

**MARLBOROUGH YOUTH  
BASEBALL ASSOCIATION  
MYBA**



**2012**

**COACHES PACKET**

## GROUND BALLS

If you've ever been to a little league practice before, chances are that you've seen a variation on the following: the coach lines his players up, hits the ball to them, and the ones with some existing skill or innate talent do a good job... while the new player or the less talented athlete struggles. The coach tells them to "get in front of the ball," to "get their glove down," and to "keep the ball in front of them." And that's about the extent of it.

Maybe this improves over the course of the season. Unfortunately, this is all too often not the case - instead, the lesser fielders get dropped into the outfield in an effort to minimize their liability to the team. As a result, they get less practice reps than the infielders, and if anything, the disparity between the skill level of infield and outfield widens further.

Now, we're not suggesting that you should place your weakest fielder at shortstop. What we're suggesting is that you, as the coach, need to make sure that you give all of your players the tools they need in order to succeed. The best way you can do this is by emphasizing - and then consistently teaching - the fundamentals of baseball fielding.

How many times have you seen a young player run after a pop-up with their glove extended as if they were expecting the ball to change direction in mid air and fall into the glove? Have you ever seen a player setup for a grounder by placing his/her glove firmly on the ground and then look shocked that the ball skipping by didn't go where it was supposed to? Why, because most kids are used to parents, coaches, and friends rolling or throwing the ball directly at them.

Try this. Start a practice by asking the kids a question. What part of their body is most important to catch a baseball? Most kids will say the hands. Grab a tennis ball and show it to the kids. Ask for a volunteer to catch the ball and have him or her hold their hands out. When he is absolutely sure that he is ready, ask him to close his eyes. As soon as he does, flip the ball into his hands. The ball will most likely bounce out on to the ground. More than likely he'll want to change his answer to "his eyes". If not, ask the question, "So, are the eyes the most important part then?" Then, when he is absolutely, positively sure that his eyes are the most important body part for catching a ball - toss him the ball about an arm's length to one side. The ball should sail harmlessly past and land behind him. Explain to the team that their eyes and feet are even more important than their hands for catching baseballs.

**Remember the triangle.** Before you begin fielding, line your players up with some space in between them. Have them set up with their feet about shoulder width apart. Now, have them reach their glove out on the ground in front of themselves about the same distance as the width between their feet, as if they are fielding an imaginary grounder. We like to call this "**butt down, glove out**". Have them hold that position, and point out that the three things on the ground - each foot, plus the glove - form the points of a triangle. This is the ideal position for fielding a ground ball; feet too close together take away the ability to move laterally, a glove too close to the feet gives no room for error when scooping up a grounder.

**Use both hands.** This is possibly the most critical aspect of fielding grounders that you can teach, and is oddly enough, the one most often ignored by coaches. When set to field a grounder, the glove should be placed on the ground, and the other hand should be open, above the glove, with the heels of the hand fairly close together (the analogy used for younger players is that of an alligator's mouth).

When the ball enters the glove, the secondary hand should automatically close over the ball and gather it in; not only does this ensure that the ball won't pop out, but it places the fielder into a favorable position to make a throw. The further, and less obvious benefit, is that balls that skip off of the heel of the glove cannot pop up and hit the fielder in the face if this basic fundamental is employed; the top hand will simply deflect the ball back down into the dirt where it can then be recovered.

**Start low, and then come up high.** Teach your kids that, when fielding a grounder, they should always begin with their glove all the way on the ground. If the ball takes a hop, they can bring their glove up to it. If they misjudge the ball, odds are excellent that their top hand and/or their body will block the ball and keep it from going past. If the player tries to start with their glove too high and then move it down, they will usually let grounder after grounder go between their legs.

**Keep soft hands.** Ground balls come in with so much velocity that they will frequently bounce out of even a perfectly placed glove. Bringing the second hand in will help this, but sometimes, the ball will still pop out in the time it takes to bring that hand down. The best way to reduce this effect is by having soft hands. In other words, teach your players to not lock their elbows in, thus presenting a brick wall for the baseball to ricochet off of. Instead, they should "give" ever so slightly - this will reduce the energy of the baseball enough to prevent it from popping out. If you have a player who always seems to get into the right position for fielding, who uses two hands, who gets his glove down, and yet still seems to lose a lot of balls, odds are he has no idea what soft hands are.

**Watch that footwork!** The first instinct that many young fielders have when fielding a grounder that is not hit right at them is to turn to the side and run towards the ball. Unless the fielder is trying to make a stab at a ball deep in the hole this is the wrong way to do it. If the player turns his head and runs, he loses track of the ball. Since the first rule of pretty much every phase of baseball is some variation of "keep your eye on the ball," we know that this cannot be correct! Furthermore, even if the fielder can pick up the ball in time, he then must turn his body and reset his feet in an effort to get back to a good "triangle" stance. This usually results in a bad throw.

Coaches are often tempted to ignore fundamentals in the case of a talented fielder who can make plays, even when doing it the wrong way. The fact of the matter is that you are doing a disservice to your player if you take this path. Instead of turning and running, players should "slide step" to the side. This allows them to keep their eye on the ball. Further, this allows for a simple stop in motion to place the fielder into the proper triangle form. Practice this by lining your players up with several feet in between them, and have them simply "slide" to the left, then to the right. The idea is that they should be stepping wide to the side, then following the other foot over until their heels almost click together. Repeat this for a minute or so, until you have them breathing nice and hard.

In younger players, this will be somewhat of a hopping motion, but as they become more accustomed, it should become second nature and more of a glide. You don't have to practice footwork every time you meet, but you should emphasize it and correct bad footwork whenever you see it.

## **FLY BALLS**

### **Drill: *Don't stand around***

Objective: To teach young athletes that they have to move **to** the ball

Equipment: Used a small (softball sized) soccer ball, soft rubber ball or tennis balls. The kids don't need gloves.

Set-up: Show the kids how to stand.

TIP: Tell them to place their feet shoulder width apart and to jump straight up in the air and to "freeze" after they land.

When they land, they will be on the balls of their feet. Their feet will be about shoulder width apart (that's how they started when they jumped) and their knees slightly bent. No adjustments are necessary!

The drill: Have the first player place his/her hands thumbs up in front of him/herself. Explain that you will throw the ball to them in the air and they have to move left or right to catch it. As the players do this, have them "freeze" again. If they are frozen with both hands on the ball and their eyes focused on the ball, they did it correctly. Once this has been mastered, try it with ground balls. (Later, you can explain to keep their backsides down and their backs flat.)

### **Drill: *No stabbin' at the ball***

Objective: To teach kids that a fly ball will indeed come down, there's no need to stab at it in self-defense. Explain that an open baseball glove doesn't attract a baseball. They must move to the ball and place their glove in its path.

Equipment: Tennis balls or soft rubber balls. Gloves are not needed until last steps.

Set-up: Explain to the kids that their brains are great computers for figuring out where a ball is going to land. Tell them to look at the arc and speed of the ball and to get to where they think it will come down.

The drill: Step 1 Let the ball hit between their feet. Tell the kids that they are not allowed to catch the ball. Repeat it.

This takes all pressure off any timid kids in the crowd. Explain that they will be in "big trouble" if they even try to catch the ball. If they can get to the right spot and have the ball land between their feet, they did it correctly. Toss a tennis ball up into the air. Have each player in turn run out and attempt to have the ball hit between his/her feet. Demonstrate it a few times. Toss the ball up. Get to "the spot" and act relaxed. This gets the kids relaxed. No pressure here. Baseball is all about confidence. A fly ball should not be feared!

Step 2: Bounce it off the palm. After the first step has been mastered, it is time to move on. Now it is time have the kids get to the right spot and then hold the palm of their hands up in the air towards the sky. No gloves yet. If the kids can bounce the tennis ball off of their palms, they're doing it right. No stabbing up allowed!

Step 3: The ball will fall into the glove. This is the same as previous step except the target is the webbing of their glove. Explain that they don't need to catch the ball, the tennis ball will most likely bounce off the web. If the ball hit the web and the glove doesn't move up, they're really close.

Step 4: Lose the tennis ball. This is the final step. Use a real, honest to goodness t-ball baseball with two addition points. 1) Tell the kids to let their hands "give" a little as the ball hits the web. 2) Have them squeeze their gloves closed. If they can freeze with their eyes focused on the ball in the webbing of their glove, they have succeeded.

### **Drill: *From the top down***

Objective: To teach kids how to catch a fly ball over their shoulder.

Equipment: Tennis balls or soft rubber balls and gloves.

For this drill you will need a set of bleachers or playground apparatus that is high enough off the ground to drop a ball into the player's glove. Line the kids up and have them take turns stepping under the ball drop zone and catching the ball in the webbing of their glove. Reinforce the previous catching techniques. Tell them to always use 2 hands and to try to catch the ball over their shoulder. Do not move the body out of the way of the ball. Doing this places the head at a position that makes it nearly impossible to catch the ball safely.

These drills can be extended to thrown pop fly balls and then later to hit pop fly balls once the kids are ready. When practicing longer fly balls start by encouraging the kids to simply "get a glove on it". Tell them it's not important right now to actually catch the ball but getting a glove on every fly ball is. This will get them focused to positioning their body in the right place to catch the ball. The actual catching of the ball will come with more practice.

When kids are taught to throw, often the instruction is watered down into just a couple of steps. The act of throwing a baseball is not that simple. Throwing requires the entire body to work together in order to throw the ball accurately and to put something on it. All positions on the field require the ability to throw the ball accurately. Good throwing mechanics will enable you to make plays. When you warm up with the team before practice or play catch in the back yard, make sure you work on your mechanics and strive to improve your accuracy.

### Grip

The best way to grip the ball is across the seams. The fingers should be placed over the top of the seams to provide a good grip on the ball. In the first picture you'll notice that you can see 2 seams running horizontally. The back of the ball not visible will also have 2 seams running horizontally. By gripping the ball in this fashion, those 4 seams will help to keep the ball in the air longer and keep the ball traveling straighter (assuming the player can throw it with 12-6 [rotation](#)).

## 4-Seam Grip



The 4-seam fastball is the king of the power pitches, and can be delivered with the most accuracy. The ball is held on the wide seams and is thrown over the top. As the ball is released, the fingertips impart straight backspin, with all four seams rotating. This produces a true pitch from the mound to the plate, so there is very little lateral movement. Younger players with smaller hands can use 3 fingers instead of 2.

## 2-Seam Grip



The 2-seam fastball is gripped with the fingers on the narrow seams. As with the 4-seamer, you don't want the ball too deep in the hand. Fingertip pressure with either the middle or index finger against the seam generates side spin, which causes the ball to drop as it nears the plate. This late movement is called a sinking or tailing fastball. Hurlled by a lefty, the ball will move down and away from a right hand hitter. Thrown by a right hand pitcher, the ball will move down and away from a lefthand hitter. Whereas the 4-seam fastball is favored by power pitchers, the 2-seamer is used more by ground-ball pitchers.

*Try to keep the ball out on the fingertips not back in your hand. Gripping the ball in the palm of your hand and not out on your fingers will cost you velocity and accuracy. Younger players may need to grip the ball with three fingers instead of two, but unless their hands are very small they should still try to grip the ball out on the fingers.*

### Arm Motion

You can think of the motion your arm makes when throwing the ball as a circular motion. If you're throwing a short distance, the circular motion will be smaller than when you are throwing farther, but it's still a circular motion. The circular motion will aid your throw by providing more natural momentum than simply bringing your arm straight back and then forward. This motion should begin when you're pulling the ball from your glove. If you are playing the outfield you will almost always be making a longer throw, so when you remove the ball from your glove, your arm and hand should drop down and by your back knee. A saying often used is "Thumb to your thigh and knuckles to the sky". Basically your thumb should brush the outside of your back leg when bringing the ball down and back. Then, as your arm reaches back the knuckles should rotate so they are pointing towards the sky until your arm begins to move forward. This will provide you with the longest circular motion possible. If you are making a shorter throw in the infield for example, you may take the ball out of your glove and move it back and down slightly. This will give you a circular motion appropriate for that distance.

How do you determine if you're throwing with a circular motion or not? One of the best ways to check yourself is to freeze occasionally after you pull the ball out of your glove. If you are bring it up and back for anything other than a very short throw, you are not using a good circular motion in your throw. If you have been throwing incorrectly for a long time, then it is going to feel different throwing with a good circular motion. That is to be expected. Practice throwing this way all the time and it will soon feel natural and you should see increased accuracy and velocity. When throwing you want your front shoulder to point in the direction of where you are throwing. So after fielding the ball you will be turning your body sideways and pointing your lead shoulder in the direction of the throw.



**Lower Body**

If you follow the logic of having your front shoulder facing the target then you might have guessed that you also want your lower body lined up in the same manner. Your back foot should be perpendicular to the target and your hips should be closed and also pointing in the direction of the target. Once you have everything lined up, you'll want to step toward the target with your lead foot, push off your back leg, and throw the ball using your entire body.

**Rotation**

In order to throw the ball so it won't tail, you want to make sure you throw it across all four seams with '12-6' rotation. '12-6' rotation refers to a clock. If the ball rotates from 12, straight down to where 6 would be on the clock, this would be considered '12-6' rotation. The next two images show an example of 12-6 rotation. To see if a player is throwing a baseball in a correct rotation, take a baseball and wrap black electrical tape around the ball 2-3 times to form a straight line. Have the player grip the ball with the tape line splitting his index and middle fingers. When the player throws the ball, look at the black line and observe its rotation. When thrown correctly the line should be straight and not wobbly. The line doesn't necessarily need to be exactly at 12 to 6, but more importantly in a straight line. If the tape line wobbles at all, he is not letting the ball roll off the fingertips and therefore losing accuracy and velocity.

**DRILLS**

**Grip Drill:** Use the 4 seam or 2 seam grip. Hold the ball gently (like an egg) Use ball with electrical tape to demonstrate grip.

**Wrist/Elbow drill:** Space out about 6 feet. Put gloves on ground in front. Hold forearm and toss ball to other player's glove with wrist only. Then back up, put gloves on, hold triceps and throw with wrist and forearm.

**One Knee Drill:** Players 15 feet apart. Down on Non-throwing knee. Drag ball along grass, turn shoulder towards target, rotate wrist and throw by rotating body. Follow through each toss. Build on wrist/elbow drill, making sure each player bends his elbow and uses his wrist.

**Stationary Drill:** Start by placing the back foot perpendicular to the target. Take a step and throw to the target. Stress the previous steps. Check shoulder and hip aim and follow through.

**Step and Throw Drill:** Get in the proper position to catch the ball. Place throwing leg in front and perpendicular to the target. As he places his back foot, bring the other leg forward and rotate body to achieve correct throwing position. (check that the back foot is perpendicular)

**Shuffle Step and Throw Drill:** Place ball on ground in front or roll the ball. Have player take a few small shuffle steps to get into position and then throw the ball to first.

**Long Toss Drill:** Start throwing at 15 feet. Each successful catch, the thrower can move back to next cone (5 feet or so). If any player misses, he must go back to start. Later add accuracy by making the stationary player simulate having one foot on first. Time for 2 minutes.

**Accuracy Drill:** Set up a bucket or soft toss net at different positions on the field. First base is a good place to start. Have the players stand at shortstop for this first round. Place a line of baseballs in the position on the infield where you want them to field the ball and have them take turns picking up the baseball and making an accurate throw to first. Once players are warmed up, the target can be moved to home plate and throws can be made from the outfield. Make this a game, split the team into 2 groups and have them compete for points. You'll notice all of a sudden the throws will become more accurate.

Regardless which side of the plate you hit from, your first step out of the box should be a crossover step. Drive out of the box as if you were stealing a base. Get in the habit of getting out of the box quickly; this helps you at the close play at first and may just turn that long single into a double.

### Run Every Ball Out! Hard!

Few players in the Majors run out every ball. As with many things in the big leagues, it may okay to do it when you get there but you shouldn't do it when you're working to get there. Lead by example, run every ball out and run it out hard. It doesn't matter if it's a slow roller to the pitcher or a pop fly to the center fielder, get your legs going and hustle down the line.

### Run Through First Base

Once you've determined that the ball is going to be fielded by an infielder, focus on the front part of first base. As you hit the base, start breaking down. This gives the illusion to the umpire that you were at the bag sooner than if you breakdown after you pass the base. After you have crossed the base, slow down and look to your right to see if there was an errant throw.

### Take A Turn

If the ball is going to make it past the infield, get ready to round first base. Do this by moving off the line and into foul territory to set yourself up for the turn at first. Try to hit the inside corner of the bag. Be aggressive with your turn, put pressure on the outfield to field the ball cleanly and make a good throw. There's a fine line between being aggressive and being stupid. Put yourself in position to take advantage of any mistakes but don't get caught being too far off the base.

Sliding is one of the most important safety concerns for players at any instructional league level, unfortunately, it is usually one of the most overlooked. As the players get older they will be required by league rules to slide on every play made to any base. If the player does not slide, they can, and will, be called out. Start teaching them how to slide early in their baseball development so it becomes second nature to them.

A good way to teach a bent leg slide (also called a "figure 4" slide) is to teach it the way you teach many skills, in steps.

1. Start by finding out which leg is going to be bent during the bent leg slide. With the player standing have him stand on one leg and bend the other leg at the knee, bringing it behind the other leg.
2. Have the player raise both hands over his head.
3. Have the player start to squat, while he keeps his bent leg up, then sit down. The player will naturally roll back on his back and his feet will come up in the air. Although this won't happen when he slides, it will during this stage. When he has rolled back to a seated position, he should still have his hands up and his front leg should be bent not straight.
4. Once comfortable with this, have him take a couple steps and slide (I always practice sliding on grass). Then have them jog and slide and finally run full speed and slide.

Checkpoints for each step:

- Hands should be above head not on the ground. Don't worry too much about how high the hands are. Keeping them above the head is used to avoid the natural reaction to put them on the ground. If the player is constantly putting his hands on the ground have him hold his glove or a stick in his hands when he slides.
- Player should be sliding on his butt, not his side.
- The front leg should be bent to allow for give when sliding into the base.
- At this level, don't slide head first into any base! Check for grass stains to be on the butt not the leg.
- Do not jump up when preparing to slide



**Drills:**

If players are having trouble getting their lead foot off the ground, have them try sliding in stocking feet. Sometimes the cleats will grab the grass and slow, or prevent, their lead leg from extending.

I have all my players wear a batting helmet when ever we do baserunning drills. They will always have one on during a game and should practice wearing one when doing the drills.

**Drill: Downhill Slide**

Find a grassy slope (Jaworek Playground, Back side of Matrinangelo field, etc.) and practice sliding down hill first. Kids usually learn to lean back instead of forward when looking downhill. Have players jog a few steps and then go into the slide first. Then progressively move back until they are running full speed.

**Drill: Run Through the Base**

**Purpose:** This drill teaches players to run "through" first base on a ground ball.

**Equipment:** bases and batting helmets

**Setup:** Start with the players lining up 30 feet from the base. 1 coach stands beside the runners and a second coach should stand 10 feet past the base

**Execution:** The coach standing beside the line of players yells "HIT" . The runner should sprint for the base. The second coach should stand 10 feet past the base and encourage the runner to run past the base making sure to step on the base as he passes.

**Progression:** Once the kids understand how to run to first base they can work on advancing to the next base. Have the kids look to the right once they pass the base to see if there is an overthrow. If there is an overthrow, have them continue and slide into second base.

**Drill: Rounding First**

**Purpose:** This drill teaches players to take a wide turn to round first base and then go to second base

**Equipment:** bases and batting helmets, a cone or a glove

**Setup:** Place a bright colored cone or glove about 20 feet down the line between first and home. Start with runners lined up behind the batters box. Have all other runners in a line behind home. Have a coach at first base and another at home.

**Execution:** Coach at home yells "HIT" and the runner charges out of the batters box and heads for first base. If the first base coach signals base hit, the runner continues to run straight through first base and looks right to look for an overthrow. If the first base coach signals extra bases, the runner should break right (outside of the cone) and make a wide turn, round first base and continue onto second. This drill can be done on grass by moving the bases slightly onto the outfield grass, therefore eliminating any injuries from the graven on the infield.

**Drill: No Defense**

**Purpose:** This drill allows players to work on many different base running situations. It is also a good conditioning drill.

**Equipment:** Bat and baseballs; Helmets

**Setup:** Start with runners on first and second and one player in the batters box. Have all other runners in a line behind home. Have a coach in the third base box and another coach out in front of home with a bat and baseballs.

**Execution:** Coach will hit a ball to any part of the field. All ground balls will be considered to be through for a base hit. All fly balls will be considered singles also. All base runners will behave as if there is a defense.

Hitter will run hard through first base on a ground ball. He will round the base on a ball hit in the air to the outfield. Either way he stays at first base.

Runner at first will run hard strait into second on a ground ball to the infield. Runner will pick up the third base coach on any ball hit to the outfield. The third base coach will then instruct the runner to either stay at second or proceed to third. Runner at second will go straight into third on a ground ball. On a fly ball he will round third and pick up the third base coach to determine whether he will score or not.

Runner at third will tag on a fly ball and run when the ball hits the ground. If there is no runner on second, the third base coach can give the runner instructions on what to do on a ground ball. "Score on all balls except back to the pitcher".

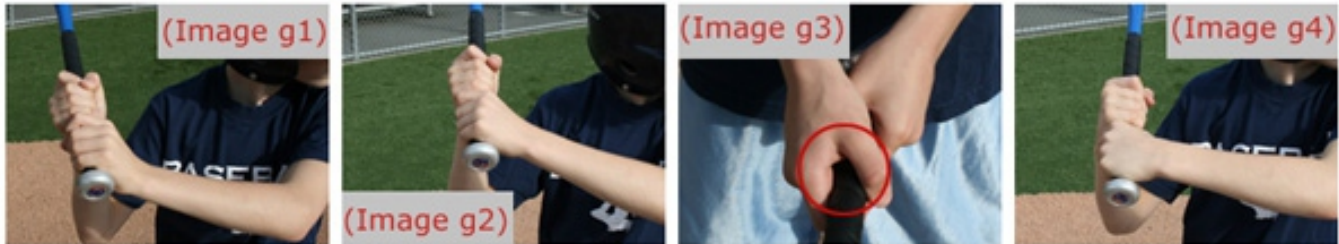
Tension is your worst enemy when it comes to a fluid swing. Tension throughout the body is often the direct result of gripping the bat incorrectly. A player with a relaxed grip on the bat will be able to react faster and wait longer on a pitch than a player with a death grip on the bat. You want to be relaxed in the box; this starts when you pick up the bat.

You'll see various types of grips at all levels of baseball and you'll also read or see some people who believe there is only one way to grip the bat. If this was true you'd see all major league players using the same grip. The variables with the grip are how far out on the fingers or deep in the palm a player will hold the bat, how the upper and lower hands aligns on the bat, how tight to hold the bat, and whether to choke up or not.

**The Grip:** With young players, show them how to grip the bat by starting them out with their middle knuckles approximately lined up and try to show them how to get the bat out of the palm and into the fingers where they will have better control (Image g1). Younger players have an easier time relaxing their hands when they don't have the bat buried in the palm of their hands. One quick way to check a player is to have him hold the bat out in front and look to see if there is a gap between the bat handle and the spot between the thumb and index finger (Image g3 below).

As players develop they will often adjust their grip and sometimes bring the grip back closer to the pad in one or both hands. The grip needs to be comfortable and it must provide the player with the ability to have a relaxed grip. Remember, tension is the enemy.

In the end you want players hands to align somewhere from the middle knuckles lining up (Image g1 below) and the middle knuckles of the lower hand lining up with the top knuckles on the upper hand (Image g2 below). Anywhere in that zone that is comfortable for the player should work as long as they don't get the bat too far in the palms of their hands.



### Location In The Batters Box

The first priority when getting into your stance is to make sure you have good plate coverage. Have a method for determining this for each at bat. During practice, have someone watch you take some practice swings from in front of the mound. Simulate swinging at an outside pitch. Is your bat covering the outside corner? Adjust your distance to the plate so you have the correct distance.

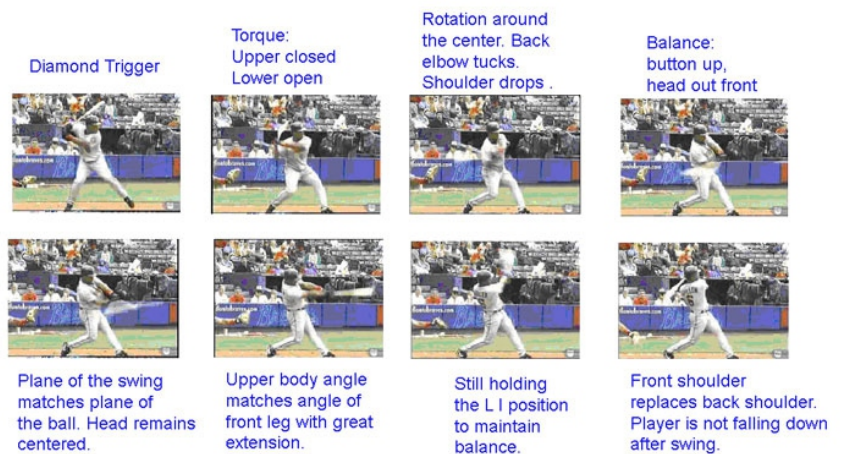
Create a method for measuring that distance. Many players tap the plate with their bat the same way each time they get into the box. If the bat hits the same part of the plate each time, then they know the distance is correct.

### Depth

While every player wants good plate coverage, the depth you stand in the box is more a matter of preference. If you stand deep in the box (towards the catcher), you may have more time to wait on a fastball. By standing forward in the box, you may be able to time a slower pitch better.

### Weight and Hands

When you get into your stance, your weight should be slightly back, but not completely on the back leg. Have your hands near the top of the strike zone. Many players prefer to have their hands slightly off the back shoulder. Having your hands off your shoulder and at the top of the strike zone puts them in the best position for swinging the bat. It's very difficult for any hitter to catch up to a high fastball and hit anything but a pop fly if their hands start below the ball.



## Coil

Timing, rotation, and weight transfer are essential to good hitting. The amount of rotation vs. the amount of weight transfer will vary from hitter to hitter. In general, power hitters tend to be more rotational, while single hitters tend to be more weight transfer. One mechanism to help achieve all of these is the coil. Simply put it's much easier to swing the bat and achieve better timing if you move back before going forward. As the pitcher starts his delivery, you will want to move your weight back on to the back leg, closing your shoulder, hips, and knee. This is also the point when you want to move the bat near the launching position. When the coil is complete you are in the correct position to stride.

## Stride

One of the most common mistakes made by hitters at all levels is having the stride be part of the swing. In fact, hitters should perform the stride before the swing.

During the stride, you shouldn't transfer your weight from the back leg to the front. Having good hip rotation is a critical piece of the swing for hitting with power. For the hitter that transfers his weight forward with the stride, power is lost not only from the transfer of weight at the incorrect time but also from the inability to rotate the hips properly.

## How Do You Stride While Keeping Your Weight Back?

The key is to stride out with the inside portion of your front foot. One way to think of it is to act like your striding onto a dozen eggs and you don't want to break those eggs. By doing that you will keep your weight back. Make sure you stride with your front foot closed. If you open up your front foot towards the pitcher, you will also open up your hips which will cause a loss of power when you do swing.

## Swing

The pitch is on the way, you've coiled and taken your stride and now you're ready to swing. The first thing to realize is that your swing should not be driven by your arms, but by your legs and hips. We'll take a look at each area of your body and follow it through the swing.

## Legs

As your weight moves forward from your back leg, your back foot will pivot towards the pitcher and your knee will turn in. The front foot will not pivot and you will want to keep that leg stiff. It's not necessary to keep it completely straight, but you don't want to flex it as you transfer your weight. (This can cause your head to drop as your tracking the ball.)

## Hips

While you pivot on your back foot, you also will open up your hips. The degree to which you open your hips depends on the location of the pitch. On inside pitches, you need to completely open the hips to get your hands through right next to your body. On outside pitches, you have to keep your hips more closed to get your hands out and drive the ball the other direction. An important point on feel for the player: It should feel as if the back hip is driving the hips open, not the front hip pulling the hips open. It may seem like a subtle difference, but a player that is pulling open will often start by pulling his front shoulder open. This can cause all types of problems.

Your legs and hips are going to drive your swing and provide power. Work hard on both of these and you will see a difference in the batting cage and on the field.

## Arms And Hands

When you begin your swing, you want your hands to be at the top of the strike zone. Any lower and you will be swinging up at a high strike. This most likely will result in a fly ball or pop-up.

To have a quick bat, you must start your swing by bringing your hands through close to your body. On inside pitches, your hands stay closer to your body longer than on outside pitches. Remember to extend the bat towards the ball just before contact. If you extend the bat too soon, you will slow down your swing. As you make contact with the ball, your bottom hand should be palm up and your upper hand should be palm down. This means that you haven't yet rolled your wrists over. Rolling your wrists happens naturally after hitting the ball. Concentrate on driving through the baseball. Sometimes players are in such a hurry to start running that they actually start slowing down their swing before contact. Hit the ball hard first, then run. As your hands continue forward and your wrists roll over, it's natural to let your top hand come off the bat. This allows you to continue with a good follow through on your swing.

## Head

It's essential that you track the ball from the start of the pitch to the bat. Often hitters want to see where they hit the ball before contact. Concentrate on watching the ball all the way through contact and look at the contact spot for a split second after you hit the ball. This ensures that you have tracked the ball the entire way.

Another way to think about tracking the ball is shoulder to shoulder. Start your chin near your front shoulder; after you swing, your chin should end up on your back shoulder. If it doesn't, then you're leaving your head out in front of the plate and not watching the ball all the way in.

**Tee 1-2-3**

Coach yells out 1- player coils and holds, 2 player will stride keeping weight back and pause, 3 - complete the swing

**Wiffle Ball Tee Drill**

Use a batting tee and a bag of wiffle balls. Tee it up and start hacking. The sooner you can hit a wiffle ball cleanly off a tee, the sooner you will become a better hitter. When you hit a wiffle ball off a tee correctly, it acts like a knuckleball. You can hear the air going through the ball. When you don't hit it correctly, you create spin on the ball and it goes all over the place. When the ball spins alot, I make adjustments to correct my swing.

**Coil Drill**

**Purpose:** Helps players develop a routine for getting into the box, getting into their stance and coiling. Also develops the timing used when coiling.

Each player will get the proper grip on the bat and step into an imaginary batters box (use a glove to simulate a plate). Each player will take their stance and get ready for the pitch. Coach will simulate a windup and deliver an imaginary pitch. The hitter will work on his coil and freeze when he has completed it. Things to watch for: Proper grip. Does the player look comfortable and relaxed. Is the weight shift enough or too much. example: Hitter should not be rolling the weight onto the outside of the back foot (too much). Is the player wrapping the bat. Are the hands going up and back or are they dropping. Can the hitter still see well. Sometimes players will turn in their lead shoulder and hip too much, which will cause the head to turn also. When the player freezes, check to see that you can see both eyes. Have the player repeat the drill the same way each time

**Stride Drill:**

**Purpose:** Helps players isolate the stride and understand the important parts of the stride.

**Execution:** Each player will get into his stance. The coach will simulate a windup and deliver an imaginary pitch. The player will then coil, stride, and then freeze. Things to watch for: Is most of the weight still back. Make sure they are not lunging. Are the hands still back. Have the hands dropped. Is the body still in the same basic alignment. Sometimes players will bend their knees or bend over during the stride. Is the head still at the same height. Have the player repeat the drill, stepping out of the box and getting the sign from the third base coach each time.

**Hip Rotation Drill:**

**Purpose:** Develops the proper hip rotation of the swing and good balance.

**Execution:** The hitter places the bat behind his back, holding it with both arms between his forearm and bicep. The barrel of the bat should be facing the catcher. Have the player take his normal stance with the bat behind his back. The coach will simulate a windup and deliver an imaginary pitch. The coach will yell inside or outside as he delivers the pitch.

The hitter will take his normal coil, stride, and then rotate his hips open. The hitter will rotate his hips open farther on an inside pitch than an outside pitch. Have the player focus on having the back hip driving the rotation. The key here is rotation, as many players mistake rotation for driving forward toward the pitcher. There is a transfer of weight, but the back foot should still be firmly contacting the ground in the "squashed bug position".

Things to look for: Hips rotate farther on an inside pitch. Hips should rotate on a level plane. Player should not be leaning forward over the plate or back away from the plate. If so, they are not balanced. Back foot must pivot in order to have good hip rotation. Player should land on a stiff front leg. Often a player will unnaturally bend his front knee in order to keep his balance.

Front shoulder opens up first. This can be difficult to see, but when watching a player see if the first movement of the hip rotation is the front shoulder starting to pull open. If this is the case, the player is using his front side to pull his back side open instead of his backside driving the front side open.

Head level should stay consistent through entire drill.

**Soft Toss Drill:**

**Purpose:** Helps players with hand-eye coordination and swing mechanics

**Execution:** Kneel at a 45 degree angle from the hitter and toss 1 baseball at a time so it peaks about waist level on the batter. Have the batter swing through the ball and hit the ball into a net, against a fence, or against a piece of cloth material. Watch for hitting mechanics. The idea is for the batter to develop better hand-eye coordination.

Variations: Use baseballs that are numbered 1,2,3 etc. Have the player call out the number on the baseball when swinging. Use colored dots and have them call out the color. Toss 2 baseballs at a time, one on top of the other. Make the matter hit the ball you tell them, top ball or bottom ball. Use wiffle balls if you don't have a fence. Use small golf ball sized wiffle balls.

### **Swing Analysis**

It is very difficult to analyze a batter's swing without somehow slowing the action down, or even stopping a swing in progress. One image that is easier to analyze is the last image seen - the swing's finish.

A lot can be seen from the finish. Obviously, if the batter's front foot is almost out of the batter's box, the batter has "stepped in the bucket" and overextended. Here are some things to look for in the swing finish that can be seen in the photograph at left.

### **Back Side Commitment**

This is often called "squishing the bug", but the term implies that you must keep some weight on the ball of your back foot. This violates the tenants of hitting coaches who teach that you should hit with your weight on the front foot. Regardless of the batter's front/back foot weight distribution at contact, the point is that prior to the swing the rear foot should point toward the plate, and through the course of the swing twist and finish pointing toward the pitcher.

The knee should also be bent to near 90 degrees. This twisting action gets the hips into the swing. The hips are key to increasing bat speed and generating power from the legs. Unfortunately, a player with good reflexes, quick hands and good hand/eye coordination can survive through AAA without good back side commitment. However, the increase in pitching velocity at the majors level makes it difficult to catch up to the pitch without "squishing the bug."

### **Front Side Closure**

While the back side is twisting, the front side should not. It should stay near the "closed" position. Closed means that the front foot is pointed more toward the plate, than to left field. Once the front foot opens, hips and shoulders tend to follow. It's great if the hitter wants to pull every pitch, but as the player progresses up the ladder of competition, the pitchers will catch on and pitch to the hitter's weakness, the outside pitch.

### **Head on the Ball**

I think we can still call this "Mike to Ike" without offending any hitting gurus. Like the front foot, the head does not twist as the back foot, hips and trunk. Mike refers to the front shoulder, or where your chin should be before the swing. Ike refers to the rear shoulder, the position of the chin at the finish of the swing.

### **Body Stays Centered**

With the twisting and weight transfer, the body must stay centered. The body should not fly forward with the bat head and end up over the front foot.

### **Balance and Extension**

The arms should be at (or at least near) full extension at contact; but not before then. Quite often, a hitter will extend their arms early. This is called casting. If the arms are extended too early, and the pitch is on the inside half of the plate, the batter must lean back on their heels to keep from hitting the ball on the bat handle. The result is a loss of balance backwards, which results in the batter catching his balance with a small step back, usually with the front foot

At the completion of a swing, the weight on the front foot should be centered on the ball of the foot, in a very wide stance, leaving the batter in a good balanced position. Also upon extension, and through contact with the ball, the bat head should be flying toward the pitcher, and not immediately whipping around the batter.

In order to stay balanced, extend properly, and swing through the ball, the elbows need to stay bent and close to the body. Keeping the hands "inside" the ball, the bat should be gripped with fingertips, not the palm, and the middle knuckles should be nearly aligned, which in turn keeps the wrists aligned and acting together to snap the bat at the ball.

### 1. Improper Stance Width

**PROBLEM:** The batter's stance is too wide or too narrow. A stance too wide causes a loss of power and prevents hip involvement during the swing. A stance with the feet too close often causes the batter to stride too far or long. This causes the head and eyes to drop during the stride. This makes the hitter's success ratio drop tremendously. It is hard enough to hit with a "quiet" head or with no movement. Over striding makes it even more difficult to see the ball, identify the speed and type or pitch and to hit the ball where it is pitched.

**SOLUTION:** Have the batter assume a stance with the feet shoulder width apart. Have the batter take a short stride of no more than 6 inches. If the stance is slightly wider than the shoulders, simply picking the front foot straight up only an inch or two and putting it down may be all the stride the batter needs.

### 2. "Wrapping" The Bat

**PROBLEM:** The batter has the bad habit of "wrapping" or "cocking" the bat behind the head. The batter's bat speed is decreased because the batter now has to bring the bat farther to get to the ball.

**SOLUTION:** The bat should be held at a 45 degree angle to vertical. Refer to the perfect swing page of this site for more details on proper bat angle.

### 3. Looking At Your Nose

**PROBLEM:** The batter does not have the head turned far enough toward the pitcher. This prevents both eyes from picking up the ball and the batter has difficulty seeing the ball. The back eye is blocked from seeing the ball by the batter's nose, thus the batter is "looking at his nose". The batter is basically hitting "one eyed". This is another reason for batter failure.

**SOLUTION:** The batter simply turns the head toward the pitcher until the batter's face is facing the pitcher and both eyes are seeing the pitcher fully. A good saying often used is "show the pitcher both of your ears". This will always make sure the head is in the correct position.

### 4. Poor Grip

**PROBLEM:** Improper grip reduces bat speed and bat control. Two simple grip mistakes cause this problem. The batter's hands are slowed by a grip that is too "tense" or too tight or the batter is gripping the bat with the palms rather than the fingers.

**SOLUTION:** The batter should strive to stay loose with the hands. Effort should be made to reduce tensions and use a relaxed grip. Slight movement of the fingers may serve to keep the "grip stress" down. The batter should hold the bat in the fingers away from the palms. This grip allows maximum hand speed and bat control.

### 5. Over striding

**PROBLEM:** Over striding is a common mistake. Batters that often get "jammed" may be in fact causing their own problems by over striding. Over striding causes the batter's head and eyes to drop often causing the batter to "loose" the ball during the swing. Tracking the ball visually is made very difficult. The batter's over striding can also cause the swing to be long. A batter's wide feet that are too wide tend to prevent hip involvement during the swing.

**SOLUTION:** Batters should use a short or a "no stride" approach. A short stride of 3 to 6 inches is often enough. In fact simply picking the front foot up and putting it back down is all the stride that is needed.

### 6. "Hitch" In The Swing

**PROBLEM:** Batters that have a "hitch" in their swing often have difficulty hitting the fastball. They often get "jammed" and are often late on medium speed pitches. The batter is not "triggering" correctly. The batter is dropping the hands before taking them to the "power position" or what is often called the "launch position". This lowering of the hands causes the batter to be late to the strike zone.

**SOLUTION:** Take the hands slightly up and then back rather than dropping them.

### 7. "Locking" The Front Arm

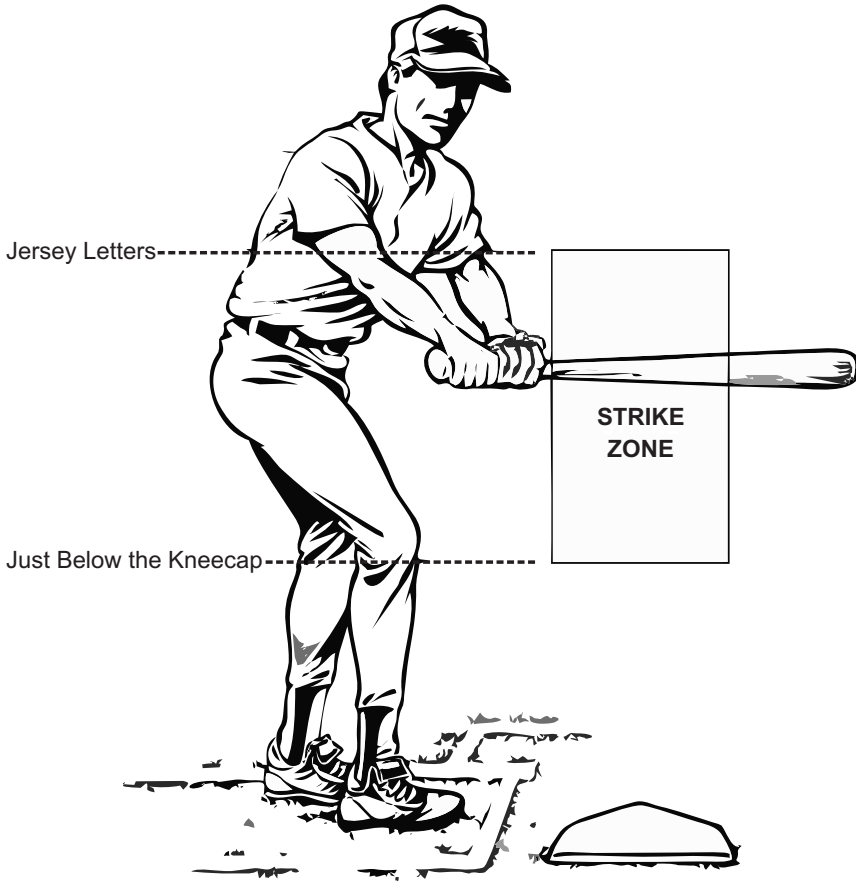
**PROBLEM:** The batter "locks" or straightens out the front arm when the hands and bat are taken back to the "power" or "trigger" position. This flaw causes the batter to be late starting the swing. It also causes the bat speed to be too slow and increases the bat's distance to the ball. Locking the front arm also often causes premature wrist roll.

**SOLUTION:** Keep a bend in the front elbow. Keep the hands together and working together. Keep the hands close to the body and do not take them back so far that front arm flex is lost.

### 8. Opening Up Too Soon

**PROBLEM:** The front side is opening too soon causing the batter's "whole body" including head and eyes to pull off the pitch. This flaw often causes the barrel to lag and a reduction in bat speed. Much less plate coverage is allowed. Another result of dropping the hands is an increase in fly balls.

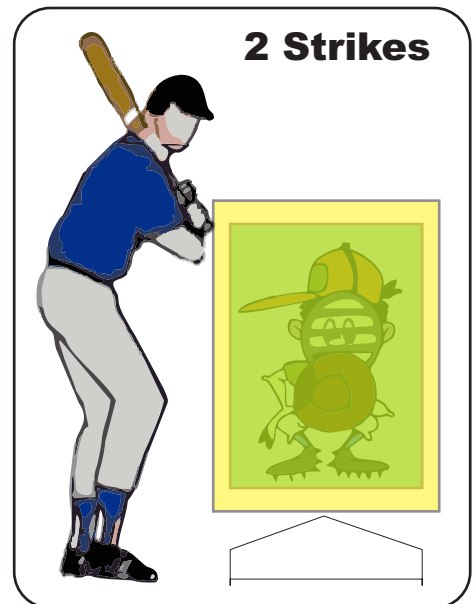
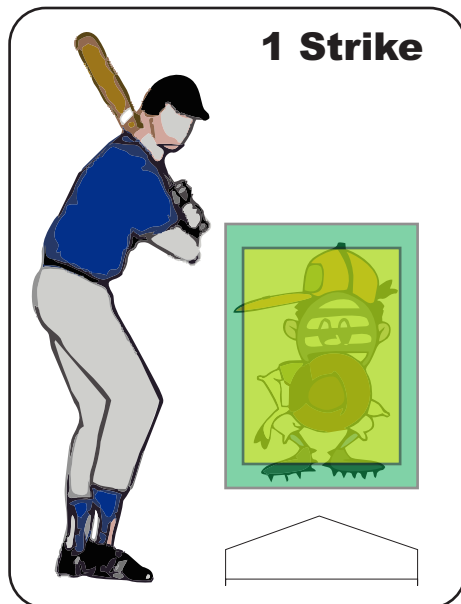
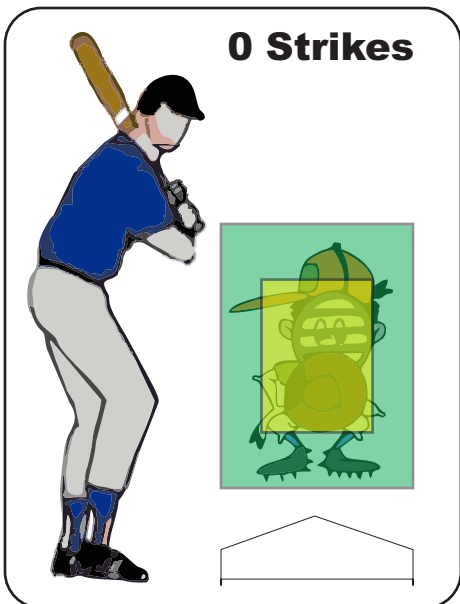
**SOLUTION:** Have the batter strive to keep the "knob to belly button" relationship during the swing. The belly button rotates with the knob of the bat. On inside pitches the batter will still "open" but the timing will be perfect. On middle and away pitches the batter will not open or rotate so much. "The belly button to knob" relationship maintains correct timing mechanics.



Once players are hitting the ball consistently, it's a good idea to introduce how to hit with different pitch counts. To simplify things, you might want to start by reinforcing the rule that you either have 2 strikes on you or you don't. With this philosophy, a hitter can simply decide if a pitch is a good one to swing at by knowing the pitch count first. For instance, if a hitter has less than 2 strikes, he/she can be somewhat selective if the pitch is not perfect for them. When the hitter has a 2 strike count, he/she can not be as selective and must "protect the Plate" and hit any pitch that is close.

The image to the right shows the typical strike zone on a batter. A good way to communicate the zone to your hitters is to tell them a strike is a pitch that goes over the plate (not outside and not inside) and is from the "Letters on their jersey to just below their knee caps". Most younger players will be able to understand that area.

In the images below, notice the hitting zone is smaller than the strike zone for a 0 strike count and expands as the strike counts increases. The 0 strike pitch is the pitch location that the hitter really likes and can handle. The ability to handle the pitch is important. A hitter may love to hit eye level pitches in batting practice but can't handle them well in the game. That pitch shouldn't be part of the hitting zone. This 0 strike pitch is the one that the hitter is confident he/she can drive somewhere and may be a little different from player to player.



Pre-season organization is a critical element of a solid start to any season. Therefore, we've provided you with a summary checklist of tips we recommend.

#### Learning to Coach Baseball

- Read and understand the rules of the level of baseball you will be coaching. If you have questions, express them to the director so they can be clarified before you have an issue.
- Read, observe, and search the Internet for good coaching tips.
- Tap into the training resources offered through the league.

#### Communicating With Parents

- Hold a pre-season parent meeting
  - At that meeting tell the parents about your coaching philosophy
- Set the season's ground rules for parents and players
- Explain why parents should not "coach from the stands "
- Talk with parents about player safety
- Tell parents to come to you at appropriate times with questions or concerns
- Suggest to parents what type of equipment they should get for their kids
- Recruit parent volunteers
- Put important information in writing

#### Recruiting Parent Support

- Give parents a specific supporting role for their player or the team.
- You will need some assistant coaches, so survey the parents of your team to see if anyone is willing to commit to helping you.
- Ask parents to help during practices or games  
(All parents must fill out a CORI form to be in the dugout or on the bench)
- Promote consistency in volunteer style and philosophy

#### Before the First Practice

- Check out your team's equipment (if provided by the league) to make sure it's complete and in good shape so it can be used safely and effectively in your practices and games.
- Check out the practice fields you will use so you are familiar with the grounds, parking, bathrooms (or lack there of) etc.
- Visit the MYBA website and log onto your team page. Read the directions and be familiar with how to navigate the page, send emails, upload pictures, enter statistics, etc.
- Set up an email list for your team so you can quickly and efficiently distribute information like directions to fields or changes in the practice schedule.
- Make a player roster card that can be distributed to the parents so they can identify kids on the field or at the plate by numbers.
- Set a goal for each practice and each practice station. (How many successful catches can you make individually and as a group?) One good strategy is to let them do a round or 2 of a specific skill and then tell them that if they beat their best time YOU will run a lap or do 5 push-ups. This really gets them focused, plus we could all use a little exercise!