shoulders, triceps
10 min	Throwing
	➤ Power Position Drill with coaches (5 min); with teammates after a few sessions ➤ One-Knee Drill with coaches (5 min); with teammates after a few sessions ➤ As season progresses, you can replace these drills with playing catch and any fun throwing drills.
30 min	Stations (3 groups, 10 minutes each station)
	➤ Hitting (Tee Work, Soft Toss); as the season progresses, you can substitute any fun or regular hitting drills. ➤ Infield and throwing (Rolled Ground Balls, Throwing After the Catch Drill); as the season progresses, you can substitute any fun or regular infield or throwing drills. ➤ Outfield (Thrown Fly Balls; use sponge balls or soft baseballs until skills are developed); as the season progresses, you can substitute any fun or regular outfield drills.
10 min	Basic rules session or any fun drill
5 min	Base running
	➤ Big League Base running or any fun Base running drills (run hard)

THREE-DAY SAMPLE PRACTICE GUIDE
Ages 7-9

Practice Plan Day 2

5 min	Dynamic warm-up (same as day 1)
	➤ Skipping, high-knee skipping, high-knee jogging, bounding, backward running, jogging
5 min	Base running (same as day 1)
	➤ Big League Base running (controlled, follow the leader)
5 min	Stretching (same as day 1)
	➤ Hamstrings, quads, groin, back, shoulders, triceps
15 min	Throwing and catching
	➤ Power Position Drill with coaches (5 min); with teammates after a few sessions ➤ One-Knee Drill with coaches (5 min); with teammates after a few sessions ➤ Catch coach's throws with two hands in front (5 min); use bigger balls, Lite Flite balls or soft baseballs ➤ As season progresses, you can replace these drills with playing catch and any of the fun throwing drills.
30 min	Stations (3 groups, 10 minutes each station)
	➤ Hitting (Short Toss From the Front); as the season progresses, you can substitute any fun or regular hitting drills. ➤ Infield and throwing (review fielding ground balls and throwing after the catch; include backhand drills); as the season progresses, you can substitute any fun or regular infield or throwing drills. ➤ Outfield (Thrown Fly Balls, Thrown or Machine Ground Balls); as the season progresses, you can substitute any fun or regular outfield drills.
15 min	Controlled game, game situations, or rules session

THREE-DAY SAMPLE PRACTICE GUIDE
Ages 7-9

Practice Plan Day 3

5 min	Dynamic warm-up (same as day 1)
	➤ Skipping, high-knee skipping, high-knee jogging, bounding, backward running
5 min	Base running (same as day 1)
	➤ Big League Base running (controlled, follow the leader)
5 min	Stretching (same as day 1)
	➤ Hamstrings, quads, groin, back, shoulders, triceps
10 min	Throwing and catching
	➤ Players play catch; stress mechanics and catching with two hands in front of body. ➤ Play Twenty-One ➤ As season progresses, you can replace these drills with regular or fun throwing drills.
30 min	Stations (3 groups, 10 minutes each station)
	➤ Hitting (Free Hitting or Line Drive Home Run Derby); as the season progresses, you can substitute any fun or regular hitting drill. ➤ Infield and throwing (review backhand, High Five Drill); as the season progresses, you can substitute any fun or regular infield or throwing drills. ➤ Outfield (Pass Patterns); as the season progresses, you can substitute any fun or regular outfield drills.
15 min	Controlled game or any combination of fun drills

THREE-DAY SAMPLE PRACTICE GUIDE
Ages 10-12

Practice Plan Day 1

5 min	Dynamic warm-up
	➤ Skipping, high-knee skipping, high-knee jogging, bounding, backward running, jogging ➤ Big League Base running or general Base running can be done as jogging
5 min	Stretching
	➤ Hamstrings, quads, groin, back, shoulders, triceps
10 min	Throwing and catching
	➤ One-Knee Drill with teammates (4 min) ➤ Power Position Drill with teammates (4 min) ➤ Play catch or play Twenty-One with teammates (2 min) ➤ Emphasize proper mechanics and accuracy on each throw; focus on catching the ball out in front with two hands.
20 min	Team fundamentals
	➤ Choose from cutoffs and relays, first-and-third offense and defense, defending the steal (if your league permits stealing), infield and outfield communication and priorities.
30 min	Stations (3 groups, 10 minutes each station)
	➤ Hitting (Tee work, Soft Toss); any hitting drill can be substituted as the season progresses. ➤ Infield and throwing (Rolled Ground Balls, Throwing After the Catch Drill); any infield or throwing drills can be substituted as the season progresses. ➤ Outfield (Thrown Fly Balls; use soft baseballs until skills are developed); any outfield drills can be substituted as the season progresses.
5 min	Base running
	➤ Big League Base running (full speed) or another base running drill

THREE-DAY SAMPLE PRACTICE GUIDE
Ages 10-12

Practice Plan Day 2

5 min	Dynamic warm-up (same as day 1)
	➤ Skipping, high-knee skipping, high-knee jogging, bounding, backward running, jogging ➤ Big League Base running or general base running can be done as jogging
5 min	Stretching (same as day 1)
	➤ Hamstrings, quads, groin, back, shoulders, triceps
10 min	Throwing and catching
	➤ Review One-Knee Drill and Power Position Drill (5 min) ➤ Play catch or play Twenty-One with teammates (5 min) ➤ Emphasize proper mechanics and accuracy on each throw; focus on catching the ball out in front with two hands. ➤ Any throwing drill can be substituted as the season progresses. ➤ Pitchers can work on throwing and pitching drills.
20 min	Team fundamentals
	➤ Choose from cutoffs and relays, first-and-third offense and defense, defending the steal (if your league permits stealing), infield and outfield communication and priorities.
30 min	Stations (3 groups, 10 minutes each station)
	➤ Hitting (Short Toss From the Front); any hitting drill can be substituted as the season progresses. ➤ Infield and throwing (review; backhand drills; High Five Drill); any infield or throwing drills can be substituted as the season progresses. ➤ Outfield (review; Thrown or Machine Ground Balls; Communication Drill); any outfield drills can be substituted as the season progresses.
5 min	Base running
	➤ Big League Base running (full speed) or another base running drill

THREE-DAY SAMPLE PRACTICE GUIDE
Ages 10-12

Practice Plan Day 3

5 min	Dynamic warm-up (same as day 1)
	➤ Skipping, high-knee skipping, high-knee jogging, bounding, backward running, jogging ➤ Big League Base running or general base running can be done as jogging
5 min	Stretching (same as day 1)
	➤ Hamstrings, quads, groin, back, shoulders, triceps
10 min	Throwing and catching
	➤ Other Throwing Games ➤ Emphasize proper mechanics and accuracy on each throw; focus on catching the ball out in front with two hands. ➤ Any throwing drills can be used as the season progresses. ➤ Pitchers can work on throwing drills.
30 min	Team fundamentals
	➤ Choose from cutoffs and relays, first-and-third offense and defense, defending the steal (if your league permits stealing), infield and outfield communication and priorities.
30 min	Stations (3 groups, 10 minutes each station)
	➤ Hitting (Free Hitting); any hitting drill can be substituted as the season progresses. ➤ Infield and throwing (Box Drill or 4-6/6-4 Drill with First Base Drill); any infield or throwing drills can be substituted as the season progresses. ➤ Outfield (Pass Patterns); any outfield drills can be substituted as the season progresses.
30 min	Controlled game, soft toss game or T-ball game, or game situations
5 min	Base running
	➤ Big League Base running (full speed) or another base running drill

THREE-DAY SAMPLE PRACTICE GUIDE
Ages 13-14

Practice Plan Day 1

5 min	Dynamic warm-up
	➤ Skipping, high-knee skipping, high-knee jogging, bounding, backward running, jogging
5 min	Stretching
	➤ Hamstrings, quads, groin, back, shoulders, triceps
10 min	Throwing
	➤ One-Knee Drill with teammates (early in season) ➤ Power Position Drill with teammates (early in season) ➤ Play catch or play Twenty-One with teammates ➤ Any throwing or pitching drills can be substituted as the season progresses ➤ Emphasize long tossing throughout the season
20 min	Infield and outfield work
	➤ Rolled Ground Balls, Throwing After the catch Drill, Hitting Ground Balls, Thrown Fly Balls, Rolled or Machine Ground Balls, Hit Fly Balls or Machine Fly Balls
20 min	Team fundamentals
	➤ Choose from cutoffs and relays, pickoff plays, first-and-third offense and defense, full bunt defenses, pop-up and fly ball priorities, and defending steals.
60 min	Hitting stations, 15 minutes per station
	➤ Soft Toss, Tee Work, Short Toss From the Front, Free Hitting ➤ Any hitting drills can be substituted as the season progresses ➤ Infielders and outfielders can take more ground balls and fly balls during this time slot. Pitchers can get in bullpen throwing or do flatwork (pitching and throwing drills).
10 min	Pitcher's fielding practice (PFP) and Big League Base running
	➤ Pitcher Covering First Base Drill, Bunt Drill

THREE-DAY SAMPLE PRACTICE GUIDE
Ages 13-14

Practice Plan Day 2

5 min	Dynamic warm-up (same as day 1)
	➤ Skipping, high-knee skipping, high-knee jogging, bounding, backward running, jogging
5 min	Stretching (same as day 1)
	➤ Hamstrings, quads, groin, back, shoulders, triceps
10 min	Throwing
	➤ One-Knee Drill with teammates (early in season) ➤ Power Position Drill with teammates (early in season) ➤ Play catch or play Twenty-One or long toss with teammates ➤ Any throwing or pitching drills can be substituted as the season progresses ➤ Emphasize long tossing throughout the season
20 min	Infield and outfield work
	➤ Backhand Throwing Drill, 4-6/6-4 Drill, First Base Drill, Hitting Ground Balls, Thrown Fly Balls, Rolled or Machine Ground Balls, Hit Fly Balls or Machine Fly Balls, Communication Drill ➤ Any infield drill can be substituted as the season progresses.
20 min	Team fundamentals
	➤ Choose from cutoffs and relays, pickoff plays, first-and-third offense and defense, full bunt defenses, pop-up and fly ball priorities, and defending steals.
60 min	Hitting stations, 15 minutes per station
	➤ Short Toss From the Front, One-Arm Drill, Lob Toss, Stickball Drill, Free Hitting ➤ Any hitting drills can be substituted as the season progresses ➤ Infielders and outfielders can take more ground balls and fly balls during this time slot. Pitchers can get in bullpen throwing or do flatwork (pitching and throwing drills).
10 min	Pitcher's fielding practice (PFP) and Big League Base running
	➤ Pitcher Covering First Base Drill, Bunt Drill

THREE-DAY SAMPLE PRACTICE GUIDE
Ages 13-14

Practice Plan Day 3

5 min	Dynamic warm-up (same as day 1)
	➤ Skipping, high-knee skipping, high-knee jogging, bounding, backward running, jogging
5 min	Stretching (same as day 1)
	➤ Hamstrings, quads, groin, back, shoulders, triceps
10 min	Throwing
	➤ Play catch, play Twenty-One, or long toss with teammates. ➤ Other throwing games (optional) ➤ Any throwing or pitching drills can be substituted as the season progresses ➤ Emphasize long tossing throughout the season
20 min	Infield and outfield work
	➤ Box Drill, backhand drills, Hitting Ground Balls, Backhand Throwing Drill, Drop Step Drill, Pass Patterns, Fence Drill ➤ Any infield drill can be substituted as the season progresses. ➤ Drills can be turned into contests on the third or final day of a week.
20 min	Team fundamentals
	➤ Choose from cutoffs and relays, pickoff plays, first-and-third offense and defense, full bunt defenses, pop-up and fly ball priorities, and defending steals.
60 min	Game situations, controlled scrimmage, soft toss game, or T-ball game
10 min	Big League Base running

THREE-DAY SAMPLE PRACTICE GUIDE
Ages 15 and up

Practice Plan Day 1

5 min	Dynamic warm-up
	➤ Skipping, high-knee skipping, high-knee jogging, bounding, backward running, jogging
5 min	Stretching
	➤ Hamstrings, quads, groin, back, shoulders, triceps
10 min	Throwing
	➤ One-Knee Drill with teammates (early in season) ➤ Power Position Drill with teammates (early in season) ➤ Play catch or play Twenty-One with teammates ➤ Any throwing or pitching drills can be substituted as the season progresses ➤ Emphasize long tossing throughout the season
20 min	Infield and outfield work
	➤ Rolled Ground Balls, Throwing After the Catch Drill, Hitting Ground Balls, Thrown Fly Balls, Rolled or Machine Ground Balls, Hit Fly Balls or Machine Fly Balls
20 min	Team fundamentals
	➤ Choose from cutoffs and relays (introduce trailer), advanced pickoff plays (daylight plays, plays put on by fielders) and situations, advanced game situations (throwing to proper base in certain situations, decoys, and so on), full bunt defenses, pop-up and fly ball priorities, first-and-third offense and defense, and defending steals.
60 min	Hitting stations, 15 minutes each
	➤ Soft Toss, Tee Work, Short Toss From the Front, Free Hitting ➤ Any hitting drill can be substituted as the season progresses ➤ Infielders and outfielders can take more ground balls and fly balls during this time slot. Pitchers can get in bullpen throwing or do flatwork (pitching or throwing drills).
10 min	Pitcher's fielding practice (PFP) and Big League Base running
	➤ Pitcher Covering First Base Drill, Bunt Drill

THREE-DAY SAMPLE PRACTICE GUIDE
Ages 15 and up

Practice Plan Day 2

5 min	Dynamic warm-up (same as day 1)
	➤ Skipping, high-knee skipping, high-knee jogging, bounding, backward running, jogging
5 min	Stretching (same as day 1)
	➤ Hamstrings, quads, groin, back, shoulders, triceps
10 min	Throwing
	➤ One-Knee Drill with teammates (early in season) ➤ Power Position Drill with teammates (early in season) ➤ Play catch or play Twenty-One, or long toss with teammates ➤ Any throwing or pitching drills can be substituted as the season progresses ➤ Emphasize long tossing throughout the season
20 min	Infield and outfield work
	➤ Backhand drills, 4-6/6-4 Drill, First Base Drill, Hitting Ground Balls, Backhand Throwing Drill, Thrown Fly Balls, Rolled or Machine Ground Balls, Hit Fly Balls or Machine Fly Balls, Communication Drill ➤ Any infield drill can be substituted as the season progresses.
20 min	Team fundamentals (same as day 1)
	➤ Choose from cutoffs and relays (introduce trailer), advanced pickoff plays (daylight plays, plays put on by fielders) and situations, advanced game situations (throwing to proper base in certain situations, decoys, and so on), full bunt defenses, pop-up and fly ball priorities, first-and-third offense and defense, and defending steals.
60 min	Hitting stations, 15 minutes each
	➤ Short Toss From the Front, One-Arm Drill, Lob Toss, Free Hitting ➤ Any hitting drill can be substituted as the season progresses. ➤ Infielders can outfielders can take more ground balls and fly balls during this time slot. Pitchers can get in bullpen throwing or do flatwork (pitching or throwing drills).
10 min	Pitcher's fielding practice (PFP) and Big League Base running
	➤ Pitcher Covering First Base Drill, Bunt Drill

THREE-DAY SAMPLE PRACTICE GUIDE
Ages 15 and up

Practice Plan Day 3

5 min	Dynamic warm-up (same as day 1)
	➤ Skipping, high-knee skipping, high-knee jogging, bounding, backward running, jogging
5 min	Stretching (same as day 1)
	➤ Hamstrings, quads, groin, back, shoulders, triceps
10 min	Throwing
	➤ Play catch or play Twenty-One, or long toss with teammates ➤ Other throwing games (optional) ➤ Any throwing or pitching drills can be substituted as the season progresses ➤ Emphasize long tossing throughout the season
20 min	Infield and outfield work
	➤ Box Drill, backhand drills, Hitting Ground Balls, Backhand Throwing Drill, Drop Step Drill, Pass Patterns, Fence Drill ➤ Any infield drill can be substituted as the season progresses. Drills can be turned into contests on the third or final day of a week.
20 min	Team fundamentals (same as day 1)
	➤ Choose from cutoffs and relays (introduce trailer), advanced pickoff plays (daylight plays, plays put on by fielders) and situations, advanced game situations (throwing to proper base in certain situations, decoys, and so on), full bunt defenses, pop-up and fly ball priorities, first-and-third offense and defense, and defending steals.
60 min	Game situations, controlled scrimmage, soft toss game, T-ball game
10 min	Big League Base running

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HELPFUL TIPS

Sideline Suggestions: 10 Things Kids Say They Don't Want Their Parents to Do:

1. **Don't yell out instructions.** During the game I'm trying to concentrate on what the coach says and working on what I've been practicing. It's easier for me to do my best if you save instructions and reminders for practice or just before the game.
2. **Don't put down the officials.** This embarrasses me and I sometimes wonder whether the official is going to be tougher on me because my parents yell.
3. **Don't yell at me in public.** It will just make things worse because I'll be upset, embarrassed, or worried that you're going to yell at me the next time I do something "wrong".
4. **Don't yell at the coach.** When you yell about who gets to play what position, it just stirs things up and takes away from the fun.
5. **Don't put down my teammates.** Don't make put-down remarks about any of my teammates who make mistakes. It takes away from our team spirit.
6. **Don't put down the other team.** When you do this, you're not giving us a very good example of sportsmanship so we get mixed messages about being "good sports".
7. **Don't lose your cool.** I love to see you excited about the game, but there is no reason to get so upset that you lose your temper. It's our game and all the attention is supposed to be on us.
8. **Don't lecture me about mistakes after the game.** Those rides home in the car after the game are not a good time for lectures about how I messed up – I already feel bad. We can talk later, but please stay calm and don't forget to mention things I did well during the game.
9. **Don't forget how to laugh and have fun.** Sometimes it's hard for me to relax and have fun during the game when I look over and see you so tense and worried.
10. **Don't forget that it's just a game.** Odds are, I'm not going to make a career out of playing sports. I know I may get upset if we lose, but I also know that I'm usually feeling better after we go get a pizza. I need to be reminded sometimes that it's just a game.

DEALING WITH PARENTS:

A pre-season meeting with the PARENTS is a must! Here are some topics that should be discussed with parents:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Introductions2. What can they expect from the COACHES<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Fundamentals➤ Development of proper techniques➤ Playing time➤ Communication: how it will be done / why decisions are made➤ Sportsmanship➤ League Expectations / Policies and Procedures3. What you expect from the PLAYERS<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Listen – have desire to improve➤ Work hard / maximum effort➤ Teamwork attitude – no individuals➤ Sportsmanship – no negative comments to umpires or other players➤ Work on skills at home➤ Have fun | <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. What you expect from PARENTS<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Have players there on time – call if they need to miss a practice or game➤ Keep it positive – recognize players success – encourage players efforts➤ Communicate any issues immediately – pick the right time➤ Sportsmanship – no negative comments to umpires, players or other parents➤ Understanding – there are many decisions a head coach must make➤ Volunteer to help5. Miscellaneous<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Get email addresses➤ Distribute coupon books➤ Distribute team rosters➤ Distribute practice and game schedules➤ Distribute Policy and Procedure Information if needed➤ Sign up sheets for help – assistant coaches, bookkeeper, treats...➤ Discuss Sportsmanship Award Program➤ Distribute league rules |
|---|--|

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE KIDS!

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

If you are like most youth parents or coaches , you have approximately 4-6 weeks to get ready for your season. Conducting three practices a week for 2 hours will give you about 36 hours of instruction.

When you consider how many facets of the game there are to teach, it's not much time to accomplish your goals. You may be able to demonstrate everything, but you won't be able to have enough quality repetitions to benefit your players without using the following keys:

Write your baseball practice plans out. Take 15 minutes the night before practice and decide which area of the game you want to work on. List the drills and how long you want to run them. If certain players need specialized work, make a list and determine how to get them the special time.

Pick your drills carefully and repeat them often. Work on fundamentals early in the year and add situational baseball as the fundamentals improve.

Ask your players to practice on their own. Players who fail to practice outside of team practices will never reach their true potential.

Baseball practice plans should include work on all or part of the following 5 fundamentals at each practice:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Warm-up and stretching. All baseball practice plans should start with a proper warm-up and stretching routine. Please don't underestimate the value of a proper warm-up. It is a fundamental. Every player should know how and be encouraged to warm-up and stretch properly to prevent injuries. | 4. Hitting. Hitting a baseball is one of the most difficult skills in all of sports. Show me another skill where being successful 4 out of 10 times (on a consistent basis) makes you eligible for the hall of fame. I'm sure you've found it to be the most popular part of practice. Unfortunately, there is more to baseball than just hitting, so you need to learn how to manage your practice time effectively. |
| 2. Throwing. Playing catch with proper mechanics is seldom stressed enough by youth coaches and parents. Habits are born with repetition; make sure your player develops good throwing habits. Insist your players focus on those proper mechanics when playing catch to warm-up their arms. | 5. Base running. Base running is the one area you can improve on the most with the least amount of athletic ability. Base running is an attitude and your job is to teach players that how they approach base running can determine the fate of the game. Hustling out EVERY ground ball, knowing the strength of opposing players arms, learning what counts tend to favor breaking balls, and being aggressive on every pitch are all skills which do not require athleticism. |
| 3. Fielding. Fielding fundamentals should be stressed in every practice you have. Fielding begins with the feet so stress proper footwork during all drills, including playing catch. Pick drills that stress all of the possible fielding skills needed. Backhand and glove side drills, fly balls, line drives over each shoulder, and short hops to slow rollers should all be included. | |

FUNDamentals must be a part of all baseball practice plans

You'll find that players will be more responsive to your coaching if they enjoy themselves. The easiest way to accomplish that is to let them compete during practice.

If you want them to use proper mechanics while warming-up offer a reward of extra batting practice for the pair that uses the best mechanics during warm-up. Allow the 2 people who show the most hustle during fielding drills to be team captains for the scrimmage.

The more game-like you make your practices, the less boredom will set in. Conduct your drills quickly and efficiently without a great deal of lecturing. Players will fall asleep quickly if the coach talks too much.

BATTING ORDER NINE-MAN BALL

Batting order	Player Characteristics
1. Leadoff Hitter	• Good speed • Good eye • Good base runner
2. Second Hitter	• Unselfish • Good contact hitter • Good bunter • Good eye
3. Best Hitter	• Left-handed (if possible) • High average • Good speed • Makes good contact • Power is a plus
4. Power Hitter	• Good power • Good pitch selection • Extra base hits
5. Power	• Much like attributes for Power Hitter • Drive in Runs
6. Contact Hitter	• Put the ball in play • Doesn't strike out much • Good speed • Base stealer
7. Contact Hitter	• Much like attributes for Second Hitter • Not as good a hitter
8. Power	• Poor contact • Some power • Not a high average hitter
9. Leadoff	• Second lead off man • Good eye • Base stealer

- Try to mix-up right and left-handed hitters. This keeps the pitcher from getting into a rhythm – throwing to the same side of the plate to several hitters in a row.
- Mix your speed players in between your slow players. This will keep you from ending up with all slow runners on the bases at one time. (Just don't stick your slowest player in the 8 slot before your two fastest "lead-off" hitters. In fact, try to follow your slowest base runner with a good contact hitter to give him a better chance of advancing).
- Place a left-handed hitter behind a base stealer. This blocks the catcher's vision of the runner and creates a hole when the first baseman holds the runners on.

BATTING ORDER EVERYBODY BATS

Batting order	Player Characteristics
1. Leadoff Hitter	• Good speed • Good eye • Good base runner
2. Second Hitter	• Unselfish • Good contact hitter • Good bunter • Good eye
3. Best Hitter	• Left-handed (if possible) • High average • Good speed • Makes good contact • Power is a plus
4. Power Hitter	• Good power • Good pitch selection • Extra base hits
5. Second Power	• Much like attributes for Power Hitter • Drive in runs
6. Contact Hitter	• Put the ball in play • Doesn't strike out much • Good speed • Base stealer
7. Weak base runner	• If he puts the ball in play can contribute • If he gets on, needs help to advance bases
8. Contact Hitter	• Much like Second Hitter attributes • Not a great hitter but could help advance 6, 7 hitters

9. Third Power	• Okay contact • Enough power • Can help plate previous runners
10. Contact	• Determined hitter to keep inning alive
11. Power	• Inconsistent hitter • Power when he connects
12. Weak Hitter	• Willing to swing • Determined to improve
13. Leadoff	• Second lead off man • Good eye • Base stealer

- Main objective is to eliminate weak innings by spreading power, sprinkling in contact hitters. Always make sure speed leads slower runners (don't tie up the speedsters). Work on making weaker hitters better
- Try to mix-up right and left-handed hitters. This keeps the pitcher from getting into a rhythm-throwing to the same side of the plate to several hitters in a row.
- Mix your speed players in between your slow players. This will keep you from ending up with all slow runners on the bases at one time. (Just don't stick your slowest player in the 8 slot before your two fastest "lead-off" hitters. In fact, try to follow your slowest base runner with a good contact hitter to give him a better chance of advancing).
- Place a left-handed hitter behind a base stealer. This blocks the catcher's vision of the runner and creates a hole when the first baseman holds the runners on.

SELECTING AN ALLOY

When choosing an aluminum bat, consider the variety of alloys available to determine weight, durability, and “sweet spot”.

What is a Bat Alloy?

Aluminum bats come in a variety of alloys. Generally, the better alloy bats will be lighter, offer a bigger sweet spot, and are more durable.

Good	7046 alloy
Better	Cu31 and 7050 alloys
Best	C405+ and 7075 alloys
Premium	C555, C777, Gen1X, Scandium XS

BAT LENGTH

To determine the correct length, consider the players height and weight. The chart below offers some guidelines and a general idea of the length of bat that fits your body.

Height Weight	36” to 41”	41” to 44”	45” to 49”	50” to 52”	53” to 56”	57” to 60”	61” to 64”	65” to 69”	69” to 72”	73” & up
60 lbs & under	26”	27”	28”	29”	29”					
61-70 lbs	27”	27”	28”	29”	30”	30”				
71-80 lbs		28”	28”	29”	30”	30”	31”			
81-90 lbs		28”	29”	29”	30”	30”	31”	32”		
91-100 lbs		28”	29”	30”	30”	31”	31”	32”	32”	
101-110 lbs		29”	29”	30”	30”	31”	31”	32”	32”	
111-120 lbs		29”	29”	30”	30”	31”	31”	32”	32”	
121-130 lbs		29”	29”	30”	30”	31”	32”	33”	33”	
131-140 lbs		29”	30”	30”	31”	31”	32”	33”	33”	
141-150 lbs			30”	30”	31”	31”	32”	33”	33”	
151-160 lbs			30”	31”	31”	32”	32”	33”	33”	33”
161-170 lbs				31”	31”	32”	32”	33”	33”	33”
171-180 lbs						32”	33”	33”	33”	33”
180 lbs & up							33”	33”	33”	33”

BAT WEIGHT

Selecting the right bat weight will depend on the players strength and hitting style. In general, a lighter weight will provide a faster swing speed and promote proper swing mechanics. A heavier bat provides more power, however, at the younger ages, can promote improper swing mechanics.

- Most bats are weighted in ounces
- Manufacturers balance the bat weight to its length. Many bats have a weight-to-length ratio, often shown as -8, -10, etc. In other words, a 33-inch bat with a -10 ratio weights 23 ounces

BAT WEIGHT (cont.)

- Selecting weight really depends on three critical factors: your strength, hitting style, and personal preference. Some simple guidelines to consider:
 - o Bigger, stronger players generally prefer a heavier bat since they get the benefits of both the heft and swing power
 - o Smaller players with less strength should consider a lighter bat to generate a quicker swing
 - o Younger players should always consider a lighter bat that increases control and promotes good swing mechanics

OTHER FEATURES TO CONSIDER

Consider the Core

A feature typically found in higher end, new technology bats. The standard aluminum bat is solid aluminum with no core. Composite cores add durability and maximize performance. An example would be the Easton Z-Core Titanium.

Consider the End Cap

Helps with the weighting of the bat and can increase bat speed.

Additional information can be found at the following websites:

www.pallendine.com/team/BatGuide.html and www.build4life.com/baseball-bats.html

BAT SIZING

The right bat for you is one that lets you generate maximum bat speed. You accomplish this with a bat that's not too long or too heavy. The best way to find the "right" bat is to start with the sizing chart. Then try different size bats in that general length range. The bat that feels "comfortable" and "easy to swing" should be selected.

Height Weight	3'-3'4"	3'5"- 3'8"	3'9"-4'	4'1"- 4'4"	4'5"- 4'8"	4'9"-5'	5'1"- 5'4"	5'5"- 5'8"	5'9"-6'	6'1"- over
Under 60 lbs	26"	26"	28"	29"	29"					
61-70 lbs	27"	27"	28"	29"	30"	30"				
71-80 lbs		28"	28"	29"	30"	30"	31"			
81-90 lbs		28"	29"	29"	30"	30"	31"	32"		
91-100 lbs		28"	29"	30"	30"	31"	31"	32"		
101-110 lbs		29"	29"	30"	30"	31"	31"	32"		
111-120 lbs		29"	29"	30"	30"	31"	31"	32"		
121-130 lbs		29"	30"	30"	30"	31"	32"	33"	33"	
131-140 lbs		29"	30"	30"	31"	31"	32"	33"	33"	
141-150 lbs			30"	30"	31"	31"	32"	33"	33"	
151-160 lbs			30"	31"	31"	32"	32"	33"	33"	33"
161-170 lbs				31"	31"	32"	32"	33"	33"	34"
171-180 lbs						32"	33"	33"	34"	34"
180 lbs & up							33"	33"	34"	34"

MOST POPULAR LENGTH BY AGE

AGE	5-7	8-9	10	11-12	13-14	15-16
LENGTH	24"-26"	26"-28"	28"-29"	30"-31"	31"-32"	32"-33"

ADDITIONAL BENGAL DRILLS

Practice Drills

- Bengal I/O
- Bengal drill
- Work-up
 - o Make teams of four
 - o Have other players play normal defensive positions
 - o Rotate every 9 outs clearing the bases after 3 outs.
 - o Coaches or players could pitch.
 - o Work on situations and teach all aspects of the game.
 - Base running
 - Hitting
 - Defense
- Defensive situations
 - o Have 9 players take the field
 - o The rest of the players should get a helmet and line up at the plate.
 - o A coach has a fungo and a ball
 - o Pitcher goes through wind-up/stretch with ball, acts as if he is throwing but doesn't.
 - o Coach hits ball to wear he wants to create a situation
 - o Don't let runners be lazy on the bases!
- Team batting practice
 - o Hitting stations
 - Hitter
 - On deck
 - Break
 - Soft Toss
 - Tees
 - Bunting
 - Bucketman
 - Protectors
 - Shaggers



Bengal I/O

OUTFIELD Coach & catcher out by mound

2B (2 times each)

- ✓ LF-2nd-3rd-Home
- ✓ CF-2nd/SS-3rd-Home
- ✓ RF-SS-3rd-Home

Another coach should be hitting grounders to the 3rd & 1st baseman.

3B (1 time each)

- ✓ LF-SS-3B
- ✓ CF-SS-3B
- ✓ RF-2B-3B

Home (2 times each, hit cut & Do or Die)-catcher

- ✓ LF-3B-C
- ✓ CF-1B-C
- ✓ RF-1B-C
- ✓ LF-C
- ✓ CF-C
- ✓ RF-C

“Cut and Hold”- means cut the ball and hold
Catcher calls out “cut 1, cut 2, cut 3, or cut 4”
Catcher must make the call early-the call must be made when the ball goes from “green to brown”

Outfielders go to CF for fly balls

INFIELD Catcher fires the ball to each player in the infield and they fire it back

1B (1 time each)

- ✓ 3B-1B-C
- ✓ SS-1B-C
- ✓ 2B-1B-C
- ✓ 1B-3B-C

1B & Cover (1 time each)

- ✓ 3B-1B-C-3B-C
- ✓ SS-1B-C-SS-3B-C
- ✓ 2B-1B-C-2B-3B-C
- ✓ 1B-3B-C-1B-SS-3B-C

Double Play

- ✓ 3B-2B-1B-C
- ✓ SS-2B-1B-C
- ✓ 1B-SS-P-C
- ✓ C-(1B or 2B or 3B) Catcher's Choice – 1B (On C-1B-SS, yell tag!)

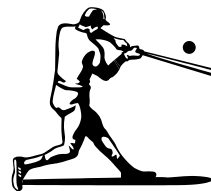
Home to 1B (Infield on Grass)

- ✓ 3B-C, 3B-1B
- ✓ SS-C, SS-1B
- ✓ 2B-C-2B-1B
- ✓ 1B-C-1B-C
- ✓ Throw Pop-Up to Catcher



BENGAL DRILL

Date: _____



0 = failure
1 = adequate
2 = success

**Max. Pts
(Incl RBI)**

- Round 1 = squeeze.....2
 Round 2 = hit and run - *man on first, zero or one out*2
 Round 3 = hit and run - *men on first and second, zero or one out*3
 Round 4 = base hit bunt/sac bunt, first base side - *man on second, zero out*.....2
 Round 5 = productive at bat - *man on second, one out*3
 Round 6 = base hit bunt/sac bunt, third base side - *men on first and third, zero out*3
 Round 7 = productive at bat - *men on first and third, one out*.....3
 Round 8 = productive at bat - *men on second and third, infield up, zero out*4
 Round 9 = productive at bat - *men on second and third, infield up, one out*4
 Round 10 = productive at bat - *man on third, infield back, zero or one out*.....3
 Round 11 = productive at bat - *man on third, infield up, one out*3

Name	RBIs	TOTAL	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	TOTAL	PCT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgements



Special Thanks to:

Blaine Dugout Club

Mick's Printing

Chris Grabowska Coach/Advisor/Speaker

Chris Miller Coach/Advisor/Speaker

Jeff Richards Coach/Advisor/Editing

Tracy Richards Editing

Jason Rudoy Coach/Advisor/Speaker