

FUNdamentals of Coaching Youth Baseball and Softball



By Coach G (Gary Weinstein)

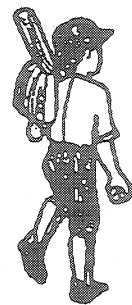


This handbook is dedicated to

Julie Wiatt, my wife and best friend,
who has supported my love for baseball,
and has helped me share and live my love for the game.



Zak Wiatt Weinstein, my son,
who steps up to the challenges of life and ball
with a joy that inspires all who know and love him.



Selma Weinstein and Bill Weinstein, my parents,
who gave me roots, wings, and good hand-eye coordination,
and who cheer me on in life and on the diamond,
just like in little league days.

Work in progress
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Draft of April 2007

TABLE of CONTENTS



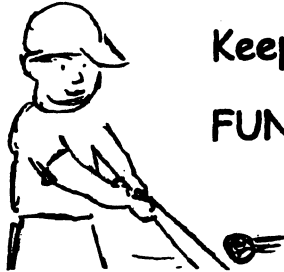
Leading off Page 1

A good coach ... 2

Every good practice has ... 7

Keep the games moving 8

FUNDamentals 9



Hitting 10

Catching the ball 13



Throwing 16

Running 17

Practice Drills 18



Key skills to learn 21

Managing your team -- 22

off the field

Support your teammates 23



Pitching to rookies 24



HAVE FUN!!! 25

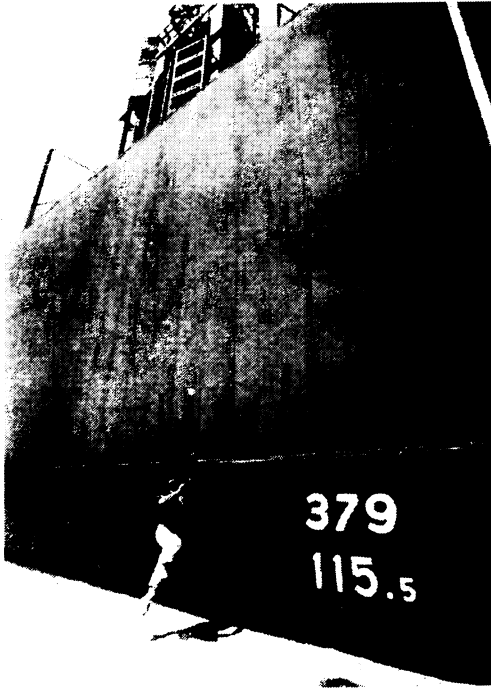
Sample lineup chart 26

Sample practice plan 27

Intrasquad games 28

Power of positive 29

Blank notes page 30



Coach G leaps to make catches at Fenway Park (left) and Yankee Stadium (right).
These photos were taken during Coach G's dreams.

Photos by John Dolan, Tim Fleming and Julie Wiatt



About the author

Coach G (Gary Weinstein) has been coaching and organizing youth baseball and softball since 1990, when his son, Zak, turned 5. He is Founding Commissioner of the Takoma Park-Silver Spring Babe Ruth League, a youth baseball and softball league in Takoma Park and Silver Spring, Md. Since 1998, he has coached youth and high school baseball in the District of Columbia.

In the D.C. area, Coach G has run coach and player clinics, and has been involved with several youth baseball and softball organizations and camps.

As a high school baseball player in Baltimore, Md., Coach G was an all-state centerfielder who broke batting average and stolen base records.



FUNdamentals of

Coaching Young Kids in Baseball and Softball

1. **CHERISH THIS SPECIAL TIME.** Relax. Have fun with it; that helps make it fun for everyone.
2. **CREATE A FUN, FAST-PACED, RELAXED ATMOSPHERE, WHERE KIDS ARE CONFIDENT AND COMFORTABLE.**

- Plan practices, in advance.
- Have fast-paced drills and warm-ups – using games, contests, challenges.
- Break FUNdamentals down to basics, using language kids understand, and will remember.
- Encourage. Praise. Suggest; don't criticize. Relax. Have fun yourself. Don't over-coach.
- Create achievable challenges.
- Have a fast-paced intrasquad games at every practice.
- Stress one FUNdamental and safety tip each practice.



3. **MAKE IT FUN FOR EVERYONE —** players, parents, siblings, grandparents, umps, yourself.
4. **MAKE IT GREAT FOR EVERY KID.** Treat everyone the same, as someone special. Every kid needs success. Every kid needs something different. Talk to parents about what their kids need.
5. **TEACH KIDS TO PLAY AND TO LOVE THE GAME --** and inspire them to play it on their own and with friends and family.



A good rookie baseball or softball coach:



Makes it great for every player

Challenges kids

Insures success and improvement for each player

Gives kids a chance

Builds confidence

Makes sure practices and games are:

FUN

SAFE

FAST-PACED

Creates a FUN atmosphere where kids are RELAXED and CONFIDENT

Encourages, encourages, encourages

Doesn't yell

Suggests, instead of criticize

Doesn't overcoach

Teach kids to love the game

to play on their own, with friends, family, anyone.

**teaches and improves basic skills and knowledge of the game,
but focuses on fun and success for all, and imparts a love of the game**

**(There are few things in life you can love for a whole lifetime.
Baseball is one.)**

a good coach ...

Strives for success more than winning

Values improvement over perfection

Makes a difference in a kid's life, the league, the community.

Is calm, relaxed, laughing, kibbutzing

Doesn't cross the intensity line

(Have a friend or assistant coach tell you if you're close to the line.)

Cares about every player ... and the team as a whole

Listens well, and shows that he or she values good listening by players

Seeks ideas and thoughts of players and parents

Establishes good eye contact, and insists that players keep eye contact when he or she speaks

Shows appreciation for good listening ("Billy, I like how you're listening.")

Never wastes practice time with speeches or administrative matters

Challenges kids to do their best, excel, win, help each other, improve

Makes sure everyone supports every teammate

Teaches:

good sportsmanship

rules

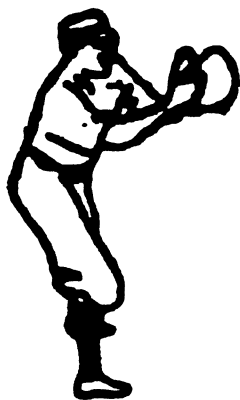
safety

teamwork

fundamentals

strategies

life lessons

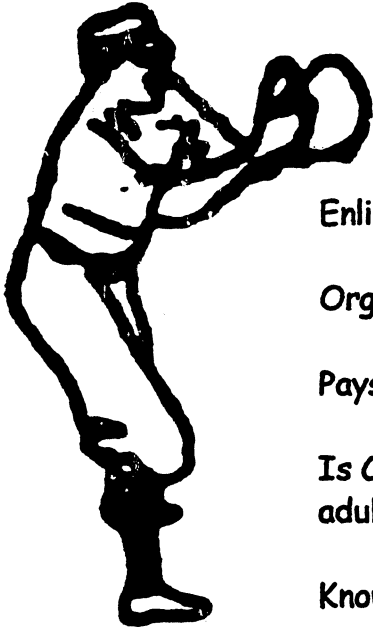


a good coach ...

**Exhibits exceptionally good sportsmanship,
and makes sure players, parents, siblings, fans are sportspersonlike.**

Adopts a no tolerance policy toward:

- unsportsmanlike conduct by players, parents, coaches, fans**
- complaining by players during a practice or game**



Enlists and welcomes help of others

Organizes good practices

Pays attention to field, weather, and playing conditions

Is CAREFUL ON ALL SAFETY, health and injury matters, including essential adult supervision and player awareness at all practices and games.

Knows basic first aid

Gives everyone a chance to play, and play good positions

**Respects officials, opponents, teammates, and the rules of the game,
and teaches players to do the same.**

Wants to win, but has the game and priorities in perspective

a good coach ...

communicates and listens well



encourages, praises -- often

offers positive, constructive, gentle suggestions -- not criticisms

suggests what to do next time, rather than harps on past

avoids public criticisms and belittling

doesn't yell

keeps messages simple

focuses on keys

listens to kids -- and their parents

Common flaws:

- **yelling**
- **letting too many people yell**
- **getting too technical with coaching**
- **over-reliance on e-mail; personal contact is important**
- **not focusing on key points**
- **making so many points that players and parents are not sure of the most important points**

Don't overcoach

Don't let others overcoach



Don't let too many people coach or shout instructions

EVERY GOOD PRACTICE HAS ...

A PLAN

drills, key points and time schedule developed -- before practice

good WARM-UP

GOOD DRILLS

kids doing lots of ... swinging, hitting, throwing, catching, pitching, running

no slow time: kids active, not standing around

no talks ... no administrative matters -- save it for before or after practice

fun, fast-paced drills, including contests, challenges, games

basic drills with a purpose

challenging drills that stretch skills



one or two FUNDAMENTALS -- taught, practiced, stressed

a key GAME STRATEGY

SAFETY TIP explained and practiced (especially with bats, helmets, throwing balls)

INTRA-SQUAD GAME

a good practice also has:

- adults helping, not watching
- encouragement and praise
- goofiness and humor

KEEP THE GAMES MOVING



Start the game on time

Have players RUN on and off the field

Have Ump call "Batter Up!" quickly, even if a catcher is not ready

Post line-ups and defensive assignments

Have a Safety Captain (parent, not a coach) make sure on-deck batter is ready, and bench and on-deck area are safe and orderly

Have players ready to take field as soon as an inning ends.

Have CATCHER suited up, ready to go

pull catcher from basepaths with 2 outs

designate someone to help catcher suit up

use adult as catcher if player not ready

Have ump throw ball back to pitcher on passed balls

Don't argue with the Ump (only the manager can speak to the ump)

Don't let your parents or coaches argue with the Ump

No protracted discussions/negotiations about rules and calls ... PLAY BALL!!!

FUNdamentals

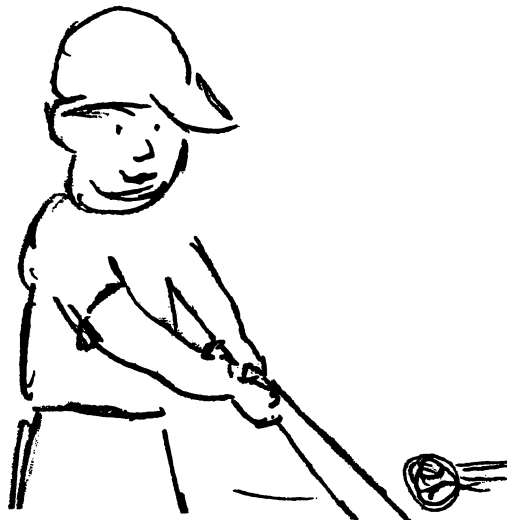
THROWING
CATCHING
HITTING
RUNNING



Keep it basic -- and fun!

Do it often, at a fast pace.

- Start at the most basic level.
- Find the simplest step that a kid can do, and practice it.
- Do drills slowly at first. Gradually speed up, from practice level to game speed.
- Master basic skills by repetition, fun drills and contests, and playing ball.
- Once basics are mastered, move up a step up, and another, and another -- as fast as success allows.



Inspire kids to play and practice at home, with friends and family.

HITTING

THINK HIT
Good pitch - smack it!
Bad pitch - let it go.

Bat
- at ready angle above shoulder
- Not resting on shoulder

GRIP
- loose
- comfortable
- in fingers, not palm



EYES on pitcher's release point (not on pitcher)

EYES on ball the whole way, including contact

lean slightly forward

knees bent

HANDS:
- up
- back
- in

about 6" from back shoulder

Use handle of bat to draw batter's box and lines where feet go

athletic stance
good bounce and balance
on balls of feet

**COMFORTABLE
READY TO HIT**

Rookies: balanced, comfortable stance
Advanced: 60-40 (60% on back leg, 40% front)
Biggs: weight back, ready to launch

HITTING

KEEP HANDS
BACK, FRONT
SHOULDER IN,
AS LONG AS
POSSIBLE.

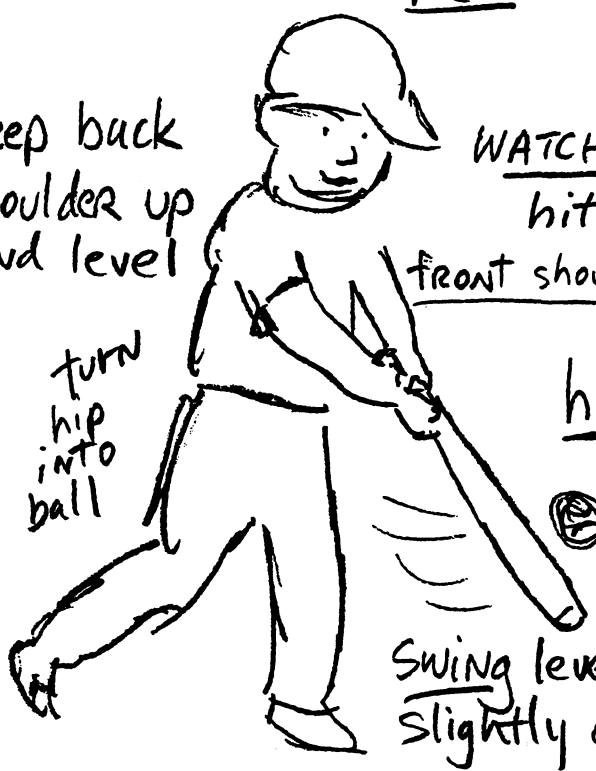


HEAD DOWN
EYES ON BALL
HANDS BACK

THROW HANDS AT BALL
HANDS THROUGH HITTING ZONE FIRST

→ STEP FORWARD SLIGHTLY, GENTLY, OR NOT AT ALL

Keep back
shoulder up
and level
WATCH the ball
hit the bat
front shoulder in

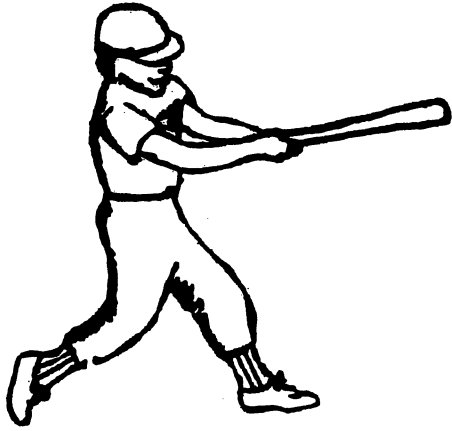


hit ball in front of plate

~~HIT IT HARD!~~

SWING level or
slightly down

launch your body forward

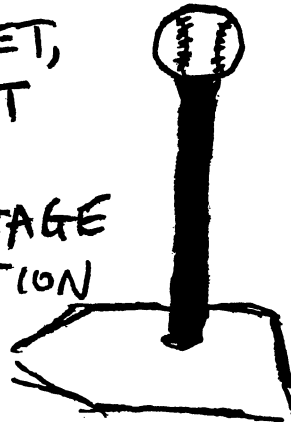


Hit it hard!
Follow Through

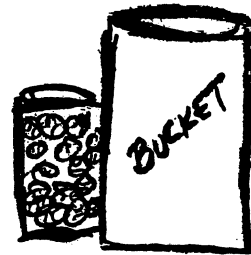
HITTING

Advanced: hit it hard, where it's pitched
And... GO!

ADULT SITS ON BUCKET,
AND FEEDS BUCKET
OF BALLS, ON T
PERFECT VANTAGE
POINT AND SITUATION
TO IMPART
HITTING ADVICE



A HITTING
COACH'S
BEST FRIEND



Common flaws:

- eye on pitcher, rather than spot where ball will be released
- eye not on ball the whole way
- lifts head as swings, forcing eye off ball
- drops back shoulder, forcing uppercut (instead of swinging slightly down)
- front shoulder flies out
- hits ball over plate, rather than in front of plate
- player thinks (and worries) too much -- about parents, pressure, etc., instead of having a simple, positive thought -- THINK HIT
- player loses confidence, and is scared of ball

CATCHING THE BALL



Rookies can start with:

Open glove wide, hold glove up, six inches from glove-side shoulder
Thumb of throwing hand behind inside part of glove

Or, open glove wide, hold glove down, at belt buckle
Pinkies crossed

Adult tosses ball lightly, right into glove

As player catches ball, close glove, cover with throwing hand

Advanced: catch ball across body, or off target

The Bigs: catch anything catchable



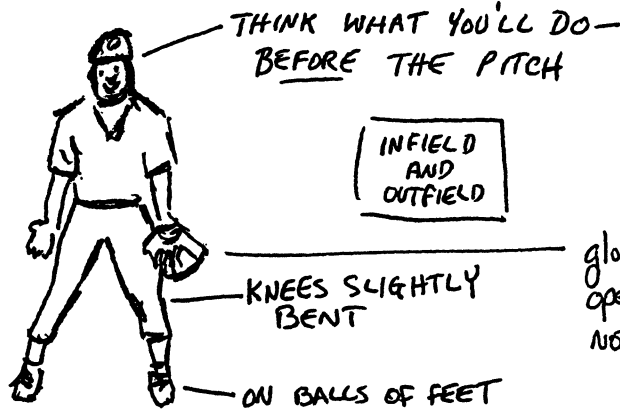
Common flaws:

- Glove partially open
- Open glove not facing oncoming ball
- Kids move back, scared of ball
- Kids take eye off ball
- Kids try one-handed, fancy catches

READY POSITION

CATCHING THE BALL

CREEP STEP AS PITCHER BEGINS TO THROW TO PLATE
(one step forward with each leg)

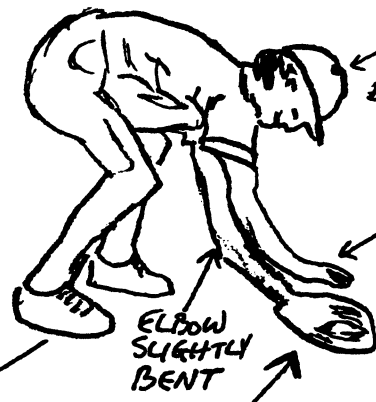


glove and hand open, facing batter, not resting on legs

FIELDING A GROUNDER

- MOVE FORWARD
- SQUARE YOUR BODY IN FRONT OF THE BALL (if possible)
- BEND DOWN
- REACH OUT

BUTT DOWN



hat button facing partner (when practicing)
HEAD DOWN, EYES ON BALL

DECIDE WHAT BOUNCE YOU'LL CATCH IT ON - AND GO GET IT

THROWING HAND SLIGHTLY ABOVE GLOVE, READY TO GRAB BALL

FEET - SLIGHTLY WIDER THAN SHOULDER-WIDTH

REACH OUT TO CATCH BALL

GLOVE ON GROUND, ANGLED LIKE A DUSTPAN, OPEN

ROOKIES: any balanced stance OK
ADVANCED: glove-side leg slightly further ahead of other leg

APPROACHING A GROUNDER
(WORDS TO COACH BY:)

- FORWARD
- SQUARE
- DOWN
- OUT

AFTER CATCHING GROUNDER:
- Funnel ball into body
- turn shoulder toward target... step toward target... throw

OUTFIELDER CATCHING GROUNDER



- DOWN ON ONE KNEE
- GLOVE FINGERS ON GROUND

CATCHING THE BALL



Common flaws:

Grounders:

- not extending glove and arm to catch grounder
- not moving forward, squaring body
- not getting the butt down
- not opening the glove wide
- letting the ball and bounce play the player, instead of the player deciding when to catch it.
- not thinking what to do -- before the pitch

Fly balls and line drives:

- misjudging -- or not judging -- the ball
- using one hand to catch the ball
- going in on a fly ball, before the player really knows whether to go in or out

THROWING

GRIP BALL WITH FINGERS ON TOP, SIDE OF THUMB ON BOTTOM, IN WAY THAT FEELS COMFORTABLE



ROOKIES: DON'T WORRY ABOUT HOLDING BALL ACROSS SEAMS. DON'T WORRY ABOUT HOW MANY FINGERS ARE ON TOP. JUST

ADVANCED: THREE FINGERS OVER SEAMS

NEXT STEP: TWO FINGERS OVER BIG SEAMS



Rookies can start with:

Feet still, at shoulder width
Arm at 90° angle
Throw ball only with arm above elbow

Feet still, then with one small step forward

Short distances and big targets

Advanced: Long toss, accuracy contests

The Bigs: Hard, straight, far, accurate

Common flaws:

- elbow drops too low
- foot not pointing at target
- partial follow-through
- throwing to a base when there's no chance of an out (but that wouldn't happen on your team!)

RUNNING

Rookies can start with:

Dropping the bat, running to first, running through the base

Learning: to hit the front of first base

-how to round first on a double

-when to run, and when not to run

(a lifetime task, but you have to start somewhere)

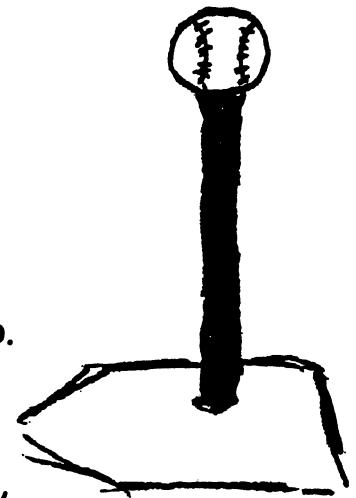
-the basics of proper running form



Common flaws:

- slowing down as player gets near first
- trying to advance on balls hit in the air
- running too heavy footed
- no forward lean
- not running on straight line to first
- players running (instead of sprinting)

Practice Drills



Break players into small groups.

Enlist adults, siblings, anyone to help.

Create skills stations.

Do fast-paced drills at each station,
with challenges, contests, games.

If kids' attention span for a drill is 8 minutes,
rotate groups to the next station at the 6-minute mark.

Vary drills.

Make up new ones.

Improvise.

Work on fundamentals and the skills and plays you need in a game.

Intersperse aerobic activities.

Use whiffle balls for hitting if space is limited.

Keep it fun and fast.



KEY (next page)

☺ Player

♀ Adult

⌚ T w/ ball

□ Base

----- grounder

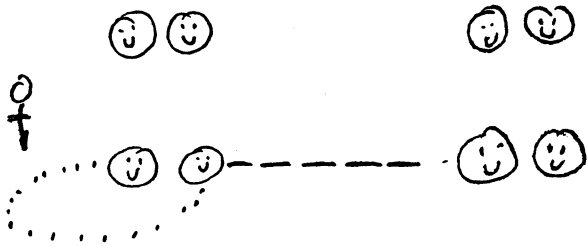
————— pitch or throw

🪣 bucket

..... running

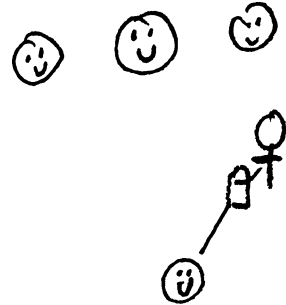
Small sampling of practice drills:

GROUP GROUNDERS



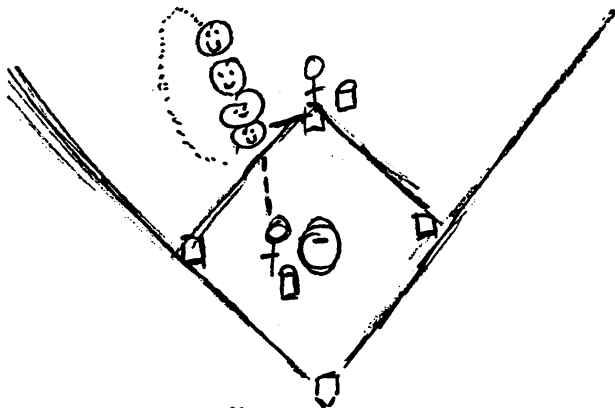
Player rolls ball to teammate,
runs back 10 steps, then to end of line,
takes turn,
moving forward to catch grounder.

WHIFFLE BP



Player hits bucket of whiffle balls
Fielders field it, throw to coach
Everyone rotates

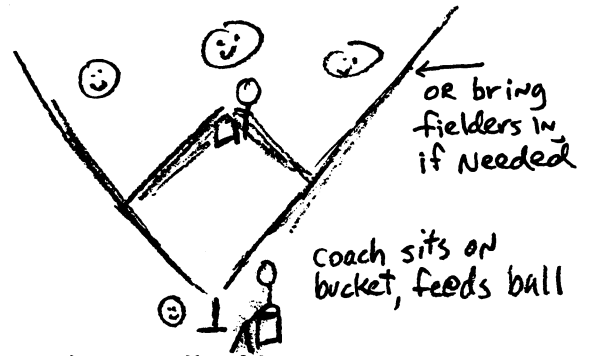
TRIANGLE



Coach rolls grounder to
shortstop or second baseman.
Player fields grounder, throws to second
(or runs to bag, for force play),
then runs to back of line.



T TO ALL FIELDS



Player hits ball off T to
LF, CF, RF
Players make play to second

TEAM D -- TO 21

Put players in game-like defensive positions. Extra players serve as runners

SAFETY: Runners wear helmets. (Higher risk of getting hit in the head with a ball on the basepaths than in the batter's box.)

Coach hits or throws ball, simulating game action and situations
(e.g., runner on 1st, one out, etc.)

Team gets points:

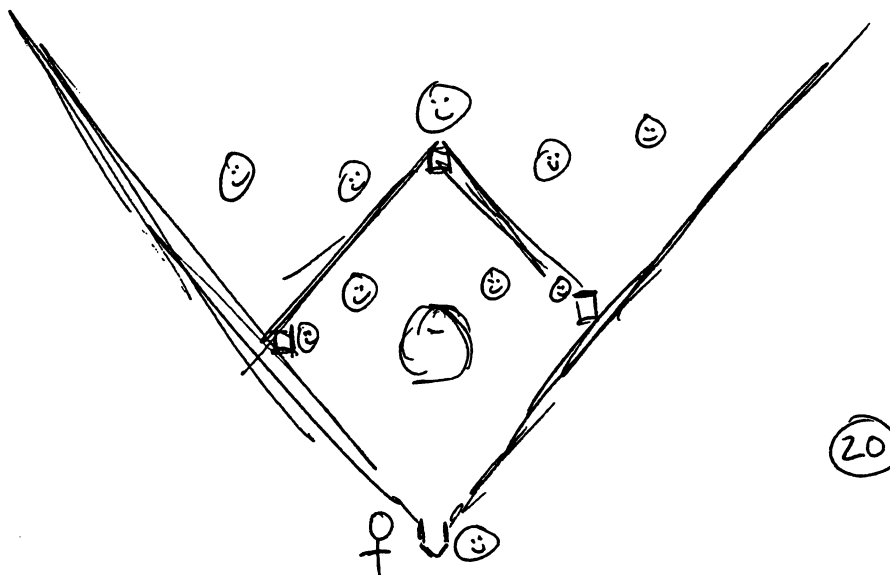
3 points	spectacular or smart play
2	great play
1	making the proper play
0	do-over
-1	physical error
-2	mental error



Object of drill: Team needs 21 points to complete drill.

Drill builds teamwork and team unity.

Option: offer reward if team gets to 21 by certain time
(I scream for ice cream!!!)



KEY SKILLS TO LEARN

Basic fundamental skills

Hitting

Throwing

Fielding grounders

Fielding pop-ups

Running the bases (when and where and why)

Basic strategies

How to record an out

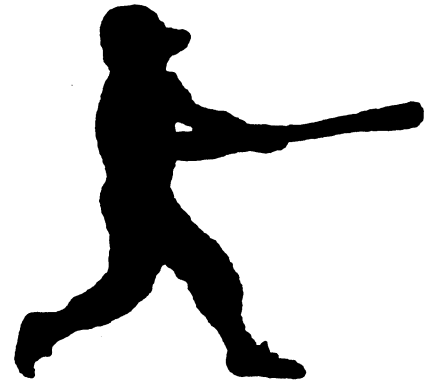
Getting the out at first

Getting the out at second

The difference between a force out and a tag play

How to score a run

How to run the bases (where and when and why)



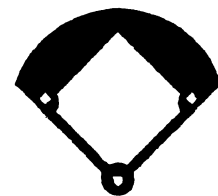
The team experience

The importance of supporting your teammates

Dealing with failure -- and success

The importance of practice and hard work

HAVING FUN!!!



MANAGING YOUR TEAM -- OFF THE FIELD

recruit a good "Team Parent" and good coaches

enlist and use help of others

have a team and family pizza party at one of the first practices. Stress:

key goals



- successful and fun season for every player
- fun for all involved
- improvement in skill and knowledge of the game

importance of being on time (10 minutes early)

if everyone on time, coaches can insure that players are properly warmed up, and can plan a good practice.

insist on parents letting you know in advance
if their kid will be late or absent to any event.

upon every violation, make your point with the parent

role of parents (who are not coaching)

support your player, the coaches, the team

cheer, loudly. let the coaches coach.

get your player to practice on time, and let the coach know, in advance, if the player will be late or absent

tell the coach of medical, emotional or other special concerns

talk with the coach about the best way to make the season fun and challenging for your kid

ask the coach how you can help, and insist on doing something

give extra support to kids in need

enjoy the experience, relax, and help make it fun for your player,
and everyone.





SUPPORT YOUR TEAMMATES

- GETTING PLAYERS TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER, NO MATTER WHAT, AND TO MAKE NEW FRIENDS, IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF A SUCCESSFUL TEAM EXPERIENCE

Pitching to rookies:



- aim for a high E.R.A.
- put it where they want it
(if unsure, have kid hold bat *where* he or she likes the pitch)
- pitch soft and up close for beginners, gradually increase distance and speed
- start with underhand, then go to overhand once underhand is mastered
- if you're tall, like Coach G, sit on a bucket

↑
NOT LIKE THIS

HAVE FUN!!!

Fun is ...

hitting -- kids love to hit

running -- kids love to run

improving

learning something new

playing as a team

making a good play, getting a base hit, having a good at bat

accomplishing something very difficult

mastering a skill

making new friends

practicing fundamentals through fast-paced drills, contests, games

joking, kidding, laughing, kibbutzing

a good team experience

falling in love with the game

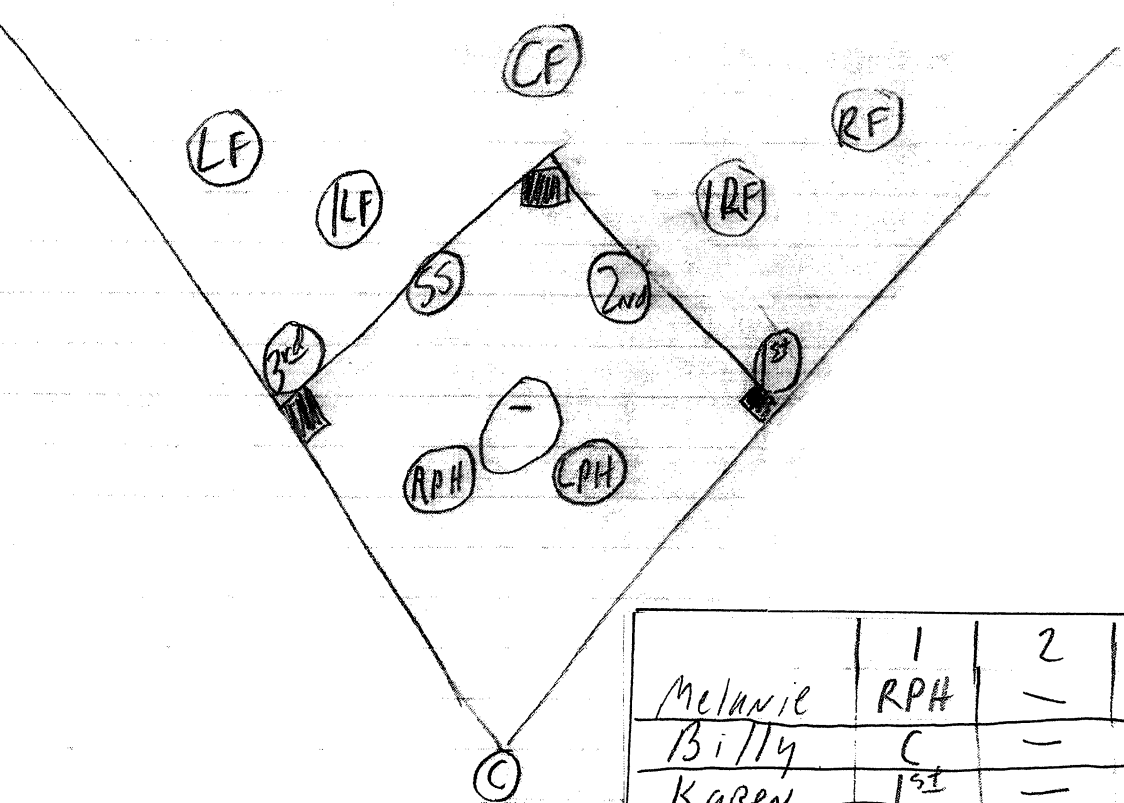
ROOKIE BALL!

25



Sample Lineup Chart

- Post offensive and defensive lineups, to help keep the game moving, to help keep track of who's in and out, and to help distribute playing time fairly



	1	2	3	4	5	6
Melanie	RPH	—	1 st			
Billy	C	—	2			
Karen	1 st	—	RF			
Bobby	2 nd	2 nd	—			
Alan	SS	SS	—			
Amy	3 rd	3 rd	—			
Carlos	ILF	ILF	SS			
Zak	IRF	IRF	C			
Julie	LF	LF	RPH			
Betsy	CF	CF	LPH			
Ken	RF	RF	3 rd			
Gail	—	RPH	LF			
Craig	—	C	CF			
Jim	—	1 st	C			
out on the bench						

- C Catcher
- P Pitcher
- RPH Right pitcher helper
- LPH Left pitcher helper
- 1st First base
- 2nd Second base
- 3rd Third base
- SS Shortstop
- LF Left field
- CF Centerfield
- RF Right field
- ILF Inside left field
- IRF Inside right field

There are many ways to draw up or create charts (some people use poster board with Velcro pieces). This format allows players to see where they play and when they bat. It also allows a coach to see who's been in, who's been out, etc. The important thing to do to post a chart, to help move the game along quickly, and to help distribute playing time fairly.

Sample Practice Plan

6-7 pm

6⁰⁰-6⁰⁵

Run and stretch (calisthenics)

6⁰⁵-6¹⁵

Toss-the-ball Warmup

- underhand toss contest
- group grounders
- fundamental taught and stressed: proper way to field a grounder.

6¹⁵-6²⁵

STATIONS (switch every 4 minutes)

- ① 2nd base triangle (force at second)
- ② dropping bat, running to 1st
- ③ underhand catch (in a square)
- ④ batting (w/ wiffle balls)

6²⁵-6³³

SAFETY TIP: When you throw the ball to someone, make sure they're watching.

6³³-6⁵⁵

INTRA SQUAD GAME

6⁵⁵-7⁰⁰

RUNNING BASES - how to run the bases when you hit a homerun!

I scream for ICE CREAM!

- first Dad arriving after 7:00 gets to treat everyone to an ice cream!

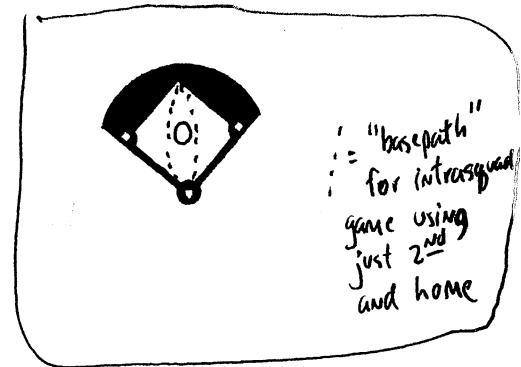
INTRA-SQUAD GAMES

I strongly suggest including a fast-paced intra-squad game with every practice.

Let them play, and they will learn to play, and learn to love the game.

Options w/ small group:

- use an adult as a first baseperson.
- use only second base and home --
 - after hitter hits, he or she runs straight to second. Once at second, runner runs straight to home after a hit, eliminating third base. This makes it more challenging to get a hit, easier to get outs, and moves the game along quickly.
 - The same concept can be applied using only second, third and home.



The POWER OF POSITIVE

The most important concept you can teach: **think hit**

- good pitch, I'm smacking it
 - think it through in the on deck circle
- relax, make the play: where's the play?
 - think it through before the pitch

offense

defense

During a game, a good coach:

- yells encouragement and praise,
privately whispers positive, constructive, gentle suggestions
for what to do next time



no negative policy:

In the early years, Coach Stacy's team was plagued by parents yelling at kids to do this, don't do that, arguing w/ the ump, etc. The team wasn't playing well, and, more importantly, it was taking the fun out of it for many of the kids and adults.

So, she adopted a no negative policy: no one was allowed to say anything negative. Immediately, the players did much better, and it was more fun for everyone.



make supporting teammates an important, positive, and fun goal.

- tell your teams that a run doesn't count, unless everyone bops 5 w/ the player that scored.

post-game pep talk

- stress everything positive that happened.
- Ask each player to say one thing that a teammate did well. For any players not mentioned, the coach comments on something that player did well.

SUPPORT YOUR
TEAMMATES

• GETTING PLAYERS TO
SUPPORT EACH OTHER,
NO MATTER WHAT,
AND TO MAKE NEW
FRIENDS, IS AN IMPORTANT
PART OF A SUCCESSFUL
TEAM EXPERIENCE

NOTES