

# ZEELAND LITTLE LEAGUE COACHES GUIDE

Brandon LaRosa

ZEELAND LITTLE LEAGUE PRESIDENT 320 E Main Ave, Zeeland MI 49464

## A Note from ZLL

*The sign of a great Little League coach won't be found in trophies or wins, but rather the number of kids who sign up to play again the next year... that means their coach created an environment that made the game fun for those kids.*

*- Darren Fenster*

Before diving into the nuts and bolts, myself and Zeeland Little League would like to first and foremost thank you for volunteering to be a coach! Without people like you, this league would not exist and we would not be able to provide kids with the opportunity to play the game they love. Whether this is your first year coaching, or a veteran of 20+ years, this guide will provide you with tools, tips, and drills to elevate the level of play of your team.

There are so many philosophies and methodologies when it comes to coaching, and even the game itself at the highest level is constantly evolving. The features you will find in this guide are the things I have found successful in my time playing and coaching. With that being said, I am constantly reading articles, listening, and watching coaches to pick up new ideas to help teach kids the game. My process is to absorb as much information as possible, and then filter that to what I think makes sense and is feasible. I suggest doing the same thing with this guide – read the items that interest you and take as much out of it as you want.

If you have any questions when going through this guide, feel free to email me so that we can talk about it. I am happy to discuss and clarify anything you find here. My goal is to provide you with the tools and knowledge to help Zeeland kids and grow this program!



- Thank you!

Brandon LaRosa

Zeeland Little League President

[ZLLPresident@gmail.com](mailto:ZLLPresident@gmail.com)

616-403-5754

[www.ZeelandLittleLeague.com](http://www.ZeelandLittleLeague.com)

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**Appendix C: Positional Chart For Games**

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## Getting Started

Now that you are stepping up to coach, there are a few items to become familiar with before the season starts. These are items to look over so that you are prepared once your roster is formed. Once you have a team, you will want to spend your available time on the field!

### The Coaches Code of Conduct

The Little League International Coaches Pledge reads as follows:

I will teach all children to play fair and do their best. I will positively support all managers, coaches, and players. I will respect the decisions of the umpire. I will praise a good effort despite the outcome of the game.

With that basic foundation in mind, Zeeland Little League has developed a Coaches Code of Conduct. This code will be delivered to you for review and signature once you are selected to be a coach. For reference, the code is listed below:

### The Rule Book

When I first got involved with Little League, I made the mistake of assuming I knew the rules of the game. Of course there are some basic things that stay the same no matter the level, but there are a vast amount of differences in the rules depending on what division you are coaching. The first thing you should do is pick up a Little League Rule Book. There are a few options here:

- We provide each team a rulebook!
- Little League now has a rulebook app that costs \$1.99 and will be updated each season. To download the app, click here → <https://www.littleleague.org/playing-rules/little-league-rulebook-app/>
- You can buy the current year rule book for \$7.00 (or electronic version for \$4.99) at this link → <https://www.littleleague.org/news/2018-little-league-rulebooks-now-available-in-print-ebooks/>

Zeeland Little League defaults to the rules provided in this rule book in almost all cases. As rules are updated by Little League International, Zeeland Little League will incorporate the same rule changes. The rule book does allow for local leagues to create their own rules depending on the division in order to provide fair and competitive games. These custom rules are created and approved by the Zeeland Little League Board on a year-by-year basis. For divisions that play games against other local leagues, the custom rules will be formed in conjunction with the other leagues. Therefore, all games within a division should be playing under the same set of rules.

If the division you are coaching in will have custom rules outside of what is in the Little League Rule book, those rules will be posted in the “League Rules” of the Zeeland Little League Website

([www.ZeelandLittleLeague.com](http://www.ZeelandLittleLeague.com)). These rules will also be given to you during your Coaches Meeting. It is important to understand these custom rules will only apply to your games, and other leagues may play under entirely different sets of rules.

If you ever need further clarification on a rule, please email your question to [ZeelandLittleLeague@gmail.com](mailto:ZeelandLittleLeague@gmail.com). If you feel your question is too long or difficult to type into an email, just send a message explaining the basics of the question and request a phone call. Someone on the Zeeland Little League Board will follow up with you with an answer! Although it is very cliché, please understand that there are NO dumb questions. The more you understand the rules, the more comfortable you will be as a coach.

### Know the Schedule

There are a few events to be aware of that happen before the start of every season, and coaches in Zeeland Little League are required to attend:

- Showcase Day – usually done in early March, this is an event where players of each age group get to show off their skills. Players are also evaluated to help ensure teams are formed evenly when rosters are determined.
- Draft Day – usually done in late March, this event is organized by division and is where coaches get to form their rosters. Coaches will have basic information on each player including a skill rating and age. Coaches will pick players in a “snake” draft and must meet certain requirements with their picks based on skill level and age. The rules and requirements of the draft will be explained in more detail based on the division.
  - **NOTE: Don't get too caught up in the draft! You are putting together a team of young kids, not a fantasy football team. Go into it with the attitude of every kid you draft, you will work on helping them improve.**
- Coaches Meeting – usually done in late March, and sometimes the same day as Draft Day, this is an event for coaches to meet other members of the Zeeland Little League Board. Coaches will also get details about equipment, rules in their division, and other important information.

The final days and times of these events will be posted on the Zeeland Little League Website and emailed to you. Make sure to mark the dates that apply to the division you are coaching in on your calendar and plan to attend!

Zeeland Little League is also dedicated to providing tools and training for its coaches. Be on the lookout for clinics and other events that are being provided to help you develop as a coach.

### Family Expectations

Coaching Little League creates a very busy schedule in the Spring. Coaches typically spend 3 hours per day for 2-3 days per week at the baseball/softball field. That assumes the weather cooperates and doesn't force teams into double headers or 4 games in a week. As most of the

coaches in Zeeland Little League have their son or daughter on the team, this is a great way to spend time with your kid. It is also important, however, to set the expectations with the other members of your family about the time you are committing.

Zeeland Little League is proud to play their home games at some of the best parks in Michigan. Many of the parks contain parks and playgrounds which are great places to bring friends and family. Kaat and Huizenga Park is always an exciting atmosphere to watch games. Please invite and bring your friends and family to games and enjoy the amenities. Also, be on the look-out for family events such as Kaat Kids Day and Girls Night Out!



## Being a Coach

No matter what your knowledge of the game of baseball or softball may be, there are certain areas of coaching that apply across the board. These concepts are building blocks that should be applied to anything you do as a coach. The acronym that Zealand Little League uses is **ZLL**, which in this case stands for Zeal, Language, and Leadership.

### Zeal

To ensure the players on your team are enjoying themselves, it is important that you bring passion and excitement as a coach, which is part of zeal. This is probably something you have heard before. The difference that the word *zeal* includes is having passion and energy towards a cause. The cause in this case is making sure every player on your team is enjoying the experience.

Every coach will express his or her “zeal” differently. Some coaches are very animated, while others are more laid back. The important thing is to make sure your players know that you care about each and every one of them, and that you are supporting them in a positive fashion. However you bring your zeal, make sure you are as consistent as possible! When a player sees you lose your zeal, they naturally lose some of their zeal as well. Here are some suggestions for incorporating zeal into your coaching:

- Support players with words of encouragement
  - Praise when a kid does something great, and encourage a kid to keep trying and working when he/she struggles or fails.
- Show the players that you are having fun
  - The more fun you have, the more fun it is for everyone
- Leave your “worries” behind when you come to the field
  - Everyone has other things going on in their lives, but when you are with your team, be sure to focus on them and give them 100% of your energy.

### Language

There are two distinct ways coaches use language with players – the things they say, and their body language.

**Words** – Just because something makes sense in your head, doesn’t mean the player is going to understand what you say and implement it. Sometimes you have to be creative in your approach to get what you want through a player’s head. Sometimes it takes hearing something over and over for it to finally click with a player. If a player isn’t grasping what you say, take the responsibility to communicate it in a different fashion to help the player out!

**Body** – Your body language can go a long way in affecting the player experience. We teach players to not “hang their head” after an error, yet many times coaches can’t hold themselves

to that standard. As mentioned in zeal, how you carry yourself will have a direct impact on the players, and many will mimic the way you behave. Make sure your body language matches what you expect out of your players. Be mindful of the little things and how you react during certain situations. Having good body language will go a long way in making a player feel supported and confident in the face of adversity.

## Leadership

To me, leadership is influence. How well you can influence your players shows your ability to lead. To be a good influencer/leader, take the following into account:

- Knowledge of the game – how much you know goes a long way in influencing players. This guide is meant to increase your knowledge so that you are confident in what you are talking about.
- Respect – although you may feel you must demand respect as a coach, while in some sense is true, it is more important to show respect to your players. It is ok to listen to what a player has to say about something, and use that information to help them. When a player feels like his/her voice is not being heard, they are less likely to listen to you.
- Put players first – make sure your decisions are about what is best for the player. Just as our league makes decisions based on the player experience, be sure you do the same in how you make decisions. It is easy to focus on your best 2 or 3 players and make them the central focus of your team. Instead, the real challenge is to take a kid with the least amount of skill and experience and improve them as much as possible.

## Skill Levels

One of the most common things coaches look for guidance on is what skills they should be teaching their players. It can be especially difficult when your team has players with a wide range of skill levels. The tables below are a great place to start for skills to be taught in the various areas of the game. The tables are broken down by division, with more specific information in the following sections.

**Important: Players will undoubtedly vary in their abilities with each skill. With that being said, there is room for improvement in these skills for each player. Focus on improving the skill of each player relative to only that player. Knowing the strengths and weaknesses of each player on your team will help you to better improve each player in his/her skills.**

## Baseball – AA & Softball Minors (8-10 Year Olds)

Area	Techniques	Awareness
<b>Pitching</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How to grip a baseball (4 seam grip)</li> <li>- 5 steps for pitching mechanics</li> <li>- Comfortable and repeatable delivery</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Know the strikezone</li> <li>- Repeatable mechanics</li> </ul>
<b>Catching</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comfortable squat position</li> <li>- Show pitcher a target</li> <li>- Let the ball close the glove</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Know the strikezone</li> <li>- Meet the ball with the glove</li> <li>- Catch everything</li> </ul>
<b>Throwing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- First step (with correct foot)</li> <li>- Body turn</li> <li>- Takeaway (point at target w/ glove hand)</li> <li>- Release w/ follow through</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accuracy at 40 feet</li> <li>- Repeatable and balanced throwing mechanics</li> </ul>
<b>Infield</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ready position</li> <li>- Proper fielding position with feet/waist/glove – bend with knees</li> <li>- Throwing the ball after fielding</li> <li>- Catching a throw at a base for a force play</li> <li>- Tagging a runner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fielding the “routine” play</li> <li>- Know where to throw the ball before it is hit</li> <li>- Know when a runner is forced out and when they must be tagged</li> </ul>
<b>Outfield</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ready position</li> <li>- Two hands to catch ball above head</li> <li>- Throwing ball back to infield</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Be able to catch a simple pop-fly</li> <li>- Calling the ball</li> </ul>
<b>Hitting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Balanced and comfortable stance</li> <li>- Trigger</li> <li>- Making contact</li> <li>- Staying balanced through swing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Swinging at hittable pitches</li> <li>- Understand the count</li> </ul>
<b>Baserunning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Less than 2 outs – groundball</li> <li>- Less than 2 outs – flyball</li> <li>- Running through 1<sup>st</sup> base</li> <li>- Sliding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Know a force situation</li> <li>- Looking at 3<sup>rd</sup> base coach for go/stop</li> <li>- Hustle</li> <li>- 2 outs = GO</li> </ul>

## Baseball - AAA (9-11 Year Olds)

Area	Techniques	Awareness
<b>Pitching</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 5 steps for pitching mechanics</li> <li>- Comfortable and repeatable delivery</li> <li>- Secondary pitch (change-up)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Locating pitches</li> <li>- Throwing through the glove</li> <li>- Repeatable mechanics</li> </ul>
<b>Catching</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comfortable and athletic squat position</li> <li>- Show pitcher a target</li> <li>- Basic “framing” (also “sticking a pitch”)</li> <li>- Basic step &amp; throw for stealing</li> <li>- Set up outside and inside</li> <li>- Basic two-knee block</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Know the strikezone</li> <li>- Meet the ball with the glove</li> <li>- Learn to call pitches</li> </ul>
<b>Throwing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- First step towards target</li> <li>- Body turn parallel to target</li> <li>- Takeaway (point at target w/ glove hand)</li> <li>- Release w/ follow through</li> <li>- Proper arm slot and grip (four-seam)</li> <li>- Catch and transfer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accuracy at 60 feet</li> <li>- Repeatable and balanced throwing mechanics</li> </ul>
<b>Infield</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pre-pitch movement into ready position</li> <li>- Approach to ball to get to proper fielding position with feet/waist/glove</li> <li>- Throwing the ball after fielding</li> <li>- Catching a throw at a base for a force play</li> <li>- Tagging a runner</li> <li>- Footwork at 2<sup>nd</sup> base for double play</li> <li>- Fielding a ball on the move</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fielding the “routine” play</li> <li>- Moving side to side to field</li> <li>- Know where to throw the ball before it is hit</li> <li>- Know when a runner is forced out and when they must be tagged</li> </ul>
<b>Outfield</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ready position</li> <li>- Two hands to catch ball above head</li> <li>- Throwing ball to cut-off</li> <li>- Get to the spot of the ball (don’t drift)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Be able to catch a simple pop-fly</li> <li>- Calling the ball</li> </ul>
<b>Hitting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Balanced and comfortable stance</li> <li>- Trigger/Load</li> <li>- Making solid contact</li> <li>- Staying balanced through swing</li> <li>- Generating leverage with legs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Swinging at hittable pitches</li> <li>- Understand the count</li> </ul>
<b>Baserunning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Less than 2 outs – groundball</li> <li>- Less than 2 outs – flyball</li> <li>- Running through 1<sup>st</sup> base</li> <li>- Sliding</li> <li>- Secondary lead</li> <li>- Stealing (when ball reaches hitter)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Know a force situation</li> <li>- Looking at 3<sup>rd</sup> base coach for go/stop</li> <li>- Hustle</li> <li>- 2 Outs = GO</li> </ul>

## Baseball & Softball - MAJORS (10-12 Year Olds)

Area	Techniques	Awareness
<b>Pitching</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 5 steps for pitching mechanics</li> <li>- Comfortable and repeatable delivery</li> <li>- Secondary pitch (change-up)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Locating pitches</li> <li>- Repeatable mechanics</li> <li>- Throw pitches with purpose</li> </ul>
<b>Catching</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Comfortable and athletic squat position</li> <li>- Show pitcher a target</li> <li>- Basic “framing” (also “sticking a pitch”)</li> <li>- Footwork and transfer for steal</li> <li>- Set up outside and inside</li> <li>- Blocking all balls in the dirt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Know the strikezone</li> <li>- Meet the ball with the glove</li> <li>- Learn to call pitches</li> <li>- Block and recover</li> <li>- Communicate with team (leadership)</li> </ul>
<b>Throwing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Footwork to bring momentum to target</li> <li>- Body turn parallel to target</li> <li>- Takeaway (point at target w/ glove hand)</li> <li>- Release w/ follow through</li> <li>- Proper arm slot and grip (four-seam)</li> <li>- Catch and transfer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accuracy at 90 feet</li> <li>- Repeatable and balanced throwing mechanics</li> </ul>
<b>Infield</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pre-pitch movement into ready position</li> <li>- Approach to ball to get to proper fielding position with feet/waist/glove</li> <li>- Throwing the ball after fielding</li> <li>- Catching a throw at a base for a force play</li> <li>- Tagging a runner</li> <li>- Footwork at 2<sup>nd</sup> base for double play</li> <li>- Fielding a ball on the move</li> <li>- Backhand and glove side fielding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fielding the “routine” play</li> <li>- Moving side to side to field</li> <li>- Know where to throw the ball before it is hit</li> <li>- Know when a runner is forced out and when they must be tagged</li> <li>- Turning a double play</li> </ul>
<b>Outfield</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ready position</li> <li>- Two hands to catch ball above head</li> <li>- Throwing ball to cut-off</li> <li>- Get to the spot of the ball (don’t drift)</li> <li>- Drop step – turn and go on ball over head</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Be able to catch a simple pop-fly</li> <li>- Calling the ball</li> <li>- Catch fly ball on the run</li> </ul>
<b>Hitting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Balanced and comfortable stance</li> <li>- Load and weight transfer</li> <li>- Making solid contact (barrel the ball)</li> <li>- Staying balanced through swing</li> <li>- Generating leverage with legs</li> <li>- Bat control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Swinging at hittable pitches</li> <li>- Understand the count</li> <li>- Two Strike Approach (protect with 2 strikes)</li> </ul>
<b>Baserunning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Less than 2 outs – groundball/flyball</li> <li>- Running through 1<sup>st</sup> base</li> <li>- Sliding</li> <li>- Secondary lead</li> <li>- Stealing (when ball reaches hitter)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Know a force situation</li> <li>- Looking at 3<sup>rd</sup> base coach for go/stop</li> <li>- Hustle</li> <li>- 2 Outs = GO</li> </ul>

## Drills and Skills

The following pages will go into detail about positional mechanics, along with drills to teach those mechanics. The general order is as follows:

- ZLL Video (Coaches Clinic)
- Pitching
- Catching
- Infield/throwing
- Outfield
- Hitting
- Baserunning
- Fun Drills/Games

## Coaches Clinic Video

Most of the explanations and drills listed below are also in video format! ZLL conducted a coaches clinic in February 2020 to show coaches how to run drills and teach certain aspects of the game. The full video is posted on youtube and can be found on the website. The links in the table below will take you to the specific sections regarding the skills and drills in this guide:

Chapter	Time	Link In Video
How to Start Practice	0:00:00	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=0">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=0</a>
Flip Game	0:00:54	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=54">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=54</a>
Two-Ball	0:02:18	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=138">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=138</a>
Pepper	0:03:41	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=221">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=221</a>
Baserunning	0:05:58	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=358">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=358</a>
Home to First	0:06:36	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=396">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=396</a>
Home to Second	0:07:59	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=479">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=479</a>
3rd Base Coach - Home to 2nd and/or 1st to 3rd	0:09:18	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=558">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=558</a>
Secondary Leads	0:13:44	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=824">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=824</a>
Throwing Progressions	0:15:27	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=927">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=927</a>
Accuracy Game	0:20:37	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=1237">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=1237</a>
Quick Hands Game	0:22:46	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=1366">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=1366</a>
Box Drill	0:24:43	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=1483">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=1483</a>
Relay Drill	0:27:15	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=1635">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=1635</a>
Infield 101	0:28:42	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=1722">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=1722</a>
Infield Partner Drills	0:31:57	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=1917">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=1917</a>
Bucket Drill	0:33:50	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=2030">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=2030</a>
Footwork Line Drill	0:35:11	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=2111">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=2111</a>
Backhands	0:36:56	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=2216">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=2216</a>
Double Play	0:38:04	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=2284">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=2284</a>
Fungo Tips	0:39:20	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=2360">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=2360</a>
Drop-Step Drill	0:40:55	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=2455">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=2455</a>
Outfield Communication	0:41:54	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=2514">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=2514</a>
Baseball Pitching	0:42:55	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=2575">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=2575</a>
Catching 101	0:57:23	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=3443">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=3443</a>
Softball Pitching 101	1:07:21	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=4041">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=4041</a>
Hitting 101	1:30:09	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=5409">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=5409</a>
Hitting the Tee Properly	1:36:38	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=5798">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=5798</a>
Walk-Up Tee Drill	1:38:58	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=5938">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=5938</a>
Cano Tee Drill	1:40:33	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=6033">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=6033</a>
How to Throw Soft Toss	1:42:02	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=6122">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=6122</a>
Top/Bottom Soft Toss	1:43:44	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=6224">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=6224</a>
Color Ball Soft Toss	1:44:43	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=6283">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=6283</a>
BP and Front Toss	1:45:23	<a href="https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=6323">https://youtu.be/PzpSCNyCHGs?t=6323</a>

## Pitching

The best method to improve pitching mechanics is getting proper repetitions throwing from the mound. Coaches must be cautious, however, as throwing too many pitches is a major concern for player safety and arm health (especially in baseball). Coaches should use their practice time to have pitchers throw bullpens, where players can focus on repeating mechanics and develop muscle memory to use in games. Coaches can more easily schedule bullpens into their practices before the season to ensure players are getting proper pitching work in the weeks leading into the first game. During the season, coaches must manage player bullpens with how they use their pitchers in games. Even still, when players get loose in the bullpen before and during a game, that warm-up should be treated like a pseudo-bullpen where the player is working on mechanics.

When evaluating pitcher mechanics, no two pitchers are exactly the same. There are, however, some critical checkpoints in the pitching process that coaches can look at to help pitchers be more efficient. For instance, if a player is off balance when they “stride”, and falling to one side after delivery, the coach should focus on the stride mechanic with that player to be more in-line with the plate. Below are the breakdowns for baseball and softball for key elements to look for in youth pitching. You will notice this only focuses on the 4-seam grip fastball. This guide will not dive into secondary pitches, but if that is something you want to know more about feel free to talk to us!

Following the mechanics section are some tools to help balance pitch counts through the Little League season and ensure players are getting the opportunity to work on their mechanics, pitch in games, and pitch counts are managed.



## Baseball – 5 Steps of Pitching

**Grip** – Before getting into the 5 steps in pitching mechanics, ensure players are gripping their fastball with a “4 seam” grip for the normal fastball.



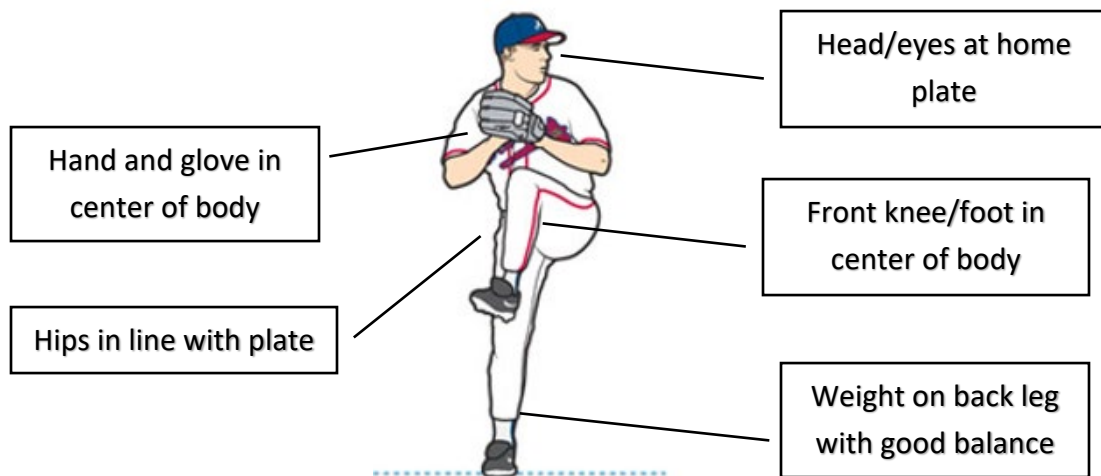
0. **Starting Position** – (Wind-Up vs. Stretch) – For players in Majors or below, the starting position of wind-up or stretch does not matter. For 50/70 and Juniors players, they must know how to pitch from the stretch for holding baserunners.

**Wind Up** – Both heels start on pitching rubber facing home plate

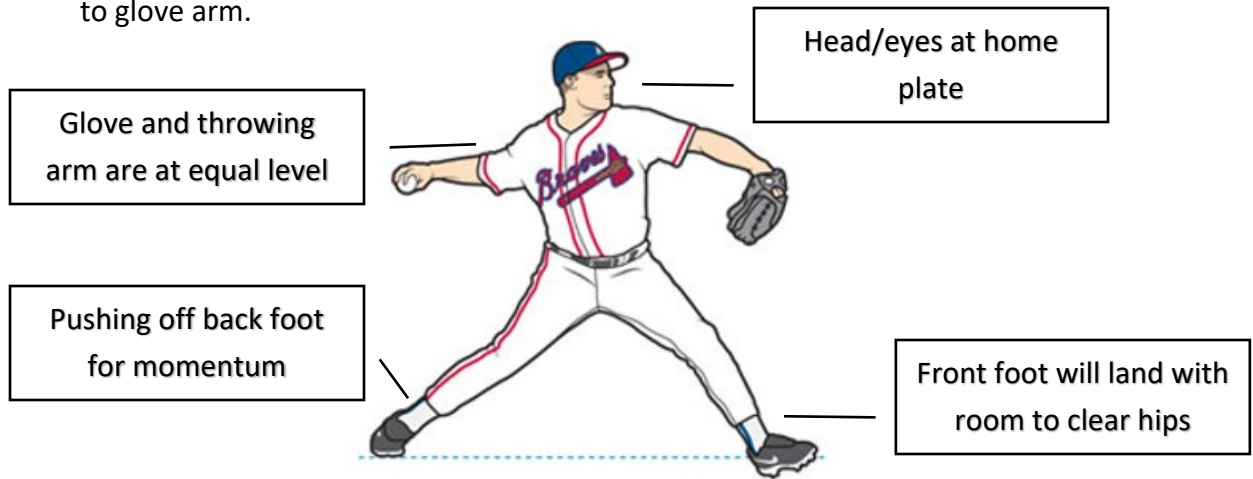
**Stretch** – Throwing side foot on rubber and glove side foot towards home plate

- a. If a player has never pitched before, the stretch is an easier place to start.
- b. If a player does both, have them focus on one preferred method.

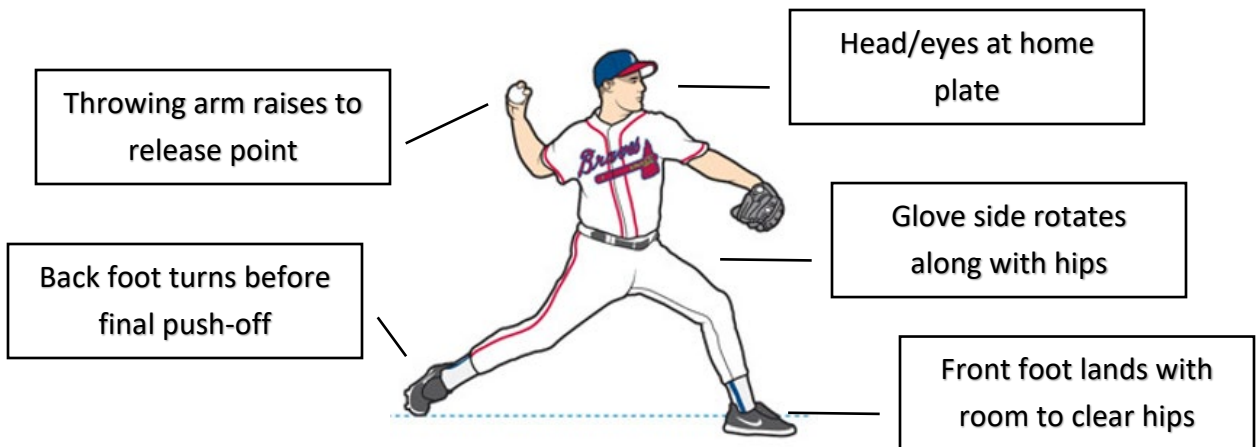
1. **Leg Lift** – Regardless of starting position, the next checkpoint in mechanics is the leg lift. The key things in the leg lift are balance, hand/glove placement, and weight distribution.



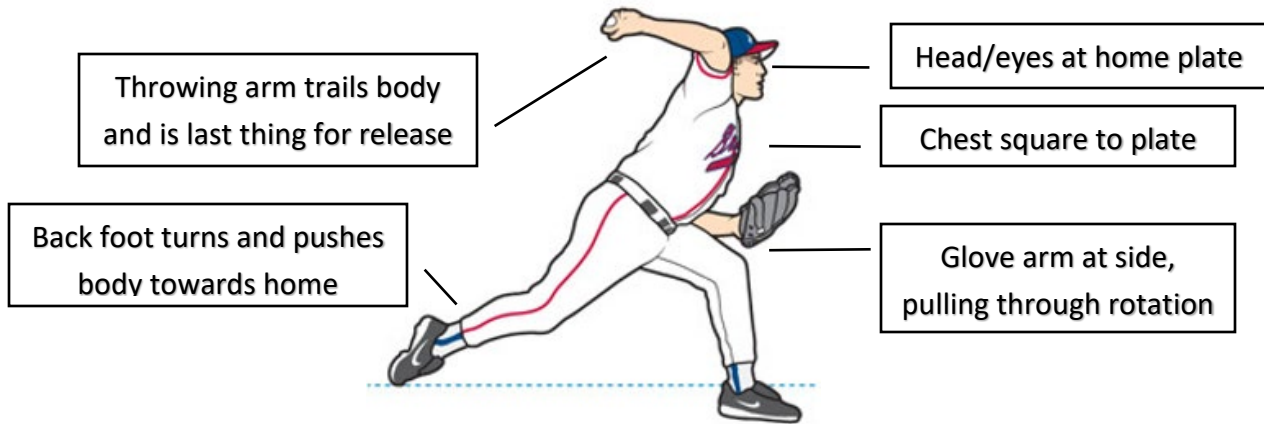
2. **Stride** – Pushing off back foot, pitcher strides front foot while reaching throwing arm back and glove arm towards target. The key elements are balance and landing spot of front foot, weight distribution, and being “opposite/equal” in throwing arm compared to glove arm.



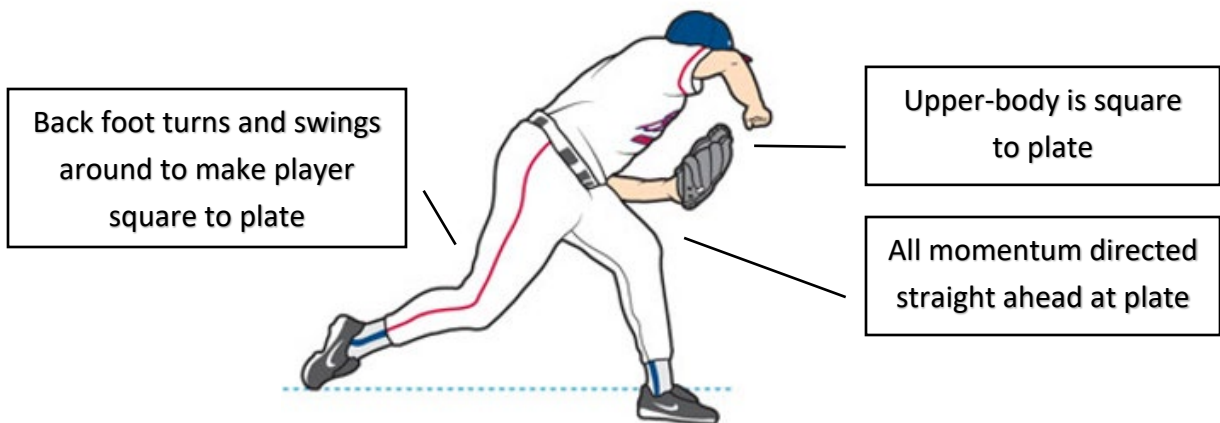
3. **Foot Strike** – As the front foot lands, the back foot rotates while transferring energy to add velocity to the pitch. The glove arm begins to rotate along with the hips, while the throwing arm raises to release point.



4. **Release** – Firing off back foot, glove rotates and finished towards knee and chest is square with plate. The throwing arm is the last thing to come through, as energy from the rest of the body assists the arm in delivering the pitch.



5. **Follow-Through** – After releasing the ball, the shoulders and chest should still be in line with home plate. The player should remain balanced with all energy/momentum in the direction of the pitch. The final movement is the back leg swinging around such that the player is square towards home plate.



## Softball – 5 Steps of Pitching

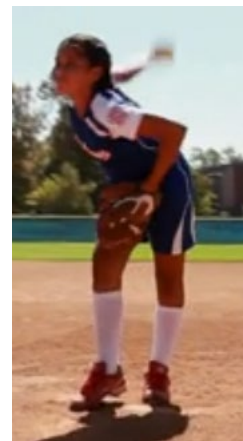
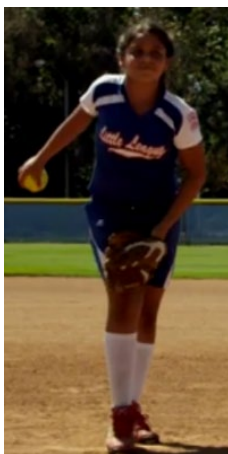
0. **Grip** – Player should grip the ball with a 4-seam grip, with four fingers on top seam and thumb on the bottom seam.



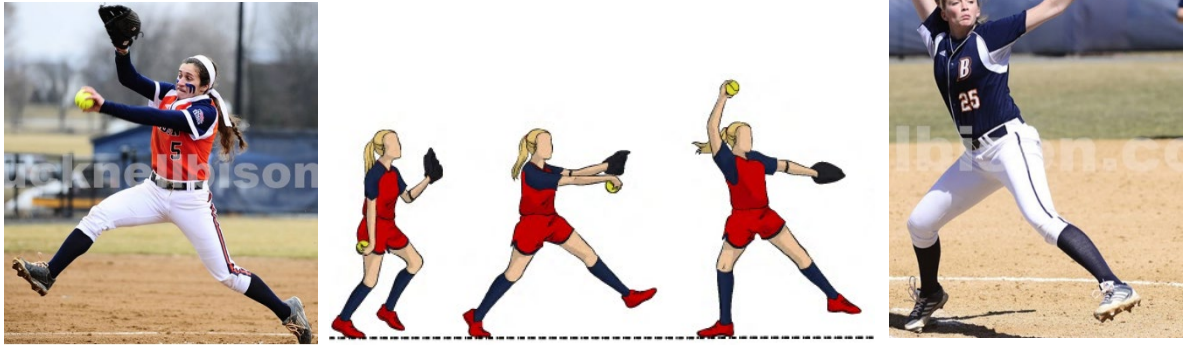
1. **Stance** – Starting with feet about shoulder width apart and offset so that throwing side heel (pivot foot) and glove side toe is on or behind rubber. Hands are together at center of body, ball in hand with grip, and hand in glove.



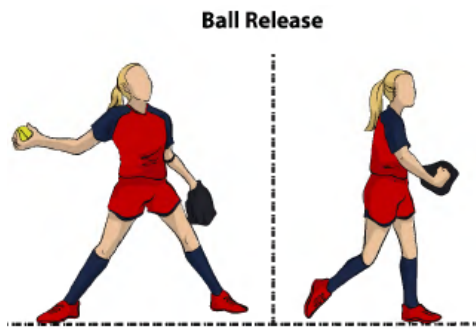
2. **Motion Start (Backswing)** – Bring throwing arm back past the hip and shift weight to back foot. NOTE – arm should swing back to a comfortable spot!



3. **Stride and Rotation** – As the throwing arm begins to move forward, the weight will shift from back leg to throwing side leg (pivot foot). The pitcher will use the momentum from the throwing side leg to push off the rubber towards home plate and rotate the body. The pitcher should then be in the “X” or “K” like position. It is important that the pitcher is driving her entire body towards home plate, which many coaches refer to as the “power line”.



4. **Pitch Release** – As the throwing arm continues around the “windmill”, the pitcher must keep her arm loose and relaxed. The ball is released by using the wrist as the hand reaches the hip. The stride foot should land firm and the body should be upright to maximize acceleration towards home plate. The stride length should be a point where the pitcher feels comfortable and can stay balanced while getting power behind the pitch.



5. **Follow Through** – As the ball is released, the push off foot should drag behind the pitcher towards center of body (think calf to calf as shown in picture above). The pitcher should keep her upper-body tall through the release and continue on the “power line”.

## Pitch Counts

Managing pitch counts for players in games can be tricky. Add on tracking pitch counts in practice, plus having various players who play on other teams and pitch in other leagues, and it can seem overwhelming. This section is designed to help coaches build a plan to ensure players are getting opportunities and not overdoing it on the mound! **And remember, if a player is complaining of arm soreness, there is no need to over-do it and have him/her throw!**

There is no magic number for how much pitching a player needs to do per week. Every player is unique, and some may need 15 pitches in a bullpen where another needs 30. The chart below is meant to be a guide for coaches on managing number of pitches per week of the Little League Season. The first table shows a recommended bull pen range for pitch counts. The second table shows a maximum number of pitches per week, and also stays under the Little League Pitch Count Rules. Coaches can use their best judgement on going slightly higher or lower (5-10) on the recommendation.

**Table 1. Bull-Pen Pitch Counts**

Age	Bull Pen Range
8	20-30
9	20-30
10	25-35
11	25-40
12	25-40
13	25-45
14	25-45

**Table 2. Weekly Pitch Count Maximums by Age**

Age	Week											
	<i>Practice Only</i>				<i>Practices and Games</i>							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
8	20	20	30	30	35	35	35	35	40	40	40	40
9	20	20	30	30	35	35	35	35	40	40	40	40
10	20	20	30	30	35	35	40	40	50	50	50	50
11	25	30	40	40	40	40	45	45	50	50	55	55
12	25	30	40	40	40	40	45	45	50	50	60	60
13	25	35	40	45	50	50	50	50	55	55	70	70
14	25	35	40	45	50	50	50	50	55	55	70	70

Again, these pitch count numbers should be treated as a recommended maximum. If a player does not pitch in a game during the week, use the ranges from Table 1 for a good bullpen session.



## Catching 101

The catching position is one of the hardest to teach and work on consistently. The only “practice” many kids get at catching is either catching bullpens or live game experience. In the grand scheme of things, many teams will only have a few players that are able and willing to catch. Therefore, it is difficult to work on the catcher position at practice as it solely focuses on a few kids who most likely also play other positions.

With all that being said, a quality catcher can control the game in many fashions. The reason we limit stealing at the younger divisions is because catchers are typically not developed enough to control the running game. In divisions where stealing is allowed, a quality catcher can make sure the opposing team is not running wild on the basepaths with the ball not even in play.

## The Set-Up

The first thing to look at with a catcher is how they set up. The set-up is the position the catcher is in before the pitcher delivers the pitch. Here are 4 key elements to the set-up”

- Athletic/balanced stance
  - Preferably on heels, but toes are ok if not flexible enough
- Backside is low with head over thighs/knees
- Knees inside the body, elbows over knees
  - Avoid getting elbow stuck inside knee!
- Low target, open glove



To check if the catcher is in a good setup, they should be comfortable and be able to stay in the squat for an extended period of time. You can also give a slight push on their shoulder and see if they fall backwards. If the catcher can remain in the squat and is comfortable, that is their best place.

## Catching the Ball

For younger catchers, the main focus is just on catching the ball. Many first time catchers have a fear of being hit, which is understandable. Fortunately, by eliminating stealing at the younger levels, catchers can focus on just trying to catch and not worry about runners advancing if they miss.

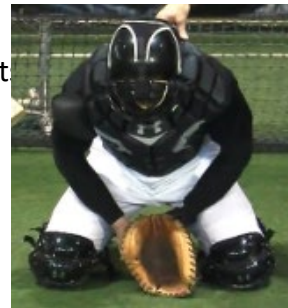
Once a catcher is comfortable and consistent at catching, the next step is to “stick” the pitch. Many people like to use the word “frame”, however this usually turns into a catcher moving their glove back over the strike zone after catching the ball to make it look more like a strike. The better method to teach catchers is to make sure the glove doesn’t move at all once they

catch it. Extra movement of the glove after catching the pitch is not necessary and doesn't fool many umpires (which is the purpose of doing that). When catchers are able to "stick" the pitch and not make any more movement once they catch it, this makes more pitches appear like strikes and gets more calls from umpires on borderline pitches. The whole goal for a catcher is to catch strikes, so "sticking" pitches is the best way to do that.

## Blocking the Ball

Most inexperienced catchers have NO DESIRE to block a ball in the dirt. It takes a lot of time for a catcher to be comfortable in using the chest protector to block a ball. The problem is that incorrect form can lead to more bruises/injuries than using the chest protector. When a catcher attempts to lean away and scoop, or not go to the knees properly, they usually get themselves (or the umpire) hit where they don't have equipment. The nice part is that, once a catcher has used their chest protector effectively, they will be more apt to block a ball correctly seeing that there is no pain when doing so!

If you have a catcher that is willing to block, here are the elements to force this on a young/inexperienced catcher):



- Glove follows ball and "pitchforks" into the ground
- Knees go to ground and envelope the glove
- Throwing hand is behind glove (HUGE SAFETY TIP)
- Bottom is on heels
- Slight lean forward such that the ball will hit the chest protector and fall right in front of the catcher
- Roll the shoulders forward to create space between chest protector and chest.
  - This reduces the impact of the ball and keeps it closer after blocking
- Bonus tip – exhale as the ball hits the chest protector!

## Throwing Out Base Stealers

In divisions where stealing is allowed, catchers will be attempting to throw out potential base stealers. Here are some basic steps to work on with catchers for throwing:

- Catch the ball first! The main job of the catcher is to catch the ball
- Transfer the ball from glove to throwing hand in front of face and as early as possible
- While staying low, take a small jab step to center of body with throwing side foot
- Bring glove side foot forward towards the base that the throw is going
- Throw the ball to the bag



## Catching Drills

The best catching drill is to have the player catch in the bullpen! They can work on catching, blocking, and even their throwing while doing so. If you are looking for drills, we suggest taking 5-10 minutes either before or after practice to work with your catchers in a small group. If you have enough coaches to work with other players while your catchers do drills, then that is great too! Just be aware that you aren't focusing on a small group of catchers and leaving your other players without something to do in a practice.

Rather than explaining drills in a written form, below are links to great drills to work on with young catchers. These can even be shared with parents and kids can do these at home! You would be surprised how much a tennis ball and a wall can help a catcher, and if you go to Spring Training to watch MLB teams, you will still see those guys working on these types of things!

Catching 101 Explained at ZLL Coaches Clinic

[Video 1](#) – IMG Academy Drills

[Video 2](#) – Tyler Flowers Drills

[Video 3](#) – Ball Drop Drill

## Infield Skills

### Ready position (pre-pitch position)

- How to be as ball comes into contact with bat
- Right, Left, Sink
  - For Right Handed thrower (switch for lefty)
- Be Athletic – balls of the feet – start low and work down to up
  - Bunny Hop right as ball reaches hitter (See Dustin Pedroia)
- Glove front, thumb up
- Head in front
- Eyes follow ball



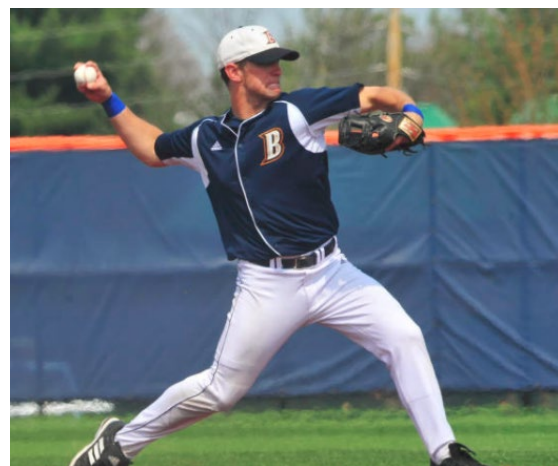
### Fielding a ground ball

- Sneaky, Short, Soft
- Work towards the baseball (gain ground)
- Right, Left, Field
  - For Right Handed thrower – switch for Lefty
- Fingers down, palm facing home
- Big glove, Big body
- Out front, eyes behind ball
- Field through the ball
- Throwing hand = alligator



### Making the throw

- Transfer in center of body
- Stay low/athletic
- Momentum towards base you are going to
- Right, Left, Throw (For righty)
  - Switch for lefty
  - Must get right foot all the way around
- Follow your throw



## Throwing Progression

<b>Set Up:</b>	This is a breakdown of a throwing progression that players should go through to have their arms properly “warmed up”. Players are partnered up with one player at the foul line and the other player in the outfield facing each other. Coaches should use a stopwatch to let players know when to move to next step, and players can throw at their own will.					
<b>Focus:</b>	Players should focus on making quality throws and hitting their partner in the chest. Player fielding the throw should move their feet to receive the ball and catch with two hands. <b><i>Bonus: Players receiving the ball work on their transfer, which is great for catchers and middle infielders.</i></b>					
<b>Drill:</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Throw Type</b>	<b>Distance (in feet)</b>			
			<b>AA / Minors</b>	<b>AAA</b>	<b>Majors</b>	<b>50/70 &amp; Juniors</b>
	1 min	One knee (throwing side knee is on the ground)	10-15	15-20	20-25	20-25
	1 min	Step and throw	20-25	25-30	30-40	30-40
	1 min	Step and throw	25-30	35-40	40-50	50-60
	1 min	Step and throw	40-50	50-60	60-70	80-90
	1 min	Shuffle and throw	60-70	70-80	80-90	100-110
	1 min	Shuffle (or Kro-hop)	80+	90+	100+	120+
	30 sec	Shuffle and throw	60-70	70-80	80-90	100-110
	30 sec	Step and throw	40-50	50-60	60-70	80-90
	30 sec	Step and throw	25-30	35-40	40-50	50-60
	30 sec	Step and throw	20-25	25-30	30-40	30-40
<b>Modifications:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a cone to mark where the players should be lined up at to keep them at proper distance.</li> <li>• Adjust distances for players that cannot reach the listed distance.</li> <li>• Coach can assign partners to ensure players are working with someone of equal skill.</li> </ul>					
<b>Purpose:</b>	Work on proper throwing mechanics. “Warming up” is typically a time where players do not focus and miss out on an opportunity for quality reps. This ensures players are properly loose and ready for the throwing demands they would have in practice or a game.					
<b>Video:</b>	<a href="#">Link 1</a> <a href="#">Link 2</a>					

**BONUS: Turn throwing into a game! At the last distance line, players alternate on a point system for each throw. One point for a throw to the player’s chest, and 2 points for a throw to a player’s head. First to 10, or highest score at end of time, wins.**

### Partner Work (One Hops and Rolls)

<b>Set Up:</b>	Two players face each other about 15-20 feet apart. Each group has one ball. This is a great drill to do prior to or after players play catch.
<b>Focus:</b>	It is imperative that the players do not rush through this drill. It is very common for younger players to goof around and not deliver quality reps. If players are not able to complete the drill as partners, a coach can step in to always be the “thrower” and players can work through a line to be the fielder.
<b>Drill:</b>	<p>Players alternate reps with one player throwing/rolling and the other fielding. Once the fielder complete the rep, he/she becomes the thrower and the other player becomes the fielder. <u>The fielder should complete the hops while on two knees and start in ready position for the rolls.</u> The basic format is below, but reps can be increased or decreased based on time doing the drill.</p> <p>10 x One hop in the middle – Stationary on knees            5 x One hop forehand – Stationary on knees            5 x One hop backhand – Stationary on knees  <i>Option to repeat the same 3 drills with fielder in ready position</i>            8 x Straight ahead roll – Moving from ready position            8 x Forehand roll – Moving from ready position            8 x Backhand roll – Moving from ready position</p>
<b>Modifications:</b>	Use a cone to mark where the players should always return to for each rep to keep proper distance and stay on focus.
<b>Purpose:</b>	<p>Work on basic fielding mechanics</p> <p>While Stationary – working on proper way to field ball with glove (field through the ball)</p> <p>While moving – proper footwork for approach, fielding, and transfer</p>
<b>Video:</b>	<a href="#">Link 1</a> <a href="#">Link 2</a>



## Relay Drill

<b>Set Up:</b>	Players space out evenly in a straight line between 30-90 feet, depending on skill level (see throwing progressions). The player at the front of the line starts with the ball, and all players are facing that direction.
<b>Focus:</b>	The primary focus is proper footwork and throwing mechanics when being the “cut-off”. Each player plays the “cut-off” role and acts as if the throw is coming from an outfielder. This also focuses on quick hands/transfer and throwing accuracy.
<b>Drill:</b>	The player at the front of the line throws to the next player in line. Each time the player receives the ball, he/she should act as a “cut-off” and turn his/her body to the side to throw to the next player in line. The goal is to see how fast the ball can get from one end to the other without being dropped.
<b>Modifications:</b>	Be sure to rotate the players on the ends to the middle of the line to make sure they are getting proper reps
<b>Purpose:</b>	Work on transfer and footwork for relaying a ball from outfield into the infield.
<b>Video:</b>	<a href="#">Link 1</a> (video starts where this drill is shown)



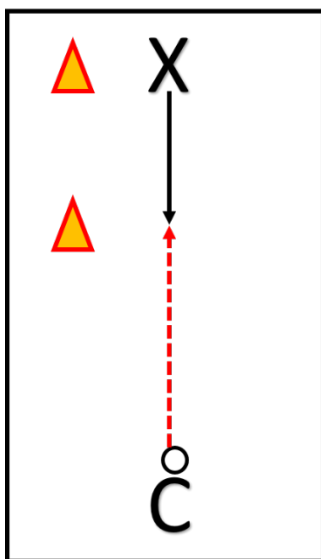
## 4 Corners

<b>Set Up:</b>	<p>Players space out evenly in a “box” formation, with 4 players in the drill. Additional players can be spaced out behind the players in the box. Depending on age/skill the distance can range 30-60 feet between players.</p>
<b>Focus:</b>	<p>The primary focus is transfer speed between receiving and making a throw. It also stresses accuracy and footwork to make drill efficient. Groundball fielding can also be used in the drill, which helps players work on fielding and footwork to make accurate throws.</p>
<b>Drill:</b>	<p><b>Style 1 – Clockwise Throws</b>            One player starts with ball and throws to player to his left. This continues around the box as quickly as possible. Drill can be measured in how much time it takes to go around the box a certain number of times, or how many times around the box the players can make it in a certain amount of time.</p> <p><b>Style 2 – Counter Clockwise Throws</b>            The same format as clockwise, except players throw to their right.</p> <p><b>Style 3 – Left and diagonal</b>  <i>For this format, fielding mechanics should be stressed and speed around the box is not important.</i> Player that starts with the ball will roll it to the player to his left. The player receiving the ball fields it like a groundball and throws across the “box” to the player in the opposite corner. Every time a player rolls a groundball, he/she should also rotate to the next spot to his/her left. This ensures every player gets to field and throw.</p>
<b>Modifications:</b>	<p>If there are more than 4 players doing the drill, evenly space out extras at the corners and have them switch in/out after making the throw. Players can also follow their throw and rotate around the box to keep them moving</p>
<b>Purpose:</b>	<p>Work on transfer and footwork for making throws in a controlled format. Coaches can set goals for the team to meet like times around the box without an error, times around the box in a time period, etc.</p>
<b>Video:</b>	<p><a href="#">Link 1</a></p>



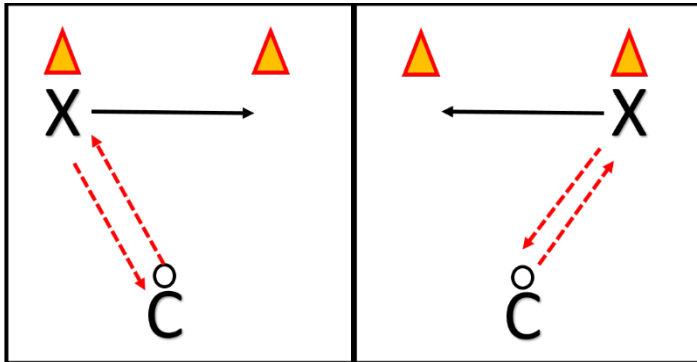
### Fielding Footwork (Line Drill)

<b>Set Up:</b>	Place one cone where the player will start. Place another cone in front of the player about 10-15 feet, which will represent where the fielder should be to field the ball. The coach stands about 20-30 feet away in a straight line with the two cones.
<b>Focus:</b>	The primary focus is moving towards a ground ball (charging the ball), then getting into proper fielding position (Right foot, Left foot, Field [for Right Handers]). Along with footwork, the player should work on fielding the ball out front and working through the ball.
<b>Drill:</b>	The player starts at the first cone and the coach either rolls or hits a groundball directly at the player. The player should try to gain ground towards the ball and field it around where the second cone is placed. The player should at minimum field the ball and then get into a throwing position towards first base. If possible, have the player complete the throw to either a coach, player, or net at first base.  Players can take one rep and then work through a line to get as many reps as possible and keep players engaged.
<b>Modifications:</b>	Have player either complete a throw or get into throwing position and then return the ball to coach.
<b>Purpose:</b>	Young players are known to wait on their heels on a groundball hit right at them. This drill teaches players to move their feet and helps them get used to being in the right position to field a ball. The less hops a ball takes, the less chance for a bad hop.
<b>Video:</b>	<a href="#">Link 1</a> <a href="#">Link 2</a>



## Bucket Drill

<b>Set Up:</b>	Place two cones/markers about 10-20 feet apart. Coach stands about 30 feet away and between the two cones. Player starts at one cone and the rest line up behind. This drill can be done with or without a glove.
<b>Focus:</b>	The primary focus is lateral footwork and fielding position. This will build strength in kid's legs and get them used to moving side to side and getting feet set to field. Be sure to focus on proper fielding form over wearing the player out. If the player is tired and form is bad, you are losing the benefit of the drill.
<b>Drill:</b>	The player starts at either cone and the coach rolls a groundball to him/her. After fielding the ball properly, the player flips the ball back to the coach. Once the player flips the ball, the coach rolls another ball towards the other cone. The player shuffles laterally to get to the ball, fields it, and flips it back to the coach. This continues back and forth.  <b>Recommended Reps:</b> 10 total rolls (5 each side) or how many balls can be fielded in 30 seconds. This can be adjusted based on skill of player
<b>Modifications:</b>	Player should always field the ball with glove hand, however a glove is optional. Coach can adjust quickness between rolls and speed of the roll to challenge players appropriately. Be sure to adjust for each player appropriately.
<b>Purpose:</b>	Focus on lateral movements in the fielding position to help infielders gain range and balance. This will also develop muscle memory of fielding position and build leg strength.
<b>Video:</b>	<a href="#">Link 1</a> <a href="#">Link 2</a>





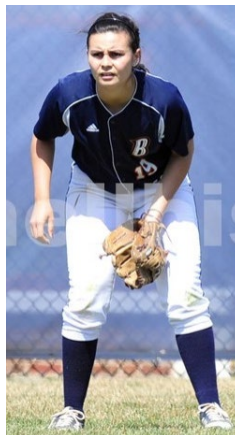
## Team Infield

<b>Set Up:</b>	The drills below are all ways to incorporate infield practice with a player at each infield position. If there are more than 4 players, spread extras evenly around other positions to wait in line behind the fielder. The coach (or coaches) use a bat at home plate to hit groundballs to the infielders. <b>Be sure to have a coach or player stationed by home plate to receive the ball back after the play is complete. Also, be sure to rotate players at each position to get reps at different spots on the field.</b>
<b>Focus:</b>	The primary focus is getting game-like repetitions of groundballs in the infield. Fielders are working on making the play as determined by coach. Also, be sure that player at first base is receiving throws properly (throwing side foot on the bag and stretching to catch ball)
<b>Drill:</b>	<p><b>Around the Horn</b> – Starting with player at 3<sup>rd</sup> base, coach hits a groundball to fielder to make a play to first. Coach continues to hit one ground ball at a time to each player working left to right in the infield (3<sup>rd</sup>-SS-2B-1B). After every player has made 2-5 plays, rotate positions in the infield. Coach can also mix in slow rollers, backhands, and double plays.</p> <p><b>18 Outs</b> – The coach sets up game like scenarios (<i>EX: Runner on 1<sup>st</sup>, 0 outs or nobody on, nobody out</i>) and then hits a groundball to a random infielder. The team’s goal is to get 18 outs in a row without making an error. If an error is made, they start back over at 0 outs. Coaches determine the result of the play (<i>if there was a an error, double play or just 1 out, base hit, etc.</i>). Have players rotate and switch every 3 outs.</p> <p><b>2 Fungo</b> – If two coaches are available to hit ground balls, one can focus on the left side of the infield (3B and SS) and the other on the right side of the infield (2B and 1B). Have an additional coach or parent stand at 1B and 2B. Start with the left side of the infield throwing to 1B, while the right side of the infield is throwing to 2B. Halfway through, switch such that right side is throwing to 1B and left side is throwing to 2B. <b><i>Note this is an advanced drill and should be done with experienced players. There are two balls in play at any given time with crossfire, so be sure players understand what they are doing to avoid an accident.</i></b></p>
<b>Modifications:</b>	Coaches have freedom to work on specific scenarios in Around the Horn or 18 outs. Also, view videos for more ideas on team infield set-ups.
<b>Purpose:</b>	Have players working on game-like scenarios to get reps at game speed in a fun and challenging drill as opposed to going through the motions.
<b>Video:</b>	<a href="#">Link 1</a> <a href="#">Link 2</a> <a href="#">Link 3</a>

## Outfield Skills

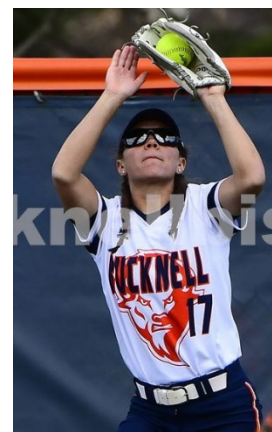
### Ready position (pre-pitch position)

- How to be as ball comes into contact with bat
- Right, Left, Hips
- Be Athletic – balls of the feet
- Ready to react once ball is hit
- Quick first step can make the difference



### Fielding a fly ball

- First step is back
- Over the head, drop step
  - DO NOT BACKPEDAL
- RUN to the spot where the ball will be
  - Take soft steps
  - Get to the spot and get set
  - Avoid drifting and catching the ball on the run
- Two hands above head to catch ball
  - If possible, keep good balance under legs to make throw
- “Call It” – Ball, Ball, Ball or I GOT IT
  - Make the call when you know it’s yours
  - CF has priority in outfield
  - Highest position # has priority in infield



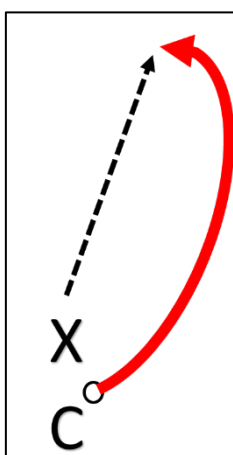
### Making the throw

- Transfer and turn body after catch
- Momentum towards base you are going to
  - Quicker > Longer wind-up
  - Advanced = kro-hop
- Right, Left, Throw (For righty)
  - Switch for lefty
  - Throw through the cut-off
- Follow your throw



## Drop Step Drill

<b>Set Up:</b>	Player and coach are 5 feet apart facing each other. Additional players line up to the side. Be sure there is plenty of room behind the player to run – this drill is best done from the corner of the outfield
<b>Focus:</b>	The primary focus is proper footwork/running to catch a flyball hit over a player’s head. The player should take a “drop-step” to turn his/her body and run to the spot of where the ball will land. Be sure players do not back pedal or drift to catch the ball.
<b>Drill:</b>	The player starts in a ready position facing the coach. The coach will throw a fly ball behind the player, and the player will have to take a drop-step and run to catch the ball. The player should return the ball to a bucket or by the coach so that the next player in line can take a rep and keep the drill moving quickly. Start the drill with balls that the players can get to the spot, turn, and catch properly. As the drill progresses, coaches can challenge players with higher/further balls.
<b>Modifications:</b>	Coaches can let players know ahead of time which way the ball is being thrown to make it easier. For a challenge, coaches can have player start with eyes shut and yell “go” after throwing the ball. Another modification is to have two players stand about 50 feet apart and do the drill together. Players can either be one in front of the other (Like LF and SS) or side to side (like 3B and SS). This adds in proper communication between the players to call the ball as well.
<b>Purpose:</b>	Proper mechanics for catching flyballs hit over the head for infield and outfield. The drill is all encompassing for players to avoid back pedaling and also proper catching of fly balls (two hands above head).
<b>Video:</b>	<a href="#">Link 1</a>



### Outfield Communication Drill

<b>Set Up:</b>	Players set up about 50 feet apart facing the coach. Coach stands a reasonable distance away from the middle of the players.
<b>Focus:</b>	The primary focus is communication and “calling” the flyball. Coaches can use whatever saying they prefer (I got it, ball, mine), but should stay consistent with that.
<b>Drill:</b>	The coach can either throw or hit a flyball between the players. The players must communicate with each other, with the player calling it being the one to catch it. <b>NOTE:</b> For younger players, be sure that the balls are directed one way or the other clearly. Avoid hitting/throwing a fly ball directly between them that could force a collision. The goal is to have the players get used to calling the ball and communicating.
<b>Modifications:</b>	One modification is to have the two players stand about 50 feet apart with one in front of the other (Like LF and SS). This adds in proper communication between an infielder and outfielder for shallow fly balls.
<b>Purpose:</b>	This drill will get players repetitions in catching fly balls with proper mechanics and communication. The added benefit is encompassing the game-like situation of fly balls hit between fielders where communication is needed.
<b>Video:</b>	<a href="#">Link 1</a>

## Outfield 2 Ball Drill

<b>Set Up:</b>	Player sets up about 50 feet away facing the coach. Coach has two balls to alternate between.
<b>Focus:</b>	The primary focus is developing coordination in moving backwards and charging in for a fly ball. The rapid pace of the drill forces players to change direction quickly and also builds endurance.
<b>Drill:</b>	The coach starts off throwing a shallow fly ball that the player must charge in to get. Once the player catches the ball, he/she throws it back to the coach. Once the coach catches the first ball from the player, he/she throws another fly ball that forces the player to run backwards (over the head) to catch. This pattern alternates for either a specific amount of time or 8-12 reps.
<b>Modifications:</b>	<p>Increase difficulty by challenging the player laterally along with charging and dropping back.</p> <p>If there is available field space, have the player throw to a player at a specific base to simulate throws from the outfield to catch a runner. If doing this, the coach just needs to have enough balls and can throw the next fly ball after the player throws to the base.</p> <p>Be sure to stop the drill if the player is winded and not moving quickly. It does not benefit the player if he/she is laboring through the drill. It is good to challenge the player and test his/her endurance, but also understand when to stop.</p>
<b>Purpose:</b>	This drill will get players repetitions in catching fly balls with proper mechanics and footwork. Players must also get themselves into a good position to throw after making the catch.
<b>Video:</b>	<a href="#">Link 1</a>

## Offense Skills – Breaking Down the Youth Swing

### Ready position – The Stance

- Comfortable and athletic
  - Unique for everyone
- Hands/arms are loose and relaxed
  - Ideally near back shoulder
- Balanced weight with good foundation
  - Proper base is KEY



### The Load (or Trigger)

- Bring hands back/up
  - Keep them loose!
- Weight shift to back leg
  - 60/40 or 70/30 distribution
- Front foot has timing step
  - Small, light step





## The Swing

- The swing starts from the ground first!
- Lower body
  - Weight transfer – generates the power
    - “Squash the bug”
  - Proper balance
- Mid-Section
  - Hips turn as a result of leg drive
- Upper Body
  - Hands take short quick route to ball
    - Stay “inside the ball” – close to body
    - Hit top half of ball to generate backspin
  - Point of contact near body
    - Between hips and front foot
    - Drive it up the middle
  - Head/eyes locked in on ball
- Goal is solid contact
- Corrections made big to small, 1 at a time



## Follow Through

- Finished balanced – like an Olympic Sprinter in the blocks
- Body should drive towards where ball was hit



### Tee Drill – Point of Contact

<b>Set Up:</b>	Player hitting off a tee either directly into a net or down the length of a cage.
<b>Focus:</b>	The most important thing about the Tee is to have a focus in the first place. The focus for younger players should be developing the proper point of contact and bat path to the ball.
<b>Drill:</b>	<p>The tee is one of the more “quality over quantity” drills for hitters. Hitting off the tee is a well-known drill, but many players and coaches take it for granted. As mentioned in the Focus, players should be reminded on setting up the tee properly before swinging, and taking time in between swings to be properly set. Each player should adjust the tee to be in the proper place specific to the hitter for hitting the ball back up the middle as hard as possible.</p> <p>The other important factor with the tee is to rotate in and out with players. Players should take 5-8 swings total then switch. Having players take 10-15 swings before switching will usually cause them to lose focus and “go through the motions”.</p>
<b>Modifications:</b>	If a player has a specific flaw in their swing, have him/her work on that for the basic tee set up. For instance, a player falling off balance in the swing should work on their weight transfer and holding balance after the swing.
<b>Purpose:</b>	Create muscle memory for the hitter on proper swing mechanics and where the player wants to make contact with the ball.
<b>Video:</b>	<a href="#">Link 1</a>





### Tee Drill – The Cano Drill

<b>Set Up:</b>	Player hitting off a tee either directly into a net or down the length of a cage. An additional screen is set up on the other side of the tee parallel to the hitter. See picture below
<b>Focus:</b>	Force a hitter to keep the hands tight to the body to create the proper swing path. If the hitter is “long” in the swing, they will hit the screen/net opposite the tee.
<b>Drill:</b>	Drill is completed like the basic tee drills, except the hitter must stay “inside the ball” to avoid hitting the screen with the bat.  The other important factor with the tee is to rotate in and out with players. Players should take 5-8 swings total then switch. Having players take 10-15 swings before switching will usually cause them to lose focus and “go through the motions”.
<b>Modifications:</b>	If an additional screen is not available, the tee can be placed at the edge of the cage near the netting. Therefore, the end of the cage acts as the additional screen to force the hitter to stay inside the ball.  This drill can also be mimicked with no ball – have the hitter hold their bat with the bottom against their belly button and end of the bat against the fence. From that same distance, the hitter can get into their stance and take a dry swing, avoiding the fence in the process.
<b>Purpose:</b>	Create muscle memory for the hitter getting inside the ball and having a tight swing path.
<b>Video:</b>	<a href="#">Link 1</a>



## Tee Drill – The Walk-Up Drill

<b>Set Up:</b>	Tee is set up as normal, just ensure there is clearance behind the tee for the player to start from.
<b>Focus:</b>	Using the lower body to drive the ball and create leverage in the swing
<b>Drill:</b>	<p>The player starts about 2-3 steps away from the tee (towards backstop). The player will then “walk-up” to the tee by taking 3 forward steps before swinging. The step sequence is front foot, back foot, front foot. The step that is the last front foot is also the trigger for the hitter. By taking two steps before the trigger, the goal is to feel the extra momentum in the body and legs to add power to the swing.</p> <p>For the first time a player goes to do this drill, have them get the step pattern down first to ensure proper point of contact. From there, the player knows where to start from and can take proper steps to have balance, leverage, and correct point of contact.</p> <p>As with other tee drills, ensure the rep count is between 5-8 before switching.</p>
<b>Modifications:</b>	<p>Players can also start slightly towards 3<sup>rd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> base side rather than taking a direct straight line to the ball. It is the choice of the hitter to cross their feet over when stepping with the back foot, or not cross feet.</p> <p>For softball – hitters that are “slappers” may work this drill to simulate that style of hitting. Only coaches that are familiar with slap hitting should teach that style.</p>
<b>Purpose:</b>	Have players feel their lower half in the swing and the power that comes with that.
<b>Video:</b>	<a href="#">Link 1</a> <a href="#">Link 2</a>



## Side Toss Drills

<b>Set Up:</b>	Player is set up to hit into either a net or down the length of the cage. The coach stands/kneels in the back, upper corner of the opposite batter box of the hitter.
<b>Focus:</b>	Hitter is working on hand eye coordination to get the barrel of the bat to the ball. This is a simple method for a hitter to hit a moving ball that doesn't involve it coming from a live arm at/near the mound. The drills below have the focus after them.
<b>Drill:</b>	<p><b>BASIC</b> - The most important factor in side toss is the way the coach is tossing the ball. As the coach brings the ball back, the hitter should do their load/trigger. The coach should then make an underhand toss aimed at the hitters belt buckle, and only have a slight arc to it. This is to ensure the hitter has the correct point of contact and timing in their swing. The coach should also station themselves so that the toss comes at an angle similar to a pitch from the mound, but also ensure the coach is safe from being struck by the ball after it is hit.</p> <p><b>Top/Bottom</b> – The same concept as BASIC is followed, however the coach now tosses two balls simultaneously. The balls should be held with one on top of the other, and tossed such that they approach the hitter in the same fashion. Once the coach tosses the ball, they should say either “top” or “bottom”, and the hitter should hit the corresponding ball. This drill helps players with tracking pitches, hand/eye coordination, and bat control.</p> <p><b>Color</b> – (Note, different balls are needed for this drill). Have different markings on various balls, and have the hitter say what color they hit at contact. This focuses on keeping the eye on the ball in order to notice the color when hit.</p>
<b>Modifications:</b>	Modifications are listed above, but below are modifications to AVOID <b>DO NOT DO – rapid fire, “high ball”, bounces</b>
<b>Purpose:</b>	Hand/eye coordination and bat control in the swing on a moving pitch. PLEASE NOTE – TEE, FRONT TOSS, and LIVE BP ARE MORE BENEFICIAL THAN SIDE TOSS, BUT SIDE TOSS CAN BE USEFUL IF DONE CORRECTLY
<b>Video:</b>	<a href="#">Link 1 – BASIC</a> <a href="#">Link 2 – TOP/BOTTOM</a> <a href="#">Link 3 – Color, Size, Top/Bottom with Softball</a>

## Front Toss Drills

<b>Set Up:</b>	Coach is set up (kneeling or sitting) behind a screen about 20-30 feet in front of the hitter.
<b>Focus:</b>	Hitter is working on hand eye coordination to get the barrel of the bat to the ball. This is a simple method for a hitter to hit a moving ball that doesn't involve it coming from a live arm at/near the mound. The drills below have the focus after them.
<b>Drill:</b>	<p><b>BASIC</b> - The most important factor in side toss is the way the coach is tossing the ball. As the coach brings the ball back, the hitter should do their load/trigger. The coach should then make an underhand toss aimed at the hitters belt buckle, and only have a slight arc to it. This is to ensure the hitter has the correct point of contact and timing in their swing. The coach should also station themselves so that the toss comes at an angle similar to a pitch from the mound, but also ensure the coach is safe from being struck by the ball after it is hit.</p> <p><b>Top/Bottom</b> – The same concept as BASIC is followed, however the coach now tosses two balls simultaneously. The balls should be held with one on top of the other, and tossed such that they approach the hitter in the same fashion. Once the coach tosses the ball, they should say either “top” or “bottom”, and the hitter should hit the corresponding ball. This drill helps players with tracking pitches, hand/eye coordination, and bat control.</p> <p><b>Color</b> – (Note, different balls are needed for this drill). Have different markings on various balls, and have the hitter say what color they hit at contact. This focuses on keeping the eye on the ball in order to notice the color when hit.</p>
<b>Modifications:</b>	Modifications are listed above, but below are modifications to AVOID <b>DO NOT DO – rapid fire, “high ball”, bounces</b>
<b>Purpose:</b>	Hand/eye coordination and bat control in the swing on a moving pitch. PLEASE NOTE – TEE, FRONT TOSS, and LIVE BP ARE MORE BENEFICIAL THAN SIDE TOSS, BUT SIDE TOSS CAN BE USEFUL IF DONE CORRECTLY
<b>Video:</b>	<a href="#">Link 1 – BASIC</a> <a href="#">Link 2 – TOP/BOTTOM</a> <a href="#">Link 3 – Color, Size, Top/Bottom with Softball</a>

### One Arm Swings – Tee, Side Toss, or Front Toss

<b>Set Up:</b>	This drill can be done on a tee, from a side toss, or from a front toss. The player will choke up on the bat to near the top of the handle grip. The player can use either the front arm or back arm to hold the bat, as both accomplish different mechanical focuses
<b>Focus:</b>	When using the front arm, the player is focusing on proper bat path and angle to the ball. The player should work on making solid contact with the barrel at the correct point of contact. When using the back arm, the player is focusing on extension through the ball to generate more power. The player should again work on making solid contact at the correct point of contact, with an emphasis on power.
<b>Drill:</b>	The drill is completed through either tee, soft toss, or front toss. Front toss is the most ideal setting, but the player can do this drill in all 3 styles. Have players work on one version (front or back arm) first before switching arms. As with other drills, ensure the rep count is between 5-8 before switching players.
<b>Modifications:</b>	Note that this is an advanced drill which requires a fair amount of arm/wrist strength. If a player is a novice with the bat, or cannot generate much bat speed, this drill should be avoided.  An additional challenge is to have the player barely use his/her lower half in the swing, and only focus on the arm movement (with a hip turn). The end of the video below shows how this is done.
<b>Purpose:</b>	Build arm/wrist strength in the swing. Players will get more hand/eye coordination by using only one arm to make contact.
<b>Video:</b>	<a href="#">Link 1</a> <a href="#">Link 2</a>



## On Field Batting Practice

<b>Set Up:</b>	<p>The key to doing effective on field batting practice is the set-up. Divide the players up into 3 groups – Hitting, Fielding, and Shagging.</p> <p>Hitting – Players take swings on the field</p> <p>Fielding – Players are positioned at infield spots to take live balls off the bat (NOTE: DO NOT HAVE PLAYERS COMPLETE THE PLAY, AND DO NOT THROW A PITCH IF INFIELDER IS NOT PAYING ATTENTION)</p> <p>Shagging – Players are stationed in the outfield to retrieve balls and get them ready for “pick-up”</p>
<b>ttFocus:</b>	<p>Hitting is focused on getting live swings on the field.</p> <p>Fielding is focused on live groundballs on the field</p> <p>Shagging is catching fly balls when they can, and otherwise collecting balls to eliminate wasted time.</p>
<b>Drill:</b>	<p><b>Know how much time you have:</b> This way, you can create equal spacing in your group switches. For instance, if you are doing this for 30 minutes, each group will spend 10 minutes at each station.</p> <p>Hitting: Have the players go through rounds of 6- 8 swings and then switch. You can give players certain game like scenarios for each round. Examples are: 0-2 count, 2-0 count, runner on 3<sup>rd</sup> 0 outs, bottom of 6<sup>th</sup> with bases loaded and winning run on 3<sup>rd</sup>.</p> <p>Fielding: Rotate players through positions in the field. Make sure the players are paying attention before throwing the next pitch if they make a play.</p>
<b>Modifications:</b>	<p>On a player’s last swing in the round, you can “play it live” and have the batter run out the ball and treat it as a game like scenario.</p> <p>You can create a 4<sup>th</sup> group if you have enough players and create a batting cage or baserunning station.</p> <p>You don’t have to THROW BP. If you prefer front toss, side toss, or even tee work, this will still be beneficial if you aren’t comfortable throwing to players.</p>
<b>Purpose:</b>	Get the entire team on the field getting live looks and comfort of being on the diamond.
<b>Video:</b>	<a href="#">Link 1</a>

## Baserunning

Baserunning is often the element of the game that is under taught, yet very valuable in the development of a baseball and softball player. Players that can run the bases well have a big advantage and can affect the outcome of individual plays as well as the entire game. Most high school and college players that are “savvy” baserunners learned the correct way to run bases at the 8-12 year old range. This section will dive into some key elements that coaches can work on with their players.

Another important factor to emphasize with your team: **Being fast has nothing to do with being a good baserunner.** None of these drills and skills are about speed, but instead focus on the science that is baserunning!

## Home to 1st

Running home to first is the most common baserunning task in the game. This happens when the hitter hits a groundball in the infield. There are 4 key elements when running home to first:

1. The first step is with the BACK foot. This applies to righties and lefties. Make sure the player isn't taking a misstep with the front foot before running, as this is a waste of time!
2. About halfway down the line, the player should peek to find the ball. The player should do this without breaking stride or losing speed. The reason they find the ball is to see if the infielder has it or not. If the infielder does not have the ball and it is instead in the outfield, then the hitter should transition into the Home to 2<sup>nd</sup> technique.
3. Assuming the infielder has the ball and is making a play to throw the hitter out at first, the hitter should run hard through the bag, striking it on the front part of the bag. It does not matter which foot hits the bag. It is important to not jump or leap to the bag. The runner should hit the bag in stride.
4. After hitting the bag, the runner should chop their feet to "break-down". Some runners want to turn right, but this is not necessary. The runner should LOOK to the right to see if the ball was thrown away. At that point, they (or the 1<sup>st</sup> base coach) can decide if the hitter should try to run to 2<sup>nd</sup>. If the player *turns* right, this leads to a longer run to 2<sup>nd</sup> in event of an overthrow!

To work on this with your players, line them up at home and have them one at a time repeat this drill. The players should step in the box (no bat), take a fake swing with their hands, and then complete steps 1-4. **The best way for players to develop these good habits in their baserunning is to repeat them at every practice so they intuitively do it in a game!**

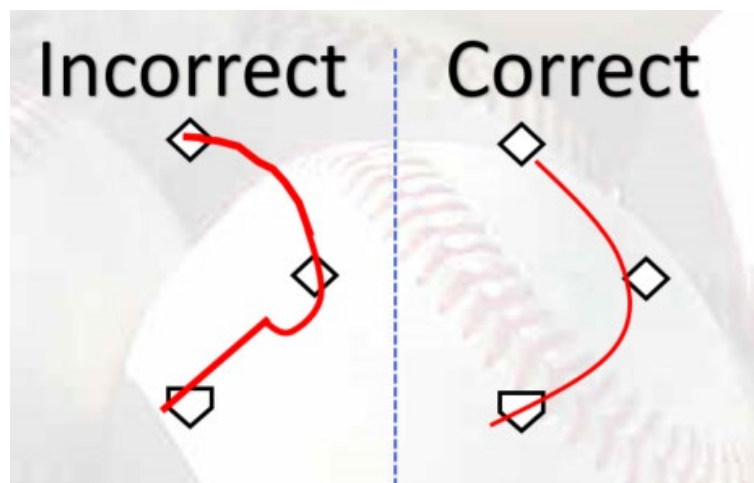
For a video explanation of this, [CLICK HERE!](#)



## Home to 2nd

Running home to 2nd for a stand-up double is relatively simple. However, hitters that are able to turn a simple single into a double (what we call HUSTLE DOUBLES) gives a huge advantage. Below is a breakdown of the proper way hitter should “round the bag” or go home to 2nd:

1. The first step is with the BACK foot. This applies to righties and lefties. Make sure the player isn't taking a misstep with the front foot before running, as this is a waste of time!
2. As soon as the hitter knows the ball is in the outfield, they should “get their angle early”. This means that the hitter should already be outside the normal basepath in foul territory. The term we use is to make a banana shape out of the box, not a question mark.
3. As the hitter approaches first, they should make a turn towards second and hit the first base bag on the FRONT INSIDE CORNER. The hitter should be in almost a direct line between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. If the hitter hits first base and is still wide outside the basepath between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, then they need a better angle from home to first.
4. The hitter is now the shortest distance between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> and can decide whether to try for a double or not. If the outfielder bobbles the ball or makes a bad throw, the hitter can be aggressive and go for 2<sup>nd</sup>.



To work on this with your players, line them up at home and have them one at a time repeat this drill. The players should step in the box (no bat), take a fake swing with their hands, and then complete steps 1-4. **The best way for players to develop these good habits in their baserunning is to repeat them at every practice so they intuitively do it in a game!**

For a video explanation of this, [CLICK HERE!](#)

## Runners on the Bases – The Secondary Lead

As a runner on base, many young players will stay glued to the bag until the ball is hit. If the ball is not hit, then the runner doesn't budge. It is important that players are learning about the "secondary lead" to avoid this common mistake. The secondary lead applies when the runner is not stealing.

1. The player should start with their left foot on the base, right foot behind them, in an athletic position. Their eyes should be focused on the pitcher and tracking the ball.



2. The runner should track the ball as the pitcher releases it, and then the runner may come off the base once it reaches the hitter. (*NOTE: For Majors Softball, the runner may leave once the pitcher releases the ball*).
3. The proper way to come off the bag (secondary lead) is to bring the right foot across to be squared towards home. From there, the runner should take 1-2 quick shuffle steps while remaining balanced.



4. In leagues where stealing is allowed, the runner should watch if the catcher misses the ball and they can advance. If they are not going to advance, the runner should return to their base.

For a video explanation of this, [CLICK HERE!](#)

## FUN – Keeping Practice Fun for Kids

Practices can become dull and monotonous for young kids. Putting 8 and 9 year olds through drills that you see at the Collegiate level for an hour will create boredom. The goal of Little League is to grow a love for the game, and to do that, keeping practices fun and engaging is key. The following drills are things to incorporate either before or during practices to let the kids let loose a little bit. Although they are fun games, they still build on skills that translate to the game itself!

## Flip

<b>Set Up:</b>	Players get in a circle of 4-6 total, with each player about arms length apart from each other. Players should wear a hat and must be wearing a glove.
<b>Focus:</b>	Hand eye coordination in volleying a ball with the glove
<b>Drill:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One player starts with the ball and flips it with their glove to another player.</li> <li>- The player receiving the toss must use their glove to volley the ball to another player in the circle.</li> <li>- Players continue to volley the ball to random players until the ball hits the ground</li> <li>- The player responsible for the ball hitting the ground (whether a bad volley or drops a good feed) receives a strike. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o The player can turn their hat to the side to show they have one strike, and wear their hat backwards to show they have 2 strikes.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- When the ball hits the ground, anyone can pick it up, and restart the volley in the circle.</li> <li>- Once a player has 3 strikes, they are out of the game.</li> <li>- The last player standing wins</li> </ul>
<b>Modifications:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Players may use any part of their body in the volley EXCEPT for their throwing hand. (For instance you can stop a volley with your chest and then volley it with the glove before it hits the ground)</li> <li>- When it becomes a 1 on 1 battle, increase the distance!</li> </ul>
<b>Purpose:</b>	Fun way to work on using the glove and getting a feel
<b>Video:</b>	none

## 2 Ball

<b>Set Up:</b>	Players get in a circle of 4-6 total, with each player about arms length apart from each other. Players should wear a hat and two baseballs or tennis balls are needed.
<b>Focus:</b>	Hand-eye coordination
<b>Drill:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One player starts holding two balls in one hand.</li> <li>- The player must toss both balls with that hand to another player in the circle.</li> <li>- The player receiving the throw must attempt to catch both balls, either one with each hand or both with the same hand.</li> <li>- If the player fails to catch one or both balls, that player receives a strike.</li> <li>- If the throw was bad and the player had no chance in catching the ball, then the thrower receives a strike.</li> <li>- If a player catches both balls with one hand, the thrower receives a strike.</li> <li>- 3 strikes and you are out of the game.</li> <li>- Play continues until the last player standing is the winner</li> </ul>
<b>Modifications:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use tennis balls for younger kids as they are easier to handle</li> <li>- Do not use softballs as they are usually too big for 12 year olds and younger.</li> </ul>
<b>Purpose:</b>	Fun way to work on hand eye coordination and catching
<b>Video:</b>	None

## Pepper

<b>Set Up:</b>	One player is the hitter and has a bat. 4-6 other players stand about 20-30 feet from the hitter in a line with 2 arms length spacing with gloves on and are the fielders. The fielder farthest to the hitter's left is in line position 1, and each fielder to position 1's left is 2, 3, and so on.
<b>Focus:</b>	Hitter works on barrel control to hit ground balls Fielders work on fielding ground balls
<b>Drill:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One fielder starts with the ball and throws a hittable pitch to the hitter.</li> <li>- The hitter attempts to hit a ground ball to any fielder.</li> <li>- If the hitter hits a groundball, the fielder must field it cleanly, and then throw a hittable pitch to the hitter.</li> <li>- If the fielder makes an error, they move to the end of the line and other fielders move up a spot towards position 1.</li> <li>- If the hitter swings and misses, then the fielder at position 1 moves to hitter and the prior hitter moves to the end of the fielding line.</li> <li>- If the hitter hits a ball foul or outside of where the fielders are standing, then that counts as a "strike".</li> <li>- After two foul hits, the hitter moves to end of fielding line and the fielder in position 1 comes to hit.</li> <li>- If the hitter hits a pop up and the ball is caught in the air, whichever fielder catches the ball moves straight to the hitting position. The hitter moves to the end of the fielding line.</li> <li>- If the fielder throws an unhittable pitch and the hitter does not swing, the fielder moves to the BACK of the fielding line.</li> </ul>
<b>Modifications:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fielders can turn a fielded groundball into a game of FLIP! Fielders can volley the ball to each other until it hits the ground or someone stops volleying. If someone drops the ball or has a bad volley, they move to the back of the fielder line. This is a fast way to move to position 1!</li> <li>- Other fun rules:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o If the hitter touches the ball with their hand while holding the bat, it counts as a missed swing.</li> <li>o If the hitter hands the bat to a fielder coming in to hit, that fielder is also OUT and the next fielder is up to hit.</li> <li>o Fielders can huddle together to disguise who has the ball. Then, each player can mimic that they are throwing the pitch but the hitter can't tell who it is coming from. This should be done if a hitter is up for an extended period and consistently hitting ground balls.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Purpose:</b>	Fun mini-game that teaches basics of baseball/softball
<b>Video:</b>	ZLL

## Intrasquad Scrimmage

<b>Set Up:</b>	Because practices are scheduled with two teams per time slot, teams can combine up to scrimmage. This is a controlled game to allow players to compete and get game-like experience for a practice.
<b>Focus:</b>	Focus on game scenarios, such as proper baserunning, fielder positioning, and defense knowing what to do with the ball when hit.
<b>Drill:</b>	<p><b>When organizing the scrimmage, here are important things to consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decide how much of the game will be player pitch, and how much will be coach pitch. Player pitch should be pre-determined, such as number of pitches or innings per pitcher. Coach pitch usually means more balls put in play!</li> <li>- Have lineups ready just like you would approach a game. This is a great way for coaches to get used to that as well! Be sure to get players experience at multiple spots</li> <li>- Who will umpire? Umpire gear is available at all fields, so a parent or coach can help and be a real ump behind the plate. If not, a coach can call balls and strikes from behind the mound.</li> </ul>
<b>Modifications:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Baserunner modifications: you can put your team in specific scenarios and start innings with runners on base to get that type of practice in for both offense and defense.</li> <li>- Out modifications: To reduce the time in switching offense/defense, have the offensive team stay for 6 or 9 outs, and just clear the bases after every 3 outs. Essentially, the team is completing half innings back to back, which cuts down dead time.</li> </ul>
<b>Purpose:</b>	Get game experience for the entire team, while not playing an actual game. This allows for repetitions at game-speed which can't be duplicated in a practice drill.
<b>Video:</b>	None

## Practice Plans

Going into a practice unprepared can have a negative effect on the players. They get a sense of the disorganization, and their time is not being used efficiently. This ultimately leads to disinterest in the game and a lack of desire to participate. On the flip side, planning practices can be a daunting task. Of all the things you have to do on any given day, writing out a practice plan is probably low on the priority list. With that being said, ZLL has developed practice plans for each one of your scheduled practices!

In the table below (and at the back of this guide) are links for complete practice plans for each level of play in ZLL. They are designed for natural progression through your season, and tailored for the typical things that need to be focused on based on player age. You can use and implement these as you see fit, and also edit them accordingly. **If you are using the practice plans as written, please read through them prior to your practice so you are prepared on what you will be doing.** The practice plan won't benefit you if the first time you are looking at it is when you get to the field!

If you want to create your own, there is a template in the same format as the pre-filled out plans as well. Feel free to write in your own plan using the template. Even just scribbling down your plan on the back of a napkin is a step in the right direction. Have a plan on what you want to do, and then implement that to the best of your ability!

### Practice Plan Links

Softball		Baseball				
Minors	Majors	AA	AAA	Majors	50/70	Juniors
1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9	9	9	9
10	10	10	10	10	10	10
11	11	11	11	11	11	11
12		12				
<a href="#">CLICK HERE FOR A BLANK TEMPLATE FOR PRACTICE PLANS</a>						



## Game Plan

Similar to proper planning for practice, having a game plan prior to getting to the field will make things go much smoother for you as a coach. The game-plan does pertain to strategy to win the game and how to approach certain situations. Instead, it is all the information to get organized before you step on the field. The tools/links below are for you to ensure players are getting equal opportunity and playing time, and to make sure everyone knows the lineup and positions.

## Pitching Plan

Entering the game with a pitching plan goes a long way in preparation and managing a game. The first step in the pitching plan is making sure you know who is eligible to pitch. Be sure to refer to the Pitcher Report on the ZLL website to confirm who will be available on the day of the game. From there, have a strategy on 3 or 4 players that can pitch that day.

Early in the season (first 3 or 4 games), we recommend having pitchers throw 2 innings maximum per appearance. This is a good way to get a lot of players opportunities early, and also build up stamina for pitchers. Therefore, for a 6 inning game, having 3 pitchers prepared is a great strategy to go with. If during the course of the game a pitcher needs to be replaced mid-inning, have the next pitcher ready to replace him or her a little earlier than planned. This is also why we recommend having a 4<sup>th</sup> pitcher ready that day. If the 4<sup>th</sup> pitcher doesn't throw, he/she would start the next game.

Starting with the 2 inning maximum, that can be increased to 3 and 4 innings as the season progresses. As teams approach their last couple of games and/or postseason play, that number can be stretched out to the maximum pitch count limits. With that in mind, players should not be reaching maximum pitch counts in the first few games.

## Line-Up Card

Create your line up and post it in your dugout. Because everyone bats in ZLL, you can put all of your players on it and set it up early. If a player is a no-show, just cross their name off in the order!

## Positional Chart

Although the batting order remains the same through the game, it is important to make sure players are getting experience at different positions. This chart will help you to make sure players are rotating on and off the bench, as well as different positions on the field. The pitching plan should be the first thing you reference to fill into the chart. From there, mix it up and move your players around. Here are a few other tips with this:

- Use your batting order to fill out the chart, and then post it! That way players see the batting order and positions each inning! They will know where to go each inning without you having to call it out to each player, and this keeps them engaged in the game.
- With your pitching plan, try to strategize so that the next pitcher coming into the game is either on the bench or in the outfield. Specifically, make sure he/she is NOT catching. That way, if a pitcher tires out and needs to be switched out prior to the end of the inning, the next player in your pitching plan can come straight in. If the next pitcher is in the outfield, a simple position swap is much easier and you can stick with your position chart for the following innings.
- Save your previous game charts to use for your next game. This way you know if you are not spreading out playing time evenly or if a player has not been playing a position.

*For coaches, the game should never be about showing off their knowledge; it should always be about the player, and making their experience on the field fun and productive*

*- Darren Fenster*