

# Brentsville District Youth Baseball's Player Development Strategy and Guide



Spring 2013

## I. Introduction

One of Brentsville District Youth Baseball's (BDYB) 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 the Babe Ruth League and Cal Ripken Baseball, BDYB makes every effort to adhere to the models those organizations have established over their decades of experience. When considering what is the best time to teach players baseball skills Cal Ripken Baseball noted, "... 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."

Like Cal Ripken Baseball, BDYB 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 lays the challenges to coaches. 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. Cal Ripken Baseball is also an advocate of 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 dills), BDYB's player development strategy will emphasize skills-based practices that also incorporate game-like situations.

## **II. Cal Ripken/BDYB Way of Baseball**

At BDYB we recognize that not every player will be able to become a major league player. Some may go on to play at the high school level and few may play at the collegiate level. Nevertheless, all have the same chance to develop a love and understanding for the game that can be passed down for generations. BDYB'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 a successful 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. BDYB 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. The BDYB's principles of coaching, like those of Cal Ripken baseball, emphasize the importance of providing encouragement while giving player feedback. Coaches should not cover up poor or incorrect play with rosy words of praise. Cal Ripken baseball teaches:

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 a phony. 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. Because we limit our formal baseball activities to three a week, and typically one of those will be a game (more if you are playing in the senior leagues), coaches are fighting an uphill battle to develop and perfect critical baseball skills in one or two 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' and BDYB's 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.

Consider 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 such as the Ripken instructional series: *Pitching the Ripken Way*, *Playing Defense the Ripken Way*, and *Hitting the Ripken Way*. In these DVDs you can see the skills performed by big league players and taught to youth baseball players of various ages. You may find skills and team fundamentals that are mentioned in this text but not usually taught. Other Ripken instructional materials are available as references to help you understand anything that may be new or confusing to you.

We've only provided information about the basics of baseball in this program. As your players progress, you'll need to advance your knowledge as a coach. You can do so by learning from your experiences, watching and talking with other and more experienced coaches, and studying advanced resources. In the near future BDYB will have more advanced training programs available for coaches, so we hope you will be able to progress right along with us.

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

### III. Age Appropriate Skills

#### BlastBall Division (Ages 4-5)

BlastBall is an excellent precursor for T-ball. In BlastBall the objective for the batting team is simply to hit the ball and make it to the sole base used (first base). Likewise, the fielding team's objective is to field the ball and call "blast" before the runner reaches base. The team is typically comprised of five players who do not have specific fielding positions. 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 teammates, coaches, and opponents.

Goals for this division include:

Area	Repetitive / Basic Skills to be Fully Competent
Basic Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Which direction to run when the ball is hit,</li> <li>· Runners must touch the base,</li> <li>· The importance of running past first base, and</li> <li>· How to record outs (catch the ball in the air or get possession of the ball and call "Blast").</li> </ul>
Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Tracking: Follow the ball with the eyes into the glove, whether on the ground or in the air (because BlastBall 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</li> <li>· Positions/positional play – If the ball is hit to your buddy, let your buddy field it.</li> </ul>
Offense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Balanced Batting stance,</li> <li>· How to hold and swing the bat,</li> <li>· Batting safety (when not to swing bats, wearing batting helmets), and</li> <li>· Hitting off a tee.</li> </ul>

### T-Ball Division ( Ages 5-6)

T-Ball offers the players a great opportunity to develop a strong foundation in batters, throwing, and fielding. Because batters solely use a tee to hit from, they are able to focus on the basic principles of hitting. Teaching this correctly is essential for players to continued growth and development. With the introduction of second, third, and home base, accurate throwing becomes a new skill the players will need to develop. T-Ball 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 T-Ball include:

Area	Repetitive / Basic Skills to be Fully Competent	Skills to be Introduced
Basic Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· The way outs are made (catching the ball in the air, throwing to first, or tagging the runner),</li> <li>· To run through first base when you're the batter, Scoring a run, and</li> <li>· That three outs constitute an inning.</li> </ul>	
Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· 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.</li> <li>· 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</li> <li>· Learn to play the position: to let your buddy field a ball that is hit to him or her, and</li> <li>· To be aggressive and go after the ball when it is hit to you.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Controlling the base runner's advance by throwing to the next base,</li> <li>· Throwing relays, instead of running with the ball,</li> <li>· Throwing the ball back to the pitcher when there is no play to be made, and</li> <li>· Introduce the areas of responsibility for each position.</li> </ul>
Offense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· How to hold and swing the bat,</li> <li>· Watching the ball come off the bat,</li> <li>· batting safety (knowing when not to swing a bat and to wear a batting helmet),</li> <li>· hitting off a tee, and</li> <li>· The ability to hit softly tossed pitches.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Introduce the importance to looking to the first and third base coaches for running guidance.</li> </ul>

### Rookies Division (Ages 7-8)

Rookies Division adds the element of live machine pitching. 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 taking a lead/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 the Rookies Division include:

Area	Repetitive / Basic Skills to be Fully Competent	Skills to be Introduced
Basic Rules	<p>Learn more advanced elements of the game:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· How to make force-outs,</li> <li>· How to tag up,</li> <li>· Base running (when you don't have to run, not running past your teammates on the base paths, etc...), and</li> <li>· Distinguishing balls and strikes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Interference and obstruction</li> </ul>
Defense	<p>Learn more advanced throwing mechanics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Four seam grip,</li> <li>· Pointing the front shoulder, stepping, and throwing, and</li> <li>· Generating momentum toward the target and following the throw.</li> <li>· Handling thrown and hit balls,</li> <li>· Catching with fingers up versus fingers down,</li> <li>· Using two hands,</li> <li>· Forehands and backhands, and</li> <li>· The underhand flip.</li> </ul> <p>Learn to play the position:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· The position and areas each player should cover,</li> <li>· How to cover the nearest base when the ball is not hit to you, and</li> <li>· The basics of cutoffs and relays.</li> </ul> <p>Throwing the ball back to the pitcher when there is no play to be made.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Controlling the base runner's advance by throwing to the next base, and</li> <li>· Throwing relays, rather than running with the ball.</li> <li>· Back-up responsibilities (LF, RF, SS, 2B, P)</li> </ul>
Offense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Choosing the right bat,</li> <li>· The proper grip,</li> <li>· Hitting pitched balls, and</li> <li>· Drill work for batting practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Importance to looking to the first and third base coaches for running guidance</li> </ul>

### Minors Division (Ages 9-10)

Minors Division adds the element of live player pitching. This allows the players to further develop the fundamentals to become a good hitter and pitcher. The game will also take on an additional element as the ball is “live” when the pitch is released (rather than in the Rookies Division where the ball is live once it is hit by the team on offense). As a result, 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 and the skills taught in Rookies that include taking a lead/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 Cal Ripken and Babe Ruth have 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. [*The Little League Pitch Count Regulation Guide is enclosed for your reference and consideration*]

In addition to the goals for the previous divisions, the goals for the Minors Division include:

Area	Repetitive / Basic Skills to be Fully Competent
Basic Rules	Learn more advanced elements of the game: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Base running from second and third base,</li><li>· Distinguishing balls and strikes, and</li><li>· Interference and obstruction.</li></ul>

<p>Defense</p>	<p>Further develop more advanced elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· How to make force-outs,</li> <li>· Double-plays,</li> <li>· The run-down,</li> <li>· How to tag up,</li> <li>· Catcher’s basics, including making a good throw to second base</li> <li>· Catcher blocking,</li> <li>· Distinguishing balls and strikes, and</li> <li>· Controlling the base runner’s advance by throwing to the next base, and</li> </ul> <p>Learn Basic pitching mechanics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Four-seam grip; pointing the front shoulder, stepping, and throwing; and generating momentum toward the target and following the throw, and</li> <li>· For more advanced players, consider introducing full wind-up rather than pitching from the stretch.</li> </ul> <p>Master catching and fielding techniques:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Handling thrown and hit balls,</li> <li>· First-base fundamentals, and</li> <li>· Crossovers and drop steps.</li> </ul> <p>Develop more advanced positional play:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· The position and areas each player should cover,</li> <li>· How to cover the nearest base when the ball is not hit to you, and</li> <li>· Cutoffs and relays.</li> </ul> <p>Develop greater arm strength and be able to make an accurate throw from third base to first base.</p>
<p>Offense</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Develop more advanced hitting techniques,</li> <li>· Hitting live-pitched balls,</li> <li>· Bunting should also be introduced to players in this division,</li> <li>· The use of signs from the third base coach,</li> <li>· Aggressive base running, including rounding first, and</li> <li>· Avoiding the double-play.</li> </ul>

## Majors Division/Babe Ruth (Ages 11 and up)

Majors Division and Babe Ruth 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 further understand the technical aspects of the game. As with the Minors Division, **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

- Preparing to Hit/getting set
- Swing/hitting fundamentals
- Bunting basics
- Sacrifice Bunting
- Drag bunting
- Base Running basics
- Running to/through First base
- Watch base Coaches
- Rounding the Bases
- Stealing Second base
- Stealing Third Base
- Bent-Leg Slide

### Offensive tactical skills

- Aggressive Base running
- Base running from Second
- Scoring from Third
- First-and-Third Play
- Using the Bunt
- Stealing Second Base
- Stealing Third Base
- Hit and Run
- Situational Hitting
- Handling a Rundown

### Defensive Technical Skills

- Throwing basics
- Catching a Throw
- Catcher basics
- Catcher Blocking/wild pitch
- Reacting as a Catcher
- Pitcher basics
- Balk
- Pitcher Stretch Mechanics
- Fastball
- Change-up
- Outfield basics
- challenging outfield plays
- Infield Basics
- Fielding Ground balls
- Double Plays
- Fielding Pop-ups in the Field

### Defensive Tactical Skills

- Defensive Positioning
- Defending the First-and-Third Double Steal
- Defending Bunt Situations
- Pitcher Pickoffs
- Catcher Pickoffs
- Double-Play Defense
- Determining the Best Pitching Options
- Rundowns
- Wild Pitches

## **IV. Additional Resources**

### **Sample Practice Plans: (Available at BDYD.org)**

#### **I. 60 Minute Practice (Throwing/Fielding)**

- a. 6:30-6:40 Stretch/warm-up
- b. 6:40-7:25 Station Rotation (15 minutes per station)
  1. target drill- improve throwing accuracy
  2. racquetball drill- learn to read a fly ball
  3. goalie drill- develop positioning and ball-handling skills for keeping ground ball in front of body
- c. 7:25-7:30 end of practice huddle

#### **II. 60 Minute Practice (Hitting/Running)**

- a. 6:30-6:45 Stretch/warm-up
- b. 6:45-7:30 Station Rotation (10 minutes)
  1. Soft Toss- develop hitting accuracy and technique through repetition
  2. Hit from T- develop hitting accuracy and technique through repetition
  3. Run through first base- teach player to run on contact through first base
  4. Hit the live pitch- teach player motion of machine and timing of swing

#### **III. 60 Minute practice (Game Scenarios)**

- a. 6:30-6:40 Stretch/warm-up
- b. 6:40-7:10 Station Rotation (15 minutes)
  1. Freeze Frame/"what do I do if the ball is hit to me"- players learn positional coverage
  2. Run the bases- run on contact, follow base coach direction
- c. 7:10-7:25 Soft Toss Scrimmage
- d. 7:25-7:30 end of practice huddle

#### **IV. 90 Minute Practice (Throwing/Fielding)**

- a. 6:30-6:45 Stretch/warm-up
- b. 6:45-7:30 Station Rotation (15 minutes per station)
  4. 6-3 Out- increase fielding ability, throwing accuracy and arm strength of players
  5. racquetball drill- learn to read a fly ball
  6. turn-and-field drill- aggressively attack the ball, ball-handling skills, and throw on the move
- c. 7:30-7:45 Round the Horn contest- increase arm strength, accuracy, and throwing speed
- d. 7:45-8:00 Infield-dual Fungo- improve fielding and toss to baseman (end of practice huddle)

#### **V. 90 Minute Practice (Hitting)**

- a. 6:30-6:45 Stretch/warm-up
- b. 6:45-7:15 Station Rotation (10 minutes)
  5. Soft Toss [top/bottom/color]- develop hitting accuracy and technique through repetition
  6. Hit from T- develop hitting accuracy and technique through repetition
  7. Hit the live pitch- teach player motion of machine and timing of swing

- c. 7:15-8:00 Home Run Derby (end of practice huddle)

**VI. 90 Minute practice (Game Scenarios/Base Running)**

- a. 6:30-6:45 Stretch/warm-up
- b. 6:45-7:25 Station Rotation (20 minutes)
  - 3. Freeze Frame- players learn positional coverage
  - 4. Run the bases- run on contact, run through the base (cone), follow base coach direction, and slides
- c. 7:25-8:00 Soft Toss Scrimmage (end of practice huddle)

**Sources for additional drills:**

**Internet:**

[http://www.qcbaseball.com/drills/baseball\\_drills1.aspx](http://www.qcbaseball.com/drills/baseball_drills1.aspx)

<http://www.weplay.com/youth-baseball/drills/skills/all>

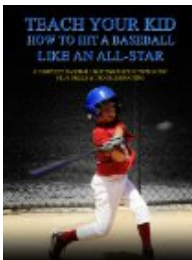
<http://www.baseballsbestdrills.com/category/baseball-drills/>

YouTube (simply search for “youth baseball drills”)

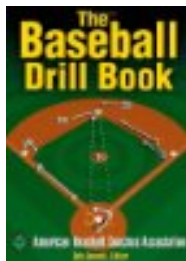
**BDYB:**

Cal Ripken Coaches’ Training Book (.pdf)

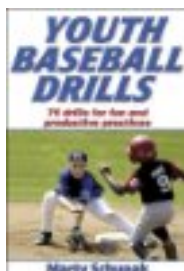
**Books:**



Teach your Kid How to Hit a Baseball Like an All-Star - A Complete Baseball Batting Instruction Guide,  
Martin, Justin



The Baseball Drill Book (The Drill Book Series)  
American Baseball Coaches Association



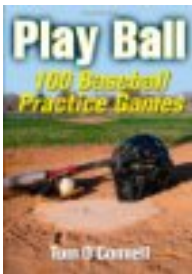
Youth Baseball Drills  
Marty Schupak



Coaching Youth Baseball: Teaching Hitting Fundamentals  
Kenneth Siegler, et al

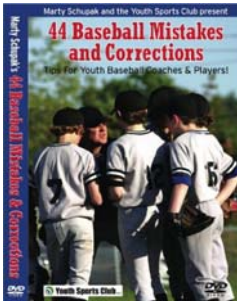


How to Hit a Baseball – Teach your Kid to Hit the Baseball in as Little as 10 Minutes a Day at Home (9 Day Baseball Systems)  
Conway, Scott

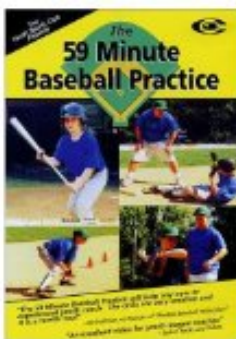


Play Ball: 100 Baseball Practice Games  
Thomas O'Connell

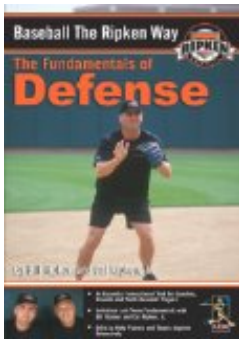
Videos:



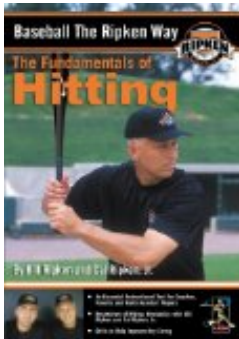
Baseball Coaching: 44 Baseball Mistakes and Corrections



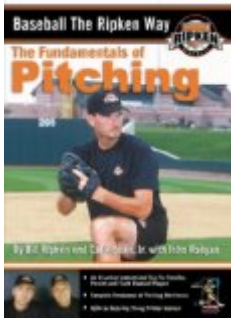
59 Minute Baseball Practice



Baseball the Ripken Way: The Fundamentals of Defense



Baseball the Ripken Way: The Fundamentals of Hitting



Baseball the Ripken Way: The Fundamentals of Pitching

## 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.

## TARGET DRILL

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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.

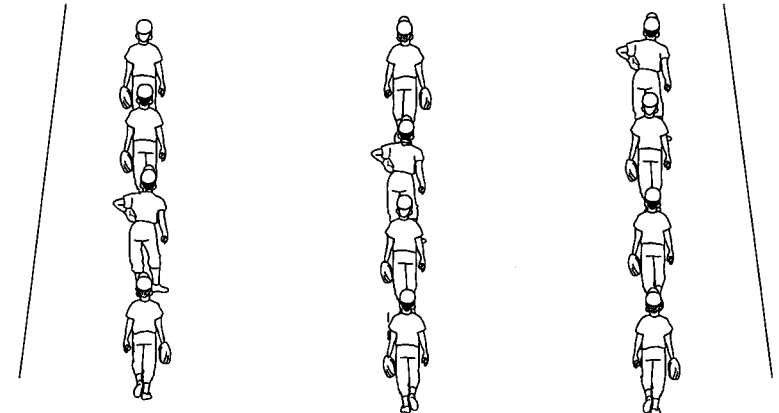
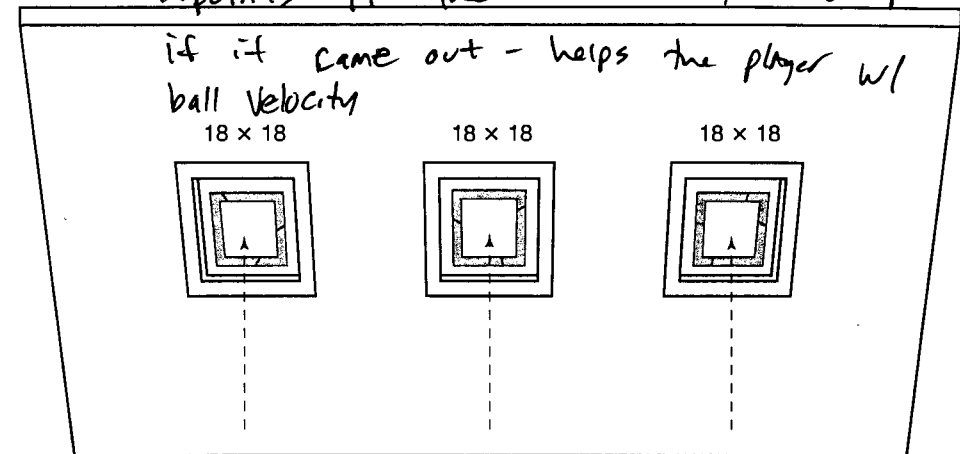
### Variation

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

### RELATED DRILLS

None

→ I would put buckets on the fence to give 2 points if the ball stays and 1 point if it came out - helps the player w/ ball velocity



**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.

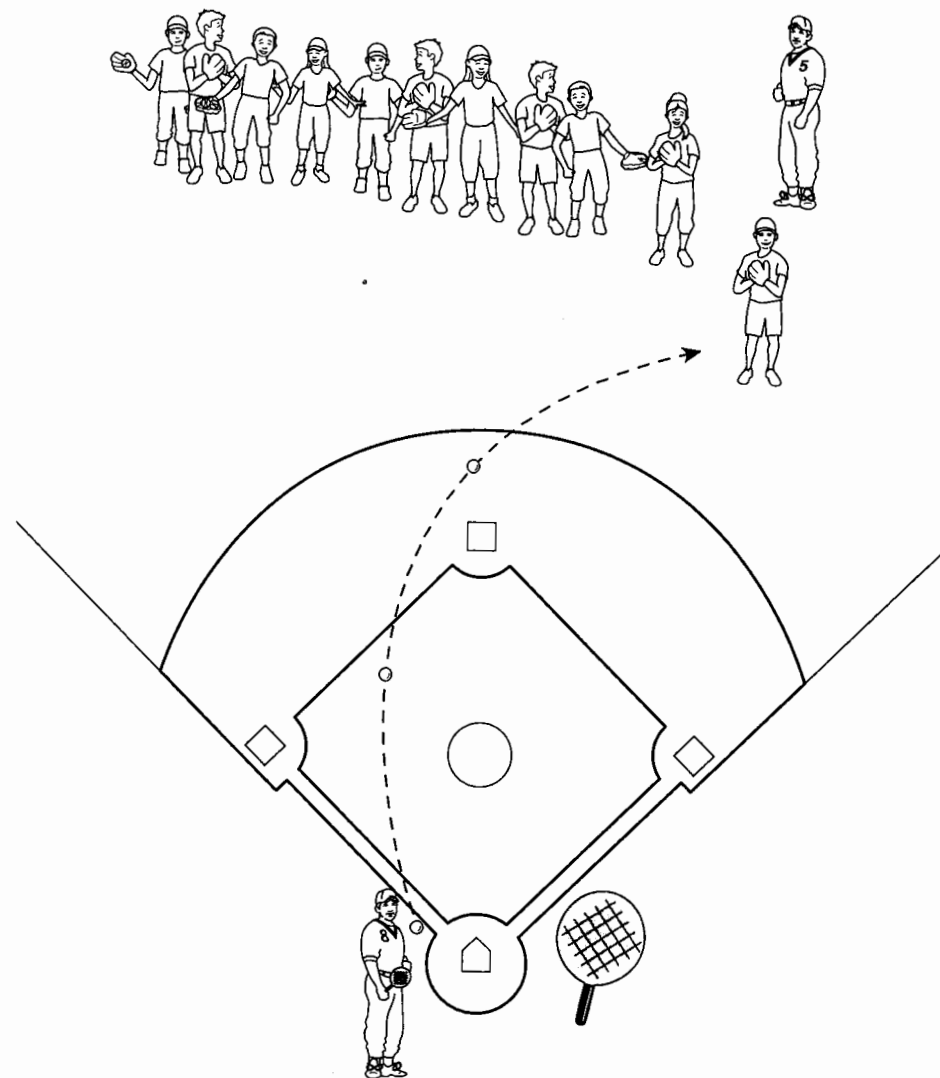
**KEY POINTS**

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.

**RACQUETBALL DRILL****RELATED DRILLS**

12, 13



**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**

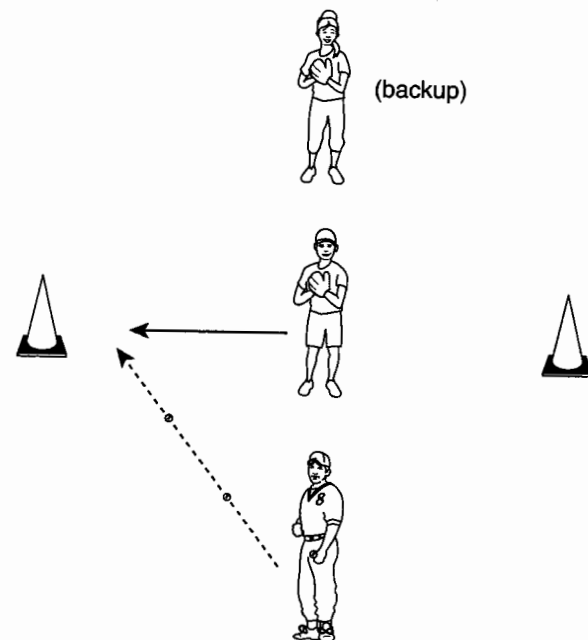
This is one of the few drills that teaches players to stop the ball rather than catch it. Learning to knock the ball down while keeping it in front of the body is just as important as catching it with a glove. In game situations many hits are too hard to handle flawlessly; however, with the right mind-set, 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**

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.

**RELATED DRILLS**

4, 14, 17



## 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.

## TOSS DRILL

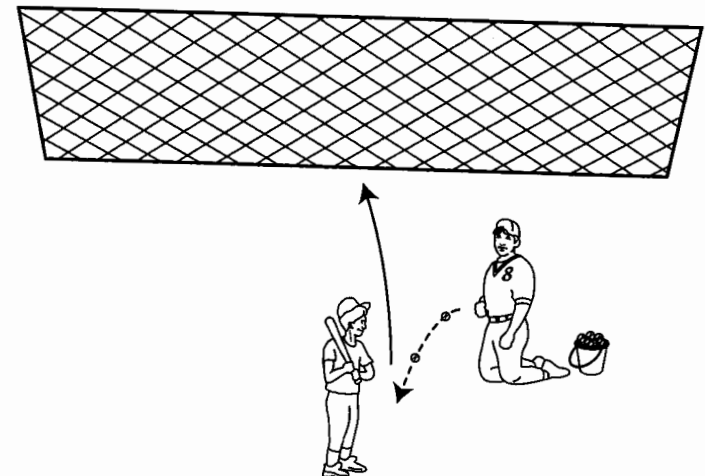
6. To discourage players from turning their heads too soon when swinging, instruct them to yell, "Hit" when the bat makes contact with the ball.

### 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.

### RELATED DRILL

38



**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.

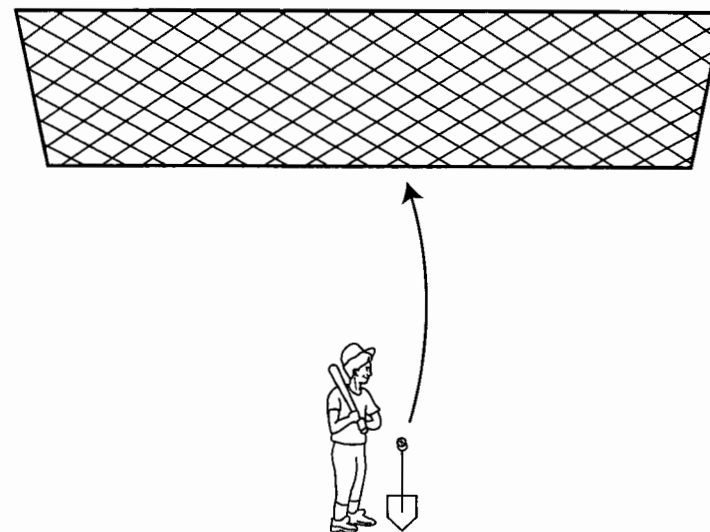
1. Players should keep their eyes focused on the ball and watch it leave the tee during the swing. Younger players have a tendency to turn their heads at the last second before the bat strikes the ball. Hitting the top of the tee instead of the center of the ball is one indication that this is happening.
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.

**TEE-BALL DRILL**

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.

**RELATED DRILL**

39



## 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:

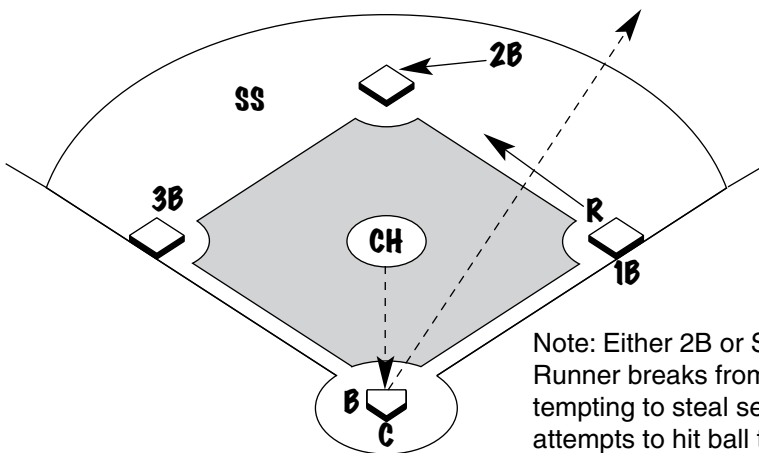
- Two points for a hit that advances a runner to third or home
- One point for a hit that advances a runner only to second
- Zero points for plays that do not advance the runner

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. 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.

**Figure 9.2** Hit-and-Run Drill/Game.

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.

## Signals to Players

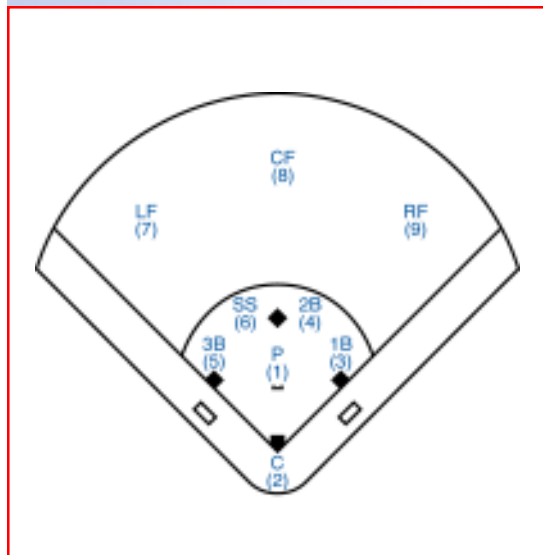
Develop a simple system of hand signals to set plays in motion, and teach your players that a sign stays on until you signal that it no longer applies. Have your players watch the entire series of signs instead of picking up a sign and turning immediately to look at the pitcher, because you may still be giving additional decoy signs. However, don't overload your players. If they have trouble grasping a strategy or remembering a signal, simplify or drop it. Usually you should try to have one sign that is an indicator, such as touching the bill of the cap with the right index finger. The next sign given after the indicator is the play that you want to put on. This technique is designed to keep the other team from figuring out your signs. You might give some decoy signs that don't mean anything unless preceded by the indicator. If your players have trouble understanding this type of system, consider making the real sign the first sign you give. Players can't execute what they can't understand. Table 9.1 shows some hitting and baserunning signals you might use (see also figure 9.3).

**Table 9.1 Coaches' Signs**

Sign	Message
Right index finger to bill of cap	Indicator
Right hand to ear	Bunt
Right hand to chest	Steal
Right hand to top of head	Hit and run
Grab both ears	Take (not recommended in younger age groups; let them hit!)
Rub either arm	Wipe off sign
Delayed steal	One finger extended down and to the left of body



## 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.*

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### 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.

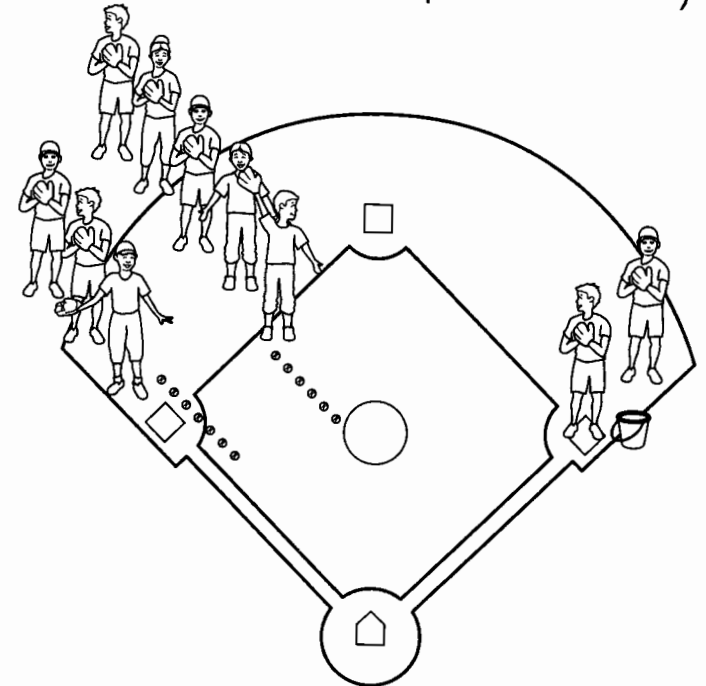
## LINE THROW

### 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.

### RELATED DRILLS

3, 51 → Can also perform using fungo to double up on fielding and throwing skills



**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.

**AROUND THE HORN**

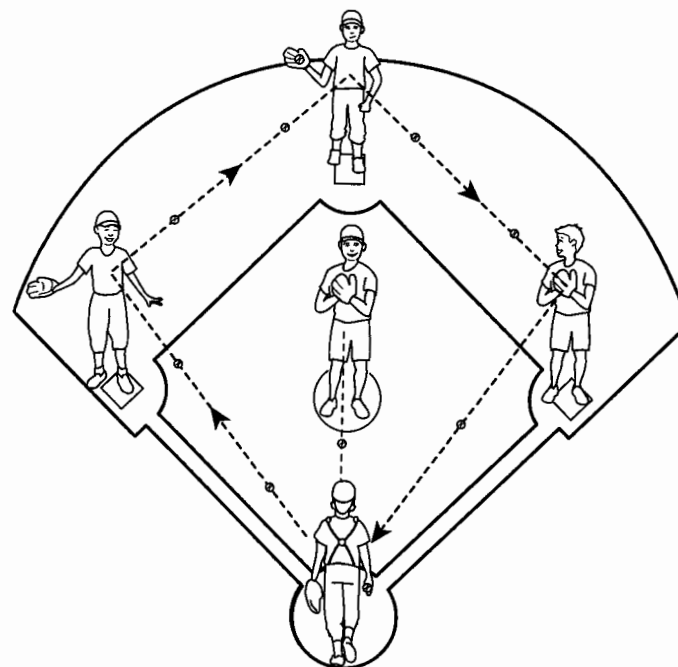
6. Players must step toward the base they are throwing to.
7. The "hot potato" technique (pretending that the ball is hot) teaches players to relinquish control of the ball as soon as possible after the catch.

***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.

**RELATED DRILLS**

17, 18



## 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.

## BUCKET RELAY

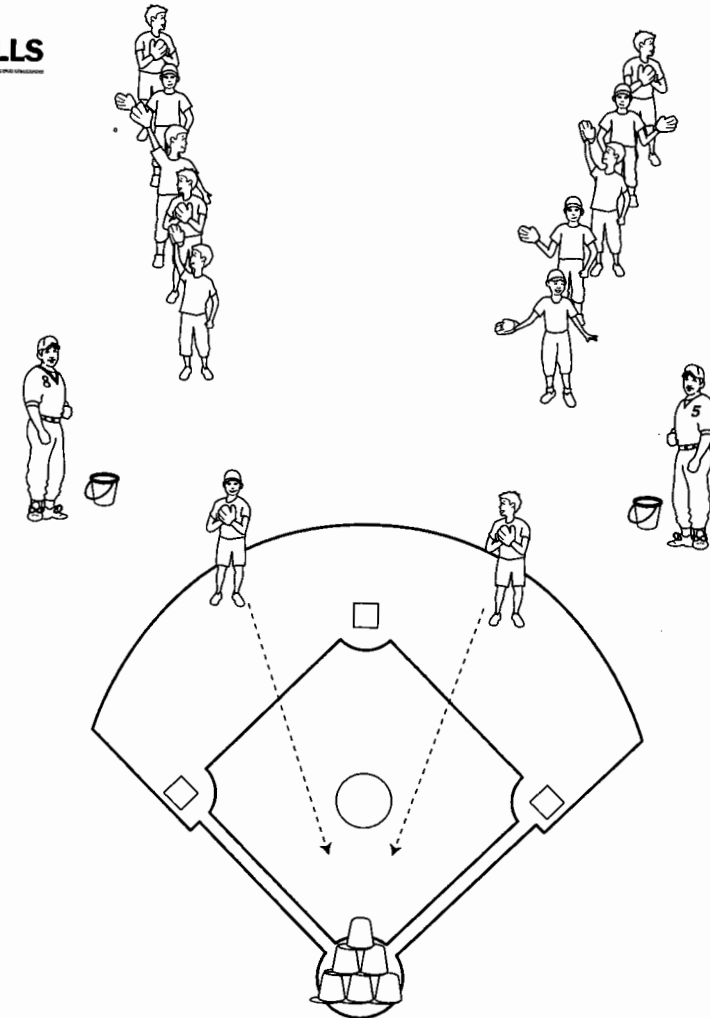
3. The ball should hit the infielder at shoulder height.
4. The infielder must pivot to the glove side when turning to throw. The term "glove side" is used rather than "right" or "left" because right-handed and left-handed players turn opposite directions before throwing.

### 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.

### RELATED DRILLS

1, 2, 8



## 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.

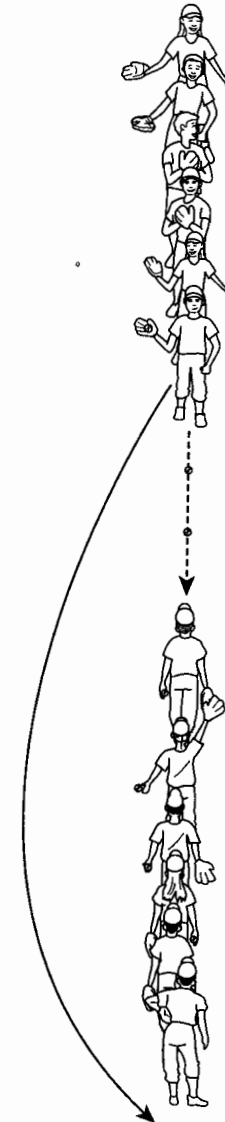
## FACE-TO-FACE DRILL

### Variation

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

### RELATED DRILLS

4, 10, 14, 17



**LEAD DRILL****PURPOSE**

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

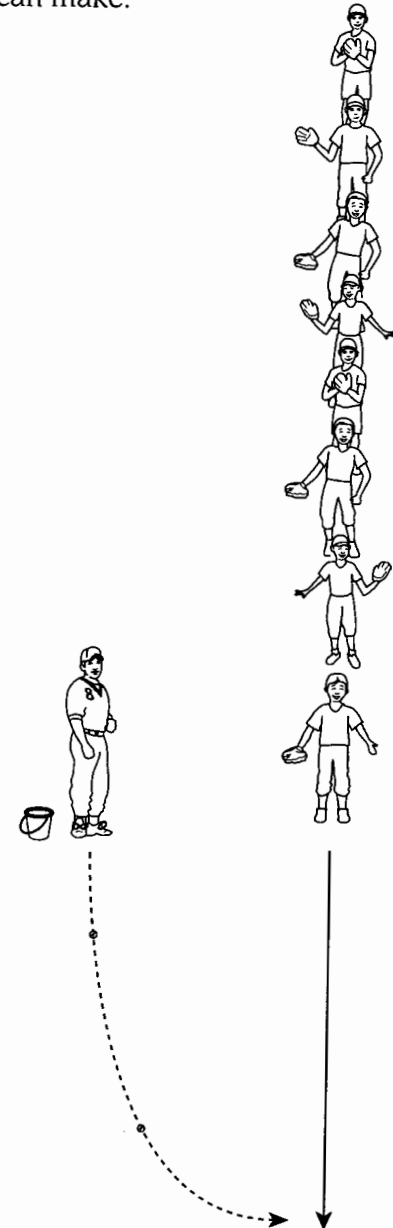
1. Coaches must teach players to run sideways.
2. Players should never take their eyes off the ball once they locate it in the air.
3. As they run, players should point their lead shoulder in the direction they think the ball will land.
4. Coaches must throw the ball high enough that the players have enough time to judge its projected path.
5. Players should try to make a one-handed catch.

**LEAD DRILL**

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.

**RELATED DRILLS**

11, 20, 26



**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.

**DIVE-BALL DRILL**

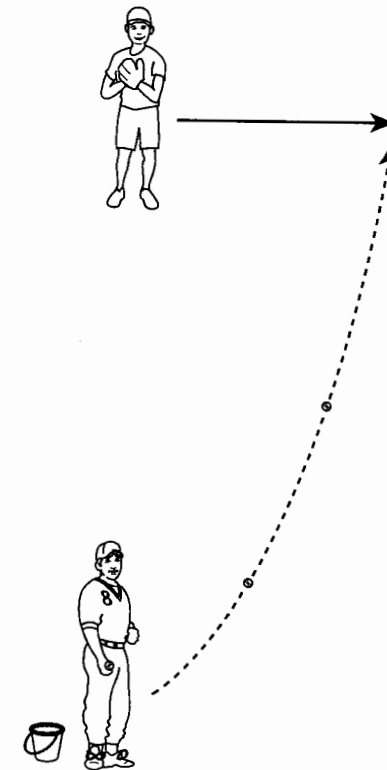
3. Teach players to run toward the ball to make a catch rather than reaching out and diving for it. A dive should always be a player's last resort.
4. As the players progress, add a player at first base, and instruct the fielders to throw to first after making a diving stop.

**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.

**RELATED DRILLS**

3, 9, 14, 17



**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.

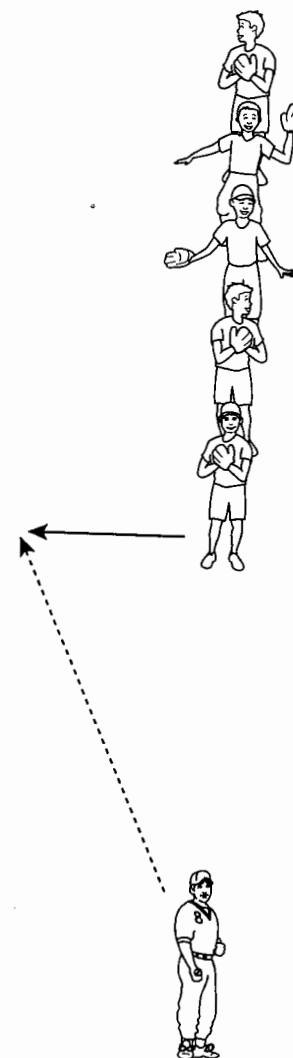
1. Remind the players to keep their gloves open.
2. Remind players to keep their eyes on the ball at all times.
3. Stopping the baseball and knocking it down can be just as effective as making a clean catch.
4. To ensure that everyone actively participates, set up as many lines for this drill as there are coaches and parents to assist. Players should rotate in and out of the drill quickly.

**BACKHAND DRILL**

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.

**RELATED DRILLS**

3, 9, 14, 15, 17



## 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.

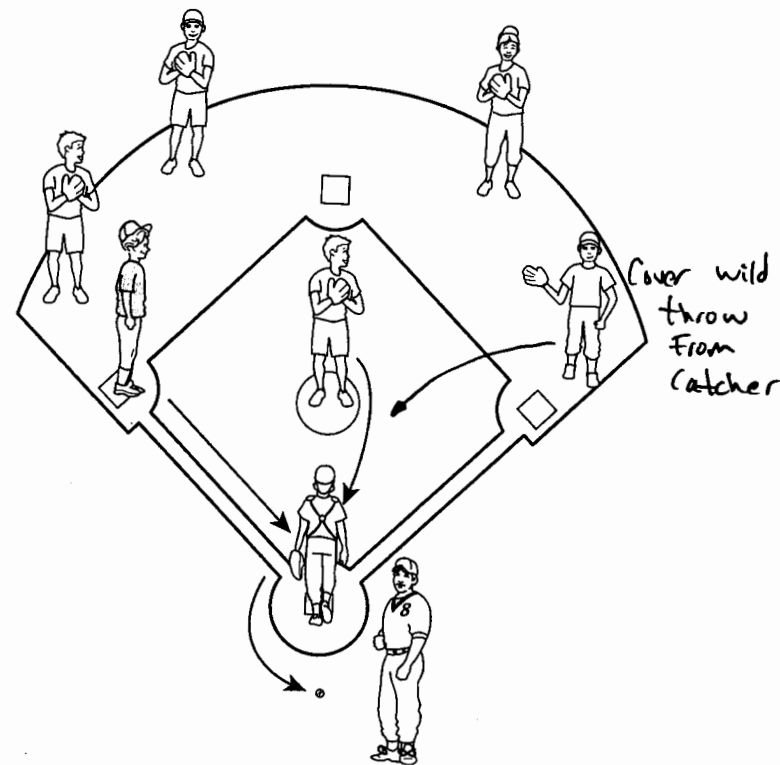
*\*Good idea to also have first base  
Cover wild throw from catcher to pitcher*

## WILD PITCH

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.

### RELATED DRILLS

21, 28, 70



## Tag-Out Drill

**Goal:** To make good throws to bases, set up properly to receive throws in tag-out 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 (see figure 9.30).

**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.

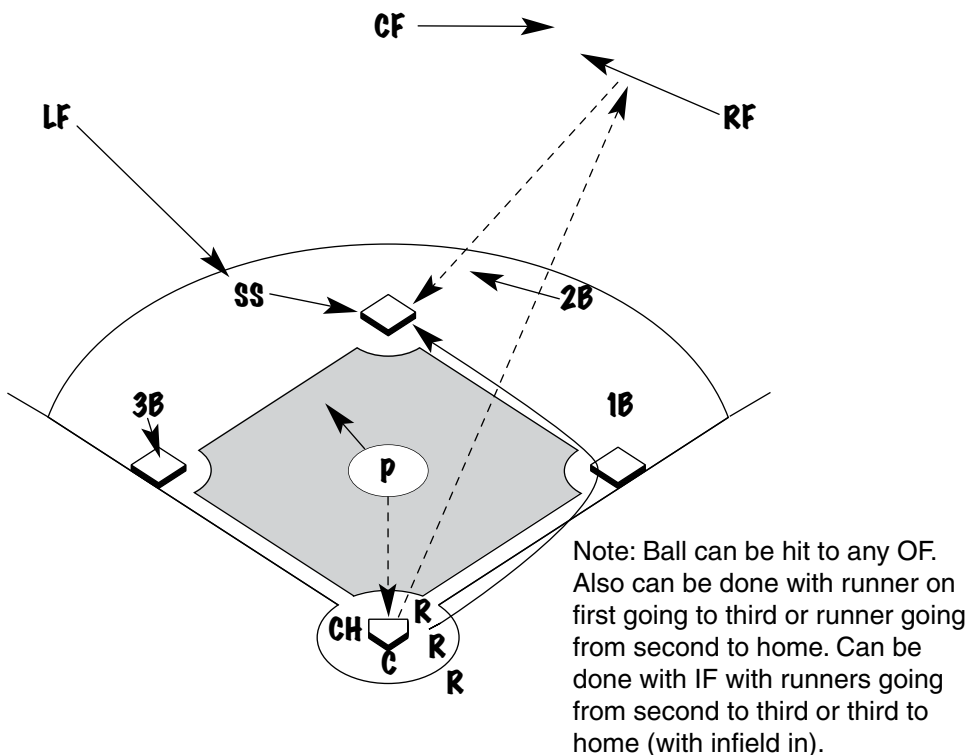


Figure 9.30 Setup for Tag-Out Drill.

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.

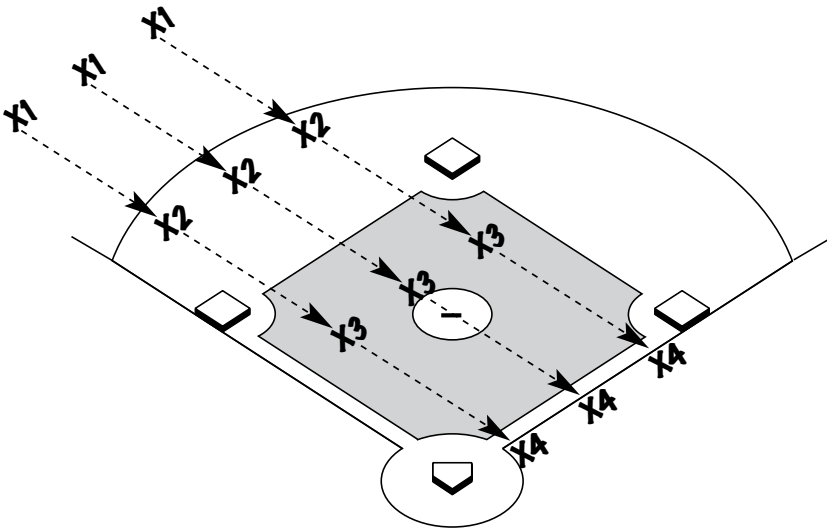
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## Cutoff Relay Race

**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 (see figure 9.22). This continues until the ball reaches the last player. The team that finishes first wins.



**Figure 9.22** Relay Race Drill.



a



b



c

**Figure 9.23** Players hone their skills and have fun during the Relay Race Drill.

## Baserunning Practice

### First to Third Game/Drill

**Goal:** To help baserunners develop a sense of when they should try to advance from first to third on a base hit and provide an opportunity for the defense to work on cutoffs and relays.

**Setup:** Put an entire defensive lineup in the field. The rest of the players on the team will serve as baserunners at first (see figure 9.5).

**Description:** Have a pitcher either throw a pitch or simulate a throwing motion to home. The coach hits balls out of his hand, re-creating singles, balls hit in the gap, fly balls that runners should go halfway on, and bloopers. The ultimate goal of the runner is to make it from first to third base on a ball that drops. However, the most important goal is to read the situation and run the bases correctly. Divide the runners up into teams, rotating them every so often with fielders to make sure that they get the same amount of chances on the bases. Award one point to a team when a runner handles a situation correctly and two points for runners who read the situation correctly and advance to third base.

To make the game easier for runners, do the following:

- Hit balls between the outfielders.

To make the game easier for fielders, do the following:

- Hit balls straight at the outfielders.



Figure 9.5 First to Third Game/Drill.

To make the game harder for runners, do the following:

- Bring the outfielders closer in, and hit balls more directly toward them.

To make the game harder for fielders, do the following:

- Add a runner at home plate who will act as the batter. Award a bonus point to the team whose runner starts at home if he or she advances to second base on the play.

**Multitasking:** Other team fundamentals can be practiced during this drill. Pitchers can work on holding runners close and making it harder for them to get a jump and take the extra base. Outfielders can practice fielding basic ground balls and fly balls, throwing after the catch, throwing quickly and accurately to the cutoff and relay people, and throwing to the proper base. Remember that a routine ball that is fielded or one that is cut off in the gap by an outfielder is thrown to a cutoff player to keep trailing runners from advancing extra bases. If a ball gets through an outfielder so that the fielder can't throw the ball all the way to the base where the lead runner is heading, a relay situation arises. The player who was the cutoff player needs to get out farther to assist the outfielder in getting the ball to the proper base. The other middle infielder should set up as a trailer, about 10 feet behind the relay person. If a throw is low or high to the relay, he or she should let it go to the trailer. The third baseman and catcher should communicate about where the final throw should go, and the first baseman should make sure that second base is covered.

Also remember that on defense situations exist in which a runner is on first and the throw should come into second base. For example, if the tying run is at bat with a runner on second and there is a base hit to the outfield, the cutoff should be set up to second instead of home. If the cutoff is set up for home and the throw is errant, the tying run can advance into scoring position. The defense would much rather prevent that runner from getting into scoring position and keep the double play in order.

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## Defensive Tactics and Strategies

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Effective team defense starts with teaching players about correct straightaway positioning, how to provide backups, the difference between cutoffs and relays, proper execution of cutoffs and relays, and how to complete specific defensive plays. Remember that all of your players may not understand baseball terminology, so take extra time to explain exactly what you mean the first time.

### Positioning

Positioning is a primary concern of any team defense. In baseball, it's not as simple as telling your players, "If your opponent does *this*, you do *that*." Instead, you'll have to base your positioning instructions on the hitter's preferred batting side, your pitcher's abilities, the game situation, and how the batter reacts to pitched balls.

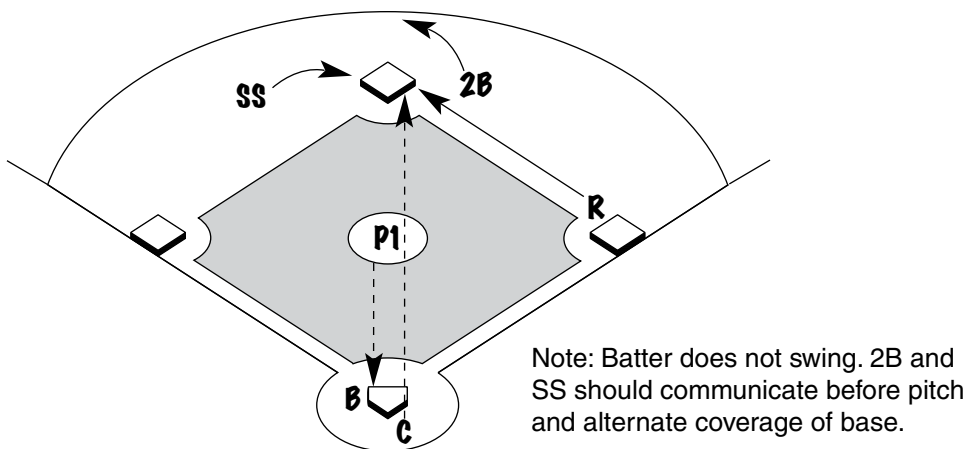
## Offensive Tactics and Strategies

### Fast Feet Drill/Game

**Goal:** To steal a base

**Setup:** The defense has a pitcher, catcher, first baseman, second baseman, and shortstop. The offense has a runner on first and a batter at the plate, but the batter does not swing.

**Description:** When the pitcher pitches, the runner on first takes off for second (adhere to your league rules in terms of taking leadoffs and leaving the bag). The catcher attempts to throw out the runner (see figure 9.1). Rotate runners until each runner gets three steal attempts, then rotate teams. Keep track of points—one point for each stolen base for the offense and one point for each player thrown out on defense. Rotate in groups of baserunners and keep a team score for each group.



**Figure 9.1** Fast Feet Drill/Game.

To make the game easier, do the following:

- Allow the runner a leadoff if none was granted earlier.
- Allow the runner to take off on the pitch if it was not allowed earlier.

To make the game harder, do the following:

- Don't allow leadoffs if they were allowed earlier.
- Don't allow the runner to take off on the pitch if that was allowed earlier. Instead, the runner must wait until the ball gets to the plate.

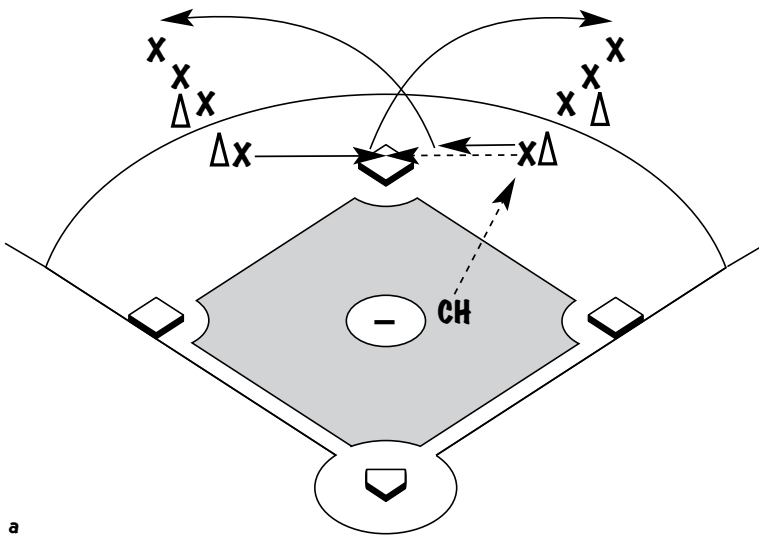
**Multitasking:** You can have players practice other team fundamentals using this drill. The pitcher can work on holding the runner on first base, and the middle infielders can practice communicating who covers (shortstop always determines), getting to the base as quickly as possible so that the catcher has a target to throw to, and straddling the bag properly to receive the throw.

## Force Play Drill; 6-4/4-6 Drill

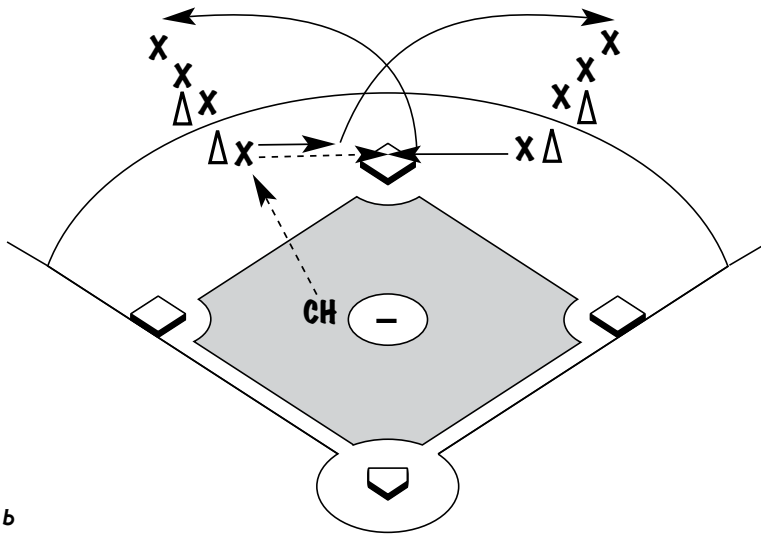
**Goal:** To work on using the underhand flip to get force outs at second base.

**Setup:** One group lines up at shortstop. Another group lines up at second.

**Description:** Coach rolls a ground ball to the first player in the shortstop line. First player in the second base line runs to the bag, puts the left foot on the bag and holds up both hands at chest level as a target. Shortstop fields the ball and executes an underhand flip to the second baseman, who takes the right foot toward the ball and catches it. Second baseman returns the ball to the coach and the players go to the end of opposite lines. After each player goes several times, switch and work on the 4-6 double play feed. Drill is reversed. Difference is that the shortstop puts the right foot on the bag and takes the left foot toward ball. As players get comfortable they can throw to a coach or teammates at first base to complete the double play. Stress the underhand flip and that the players covering second base should get there early and be stationary targets for their teammates. Figure 9.26 diagrams the 6-4/4-6 Drill.



**Figure 9.26** The 6-4/4-6 Drill.



b

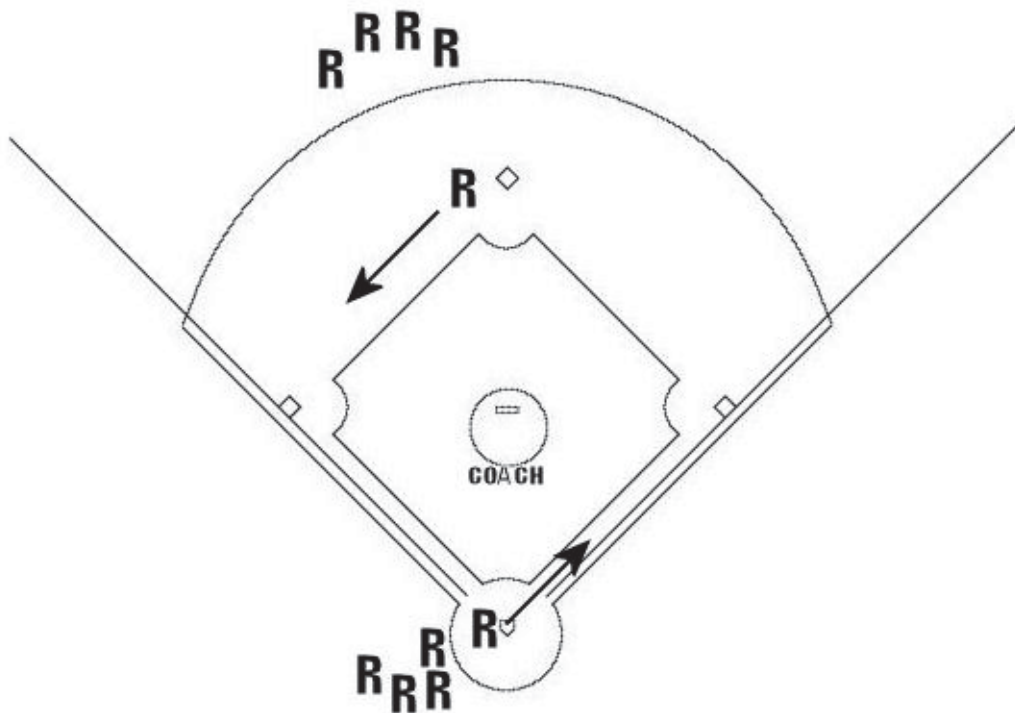
**Figure 9.26** (continued)

**Multitasking:** For players 9 years old and up, add the first baseman to the drill and complete the double play. Start with first base at a shortened distance, and then try to move it back as the players get more comfortable.

## RUNNING GAME

### Scoring from second base/stand-up double

Divide the team into 2 groups. Put one group at second base and the other at home plate. One player from the group at second base assumes a normal lead-off from second base while the rest of the group remains on the outfield grass. One player from the group at home plate assumes a normal hitting stance in the batter's box while the rest of the group remains against the backstop. The coach stands between the pitching mound and home plate. The coach gives a hand signal to tell the base runners to go. The runners practice good base-running technique by rounding each base, touching the inside corner, and either running through home plate (the runner from second base) or simulating a stand-up double (the runner from home). Players waiting in each group cannot leave the waiting area until the runners have reached their respective bases and are in line. Continue the drill until each player has gone through 4-6 times.



## ***PITCHERS COVERING FIRST DRILL***

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*"Pitchers who field their positions, cover unoccupied bases, back up bases, and hold runners close will win 25% more games than pitchers who don't."*

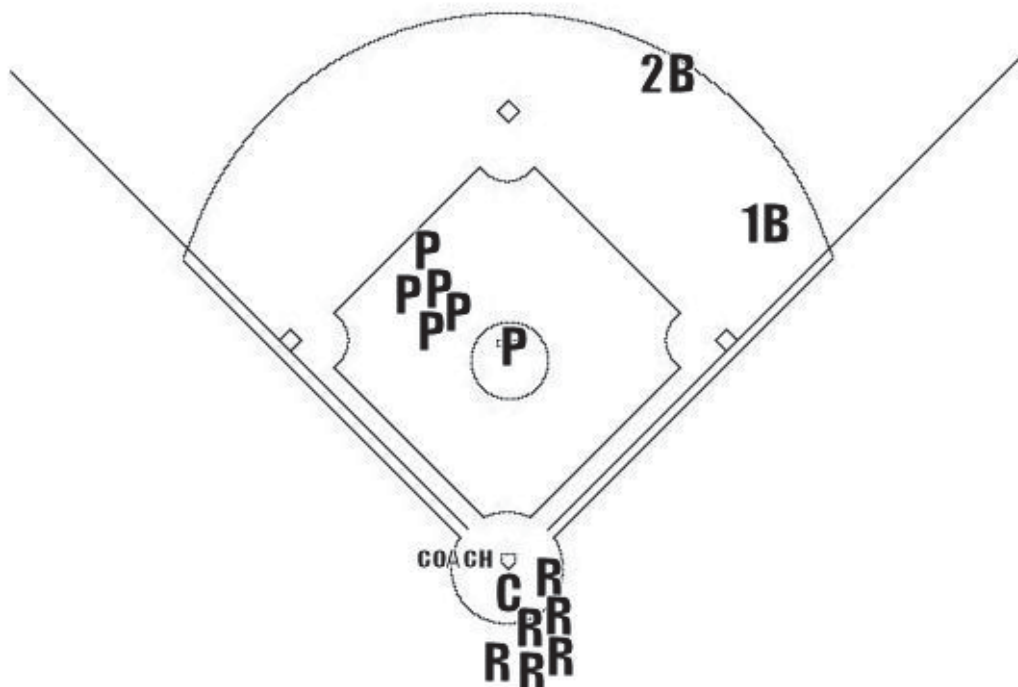
This drill involves the pitchers covering first base, fielding bunts, and fielding come backers to the mound. The drill includes the pitchers on the staff, first baseman, second baseman, catcher, and the rest of the team as runners.

Have the pitchers form a line on the third base side of the mound. Each pitcher should have a baseball. Pitchers alternate during this drill. The first baseman and second baseman go to their normal playing positions in the infield. The catcher gets in a normal stance behind the plate. The rest of the team acts as runners and they line up behind and to the right of the catcher.

The drill begins when a pitcher steps on the rubber and throws a pitch to the catcher. As the pitch gets to the catcher the coach, equipped with a fungo and ball in hand, can do five things:

1. Bunt down the third-base line so the pitcher must field it and throw to first base.
2. Bunt down the first-base line so the pitcher must field it and throw to first base.
3. Hit a come-backer to the pitcher who must field it and throw to first base.
4. Hit a ball between the second baseman and first baseman forcing the pitcher to cover first base.
5. Swing and miss forcing the catcher to field the ball and throw to first base.





**NOTE:** Pitchers' technique in covering first base is up to the coach and pitcher. Some pitchers may feel more comfortable sprinting straight to the bag while others may prefer to sprint to the foul line and then toward the base.

**NOTE:** It is important that the players acting as runners do not begin running to first base until the ball has hit the ground.

# ***Protecting Young Pitching Arms***



***The Little League® Pitch Count Regulation Guide  
for Parents, Coaches and League Officials***





[www.asmi.org](http://www.asmi.org)

Baseball is a great sport, and Little League continues to be one of the premier youth organizations. However in the mid-1990's (when today's Little Leaguers were born), we started to notice an alarming increase in serious injuries in adolescent pitchers. For example during the last five years of the 1990's, 21 of the 190 "Tommy John" surgeries at our center were high school age pitchers or younger; however during the first five years of this decade, 124 of our 627 "Tommy John" surgeries were high school age pitchers or younger. This alarming trend was also happening for other types of pitching injuries.

Anecdotally it's believed that the rise in injuries is due to increased amounts of pitching at a younger age. To determine if this was true, our American Sports Medicine Institute conducted a series of scientific studies with support and cooperation from USA Baseball, Little League Baseball, and Major League Baseball. We followed hundreds of youth baseball pitchers, and monitored arm problems and potential contributing factors including pitch counts, types of pitches, quality of mechanics, and other factors. The scientific results confirmed that the number of pitches thrown was the most significant contributor to arm problems. Another study compared our young, surgery patients with healthy adolescent pitchers and found that young pitchers who often pitched past the point of fatigue were 36 times more likely to end up on the surgery table. Another risk factor was year-round baseball without sufficient rest (the data suggested at least four months a year away from throwing). Other risk factors included participating in showcases, and throwing with high ball velocity. Of course ball velocity is valuable for all pitchers, but we believe that there is too much emphasis on ball speed instead of on quality of mechanics, speed variation, and control, in today's "radar gun" generation. Details about these scientific studies can be found at [asmi.org](http://asmi.org).

Little League Baseball has been the leader in recognizing the rise in injuries and has taken dramatic steps to make baseball safe for young players. Some issues – such as showcases and participation in independent traveling teams – may be beyond Little League's control, but Little League has embraced the pitch count research and boldly altered their rules. We applaud Little League for their continued effort to insure that their game is as safe and enjoyable as possible for you and your children.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James R. Andrews, M.D." in a cursive style.

James R. Andrews, M.D.  
ASMI Medical Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Glenn S. Fleisig" in a cursive style.

Glenn S. Fleisig, Ph.D.  
ASMI Research Director



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# INTRODUCTION

## GOAL OF NEW LITTLE LEAGUE REGULATION: PROTECTING PITCHERS' ARMS

Little League Baseball has changed its decades-old pitching rules, making the actual number of pitches delivered the deciding factor in determining eligibility in the baseball division.

Twenty copies of this publication, "Protecting Young Pitching Arms: The Little League Pitch Count Regulation Guide for Parents, Coaches and League Officials," are being provided at no charge to more than 7,000 local Little League programs worldwide. The goal of this publication is to reach as many parents and volunteers as possible, so that everyone will know the benefits and their responsibilities in making this regulation work.

Inside, you'll find helpful questions and answers about the new regulation, as well as the regular season regulation and the rule to be used in the International Tournament. It also includes great advice from respected medical professionals on the care and conditioning of the pitching arm, and the best ideas from the thousands of Little League volunteers who have successfully used "pitch counts" in their local Little Leagues during the past year or two.

Starting with the 2007 season, pitchers in all divisions of Little League, from age 7 to 18, will have specific limits for each game, based on their age. The number of pitches delivered in a game will determine the amount of rest the player must have before pitching again.

"Little League has a rich history of pioneering baseball safety innovations," said Stephen D. Keener, president and chief executive officer of Little League Baseball and Softball. "As the world's largest organized youth sports program, Little League is proud to take a leadership position in youth sports safety."

There are about 2.3 million players in the baseball divisions of Little League worldwide. There are nearly 400,000 female softball players, but the new regulations will not apply to softball.

For all of Little League Baseball's history, and for the history of amateur youth baseball in general, pitching regulations have used innings pitched to determine pitcher eligibility. Recently, researchers and medical professionals in the field of sports medicine have been working to determine if the actual number of pitches thrown (i.e., pitch count) is a better way to regulate pitching in youth baseball.

Most notable among those calling for pitch counts has been Dr. James R. Andrews, M.D., medical director at the American Sports Medicine Institute (ASMI) in Birmingham, Ala. Dr. Andrews is the world's foremost authority on pitching injuries and ulnar collateral ligament reconstruction, or, as it is better known, "Tommy John surgery." The ASMI and the USA Baseball Medical and Safety Advisory Committee have worked closely with Little League to create the guidelines for the new regulation.

"This is one of the most important injury prevention steps ever initiated in youth baseball by the leader in youth baseball," Dr. Andrews said. "It is certain to serve as the youth sports injury prevention cornerstone and the inspiration for other youth organizations to take the initiative to get serious about injury prevention in youth sports. I am proud that our American Sports Medicine Institute and USA Baseball can play a small role in this important initiative."

Little League is the first national youth baseball organization to institute a pitch count. The Little League International Board of Directors approved the measure unanimously at a meeting on Aug. 25, two days before the conclusion of the Little League Baseball World Series.

"This is the right time to make this change," Mr. Keener said. "We call upon all youth baseball organizations, including travel leagues, to implement their own pitch count programs in the interest of protecting young pitching arms. Our goal continues to be to educate everyone, particularly parents and coaches, on the potential injuries that can occur from throwing too many pitches."

For the past two years, Little League has conducted a Pitch Count Pilot Program to determine the feasibility of implementing a regulation limiting the number of pitches a Little Leaguer can throw in a day, and the rest required before pitching again. Fifty leagues were studied in 2005, and nearly 500 signed up for the program in 2006.

"Surveys of those leagues showed the overwhelming majority were able to implement a pitch count without any problems," Mr. Keener said. "They also found that they were able to develop other pitchers who might not have otherwise ever taken the mound. And they found that their pitchers were stronger at the end of the season."

Regulations for tournament play (all-stars) are similar, but with some modifications. Little League also continues to explore other pitching-related issues, such as the use of breaking pitches.

"While there is no medical evidence to support a ban on breaking pitches, it is widely speculated by medical professionals that it is ill-advised for players under 14 years old to throw breaking pitches," Mr. Keener said. "Breaking pitches for these ages continues to be strongly discouraged by Little League, and that is an issue we are looking at as well. As with our stance on pitch counts, we will act if and when there is enough medical evidence to support a change."

Little League International has begun a five-year study on breaking pitches by Little League pitchers. The study is being conducted by the University of North Carolina and is supported by the Yawkey Foundation.

# THE NEW PITCH COUNT REGULATION

The following is the text of the new regular season Pitch Count Regulation for all levels of Little League Baseball. (The rule for use in the International Tournament is similar, and also is printed below.)

## REGULAR SEASON – BASEBALL ONLY

### REGULATION VI – PITCHERS:

- (a) Any player on a regular season team may pitch. (NOTE: There is no limit to the number of pitchers a team may use in a game.)
- (b) Junior, Senior, and Big League Divisions only: A pitcher remaining in the game, but moving to a different position, can return as a pitcher anytime in the remainder of the game, but only once per game.
- (c) The manager must remove the pitcher when said pitcher reaches the limit for his/her age group as noted below, but the pitcher may remain in the game at another position:

<b>League Age</b>	17-18	105 pitches per day
	13-16	95 pitches per day
	11-12	85 pitches per day
	10 and under	75 pitches per day

Exception: If a pitcher reaches the limit imposed in Regulation VI (c) for his/her league age while facing a batter, the pitcher may continue to pitch until that batter reaches base or is put out. Note 1. Intentional Walk: Before a pitch is delivered to the batter, the catcher must inform the umpire-in-chief that the defensive team wishes to give the batter an intentional base-on-balls. The umpire-in-chief waves the batter to first base. The ball is dead.

- (d) Pitchers league age 16 and under must adhere to the following rest requirements:
  - If a player pitches 61 or more pitches in a day, three (3) calendar days of rest must be observed.
  - If a player pitches 41 - 60 pitches in a day, two (2) calendar days of rest must be observed.
  - If a player pitches 21 - 40 pitches in a day, one (1) calendar days of rest must be observed.
  - If a player pitches 1-20 pitches in a day, no (0) calendar day of rest must be observed.

Pitchers league age 17-18 must adhere to the following rest requirements:

- If a player pitches 76 or more pitches in a day, three (3) calendar days of rest must be observed.
  - If a player pitches 51 - 75 pitches in a day, two (2) calendar days of rest must be observed.
  - If a player pitches 26 - 50 pitches in a day, one (1) calendar days of rest must be observed.
  - If a player pitches 1-25 pitches in a day, no (0) calendar day of rest must be observed.
- (e) Each league must designate the scorekeeper or another game official as the official pitch count recorder.
  - (f) The pitch count recorder must provide the current pitch count for any pitcher when requested by either manager or any umpire. However, the manager is responsible for knowing when his/her pitcher must be removed.
  - (g) The official pitch count recorder should inform the umpire-in-chief when a pitcher has delivered his/her maximum limit of pitches for the game, as noted in Regulation VI (c). The umpire-in-chief will inform the pitcher's manager that the pitcher must be removed in accordance with Regulation VI (c). However, the failure by the pitch count recorder to notify the umpire-in-chief, and/or the failure of the umpire-in-chief to notify the manager, does not relieve the manager of his/her responsibility to remove a pitcher when that pitcher is no longer eligible.
  - (h) Violation of any section of this regulation can result in protest of the game in which it occurs. Protest shall be made in accordance with Playing Rule 4.19.
  - (i) A player who has attained the league age of twelve (12) is not eligible to pitch in the Minor League.
  - (j) A player may not pitch in more than one game in a day. (Exception: In the Big League Division, a player may be used as a pitcher in up to two games in a day.)

#### NOTES:

1. The withdrawal of an ineligible pitcher after that pitcher is announced, or after a warm-up pitch is delivered, but before that player has pitched a ball to a batter, shall not be considered a violation. Little League officials are urged to take precautions to prevent protests. When a protest situation is imminent, the potential offender should be notified immediately.
2. Pitches delivered in games declared "Regulation Tie Games" or "Suspended Games" shall be charged against pitcher's eligibility.
3. In suspended games resumed on another day, the pitchers of record at the time the game was halted may continue to pitch to the extent of their eligibility for that day, provided said pitcher has observed the required days of rest.  
Example 1: A league age 12 pitcher delivers 70 pitches in a game on Monday when the game is suspended. The game resumes on the following Thursday. The pitcher is not eligible to pitch in the

resumption of the game because he/she has not observed the required three days of rest.

Example 2: A league age 12 pitcher delivers 70 pitches in a game on Monday when the game is suspended. The game resumes on Saturday. The pitcher is eligible to pitch up to 85 more pitches in the resumption of the game because he/she has observed the required three days of rest.

Example 3: A league age 12 pitcher delivers 70 pitches in a game on Monday when the game is suspended. The game resumes two weeks later. The pitcher is eligible to pitch up to 85 more pitches in the resumption of the game, provided he/she is eligible based on his/her pitching record during the previous three days.

Note: The use of this regulation negates the concept of the “calendar week” with regard to pitching eligibility.

#### **TOURNAMENT RULE – BASEBALL ONLY**

#### **4. PITCHING RULES – LITTLE LEAGUE BASEBALL, 9-10 YEAR OLD, 10-11 YEAR OLD DIVISION, JUNIOR LEAGUE AND SENIOR LEAGUE**

These rules replace the regular season pitching regulations. Violation of these pitching rules is subject to protest and forfeiture by decree of the Tournament Committee in Williamsport if protested before the umpire(s) leave the playing field.

- a. Any player on a tournament team may pitch. (NOTE: There is no limit to the number of pitchers a tournament team may use in a game.)
- b. A tournament pitcher may not pitch in regular season or Special Games while the team is still participating in the tournament.
- c. Pitchers once removed from the mound may not return as pitchers. Junior/Senior League: A pitcher remaining in the game, but moving to a different position, can return as a pitcher anytime in the remainder of the game, but only once per game.
- d. The manager must remove the pitcher when said pitcher reaches the limit for his/her age group as noted below, but the pitcher may remain in the game at another position:

League Age:	13-16	95 pitches per day
	11-12	85 pitches per day
	10 and under	75 pitches per day

Exception: If a pitcher reaches the limit imposed above for his/her league age while facing a batter, the pitcher may continue to pitch until that batter reaches base or is put out. Note 1: Intentional Walk – Before a pitch is delivered to the batter, the catcher must inform the umpire-in-chief that the defensive team wishes to give the batter an intentional base on balls. The umpire-in-chief waves the batter to first base. The ball is dead.

- e. Pitchers league age 16 and under must adhere to the following requirements:
  - If a player pitches 46 or more pitches in a day, two (2) calendar days of rest must be observed.
  - If a player pitches 21 to 45 pitches in a day, one calendar day of rest must be observed.
  - If a player pitches 1 to 20 pitches in a day, no rest is required.
- f. A player may not pitch in consecutive games. Exceptions – A player may pitch in consecutive games if:
  1. less than 21 pitches were pitched in the previous game, or,
  2. the previous game was at another level, and the pitcher has received the required number of days of rest as noted in (e.) above. (Levels are District, Section, State, Division, Region, and World Series.)
- g. A player may not pitch in more than one game in a day.

#### **4. PITCHING RULES – BIG LEAGUE BASEBALL**

These rules replace the regular season pitching regulations. Violation of these pitching rules is subject to protest and forfeiture by decree of the Tournament Committee in Williamsport if protested before the umpire(s) leave the playing field.

- a. Any player on a tournament team may pitch. (NOTE: There is no limit to the number of pitchers a tournament team may use in a game.)
- b. A tournament pitcher may not pitch in regular season or Special Games while the team is still participating in the tournament.
- c. A pitcher remaining in the game, but moving to a different position, can return as a pitcher anytime in the remainder of the game, but only once per game.

Exception: If a pitcher reaches the limit imposed above for his/her league age while facing a batter, the pitcher may continue to pitch until that batter reaches base or is put out. Note 1: Intentional Walk – Before a pitch is delivered to the batter, the catcher must inform the umpire-in-chief that the defensive team wishes to give the batter an intentional base on balls. The umpire-in-chief waves the batter to first base. The ball is dead.

- d. The manager must remove the pitcher when said pitcher reaches the limit for his/her age group as noted below, but the pitcher may remain in the game at another position:

League Age: 16 – 18 105 pitches per day

- e. Pitchers league age 16 and above must adhere to the following requirements:
  - If a player pitches 51 or more pitches in a day, two (2) calendar days of rest must be observed.
  - If a player pitches 26 to 50 pitches in a day, one calendar day of rest must be observed.
  - If a player pitches 1 to 25 pitches in a day, no rest is required.
- f. A player may not pitch in consecutive games. Exceptions – A player may pitch in consecutive games if:
  1. less than 26 pitches were pitched in the previous game, or,
  2. the previous game was at another level, and the pitcher has received the required number of days of rest as noted in (e.) above. (Levels are District, Section, State, Division, Region, and World Series.)
- g. A player may not pitch in more than two games in a day.

## TWENTY QUESTIONS ON THE PITCH COUNT

Here are 20 commonly asked questions regarding the regular season baseball pitching regulation (pitch count) that takes effect in 2007.

### 1. Why has Little League changed the pitching regulation for all baseball divisions?

Recently, researchers and medical professionals in the field of sports medicine have determined that the actual number of pitches thrown (i.e., pitch count) is a safer way to regulate pitching in youth baseball. Little League has a rich history of pioneering baseball safety innovations. As the world's largest organized youth sports program, Little League is again taking a leadership position in youth sports safety.

### 2. How will a league determine who is responsible for counting the pitches?

Selecting the person responsible for counting pitches will be a decision of each local league. That person's pitch count will be the officially recognized pitch count for the game.

In most leagues, this responsibility will rest with the game's official scorekeeper. In that case, since a scorekeeper already keeps track of the balls and strikes on each batter, so he or she will additionally need to keep track of the number of foul batted balls that are hit with two strikes. Each pitcher's pitch count is computed by adding the number of balls and strikes, the number of foul balls hit with two strikes, and the number of fair batted balls.

Other leagues might assign a separate person who simply keeps track of every pitch on a piece of paper. Little League International will provide local leagues with a suggested form for this in the coming months. Leagues also can use any of the various digital or mechanical pitch counting tools that are available commercially. Still other leagues might assign the task to one or both of the managers, or to one of the base umpires.

### 3. What is the penalty for violating the pitch count regulation?

Violating the regular season pitch count regulation can be protested in accordance with Rule 4.19. And, as with all regular season games, the local league (by action of the local league Board of Directors through the Protest Committee) resolves all protests. The local league Protest Committee could decree a forfeit, or not, as it sees fit. The Board of Directors also could suspend or remove managers who willfully and persistently violate any rule or regulation.

### 4. What is the procedure for Interleague Play games?

As with any procedure of this nature, the Interleague Play Committee (formed from among personnel in the leagues involved before the start of the season) should decide this. The procedure for counting pitches should be agreed upon between all leagues involved in an interleague arrangement before the first game is played.

### 5. What is meant by "calendar days" in the regulation?

The principle of "calendar days" remains the same. A calendar day is one full day as it is seen on a calendar. A calendar day begins at midnight and ends at midnight the following evening.

Example: If a pitcher in the Little League Major Division throws 70 pitches in a game on Saturday morning, that pitcher cannot pitch again until Wednesday, when he/she has had three calendar days of rest (Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday). It makes no difference what time of day the pitcher pitched on Saturday, as the rest period does not begin until midnight that night.

### 6. Can the same pitcher throw in consecutive games?

Yes, depending on the number of pitches thrown and the days of rest, the same pitcher could pitch in consecutive games (regular season).

### 7. Can the same pitcher pitch in both games of a doubleheader played on the same day? What about a partial game (such as a continuation of a suspended game) and a full game later in the day?

No, in both cases. The regulation specifically forbids a player from pitching in two games in one day. It does not matter if one of the two games is only part of a game. (Exception: In Big League Baseball, a player may pitch in up to two games in a day.)

**8. Why do 7 and 8 year olds have the same pitch limits as 9-10 year olds?**

The medical and expert advice Little League received shows that these age groups are essentially the same.

**9. Could our local Little League place further restrictions on pitching in the Minor Divisions?**

Yes, a local league could further limit the number of pitches that can be thrown by a player in the Minor League.

**10. If a pitcher is pitching a perfect game or no hitter and reaches his or her maximum pitch count, does he or she have to be removed as a pitcher, or can he/she continue until the perfect game or no hitter is lost?**

Any pitcher, without regard to his/her effectiveness, must be removed when he or she reaches the limit prescribed in the regulation. Remember, no game is more important than protecting pitchers' arms.

**11. Is the pitch count regulation mandatory in all divisions of baseball? What about softball?**

The regulation applies to all baseball divisions of Little League. It does not apply to and cannot be used in softball.

**12. Is there a limit to the number of 12 year olds that can pitch in a week?**

No. A manager may use as many 12-year-old pitchers in a week as he/she chooses.

**13. Can 12 year olds pitch in the minors?**

No. The regulation prohibits 12 year olds from pitching in the Minor Division. The Minor Division must be considered an instructional division for players who, because of age or ability, are not placed in the Major Division. It should be the goal of every league to place all 12 year olds in the Major Division who are capable of playing at that level.

**Note:** A local Little League is limited to only one Major Division, but may have multiple levels of Minor Division play (player pitch, coach pitch, machine pitch, etc.).

**14. Are warm up pitches calculated in the pitch count for a pitcher?**

No. As always, however, umpires should be mindful that the rules permit a returning pitcher to have eight preparatory pitches, or one minute, whichever comes first. (See Rule 8.04.)

**15. If a Major Division pitcher has completed six innings in a game, and the game is tied, will that pitcher be permitted to pitch in the seventh inning if he/she has not reached the limit?**

Yes. There is no limit to the number of innings a pitcher can pitch in a day. A limit is placed on the number of pitches only.

**16. Is the Tournament Pitching Rule the same as the regular season regulation?**

The Tournament Pitching Rule is similar to the regular season rule, but there are some modifications.

**17. Last year, the Pitch Count Pilot Program was optional. Is it optional in 2007?**

No. All leagues in Little League must use the new Pitch Count Regulation in all divisions of baseball.

**18. Will local leagues have the ability to continue to provide feedback to Little League International regarding the new pitch count regulation?**

Absolutely. As with any rule or regulation of Little League, local leagues and districts are encouraged to provide feedback through the regional office. This feedback is valuable in determining what, if any, changes need to be made.

**19. Does this mean a pitcher could pitch in two games in a "calendar week."**

Yes, but the concept of the calendar week is no longer in use. Here's why: A pitcher under the previous regulation could have pitched six innings (potentially 150 or more pitches) on a Saturday, and after three days of rest, could have pitched on Wednesday for six more innings (and potentially more than 150 pitches). That's a potential total of 300 or more pitches in a five-day period.

Under the new regulation, the same pitcher could pitch on Tuesday (but no more than 85 pitches), and, after three days of rest, could pitch on Saturday (again, no more than 85 pitches). That's a potential of no more than 170 pitches in a five-day period.

**20. What about breaking pitches (curve balls, sliders, etc.)?**

As of now, there is no solid medical evidence that these pitches are detrimental. However, Little League and many experts recommend they not be thrown until age 14. Little League International is currently conducting an epidemiological study on this issue to see if these pitches are harmful.

# BEST PRACTICES OF THE PITCH COUNT PILOT PROGRAM: LITTLE LEAGUE VOLUNTEERS TELL US HOW IT WORKED

Here is a sampling of the comments we received from volunteers in those leagues that used the Pitch Count Pilot Program in the 2006 season. Little League International asked for the “best practices,” so the information could be shared with all Little Leagues worldwide for the 2007 season. In this book, we’ve also included some sample forms that local leagues can use, also based on the best ideas from Little League volunteers.

- **Greg, from a local Little League in New Jersey** – “We had each team’s scorekeeper keep track of pitches. We made up our own form, which was modeled after the pitching affidavit for tournament play. Before each game, the managers checked both forms to determine eligibility, and after each game, the opposing manager had to sign the sheet (in ink). We bought counters for all teams to use.”
- **Pat, from a local Little League in California** – “We created a sheet that was placed in the scorekeeper’s notebook that kept track of the number of pitches for each pitcher. The scorekeeper was the official pitch count recorder. We used two counters for each game and kept track of the pitches on one counter for each pitcher that was in the game.”
- **Rick, from a local Little League in Illinois** – “We required all managers to purchase a pitch count device with the home team keeping the ‘official book.’ After a few initial complaints from a few managers who, in the past, relied on only a few pitchers to carry the load, our program ran quite well.”
- **David, a president of a local Little League in New York** – “As we do not have enough volunteers to provide official scorers, each team was responsible for keeping track of its own pitch count. Most teams tried to keep track of both pitchers.”
- **Florian, from a local Little League in Alberta, Canada** – “It was fairly easy. The scorekeeper ticks off each ball and strike, and counts one for the pitch that puts the ball into play. If he/she also ticks off two-strike foul balls at the top or below the column, you simply total the column at the end of each inning. The teams were also required to have with them an updated pitching control roster. They simply stapled it to the back of their scorebook.”
- **Gary, from a local Little League in New Jersey** – “We used a volunteer parent to keep track of pitches for each team. They used a hand-held counter and compared numbers with each other after each half-inning to make sure they were both on the same page. This system worked out very well. Coaches e-mailed pitch counts to our Information Officer along with the scores of the game. The Information Officer kept track of the pitch count for each player.”
- **Rene, from a local Little League in California** – “Our league was very successful with the Pitch Count Pilot Program last season. Everyone was a little hesitant at first, but within a couple of weeks, it was running smoothly. We purchased small hand-held tally counters for each manager and they made one available to the official scorekeeper for each game. Between innings, each manager would come to the official scorekeeper and the three of them would compare pitch counts from the prior inning. Once it was determined how many pitches were thrown, the official scorekeeper would mark it in the official book by the particular pitcher’s name and/or number. We never had any problems with this system.”
- **Steve, from a local Little League in Wisconsin** – “We issued each manager a ‘lap counter’ so each bench could keep track of pitches during each half-inning. At the end of each half-inning, the pitch counters would meet at home plate and record the number of pitches on the umpire’s game sheet. Then we recorded the game totals on our website, for all other coaches and interested parties to view.”
- **Kevin, from a local Little League in California** – “We found that the teams that developed the younger pitching advanced further at the end of the season in the Tournament of Champions. With a year of experience, I don’t think we’ll get any objections from the coaches this year. After a little training of the scorekeepers, coaches and umpires, this seemed to work.”
- **Gary, from a local Little League in Rhode Island** – “We used hand-held counters, and confirmed pitch counts for pitchers after each half-inning. At the conclusion of each game, we had a pitch count sheet that was filled in by each manager and signed by the opposing manager. This sheet was available to all managers at every game, so they could quickly find out the eligibility on any player. It worked extremely well.”
- **Ray, from a local Little League in California** – “We don’t have official scorekeepers for the regular season, so each team had to count pitches for both pitchers. The coaches met between innings to validate the numbers. All coaches must fill in the game results in a book that is kept in our field house.”
- **Kevin, from a local Little League in Iowa** – “We bought a hand-held pitch counter for every field that had a baseball team on it. That allowed one person to track both pitchers in the game on the same device. We just used the home team as the official scorekeeper, since we don’t have a separate scorekeeper. We provided everyone with a form that they were required to fill out and keep with them for the pitches thrown by game. If a

manager fails to sign it, we allow the umpire to sign for that person.”

- **Joe, from a local Little League in Pennsylvania** – “We found the best and easiest way to track the number of pitches thrown, was to have the coach keep the scorebook in the dugout, and record each pitch in the scorebook. Since the scorebooks we use had a box for balls and strikes, it was simply a matter of checking off each pitch in the book. For fouls, we just made extra marks next to the strikes. We would then compare the numbers between innings with the opposing coaches, and I would estimate there were not issues 99 percent of the time.”
- **Curtis, from a local Little League in California** – “The Pitching Record form was kept with the ‘Official Game Scorebook’ and the information listed was recorded as the total summary of the pitcher’s usage for that game. To try to maintain a level of honesty, the Pitch Count Record was kept by the visiting team’s scorekeeper, and the Pitching Record was recorded into the book by the home team’s scorekeeper, who was responsible for the ‘Official Game Scorebook.’”
- **Bill, from a local Little League in Pennsylvania** – “The feedback I received from my managers was that the process was pretty easy and straightforward. Feedback from the parents was very positive, and we know they can be our worst critics.”
- **Jim, from a local Little League in New Hampshire** – “Each team typically has a coach keeping a book, and we provide a pitch counter to them before the start of each game. In between each half-inning (or when a pitching change occurs), the coaches sync up with the official scorer.”
- **Mike, from a local Little League in Rhode Island** – “Each team received a small hand-held counter. After each inning, the two scorekeepers checked the counts. Counts were e-mailed to me, and a spread sheet was updated each night and e-mailed back to all managers so they would know pitcher eligibility.”
- **Bob, from a local Little League in Michigan** – “We kept the pitch count a couple of different ways. One way was using a small, hand-held counter device (such as one purchased in an office supply store). The other way was to simply add a tally mark next to the area where we keep balls and strikes in the scorebook. The total pitches thrown by each pitcher were written next to each pitcher’s name on the scorebook, and then circled. In our league, the home team is responsible for keeping and tuning in our scorebooks in after each game. This gave the league the ability to periodically audit the program as well as settle any disputes about when pitchers were eligible to pitch again. In addition to protecting young pitchers’ arms, the pitch count program also places a priority on developing and teaching many more players how to pitch.”
- **Kent, from a local Little League in California** – “I am proud to report that we had absolutely NO arm injuries in 2006, as opposed to at least two a year in previous years. I believe the Pitch Count Pilot Program was a key factor. In our league, each team designated a “pitch count person” (not a coach, but a parent in the stands, as the coaches have too much else going on). The parent was given a hand-held counter and kept track of each pitch. After the end of each half-inning, the parents from each side compared their counts, which were exactly the same 99 percent of the time, then reported them to the official scorekeeper. The scorekeeper had a simple log for each game, which were kept with the official scorebooks in our board room.”
- **Chris, from a local Little League in Arizona** – “As an umpire, we always asked about the pitch count at the end of every half-inning to make sure everyone is communicating.”

## CONCLUSIONS

A common thread in many of the responses was the importance of clear communication. Leagues reported that the official scorekeeper, the pitch counter(s), the umpire-in-chief, and the managers should all be made aware of the pitch counts.

It is also very important for leagues involved in interleague play to ensure all officials concerned are “on the same page.”

Most leagues also kept the Pitch Count Log someplace accessible, so that both teams would know which pitchers were eligible for a particular game, and which ones were not. The location for the log varied, however. Some kept it in the concession stand or other common building, while others maintained the log on the league’s web site, or sent it to managers via e-mail.

The person who actually counts the pitches can vary from league to league. Here are a few of the ideas for the official pitch counters:

- The official scorekeeper. (Sometimes, this was a coach or parent from the home or visiting team).
- An assistant to the official scorekeeper whose duty it is to track only the pitch count for each pitcher.
- One coach or parent for each team in the game, with the two tallies being compared every half-inning.
- A base umpire.

The mechanics involved in counting the pitches also can vary:

- The official scorekeeper counts up the balls, strikes, foul balls with two strikes, and fair batted balls in a scorebook designed for this purpose, or on a separate sheet of paper.

- The official scorekeeper uses a commercially-available computerized scoring program, rather than the traditional paper scorebook, which allows the user to easily track the number of pitches throughout the game.
- The assistant to the scorekeeper counts up the balls, strikes, foul balls with two strikes, and fair batted balls using a form designed for this purpose.
- The person doing the counting uses a hand-held counter specifically designed for counting pitches or counting laps. These are generally available at sporting goods outlets.
- The person doing the counting uses a standard “inventory counter” that is available in most office supply stores.

The bottom line is, whichever system works best in your league for counting pitches, is the system you should use. It might take some leagues a week or two to become accustomed to the new regulation, and some refinements in putting it into effect in your league may be necessary – just as they were in the leagues that used “pitch counts” over the past two years.

# PITCHING FUNDAMENTALS

By NICHOLAS CARINGI

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this part of “Protecting Young Pitching Arms: The Little League Pitch Count Regulation Guide for Parents, Coaches and League Officials,” is to provide some insight to players and coaches learning about pitching in a mechanically correct way.

From Little League to the professional ranks, pitching styles have always varied. Regardless of the style, there are definite fundamentals all pitchers must follow. By doing this, the chances of injury are lessened.

Most effective pitchers have three things in common; working fast, throwing strikes and changing speeds. To be effective a pitcher must learn to keep hitters off balance. After all, hitting requires good timing on the part of the batter. The pitcher’s main task should be to disrupt the hitter’s timing. As a result, this portion of “Protecting Young Pitching Arms: The Little League Pitch Count Regulation Guide for Parents, Coaches and League Officials,” will teach the change-up, which gives the pitcher an added edge on the hitter.

Learning a skill like pitching is not easy for most players. In order to assist teaching this skill several drills are included that are specifically designed to improve and maintain proper pitching mechanics. Pitchers need to work on these drills every day. The drills do not require expensive equipment; just a baseball, glove, and a hard-working player.

With a positive frame of mind, the willingness to succeed, and the latest knowledge provided in “Protecting Young Pitching Arms: The Little League Pitch Count Regulation Guide for Parents, Coaches and League Officials,” pitchers can succeed – safely – at any level of ball.

## THE STARTING POSITION

When a pitcher stands on the rubber to begin the delivery to the hitter, it is suggested that a right-handed pitcher stand on the right corner of the pitching rubber. Left-handed pitchers should stand on the left side of the rubber. Deception is an important part of pitching. By standing on the throwing-hand side of the rubber, the pitcher gains a deception advantage. The hitter is prevented from picking up the baseball during the delivery until it gets to the “window” – the spot over the pitcher’s shoulder where the batter sees the release of the ball.

The pitcher should start in a relaxed stance with the shoulders square to the plate. Standing with both feet on the rubber, the pitcher’s toes should be slightly in front of the pitching plate. Be sure that there is space between the pitcher’s feet (a little closer than shoulder-width apart). The pitcher’s weight should be on his/her pivot foot with the glove-side leg relaxed and slightly bent. This helps emphasize the weight transfer back when beginning the delivery.

The starting position of the hands can be held in any way that feels comfortable, such as:

1. In the throwing hand behind the back; 2. In the glove to the side, and; 3. In the glove resting against the waist or chest.

However, at the point of the delivery, the hands will be brought together in front of the chest and the hands will be together. If the pitcher holds the ball in the glove it is important that the pitcher holds the ball in the palm of



*Ready Position*

the glove for securing a grip. Be sure that the pitcher keeps the ball hidden from the batter and the opposing team's coaches' view to prevent them from picking up what pitch is going to be thrown.

## THE DELIVERY

**Weight Transfer:** Regardless of the pitcher's position on the rubber, the next progression is to start the delivery. The pitcher will take a small step straight back with the left foot (right-handed pitcher), about five or six inches. The pitcher may want to step to the side instead of straight back. Either way is fine.

One important checkpoint is to make sure that the bill of the cap of the pitcher never leaves the plane of the rubber. This ensures that the pitcher will not pull the body back too far, causing a rushed delivery. The aim is to produce a smooth, tension-free delivery.

The best approach is to keep an unobstructed view of the target. Many pitchers like to take their hands back over their head when beginning the delivery, but some young pitchers may have trouble maintaining balance. By keeping the pitcher's hands near the chest during the delivery, balance is more easily maintained. It is important for the pitcher to move the hands at the same time the small step back is taken. Otherwise the pitcher gets out of rhythm and the delivery will not be as smooth.

**The Pivot Foot:** Establishing the pivot foot is one of the most important elements in getting the pitcher's body in a correct position to throw accurately. After transferring the weight back, the next step in the progression is for the pitcher to square off the pivot foot and place it in front of the rubber. The outside portion of the pivot foot must remain in contact with the rubber, and the instep should be directly at the target. Placing the foot on top of the rubber does not allow for an effective push or drive to the plate.

**The Leg Lift:** The leg lift enables the pitcher to obtain a maximum weight transfer towards the plate. As the pitcher's weight transfers to the pivot foot, his/her shoulders will automatically square toward third base (right-handed pitcher). Now the pitcher has established a pointer or a directional side with the glove side pointed towards the catcher.

The pitcher then begins the knee lift, with three important checkpoints. First, make sure the pitcher's thigh is at least parallel to the ground at the height of the lift, at a comfortable level. A good way to find a comfortable knee lift position is to have the pitcher freeze at the top of the lift. If the pitcher loses balance, the knee lift is too high. The pitcher must keep good posture. Arching the back may cause the pitcher to lose balance during the delivery.

Another checkpoint on the leg lift is to keep the lift foot somewhat underneath the knee. Kicking the foot out will cause the pitcher to lose balance. If the foot is relaxed, it will allow the pitcher to have a higher, more comfortable leg lift. Remember, the pitcher needs to achieve a tension-free delivery.

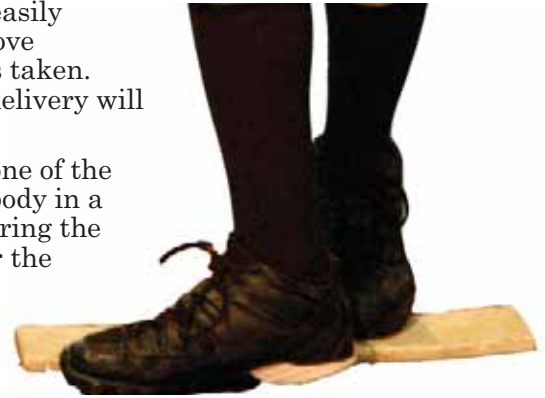
Finally, at the height of the leg lift, the knee should be turned back slightly towards the plane of the rubber. By bringing the knee back, this ensures that the hips stay closed and the pitcher's weight is completely on the back leg. By not keeping the hips closed, the pitcher cannot get maximum hip thrust when throwing the ball. It is important that the pitcher's head is over the back knee. If the pitcher tips his head toward the plate, it will cause a rushed delivery.

The hands, regardless of where the pitcher has them during the beginning of the delivery, must be at the chest or waist area at the height of the leg lift.

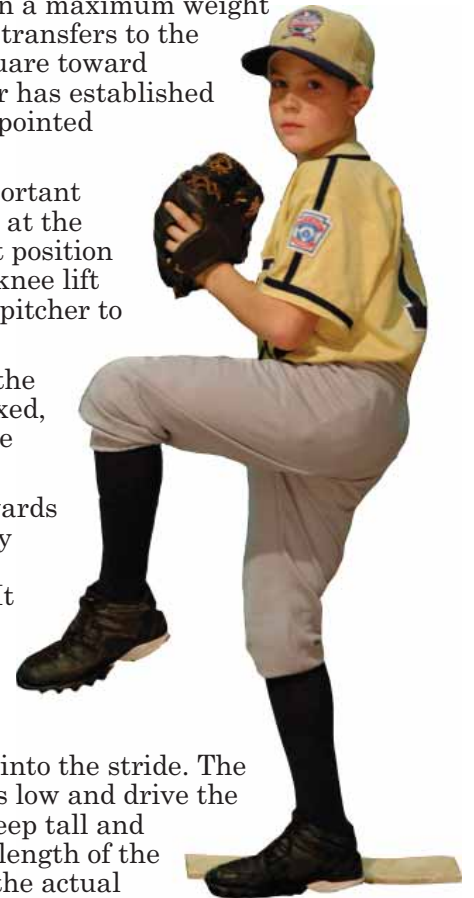
**The Stride:** From the leg lift position, the pitcher should drive off the back leg into the stride. The extent of the drive is the pitcher's preference. Some pitchers like to drop their hips low and drive the ball to the plate using their legs as a part of the throwing action. Others like to keep tall and in a sense "fall" towards the plate. This is a decision for the pitcher to make. The length of the stride may range anywhere from approximately 85 percent of the body height to the actual length of the entire body.



*Weight Transfer*



*Pivot Foot*



*Leg Lift*



*Launch Position*

Good advice is to use the pitcher's physical attributes when making this decision. If the pitcher is tall, then the "tall and fall" method might be desired. If the pitcher is not tall then the "drop and drive" method might be desired. The only problem with the drop and drive method is that some pitchers have a tendency to drop and drag the elbow during the throwing motion. A low elbow at delivery of the pitch can lead to arm and shoulder injuries. The "tall and fall" method will not necessarily keep the elbow from dragging, but it makes it easier for the pitcher to stay on top of the ball.

What is important is that the pitcher gets a maximum stride that is comfortable. A maximum stride will allow the pitcher to release the ball closer to the plate, increasing velocity. Over-striding may result in the pitcher having trouble keeping pitches down in the strike zone.

As the lift knee moves forward into the stride, the pitcher should keep the knee flexible. This prevents the pitcher from kicking out the foot when pushing toward the plate. If the pitcher does kick the lift foot out when striding, the pitcher will normally arch the back in order to attempt to gain balance. Arching the back cuts down on the stride.

As the pitcher lands on the stride foot, make sure that the landing is on the ball of the foot with the toes pointing just slightly closed to the plate. Landing on the heel of the foot will cause a "jerk" or momentary stop in the delivery. This can create arm problems.

The foot must be in a direct line with the target when landing. If the foot lands away from this line, then the pitcher is forced to either throw across the body, or the follow-through will be affected by the loss of balance.

**Getting to the Launch Position:** As the pitcher lifts the leg and takes a comfortable stride, the hands must separate and reach what is called the launch position. The pitcher must concentrate on turning the thumbs in toward the body (down) and turning the palms away from the body when separating the ball from the glove. This action helps to get both the glove-side elbow and the throwing-arm elbow to shoulder height. When the hands break, be sure the pitcher separates the ball and glove inside of the lift knee. If the pitcher throws the hands outside the lift knee, the back may arch.

There are three checkpoints in the launch position. One is to be sure the glove-side elbow is at shoulder height when the pitcher is ready to deliver the ball. This will give the pitcher a better balance and will aid in keeping the throwing elbow from dragging.

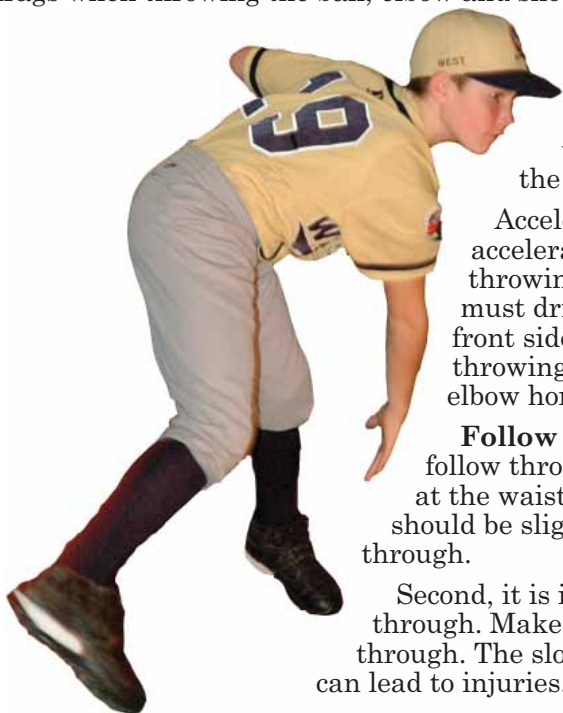
The second checkpoint involves the throwing elbow at or slightly above shoulder height. If the elbow drops or drags when throwing the ball, elbow and shoulder problems are soon to follow.

Finally and most important, make sure the ball is facing away from the catcher toward second base. Keep the elbow slightly bent in an "L" shape. If the ball is not facing away, the elbow will have a tendency to drag below shoulder height as the ball is thrown. With the ball facing away in the correct position, as the hips are rotated to the plate the ball also will automatically be rotated toward the plate.

**Acceleration of the Arm:** From the launch position, the pitcher begins to accelerate the arm. At this point, the glove side is just as important as the throwing side. With the elbows at shoulder height in the launch, the pitcher must drive the glove side elbow down vertically past the hip. By "driving the front side down" the pitcher ensures that the throwing shoulder is up and the throwing elbow is at shoulder height. If the pitcher drives the glove hand or elbow horizontally, the throwing elbow may drag.

**Follow Through:** Pitchers must adhere to two absolutes for an effective follow through after delivering the pitch. First, be sure that the pitcher bends at the waist and is getting the head out over the stride knee. Also, the front knee should be slightly bent to cushion the weight transfer, and to aid in a smooth follow through.

Second, it is important that the pitcher is in a good fielding position after following through. Make sure that the pitcher does not stop the throwing arm during the follow through. The slowing action causes control problems and completely stopping the arm can lead to injuries.



*Follow Through*

## PITCH VARIETY

A Little League pitcher should concentrate on mastering two pitches, the fast ball and the change up. As players get older, they may elect to learn the breaking ball.

**Fast Ball – Four-Seam Grip:** The most commonly used grip for accuracy is the four-seam fast ball. The four-seam fast ball is held with the index and middle fingers positioned across the large seams. A finger's width should be the distance between the index and middle fingers with the thumb positioned underneath the ball on a seam. The pitcher should be sure there is a small space between the web of the hand and the ball. The third and fourth fingers are curled back.

**Fast Ball – Two-Seam Grip:** The two-seam fast ball is held with the index and middle fingers across the seams where the horseshoe-like seams almost meet. The thumb is placed on a seam at the bottom of the ball, while the third and fourth fingers are curled back. Using this grip provides a little extra movement on the fast ball. Again, the pitcher should be sure there is a small space between the web of the hand and the ball.

**Fast Ball – With-the-Seam Grip:** On this grip, the index and middle fingers should be placed on the seams where both horseshoe seams almost meet. The thumb is placed on a seam underneath the ball. The pitcher should be sure there is a small space between the web of the hand and the ball. The third and fourth fingers are curled back. When thrown, this pitch has a tendency to move a little which will make it more difficult to hit.

**Three-Finger Change Up:** The purpose of a change up is to give the appearance of a fastball, but because the speed of the ball is much slower, the hitter's timing is disrupted.

The three-finger change up can be gripped in any way the pitcher feels comfortable. Most pitchers grip the first and third fingers running the length of the seams with the middle finger in between the seams. The thumb is positioned underneath on a seam. Some pitchers grip the three-finger change up similar to a four seam fastball with slight modifications.

The most important aspect of the change up is that the ball, unlike all the fast ball grips, is tucked back against the pad of the hand. When throwing any change up, the key is to keep the same pitching mechanics and arm speed. The grip of the ball will slow the speed of the pitch.



*Four-seam Fastball*



*Two-seam Fastball*



*With-the-Seam Fastball*



*Three-finger Change Up*

## DRILLS

The following drills are designed to break down the pitching motion into progressions that can be isolated. They can be done from shorter throwing distances.

**Slow Motion Drill:** Standing on the rubber, or a simulated rubber, or simply line in the dirt or grass and without a ball, the pitcher begins the pitching progression as slow as he or she possibly can. This concentration drill allows the coach and the pitcher to look very closely at each progression of the motion and make corrections. The pitcher fakes a pitch and completes the progression with the follow through.

**Pivot Foot Drill:** The pivot foot drill begins with the pitcher's pivot foot or power foot placed against the rubber with the instep facing the target or the plate. The weight is on the stride foot. At this point the body should be in control and above the plane of the rubber. The pitcher transfers the weight to the pivot foot which then creates the directional side (meaning glove side pointing to the plate) and goes right through to the knee lift and finishes the progression. This drill reinforces the control over the rubber as well as the creation of the directional side.

**Knee Lift Drill:** Starting in the knee lift position, the pitcher simply holds a proper, comfortable knee lift for three to five seconds, and then completes the progression moving to the stride and launch positions. This drill reinforces the balance needed and controlled direction towards the plate.

**Launch Drill:** With the feet separated more than shoulder-width apart, and in a good launch position (both elbows at shoulder height, ball facing away and throwing arm in an "L shape), the pitcher should simply lift the

stride foot slightly, transfer weight from the pivot foot back to the stride foot, continue with the progression by driving the glove side elbow down and back past the hip, and throw the ball with a good follow through.

If needed, the coach can reinforce any position of the launch by simply holding or reinforcing the position. For instance, a pitcher may drag his elbow through the delivery, and the coach may correct it by holding the elbow at the correct height at the start of the launch.

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## EIGHT ESSENTIALS OF POST-PITCHING RECOVERY

BY JIM RONAI MS, PT, ATC, CSCS

The institution of the pitch count in Little League Baseball represents a positive step towards ensuring that the game of baseball is safer both in the present and future careers of young pitchers.

As an adjunct to this new pitch count regulation and in an attempt to protect the health and safety of youth baseball pitchers, the following post-performance suggestions are offered. Since most youth baseball pitchers are typically removed from the mound, but not necessarily from the game, these suggestions are intended for post-game or for a time when the pitcher is considered done for the day.

1. Children learn most effectively with a consistent routine. All athletes need to have a routine that they perform both pre- and post-game. The routine needs to be monitored and consistent. Athletes need to know that the routine needs to be completed correctly before they will be permitted to participate in subsequent game or practice play.
2. Perform a “cool down activity.” Have pitchers jog for four to six minutes, to the point when they start to sweat. This increases general blood flow throughout the body and prepares the body for a post-performance flexibility routine. Increasing blood flow allows the body to circulate oxygenated blood to fatigued muscles. Oxygenated blood helps soft tissues recover and heal following activity.
3. Spend five minutes on a post-game, movement-based, “dynamic flexibility program.” Incorporate movements for the forearms, shoulders as well as the torso and lower body. As an example, have athletes perform progressive arm circles forward and backward for their arm and shoulder muscles, and walking heel grabs for their thigh and hip flexor muscles. These drills represent only a portion of a post-outing routine that help the athlete stretch their entire body. Along with increasing the flow of oxygenated blood to muscles and tendons, stretching dynamically following an athletic performance helps to mediate the by-products of exercise that make the body stiff and sore.
4. Designate one staff member to review the pitcher’s performance. Keep things simple and to the point. Review the negative aspects of the pitcher’s performance, but be sure to finish the conversation by emphasizing the positive. Leave the athlete feeling good about his/her outing.
5. Since most young athletes answer questions about how they feel with a shrug or a one-word answer, develop a visual analog scale for the pitchers to use to quantify how they feel before, during, and after the game. The scale can be something as simple as a one-to-10 scale with a picture of a frown at No. 1, a neutral face at No. 5, and a happy face at No. 10. Ask the pitcher how he/she feels before the game, at the end of each inning, and at the end of the performance. The visual scale allows younger players to easily point to the number or picture that most describes how the arm is feeling. Coaches can use the scale to inquire about the condition of a pitcher’s arm before the game as well as any symptoms that he/she develops during or at the conclusion of the game. Monitoring a young pitcher’s perception of his/her physical wellness helps coaches make note of trends related to performance or potential injury related to volume, lack of endurance, or other variables.
6. Having a cooler of ice available in the dugout is an important part of optimizing a pitcher’s recovery. Keep a few bags of ice available for pitchers to apply to their shoulders and elbows following a pitching outing. Never apply ice directly to the skin or for more than 12-15 minutes. Also be aware of the ulnar nerve found in the area of the “funny bone,” and be sure not to apply ice directly over it.
7. Do not allow pitchers to go home and re-create their game by throwing with “coach mom or dad.” Once they are done on the field, they are done for the day. Encourage families to follow this approach for the sake of the child’s health.
8. In an attempt to establish consistent pitching performance, athletes need to gain and maintain strength as well as control of their bodies. An age-appropriate strength, balance and coordination routine for your pitchers should be taught at the beginning of the season and should be

performed by pitchers the day after each outing. These activities help to ensure that the athlete is taking care of his/her “pitching muscles” on a consistent basis in preparation for the next outing. Simple programs should address balance, as well as strengthening for the rotator cuff, back, core and leg muscles. Remember that the season is long, and that without training, muscles fatigue and lose strength over time. Keep them strong for the long haul.

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# Little League -- Baseball Game Pitch Log

Team \_\_\_\_\_ Opponent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Pitcher's Name	Uniform Number	League Age	X Cross out the number as that pitch is thrown.																																								
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Pitching eligibility varies by the league age of the pitcher, which is the pitcher's age as of May 1 of the current year. The pitching eligibility regulation is Regulation VI (see current rule book for details). A blank electronic version of this form is available for free download at [www.littleleague.org](http://www.littleleague.org).

## LITTLE LEAGUE FIELD CENTERS

Little League Field Centers are fully staffed year round to provide assistance and direction to Little League volunteers. All general questions, written suggestions for improving this rulebook, tournament inquiries, rule interpretation requests and supply orders should be directed to the appropriate field center in your region as indicated.

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# ***What They Are Saying About Little League's Pitch Count Regulation...***

**"This is one of the most important injury-prevention steps ever initiated in youth baseball by the leader in youth baseball. It is certain to serve as the youth sports injury prevention cornerstone and the inspiration for other youth organizations to take the initiative to get serious about injury prevention in youth sports." – *Dr. James Andrews, medical director and the world's foremost authority on pitching injuries at the American Sports Medicine Institute***

**"We, as scouts, like fresh arms and cringe when we hear of players throwing 100-plus pitches. You can teach players with fresh arms and mold them. Older players, or players who have thrown a lot, simply don't adapt well to change and have a greater chance of being injured." – *Jimmy Lester, scout for the Pittsburgh Pirates***

**"Following the pitch count rule made our managers teach the fundamentals and start to develop more pitching at a younger age." – *Jeff Keller, manager of the 2007 Northwest U.S. Champion Murrayhill (Ore.) Little League team***

**"It's too early to see kids having elbow and shoulder surgery at 17 and 18 years old. I vote for doing the best we can to take care of them, and that's why I support this program." – *Mike Mussina, Major League Baseball pitcher***

**"By the time (the Marlins) sign a player, I've done extensive medical background work. A lot of guys have already had specific problems with their arms because coaches don't seem to realize that there are only a certain number of throws a player has in him." – *Matt Anderson, scout for the Florida Marlins***

**"Naturally, this rule will make coaches develop more pitching. I've said all along, a pitcher's arm has a certain number of throws in it before it gives out. Little League is for fun no matter how you look at it. It's not about throwing a player's arm away to win a game." – *Randy Morris, manager of the 2006 Little League Baseball World Championship team, Columbus (Ga.) Little League***

**"I think Little League going to a pitch count is awesome. I think since players in pro baseball are on pitch counts, that tells you something. Teams want their pitchers to be healthy and have something left. I can't imagine a Little League coach's argument against that." – *Dale Murphy, former Major League player***

**"Over the course of the regular season and into tournament play is when you will see the benefits of counting a player's pitches. By keeping pitch numbers down in April and May, these players will be better pitchers in June and July." – *Jamie Reed, athletic trainer for the Texas Rangers***

**"Little League has a rich history of pioneering baseball safety innovations. As the world's largest organized youth sports program, Little League is proud to take a leadership position in youth sports safety." – *Stephen D. Keener, president and chief executive officer, Little League Baseball***