



Sycamore Baseball and Softball Association (SBSA)

Player Development Strategy and Guide

Spring 2016

Introduction

One of SBSA's primary objectives is to develop well-rounded baseball players. Coaches play a critical role in this objective. Although there is no "cookie-cutter" approach to coaching, having a uniform player development strategy will enable coaches to appropriately work with players in order to develop age appropriate skills and an age appropriate understanding of the strategies and rules of baseball.

As part of Knothole Baseball organization, SBSA makes every effort to adhere to the model established over decades of experience. When considering the best time to teach players baseball skills Cal Ripken Baseball notes, "... games do not usually offer an atmosphere that is conducive to teaching. A lot of excitement, energy, tension, interference, and distractions surround games, making it extremely difficult to communicate any type of teachings or lessons to a player." SBSA believes that practice is the best time to address situations that occur in games and to perfect other areas of play. Unfortunately, baseball practice has a reputation (sometimes deserved) for being boring and tedious. This is because baseball requires the development of so many fine motor skills—throwing, catching, hitting, and so on. And in order to properly execute these skills in a game, the player must develop the correct muscle memory, and this requires repetition- a great deal of repetition. Therein lies a coach's challenge. How do you get your players to participate in so much repetitive work, ensuring they learn, develop, maintain, and perfect critical skills and still keep their attention and make sure they are having fun?

Bob Bennett, one of the most winning Division I baseball coaches, said that it is virtuously impossible to conduct baseball practice without using drills. Of course there is no question that fundamental drills can become tedious. Kids, and many adults for that matter, are not wired to be able to perform the same simple tasks over and over again without shifting their focus or attention. Accordingly, to combat the attention loss and monotony that naturally comes from repetitive action (like ordinary drills), SBSA's player development strategy will emphasize skills-based practices that also incorporate game-like situations.

SBSA Way of Baseball – Developing a Community for Baseball

SBSA desires to develop a love and understanding for the game that can be passed down for generations. SBSA's goal of developing well-rounded players is not limited to just perfecting a baseball player's skill, it also includes being a good teammate and displaying a positive attitude. Players will often adopt the attitude and characteristics of their coach. For this reason it is vital that coaches be a good example of sportsmanship and project respect for the game, rules, and other players.

A major way of positively impacting players and team attitudes can be made in the way coaches correct player errors. SBSA caters to youth players ranging in ages of four to 18, and skill levels that are equally diverse often within the same divisions. Players who become frustrated often look to the coach for support.



SBSA emphasizes the importance of providing encouragement while giving player feedback. Coaches should not cover up poor or incorrect play with rosy words of praise.

Remember some good teaching principles:

Kids know all too well when they've erred, and no cheerfully expressed cliché can undo their mistakes. If you fail to acknowledge players' errors, your athletes will think you are insincere. A good way to correct a performance error is to first point out what the athlete did correctly, then explain in a positive way what he or she is doing wrong and show him or her how to correct it. Finish by encouraging the athlete and emphasizing the correct performance. Practicing this "praise-correct-praise" sandwich is also a great way to help players keep or develop confidence, and confidence is a large part of being a successful baseball player.

Effective Practices

One of the most effective ways to get youth players to participate in so much repetitive work, ensuring they learn, develop, maintain, and perfect critical skills and still keep their attention and make sure they are having fun is by breaking the kids into small groups and rotating them to different drill stations every 15 or 20 minutes. Following this model will break up the monotony of practice and still have the desired effect of ensuring players develop, maintain, or perfect the desired skills. This will also be of benefit to coaches who can teach the drill where they are most proficient, which will result in consistent coach to player feedback.

Coaches can hold the players' attention in other ways as well, such as using "drills" as games or contests to help maintain a high level of interest and concentration. The same drills that seemed boring before suddenly become a great deal more exciting when the element of competition is introduced. Across the board, players react positively to competitive drills and coaches will have to ask the kids to leave the field or stop doing a drill. Coaches can also combine multiple drills into one over-all competition by creating a point system or some other means of determining a winner for the player who is the most proficient at the drills. Not only does this method allow the players to receive a lot more repetitions, but also it puts them in more of a competitive, game like situation.

Successful baseball practices must also include the parents. Coaches are fighting an uphill battle to develop and perfect critical baseball skills in one, two or three weekly practices that last one to two hours. Accordingly, parental involvement is critical. By including the parents in practice, the parents have a much clearer idea of the Coaches' goals and how they should be practicing at home. Additionally, involving the parents will increase the parents' baseball knowledge and confidence to provide valuable feedback to their kids.

One approach that you might consider is Cal Ripken Baseball's five points regarding practice:

1. Place your players in small groups to introduce the skill to them. Be sure to use key buzzwords that can help them remember how to perform the skill. Demonstrate the proper way to execute the skill. Don't forget to explain why the skill should be performed that way. Describe and demonstrate the drill that will help them improve the skill you have introduced.
2. Observe your players. Note what they are doing well and what they might need to improve.



3. Bring your players together to talk about how they've performed so far. Ask them questions about the proper way to execute the skill and why it should be done that way. Answering basic questions such as "What is the goal of the drill?" and "What are the most important things to remember when executing the drills?" allows players to understand the correct mechanics. Asking them to explain why convinces them that an important reason exists for performing the skill a certain way and helps them remember the proper techniques. If they don't come up with the answers on their own, guide them toward the correct responses or demonstrate the proper way to execute the skill without speaking.
4. Ask some or all of the players to demonstrate the proper technique and to repeat the key buzzwords for you. Do this again at the end of the drill and then before you repeat the drill to reinforce the concepts.
5. Once the players get the hang of the drill, introduce a point system or some other method for them to perform the drill in a competitive setting. If you aren't familiar with baseball skills, you may want to look into purchasing an instructional video or DVD. There are multiple options available free via YouTube.

When developing your practice strategies and plans, here are some baseline goals that should be achieved for each age group.

Age Appropriate Skills

Instructional Baseball (Ages 4-5)

Instructional Baseball is an excellent precursor to more organized baseball. In Instructional Baseball the objective for the batting team is simply to hit the ball and make it to the sole base used (first base). As such, the primary goal is for the players to have fun and hopefully want to progress to play t-ball. Nevertheless there are a few basic objectives players can learn that will benefit them in their transition to t-ball and beyond. Of course at every age a major objective will be to teach good sportsmanship and to show respect to teammates, coaches, and opponents.

Goals for this division include:

Area Repetitive / Basic Skills to be Fully Competent

Basic Rules

- Which direction to run when the ball is hit,
- Runners must touch the base, and
- The importance of running past first base.

Defense

- Tracking: Follow the ball with the eyes into the glove, whether on the ground or in the air (Instructional Baseball uses softer balls the players will likely be more aggressive in their effort to field or catch the ball, coaches should take advantage of this to teach correct fielding)



techniques such as using two hands to field and catch, and having the glove close to the ground when fielding), and

- Positions/positional play – If the ball is hit to your buddy, let your buddy field it.

Offense

- Balanced Batting stance,
- How to hold and swing the bat,
- Batting safety (when not to swing bats, wearing batting helmets), and
- Hitting off a tee.

Beginning Baseball Division (Ages 6-7)

Our Beginning Baseball league is designed for 6 and 7 year olds and focuses on participation and skill development. This league is a combination of t-ball and coach-pitch. Games are typically played on Friday evenings. BB offers the players a great opportunity to develop a strong foundation in batting, throwing, and fielding. The introduction of more complex base running results in more accurate throwing that the players will need to develop. BB also formalizes the fielding team's positions and allows players an opportunity to learn the basic strategies of positional play (such as the second baseman covering second base when the ball is hit to the short stop position).

In addition to promoting good sportsmanship and the goals identified above, goals and objectives for BB include:

Basic Rules

- The way outs are made (catching the ball in the air, throwing to first, or tagging the runner),
- To run through first base when you're the batter,
- Scoring a run, and
- That three outs constitute an inning.

Defense

- Learn throwing mechanics: turning your body so that the front shoulder points towards the target, keeping the elbow above the shoulder, and stepping toward the target with the non-throwing foot while releasing the ball.
- Continue to develop tracking: follow the ball into the glove with your eyes, whether it's on the ground or in the air; using two hands to catch and field; and catching the ball out in front of your body
- Learn to play the position: to let your buddy field a ball that is hit to him or her, and
- To be aggressive and go after the ball when it is hit to you.
- Controlling the base runner's advance by throwing to the next base,
- Throwing relays, instead of running with the ball,
- Throwing the ball back to the pitcher when there is no play to be made, and
- Introduce the areas of responsibility for each position.

Offense



- How to hold and swing the bat,
- Watching the ball come off the bat, batting safety (knowing when not to swing a bat and to wear a batting helmet),
- hitting off a tee, and
- The ability to hit softly tossed pitches.
- Introduce the importance to looking to the first and third base coaches for running guidance.

DJr and DSr (Ages 8 - 9)

DJr uses a combination of kid pitch and coach pitch. This allows the players to further develop the fundamentals to become a good hitter. The aspects include timing, watching the ball, and determine if the pitch is a ball or a strike. Players at this level also should be taught base running strategies, and introduced to skills such as wait-and-see approach to a pop-fly, not running from second to third when a grounder is hit to the short-stop (unless there is also a runner on first), and how to avoid committing interference (team on the offense impacts a defensive play) and obstruction (defensive team impacts offensive team- typically standing in the base path when not making a play for the play).

In addition to the goals for the previous divisions, the goals and objectives for DJr include:

Basic Rules

Learn more advanced elements of the game:

- How to make force-outs,
- How to tag up,
- Base running (when you don't have to run, not running past your teammates on the base paths, etc...), and
- Distinguishing balls and strikes.
- Interference and obstruction.

Defense

Learn more advanced throwing mechanics:

- Four seam grip,
- Pointing the front shoulder, stepping, and throwing, and
- Generating momentum toward the target and following the throw.
- Handling thrown and hit balls,
- Catching with fingers up versus fingers down,
- Using two hands,
- Forehands and backhands, and
- The underhand flip.

Learn to play the position:

- The position and areas each player should cover,
- How to cover the nearest base when the ball is not hit to you, and



- The basics of cutoffs and relays.
- Throwing the ball back to the pitcher when there is no play to be made.
- Controlling the base runner's advance by throwing to the next base, and
- Throwing relays, rather than running with the ball.
- Back-up responsibilities (LF, RF, SS, 2B, P)

Offense

- Choosing the right bat,
- The proper grip,
- Hitting pitched balls, and
- Drill work for batting practice
- Importance to looking to the first and third base coaches for running guidance

CJr and CSr (Ages 10-11)

CJr and CSr expand the element of live player pitching. This allows the players to further develop the fundamentals to become a good hitter and pitcher. The catcher's position becomes more important to controlling the pace of the game. Players in this division will continue to develop aspects of good hitting that include timing, watching the ball, and determine if the pitch is a ball or a strike. Players at this level also should practice correct base running strategies that include wait-and-see approach to a pop-fly, not running from second to third when a grounder is hit to the short-stop (unless there is also a runner on first), and how to avoid committing interference (team on the offense impacts a defensive play) and obstruction (defensive team impacts offensive team- typically standing in the base path when not making a play for the play).

With the added element of youth pitching, coaches must be aware and seek to protect developing players throwing arms and avoid unnecessary injury. Although Knothole has rules that govern the number of innings a youth pitcher may pitch in a given number of days, coaches should always be aware of developing pitchers and the players' pitch-count. The pitch-count is often a more accurate reflection of the strain put on a youth pitcher's arm. Pitch count rules can also be found on the Knothole website.

In addition to the goals for the previous divisions, the goals for CJr and CSr include:

Basic Rules

Learn more advanced elements of the game:

- Base running from second and third base,
- Distinguishing balls and strikes, and
- Interference and obstruction.

Defense Further develop more advanced elements:

- How to make force-outs,
- Double-plays,
- The run-down,



- How to tag up,
- Catcher's basics, including making a good throw to second base
- Catcher blocking,
- Distinguishing balls and strikes, and
- Controlling the base runner's advance by throwing to the next base, and

Learn Basic pitching mechanics:

- Four-seam grip; pointing the front shoulder, stepping, and throwing; and generating momentum toward the target and following the throw, and
- For more advanced players, consider introducing full wind-up rather than pitching from the stretch.

Master catching and fielding techniques:

- Handling thrown and hit balls,
- First-base fundamentals, and
- Crossovers and drop steps.

Develop more advanced positional play:

- The position and areas each player should cover,
- How to cover the nearest base when the ball is not hit to you, and
- Cutoffs and relays.

Develop greater arm strength and be able to make an accurate throw from third base to first base.

Offense

- Develop more advanced hitting techniques,
- Hitting live-pitched balls,
- Bunting should also be introduced to players in this division,
- The use of signs from the third base coach,
- Aggressive base running, including rounding first, and
- Avoiding the double-play.

BJr and Beyond (Ages 11 and up)

BJr and up players should be ready for the more advanced and technical skills of the game. At this level of play, coaches should also assist the players to further understand the technical aspects of the game. As with the younger divisions, coaches should always be aware of developing pitchers and the players' pitch-count. The pitch-count is often a more accurate reflection of the strain put on a youth pitcher's arm. The fundamentals taught at the younger aged divisions should be mastered during these levels and players in this division should continue to develop aspects of good hitting that include timing, watching the ball, and determine if the pitch is a ball or a strike.

Including the previous three divisions skill-sets, the goals for this age group include:



Offensive Technical Skills	Defensive Technical Skills
Preparing to hit/get set	Throwing basics
Swing/hitting fundamentals	Catching a throw
Bunting basics	Catcher basics
Sacrifice Bunting	Catcher blocking/wild pitch
Drag bunting	Reacting as a catcher
Base Running basics	Pitcher basics
Running to/through first base	Balk
Watch base coaches	Pitcher stretch mechanics
Rounding the bases	Fastball
Stealing second base	Change-up
Stealing third base	Outfield basics
Bent-leg slide	Challenging outfield plays
Lead offs	Infield basics
Offensive tactical skills	Fielding ground balls
Aggressive base running	Double plays
Base running from second	Fielding pop-ups in the field
Scoring from third	Defensive tactical skills
First-and-third play	Defensive positioning
Using the bunt	Defending the first-and-third double steal
Stealing second base	Defending bunt situations
Stealing third base	Pitcher pick-offs
Hit and run	Catcher pick-offs
Situational hitting	Double-play defense
Handling a rundown	Determining the best pitching options
Rundowns	
Wild pitches	

SAMPLE DRILLS

TARGET DRILL

PURPOSE

To improve throwing accuracy for younger players

EQUIPMENT

Soft-covered baseballs, colored masking tape, access to a fence or a wall

TIME

4 to 6 minutes

PROCEDURE



1. On a wall or fence mark off three or four squares with blue painter's tape, 18 inches by 18 inches. The squares should be about 4 to 6 feet apart from each other.
2. Within the large blue squares mark off smaller squares with white tape.
3. Mark a line on the ground in front of each square. The distance between the line and the box depends on the age and skill level of the players.
4. Divide the team into as many groups as there are large squares on the fence or wall.
5. Give each player 3 to 5 balls.
6. The first player in each line throws the ball against the fence.
7. Award one point for throwing the ball within the blue square and two points for hitting one of the smaller white squares.

KEY POINTS

Although it takes a long time to prepare, this is a simple, yet fun and effective, drill for young athletes.

1. In the early stages of the season, emphasize hitting the target as success. With young players, immediate success is important for positive reinforcement and will encourage their enthusiasm for the drill and willingness to listen to instruction.
2. Adjust the distance between the box and the line depending on the age and skill level of the team.
3. Incorporate throwing techniques only after introducing the drill at its elementary level.

Variation

Players can also aim for empty soda cans or plastic cones.

RACQUETBALL DRILL

PURPOSE

To learn to read a fly ball

EQUIPMENT

A racquetball racket, approximately 10 soft-covered sponge-type balls, gloves

TIME

6 to 8 minutes

PROCEDURE

1. All of the players, who have been assigned numbers, and some of the coaches go to right field.
2. A coach or an assistant coach goes to home plate with a racket and a bucket of soft-covered balls.



3. The coach supervising in the outfield calls out a number.
4. The coach at home plate hits the ball into right field as high as he or she can.
5. The player whose number is called tries to catch the ball.
6. Repeat the drill until each player's number is called.

KEY POINTS

Youth players have a very hard time catching fly balls. This drill, if followed correctly, improves a player's ability to catch fly balls.

1. When catching a fly ball, a fielder's first step is usually back.
2. The fielder must be able to anticipate where the ball will land.
3. The fielder should catch the ball with two hands.
4. Soft-covered balls are difficult to catch because they tend to pop out of players' gloves. Therefore, players should not be discouraged if early in the drill they have trouble squeezing the ball into the glove.

GOALIE DRILL

PURPOSE

To develop positioning and ball-handling skills for keeping a ground ball in front of the body

EQUIPMENT

A bucket of baseballs, gloves, cones

TIME

1 to 2 minutes per person

PROCEDURE

1. Set up two cones 8 to 15 feet apart, depending on the age and ability of players.
2. One player stands between the cones.
3. Another player serves as backup.
4. The coach throws grounders between the cones, and the player tries to stop the ball with his glove before it gets behind him, just as a hockey goalie would sweep away a puck.
5. Award a point for every ball the player stops.
6. Coaches can practice this drill with either a predetermined number of throws to each player or with a time limit.



7. Once done, the fielder moves to the back of the line, the backup becomes the fielder, and the next person in line becomes the backup.

KEY POINTS

This is one of the few drills that teaches players to stop the ball rather than catch it. Learning to knock the ball down while keeping it in front of the body is just as important as catching it with a glove. In game situations many hits are too hard to handle flawlessly; however, with the right mind-set, players can be confident about making the play if they learn to keep the ball in front of them. This drill also emphasizes the importance of keeping the ball in front of the body if it is mishandled or dropped.

GOALIE DRILL 10

1. Players should not try to anticipate which side the coach will throw to.
2. The players can dive toward the baseball if they can do so safely.
3. It is important that players move toward the ball instead of just reaching for the ball with their arms while staying in one place.
4. Because this drill involves two players at a time, try to assemble as many of these stations as you can to keep as many players as possible actively participating. Assistant coaches or even other players can throw the ground balls.

TOSS DRILL

PURPOSE

To develop hitting accuracy and technique through repetition

EQUIPMENT

A bat, a bucket of soft-covered balls or rag balls, access to a fence

TIME

2 to 4 minutes per player

PROCEDURE

1. One player with a bat faces a fence three to five feet away.
2. The coach kneels next to the player on a 45-degree angle
3. The coach tosses the ball underhand in front of the batter. The player swings at the ball and hits it against the fence.
4. The player gathers the balls and puts them in a bucket for the player in the next round.



KEY POINTS

This is one of the most effective hitting drills because players are guaranteed a lot of swings in a short time.

1. Use soft-covered balls or rag balls that won't bounce forcefully off the fence toward the player. Besides being safer, softer balls won't damage the fence.
2. The player should practice a level swing rather than taking an uppercut at the ball. The ball should hit the wall or fence no higher than the batter's shoulder height.
3. Eventually players can pair up for this drill. One player can toss to the hitter, then the players can switch positions.
4. Safety is a major concern. Make sure there is plenty of space between hitters and that all batters begin their turn at the same time. No one should gather the balls until everyone is finished.
5. Younger players can use a big plastic bat for this drill.
6. To discourage players from turning their heads too soon when swinging, instruct them to yell, "Hit" when the bat makes contact with the ball.

Variations

1. High and low. This drill is a challenge for youth players. The coach tosses two rag balls from one hand and calls out either "High" or "Low." The batter must swing at whichever ball the coach calls out.
2. Color ball. The coach has six rag balls. Three are wrapped in white masking tape; three are wrapped in blue painter's tape. Instead of calling out, "High," or "Low," he calls out, "White," or "Blue," and the player swings at whichever ball the coach calls out.
3. Bunting. Using rag balls for bunting is an easy and effective variation. A player tosses the rag ball to a partner in the bunting position, who bunts the ball into the fence. More advanced players can use a broom handle instead of a bat.

TEE-BALL DRILL

PURPOSE

To develop hitting technique and teach batters to keep their eyes on the ball when swinging

EQUIPMENT

A batting tee, a ball, a bat

TIME

4 to 6 minutes per player

PROCEDURE



There are hundreds of variations for hitting drills off of a batting tee. This is the procedure for the most basic drill.

1. The player gets into his stance next to a batting tee located in front of a fence, net, or tarp.
2. The coach places a hardball or soft-covered ball on the batting tee.
3. The player swings at the ball and returns to his stance.
4. The coach puts another ball on the tee.

KEY POINTS

Baseball players at every level recognize the importance of the batting tee as a powerful instructional tool. Some major league players hit 50 to 100 balls off a tee before practice or a game.

1. Players should keep their eyes focused on the ball and watch it leave the tee during the swing. Younger players have a tendency to turn their heads at the last second before the bat strikes the ball. Hitting the top of the tee instead of the center of the ball is one indication that this is happening.
2. If a player turns his head as he swings, instruct him to yell, "Hit" as the bat contacts the ball. This forces the player to watch the ball as the bat makes contact with it.
3. If the player still has trouble with this drill, use a larger ball such as a softball.
4. The player can also swing with just the top hand to cure the head turn. If the bat is too heavy to hold with one hand, the player can use a broomstick and a soft-covered ball.
5. Encourage the batter to swing at nothing higher than the shoulders to avoid swinging with an uppercut.
6. Do not practice this drill with a hardball against a metal fence; the ball might bounce back and injure someone. A net or a tarp is the best option for this drill.
7. Players should use bats other than their own to get different feels for hitting the baseball.

HIT-AND-RUN DRILL/GAME

Goal: To execute the hit-and-run play.

Setup: Set up an entire defense and place one runner on first base.

Description: A coach should pitch and control the velocity and location of pitches, asking the batters to try to hit toward the hole vacated by whomever is covering second in an attempt to advance the runner to the next base and avoid a double play (see figure 9.2). Remember to ask the batters to try to make contact no matter the location of the pitch. The runner should advance as far as possible without being thrown out. Let the group of offensive players have two at-bats each and then rotate in that many players from the defense.



Award points to each hitting group this way:

- Two points for a hit that advances a runner to third or home
- One point for a hit that advances a runner only to second
- Zero points for plays that do not advance the runner

To make the game easier, do the following:

- Have batters hit off a tee.
- Instruct infielders to let the ball go through to the outfield.
- Allow leadoffs.

To make the game harder, do the following:

- Throw faster pitches.
- Allow no leadoffs.
- Throw pitches outside the strike zone to make the hitters protect the runner.

Note: Either 2B or SS can cover. Batter attempts to hit ball through vacated hole. OF optional. If you use OF, runner should try to go to third and defense should set up cutoff to third.

Note: Either 2B or SS can cover.

Runner breaks from first as if attempting to steal second. Batter attempts to hit ball through vacated hole. OF optional. If you use OF, runner should try to go to third and defense should set up cutoff to third.

A point to remember for the defense is that games have certain hit-and-run situations. If there is a 3-2 count on a hitter who doesn't strike out much, teams are likely to hit and run. In these situations the middle infielders need to hold their ground as long as possible and not move toward second base so that they don't open up big holes in the infield. With a runner on first with two outs and a 3-2 count on the batter, the runner will always be going on the pitch. The middle infielders must stay in their positions on this play, because the end result will be a walk, a third strike, or a ball put in play. There will be no play at second base.

POSITIONING/BACKUPS: FREEZE FRAME

GOAL: Get in proper position

SETUP: 9 players (entire defense)

PLAY:

1. Hit to various locations.



2. Players field the ball.
3. Blow a whistle.
4. Players freeze where they are.

SCORING: Everyone in proper position for fielding and backing up = 1 point

OBSERVATIONS

Either make notes on individual performance, player by player, or on the team's overall ability to perform the key components of the tactic: communication, know responsibilities, be familiar with batter's tendencies and power.

KEYS TO POSITIONING AND BACKUPS

- Be familiar with batter's tendencies.
- Watch for signals from coach on position adjustments.
- Shift left or right based on batter's tendencies.
- Play deep or shallow based on batter's power.
- Know your backup responsibilities.
- Be involved in every play.

COMMON ERRORS

- Playing too deep or too shallow
- Not shifting for batter's tendencies
- Standing around

QUESTIONS FOR PLAYERS

- What was the goal of the game?
- What did you have to do to be successful?
- How can you improve your positioning?

LINE THROW

PURPOSE

To develop proper throwing technique, specifically accuracy

EQUIPMENT

One bucket, 20 to 30 hardballs, gloves



TIME

3 to 6 minutes

PROCEDURE

1. Players assemble in two lines, one at the third-base position and the other at the shortstop position.
2. Set up a row of baseballs in front of each line of players.
3. Send two players to first base with an empty bucket. One player is the first baseman and the other is the backup first baseman.
4. On the "go" command, the first person in line at third base runs to the closest ball, picks it up, and throws it to first base. After the throw, the player goes to the end of the shortstop line.
5. The coach gives the "go" command to the first person in the shortstop line, who runs to the closest ball, throws it to first base, then goes to the end of the third-base line.
6. This drill can be done more quickly if the coach gives the "go" command to the next player as soon as the previous player throws the ball.
7. The first baseman receives the throws from the third-base and shortstop positions and places the balls in the bucket. The first baseman rotates with the backup after every five or six throws.

LINE THROW

KEY POINTS

1. This drill teaches players to start from the ready position before the pitcher pitches the ball. It also teaches infielders to charge slow rollers and to pick up the balls with their bare hands.
2. When throwing to first base, the fielder must plant the foot and aim between the first baseman's shoulders and abdomen.
3. The first baseman must give the fielders a good target. He keeps his glove open with his arm stretched out at about chest or shoulder height.

AROUND THE HORN

PURPOSE

To develop accurate and quick fielding skills

EQUIPMENT

A baseball, a stopwatch, gloves

TIME



4 to 8 minutes

PROCEDURE

1. Assign players to third-base, second-base, first-base, catcher, and pitcher positions.
2. On the "go" command the coach starts the stopwatch.
3. The pitcher throws the ball to the catcher, who throws the ball to the third baseman, who throws to the second baseman, who throws back to the first baseman, who finally throws the ball back to the catcher.
4. The coach stops the watch when the catcher receives the ball.
5. A different set of players rotates into the drill.
6. Players should rotate to different positions within the drill.

KEY POINTS

1. This drill works best with five players.
2. Keep a written record of each team's time throughout the season to chart improvements in the drill.
3. Coaches should have extra balls in case of an overthrow.
4. Emphasize that catching the ball smoothly, not the team's time, is the most important aspect of the drill.
5. Players have a tendency to hurry their throws when they are preoccupied with their team's time. Emphasize that hurrying their throws results in errors.
6. Players must step toward the base they are throwing to.
7. The "hot potato" technique (pretending that the ball is hot) teaches players to relinquish control of the ball as soon as possible after the catch.

Variations

1. Place four fielders in a square (the distance depends on the skill level of the four players), and instruct them to throw the ball around the square. As they throw to each other, they should move their feet properly so that the ball is in the center of their bodies as it is caught.
2. Players can throw around the horn once in reverse. To end the drill, the catcher: throws the ball to second base as if trying to throw out a runner trying to steal.

BUCKET RELAY

PURPOSE

To develop techniques for relaying a baseball from the outfield to the infield



EQUIPMENT

Two buckets of baseballs, six empty plastic buckets, gloves

TIME

10 to 14 minutes

PROCEDURE

1. Divide the players into two teams. Station one team and a coach in right center, and the other team and a coach in left center.
2. Each group has a bucket of hardballs.
3. On home plate, stack six empty plastic buckets into a pyramid.
4. Place one player from each team in the infield.
5. The teams alternate turns.
6. The coach throws the ball high behind the outfielder, preferably hitting the outfield fence.
7. The outfielder turns, locates the ball, runs to it, picks it up, turns, and throws it to the infielder.
8. The infielder pivots after the catch, and throws the ball toward the buckets, trying to knock down as many as possible.
9. The outfielder becomes the infielder, and the infielder goes to the end of the line in the outfield.

KEY POINTS

Emphasize these four points:

1. The infielder waves his hands over his head as the outfielder prepares to throw the ball.
2. The infielder then makes a target for the outfielder with the arms extended at shoulder height.
3. The ball should hit the infielder at shoulder height.
4. The infielder must pivot to the glove side when turning to throw. The term "glove side" is used rather than "right" or "left" because right-handed and left-handed players turn opposite directions before throwing.

Variation

Use a garbage can lying on its side instead of buckets. In this case, the infielder must throw the ball into the garbage can after the relay.

FACE-TO-FACE DRILL

PURPOSE



To develop the basic mechanics for fielding a ground ball and following it with an accurate throw

EQUIPMENT

One baseball, gloves

TIME

2 to 4 minutes

PROCEDURE

1. Divide the team into two groups.
2. Line up each group in single-file lines 20 to 30 feet apart, facing each other.
3. The first person in one line throws a grounder to the first person in the other line.
4. After throwing the grounder, the player goes to the end of the line.
5. The person who catches the ball throws a grounder back to the first person in the other line.

KEY POINTS

This is an excellent, fast-paced drill for practicing in an enclosed space.

1. Players should start in the ready position. When in the ready position, players' legs are spread out at shoulder width, their knees are slightly bent, and both hands hang loosely between the knees without touching them. Players should also lean forward a little because it puts weight on the balls of their feet so they are ready to react to any situation.
2. Players should keep their heads down and watch the ball go into their gloves.
3. Each player should step and follow through when throwing a ground ball to the other line.

Variation

Award points for the fewest poor throws. In this situation, teams take turns throwing grounders to the opposing team.

LEAD DRILL

To develop the ability to catch while on the run

EQUIPMENT

A bucket of baseballs, gloves, an empty bucket

TIME

6 to 8 minutes



PROCEDURE

1. The players line up in a single-file line.
2. The coach, with a bucket of baseballs, stands beside the first player.
3. On the "go" command, the player runs away from the coach, looking over his shoulder at the coach.
4. At the opportune time, the coach throws a baseball, "leading" the runner with the throw like a quarterback leading a receiver. The player should not have to break stride to catch the ball.
5. The player catches the ball, drops the ball in the bucket, and returns to the end of the line.

KEY POINTS

This fast-paced drill keeps everyone moving. Players must wait in line only a short time once the drill begins

1. Coaches must teach players to run sideways.
2. Players should never take their eyes off the ball once they locate it in the air.
3. As they run, players should point their lead shoulder in the direction they think the ball will land.
4. Coaches must throw the ball high enough that the players have enough time to judge its projected path.
5. Players should try to make a one-handed catch.
6. Coaches should increase the throwing distances according to the ability of the individual and the team.
7. Turn this drill into a game by counting the number of catches in a row the team can make.

DIVE-BALL DRILL

PURPOSE

To develop the confidence to leave the feet, or dive, when fielding a hard-hit ball on the ground.

EQUIPMENT

Bucket of baseballs, gloves

TIME

3 to 5 minutes

PROCEDURE

1. Divide the team into two or three groups, depending on the number of available coaches.



2. The coach calls out the first player, who stands 10 to 20 feet from the coach, facing him.
3. The coach takes a ball from the bucket, then yells, "Left." The player moves toward the left, and the coach leads him with the ball so that the player must dive for it.
4. If the player catches the ball, he rolls it back to the coach. Knocking down the ball or stopping it with his body is as good as a catch. The player should kick aside any balls in the active or "diving" area.
5. The coach then yells, "Right." The player moves to his right. The coach leads the player with the ball so that he must dive to catch or stop the ball.
6. Each player gets three or four turns before the next player's turn.

KEY POINTS

The player's main objective is to stop the ball and keep it in front of him instead of worrying about making a spectacular catch.

1. Players should start off in the ready position.
2. Teach players to keep their gloves open as they run to make a backhanded catch.
3. Teach players to run toward the ball to make a catch rather than reaching out and diving for it. A dive should always be a player's last resort.
4. As the players progress, add a player at first base, and instruct the fielders to throw to first after making a diving stop.

Variation

Begin this drill with the players kneeling, diving for the ball from their knees. This variation trains players how to dive even if they aren't in the ready position.

BACKHAND DRILL

PURPOSE

To develop the ability to catch a ground ball backhanded

EQUIPMENT

Bucket of baseballs, gloves

TIME

4 to 8 minutes

PROCEDURE

1. Separate the team into two groups and send them to different parts of the field. One coach assists each group.



2. Players in each group line up behind one another.
3. The coach stands approximately 15 feet in front of the players and throws a ground ball to the backhand side of the first player in line. A backhand catch is one in which a player crosses the body with the glove hand to catch the ball, either in the air or on the ground.
4. The fielder starts in the ready position then runs in the direction of the thrown ball, keeping the glove open. After making the catch, the player throws the ball back to the coach, then goes to the end of the other coach's line.
5. Each player in line takes a turn making a backhand catch.

KEY POINTS

This is a progression-type drill. Introduce it early in the season by instructing the players to field the ground balls on their knees.

1. Remind the players to keep their gloves open.
2. Remind players to keep their eyes on the ball at all times.
3. Stopping the baseball and knocking it down can be just as effective as making a clean catch.
4. To ensure that everyone actively participates, set up as many lines for this drill as there are coaches and parents to assist. Players should rotate in and out of the drill quickly.
5. Young players may find catching a baseball backhanded difficult. Make it as easy for them as possible by checking to see if their gloves are properly worked in.

WILD PITCH

PURPOSE

To develop tactics for handling a wild pitch with a runner on third base

EQUIPMENT

A baseball, gloves

TIME

6 to 8 minutes

PROCEDURE

1. Situate the fielding team in their regular positions.
2. Put a base runner on third.
3. The coach places a baseball somewhere behind the catcher without the catcher knowing where.



4. On the "go" command the base runner sprints for home plate.
5. The catcher turns to locate the baseball, and the pitcher runs to cover home plate.
6. When the catcher locates the ball, he turns and tosses it to the pitcher covering home. The pitcher tags the sliding runner with the ball.

KEY POINTS

This situation occurs in almost every youth baseball game and is very rarely practiced. This is an easy drill to set up, and if practiced correctly, can prepare players for real game situations.

1. While running to cover home plate, the pitcher should yell to the catcher where the ball is if the catcher has trouble locating it.
2. The catcher should concentrate only on locating the ball. After doing so, he should turn and toss the ball underhand and low to the pitcher so that the pitcher's glove will be in a good position to tag the sliding base runner.
3. The pitcher should concentrate on catching the ball before turning toward the base runner.
4. Because this is practice, the base runner should, at first, slow up a few feet before reaching home plate so that fielders can effectively practice the drill.
5. When this play occurs, either in practice or in a game, the second baseman should move to the base of the mound to back up the toss to the pitcher. This backup can prevent additional runs if the catcher overthrows the toss to the pitcher and there is more than one runner on base.
6. Rotate all of the pitchers and catchers in this drill.

Tag-Out Drill

Goal: To make good throws to bases, set up properly to receive throws in tagout situations, and apply the tag.

Setup: Place a complete defensive lineup in the field (minus the pitcher) and set up situations where there could be tag outs.

Description: Start with no one on base and hit a ball in one of the outfield gaps, but not past the outfielders. Make it short enough so that the throw can be made all the way to the base without a cutoff person. The running group is attempting to get to second base no matter what. The outfielder's job is to cut off the ball and make the throw all the way to the bag. The proper middle infielder should straddle the bag, receive the throw, and attempt to make the tag. Keep score. The running group gets a point for making it to second, and the defense gets a point for recording the out.

Change the situations: Have the runners attempt to go from first to third and from second to home. Also bring the infield up and have players try to score from third on ground balls to the infield. This also can be done in leagues that permit stealing by having the runners try to steal. You will need a pitcher to



do this.

Note: Ball can be hit to any OF. Also can be done with runner on first going to third or runner going from second to home. Can be done with IF with runners going from second to third or third to home (with infield in).

To make the game easier, do the following:

- Don't use an outfielder.
- Don't allow leadoffs.

To make the game harder, do the following:

- Allow leadoffs.
- Hit the ball to spots that make the play difficult.

Multitasking: You can work on many facets of offense and defense during this drill. Baserunners can practice making proper turns, sliding to avoid tags, and getting jumps on stolen base attempts. You also can mix in some fly balls, ground balls to the left side, and so on to simulate certain tricky baserunning situations. Balls can be hit a little deeper to allow the defense to work on cutoffs and relays. Pitchers can be incorporated and taught how to back up throws to the bases.

Cutoff Relay Race

Goal: 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

Description: 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.