

# Clayton Parks and Recreation



## Youth Baseball Coaching Manual

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### **Practice Plan**

There are a number of practice plans and they all contain the following elements

This plan should include:

- Provide objectives that should be accomplished during the practice. This can include both subjective and non-subjective goals.
- Outline the goals and requirements of the four basic activities and the amount of time you would like to devote to each. Our sample agenda includes recommended times and should vary with your teams skill development and maturity.
- Prepare a list of the equipment required. This helps ensure you only take what you need and makes sure you get what you need if you should be in a hurry.
- The Practice Plan form gives you an area to take notes as to what aspects of the practice went well, what didn't, or maybe ideas you had to make the skill development simpler for the players. You can also take notes about the players' responses during your Team Talk regarding the next practice. Keep these forms for a reminder next year.

**Warm Up** : This is especially important in developing long-term physical fitness awareness for your players and greatly reduces the risk of injury to your players. If your team is like most, the kids will 'wander' onto the practice field. Do low impact 'games' with them while waiting for everyone to show. When the warm-up 'officially' begins, first demonstrate the exercise and then begin the exercise. Be sure to explain the exercise in words the players can understand. Sometimes you will have to teach them new words for this to work. Be sure that you participate with them, because the players will learn quickest by example. And if you can, get the parents to participate as well!

**Team Talk** : Have a brief Team Talk with them and let them know what you want to accomplish today and what you expect of them today. Keep it simple and in words they can understand.

**Skill Development** : Begin skill development drills and exercises. Spend the first 10 minutes improving skills taught in previous practices. You will need to focus on the less-talented players at this time to help them improve at a quicker pace. Consider providing these players a 'mentor', another player that can show them good execution of the skill. This mentoring approach also keeps more players busy and 'engaged' providing more fun and participation.

After the review, begin introducing a new skill 'game' or regimen. You should strive to introduce one new skill, or a variation or refinement of a skill at every practice session. This may require a brief Team Talk with the players to provide a foundation of words or expectations. First explain the skill, then with other assistants, if necessary, demonstrate the skill using proper technique. Then turn the players loose to try it themselves.

Once they begin the skill development exercise, try to keep further instruction and refinement to a minimum, and spend your time one-on-one with the players. Having other volunteers and coaches manage the 'team' allows you to spend some 'quality time' with each player while they are striving to learn. If you have an exceptional player or two, place them in a mentoring position with another players.

**Water Break:** If you are in warm or summer conditions, take a 3 to 5 minute water break. Have the players' gather in the Team Talk location and use this as a brief cool-down. You can have an assistant or player 'serve' the water and you can use this opportunity to reinforce the skill(s) just practiced. Here's some more info about keeping you players properly hydrated.

**Play:** Play a modified game or small-sided game / scrimmage. This will increase the likelihood that the skills you have just introduced or have previously introduced have real-world (read game-time) implications. Here are a few tips to ensure a successful (read fun and educational) scrimmage:

- Be sure to have the player's rotate positions so that each player can understand the requirements of the position, and possibly develop an appreciation of other players that play that position.
- Have a couple of players be assistant coaches and officials. This encourages these players to understand the rules and really teaches a sense of fair play.
- Play for a pre-determined amount of time, not until a scrimmage team reaches a certain score.
- Focus on only one or two rules or skills at a time. Trying to teach too many skills / rules at a time can be overwhelming for most players.

**Team Talk :** This provides time for the players to cool-down and reflect on their recent accomplishments. It also provides a time for you to repeat today's instructions and to communicate with your players.

A sample agenda on the closing Team Talk could include the following:

- Ask the players to tell the team what they learned today. Try to refrain from using "Yes" or "No" questions. Don't force a player to make provide an answer to your questions. He may be too tired or mentally drained to answer your question. If they give you an inattentive answer, simply acknowledge their answer with a nod, smile or "that's interesting" and move on to the next player.
- Talk to the team about a particular rule or situation that may have happened in practice or the last game. For instance, in soccer, "Johnny pushed Jason down while going to the goal. What foul would be called? What would the penalty be?" Or in baseball, "Johnny was called out at second in our scrimmage. Can anybody explain why? " (Running outside of the baseline, tagged out, or force out).
- Ask the players what they would like to do in the next practice. This will give you a good pulse on what part of the game is the most fun, and will let you use this in between "less fun" activities.
- If your team is old enough or if you choose to use the "mentoring" practice, assign some players to be officials, assistants or mentors for the next practice. This creates enthusiasm for practice for these players, and is especially useful with less enthusiastic players.

- If you're going to give the players 'homework', now would be the time to do so. Give them very specific instructions on skills and rules they should practice and learn. For younger children you should provide this information as note cards or flash cards. Then see how many of them completed last week's homework. Test them with simple questions.
- Summarize your discussion and repeat the important teachings of the day. With younger kids a small 'reward' can help keep the players' attention. (Bubble gum, etc...)
- Make a game out of wrapping up the practice. Have the players' pack up the equipment, balls, retrieve the bases or cones, etc...

# Practice Plan Worksheet

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Practice Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Practice Emphases: \_\_\_\_\_

Time Started: \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_

Time Ended: \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

Total Time: \_\_\_\_\_

<u>Time</u>	<u>Practice Activity</u>	<u>Coaching Emphases</u>

## **Batting and Bunting Instructions**

What do long-ball sluggers and line-drive hitters have in common? Balance and good mechanics. Balance means having your weight centered over the middle of your body. Mechanics means hitting the ball using the proper technique

### **Balance**

First relax. Now place your feet shoulder width apart. Stay relaxed - a little flex in the knees reduces tension. Now get your three "eyes" to connect if you drew a straight line from each eye. The 1st eye is your belt buckle; the 2nd eye is your left foot; the 3rd eye is your right foot. Turn your left foot in (to the right) slightly and turn your right foot in (to the left) slightly. Now, if you drew an imaginary straight line from all three eyes they should connect. Adjust as needed, but keep your weight centered over the front part of your body (with left shoulder closed slightly). Now you are balanced. Stay relaxed.

### **Mechanics of the Swing**

Use a 1-2-3-4 approach. Do this after you are balanced. As the pitcher commits to pitch (his front crosses the rubber or moves forward to the plate) follow these steps.

1. Turn left shoulder in slightly.
2. Stride directly toward the pitcher - landing softly. Extremely important to keep hands back on the stride. When the front foot lands, the hands should be back.
3. Squash a bug with your back foot, but don't turn (roll) your ankle over, you'll lose balance.
4. Follow through with your swing.

Tips:

Remember to relax. Holding the bat with a loose top hand helps you to be loose up top. You will automatically tighten up when you swing.

Drills

These one-arm hitting drills with a batting tee will improve your balance and your swing. Note: These instructions are written for a right-sided hitter (just reverse arm for a left-sided hitter).

### **Get A Grip**

You'll need a baseball, a bat and a baseball tee. First, lay the bat handle onto your right hand (or the hand you feel more comfortable with). Usually that's the same hand you use to throw or write. That's your batting hand (for a right-sided hitter, your right hand). The bat should rest against the base of your fingers, not on the fatty part of the lower palm. The left hand should now grip the bat below the right hand.

Tip:

Make sure that you line up the knuckles on the hands – this is important as it will help you develop an “inside swing” (shorter route to the ball).

## *Take A Stance*

Get comfortable in front of the tee. There's nothing wrong with "choking up" on the bat handle, or positioning your hands higher up on the bat handle, whatever is comfortable for you. Place the bat on your right shoulder. Take a swing. Note that each arm makes a different motion. Your right arm makes a punching motion down and out. The left hand makes a karate chop from your shoulder to the tee.

First one arm...

Now, work each arm separately. First, the front-arm, the one that faces the pitcher. For right-handed batters, that's your left arm. For lefty batters, that's your right arm.

Set up a batting tee and a home plate (piece of paper, towel or other object as a plate).

The tee should be in front of the plate - hitters hit the ball in front of the plate not over the plate (so never stand directly in front of the tee when practicing). Remember, hit the ball in front of the plate.

Stand at the plate with as if you're going to hit a baseball. Your feet are a shoulder-width apart. You don't need a bat yet.

Grab the front of your shirt with your right hand. You might feel silly, but it's important to keep holding onto your shirt to achieve proper balance.

Put your other left hand on your right shoulder. Now slice your left hand down toward the tee at a 45-degree angle, karate style. You'll do this same exercise with a ball on the tee and holding a bat (you'll have to choke up on the handle). Remember that your right hand must hold onto the front of your shirt. With the left hand, hold a bat so that it feels comfortable as you swing it away from you. Chop the bat down toward the tee and hit the baseball. Don't worry about where the ball goes. Try to hit the ball in the middle, not on top or the bottom.

...Then the other arm

Now we'll do the drill for your right hand. Make your left arm hug your chest while making a punching motion toward the tee with your right hand. Next, pick up the bat and repeat the punching motion. You'll have to choke up on the handle for comfort. Drive your bat down and out.

## Sweeping the Table

A good swing has follow-through. You hit down toward the tee and out, as if you were hitting through a line of baseballs on a tabletop. This is called "sweeping the table."



## **Bunting Instruction**

Mickey Mantle and Willie Mays, two of the game's greatest hitters, were willing to lay down a bunt if it helped their team. Baseball is one of the few sports that require the individual to "sacrifice" himself or herself for the team. For such a noble cause, you should know how to do it right.

With a "sacrifice" bunt, you advance a runner who is already on base but you'll probably be out. There are other kinds, a "drag" bunt, for instance, but we're teaching you the most fundamental of the bunts. A coach will tell you which direction to bunt the ball. In the majors, most sac bunts are hit toward the first baseman. In youth leagues, the angle is often toward third to make the pitcher or third baseman run in – except with a runner on third, then the coach wants you to bunt the ball to the right side of the pitching mound (toward first base).

There are several ways to set up for a bunt, including the square-around method. Let's discuss the pivot-in-place technique. In the batter's box, move up so that your front foot is ahead of the plate. This makes it easier to bunt the ball in fair territory. Position your back foot to within a few inches of the plate to increase plate coverage. Set up as you do in a normal batting stance. As the pitcher begins his stretch, pivot on the balls of your feet so that your hips and upper body face the pitcher. Keep your eyes fixed on the pitcher. Bend your knees slightly. Let your back leg take some of your weight.

At the same time, slide your top hand up the barrel and regrip the bat firmly just below the label using the thumb and the topside of a curled-under index finger. The other hand should stay in place by the knob of the bat. Hold the bat away from your body, just above the belt. Tuck your fingers underneath. You don't want the ball hitting them.

Hold the bat so that the fat end is slightly higher than the knob of the handle. Angle the bat in the direction you want the bunt to go. Try to catch the ball on the fat part of the bat. Don't stab at the ball. This is why many bunts don't work. Even a major league player will sometimes try to hit the ball when he should let the bat receive it. Avoid bad balls and high pitches. A good pitch to bunt is down in the strike zone.

Start the bat at the top of the strike zone and use your legs as an elevator to go up and down. By using your legs, the angle of the bat won't change. If you choose not to take the pitch, bring the bat back across the strike zone and return it to your shoulder. In the process you are blocking the catcher's view for a split second. The catcher might lose sight of the ball and misplay it. Use your legs.

Think of it as playing catch. You know how you bend your knees when you make a catch and then straighten them after you've made the grab? Well, it's just like that when you bunt. You want to catch the ball with the bat. And you start to stand up as you make contact with the barrel of the bat. Making contact with the barrel of the bat kills the ball so you won't get a hard bunt. You want to make sure that your bunt is soft so you can advance the runners.

Catchers can be quick.

If the bunt is too soft, they can reach the ball and throw the ball to a base for the out. So you should try to aim the baseball to travel in between the catcher and the infielder. The batter should know which player moves quicker to put the bunt in the right spot so it can work.

### **Using the Batting Tee**

This section will teach you a simple drill using your batting tee to hit pitches over the inside and outside corners of the plate.

The goal is to use the same swing for every ball.

1. Place your tee on the outside back edge of home plate. Stand next to the plate and make contact following your normal swing. Remember this from Hitting Instruction above? Your batting hand makes a punching motion; the lower hand on the bat makes a karate chop. Don't try to hit a home run. Line drives are what you want. Home run power can come later. You'll find that you're driving the ball to the opposite field from where you're standing. If you bat on the left side of the plate, the ball is going to right field.
2. Now move your tee to the front of home plate. This time, when you hit the ball it should head straight out to center field.
3. Finally, place the tee on the inside edge of home plate. Try to "pull the ball." If you're batting right-handed, you're standing on the left side of home plate and the ball should be going to left field.

Young players have a hard time with outside pitches. They want to go after the ball, so they reach out, which takes the strength out their swing

### **Batting**

You will have no problem getting your players' enthusiastic about batting practice. They simply love it. But it requires the greatest amount of hand-eye coordination in baseball, so it can be frustrating to some players. To limit a negative experience, be sure the bat the player is using is properly sized for their age, strength and weight. Many parents' will buy a bat because the player liked the color, shape, handle, logo, brand, etc..., without any consideration to it's size, weight and appropriateness.

The actual hitting motion is a variation of the throwing procedure. Use "Turn, Look, Step and Swing" instead of "Turn, Look, Step and Throw".

Be Ready: As in throwing, hitting the ball requires the player to be in a 'ready' position to effectively hit the ball.

## **Plate Discipline Tee Drill**

**Purpose:** To help players learn their hitting zone for different counts. This is an introductory drill to learning plate discipline that can be used to get the player thinking about pitch location and get a rough idea of what pitches they like.

**Procedure:** Have a throw down home plate with a batting tee on top of it in an area where you can have a player hit into a fence or other backstop. Have a coach or parent available to help with moving tee and placing balls.

This drill can be used as a batting practice station over a course of any 3 practices or you could have 3 stations set up at a single practice if you have the equipment available.

### **Practice 1**

Player moves and adjusts the tee to the pitch they like the best and can handle. This is the pitch they would like to hit on a 3-0 count. Have them take a few swings. Now at the same height have them move the tee towards them not going beyond a spot that they still like and is not too far inside the plate. Have them take a few swings and confirm that this is still a pitch they like and can handle. If not move the tee until they have a pitch they like. Then move the tee back to the original spot. Take a couple of swings, now move the tee outside a few inches to find the outside part of the zone for the pitches they really like.

Once you have determined the width, then do the same for the height. After this station, the player should have a rectangle of a zero strike hitting zone.

**Coaching Tip:** I find it beneficial to print out a hitting zone chart for each player and have it filled in by a parent or coach at this station. Not only can it be referenced and refined by the player and coach at later times, it can also help a coach determine weaknesses that need to be worked on for that player.

### **Practice 2**

Once the 0 strike hitting zone has been defined, then work on establishing a 1 strike hitting zone, which for most players will be the strike zone. Move the tee location and height to be outside the 0 strike hitting zone, but within the strike zone and have the player take a few cuts at each of these locations.

### **Practice 3**

Now complete this series by having the player work on hitting pitches that they may not be strikes, but are too close to take with 2 strike count. Emphasize taking a short quick swing and putting the bat on the ball.

This drill can also help players evaluate their plate coverage and determine the proper distance from the plate.

## **Target Bunting Drill**

Purpose Works on Eye, hand coordination. Perfect for getting bunts where they belong

Procedure: Draw sections in the dirt in front of home plate.  
In each section, write a number representing a point value based on what the coach considers the perfect bunt.  
Divide the players up into teams  
Bunt for points.

### Key Points

Players are awarded the point value of the section that the ball stops in (not lands in)

Add up the points and make a competition out of it.

Eventually you can have the players draw the sections so they get more in tune with what they are trying to accomplish.

## **Base Running**

This is a great skill development area that can be practiced at the end of each warm-up session. Have players 'run through' first base. Lead off and steal second before the next base runner, etc... Just like throwing, the base runner should assume a 'ready' position before the next pitch.

This includes:

- Square the body to the batter with the foot on the edge of the bag (for tight bases) or the feet spread shoulder width (loose bases) to begin the 'push' with the front foot ready to begin the next sprint.
- Think: What will I do if the ball is hit to... (second, third, left field, etc...)
- Look to the coach. The coach will be giving signals to the batter and the runner instructing them about the next play. This could include a bunt, hit and run, sacrifice fly, etc...
- Watch the ball. Each runner should begin their 'push' to the next base as soon as the ball is release, whether contact is made with the ball or not, but should immediately halt their progress when they do not hear contact with the ball.
- Run a flat arc. The player should be taught to round the bag, not make hard left cuts at each bag.

The Skills:

There are 4 basic base running skills that you will want to teach your players.

They are:

- The sprint to first base.
- How to lead-off the base.
- How and when to slide.
- How and when to tag-up.

### **The Sprint**

Running to first base is the equivalent of the 40-yard dash, just shorter. The running style is similar to track and field; head held high, upper body leaning forward to create momentum, arms pump back and forth with the forward movement and run on the toes or ball of the foot. Players' should focus on the following skills:

Run through the bag. The runner should not stop, slow down, or even change pace, except to adjust their stride to make contact with the bag, unless the coach signals them otherwise. Their momentum should carry them into foul territory, where they are deemed to be 'safe'. If the player remains in fair territory, they can be tagged out.

Have the player watch the first base coach after the initial contact, not the ball. The coach should signal the coach to prepare to run 'extra' bases or to continue on to second.

Slide into first base only if the first baseman is off the bag and it is the only way to avoid a tag.

Once at or beyond first, the runners' attention should turn to the third base coach, who will signal plays, steals, etc...

### **The Lead Off**

For runners' not playing 'tight' bases, the lead off can allow a runner a much better chance of reaching the next base safely. Once the ball is back to the pitcher, and he begins his windup, the player should advance 6 to 12 feet from the bag, depending on age and size. They should feel comfortable that they could get back to the bag quicker than a ball thrown to the first baseman. They should assume a ready position; feet no more than shoulder width, weight on the balls of their feet, shoulders square to the batter.

Regardless whether they run or return, the process is the same. The foot closest to their destination takes a small forward step as the shoulders and hips turn to the same. The back foot now crosses over the front foot as the sprint begins.

If they intend to steal, or there is a full count with 2 outs (everyone should be running!), they should begin their sprint as soon as the pitcher makes forward progress towards the plate. Runners should learn to watch the pitchers' feet to make sure he is making contact with the rubber, otherwise he can throw anytime.

### **Sliding**

Once a runner realizes the play at the base will be close, or are instructed to 'get down' the player should begin a slide. This is not necessary if the runner is in a force situation, but it is common to slide into second to force the second baseman to move out of the basepath, making a double play more difficult. This skill should be practiced, as injury will occur if the slide is not executed properly. There are two common sliding techniques, the feet first slide and the head first slide. Due to the inherent dangers of sliding head first, we will focus on the feet first slide.

The player will begin the slide 8 to 12 feet from the base, depending on their speed and size.

The player should drop gently to the ground, by first bending both knees. The right leg should extend towards the base and the left leg should bend under the player, with the left toe pointing backwards. This position allows the runner to control the descent to the ground.

Land on the read end. There is much more padding that on the hips and prevents some nasty bruises.

Now sliding on the ground, the front foot should come up 6 inches to allow the foot to go over the bag. The hands should be up off the ground, as this will only slow them and possibly make them stop short of the bag.

### **Tagging Up (Tag Up)**

This allows a runner to advance to the next base on a fly ball, as soon as it is caught. This will generally be on deep fly balls, away from the runner's next base. For instance, a ball deep to right field is perfect to advance from second to third. However, a ball to left field would probably be disastrous. Any deep ball can advance a runner home. Balls hit to extreme left and right field can advance a runner from first to second.

Here's the basics.

To tag up, a runner must return to his last base while the ball is in the air.

They should prepare to sprint hard, and be prepared to slide into the base.

As soon as the ball is caught the footrace begins.

Some tips for tagging up:

With very young teams, have the player advance half way to the base, as the ball will as often as not be dropped.

The player needs to think about the player fielding the ball, and judge their throwing abilities.

They should judge the depth of the ball, as well as how far it will be from the base they are running to.

### **Baseball/Softball - Beginning Slide Drill**

Purpose: Great sliding drill for teaching beginners how to slide.

Procedure: Line up your players in a single line, space arm length apart. Talk to them about the cadence of the slide. Left, right, left, sit. Then have the player's start walking left leg first, right leg, left leg and then have them fall to their butts with the right leg extended and the left leg folded underneath in a figure four. Once the players get better then begin having them slowly run the three steps, left, right, left, sit.

### **Baseball/Softball - Watch The Ball Through Drill**

Purpose: Teach players to watch the ball through as baserunners, before taking the next base.

Procedure: Line up a player at first base, shortstop, second base and in shallow left, center and right fields. Line-up remaining players in foul territory at first base. Start off the drill with a runner on first base. The coach hits to one of the fielders. If it's a fly ball to left field the runner at first should go half way between first and second and watch the ball to see if the fielder catches it. If the fielder catches it, then the runner should return to first. If the fielder misses it then the runner needs to continue to second base. Have the fielders play the ball live. Continue the drill with different baserunning situations and hitting to different areas of the field.

### **Relay Race**

Purpose: This is a good conditioning drill and helps players work on making good turns when taking extra bases.

Procedure: Split your team into 2 equal squads. Have half the team at home and half at second.

Have the first player in line start with the ball in his hand.

On your signal each team will start running around the bases. After each player runs around the bases, he will hand the ball to the next player. First team to get all players completely around wins.

To add a level of difficulty and decision making, use tennis balls and let the players throw the ball to the next player anytime after he has rounded the last base.

### **Baseball/Softball - In The Dirt Drill**

Purpose: To help base runners learn to read the trajectory of a pitched ball.

Procedure: Set players up at all three bases. They are independent of each other because each base has different rules for a ball in the dirt. A coach pitches from the mound and mixes in good and bad pitches to the catcher. Any time a ball is about to bounce the whole team yells "Dirt". This helps you make sure everyone is paying attention. Base runners on first should automatically go when the ball is in the dirt. Runners on second should react to the ball in the dirt by getting a good lead and deciding if they can make it safely to third. If the ball gets away from the catcher they should go, if the catcher digs the ball out of the dirt, they should return to second. Runners at third should follow the same principles as the runner at second, get a good lead, and then react to whether the catcher digs the ball out of the dirt or not.

## **Base Circuit Drill**

Base running to all bases

Purpose:

Procedure:

To begin, place one player in the coach's box at first base. Put the first runner in the batter's box at the plate with a bat.

All other players line up in the home plate vicinity.

Pitcher simulates throwing a pitch. Batter executes normal swing mechanics, breaks from batter's box and sprints to first base.

Batter runner to run full-speed through the bag at first.

After the batter has sprinted to first, he becomes the first base coach.

The first base coach becomes the runner at first.

The next player in line steps to the plate with a bat.

The pitching coach simulates the next pitch. The batter swings and breaks toward first. The runner at first steals second with a slide into the base.

The pitching coach simulates the next pitch. The batter swings and breaks toward first, Runner on first steals second with a slide into the base. Runner on Second takes a proper turn around third and heads for home.

Continue.....

Key Points:

Each runner runs the base circuit in three stages, and a full circuit includes three runners running separate stages.

***It is a good conditioning drill, but mostly it prepares them to run the bases properly and with a mission.***



## **Defense**

### **Catching**

Players' will need to learn to catch a thrown ball, a fly ball, and grounders. Younger or inexperienced players will tend to be afraid of the ball, which usually results in a missed ball or a bonk on the head, chest, etc... For these players, the use of safety balls will help them gain confidence in their catching abilities without risk of injury. This can be a major hurdle for many players and seeing them conquer this fear will be a satisfying accomplishment for you and the player.

Every player, with the exception of the catcher, should follow these guidelines for effective catching.

- Keep your eyes on the ball.
- Always be in a ready position when the ball is batted or thrown.
- Think. What am I going to do if the ball comes to me?
- Concentrate on getting to the ball first, then make the catch.
- Keep the arms relaxed and both hands ready.
- Keep the elbows flexed to help absorb the impact of the ball.
- Watch the ball all the way into the glove
- Use both hands. Players should use the throwing hand to help 'cage' the ball in the glove, and then to get the ball out of the glove quickly for the throw.
- Be Ready: The ready position serves to get the player in position to move quickly to get to the ball. It is also should serve as a moment to think about the upcoming batter and play the "If the ball comes to me, I am going to..." drill in their head.
- The feet should be slightly wider than the shoulders.
- Knees should be bent.
- The player should be bent at the waist to move their weight over the balls of their feet.
- The arms are between or on the knees.

### **Catching Fly Balls**

Before catching the fly balls, the player must first get to the ball. Have the players follow these guidelines:

- Assume the 'ready' position.
- As soon as the ball heads their direction, they should sprint to where they think the ball will come down while keeping their eyes on the ball with quick glances at the position of other players. The glove should be down in a typical running fashion. For balls hit over their head, it is especially important to get back quickly since they can adjust forward much quicker than backwards
- Yell "Mine" at least twice and loudly while in motion. Continue making momentary glances around the field for other players approaching with better position to make the catch.
- Use the feet to adjust and drift with the ball.
- The glove should be extended over and in front of the head with the fingers parallel with the ground and the thumb pointed forward. This maximizes the amount of pocket exposed to the path of the ball. Keeping the glove over the head allows the player to follow the ball with their

eyes all the way into the glove and serves to protect the face and head of inexperienced players. After the catch the player should quickly, turn, look, step and throw.

- **Catching Thrown Balls:** Since they should not have to move far to get the ball, this should not be an issue, unless you coach T-Ball! The glove should be positioned in front of the body with the elbow bent whenever possible. To catch a ball that is above the shoulders, the fingers will generally point skyward, with the pocket facing the path of the ball. For balls between the waist and shoulder the glove fingers should be pointed with the thumb pointed skyward, unless the ball is coming directly into the chest of the player. In this case the glove is extended out in front of the player with the fingers pointed out in the direction of the throwing arm, with the thumb pointed down. For balls below the waist the glove fingers will be pointed down. After the catch the player should quickly, turn, look, step and throw

### **Backups**

Since not all your players will be perfect with their throws, you will need to teach your players to make strategic backups on throws to bases. Teach your players a simple rule: If they are not involved in the play, they should be! Even if the ball doesn't come to them, they should be in a position to field the ball on overthrows or missed catches. Here are some basic backup strategies listed by base:

**First Base:** All throws to first base should be backed up by the catcher on infield hits or outfield flies. The right fielder is responsible for all throws coming from the catcher. If the 1<sup>st</sup> baseman is responsible for fielding the ball, the pitcher should back up or cover first base.

**Second Base:** The shortstop and 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman are equally responsible for covering second base, and they are equally responsible for backing each other up. For throws from the catcher, the shortstop should backup on the throw. The center fielder should also move up as the throw is made. The shortstop will generally cover the base on throws from first and the 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman will cover on throws from 3<sup>rd</sup> and short.

**Third Base:** Throws to third from the infield or outfield should be backed up by the pitcher. Throws from the catcher will be backed up the left fielder. Should the play be at 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> baseman is busy fielding the ball, the pitcher or shortstop will be responsible for covering the base.

**Home Plate:** All throws to home will be backed up by the pitcher, and if the catcher has to field the ball, the pitcher is responsible for covering the base.

### **Relays and Cutoffs**

Since few young players can throw the ball, at least accurately that is, from the outfield to a base, it is important that your players' know to setup a relay.

On long fly-balls hit to left and center field, the shortstop should sprint to position themselves between the fielder and the base where the play will take place. The second basemen should do the same for balls hit to right field, as the shortstop covers second base. The weaker the fielders arm the closer the relay player must get.

Cutoffs are designed to stop the ball when it is obvious the runner will be safe and there is an opportunity to redirect the play to a following runner. The cutoff player will position themselves about 20 feet in front of the base where the play will occur. If the runner will obviously be safe, the player should cut off the ball and redirect it to another base. If the throw is off target, they can field and throw the ball to the base to try and make the out. If there is a good chance at an out, the player should let the ball go. Since almost all relays are to third and home we will focus on these:

Third Base: For throws to third, the shortstop should make the cut off while the pitcher backs up third.

Home: Throws from left field will be cut off by the third baseman as the pitcher backs up the catcher. Throws from center and right should be cutoff by the first baseman

### **Catching Grounders: Fielding**

The key to proper fielding is to keep the player square to the ball as it approaches. Note: This can be difficult for younger players to grasp so you will have to demonstrate the concept repeatedly. This maximizes the pocket area open to the ball and should the ball be difficult to handle, they will at the very least be able to stop the ball. Here are the key steps to proper fielding:

- Assume the 'ready' position.
- Get to the ball. The player should lead with the glove, always keeping the glove the nearest thing to the ball. Infielders may not have the opportunity to get in front of the ball, but instead will have to judge the speed and bounces of the ball to field it on the run.
- Once in position, resume the ready position with these changes. The glove foot should be in front with the glove open wide and on the ground. This allows the player to transfer to the 'turn, look...' throwing method quickly.
- As the ball approaches, extend the glove in front of the body towards the ball. Should the player mishandle the ball, this will allow them to possibly have a second opportunity.
- Keep the glove low, especially on erratically bouncing balls. Teach players to always err on the low side since they can bring the glove up to field a ball much quicker than they can move it down.
- Watch the ball all the way into the glove.
- Use both hands. Players should use the throwing hand to help 'cage' the ball in the glove, and then to get the ball out of the glove quickly for the throw.
- Turn, Look, Step and Throw...

### **Throwing**

This is an important developmental step in every player's skill-set. Bad fundamental throwing mechanics can result in severe injury to the arm.

There are three basic throwing styles: the overhand throw, the three-quarters throw and the side-arm throw. It is strongly suggested you teach the overhand throw, where the hand, forearm and elbow come straight over the top of the shoulder, rather than the three-quarter throw, where the hand, forearm and elbow is outside the shoulder at the top of the throw. Sports medicine over the last 20 years has proven that the overhand throw is the least damaging type of throw (all types of throwing are unnatural to the human body and all can create some tendon and joint damage). The sidearm throw, where the elbow is bent and the forearm moves parallel to the ground should only be used for short cross-motion throws. I.e. Player running to his left while throwing to the right. Sidearm throws are extremely damaging to both the shoulder and elbow joints.

You will need some basic guidelines to teach your players proper technique. We suggest the "Turn, Look, Step and Throw" method. Here are the details:

- **Turn**. After fielding a ball, the player must first turn his body perpendicular to the target. During this transition, the throwing hand retrieves the ball from the glove and grips the ball with the index and middle fingers across the seams of the ball. The thumb will be under the ball, directly on the stitching.

Note: Younger players will not be able to grip the ball in this manner, since their hands are not large enough. They will tend to 'palm' the ball instead, which will be rectified as they get older and larger.

- **Look**: The arm comes back as the weight of the player shifts to their back, or throwing-arm, foot. The throwing arm should be flexed at the elbow, not stiff. This part of the skill encourages eye contact with the target player, who needs to know the ball is coming at them. Note: This is especially important with younger players, who will learn not to throw the ball at someone who is not looking.
- **Step**: As in most motions, the energy the 'whole-body' produces far outweighs the results of the action. (For instance, do you think a golfer hits the ball 300 yards because of the strength of his arms? Not!) This action transfers their weight and 'whole-body' energy from the throwing foot to the target foot. By this time, they should be confident of their target, and the target player is waiting for the ball. This is similar in nature to the weight transfer of the swing.
  - **Throw**: Let it go and follow through. Before the throwing-arm comes forward, the entire weight of the body is transferred to the forward foot. This transfers energy to the arm and the ball. The throwing arm foot swings forward immediately after delivery and should 'land in a ready position' as the arm continues downward. The players' body should finish roughly parallel to the target

### **Baseball/Softball - Star Drill Game**

**Purpose:** Teaches the infield to concentrate on their throws and allows the coach to stress the importance of teamwork. If one player doesn't make a good throw, the outfielders need to be in a position to back up the bases.

**Procedure:** Position a complete infield, except for the pitcher, and a complete outfield. The drill starts with the coach hitting to the second baseman, the second baseman throws to third base, the third baseman throws to first base, the first baseman throws to the shortstop and the shortstop throws to the catcher. The whole time this is going on you have a runner run the bases. They leave at the same time as the coach hits the ball, Make sure that your infielders stay in their normal positions and do not start moving closer together. The runner is racing to get around all of the bases before the ball gets to the catcher. As your players will quickly learn, if they make good throws and catches they will easily beat the runner.

### **Baseball/Softball - Outfield Throwing Drill**

- Purpose:** To develop the outfielders throwing accuracy and emphasize the importance of throwing the ball low and on the line. This drill also works on helping the players understand alignment.
- Procedure:** Make sure you work all fields; left, center and right. Start off with all outfielders in left field in a single line. Infield and catcher are in their normal positions. Start off by hitting a grounder down the left field line, outfielder fields the ball and throws to second base, then goes to the back of the line. After all fielders have gone through once, hit grounder to left center, outfielder fields the ball and throws to second base, once group has completed a cycle hit grounder directly to left fielder who will now throw home. Finally, hit a routine fly ball to the left fielder, who will again throw home. After the group has completed this cycle rotate to center field and repeat drill. During this time have the infielders play their normal back-up positions for an outfield hit. On throws to second, the second baseman should cover the bag, make the tag and then throw to third base. Third base will make the tag and then throw to first base. First base will cover the bag, catch the ball and throw to the shortstop. On throws to home, catcher should catch the ball, make the tag and then throw to the shortstop covering third base, who will make the tag and throw to first, first throws to second and second back to third

### **Short-Hop**

- Purpose:** To give players practice fielding ground balls that they would have to field as a short hop if they didn't move.
- Procedure:** Have two lines of players who will work in pairs just as if they are playing catch. Set the distance between the two lines at about 60-90 feet depending on age.

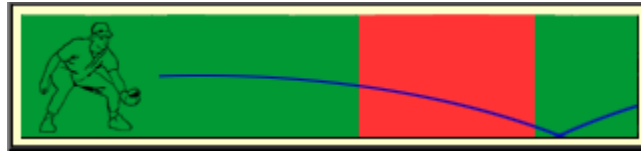
Players will take turns throwing short-hops to one another. As the ball in the air the player fielding the ball will need to adjust his position to either get closer to the ball and catch it right at the bounce or back up slightly to catch the ball at a higher point to make the play easier. See the diagram below and have your players try to catch the ball in the green areas.

The ball should be thrown right at the player not to the side. The players should be working on getting the correct depth and learning when to charge the ball, when to stay put, and when to back up slightly.

Players should vary the distance and arc on the ball to help the other

player work on many different types of short-hops.

The graphic below shows the best positions to catch the ball and avoid a short-hop.



Coaching Tip: Make sure the players understand that it is preferable to charge the ball and catch it as it hits the ground rather than backing up. Depending on age and arm strength, you may have players that won't be able to throw a runner out if they back up. If that's the case you may want to modify the drill so the players do not have the option to back up.

### **Bad Throw**

Purpose: This drill helps your first baseman work on fielding balls thrown in the dirt.

Procedure: Have first basemen in a line by first base. Coach will stand midway between first and second.

Coach will throw the ball in the dirt to the first baseman. Ball should be thrown on all sides to allow first basemen to work on fielding balls in the dirt on different sides and angles.

Once a player has caught the ball he will throw it back to the coach and go to the end of the line.

For younger players use softer baseballs to allow them to gain confidence. Don't use tennis balls as they won't give a true enough hop.

### **Baseball/Softball - Outfield Throwing Drill**

**Purpose:** To develop the outfielders throwing accuracy and emphasize the importance of throwing the ball low and on the line. This drill also works on helping the players understand alignment.

**Procedure:** Make sure you work all fields; left, center and right. Start off with all outfielders in left field in a single line. Infield and catcher are in their normal positions. Start off by hitting a grounder down the left field line, outfielder fields the ball and throws to second base, then goes to the back of the line. After all fielders have gone through once, hit grounder to left center, outfielder fields the ball and throws to second base, once group has completed a cycle hit grounder directly to left fielder who will now throw home. Finally, hit a routine fly ball to the left fielder, who will again throw home. After the group has completed this cycle rotate to center field and repeat drill. During this time have the infielders play their normal back-up positions for an outfield hit. On throws to second, the second baseman should cover the bag, make the tag and then throw to third base. Third base will make the tag and then throw to first base. First base will cover the bag, catch the ball and throw to the shortstop. On throws to home, catcher should catch the ball, make the tag and then throw to the shortstop covering third base, who will make the tag and throw to first, first throws to second and second back to third

### **Baseball/Softball - All Around Drill**

**Purpose:** Great drill for working the infield quickly and warming up. Great for teaching players how to back up the throw. "If you can't see the player who is making the throw to the position you are backing up, you are too close"

**Procedure:** Position a player at each infield position excluding pitcher and shortstop. Each base excluding the catcher has a backup who is positioned behind the base. Begin the drill with the catcher throwing to first, first throws to second, second throws to third, third throws to home. After a few minutes, reverse the drill home to third, etc. The players playing behind the bases should be lining them selves up to back up the throw. If there is an errant throw the back-ups should be ready to retrieve the ball and make the throw to the next base

### **Baseball/Softball - Ground Belly Load Drill**

- Purpose: Develops good mechanics for throwing.
- Procedure: Players start from a distance of the normal base setting. I.e. (60 feet for little league, 90 feet for high school baseball). Infielders start with the glove on the ground with the ball in the glove and their throwing hand next to the glove. This helps the players learn to find the seams for throwing. On the coaches command of belly the infielder brings the ball to their belly.  
Skip step , load, and throw. Outfielders follow the same except they start with the ball in their glove above their head. (T-drill) Go hand in hand with this drill. Set-up two bats in the shape of a T. Throw starts with the pushoff leg on top of the T. Rythym up to the ball using baby steps either 123 or 12. The receiver is in position when the throwing leg is below the top of the t and on the opposite side of theT from non throwing leg. Then the receiver will skip step and load up to throw. Instep should be shown to target..

### **Baseball/Softball - Fungo Fielding Drill**

- Purpose: To provide players with an opportunity to field a large number of ground balls.
- Procedure: Drill has one fielder, who stands 40-60 feet in front of the hitter (depending on their age), and one shagger, who stands on the right side of the hitter. (Three person groups.) Drill can have as many groups as desired.  
The hitter hits 10 ground balls to the fielder. The fielder fields the ground balls and throws them to the shagger. After fielding 10 ground balls, the fielder becomes the shagger, the shagger becomes the hitter and the hitter becomes the fielder.

### **Baseball/Softball - Line Relay Drill**

- Purpose: To simulate throwing under game conditions. Works on proper execution of throwing and relay mechanics .
- Procedure: Divide the team into groups of four. Place members of each group between 60 and 90 feet apart depending on age. Place first person on the first base foul line and spread the balance of players towards left field. Infielders should be in the middle two relay positions so they can practice relay moves. Player at the beginning of the line has the ball. On coaches command the players throw down and back a predetermined number of times. If an overthrow occurs or a ball is missed, the ball must return to the start of the line and the throw made accurately before the ball can be advanced.



### **Hockey Drill**

- Purpose:** To practice fielding fundamentals and game reactions in situations where players can't predict the bounce of the ball.
- Procedure:** Separate players into two teams, and put one team on each side of the backstop, which serves as a goal.  
Each team rotates a "goalie" to defend the goal (about 10 feet wide).  
The coaches hit ground balls in an attempt to score on the goalies.
- Key Points:**  
Start out slowly and increase the tempo as the game continues.  
Make sure the players field the ball out in front of the body and that the head is down on the ball as it enters the mitt.

### **Hockey Goalie**

- Purpose:** This game helps your catchers develop the skill of blocking pitches in the dirt.
- Procedure:** Catcher in full gear; 2 cones; baseballs
- Place a cone on each side of the catcher. Vary width depending on age, skill level.
- Coach will position himself about 30 feet in front of the plate depending on arm strength. For younger players I would recommend having a coach or parent throw the balls instead of a player.  
Throw balls to the catcher between the cones. Throw most in the dirt, but also throw some in the air to make sure the catcher isn't dropping early. Vary throws on each side and in front of the catcher.  
Throw 10 pitches and count the number of goals allowed.

### **Throwing to Second**

- Purpose:** Helps to teach the catcher the importance of quick feet and proper technique when throwing to second base.
- Procedure:** Catchers gear, baseballs, stop watch
- Have a player or two cover second base. A pitcher on the mound to throw a pitch and your catchers behind the plate.
- Have the pitcher go through his stretch motion and pitch the ball to the catcher who is behind the plate. The catcher will catch the ball and throw to second as if a runner is stealing.
- The coach should time the catcher as he makes the throw. Start the stop watch when the ball hits the glove and stop the stop watch when the tag is applied by the fielder covering second.

By waiting for the tag to be applied, you will be emphasizing the importance of accuracy in throwing a runner out.

For young catchers there is a tendency to take an extra step so they can get something extra on the throw. This drill will show them that it's more important to release the ball quickly than it is to take extra time and throw the ball harder.

This drill can be used when throwing to other bases as well

### **Cutoff & Relay Drill**

**Purpose:** To work on the mechanics of relay and cutoff skills and show players how they can contribute to a team defense

**Procedure :** Place a team on the field.  
Each infielder has a ball (except for the pitcher and catcher).  
Stand in shallow outfield and call out the number of runners on base.  
Each infielder, one at a time, calls out the number of outs and throws a simulated hit to the outfield, anything from a single or a double to a sure out.  
The drill starts with the third baseman, and the other infielders wait until the previous cutoff or relay play is complete before taking a turn.  
The catcher directs the cutoff players to their positions and calls the play.

**Key Points:**

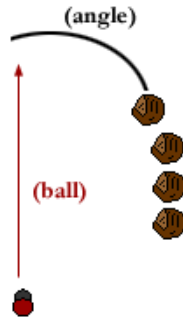
Use every base running situation possible to practice the spectrum of cutoff and relay plays.

Watch each infielder's and outfielder's throwing, catching and fielding mechanics, and check that each player makes the proper choice about where to throw the ball.

## **Get the Angle**

Purpose: Gives outfielders practice at taking the proper angle to cut-off a ball in the gap and circle the ball if time allows.

Procedure: Have outfielder start about 50 feet in front of you. Have a line of outfielder a few feet away.



This drill has the coach throw balls on the ground and in the air to simulate different balls that are hit in the outfield gaps. If you have difficulty throwing a tennis racket can be used. This will help you have better control over where the ball goes.

Have the players work on taking the proper angle to the ball making sure they error on the side of getting behind the ball and not letting it get by. Emphasize to the players that by getting behind the ball they will be in a good position to make a throw.

## **Bunt Defense Drill**

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

Procedure: Place a defender at each infield position, including one pitcher on the mound. The remainder of the pitching staff will be in foul ground, ready to take their turns on the mound. Use your outfielders to run the bases.

Direct the drill from one of the batter's boxes

The drill begins with the pitcher on the mound throwing a strike.

The coach responds by rolling a simulated bunt to various parts of the infield and observing the defense accordingly.

### Key Points

Depending on the location and speed of your "bunts," you can create any situation you desire.

Work on the most common situations first and foremost

As a variation, you can use outfielders or extra players to do actual bunting, depending on their abilities and roles as hitters. For best control, a coach works just fine.

## **Pitching**

The big difference between throwing and pitching is accuracy. Your association or league will probably have limits on the amount of time and number of pitches young players can throw since overworking an arm can create a great deal of damage to the players' wrist, elbow and shoulder joints. Younger pitchers (12 and under) should focus on throwing an accurate fastball and a change-up. Your players' will want to throw a curve or slider, but will generally not be able to get the ball over the plate. Throwing breaking balls can really tire, and possibly injure, a young arm if performed incorrectly. Emphasize the need to keep their eyes on the target throughout the motion and be ready to field the ball at the end of the pitch.

If you read the throwing points above, you will notice some similarities with pitching, with the exception of the pre-throw procedure. You still need to ensure they throw overhand. A pitcher will tend to slip into a three-quarters throw as they tire, so this is a signal to warm up your pitcher.

There are two throwing styles, depending on whether there are runners on base. With runners on base, the pitcher will throw from the 'stretch', which is a shorter, more compact throwing style.

This shortens the amount of time a runner has to take a big lead or steal a base. With no runners on base the pitcher will use a wind-up, an exaggerated forward motion with the front, or non-throwing, leg making an up and out motion to maximize the forward body motion.

**The Wind-up:** This is the 'pre-throw' part of the pitch. This requires the pitcher to properly grip the ball and then properly place their feet for the wind-up. The pitcher **MUST** grip the ball with their fingertips for good speed and accuracy. By holding the ball across the seams, the ball will tend to rise, whereas a ball gripped with the seams will tend to sink. The wind-up motion begins by placing the ball of the ball-throwing foot on the front edge of the rubber, with the other foot behind the rubber. A small 'rocking motion' backwards with the non-throwing foot begins the throw, shifting the weight of the player onto the back foot.

**Turn:** Similar to the throwing motion, but a bit more precise and delicate. After the 'rocking motion', the front, throwing arm foot turns parallel to the rubber as the pitcher pushes forward with the non-throwing foot. Getting the front in this position allows the pitcher to 'push' against the rubber. The pitchers' eyes **MUST** remain on the target throughout the motion.

**Step:** The front leg, or non-throwing leg, lifts and extends towards the target. If pitching from a mound, you will need to have the player experiment with the length of the step, since the downward motion will effect their ball positioning. The foot should stay almost parallel to the rubber, or pointing at third base (for a right handed thrower), until just before touching down, when the foot should then rotate and point at the target. This forces the shoulders and waist to turn and open which transfers all the bodies forward motion to the upper body. The knee should be kept bend to absorb the shock associated with the impact.

**Throw:** Or in this case, pitch with great accuracy. As the arm comes over the top, the ball should be released at the apex of the throw. As the ball is released, the wrist snaps to add acceleration and spin. The back leg should come around after the ball is released and lands parallel with the forward leg, putting the player square to the plate in a 'ready' position.

The stretch position is the same without the windup. The player begins with the throwing foot parallel to and touching the rubber facing third (right-handed) or first (left-handed). The non-throwing foot should be parallel to the rubber at shoulder width or less. This allows the pitcher to view all the runners and make quick throws to first and third in pick-off attempts.

### **Additional Resources**

<http://eteamz.active.com/baseball/instruction>

- A one stop shop for coaches and players alike, the eteamz instruction section is jammed packed with tips and drills from coaches across the country. Check them out and share your favorite tips and drills with us and we'll put them into our library!

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

- Baseball Skills Clinic and Product Guide

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

- Quality Coaching Baseball provides baseball instruction, baseball drills, coaching philosophy, and other information for youth baseball coaches, players, and parents who want to learn more about playing and coaching baseball.

[www.baseball-excellence.com](http://www.baseball-excellence.com)

- Baseball excellence is an online baseball clinic with emphasis on teaching the game of baseball to players, parents and coaches

<https://eteamz.active.com/fastpitch/instruction>

- A one stop shop for coaches and players alike, the eteamz instruction section is jammed packed with tips and drills from coaches across the country. Check them out and share your favorite tips and drills with us and we'll put them into our library!

<http://www.y-coach.com/youthbaseballinfo.html>

- Providing information that will enhance the coaches, players and parents youth baseball experience.

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

- a free resource committed to helping you quickly find useful information on drills, practice organization, game strategy, baseball fundamentals, and other subjects of interest to the youth baseball coach, parent, or fan.

[www.baseballtips.com/instruction.html](http://www.baseballtips.com/instruction.html)

- Improve Your Game by using our Free Articles

[www.youthbaseballcoaching.com/drills.html](http://www.youthbaseballcoaching.com/drills.html)

- The Place for Baseball Knowledge

[www.guidetocoachingsports.com/baseball.htm](http://www.guidetocoachingsports.com/baseball.htm)

- A huge set of drills and more, designed to put your team ahead