

Coaching Handbook

2023 Season

Rockford Little League

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# Recommendations for Running a Baseball/Softball Practice

## General

* Stress the importance of practice to the kids and parents. Remind parents that the best way for the kids to improve skills and possibly have more fun in a game is by practicing and being prepared. We learn and prepare for the game by practicing.
* Communicate to parents that team practices are to learn skills but practicing at home will help improve skills even more.
* One of the most important things to remember when running practice is to keep the kids busy or moving. Make the most of your time by breaking up into two or three groups, depending on the number of coaches/Parent Helpers, space, and equipment you have available.

## Preparation

* Keep total practice time to guidelines listed.
* Practice plans should be designed to build fun into the drills, activities and mini competitions. Your goal  should be to make sure each practice is fun, efficient and improvement focused all season long.

### Tee Ball Divisions

#### 60-80 minute plan

* Pre-Practice Team Meeting (5 minutes)
* Fun Warm-up Activities (10 minutes)
* Fun Skill Practice Time (30 minutes)
* Fun Mini Games and Activities (20 minutes)
* Review and Team Base running Relay (10 minutes)
* Post Practice Team Get Together (5 minutes)

### Minor, Major, Intermediate, Junior and Senior Divisions

#### 80-100 minute plan

* Pre-Practice Team Meeting (2 minutes)
* Warm-up (8 minutes)
* Teach and Drill an New Skill (15 minutes)
* Fun Skill Competitions (15 minutes)
* Review and Drill and old Skill (15 minutes)
* Fun Game-like Competitions (20 minutes)
* Introduce a New Skill (10 minutes)
* Post Practice Team Meeting (5 minutes)
* NOTE: Use your coaches to split practice squads into several groups so activities can be run in parallel and the coach to player ratio can be kept as low as possible during practice. Rotate squads through drills and skills minimizing the amount of time any one player spends waiting for instruction or a turn.
* Have a plan before you come to practice.
* Include drills that will work on things that the kids did wrong during the last game.
* Start each practice by telling the team what the practice will entail.
* Reward the players who show up on time. For example, if you plan a hitting practice, have the players hit  in the order they showed up. You will be amazed how many players will beat you to practice.

## Running the Practice

* Practice the way you play in a real game with proper techniques. During batting practice, have fielders field the ball as they would in a game situation. Runners run hard and hitters take good cuts. Practice is the time to work out the mistakes and build confidence resulting in better play during games.
* A good routine for starting each practice is to have the players run a lap or two around the ball field to warm up and loosen their muscles. Next have them stretch their arms (as described in the throwing section). After the stretch, have them loosen their arms with a short toss drill.
* If you have the kids throw to loosen up, make sure you observe them throw and correct them if they are throwing wrong.
* On cold days make sure they stretch and loosen their arms. Avoid any drills that involve excessive throwing.
* When possible, carry a clipboard during practice to keep track of your objectives and record your observations.
* Games are won at first base and second base. Spend more time throwing to those bases.
* Make sure you have coaches/Parent Helpers present so you can break the team up into smaller groups  when working on skills.
* Avoid one ball, one batter batting practices and one ball, one fielder fielding practices. Instead of a live  Batting Practice, try closing each practice with the Scrimmage described in the hitting section.
* When having fielding practice, catch the ball yourself (glove on one hand, bat in the other) or rotate fielders home to catch for you. Don’t waste your catcher’s time simply catching throws that don’t improve  skills. Instead, have a coach take the catcher aside and run catcher drills.
* If you are not good at hitting an infield practice with a fungo bat, then don’t. You can throw the ball  instead of hitting it.
* Explain why, as well as how, when teaching. For example, base runners are much more likely to make  the little turn before each base if they’re aware that if they don’t, their momentum will carry them to the outfield grass and they’ll not stay tightly in the base paths.

## Run, Run, Run

* All sprinting should be done with fielding glove on to reinforce proper defensive running.
* Excel in effort. Give your best, 100% effort--always!
* Let the players know the ball field is a sacred place. No one walks on or off the field. Hustle. On a ball  field, walking is prohibited. Hustle and run at all times! A team that hustles is a team that has great spirit, and one that plays with discipline and enthusiasm. Hustle does not require awesome talent; it requires simple commitment and desire. When competing with others teams on the ball field, this is the part of the game you can always win. Regardless of whom you play, you can control this phase of the competition. You can out hustle every team you play!

## Ending Practice

* Try to end each practice at the same place on the field and depart with a positive confident message. Young players like closure and consistency to their activities.
* Consider designating one player each practice to stay 5 minutes longer for individual work or a quick confidence booster.
* Don’t be afraid to give the players homework. Give each player something to work on. They should be practicing at home.
* Check the field before you break practice. Make the players pick up any bottles or wrappers they used or other trash around the field. They should respect the field and keep it clean.
* **Never underestimate the effect you have on the lives of every player that calls you “COACH”.**

## Team Building

* RLL covers a geographic area that takes in at least three public school systems as well as several Christian schools. Therefore, many of the kids do not know each other. Spend a few minutes at the first practice doing some “friend building” activities. This is especially important at the younger levels where some players may feel anxious that they do not have any friends on the team.
* Teams that play as teams will typically have more fun and “win” more games than teams that have players that play individually. Work to create the “team” concept during practice so that it will show during the games.
* Plan an activity that the team can do together that isn’t involved with practice. Examples would be pizza party at a coach or Parent Helper’s house, working on your field as a team during Spring Cleanup, or do a service project at the RLL fields. Get creative, and ask the kids. They can tell you what they’d like to do.

## Players - Support your Teammates

* Develop loyalty. Put the team first. Be a team player. Help your team members achieve team goals.
* Support your teammates. Baseball is a team game. We succeed and fail on the field as a team. Be supportive of your teammates at all times. Encourage and cheer for one another. Mistreating or criticizing another player is a team offense.

## Players - Stay Alert

* Think baseball/softball. Concentrate. Whether in a game or at practice, keep your mind focused on the team's objectives.
* Master the fundamentals. Learn the basic skills. To become a skilled player on game day, start by being a good practice player.
* Anticipate each pitch and fielding situation. Players are never spectators--when you are on the field, be prepared to be involved in every play. Know your assignments. With every pitch anticipate the action and get in position to make the play.

## Players - Everyone is Going to Make Mistakes

* Make every mistake a part of your development. Learn from adversity. Mistakes are common when playing ball. Errors are part of the game. Every player, regardless of skill, will make errors that are both physical and mental. What sets winning teams apart from others is attitude. When a mistake is made, forgive yourself, and make a commitment to learn from the experience.

## Players - Be a Good Sport

* Value sportsmanship. Be a good sport.
* Show respect for opponents, officials, and fans.
* Most of all, demonstrate your respect for your team and the great sport of baseball/softball by conducting  yourself with honor on the field.

## Practice Guidelines – All

* Stress the importance of practice to the kids and parents. Remind parents that the best way for the kids to achieve is by practicing and being prepared. We learn and prepare for the game by practicing.
* One of the most important things to remember when running practice is to keep the kids busy or moving. Make the most of your time by breaking up into two or three groups, depending on the number of coaches, space, and equipment you have available.
* Coaches must be prepared. Have your practice planned before arriving at the field. Jot some things on a piece of paper to help get your thoughts together.
* Practice the way you play in a real game with proper techniques. During batting practice have fielders field the ball as they would in a game situation. Runners run hard and hitters take good cuts. Practice is the time to work out the mistakes and build confidence resulting in better play during games.
* Start a routine. Get the kids to arrive at least 15 minutes before the game or practice to warm up by throwing, catching, and stretching together as a team. Practice scheduled at 9am means that the kids are warmed up and ready to go at 9am. Start by throwing. Pair the kids up with half lined up just outside the first (or third) base line and the other half just inside the pitchers mound and facing each other. Always throw in the same direction and with equal spacing. When playing catch you should always give your partner a target (at glove shoulder).
* After playing catch, take a team jog and stop to do some stretching. This is a great time to talk to the players – maybe give a little pep talk before a game. This is how we create a team concept.
* Explain why, as well of how, when teaching. Base runners are much more likely to make the little turn before each base if they’re aware that if they don’t their momentum will carry them to the outfield grass and they’ll not stay tightly in the base paths.
* Stress fundamentals!

## Practice Guidelines – T-Ball Division

### Base running

* Bases and base direction
* Running through 1st base (only). Always run the ball out.
* Ready position with left foot on the edge of the base and right foot toward next base

### Fielding & Positions

* Teach Infield fielding positions and bases (minimum 1st, 2nd, SS, & 3rd).
* Fielding ground balls using alligator method (best to begin without gloves).
* Throw to bases (minimum 1st base)
* Foul lines
* Tagging runners
* Try to get the kids focused for every batter hitting the ball. Use the “ready position” as a tool for  preparing the kids to field the ball

### Hitting

* Bat grip (not too firm, definition of choking up, etc.)
* Hand position (hands together, right on top for right-handed hitter)
* Basic swing mechanics and batting stance
* When hitting off the tee (during practice), the tee location (the ball) should be a couple inches ahead of  the front foot
* Always drop the bat after hitting the ball
* Step into the pitch (ball) and follow through with the swing. Squash the bug with the back foot.

### Throwing & Catching

* Basic throwing mechanics
* Step first (foot opposite throwing hand) and throw
* Crow hop
* Enforce two handed catching

### Safety

* Warm-up
* When playing catch always throw in the same direction with plenty of separation
* Position players so they’re not in the base paths
* Only one player holding a bat at a time
* Always keep your attention and eyes on the baseball
* No climbing the fences

### Equipment and Uniforms

* If asked, a leather glove is preferable (10” - 11” glove is a good for a couple years)
* Cleats (preferable), baseball pants (optional), bat (optional), and water bottle
* Recommend to parents to pick up baseball pants. The kids will look and feel like ball players and a team.  Plus it will save them the hassle of searching for sweatpants or shorts before every game or practice.

### Sportsmanship & Team Concept

* Shake hands with opponents after each game. Tell each player “good game”
* Always run on and off the field
* Help pick up the equipment after practices and games
* Arrive 10-15 minutes early to games and practices to stretch, warm-up, & get ready to play.
* Enforce league rules as described in the Rockford Little League Program

### Games

* Arrive 10-15 minutes early to games and practices to stretch, warm-up, & get ready to play.
* Always try to have a Parent Helper on the bench for safety reasons. The coaches cannot be expected to  see everything that is going on.
* Remind the kids to always wear their hats on the field.

### General

* Explain some of the rules as outlined in the Rockford Little League Program
* Explain what you expect from the players and the parents (i.e. be on time, ready to play, & cheer for  players and encourage the players to stay focused and pay attention.

### Drills – Base running

#### Running through the 1st base bag

Place a second bag or glove about 5–10 feet beyond the 1st base bag. From home plate, have the kids simulate a swing, drop the bat, and run through first base and don’t slow down until they get to the second base.

Ready position

Position the player on first base with their left foot on the edge of the bag and right foot toward the next base (feet the opposite way will result in their back being toward the field). Feet should be shoulder-width apart and knees slightly bent. When you say, “GO”, have them run to 2nd base. Next, set-up from 1st and 2nd base (do not over-run 2nd and/or 3rd base) and so on. If you like, use this drill with the “running through the 1st base bag” drill.

#### Fun throwing and running drill

Place the player at home plate and have them throw the ball as far as they can onto the field with only the coach to shag it. After they throw it they must run to first base (run through the bag) before the coach gets the ball and can tag them off. You can also do this with the kids running from each base (remove the ones, if any, that are tagged out).

#### Tire them out so they’ll go home and sleep drill (last hitter homerun)

Starting from home plate, have the kids run around the bases making sure every base is touched. If a base is missed the whole team much to do it again. . It’s always helpful to have the players first simulate a good swing from home plate and then run.

### Drills - Fielding

#### Alligator hands

Have the kids pair up about 10 feet apart taking turns rolling the ball to each other. Teach them to field the ball with their seat down and feet slightly wider than shoulder-width and glove down and open (web touching the ground). Have them position the throwing hand a few inches above the glove giving the appearance of the Alligator.

### Drills – Hitting

#### Hitting off the tee

### Drills – Throwing & Catching

#### Pop fly Drill #1

Have the kids toss a tennis ball (under-hand and without their glove) into the air to try and catch.  This enforces two-handed catching (catch and cover it up).

#### Pop fly Drill #2

Have them toss a tennis ball (with their glove) into the air to try and catch. Remind them to catch and cover it up.

## Practice Guidelines – Jr. Minor Coach Pitch Division

### Base running

* Running through 1st base (only).
* Always run the ball out and run your hardest without slowing down
* Teach correct turns when rounding the bases (doubles are allowed on hits to the outfield)
* Ready position with left foot on the edge of the base and right foot toward the next base
* First step and cross-over step
* Runners should understand force plays and when it is safe run when a force is removed (i.e. not running  into outs)

### Fielding & Positions

* Teach all positions. No more than five infielders (1st, 2nd, 3rd, SS, & P). Players should be taught the correct locations for each position (please do not allow any of these fielders to stand on or two feet behind a bag prior to the pitch. Outfielders should be on the outfield grass and not in the infield)
* Fielding ground balls using alligator method
* Remember to charge the ball whenever possible
* Throw to bases
* Foul lines
* Force plays & situations when force play is removed
* Tagging runners
* Outfielders backing up

### Hitting

* Bat grip (not too firm, definition of choking up, etc.)
* Hand position (hands together, right on top for right-handed hitter)
* Basic swing mechanics and batting stance
* Keep the bat still
* When hitting off the tee (during practice), the tee location (the ball) should be a couple inches ahead of  the front foot
* Always drop the bat after hitting the ball

### Throwing & Catching

* Gripping the baseball
* Step first (foot opposite throwing hand) and throw
* Crow hop
* Enforce two handed catching

### Safety

* Warm-up
* When playing catch always throw in the same direction with plenty of separation
* One player holding a bat at a time
* No climbing the fences

### Equipment and Uniforms

* If asked, a leather glove is preferable (10” - 11 1⁄2 ” glove is a good for a couple years)
* Cleats (preferable), baseball pants (preferable), bat (optional), batting gloves (optional), and Water bottle
* Recommend to parents to pick up baseball pants. The kids will look and feel like baseball players and a  team. Plus it will save them the hassle of searching for sweatpants or shorts before every game or  practice.

### Sportsmanship & Team Concept

* Shake hands with opponents after each game. Tell each player “good game”
* Always run on and off the field
* Help pick up the equipment after practices and games
* Arrive 10-15 minutes early to games and practices to stretch, warm-up, & get ready to play.
* Enforce league rules as described in the Rockford Little League Program

### Games

* Arrive 15 minutes early to games and practices to stretch, warm-up, & get ready to play.
* Use the Parent Helper or assistant coach to call out the fielding positions (written down in advance) to  the kids as they finish batting. This way the kids can be running out to their position as the coach, who was pitching, is rounding up the baseballs. This speeds up the game and really makes you look organized.
* Always try to have a Parent Helper on the bench for safety reasons. The coaches cannot be expected to see everything that is going on.
* Use the Mandatory Rotation Sheets listed in the Operations Manual and online.

### General

* Explain some of the rules as outlined in the Rockford Little League Program
* Coaches explain to new players or players moving up some of the differences between the leagues
* Talk to the parents about sideline coaching. Players often get conflicting instructions while they’re on the field or at bat. There can be hundreds of people in the stands and the coaches shouting, but the one voice a player hears is his own mother’s. Cheering is encouraged, but please limit the sideline and bleacher coaching and instructions for the coaches.

### Drills - Base running

#### Running through the 1st base bag

Place a second bag or glove about 5–10 feet beyond the 1st base bag. From home plate, have the kids simulate a swing, drop the bat, and run through first base and don’t slow down until they get to the second base.

#### Ready position

Position the player on first base with their left foot on the edge of the bag and right foot toward the next base (feet the opposite way will result in their back being toward the field). Feet should be shoulder-width apart and knees slightly bent. When you say, “GO”, have them run to 2nd base. Next, set-up from 1st and 2nd base (do not over-run 2nd and/or 3rd base) and so on. If you like, use this drill with the “running through the 1st base bag” drill.

#### Fun throwing and running drill

Place the player at home plate and have them throw the ball as far as they can onto the field with only the coach to shag it. After they throw it they must run to first base. Start with running through the bag at first, then go onto rounding first and hold, and finally round first and go on to second for a double.

#### The last hitter homerun

Starting from home plate, have the kids run around the bases making sure every base is touched. If a base is missed the whole team must to do it again. It’s always helpful to have the players first simulate a good swing from home plate and then run.

#### Rounding the bases

### Drills – Fielding

Alligator hands

* Practice the alligator hand position fielding first without glove.
* Set the kids up in pairs about 8 to 10 feet apart and take turns rolling the ball to each other. Teach them to get their seat down and feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart with glove down and open (web touching the ground) to field the ball. Have them position the throwing hand a few inches above the glove giving the appearance of the
* Place the kids into two to three lines (3rd, SS, & 2nd) and roll a ball to each player having them practice this fielding method.

#### Covering 2nd base (Shortstop& 2nd baseman)

#### Crow hop from third base

#### Grounder to Pitcher & 2nd base (throw to first)

#### Covering 1st base

### Drills - Hitting

#### Hitting off the tee

Use the tee for both hitting instruction as well as getting additional swings.

#### Individual hitting

Toss the ball into the air and hit the ball into the screen. This helps teach hand/eye coordination.

#### Soft toss hitting

Have a partner toss the ball softly toward the front knee and hit the ball into the screen. Use this for extra swings, to build confidences, and build hand/eye coordination.

#### Hitting live pitching

Breakup in two teams so the kids get batting, running, and fielding practice at the same time. This keeps the down time to a minimum. Play third hit is live (run on the third hit).

### Drills – Catching

#### Pop fly drill

Have the kids put their gloves on the bench and make two lines in the outfield. Have the coach toss a tennis ball into the air 10-15 feet high and have the kids catch the ball with two hands. This promotes two handed catching and soft hands. Teach them first to run to the spot where the ball is and then get set and make the catch. Do not jog or coast to the ball. Next, toss the ball over their right shoulder and practice the drop step. Remember to have the feet parallel to the shoulders and hands off your knees. For a ball over the right shoulder the first step is dropping the right foot back toward the ball and then crossing over with the left foot. Do not back pedal and always run to the ball. Repeat this tossing the ball over the left shoulder. At first the kids will have very little range, but after a few tosses and getting their footwork down the range will probably double. Once they get the hang of this try tossing the ball in front, to the sides, and directly behind them.

#### Playing catch

## Practice Guidelines – Minor League Divisions

### Base running

* Review running through 1st base and running your hardest without slowing down
* Review base runner’s ready position, first step, and cross-over
* Teach correct turns when rounding all the bases
* Runners must understand force plays and when it is safe to run when a force is removed (i.e. not  running into outs)
* Stealing
* Sliding

### Fielding & Positions

* Review all fielding positions
* Fielding ground balls using alligator method
* Remember to charge the ball whenever possible
* Throwing to bases
* Foul lines
* Force plays
* Backing up
* Cutoffs
* Tagging runners
* Fielding a bunt

### Infield fly rule  Infield

* Creeping
* Covering the bag
* Calling the ball (Shortstop is the boss)

### Outfield

* Backing up bases and throws
* Shielding the sun
* Throwing using four seam grip (preferable)
* Calling the ball (Center fielder is the boss)

### Pitching

* Grip
* Pitching from the wind up and the stretch
* Use of the pitching rubber
* Pitching motion
* Balance and arm position
* Backing up 3rd and home
* Covering 1st base

### Catcher

* Go over the equipment
* Blocking balls (preventing pass balls)
* Base stealing
* Framing the pitch
* Foul popup

### Hitting

* Review bat grip and hand positions
* Review swing mechanics and batting stance
* Strike zone
* Bunting (sacrifice and for a hit)
* Keep the bat still and concentration on hitting ground balls and line drives
* Use the batting tee and soft toss drills during practice for extra swings
* On-deck routine
* Quick hands and shortening swing

### Throwing & Catching

* Review throwing grip (two seam & four seam)
* Crow hop
* Enforce two handed catching

### Safety

* Warm-up
* When playing catch always throw in the same direction with plenty of separation
* One player holding a bat at a time
* Calling (loudly) for the ball
* No climbing the fences

### Equipment and Uniforms

* Cleats, Bat (optional), and water bottle
* Shirts tucked in and hat on forward

### Sportsmanship & Team Concept

* Shake hands with opponents after each game. Tell each player “good game”
* Run on and off the field
* Encourage teammates
* Help pick up the equipment after practices and games
* Enforce league rules as described in the Rockford Little League Program
* Absolutely no arguing with the coaches and/or umpires

### Games

* Arrive 20–30 minutes before all games and 10-15 minutes before practices to warm up.
* Always have the kids place their hats inside their gloves at the same end of the bench. Have outfielder  keep their gloves together and infielders their gloves together. When a fellow infielder ends up on second on the third out you can bring his glove out to him. This speeds up the game and promotes a good team concept.

### General

* Explain some of the rules as outlined in the Rockford Little League Program
* Coaches explain to new players or players moving up some of the differences between the leagues Talk to the parents about sideline coaching. Players often get conflicting instructions while they’re on the field or at bat. There can be hundreds of people in the stands and the coaches shouting, but the one voice a player hears is his own mother’s. Cheering is encouraged, but please limit the sideline and bleacher coaching and instructions for the coaches.
* Player achievement metals are given out at the end of the year

### Drills - Base running

#### Running through the 1st base bag

Place a second bag or glove about 5–10 feet beyond the 1st base bag. From home plate, have the kids simulate a swing, drop the bat, and run through first base and don’t slow down until they get to the second base.

#### Ready position

Position the player on first base with their left foot on the edge of the bag and right foot toward the next base (feet the opposite way will result in their back being toward the field). Feet should be shoulder-width apart and knees slightly bent. When you say, “GO”, have them run to 2nd base. Next, set-up from 1st and 2nd base (do not over-run 2nd and/or 3rd base) and so on. If you like, use this drill with the “running through the 1st base bag” drill.

#### Rounding the bases

### Drills – Hitting

Hitting off the tee

Use the tee against a backstop

#### Individual hitting

Toss the ball into the air and hit the ball into the screen. This helps hand/eye coordination.

#### Soft toss hitting

Have a partner toss the ball softly toward the front knee and hit the ball into the screen.

#### Avoiding being hit by the pitch

#### Overcoming the fair of being hit (bailing out)

Quite often we see young players bailing out of the batters box in fair of being hit by the pitch. A drill that you may find useful for these players is to have them concentrate on bunting the ball. With the feet in a bunting position it’s very difficult for the player to pull out of the box. This also promotes concentration to follow the pitched ball as well as building confidence and, with any luck, it may eliminate his fear.

### Drills – Catching

#### Pop fly drill

Have the kids put their gloves on the bench and make two lines in the outfield. Have the coach toss a tennis ball into the air 10-15 feet high and have the kids catch the ball with two hands. This promotes two handed catching and soft hands. Teach them first to run to the spot where the ball is and then get set and make the catch. Do not jog or coast to the ball. Next, toss the ball over their right shoulder and practice the drop step. Remember to have the feet parallel to the shoulders and hands off your knees. For a ball over the right shoulder the first step is dropping the right foot back toward the ball and then crossing over with the left foot. Do not back pedal and always run to the ball. Repeat this tossing the ball over the left shoulder. At first the kids will have very little range, but after a few tosses and getting their footwork down the range will probably double. Once they get the hang of this try tossing the ball in front, to the sides, and directly behind them.

#### Playing catch

## Practice Guidelines – Major League Division

### Base running

* Review running through 1st base and running your hardest without slowing down
* Review base runner’s ready position, first step, and cross-over
* Teach correct turns when rounding all the bases
* Review force plays and when it is safe to run when a force is removed (i.e. not running into outs)
* Stealing
* Sliding (including pop-up slide)

### Fielding & Positions

* Review all fielding positions
* Fielding ground balls using alligator method
* Remember to charge the ball whenever possible
* Throw to bases
* Force plays
* Backing up
* Cutoffs

### Pitching

* Pitching from the wind up and the stretch
* Use of the pitching rubber
* Pitching motion

### Catching

* Go over the equipment
* Blocking balls (preventing pass balls)
* Base stealing

### Hitting

* Review bat grip and hand positions
* Review the strike zone
* Bunting (sacrifice and for a hit)
* Review swing mechanics and batting stance
* Keep the bat still and concentration on hitting ground balls and line drives
* Use the batting tee and soft toss drills during practice for extra swings
* On-deck routine
* Quick hands and shortening your swing

### Throwing & Catching

* Review throwing grip
* Crow hop
* Enforce two handed catching
* Around-the-horn
* Outfield throws

### Safety

* Warm-up
* When playing catch always throw in the same direction with plenty of separation
* Calling (loudly) for the ball
* No climbing the fences

### Equipment and Uniforms

* Cleats, bat (optional), batting gloves (optional), & water bottle
* Shirts tucked in and hat on forward

### Sportsmanship & Team Concept

* Shake hands with opponents after each game. Tell each player “good game”
* Run on and off the field
* Encourage teammates
* Help pick up the equipment after practices and games
* Enforce league rules as described in the Rockford Little League Program
* Absolutely no arguing with the coaches and/or umpires

### Games

* Arrive 20–30 minutes before all games and 10-15 minutes before practices to warm up
* Always have the kids place their hats inside their gloves at the same end of the bench. Have outfielder  keep their gloves together and infielders their gloves together. When a fellow infielder ends up on second on the third out you can bring his glove out to him. This speeds up the game and promotes a good team concept.

### General

* Explain some of the rules as outlined in the Rockford Little League Program Talk to the parents about sideline coaching. Players often get conflicting instructions while they’re on the field or at bat. There can be hundreds of people in the stands and the coaches shouting, but the one voice a player hears is his own mother’s. Cheering is encouraged, but please limit the sideline and bleacher coaching and instructions for the coaches.
* Player achievement metals are given out at the end of the year.

### Drills - Base running

#### Running through the 1st base bag

Place a second bag or glove about 5–10 feet beyond the 1st base bag. From home plate, have the kids simulate a swing, drop the bat, and run through first base and don’t slow down until they get to the second base.

#### Ready position

Position the player on first base with their left foot on the edge of the bag and right foot toward the next base (feet the opposite way will result in their back being toward the field). Feet should be shoulder-width apart and knees slightly bent.

#### Rounding the bases

### Drills – Hitting

#### Hitting off the tee

Use the tee for instruction as well as extra swings and repetition.

#### Soft toss hitting

#### Hitting live pitching

#### Avoiding being hit by the pitch

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#### Playing catch

## RLL Quick Coaching List

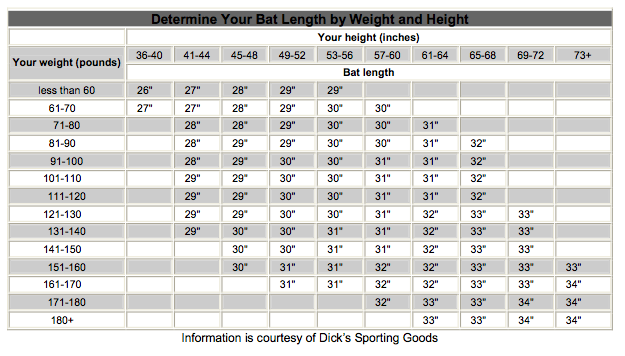
1. Base running
   1. Base running drills
      1. Running through 1st base (only).
      2. Running Home to 2nd, 1st to 3rd, 2nd to Home.(Rounding Bases)
      3. Running Relay (1⁄2 the team vs. other 1⁄2 of the team)
      4. Base runners with pop-ups and grounders (when to go and when not)
   2. Feet first slides only
   3. Teach runners force plays & when it’s safe to run when force removed (i.e. not running into outs)
2. Fielding & Positions
   1. Basics
      1. Teach all positions. No more than five infielders (1st, 2nd, 3rd, SS, & P).
      2. Force plays & situations when force play is removed. 􏰀Fielding ground balls using “alligator” method.
      3. Charge the ball whenever possible.
      4. Calling for fly balls (Mine, Mine, Mine)
   2. Players should be taught the correct locations for each position
      1. Infielders do not stand on or right next a base.
      2. Outfielders should be at least 10’ into outfield grass and not in the infield
      3. First base should stretch with the glove hand and starts with heal on the bag.
      4. Teach straddling the bag at 2nd and 3rd (not playing it like 1st when there is no force)
   3. Outfielders backing up each other and infielders.
3. Catcher Drills (Older Players)
   1. Drills
      1. Goalie Drill (Dropping down and covering the hole)
      2. Receiving a Throw at the Plate
      3. Pop-Up drill
      4. On passed ball and runner stealing home, toss ball to pitcher near ground level.
   2. Basics
      1. Catching a ball above and below the waist.
      2. How to block balls in the dirt.
      3. How to position behind plate relative to the batter (arms length w/glove to batters elbow)
      4. Proper throwing to bases
      5. Fielding balls in front of the plate
4. Basic Throwing & Catching
   1. Gripping the ball (four-seam)
   2. Step first (foot opposite throwing hand) and throw.
   3. Crow hop. (Hop – Step – Throw) o Relay (Catch – Pivot – Throw)
   4. Enforce two handed catching.
   5. Proper throwing form
      1. Hands above head and elbow above shoulder
   6. Show target to player throwing the ball (both hands should be raised)
5. Hitting
   1. Stress that they always drop the bat after hitting the ball
   2. Hand position (hands together, right on top for right-handed hitter)
      1. Both hands on the bat during the swing (no one-handed follow through)
      2. Bat grip (not too firm, small knuckles aligned)
   3. Basic stance
      1. Stand in batters box (about the batters foot away from the plate) The player should be close enough to home so they can bend 45-degrees at the waist and touch the outside corner of the plate with their bat
      2. The Hands should be aligned so that the top hand on the bat sits at the same height as the rear shoulder, approximately 3-6 inches from same rear shoulder.
      3. The Rear elbow should be down at a natural 45-degree angle and the front elbow should also be down, pretty much even with the back elbow. NOTE: ELBOWS SHOULD NOT BE UP!!!
      4. The bat should sit at a 45-degree angle also, with the knob of the bat pointing at the opposite batter's box.
   4. Basic swing mechanics
      1. Four step in the swing (Stride, Weight shift, Squash the Bug, Swing)
   5. Hitting Drills
      1. Tee-Work (the Tee/ball should be a couple inches ahead of the front foot)
      2. Soft-Toss (Side or from Behind)
      3. Chair Drill (for players with and upper-cut swing)
      4. Two Ball Drill (High/Low or Different Colors)
      5. Live Pitching
   6. Taking a pitch (turning away from the ball and covering)
      1. Throw behind batter or at batter (using tennis balls)
6. Pitcher Drills (Older Players)
   1. Gripping the ball (four-seam)
   2. One Knee Drill (Players Throw from One Knee)
      1. Kneeling on one knee (throwing hand knee on ground)
      2. Hands above head and elbow above shoulder
      3. Foot pointed toward plate (target)
      4. Ball facing center field
      5. Throw and finish with throwing elbow past the opposite knee
   3. Bucket Drill
      1. Kneeling with top of one foot (throwing hand foot) on bucket
      2. Hands above head and elbow above shoulder
      3. Foot pointed toward plate (target)
      4. Ball facing center field
      5. Throw and follow through and stand-up
      6. Finish with throwing elbow past the opposite knee
   4. Power Position Drill
      1. Hands above head and elbow above shoulder
      2. Front foot Pointed toward plate (target)
      3. Ball facing center field
      4. Throw and follow through hand to opposite knee
   5. Pause And Balance Drill
      1. Start wind-up without ball until they reach Power Position
      2. Balance on one leg
      3. Hand player the ball
      4. Continue throw like power position drill

# Hitting

## The Basics of Hitting

### Choosing the Proper Bat Size

Use the chart below as a guideline when selecting a bat.



#### Determining the Right Bat Weight

* Most bats are also weighted in ounces
* Manufacturers have done a great job in balancing the bat's weight to its length
* Many bats have a weight-to-length ratio, often shown as -4, -6, etc.
* This basically means a 34-inch bat with a -6 ratio weighs 28 ounces
* Selecting weight really depends on two critical factors--your strength and your hitting style
* It also depends a lot on your personal preference in weight and length, so the following are simply  guidelines to follow:
  + Bigger, stronger players generally prefer a heavier bat since they get the benefits of both the heft  and swing power
  + Smaller players with less strength should consider a lighter bat to generate a quicker swing
  + Younger players, too, should consider that a lighter bat increases control--great for singles  hitters, while also reducing the risk of injury
  + Note that Little League Major and below cannot have a Bat Performance Factor greater than  1.15

### The Proper Grip

* Grip the bat very loosely. The bat should rests across the middle of the fingers, (not in the palm of the hand), with your “door knocking” knuckles lined up.
* DO NOT: grip the bat too tight, over-wrap your knuckles or hold the bat with the palms of your hands. All these things will slow down the swing.

### The Proper Stance

* The player should be close enough to home so they can bend 45-degrees at the waist and touch the outside corner of the plate with their bat.
* The feet are a little more than shoulder width apart, with the toes in a straight line pointed towards home plate (No closed or open stances).
* The head starts completely turned toward pitcher, square to the ground with both eyes level and focused on the release point of the pitcher (Just outside and above the throwing shoulder).
* The knees are flexed with the weight centered on the insides of the feet. Balance is the primary objective.
* The Hands should be aligned so that the top hand on the bat sits at the same height as the rear shoulder, approximately 3-6 inches from same rear shoulder.
* The Rear elbow should be down at a natural 45-degree angle and the front elbow should also be down, pretty much even with the back elbow. NOTE: ELBOWS SHOULD NOT BE UP!!! When the rear elbow starts up, it must come down in order to hit the ball, creating an uppercut.
* The bat should sit at a 45-degree angle also, with the knob of the bat pointing at the opposite batter's box.
* This is where all proper swings originate from (launch position) regardless of their starting position. Starting here eliminates unnecessary movement needed to get here during the swing.

### The Swing

* When pitcher shows you their hip, begin the swing by actually moving back. Front knee, front shoulder and back hip turn back 2-3 inches.
* Don’t over stride. The stride should be no more than 3 inches and the weight remains back. After completion of stride, the heel of the front foot touches the ground, officially starting the swing.
* The swing begins from the waist down. The power in the swing comes from the HIPS. Hit with your HIPS. HIPS before HANDS. The back hip rotates toward the ball so that eventually the rear knee, the waist and the belly button are ALL facing the pitcher and the back foot is pointing straight at the pitcher.
* You are now ready to swing. The swing is in the shape of the letter U. The hands come straight down towards the ball, leading with the knob of the bat. Don’t extend early; keep hands close to body and inside the ball. As the bat enters hitting zone it should level off until impact. The swing then finishes with a slightly upward angle as the arms extend completely. Don’t stop your swing, let it finish and follow through.
* Keep the head DOWN. The hitter's chin rests on front shoulder, while looking at pitcher, prior to initiating swing. The head stays there during the swing, down on the ball, with shoulders rotating around head, until chin ultimately ends up on rear shoulder at completion of swing.

Diagnosing and Fixing Common Problems with the Swing

Where’s the Problem?

If you have a hitter that is having problems (doesn’t make contact, has a slow swing, doesn’t hit with power, just looks wrong) try this technique for diagnosing the problem. First make sure they are starting in the proper position. Check their grip and stance. Once you are sure the grip and stance are fine, watch their feet when they swing. Make sure they are staying balanced, not over-striding and that their back foot is turning when they swing. If the back foot is not turning on every swing then they are not rotating their hips. If the feet are fine then check the hands. The hands should stay close to the body and come straight at the ball as they start to swing. Many hitters will extend their hands away from their body as they start the swing (looping or big swing) or they will drop their hands just before they start the swing (hitch). If their hands are fine, then move on to the head. Is it facing the pitcher when they start, does it stay on a level plane or is it bouncing up and down? Are they watching the ball all the way until it hits their bat? Below is a list of the most common problem that kids have when they are hitting and some suggestions for correcting them.

#### The Grip

Most kids will over wrap their knuckles, hold the bat in their palms and/or grip the bat too tight. If their elbows are not pointing down when they are in their stance then they are probably gripping the bat wrong. This slows down the swing and makes it harder to bring it through the hitting zone. Fix the grip before you let them swing. Have them take some practice swings after you fix their grip. They will probably notice how it makes it easier to swing the bat. You will probably need to correct each players grip a number of times before they do it naturally. Don’t let them swing with a bad grip. It will just cause bad habits.

#### Hit With Your Hips

Many kids do not rotate their hips when they swing and end up swinging completely with their arms. If the ball does not jump off their bat then they are probably not using their hips. Watch their feet when they swing. If the back foot is not turning when they swing, they are not rotating their hips. Explain that all the power comes from the hips. Usually if you correct this in soft toss they will immediately see how much harder they can hit the ball. If they still don’t understand how to use their hips try this Hip Twist drill. Have the player place a bat (stick, broom handle, etc.) behind their back on their waistline. With hands gripping the bat from behind, they should get into their stance. Have them try and hit a few soft toss pitches from this position. The only way they can get the bat head to cross the plate is to rotate their hips. Repeat this a few times until they get a feel for the movement. Go back to the normal stance and repeat. Doing this 10 to 20 times a day programs young hitters to get their lower body working correctly without conscious thought (Muscle Memory).

### Over-Striding and Reaching

Some hitters will stride too far and end up shifting their weight forward before they swing. They end up reaching at the ball instead of swinging. This action makes it difficult to hit change-ups and off-speed pitches. Have them shorten their stride and focus on keeping their weight back. Put an object, like a batting helmet, in front of their front foot so they can’t over stride.

### Keep Your Eye on the Ball

Many kids will turn their head just prior to impact. They don’t keep their head down and “watch the ball hit the bat.” If you have a player that consistently swings and misses at soft toss, they are probably doing this. There are a couple of ways to correct it. Have a ball in your bag that you have colored with two different bright colors. When you soft toss to the player, have them yell out the color that they hit. This forces them to watch the ball all the way to the bat. You can also put a batting helmet on the first base line when they are swinging. Tell the player that when they finish the swing they should be looking at the batting helmet.

### Hitch

This happens when the player starts the swing by dropping their hands instead of coming straight at the ball from the launch position. This action slows down the swing making it difficult to hit fastballs. To break this habit, have the player get in the launch position and then let the bat rest ON their shoulder. As you soft toss to them, the bat must come straight from the shoulder to the ball. You can also try rapid-fire soft toss. Get five soft toss balls ready to pitch. In rapid succession soft toss the balls to the player giving them very little time between pitches. This forces the player to shorten their swing and come straight at the ball. You can also try the Fence Drill (see below) to try and stop the hitch.

### Looping or Big Swings

This happens when the player extends their arms too early, usually when the bat is still behind home plate. This slows down the swing and reduces power at impact. Use the Fence Drill to correct this problem. Have the player take a batting stance with the outside of the rear end against a fence or wall. The object is to have the player take a normal swing without making contact with the fence or wall. Start in slow motion, for obvious reasons. Improper swing and bat angle will provide immediate negative feedback. The key here is to keep the barrel above the rear shoulder at the proper bat angle (good launch position) and swing through the ball. If a player does this with hands in close to the body (inside the ball), allowing back foot to begin first, they will complete the drill properly. If the player takes a stride, rotates back foot and hips, keeping the bat head above the hands, hands inside the ball, and opens up away from the fence, they can swing down and through the ball without hitting the fence. Full arm extension should not take place until immediately after contact.

## Hitting Drills

### Do’s and Don’ts

Don’t run your practice with one player hitting while you pitch and everyone else is just standing around. If you are pitching to one player, have another player hitting off a Tee and another player (or two) hitting soft toss. Break your team into a couple of groups and have an assistant coach work on throwing or fielding while you are live pitching. Use Soft Toss and a Tee to fix hitters problems. Don’t try and fix their swings when they are up at bat in a live game.

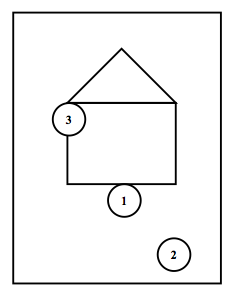
### Soft Toss Drill

This is the best way to fix hitting problems. (NOTE: RLL does not allow soft toss into the field fences or backstops as this damages the fencing.) Have the pitcher kneel at the fence at a 45-degree angle from the batter. The batter should start with their head facing the normal pitchers throwing zone. As they see the soft toss starting (from the corner of their eye) they can bring their head to the hitting zone and begin their swing. Don’t let them continue bad habits during Soft Toss. Make sure the grip, stance, and swing, are correct. When one batter is facing live pitching, you should have the on deck hitter at a soft toss station. Use soft toss in every hitting practice and before games. If a player is having trouble making contact, have them take extra soft toss. Players should have their own tape balls (scrunch one full sheet of newspaper into a ball and then wrap it with duct tape) so they can practice at home.

### Hitting Off a Tee Drill

This is another good way to work on the swing. Don’t put the Tee in the middle of home plate. Practice with the Tee in three different places. Start with the Tee in the middle of the front edge of the plate (Position 1). This is where a pitch straight down the middle should be hit. Next move the Tee approximately 6 inches in front of the inside corner of the plate (Position 2) where an inside pitch should be hit. Then move the Tee on the back edge of the outside corner of the plate (Position 3) where an outside pitch should be hit. Have the player begin every swing by first looking out where the pitcher would normally be standing. Then they can bring their head down to the ball in the hitting zone.

#### Tee Positions



### Scrimmage

Kids love to scrimmage during practice. Combine your live pitching with a scrimmage. If you have 12 players, divide them into three teams of four. One team is up and the other two are in the field. Have one coach pitch and another coach play catcher (by the backstop). You don’t need to use a real catcher; it will just slow down the game. The team that is up gets to hit until they make three outs. Have the kids keep score (they will anyway). The coach that is pitching should talk to the players about situations in-between batters. (How many outs are there? What are you going to do with the ball if it’s hit to you?) The coach that is catching can work with the hitters. This is a good way to end each practice.

### Using Your Hips When You Swing Drill

Have each player get a partner and face each other approximately 3 feet apart. Player One puts their hands behind their lower back with palms facing out and elbows pointed out. Player Two extends one hand out in front of their body at waist level into the other players “strike zone”. Player One must hit Player Two’s hand with their strong elbow (for a right-handed batter that is their right elbow). To do this, Player One is forced to rotate their hips as they should when they swing. Have the player repeat this ten times so they get a feel for the swing. Now

have Player One hold their two hands as if they are holding the bat in a cocked position. Have them swing their hands to hit Player Two’s hand using the same hip motion. Repeat this ten times. As Player One swings, the coach should watch their back right foot. If it does not turn forward (“squish the bug”) then they are not using their hips. Have them go back to swinging with their hands behind their back until they get the feel for the swing, then have them return to swinging with their hands in the cocked position. Now have Player One and Player Two switch positions and have Player Two perform the two exercises. Repeat this drill so each player practices the drills twice.

Now move to the batting Tee and have each player hit 10 balls off the Tee. Place the Tee in the front center position of home plate. Again watch their back foot to make sure it turns forward. If it does not, have the player put down the bat and practice the exercise with their hands behind their back. Have the player retrieve the 10 balls and then move to the end of the line.

### The Trigger Drill

The swing actually begins with the hitter rotating their back hip, front shoulder and hands, about 2-3 inches back in a clockwise motion. This move, called the trigger, gets the swing started and gives it some momentum to move into the ball. When the pitcher winds up and shows the hitter their hip, the batter starts the triggers. Once the player has rotated 2-3 inches they should reverse direction now rotating their hips counter clockwise into the ball. The player should not freeze before reversing direction; instead it should all be one fluid motion.

Have the players form three rows in front of the coach. Each player should be an arms length from the next player and should be in a batting stance facing the coach as if the coach is the pitcher. The coach yells trigger and swing. On trigger, the batter begins the trigger by rotating back. They should freeze at this point and the coach should check the position. On swing, the player rotates forward and freezes. The coach should now check that the hips rotated properly. Repeat this a few times until they are performing the skill properly. Now the coach should repeat the drill a few times, without freezing, so the players get a feel for the fluid motion. The coach should repeat the drill using a pitcher’s windup. When the pitcher shows them the hip (when the glove side knee reaches the peak of the kick) the coach yells trigger. As the throwing motion is finished, the coach yells swing. The coach should be watching the player’s hips and back foot to make sure the hips are rotating properly.

Now the coach should soft toss each player five balls. On each toss the coach should start with the ball pointed directly at the batter. As the coach brings the ball down to start the underhand toss, they yell trigger. Then they should toss the ball and yell swing. The coach should check the trigger and swing to make sure the hips rotate properly.

### Watching the Ball Drill: Two Ball Soft Toss

In this drill the coach will be soft tossing different colored balls to a batter. The coach tosses the two balls at different heights. The coach calls the color to hit after the balls are released. The hitter hits the called ball into the screen. This drill can be done from different locations. The coach should also fake toss and change the release points as well as vary the speed of the balls. Each player takes five swings, retrieves the balls for the coach, and moves to the end of the line. Variation: Simply use regular balls and have the tosser call out "high" or "low." By switching between the high and low ball, the hitter learns to adjust to high pitches when they were expecting a low pitch and vice versa.

### Watching the Ball Drills: “Ball” and “Hit”

"Ball" and "ball-hit" are two easy drills to help a coach and hitter determine when the hitter first sees the ball and how long they see it. In the "ball" drill, the coach throws batting practice to the hitter. The hitter says the word "ball" when they first see the ball, which should be when the ball is about to leave the coach's hand. At first the ball will be well on its way before the coach hears the word "ball." As more repetitions take place, the ball moves back toward the release point. In the "ball-hit" drill, the hitter says the word "ball" when they first see the ball and the word "hit" as they make contact with the ball.

### Hitting Drills: Rhythm-Balance and Over Striding Drills

* With the feet spread and the knees squeezed, place volleyball or a junior basketball between the knees. Hit balls off a Tee or straight-on underhand toss. If rhythm and balance are consistent, the volleyball or basketball will remain between the knees until just before contact. A key point is that the front knee stays behind the front ankle at all times. The back knee moves down and in as the back hip rotates.
* Weight-shift hitting. Most young hitters shift their weight too soon, either in the stride or as they start the bat. To have significant power, the weight must shift as the barrel is traveling through the hitting zone (just before contact and through contact). Hit balls off a Tee. Using ankle flexion, the inside ball of the back foot is pushed down into the ground and the back foot "squashes the bug," then the back foot comes off the ground slightly as the barrel of the bat moves through the hitting zone. The important point here is to feel the weight shift against the front leg just before contact.

### Hitting Drills: Standing one-hand

* Use a short bat in the bottom hand. Hit balls from straight-on underhand toss. Top hand on the chest. Keep the front elbow down and the barrel of the bat as close to the body as possible until right before contract. Hit the inside of the ball and try to hit the ball to the opposite field.
* Use a short bat in the top hand. Hit balls from straight-on underhand toss. Bottom hand on the chest. Keep the back elbow close to the body, striving to get it even with the belly-button at contact. The barrel stays close to the body until right before contact. Hit the inside of the ball and try to hit the ball to the opposite field. Stop the barrel as soon after contact as possible without slowing the bat through contact, being careful not to roll the hand over.

### Hitting Drills: Backside soft toss

* The feeder in backside soft toss is on the same side as the hitter, rather than the opposite side as in traditional soft toss, but at about the same 45-degree angle. The ball is tossed across the plate, and the hitter keeps their head still, stays inside the ball and hits it to the opposite field. This is a difficult drill, especially if the hitter turns away from the ball. The feeder may want to use a screen!
* The feeder is in back about where the umpire stands behind the catcher. The hitter's head should be angled slightly toward the back shoulder to pick up the ball as it comes through the hitting zone. The ball is tossed slowly through the zone and the hitter stays inside the ball, keeping the barrel "on" the ball out front as long as possible. This is a very difficult drill and can be extremely frustrating. It takes the hitter's maximum concentration to do it right.

Hitting Drill: Driving through the Ball (Basketball Drill)

The hitter learns to forcefully hit through the ball. Set a basketball on a batting Tee set about knee height. The batter takes a regular swing at the ball and hits it into a net. Coaches: The drill makes the batter incorporate the lower body to generate power and a strong wrist snap through contact. For younger hitters, use a water polo ball or volleyball to lessen the effort necessary to hit through the ball correctly.

### Hitting Drill: Avoid Being Hit Drills

Most kids that are afraid of being hit tend to step out with their left foot. This does two things: it exposes the front of their body to the ball and, if they do swing, the bat is pulled out of the strike zone making it almost impossible to hit the ball.

* To keep them from getting hurt by opening up to an inside pitch, teach the kids to turn their front shoulder in and down. This exposes their back end to the ball, reducing the risk of serious injury. To reinforce this behavior in practice, have the player get up in their normal stance and soft toss tennis balls right at the player.
* To keep them from stepping out of the batter’s box on normal pitches, place a bucket behind their left foot to force them to step forward rather than out.

Hitting Drill: Don’t Hit the Chair Drill

Place an old folding chair slightly behind and not too close to a batting Tee, and practice hitting the ball off the Tee, without hitting the chair. You'll probably want to use an old bat for this drill, which helps break an upper cutter's bad habit. Make sure that the Tee is a little lower than the chair so you swing with a downward motion.

# Throwing

## The Basics of Throwing

### Stretch Before Throwing

Have all the players stretch their arms before they begin throwing. The following routine is a good start:

* Three sets of front arm circles for 15 seconds.
* Three sets of back arm circles for 15 seconds.
* Stretch the throwing arm by holding it across your chest and then use the opposite hand to pull the  throwing arm bicep towards your chin. Hold for 15 seconds and repeat three times.
* Raise the throwing arm straight up with the palm faces back; bend the throwing elbow so the throwing hand is now touching the back of the throwing shoulder. In this position use your non-throwing hand to push your throwing elbow back causing your throwing hand to reach down your back. Hold for 15  seconds and repeat three times.
* IF THE WEATHER IS COLD, AVOID ANY THROWING DRILLS.

### The Grip

Four-seam grip – Grip the ball so the index and middle fingers are on top and cross two seams each, and the thumb is on the bottom directly under the index and middle fingers. The ball is gripped loosely and there should be a space between the ball and the V formed by the thumb and index finger. The pads of the fingers should come to rest on top of a seam so that a reverse spin can be put on the ball as it is released.

Proper Throwing Motion

#### Starting Position

The players should position themselves so their shoulders form a straight line to the target with their throwing shoulder in back and their feet facing forward (perpendicular to the target). The hands should start together at the belly button.

#### Starting the Throw

When the throw starts the front foot is lifted and slid towards the target. At the same time the hands separate. The glove hand is thrown forward towards the target with the thumb pointing down (this forces the front shoulder to turn in). The throwing hand goes down then back with index and middle fingers on top and pointing away from the target.

#### Hip Rotation and Weight Shift

As the front foot lands (on the toe and ball of foot), the back hip and shoulder rotate forward towards the target bring the weight up and over the front foot. This rotation and weight shift is the key to using your body to throw. The throwing arm comes up (so the throwing elbow is at least shoulder height) and then forward with the elbow in front of the ball. As the back shoulder comes forward it should be aimed at the target. The glove arm is bent and pulled back into the body so that it tucks right under the shoulder. This movement with the glove arm is important because it helps the hips to rotate and improves throwing accuracy.

#### Release

The ball is released slightly in front of the body with a downward motion. There should be a snap of the wrists as the ball is released to add velocity to the throw. The ball should just spin off the top pads of the index and middle fingers.

#### Follow Through

The motion should be completed naturally. The player should let their throwing arm complete its motion and not force it to stop. The back leg will come forward with the weight shift and the back knee should come towards the front knee.

### Diagnosing Problems

#### Check the starting Position

As with hitting, make sure the player is starting in the proper place. Check the ball grip and starting position.

#### Watch the feet and legs

If they are starting properly, watch their feet and legs when they throw. Watch the front foot to see if they are over striding, landing on their heal, or not stepping directly towards the target. If they stride too far they end up shifting their weight forward before the hips have started to turn and they don’t get their body into the throw. If they land on their heal, it can force there weight back and make it difficult to rotate their hips. If they don’t step directly at the target, it will throw off their aim and hip rotation.

#### Check the body rotation and weight shift

As the front foot lands, the back knee hip and shoulder should rotate and bring the weight forward. If the player’s belly button has not turned to face the target at the time of release then the player is not rotating their hips properly. If the back knee does not come towards the front knee then the player is not shifting their weight forward over the front foot.

#### Arm Position

If the body rotation and weight shift is correct, watch the arm motions. The arms should separate as the player’s strides. Make sure the glove arm is thrown out towards the target and then pulled back under the glove side shoulder. Check the throwing arm to make sure it goes down, back and up. When the throwing arm is back the index and middle fingers should be on top. If they are on the bottom the player will end up pushing the ball instead of throwing it. When the throwing arm is up, the elbow must be at least should height. If it is below shoulder height the player ends up short-arming the throw and can injure their arm.

## Throwing Drills

### Throw and Go

This drill teaches young players to follow their throws in the right direction. Have two single file lines of players (one behind the other) facing at a comfortable throwing distance. The player at the head of line one throws to the player at the head of line two. After the throw, player continues a forward motion (as one should) in the direction of the throw by running to the back of the opposite line. The drill is especially effective for Tee Ball players as it encourages players to follow their throws instead of allowing them to “cheat backward” as they tend to do when going to the back of the same line.

### Wrist Snap

#### Wrist Drill

Players are on both knees facing each other about 8-10 feet apart. Player 1 will place their throwing elbow in their glove. Raise the throwing elbow so it is even with their throwing shoulder. Concentrate on loading and popping the ball with the wrist to Player 2. There should be very little body movement other than the wrist propelling the ball. Player 2 should give a target and catch the ball with two hands. PURPOSE - focus on the last 10% of the throw/wrist action

### Throwing Drill – Motion: Upper Body Movement

#### Two Knee Throwing

Players are on both knees facing each other at 15 feet. Player 1 will throw to Player 2. The emphasis should be on the hand break out of the glove, arm arc (loose and controlled), turning of the shoulders, release, and follow through. Also it is important to preach proper arm action - ball comes out of glove and proceeds down, back, and up. The fingers should remain on top of the ball. The throwing elbow needs to get even with the throwing shoulder. PURPOSE - To isolate the upper body during the throwing process.

### Throwing Arm Down and Back, Fingers on Top

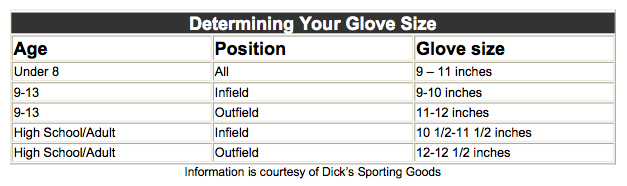
Players 1 is in a throwing position with shoulders lined up facing a target and hands together at chest. Player 2 is on one knee about 8-10 feet directly behind Player 1. Player 1 starts the throwing motion by separating the hands, the glove hand goes forward and the throwing hand goes down and then back in an arc. The fingers are on top of the ball at all times. Player 1 releases the ball as it reaches shoulder level behind their body resulting in a toss to Player 2. Coaches: watch for proper arm separation, throwing arm going down and then back, and that the fingers remain on top of the ball. If the toss does not go directly to Player 2 then make sure the arm is coming straight back.

# Fielding

## The Basics of Fielding

### Choosing the Proper Glove

The glove should be small enough so the player can move their arm and wrist easily when the glove is on. The player should not bury their entire hand in the glove. When worn properly the bottom of the palm, near the wrist, is exposed. Always choose a good quality leather glove. Synthetic leather and vinyl gloves will not break-in in a proper manner. Smaller gloves force the player to use two hands when catching. Use the chart below as a guide when selecting a glove size:



### Preparation

The first step in fielding is to be prepared, mentally and physically. Before the pitcher starts to throw the fielder has to know what they are going to do with the ball if it is hit to them. As the pitch is delivered, an infielder takes two short steps forward with their knees slightly bent, their feet a little more than shoulder width apart and both hands in front of their body. They time their second step so they land as the ball crosses the plate. If the ball is hit, they are already moving and will be able to react quickly. An outfielder takes the same two-step approach but their hands do not need to be in front of their body. Their first reaction will be to run so the arms should be prepared to run. Remind the players during games by saying “step-step.”

### Fielding a Ground Ball – Infielders

#### Approaching the ball

If the ball is hit directly at an infielder then they should charge the ball. If the ball is hit to either side they should first move laterally until they are in front of the ball and then they should charge the ball. They should NOT take a direct line to the ball that is hit to their side.

#### Catching the ball

As the ground ball arrives, their feet should be slightly more than shoulder width apart with the foot on their glove side slightly in front of the other foot. They should position themselves so the line of the ball is just inside the foot on their glove side. Their knees and waist are bent so the back is parallel to the ground. The ball is caught out in front of the body. Their glove hand should be touching the ground in front of their body with the palm facing up. In order to get the glove in this position they will be forced to bend their knees and waist. Their throwing hand should be on top of their glove hand so they form the shape of on open Alligators mouth. Their head is square to the ground and watching the ball.

#### Positioning to throw

After catching the ball they can make one of three moves to get their bodies in a throwing position that is lined up to the target. If they are making a short throw they can just POP: take a quick hop (staying in a crouched position) with a slight twist so their throwing arm foot lands behind them and is perpendicular to their target. If they are making a medium length throw they can PIVOT: take a short step forward with their throwing foot so it lands perpendicular to their target so that the next step with their opposite throwing foot will cause them to pivot into a position that lines them up with their target. If they are making a long throw they can SHUFFLE their feet towards the target, making sure that their throwing foot is perpendicular to the target when they finish the shuffle. Regardless of the move they choose they should end up with their shoulders lined in a direct line to the target with the throwing shoulder in the back.

### Fielding a Fly Ball – Outfielders

#### Approaching the ball

An outfielder’s first step should almost always be back. They should not move forwards until they are SURE the ball is hit in front of them. Tell your outfielders that if they are going to make a mistake it should always be in front of them. A mistake in front of them is a single. A mistake behind them could be a HOME RUN! If the ball is hit to their side, their first step should be to move their glove side foot back and towards the ball. This pivot will cause a right-handed player to close (turn their back on) a ball hit to their right, and open up on a ball hit their left or directly at them. Their first step should not be lateral. Outfielders should run under control (the head should not bounce up and down) and their glove should NOT be extended until the ball is about to arrive. If they have time, they should always put themselves in a position so they can face the ball and catch it with their arms extended in front of the body.

#### Catching the ball

Just before the ball arrives they should extend their arms so they catch the ball with two hands away from their body. They should try and position themselves so the glove never blocks their line of sight to the ball.

#### Positioning to Throw

Most outfield throws will be long so an outfielder should take a shuffle step. They should shuffle their feet towards the target making sure that their throwing foot is perpendicular to the target when the finish the shuffle.

#### Balls hit down the Line

Tell your left and right fielders that any ball hit between them and the foul line will tail towards the foul line. It doesn’t matter if a lefty or righty is up, it will still tail towards the line.

### After the Ball is Hit – Backing Up

Teach the players that everyone moves after the ball is hit. Outfielders charge every ground ball and assume that it will get through the infield. They also back up overthrows to the bases. Catchers and second basemen can back up throws to first; the pitcher should be backing up third and home. Players should learn to anticipate throws. If there is a wild throw to first then the left and center fielders should move to back up the first baseman’s throw to second.

### Positional Responsibilities

#### Requirements for Defensive Unit

* Call for all Fly Balls!
* Know and go for sure outs.
* Effectively back each other up on all batted and thrown balls.
* Have all bases covered on all plays.
* Know when to “eat” the ball.
* Know where the force-outs are and which ones to take. It can change on every pitch!
* Be aware of base runners trying to advance after an out.
* On pop flies and line drives, cover bases! You can double up runners.
* Throw ahead of base runners.
* On balls hit to the outfield, use the cutoff man.
* Always think ahead of the play. Know what you’ll do when the ball comes to you. It can change on every  pitch!
* Always know the count. It affects the way a batter will hit.
* Chatter, chatter, chatter!!!

#### Requirements for the Pitcher

* Throw strikes
* On ground balls to the right side, cover first base
* When third basemen makes play on bunt, cover third base if there are runners on base
* Back up throws to third base and Home from Outfield
* Cover home plate on wild pitches with runners on third base or second base
* Hold runners on base, if applicable
* Keep the base runner from advancing on the throw from the catcher
* Runner on first and ball hit to right, backup third.
* Runner on second and ball hit to any field, backup home.

#### Requirements for the Catcher

* Control your pitcher. Work together as a unit. Talk about batters between innings and strategize.
* Minimize the number of balls that get past you. Keep the ball in front of you.
* Catch all pop-ups. Remove and drop mask in one movement as you stand up to locate the ball.
* QUICKLY retrieve wild pitches and passed balls and get the ball back to home plate.
* Throw out base runners attempting to steal.
* Come out quickly on bunts and topped balls.
* With no one on base, back up the 1st baseman on ground balls to the infield.
* Let the infield cut-off man know what to do if the throw is coming to them.
* Know when to pick off runners leading too far off the base.
* Keep runners from advancing on the throw back to the pitcher. Throw the ball back on a line.
* Block the line on close plays at the plate. Make them earn the run.
* Runners on second or third, cover home.

#### Requirements for the First Baseman

* Play the ball first, and the base second. On any contact, the player should know whether the ball is  coming in their general direction or not. If so, they should attempt to make the play, just as should any fielder. If not, they must cover the bag, whether or not they believe that there is any hope of a play at first base.
* Scoop 999 out of 1000 throws out of the dirt.
* Give infielders a good target
* Always be aware of other base runners after the play at first base
* When a throw is off target, move off the bag – if necessary – to catch it. Nothing gets by you!
* Charge bunts and topped balls down the first base line
* Don’t commit bag foot until you see the throw – then STRETCH!
* On bloop hits, or on grounders that pull them far off of the bag, the first baseman should know when to  tag the base themselves, and when to toss it to the covering pitcher (or second baseman).

#### Requirements for the Second Baseman

* Turn the double play. With a runner on first and less than two outs, the top priority should always be to  attempt a double play. If fielded near the bag, the player should know whether to step on the bag them selves or to make the throw to second base via the underhand toss. However, the player should always bear in mind that the first responsibility is a sure out - make the throw to first if they do not think they have a chance to get the runner at second.
* Cover first base on bunts and ground balls that the 1st Baseman charges
* When covering first base, get there quickly – give the fielder a stationary target
* Cover second base on ground balls to short or third with a runner on first base – AND on balls hit to Left  and Left Center field.
* Cover or back up second base on steal play. Usually, the shortstop will cover the base, while the second  baseman will back up the play a good ten feet deep. It is vital that the second baseman and the shortstop communicate and clearly understand when each will be covering the base! If they get into one another's way, outs will be lost.
* On throws from the Catcher to Pitcher, make it a ritual to back up the Pitcher every time.
* Play positionally sound defense. Always play the ball first and the base second.
* Bases empty, backup throw to first on groundball.
* The right side of the infield is the second baseman's domain - anything hit between second base and the  right foul line is their responsibility. If they can get to the ball, they should do so. If the ball is hit to the first baseman, it is their job to back up the play. If the ball gets into the outfield, they should sprint out onto the grass and act as a cutoff man.

#### Requirements for the Shortstop

* Turn the double play. With a runner on first and less than two outs, the top priority should always be to attempt a double play. If fielded near the bag, the player should know whether to step on the bag them selves or to make the throw to second base via the underhand toss. However, the player should always bear in mind that the first responsibility is a sure out - make the throw to first if they do not think they have a chance to get the runner at second.
* Cover second base on hits to the right side of the infield
* Cover or back up second base on steal play. Usually, the shortstop will cover the base, while the second  baseman will back up the play a good ten feet deep. It is vital that the second baseman and the shortstop communicate and clearly understand when each will be covering the base! If they get into one another's way, outs will be lost.
* On throws from the Catcher to Pitcher, make sure either you or the 2nd baseman backs the throw up
* Play positionally sound defense. Play the ball first and the base second.
* The left side of the infield is the shortstop's domain - anything hit between second base and the left foul  line is their responsibility. If they can get to the ball, they should do so. If the ball is hit to the third baseman, it is their job to back up the play. If the ball gets into the outfield, they should sprint out onto the grass and act as a cutoff man.

#### Requirements for the Third Baseman

* Cover third base on balls hit to others.
* Always be ready to charge bunts and topped balls.
* Take any pop flies toward home plate that you can get.
* Must constantly work on long throws to first base and on charging bunts.
* In the event of a bunt, the third baseman will be charging the ball, leaving third base vacant. Usually, the  only play here is to throw the runner out at first unless you are dealing with very slow runners at other  bases.
* The extreme left side of the infield is the third baseman's responsibility domain - anything hit between the  shortstop and the left foul line is their responsibility. If they can get to the ball, they should do so. They  should be prepared to cover third base if there is any possibility of a play there.
* If the ball is hit between second base and the right foul line, the player should always cover third base, in  the event of a throw there.
* With a runner on first and less than two outs, the top priority should always be to attempt a double play.  If possible, make a clean throw to the second baseman in an effort to "turn two." However, the player should always bear in mind that the first responsibility is a sure out - make the throw to first if they do not think they have a chance to get the runner at second.
* If there is a force play at third (runners on first and second), the first option is usually to step on third base to begin a double play - either to second or first, depending on the judgment of where the best chance for an out is. Preference is always given to the lead runner - that is, if it is possible to get the lead runner out (at third or at second), then do so before getting the runner at first.
* With the base loaded and two outs, the third baseman may pursue whatever out is easiest to get - this may be stepping on their own base, or making a throw to any base. With less than two outs, the call may be for a double play, unless the coach has decided that runs cannot be sacrificed (tie game late). In this case, the only priority is to attempt to force the runner at the plate.

#### Requirements for the Outfield

* You are the goalie of the defensive. Nothing should get past you.
* Back each other up on ALL balls hit to outfield.
* Back up infielders on balls hit to them AND on subsequent throws.
* Go for short flies and – if you can reach the ball – call the infielder off and make the catch.
* Throw ahead of the base runners and to (or through) the cutoff man.
* Edge in and back-up bases on attempted steals and on pick-off plays.
* Know and tell a fellow outfielder where to throw when they are fielding a ball.
* ALWAYS throw through the relay man so they can cut it if necessary.

##### Left Fielder

* If there is a runner on third, backup the baseline after every pitch.
* Ball hit to center, backup the center fielder.
* On a ball hit to right and a play at second, backup the throw to second.
* On a ball hit to right and a play at third, backup throw to third.
* On a groundball to third or shortstop, assume an error and charge hard.
* Rundown going home or third, backup third.
* Rundown going to second, backup second.

##### Right Fielder

* If there is a runner on first, backup the baseline after every pitch.
* Ball hit to center, backup the center fielder.
* On a ball hit to left and a play at second, backup the throw to second.
* On a ball hit to left, and a play at first, backup first in foul territory.
* On a groundball to first or second, assume an error and charge hard.
* Rundown going to third, backup second.
* Rundown going to second, backup first.

##### Center Fielder

* If there is a runner on second, backup second after every pitch.
* Ball hit to left, backup the left fielder.
* Ball hit to right, backup the right fielder.
* On a groundball to second or shortstop, assume an error and charge hard.
* Rundown going to second or third, backup second.

Calling for the Ball

### Calling for the ball

Wait for the ball to reach the top of its trajectory. Once you know you can catch the ball, call for it. To call for the ball, YELL “MINE! MINE!” The louder you yell, the more likely another player will not collide into you. Don’t yell, “I got it”, and don’t call the ball for someone else (Yours). If you are not sure if you can get to it, and the ball is about to hit and no one has called for it, then call for the ball and try to get it. Call EVERYTHING even if it is hit right at you. This lets the other players know you see the ball (you haven’t lost it in the sun) and they don’t need to call for it.

### Order of Precedence

There is an order of precedence among the fielders with the center fielder being the highest. Center Fielder, Left and Right Fielder, Shortstop, Second Baseman, First Baseman, Third Baseman, Pitcher, Catcher  

Whenever possible the player highest in precedence should call for the ball and catch it. Examples:

* Outfielder should try to catch all shallow fly balls.
* Shortstop should try to catch a popup behind third.
* Second baseman should try to catch a popup behind first.
* First and third baseman should try to catch foul pops between their base and home.
* The Center Fielder wins all ties with other outfielders.
* The Shortstop wins all ties with infielders.

If two players call for the ball the player highest in precedence should catch the ball and the other player should back off. Don’t dive for a ball if you have not called for it.

## Fielding Drills

### Getting Started

#### Use Tennis Balls and Tee Balls

Kids have a natural fear of being hit with a hard ball. To prevent this fear from interfering with the learning process, you should use a softer ball (Tennis balls, Tee balls) when you start teaching them to field.

#### Catch with Two Hands

Tennis balls are great because it will force them to use two hands when catching.

Count the Bounces

Kids tend to watch the ball until it is just about to arrive, then they turn their face away so it won’t get hit. Even if they are not afraid of the ball, experienced players can develop a bad habit of taking their eye of a ground ball, just before it arrives, so they can sneak a look where they should be throwing it. Both infielders and outfielders will do this especially if men are on base. This move causes most errors (and injuries). When you throw them ground balls, tell them to count the bounces out loud. This forces them to keep their eyes on the ball and to watch the last bounce. This bounce is the most important because they need to react to it in order to field it. Watching the ball is actually their best defense mechanism against getting hit by it.

Machine Gun Throwing

Put 7 players in a straight line approximately 3 to 4 feet apart with the player at the far right (P2) holding a ball. Put 1 player (P1) facing the line of 7 approximately 15 feet away from the center player in the line of 7. The player facing the line of 7 also has a ball.

P8 P7 P6 P5 P4 P3 P2

P1

Coach will say, "Go." P1 throws their ball to player 3 (P3). At the same time P2 throws their ball to P1. As soon as P3 catches the ball they throw it back to P1. As soon as P1 catches the ball from P2 they throw it to P4, and so on down the line. P1 works their way down the line to P8 and then back up the line to P2. At this point P1 flips their ball to P3, P2 replaces P1 (P1 then goes to the end of the line) and everyone rotates up one spot and the drill starts over again.

P1 P8 P7 P6 P5 P4 P3

P2

This is an excellent drill for developing quick hands and quick feet. It forces the players to catch the ball with two hands. If they catch it with one hand, they can't get rid of it in time before the next ball is coming at them. It also teaches the players the importance of stepping at your target because you have to shift your feet in a different direction before throwing to the next person in line. A player who is lax or sloppy with their glove or feet is easily spotted in this drill.

### Relays and Relay Race

This drill is a great skill builder. There will be at least 5 players on a team. They line up about 30 feet apart and stretch about 120 feet across the field. You will have two teams or "lines" competing against each other. Make sure to have your catcher, first baseman, and third baseman on one end. Have an outfielder on the opposite end. Your middle infielder should be in the middle. The drill will start for both lines at the same time. The first team to take the ball to the other end and get it back is the winner. The ball must be caught and thrown by each player in the line. Teams may not skip a man. The catchers should practice catching and tagging a runner. The middle infielders should be taught to properly "round" the ball, make a proper relay catch and quick throw.

Catcher-------------x--------------------x------------------x--------------------Outfielder

The distances should be matched to the age. You may also have the outfielder let the ball go and hit the fence, before the player retrieves it and makes their throw to the cutoff man. You may also want to have the "line" make more than one trip down and back. It is great to make each "line" take the ball to the other end three times.

### Follow Your Throws

Start with five infielders, one at each base, and two at home. The first catcher rolls a ground ball to the third baseman and then follows their throw to third base. The third baseman throws to second, starting the double play and then follows their throw to second. The second baseman turns the double play and then follows their throw to first. The first baseman receives the throw, turns and fires home to the second catcher and then follows their throw home. The second catcher now rolls a groundball to third and starts the drill again. Have a contest by keeping track of how many times each group of five can get the ball around the infield in two minutes.

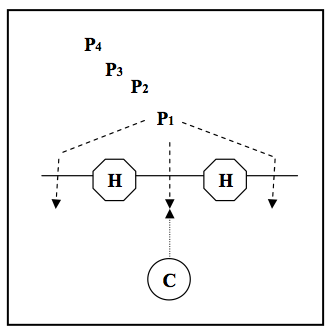
### Tennis Ball Pop-Ups

Utilize a tennis racquet and tennis balls to hit players pop-ups. Kids are about 30 feet away from you. Make a line off to the side - one player sprints out and gets ready. Catch popup, place in bucket at the end of the line. Can hit these really high and it is much safer. Kids love it. Coach checks to see if players are moving their feet to get under the pop-ups, keeping their gloves out in front of their body with two hands. Tennis balls are great for teaching proper fly ball procedure because they tend to bounce out of the glove more and it forces the player to use two hands to keep it in the glove.

### Calling for the Ball

Put players at each outfield position and each infield position. Have the outfielders play fairly deep. The coach stands at pitchers mound with a Tennis Ball and racquet and hits high fly balls to various places. The players need to go after the fly balls and make the proper calls.

### Fielding Drills: Groundball Drill



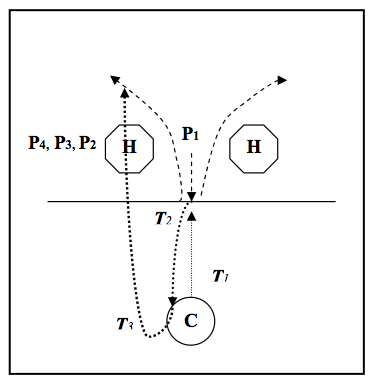
#### Instructions

Place two Batting Helmets (H) approx 10 feet apart on a line. Player 1 (P1) stands in ready position 10 feet behind the line. The coach says ready and the player takes two steps forward as if the pitch is being thrown. The coach then throws a ground ball to the left, middle or right of the batting helmets. Player 1 moves to position them selves in front of the ground ball, picks it up and throws in to the coach. Player 1 then goes to the end of the line and Player 2 (P2) steps in. Continue through the line until each player has had a chance to field the balls in all three positions. The coach should have an ample supply of balls so they don’t have to stop the drill if a throw is wild.

#### Things to check

* **Infielders need to be ready to move when the ball is hit:** Make sure the player takes two short steps after you say ready.
* **Taking the right line to a ground ball:** The player should not take a straight line to the ground ball. They should move slightly lateral and then come straight to the ground ball so they are facing their target when they field the ball. The helmets force them to do this.
* **Charging ground balls:** Make sure the ground ball is fielded in front of the line.
* Proper position for fielding ground balls: The player should be facing target (coach) with foot opposite throwing hand slightly ahead of other foot. Knees bent, back parallel to ground.
* **Field Ground Balls out in front of your body:** The players’ glove should be extended with palm facing up and throwing hand on top of glove with palm facing down in Alligator position.
* **Step and throw:** After fielding a ground ball the player should stay low and their first step should be to move their throwing foot forward and plant it perpendicular to the target so they are ready to stride and throw.

### Fielding Drills: Fielding On the Run



#### Instructions

Place two Batting Helmets (H) approx 6 feet apart and 10 feet behind a line on the field. Player 1 (P1) stands in ready position between the two helmets. The Coach (C) says ready and the Player 1 takes two steps forward as if the pitch is being thrown. The coach throws a line drive (T1) at the Player 1. Player 1 charges the line drive and catches it near the line. Player 1 throws the ball back to the coach (T2) and then the coach throws a fly ball (T3) behind one of the helmets. Player 1 runs back and catches the fly ball, throws the ball back to the coach and goes to the end of the line. Player 2 (P2) now takes a turn in the drill. The coach should have an ample supply of balls so they don’t have to stop the drill if a throw is wild. Continue the drill until each player has had a few turns fielding the throws.

#### Things to check

* **Infielders need to be ready to move when the ball is hit:** Make sure the player takes two short steps after you say ready.
* **Catching the ball on the run:** The player should catch T1 near the line. The player needs to run under control, the head should stay on the same plane and not bounce up and down.
* **Catch the ball out in front of the body:** The player should extend the glove in front of their body to catch the line drive. The throwing hand should be near the glove (catching with two hands).
* **Pivot and throw:** The player’s first step after the catch should be a short step forward with the throwing foot placing it perpendicular to the throwing target. This will force the next step to be a pivot that properly lines up their body with the target. They are now ready to spread and throw.
* **Proper line on a fly ball:** The player’s first step should be to pivot and run back. The first step should not be lateral move. The helmets will force the player to start straight back and then move laterally.
* **Players should run to the ball:** Once the player has pivoted they should RUN to the ball. Make sure the player does not shuffle back or run backwards. The glove should also be down while running. The player should not raise their glove until they are ready to catch the ball.
* **Catch the ball away from the body:** The player should extend their arm and catch the ball (with two hands if possible) away from the body.
* **Shuffle step and throw:** The throw from the outfield requires a shuffle step that lands with the throwing foot behind the body and perpendicular to the target.

### Fielding – Infield: Proper hand and feet position when fielding the ball

The coach should demonstrate the proper foot and hand position to catch a ground ball. When possible, an infielder should field a ground ball with the glove out in front of their body (so their eyes can watch the catch) just inside their glove hand foot. The glove hand foot should be slightly in front of the other foot so the player can quickly pivot into a throwing position. The glove should be on the ground and open with the palm facing the sky. The throwing hand should open just above the glove with the palm facing down.

Break the players into circles of about 5-6 players. Give each group a Tee ball and have them start rolling groundballs to each other. The players should focus on getting their feet and hands into the proper position to field the groundball. The coach should watch the circles and make sure the drill is performed properly. If a player is not in the proper position then stop the drill and correct them.

Now have the players get into lines and have a coach roll ground balls to the first player in each line. When you first introduce this drill use Tee balls so the player is not worried about getting hit with the ball and can focus on their hands and feet. The coach should roll the balls slow enough so the player has time to get into the proper position. The player is instructed to freeze when they catch the ball. Check the players hand and foot position when they freeze. If the ball is not being caught just inside the glove hand foot or the glove hand foot is not slightly ahead of the other foot then correct the player.

Have players do this a few times until their hands and feet are in the proper position. Now repeat the drill but instead of having the players freeze, they should come up throwing. The coach should continue to check the hand and foot positions.

### Infield: Watching the last bounce

This drill focuses on making sure that infielders keep their eye on the ball and see the last bounce. Tell the players that MOST infield errors are made because the infielder does not watch the ball take its last bounce. Also tell them that the best way to avoid being hit with a ground ball is to make sure that you watch it. You can’t duck out of the way of a bad hop if you are not watching the ball take a bad hop. You will need a bouncy lopsided ball that does not bounce true. To make one you need a tennis ball and a roll of masking tape. Tear off about eight five inch strips of masking tape and scrunch them into small balls with the sticky side out. Stick the scrunched balls onto the tennis ball in various places. Now take some strips of masking tape and tape the tennis ball completely so that the scrunched balls will stay in place.

Have the players get into lines and have a coach roll the ball at a brisk pace to the first player in each line. The player is instructed to focus on the last bounce so they know where the ball is heading. You can do this drill with or without gloves. Repeat the drill often so the players get into the habit of watching the ball.

### Infield: Footwork for a Medium length throw

When an infielder catches a ground ball, their feet should be a little more than shoulder width apart with the glove side foot slightly ahead of the throwing side foot. If they are making a medium range throw their first step after catching the ball is to bring their back foot (throwing foot) one step forward towards the target so that it lands perpendicular to the target. Now when they bring their glove foot forward their body will automatically turn so their shoulders line up and point to the target and they can go right into their throw. Their knees should remain bent at all times so they stay low to the ground.

Have the players form three rows, an arms length apart, in front of the coach. The coach yells three commands, catch, step, and pivot. On catch the player should get their feet and hands into the proper position to field a ground ball. On step the player should bring their back foot (throwing foot) one step forward towards the target so that it lands perpendicular to the target. On pivot the player should bring their glove foot forward and their body should turn so their shoulders line up and point to the target. Have the players freeze after the pivot and make sure they are all lined up to the target and their knees are still bent. Repeat this drill about 10 times until they are all comfortable with the footwork.

Now have each player get a partner and form two lines with the partners facing each other about 15-20 feet apart. Give every other player on each side a ball so that each pair has a ball. The coach now yells catch, step, pivot, and throw. On catch the player with the ball gets into the proper groundball fielding position as if they have just caught a ground ball. On step and pivot they move their feet as described above and on throw they throw the ball to their partner. Repeat this drill so each side performs the drill a few times.

Now the coach will yell ready, throw. On throw the player rolls a soft groundball directly to their partner. The partner should catch, step, pivot and throw in one fluid motion. Continue this drill with the players only throwing on the coach’s command. The coach should watch all kids making sure they are moving properly and correcting them if they are not.

### Outfield: Proper hand and feet position to catch a fly ball or pop fly

The coach should demonstrate the proper hand and feet position for catching a fly ball or a pop fly. When possible, fly balls and pop flies should be caught with the glove out it front of the body about at approximately eye level. The glove should be positioned in front of the throwing hand shoulder with the glove open and up. To get the glove in this position the player should move the glove across the body first and then up, so that the glove never blocks the eyes view of the ball. The throwing hand should be under the glove with the palm open and facing up. The feet should be a little more than shoulders width apart with the glove hand foot should be slightly in front of the throwing hand foot so that the player can quickly pivot into a throwing position after catching the ball.

Have the players spread out with gloves but no balls. Have the coach call ready, catch, and freeze. On catch the players should move their feet and hands to the proper position and then freeze. The coach should check the hand and feet positions to make sure they are correct. Watch how the player moves the glove into position to make sure it does not cross their line of sight. Repeat this drill until the players are doing it correctly.

Now have the players get into lines and have a coach toss a pop up to the first player in each line. The player should freeze when they catch it. Check the feet and hands. Repeat this drill a few times then have the players catch the ball and throw without freezing. To start, throw the pop fly to the throwing hand side of the player so they don’t have to move their feet too much in order to get in the correct position. After they are more comfortable, alternate throwing the ball to either side of the player so they have to move their feet in order to get in the correct position. Don’t throw the ball over the players head during this drill. Correct any player that does not do the drill properly.

### Outfield: Moving for balls hit over your head

To move for a ball hit over their head, the first step an outfielder should make is too move the ball side foot (the foot on the side where the ball has been hit) one step back so that the foot comes down with the toes pointing away from the body. The player should then move the other foot across the front of the body so that it lands in a line pointed to where they think the ball is going to land. This will cause the players body to close on the ball (their back will be facing the path of the ball). They should proceed to run towards the landing point while keeping their eye on the ball at all times.

If a ball is hit directly over their heads then they should try to drop and pivot on their glove hand side. It will be easier to extend their gloves to make a catch if they pivot on this side.

Have the players spread out in front of the coach. Start with a ball hit to their right. Have them drop their right foot and then cross over the left foot. Change to a ball hit to the left. Have them drop their left foot and then cross over their right foot. Repeat each side a few times, doing each step slowly until they are comfortable with the drill. Now have the coach hold up either their left or right hand to indicate which side the ball has been hit. The player should drop, crossover, and freeze. Check to make sure each player has done it correct. Repeat this drill a few times until everyone is doing it right. The coach should hold their hand directly over their heads to indicate fly balls hit directly over the players head. Check to see if they are pivoting to their glove side on this type of fly ball.

Now the coach should throw each player a pop fly just slightly over their heads to either side of their body. The coach should observe the player to make sure they drop and cross over. If they do it wrong have them repeat the drill. Keep doing the drill until each player has had a chance to practice catching the ball a few times for each side.

### Outfield: Footwork for throwing

When an outfielder catches a fly ball in the proper position, their throwing side foot will be slightly behind their glove side foot. To make throws from the outfield, the thrower will have to make a shuffle step in order to gain momentum to make the long throw. The shuffle step is actually made up of four quick steps.

* The throwing side foot steps forward towards the target so that it lands perpendicular to the target.
* The glove side foot steps towards the target landing perpendicular to the target, on a line between the throwing side foot and the target, so the body will automatically turn and the shoulders will now  form a line pointing straight at the target.
* The throwing side foot steps towards the target but behind their glove side leg again landing  perpendicular to the target.
* The glove side foot steps towards the target and the player goes right into the throw.

Have the players form three rows, an arms length apart, in front of the coach. The coach yells **catch**, **one**, **two**, **three** and **throw**. On **catch** the player gets in the proper position to catch a fly ball. When the coach yells **one** the players take step one above and should freeze. The coach check to make sure everyone is in position. Now do steps **two**, **three** and four (**throw**), freezing after every step. Repeat this a few times until they are comfortable.

Now have each player get a partner and form two lines with the partners facing each other about 30 feet apart. Give every other player on each side a ball so that each pair has a ball. The coach now yells **catch**, **one**, **two**, **three**, and **throw**. On **catch** the player with the ball gets into the proper fly ball fielding position as if they have just caught a fly ball. On **one** they perform step one above and freeze. The coach checks to make sure everyone is in position. Now do step **two** and **three** freezing after every step. On **throw** they should take the final step and throw the ball to their partner. Repeat this a few times freezing between the steps. Once everyone is doing it properly, repeat the drill without freezing.

## Base Running

## The Basics of Base Running

### Home to First

**Always run hard** – the runner’s goal is to advance for extra bases on balls hit into the outfield. On balls hit in the infield, the goal is to beat the throw to 1st base, but at least apply a little pressure on the defense. Runners are expected to run out all pop ups and fly balls. If there is any doubt as to whether a batted ball is fair, run hard and let the umpires decide.

**Always find your batted ball** - about 3 steps out the batters box, the runner should find the ball (keep running) so they will have the information needed to approach 1st base.

Balls in the infield - On balls hit in the infield, the runner should hit first base with their left foot. Never lunge at the bag - just run through 1st base, which is why the rules allow runners to overrun that base. Only slide if the first baseman is trying to apply a tag.

**Balls in the outfield** - On balls hit in the outfield, runner should always make an aggressive turn at 1st base – the objective is to make the outfielders believe the runner is going to second base. If the outfielders aren't even aware that there is a runner, there is no chance to put pressure on the defense. To avoid turning wide, runners should learn to swing out into foul ground and dip the inside shoulder as they turn for 2nd base

**Never become a spectator** - If the hit singles in a runner from second base, chances are there will be a throw to the plate. If the ball clears the cutoff man, the runner should be on second base. The runner must anticipate this throw, find the cutoff man, determine the height of the ball, and aggressively take second base when it is available. Lots of things happen in games when a ball is batted. Runners must always be ready to take the extra base if the situation allows for it. Note that there is a difference between aggressive and foolish.

### When you are on base

**Know the situation** – Runners should get their signs from the coach and know how many outs there are and if they are forced to run on a groundball. Always check where the outfielders and infielders are playing and make a mental note. That information will help on batted balls into the outfield.

**Don’t Interfere** - The rules require that runners avoid all batted balls and fielders in the act of fielding. If runners run into a batted ball that has not yet passed a fielder (not including the pitcher) or a fielder trying to field, the runner will be called out. Note that if the fielder is playing on the home plate side of the baseline and misses the hit ball, the runner is not out if the ball hits them after it passes the fielder.

### First base

**Get a good jump on every pitch** - If the ball is in the dirt, the runner should go. If the ball is caught, they should GET BACK! The runner is responsible for getting back if the catcher throws to first. They should not rely on the First base coach. If getting a good lead, many catchers will throw over. That is good, because the defense cannot get the runner out if the runner is paying attention and know how far they can lead off and still make it back to the base. What will happen is they will throw the ball into right field sooner or later and the runner will be able to advance to third.

**When to Run** - If there are two outs then run on everything. If there are less than two outs then the rule is: Groundball - Go, Line drive - Freeze, Fly ball - Halfway and get back. Only tag up if the ball is foul, otherwise runner should be "halfway" on pop-ups and fly balls at first base. "Halfway" means as far as they can get toward 2nd base and still get back safely if the ball is caught. That could be 2 feet on a pop up to the first baseman or 59 feet on a fly ball to deep center field. With less than 2 outs, always freeze on a line drive. The reason they need to freeze (or not run) is to make sure the line drive goes through the infield. If it is caught in the infield and the runner has already started the move toward the next base, they will be doubled off.

**Be Aggressive** – The goal is to run to third base. If the ball is hit in front of the runner (to Left or Center), the runner will decide if they can make it or not and carry out the appropriate actions. If the ball is hit into right field, they should pick up the third base coach before they get to 2nd base (about 20 feet before) and the coach will tell them to stay or GO.

Bunts - If batter is bunting, the runner should see the ball down before running! GO when sure the ball will hit the ground and not popped up.

**First and Third Steal** - If there is a 1st and 3rd steal situation and a play is on, the runners job at 1st base is to NOT run into an out, especially with 2 outs. That means stay in a rundown. If the defense refuses to make a play, advance to second base.

### Second base

**Get a good jump on every pitch** - Get off the base on every pitch (or as it passes the plate in Major and below) and watch for the ball in the dirt. Runners on second need to react to the ball in the dirt. If the ball kicks away from the catcher they should go. If the catcher blocks the ball in front of them, the base runners should stay.

**When to Run** - Groundballs: If runner is in a force situation, then GO! If there is no runner at 1st base forcing them to advance on ground balls with less than 2 outs, runner should GO on ground balls hit at them or behind them. They should not hesitate. On balls hit in front of them (left field side), they should wait and read the infielders throw. Fly balls: Tag at 2nd base on all foul pops or fly balls. If not sure if the ball is foul, they should rely on the base coach on the side of the field where the ball has been hit. Otherwise, the runner should only tag on fly balls that appear to be sure outs but are deep enough that they can beat the outfielder's throw to third base. Most of these fly balls are hit to center and right. It is very rare to tag on a ball hit to left field. Line drives: FREEZE!

**Be Aggressive** - When running from 2nd base, runner should advance to 3rd as though they will keep going toward home. The 3rd base coach should only stop them. Avoid station-to-station running. In other words, runner should not go to third and wait for the coach to send them home. They are going home unless the coach stops them. Runner must advance toward 3rd full speed with the intention of scoring. Important: with two outs runners on second are concentrating on scoring on a single.

### Third base

**Get a good jump on every pitch** - Always take leads in foul ground and return back to the bag in fair ground. This is because a batted ball that hits the runner over fair territory puts them out, but a thrown ball that hits them will probably result in a run. If runner has the green light on a passed ball then they need to be aggressive! If there are two outs and a weak hitter is up, runner should be aggressive! However, they also need to be smart. Coaches should encourage taking chances if runner gets a good jump. If the ball kicks away from the catcher they should go. If the catcher blocks the ball in front of them, the base runners should stay. If not sure, then STAY!

**When to run** – Groundballs: with less than two outs runner needs to know if they should advance on a groundball. They need to listen to the base coach for special instructions. The coach may want to make the ball go through the infield before the runner tries to advance or go on anything hit to the right side. The runner must be ready to react when running at third base. Fly balls: with less than 2 outs, runner should tag on all balls hit in the air and listen to the third base coach for instructions. All on balls hit to the outfield, they should go back and tag until the ball hits the ground. The coach may tell the runner to go halfway on a fair pop up if they think the ball is not batted far enough out for the runner to score. Or the coach may tell the runner to bluff to the plate so the runner can draw a throw and hopefully make the defense throw the ball away. The runner is responsible for seeing the ball enter the outfielder’s glove so that they can get the best possible jump toward the plate. It is a sprint so they need to run full speed.

**First and Third Steal** - When running at third in a first and third steal situation, the rule is to go as soon as they are sure the ball will clear the pitcher's head. Don't cheat, they just need to be focused and leave at precisely the right time to score. The runner will have to extend their lead a little as they see the catcher start their throw to second base. If the runner at third starts early, the catcher will see them and throw their way.

## Base Running Drills

### Sliding for Tee Ball Players

When practicing sliding, try using a large piece of cardboard placed on grass. Have the kids start their slide hitting the piece of cardboard. This causes the cardboard to slide on the grass instead of the kid so there is less chance for injury due to abrasion or maybe snagging a cleat or shoe in the grass. Use a stick of some kind as sort of limbo bar and have them slide under it to make sure they stay as low as possible. Make sure they practice good form (slide more on your back than side and keep the hands up and back). The lead leg should be bent at the knee so it can bend as it hits the base.

### Running the Bases Relay Races

This is a good base running drill to use with young kids at the end of every practice.

Split the team in half, with one group of kids behind home plate and other half behind second base. Give the first kid of each group a ball (this will be the "baton" for the relay race). At "GO!" the first kid from each team begins running the bases, ball in hand. After making a complete lap around the bases (back to each kid's starting point) that kid hands the ball off to the next kid in line, who continues the relay race. First group to finish the race wins.

### Running to First

Players line up at home plate. Place another base about 10 feet past First base down the right field line about three feet in foul territory. One at a time swing a bat and drop it safely as if a hit. They then become a runner and run to first base watching the coach.

If signaled to second, they round the turn and go to second. The coach may stop them and have them slide back into first, send them to slide into second, or have them overrun first and hit the base in foul territory. The coach should alternate their calls to keep the players guessing and watching.

Coaches Focus for:

1. running through the base.
2. rounding a base.
3. tagging the base with the left foot on the left corner of the bag, and
4. watching and listening to the base coach.

### Running to First #2

Line up half the team behind home plate and half behind second base. Have a coach at first and a coach at third. Players run for first or third on a start signal from the coach and must either stop or go on based on coach's signal.

Variation 1: Treat third base same as first. This allows the home to first drill to go twice as fast. If done in reps with players jogging to back of line after run can be used as a type of wind sprint.

Variation 2: Use bases as actual bases so runner at second will either slide into third, go in standing up or make turn for home, while runner going to first either runs through or makes turn to second.

### Aggressive Base Running and taking the Extra Base

Divide the players equally among the four bases. One player from each base will be running, with the others waiting their turn. At 'Go' from the coach, the four take off. Proper technique is a must and the goal would be to do a certain amount right in a row before going on to something else.

Player at the plate: Simulates a swing. Takes off as if hitting a double and possibly a triple. Makes a good turn at first. Picks up the 3rd base coach halfway to 2nd. Rounds 2nd hard, 'picks up the ball' and returns to 2nd quickly. Player at first: Goes from 1st to 3rd. Picks up the 3rd base coach half way to 3rd. Makes a hard turn at 3rd then returns quickly. Player at 2nd: Goes from 2nd to home. Picks up the 3rd base coach and makes a good turn. Runs hard through the plate. Player at 3rd: Goes back to the bag to tag. Takes off for home, rounds it, and then takes off for 1st as if beating out a single. Looks inside towards the 1st base dugout as crosses the bag for possible overthrow.

### Getting the Jump

One problem we have in youth baseball/softball is getting the base runner to come off of the base aggressively as soon as the pitch crosses the plate. To correct this, run an exercise requiring a pitcher, a catcher and a first baseman and one base runner with batting helmet (at first base). The remaining players line up in foul territory to take their turn running. To begin the pitcher pitches to the catcher and the catcher makes a throw to first base to try to catch the base runner coming off of the bag to go to second base.

The object is for the base runner to get as far as possible toward second base (but not to go to second) and then try to get safely back to first before the throw. Mark a line in the dirt at the farthest distance that each player gets to - only if they get back to first safely. That tells the player how far they can get off the bag and still get back during a regular game. Have a competition to see who can get the farthest. Never lose a chance to make any drill into a game or competition. In order to get any distance at all they have to dive headfirst back to first base (which is considered both safe and legal in Little League).

The aim is to get the players to come off the bags far enough to take advantage of any dropped balls by the catcher or to get the catcher to make an attempt at a throw-out (which results in an error about 50% of the time). It is also a good workout for the pitcher, catcher and first baseman.

It's important that when you finish the competition to go back over each player's mark with that player and have them stride off the distance. This will let them have an idea how far to come off the bag.

### Balls in the Dirt

This drill helps the players learn how to read the trajectory of a pitched ball that will bounce in the dirt. Players are set up at all three bases. They are independent of each other because different bases have different rules for a ball in the dirt. A coach pitches from the rubber and mixes in strikes and balls in the dirt to the catcher. Any time the ball is about to bounce the whole team must yell "DIRT." This helps you make sure everyone is paying attention. Base runners on first should automatically go when they know the ball is going to bounce. If they leave after the ball has bounced, they left too late. A runner on second needs to react to the ball in the dirt and then decide if they would be safe. Tell them to read and decide. If the ball kicks away from the catcher, they should've gone. If the catcher blocks the ball in front of them, the base runners should stay. The runner on third base is similar to the one on second. Runner takes their lead, gets a good crow hop as the ball nears the plate and reacts to the ball in the dirt. Again, runner reads and decides. (Note that leads are only allowed in Junior and above, anytime in baseball and after the ball leaves the pitcher’s hand in softball.)

Coaches should emphasize that each base is independent of each other. Just because the runner from first goes to second doesn't mean the runner on second has to go. Coaches should also emphasize good secondary lead technique. It also helps if you have at least 2 catchers. You don't want one catcher getting tired and picking up bad or lazy habits.