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Parish Athletics: T-Ball Coaching Manual



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Welcome

Welcome coaches to another season of Parish Athletics Spring T-ball at St. Francis. We carry on a long tradition of exceptional baseball development in a fun and welcoming environment from our years as a league.

T-ball is one of the first step for many of these children into a larger world. We offer to help shape and build that world around teamwork, cooperation and physical fitness. This league has built its stellar reputation by empowering its coaching volunteers. Coaching a team's worth of children can feel overwhelming at first but by sharing previous experiences and lessons learned we are all able to improve.

Have fun and enjoy your time as a coach. Reach out to your peers and league leaders if you have any questions or concerns.

Good Luck Coach. This is going to be a great year.

This Manual

This manual was put together to ease new coaches into understanding how to organize and run the team as well as share best practices among seasoned coaches. This document should be thought of as a living document that gets edited and updated every year with new notes and best practices. Everything in this manual has been used by a team in the Parish Baseball League.

This manual is *not* meant to be a mandatory checklist. Every team, every season will be different. Every team will have their own personality that comes with its own challenges. Drills that work one year with an older more mature team may not work as well next year with a more inexperienced team. Take these ideas and lessons learned and adjust them to fit your team.

My Own Personal Coaching Philosophy

To better understand why I wrote this book and how many of these activities were created it is important to understand my coaching philosophy. I follow the Japanese philosophy of Kaizen by making continuous improvements of working practices and personal efficiency. Having trouble remembering player's names, have an issue with players tackling each other over ground balls, spending too much time finding hats and gloves between innings; this is when Kaizen kicks in. Try something new make improvements and build upon them. Every year I try something new to eliminate an issue from last year.



The Coach's "Toolbox"

This section includes all of the items that I bring to each and every game. Some of these items are more important than others. Also, some of these items have been purchased by myself through the years. To keep costs low, remember that the Dollar Tree store is a great place to pick these items up at a low price.

- The Silver Sharpie- Perhaps the most important tool on this list, especially during the first game. Using a silver Sharpie helps show up on dark surfaces. I use the silver sharpie to write the first name of the child on every glove, hat, personal bat and water bottle. You will be amazed at how fast items will go missing if a name is not on it. **Pro Tip**- Write the name of the child on the back of the hat above the size adjuster so you can see the name of the child when you are in the field coaching them. Writing the name under the brim of the hat is a waste since it cannot be seen in the field. **Pro Tip**- Draw a small star on the outward facing brim of the hat to indicate a lefty. This is a great visual indicator for coaches to remember to adjust glove placement for the child. Very few children in this age bracket will proactively correct you if you start to adjust them as a righty.
- Hula Hoops- This is perhaps the most versatile tool in the toolbox. It can be used to help children visualize positions on the field, a place to drop the bat after getting a hit, a target to throw at or a dozen other uses. Go to a local dollar store to find cheap hula hoops. Look for hoops that are 36 inches in diameter for best results. A question I get asked often is if children trip over them. I have found this to not be an issue. The hoop will settle into the grass nicely and won't cause an issue. **Pro Tip**- buy a large carabiner clip to help easily transport the hoops. **Pro Tip**- Do not use cones as a replacement for hula hoops. Older kids work well with cones but younger kids struggle to understand how close to the cone they need to be. Some kids will wonder away from the cone to the point that the cone is useless while others are confused and believe they need to be physically touching the cone at all times. Young children can typically understand the concept of standing *inside* the hoop to maintain a location.
- Pool Noodles- Use of pool noodles can be helpful to set up a visual location during drills. I will often use a pool noodle to indicate a line to not step over during a drill or the location of a station if we are doing multiple drills. Previously, I used a bat but found that bats could cause injury if a child accidentally kicks or walks on a bat.
- The Stance Stick- This is one of my favorite inventions. Until you are a T-ball coach you have no idea how difficult it is for a child to get into a batting stance. This was the first thing I corrected as a new coach. After two games I was sick of having to physically move a child's feet only to start the whole process over again if they missed the ball or an overly excited parent distracted them. The stance stick is a 24 in long PVC pipe with two different set of colored duct tape spaced 11 in apart for smaller children and 18 in apart for



taller kids. When a child is getting ready to bat place the stick on the ground where the child should stand and ask the child to place their tip toes on the appropriate color tape then slide the stick away once you have their feet in the correct position.

- Hat/glove Baskets- This is a new adjustment for me this year. We have had a lot of issues in the past of misplacing hats, gloves, and water bottles. Often players will get confused with which item belongs to them. With only having a limited time to play each week each minute that you can spend on coaching and not finding personal items is a minute well spent. Ask each child to place their items in the assigned basket in-between each inning. **Pro Tip**- write the child's name on the basket. This will help build early reading skills and create a sense of responsibility. If a child misplaced an item the first question from the coach should be did you place it in the basket? The child will eventually learn what the expectation of them is and should result in fewer missing items and a shorter transition between innings.
- The Soft Bat- Safety is important and as a coach your head needs to be on a swivel. One stray bat swing could really ruin someone's day. However, you need to balance this with completing drills in a timely manner. I like using a soft nerf bat as a stand-in for a real bat in some of the drills. This soft foam bat can be used to move through drills faster and without as many precautions, like putting on a helmet.
- Provided by the league- The league does a great job at providing the essentials for the season. There are plenty of helmets, bats and balls for every field. If you are one of the early games and you are missing equipment and the league leaders are not available you can find everything in the equipment trailer. Look for the section that is labeled Parish Athletics. The storage for the Franciscan school will likely be locked and should not be used. The equipment is the responsibility of all coaches, please ensure that your team treats all of the equipment with respect.
 - *Bats*- The provided bats are great for a wide range of weights and lengths. Help the players find a bat that is the right weight for them. **Pro Tip**- Ask the player to hold a bat at the very end of the grip and hold the bat out straight. If the bat starts to sag the bat is too heavy for them and you should find another. Try to be cognizant of a player's personal bat. There will be players who will want to use their own bat. I try to not have that bat used by the rest of the team but parents and players need to understand that if a bat is brought to the game it may be used by other players.
 - *Helmets*- Again, the helmets provided by the league do a great job accommodating different head sizes. It is important that a child is using a properly fitting helmet. It should fit snug around the ears but still be comfortable to wear. A helmet that is too big or too small will not provide the intended protection. Some parents/players like to wear a hat under the helmet for hygiene reasons. This is completely acceptable. **Pro Tip**- the helmets come in a wide variety of colors, this could open up a possible teaching moment that there are no such thing as boy colors and girl colors. The important thing about a helmet is that it protects the player's head.
 - *Balls*- The league issued balls are perfect for young players just learning to catch. The balls have a nice soft density that will not cause injury if hit but are

not so light that they are difficult to throw. There are limited quantities so please do your best to collect all of the balls after each game.

The First Game

Baseball is a wonderfully complicated game and you certainly know a lot about the greatest sport on the planet but your players are new to the game. Don't drive yourself crazy on the first game trying to explain all of the positions and best strategies for the game. You have the whole season to introduce new ideas and baseball rules. This is T-ball and the first experience many of these children will have being on a team. Even the best plans go out the window with a new team in the first week. Relax, coach, you are doing great!

- It all starts with teamwork- After all of the shirts and hats have been given out I will call all of the players over and sit with them in the grass. **Pro Tip** whenever possible I

like to sit with the team and come down to their level, this helps build trust and a sense of team. We go around the circle introducing everyone making sure everyone says their name out loud. I then talk to the team about what they think being on a team means. Four- and five-year old's always share some of the best answers. These few moments will be important to call back to throughout the season so take your time and help your team understand why we are even here.

Pro Tip- this is a coed league as coach you should use gender neutral terms when addressing your team or a group of players.

- Goals- The first game can be absolute chaos at times. Most of the volunteer coaches are not used to leading a large group of young children for this long. It can feel overwhelming. I like to go into the first game with specific goals for myself and the players. This helps to focus my own energy back into what we are trying to accomplish. Below are the goals that I try to achieve during the very first game.

- *Coach Goals:*

- Start the routine- As detailed later in this document I just try to slowly introduce the normal game routine to the players. Start to use all of the correct baseball vocabulary even if you haven't explained that word yet. In many ways learning baseball is like learning a new language and sometime simply hearing terms like pop fly, grounder or short stop will make it easier to understand later.

- *Player Goals:*

- Throw overhand- Many players start throwing like their parents do to them, underhand. Correct this motion whenever you see it starting from the first game. By the end of the first game all players should be throwing overhand. Don't worry about form yet. Drills later in the season can begin to correct any form issues.
- Hit the ball- It may not look pretty this week but getting a young child to hit a ball off the tee is a huge accomplishment. Help them enjoy that moment. Praise them for their efforts even if they need a guiding hand at first. Again, don't worry about form this week. There are plenty of drills that will help to improve form later in the season.



- Run to first base- Sure it makes for a funny home movie when a player hits the ball off the tee and runs to third base but it is important that the players know which way they are supposed to go. Help each of the players understand that after they hit the ball they should drop the bat and run to first base.

The Rest of the Games

Congrats, you made it through the first game! Now you just have the rest of the season to go. Below is typical schedule I try to follow with each game for the remainder of the season. The schedule may be adjust on a per game basis if there is an attendance issue or incoming weather that may shorten the play time. The next section goes into detail around each activity.

- Warmups- five minutes before the scheduled start time to five minutes after the scheduled start time.
- Stretches- five minutes to complete.
- One drill- While the team is stretching ask one of your assistant coaches to set up this week's drill if needed. Ten minutes to run the complete drill.
- The game- try to have the actual game last at least 45 minutes. It is ideal for each team to have the same number of at bats but this may not be possible given the time it takes for each team to make their way through the batting order or if it is particularly hot and the kids are worn out.
- After game activities- The most important part of the game, according to the kids, snack time. I like to talk to the kids before the snack, congratulate them on a well-played game, give any reminders and thank the parents. Once the kids have a snack they are not listening to you.

Game Activities

As mentioned previously the team will start to settle into a routine after two to three games. As a coach it is important for you to try to establish this routine as early as possible. The players will be more receptive to learning when they have a rough idea of what to expect each game.

- Warmups- Every year that I have coached some players tend to arrive 5-10 minutes before the scheduled start to five to ten minutes after the scheduled start. This uncertainty around when the team will arrive makes it difficult to have a drill as the first thing the players do, as there are usually some instructions that need to be given. Therefore, I like to start everyone off with throwing a ball back and forth for warmups. Place the hula hoops in two even lines five to 8 feet apart from each other. Have the players stand in a hoop facing each



other and practice throwing. A coach can fill in if there is an uneven number of players. This is a good time for you and your assistant coaches to look at the throwing form of each player. Watch to make sure that the players are stepping with the correct foot and throwing with an overhand motion. As the team gets used to throwing correctly you can begin to introduce catching techniques. However, at this age don't expect of catch rate better than 1 out of twenty throws.

- Stretches- It is important to establish the importance of stretching at an early age. Have the players stand in a circle with enough room for the players to stand with their arms stretched out to their sides without touching another player. Start with arm circles with a slow count to five. Then ask the players to bend at the waste and touch their toes. Finish with five jumping jacks and a run around the bases. Keep this activity fun for the players and use this time to set up any prep work for the drill you will be running today.
- Drills- This is the only real development time you will have each week with the players. I try to rotate between fielding drills and batting drills but also allow for the progress level to guide me. If the players are doing well in the field but they are not hitting well I may take a few games in a row to focus on batting. Ultimately, you should have a plan before game day, there is no time to waste on game day.
- Batting- Most players really like getting a chance to bat, however, if a player is going to have an anxiety it will like be while batting. From their perspective this is the one part of the game that they are the center of attention and there are a lot of things to remember. It can be stressful for a young player. As the coach you can help by making this part of the game predictable. Here is what I focus on during every at bat:
 - The Stance stick- Make sure you remember to grab the stick for every at bat. It is absolutely the easiest way to help a player figure out the correct stance.
 - The batting routine- Starting from the very first game as I am helping a player into the batter's box I am saying *Stance*, *Grip*, *Elbow* and *swing* as I am getting them into position. This helps build repetition and the player's confidence.
 - Stance- The player places their feet on the stance stick facing home plate. Double check that the player is on the correct side.
 - Grip- position the player's hands at the very bottom of the bat and choke up if needed. Show the players that there should be no space between their hands. Double check that their dominate hand is on top.
 - Elbow- Get that elbow up. Help the player position their elbow correctly for a smooth level swing.
 - Swing- Step back from the player and let them swing. **Pro Tip-** as the coach make sure you have one hand on the bat until you are ready for the player to swing. Players get excited to swing and may not be too



concerned with your own personal safety. This is a lesson learned from several of coaching.

- Drop the bat in the hoop- Before the inning starts place a hula hoop a few feet away from home plate up the first base side as a safe place to drop the bat after hitting. I have had players who get so excited that they toss the bat away in an unsafe manner. The hoop is an easy reminder to drop the bat safely.
- What are the coaches doing during an at bat
 - The batting coach- this is usually the head coach
 - Adjusting stance
 - Keeping a hand on the bat until it is safe to swing
 - Looking out for other players running by (especially at the field by the trailer)
 - Adjust the tee height for the player
 - The bench coach- this is usually the assistant coach
 - Have the players sit or stand in a line a safe distance from the batter
 - Helping players find the correct size helmet
 - Ensure players are drinking water
 - The base parents- While your team is batting I like to call three parents to help out with the bases. Have the parents stand behind the base to help direct the players as they run to the next base. The batting coach can fill in as the first or third base parent if you cannot get enough volunteers. **Pro Tip**- this is a great way for parents who are unsure about coaching to get used to working with players.
- Switching between batting and fielding- It is easy to overlook the importance of this activity; however, this can easily be one of the biggest time wasters. It is important that players and parents know to move quickly through this transition.
 - Hats gloves and water in your basket- Starting this season I am using small Dollar Store baskets to keep all player belongings in one spot. In years past we have asked the players to take their hat off and put their glove and water bottle in their hat. This has been met with various degrees of success. I am hopeful that the basket method will be more successful, and the players will consistently place their belongings in it.
 - As an added bonus having the names of the players written on the baskets will help the young players learn how to identify their name.
 - Water breaks- As a coach you should be constantly pushing your players to drink water. In the late spring and early summer months the fields get incredibly hot and the players can become dehydrated quickly.
- Fielding- At this level of play perhaps the most difficult phase of the game for coaches is the fielding. It is important that all the players feel like they are engaged in this part of the game but given the random nature of hitting it is hard to do this. Additionally, some players will naturally be more aggressive than others. It is a difficult task but as the coach you need to help balance all the different styles. I have included my most frequently used methods to balance player participation.

- The 3 stations- This is my go-to method, and I will typically use this for the first few weeks. Occasionally, I will cycle in other methods if the team is mature enough. To set this up I will have a hoop to the left and right of the pitcher's mound and a third hoop at first base. Ask one player to stand at first base and the rest of the players to form two lines on either side of the pitcher's mound. One player in each of the fielding hoops. When the batter hits the ball the player closest to the ball will field it and throw the ball to first. The fielding player then moves to first base and the first base player joins the back of the line the fielding player came from. At first the coach will likely need to call out names to help the players understand who needs to field the ball. After a few weeks the players will not need this type of direction. This method seems to be very successful in keeping the players engaged even if this method does not emulate a true baseball game.
- The hoops all around the field- This method helps the players learn the approximate location of the positions and prevents the bunching of players to one side of the field or the other. To set this method up I place one hoop for each player around the field. I try to approximate the location of the infielders and outfielders but given the fact that, so few balls are hit past the pitcher's mound it is difficult to do this. This method works well for players that have been on a team for a while and have mastered fielding a ball if they are the closest to the ball. If the team has not mastered this skill what happens with this method is a track meet where 4-5 players run full speed to be the first to the ball. Tackling and fighting over the ball if they are not the first. This can lead to a dangerous situation and was the reason why I created the three-hoop method.
- Nothing- Some coaches try to emulate a game as much as possible by having the players take the field without any props or fielding stations. This can work as the players become more mature at the end of the season. It may even be a fun "graduation" activity during the last game of the season. However, as the coach you will need to continuously move the players to prevent bunching to one location and rugby scrum with every hit.
- Modified stations- As the team matures and gets used to the fielding stations you can start to add in more stations eventually working up to a proper infield alignment. Again, this method will work the best if the players are used to fielding and not fighting over every ball.
- End of Game- There are a few end of the game activities that are important to do every game.
 - Handshake- First thing to do at the end of every game is a post-game handshake/ high five. The two teams line up behind their coach with their right hand extended ready to shake.
 - Sit with the kids- When the handshake is over but before the snack sit down with the players.
 - Come down to their level- and tell them what a great job they did. Discuss any items you would like to work on at the next game and finish with a team cheer.

- Thank you, parents- When you finish with the game recap have the team turn around and face their parents. Have the team shout out nice and loud “Thank you, parents”. Parents work hard to bring the players to the game and should be recognized.
 - Snacks- Just get out of the way coach. The kids know what to do here.
- Special Activities- Throughout the year there are a few special activities. Here are a couple notes to consider during these events.
 - Picture day- This can be a very chaotic day. Remind the parents at least a week before that picture day is happening. It is also a best practice to send a follow up email/ text message the day before. The team picture will usually take place before the scheduled game start time.
 - End of year Lunch- This is a ton of fun for players and parents. If you have an early morning game scheduled let your parents know that there will be breakfast items available. Lunch will be served for the later games.
 - Last day medals- This is your chance to make a big deal out of each player. At this age it is possible that this will be the first medal a player has ever received. Make it a memory they will never forget. Remember to wait and pose for pictures.
 - Team website- I have been lucky to have one of the best team parents in the league. She has set up a Shutterfly website for the team each season. This has been a great place for the team to track snacks and upload pictures.

When the season is finished, I hope that you will find coaching t-ball just as fun and rewarding as I have over the years. Please contact me with any additional thoughts and comments. I love any and all feedback.

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Hitting Drills

Invisible Bat Drill

Teaching the kids, the proper swing is important to building a foundation for hitting the ball.

What you need – Line the kids up on the first and third baselines and ask them to get into a **batters stance**.

How this drill works – This will be a fun drill for the kids, as they get to show off their swing without the bat as an impediment. When they line up, ask them to assume the **batter's stance**. They should have their arms up with their hands raised to their ears and their back elbow raised.

When you call out '**swing**', all of the kids will show you their swing with the invisible bat. At this stage, you (and assistant coaches) can view the swings of each player and you can make small adjustments to the swings.

Make it a fun time and a game to swing without a bat. Make sure the players don't swing too hard, and that they maintain the same fundamentals throughout.

Result – With coaches watching over their swing, better instruction can be given to help the players swing properly.

Tee counter

This is a basic batting drill to help a player work on the contact they make with the ball.

What you need – A player with a helmet and a bat at the tee. Make sure the tee is at the appropriate height (waist high, or just under). You can set up other stations with a few players at each, with another coach or parent helper.

How this drill works – Once the player gets to the tee, they must get into their batter stance. The coach should help them set up properly so they can increase the chance of good contact.

The other players in the station are waiting, gloves in hand, to field the ball. The coach says, '**hit**', and the player swings. If the ball is hit the first time, the rest of the teams yells '**one**'. For each hit, they say the corresponding number. This provides encouragement to the player when they are hitting.

The coach should give each player five swings on the tee. On the final swing (and hit), the player should drop the bat and run to 'first' base.

Result – This drill helps players get used to making contact with the ball and using the encouragement of their teammates to help them along the way.

Kiss and swing

This will be a fun drill for the kids as they try to get the bat to kiss the ball

What you need – Place a ball upon the tee and have a batter with a helmet and bat standing in the proper position to hit the ball. You can have two or more stations for this drill with a parent helper or assistant coach at each station.

How this drill works – Coaches will help the batter assume the correct stance in the batter's box. The rest of the drill is up to the batter. Sometimes, taking a swing in slow motion so a player can visualize where they want to hit the ball is valuable in building memory.

Before the batter takes a swing, they need to slowly go through the batting motion and stop the bat right where they want to hit the ball. This is the 'kiss' the bat will give the ball. The player then brings the bat back up and then takes a normal swing at the ball.

Focusing on the spot they want to hit (the kiss) is a fun way for kids to learn what motion they need to hit the ball where they want.

Result – Your players will begin to develop the muscle memory and coordination to make consistent contact with the ball.

Coach Says

This will help the players learn the different steps involved in a good swing.

What you need – Start off this drill the same as you would start off the drill with the invisible bat. Line up the kids on both the first and third baselines.

How this drill works – This is a batter's version of 'Simon Says' where the players must do what you say in order to demonstrate their understanding of a skill.

You will focus on three key areas: grip, stance, elbow and swing. When you say any one of those four words, the player must show you their best grip, stance, elbow up or swing (after instruction, of course). As the coach, you can watch, and go to individual players to help them with different aspects of their swing.

Result – You will be able to help the players with each step of their swing, and sometimes that is more helpful than seeing the entire swing all at once.

Don't Miss

This is a game that can be played with the players to try and establish the desire to hit the ball.

What you need – Set up several stations each starting with one batter and three or four fielders. Set up one base that the hitter will run to.

How this drill works – With a batter at the plate and fielders in the field for each station, the batter will hit attempt to put the ball in play by hitting it. If they miss the ball or if they hit the tee without knocking the ball forward, then it will be considered a strike. This is a perfect opportunity to teach them about how three strikes means an out.

This will be one of the player's first introductions to an 'out'. The player needs to understand the importance of making contact with the ball in order to get to first base and to advance other runners.

Each time the player hits the ball, they must drop the bat and run to first base.

Result – This drill adds a step to the process, after hitting and then running to first base. Making contact within three strikes is the key.

A drop in the Hoop

Sometimes young players have a tendency to throw the bat after they swing. This drill will show them to

What you need – Step up a batting drill, and then to the back of the plate, set up an old tire or large bucket.

How this drill works – With the tire stationed just behind the tee, it should be in easy access of the batter in order for them to drop the bat once they make contact with the ball.

Once they do make contact, instruct the player to make sure the bat is nicely dropped into the tire or bucket before they keep running toward first base. Repeated work with this drill will reinforce to the player the importance of having to drop the bat when they have hit the ball.

Work on this drill until the batter naturally begins to place the bat into the tire or bucket.

Result – This may not necessarily be a skill development drill; however, it is an important one to emphasize, in order to make sure that the safety of all players is at the forefront.

Spot the ball

Sometimes a visual mark will help a player understand where they need to make contact with the ball.

What you need – Set up a tee with a ball on top of it and line up a batter in the batter's box. You can have fielders to field the ball if you want. The ball will have a black dot the size of a nickel marked on it (with a black marker).

How this drill works – This is a simple batting drill that once again helps the batter to focus on a spot they want to hit. Think of the saying, "aim small, miss small." With the black dot facing back toward the backstop, the player is able to locate and ultimately hit the spot on the ball.

The player will focus on striking the spot with the bat – not just the ball. If a player tries harder to focus on hitting the spot, it can decrease their overall margin of error and make it much easier to hit the ball.

Over time, you can reduce the size of the black mark on the ball, until eventually the black mark is gone and the player is just hitting the ball.

Result – More focus and consistency hitting the ball.



Throwing and Fielding Drills

Show the Ball

Learning how to properly hold the ball is the first step to throwing it well.

What you need – Each player needs to have a ball and a glove in order to work in this drill.

How this drill works – Gripping the baseball is essential to throwing properly and accurately. At a young age, learning the proper grip is the best way to help them build the foundation for throwing.

Each player has the ball, and they must grasp the ball with the thumb on the underside, and the two top fingers spread slightly apart over the top. The ring finger and the pinky should be touching the side of the ball slightly on the outside.

When the coach says ‘show me’, each of the players gets into the proper throwing stance: legs apart (one in front of the other), foot on the throwing side is behind the body, and the arm is up, with the elbow raised to shoulder height and the forearm and bicep at a 90 degree angle (L-shape).

Result – Coaches will be able to watch how their players are gripping the ball as they show them the grip and the throwing stance. Problems can be corrected at this point.

Bounce to the hoop

It’s good to learn throwing accuracy at an early age – this is a fun game to learn!

What you need – Set up a bucket or box at the first base. You can set up more than one station for this drill. Line up kids at each station about 10 feet away to start.

How this drill works – The first thrower steps up and tries to get the ball into the box or bucket – and they get 10 points. If they hit the side of the bucket they will get 5 points. The closest ball to the bucket will get 2 points.

You can increase the difficulty of the drill by increasing the distance that the players have to throw. But, don’t sacrifice the distance for the accuracy. Once the kids gain the accuracy, then in time they will build the strength to throw the ball a greater distance.

Result – The players will begin to develop a sense of how to get the ball to their intended target by aiming at the box or bucket.

Learning the Crow Hop

The crow hop is a basic move that is taught at all levels to help a player gain a little bit of momentum on their throw.

What you need – Give each player a ball so they can throw it. Or, you can start this drill by using an 'imaginary' ball.

How this drill works – This technique helps younger players learn to generate power and momentum to get the ball a greater distance. Once a player has fielded the ball, they take a short step forward with the foot that is opposite the throwing arm and they shuffle and hop in the direction of the target.

Upon the follow through, the rear leg crosses over in front of the other leg and it lands at a right angle to the target. It would be a good idea to practice this yourself so you can understand how it works and then how you are going to show it to the kids.

Once you show them a couple of times, the kids will usually get the gist of how to do the crow hop.

Result – Once the kids are familiar with the technique, they will quite enjoy the ability to throw the ball further. This is an advanced drill for later in the season

Block the Ball

This is the first step to getting kids to learn the prospect of fielding the ball.

What you need – Set up two or three lines of players so the kids can get maximum repetition. Have a coach or parent volunteer at each line with several balls.

How this drill works – With this drill coaches need to first instruct their players on how to move to get in front of the ball. Start the players off in the ready position (hands on the knees, slightly bent, and with their head up watching the play).

The coaches or volunteers should roll the ball directly at the players at first, but then to either side. The player needs to shuffle to get their body in front of the ball to knock it down. For each ball that the player knocks down they get three points. If the player scoops the ball with their glove, they get five points.

The players will get excited about getting points for knocking the ball down.

To teach players how to use their gloves properly, try using plastic milk jugs with one side cut out to form a “scoop”. Have the kids use the scoop to field the ball. This will help them learn to use their gloves to scoop up the ball, rather than trap it.

Result – Learning to knock the ball down and ultimately to try and scoop the ball is the first part of fielding the ball.

Field and Bounce to the hoop

This puts together the basic idea of fielding a grounder and then throwing the ball to a spot on the field.

What you need – You can set up several stations for this drill in order to increase the amount of repetition. You have a line of fielders and a box or bucket at a base.

How this drill works – This puts the original drill of bouncing to the bucket together with fielding the ball. The coach will roll a grounder to the player and they pick it up and throw it to try to get it in the box.

The emphasis is for the player to knock down the ball, gain the proper grip, throwing motion and then aim it to the bucket. Players will get the same points as they would get in the bounce to the bucket drill.

Adding the extra element of fielding the ball may be difficult for some players, but it is an essential skill to master at this level.

Result – This is a step above the basic skill of throwing to a target, by adding the fielding aspect to this drill.

Slo Mo Throw

At an early age, coaches often combat players that cannot throw the ball without throwing it as hard as they can.

What you need – Set up a target (or a series of targets for several stations), that is about 10 to 15 feet away. It shouldn't be too far for the kids, otherwise they feel like they have to throw the ball hard. Line up the kids in single file in each station.

How this drill works – In order to get the player to throw the ball normally, you need to help them understand that the ball will go as far as they want with a slow-motion throw. This drill works as a method to reinforce the basic throwing skills, but also to learn control.

Teach the players to learn control by asking them to throw in slow motion with just enough force to get the ball to the target. Once they can get the ball to the target with the slow-motion throw, ask them to do the same thing with their normal throw.

Result – Younger players will learn to control their throws. This is important to make sure they have accuracy and that they aren't throwing the ball all over the place.



Game Play Drills

Fast Fingers Drill

Charging the ball to get to it quickly is a great skill to learn in baseball.

What you need – Line the players up in four single file lines along the first or third baseline. The coach will stand out in front of them about 15 or 20 feet away.

How this drill works – All of the players will be in their lines and the coach will be in front of them. The coach will point to one of the lines and then roll or hit the ball to them with a slow grounder.

The player needs to run up to pick up the ball and then settle themselves down to throw back to the coach. The object for the kids is going to be to pick up the ball, remember their proper throwing action and make a nice throwback to the coach.

Once the coach tosses the ball, he or she counts out 1001, 1002, 1003... and then stops when the ball gets back to the coach. The object of the game is to have the players get the ball back to the coach as quickly and accurately as possible. The quickest pick up and throw is the fastest fingers player.

Result – The players will learn to get the ball to the coach quicker by charging it, picking it up, and then making a good throw.

First base drill

This is the most basic play in baseball and should be taught early

What you need – You can start with the players just in a couple of single file line in the infield, or you can put them at positions. You may want to start them in lines and have them closer to first base to build confidence. Have a coach or parent at first base to start.

How this drill works – This is a basic fielding drill for beginning players. The coach will softly hit or roll grounders to the players and they need to scoop the ball, set, and then make an accurate throw to the coach.

Coaches should focus on making sure the player gains good control of the ball, faces their target and then goes through a good throwing motion to get the ball to the coach or parent on first base.

You can make the drill more challenging by putting players at the infield positions.

Result – The players will learn the fundamentals of making an out.

Coach run around (then players)

This is a base identification drill, and the coach gets a little exercise

What you need – Make sure all of the bases are intact and in their proper positions. The kids can watch from the middle of the diamond.

How this drill works – At first, get all of the kids attention and go over which bases are which on the field. Then, the coach will stand at home plate in front of the tee and take an imaginary swing at an imaginary ball and then go towards first base. Tell them to yell out which base you are heading to each time.

Once you get to first base, they yell ‘first’. Once you round the bag and get to second, they yell ‘second’. Etcetera.

After you do this a couple of times, then you can run each player through the bases and have them yell out which base they are on, along with all of the other kids.

Result – Base identification is important to learn at an early age. It is the fundamental for baserunning and should be something you work on regularly.

Tag out Frozen Tag

This helps players to learn the importance of tagging with the ball, and also promotes a whole lot of fun.

What you need – Mark off an area about 20 yards by 20 yards. The T-ball infield might work if you don’t have too many players. Two players will need to have their gloves and a ball inside the glove.

How this drill works – This is a tag game that actually requires the taggers to tag the other players with the ball inside the glove. The two players that are ‘it’ will chase other players and they will have to tag those players with their gloves.

If the ball comes out of the glove, then the player tagged is NOT frozen. If they don’t tag with the ball, then the player is NOT frozen. Players that are tagged must be frozen and they need to get unfrozen by their teammates by going underneath their legs or their arms.

Result – Players will quickly learn the importance of tagging others with the ball in their glove and maintaining control of the ball when doing it.

Next base drill

Once a player is on first base, they may not always know where they need to go next.

What you need – You can set up a couple of stations if you have enough bases. Set up a diamond with the bases as they would normally be set up. Start with a player on first base and a lineup of batters.

How this drill works – This drill starts with a player on first base and one at the tee to bat. Instead of having a real ball, players will ‘show’ coach their great swing and then run to first.

You will also have to explain to the kids on first base, where they need to go next. Another coach, or a parent volunteer can be on second to help direct the players where to go next. Keep going so each player has a chance to bat and run around the bases.

Coaches should watch that the runner understands which base he or she is headed to, and also that they stop right on the base.

Result – This is a basic baserunning drill that helps kids learn where to go during the game.

Drills have been collected from:

<https://tee-ball-drills.com/>

<http://truckeelittleleague.com/Assets/190/TBall-Practice-Plans-and-Drills.pdf>

<http://www.baseballpositive.com/tee-ball>

and my own creation