

FUNDAMENTALS OF BASEBALL

Batting

Bat Selection

The starting point for any hitter is finding the right bat size. Have the player grip the bat at the end of the handle and lift it with one arm, fully extended, straight out from their body. They should be able to hold it level with the ground for three seconds without wobbling or shaking. If not, find them a lighter bat.

Safety First

Young players don't pay attention to others around them when they swing a bat. For the safety of your players, set a rule during the first practice that no player is to pick up a bat unless instructed to do so by a coach and then enforce the rule. Also remind your players to never go near another player who is holding a bat.

Proper Stance

A good training aid at practice can be useful in helping a beginning batter learn the proper stance in the batter's box. Try using a flat piece of rubber approximately 19" long and 5" wide, like the flat pitching rubber that is included with many throw-down practice base sets. Place the aid in relation to the tee where you want the toes of the batter. This will allow the player to assume the proper batting position with minimal assistance.

Pivot Foot

Let the batters practice pivoting their back foot by pretending to "squish a bug". By pivoting the back foot during their swing, the batter will generate more power using their hips and have fun learning how.

Bat Safety

Many young players get excited and throw their bat after a hit. That can be dangerous for the other players if not corrected. An easy remedy is to place a glove near the tee during practice and have the batter drop their bat on the glove when starting to first base. After a few repetitions they will do it without being told.

Batting

Hand Position

- Dominant hand on top
- Hands together, above the knob of the bat
- Hold bat firmly; don't squeeze

Hitting Stance

- Adjust tee so ball is set even or slightly above the batter's waist
- Stand facing the tee
- Feet shoulder-width apart and pointed at home plate
- Front foot even with the tee
- Bend knees
- Bring bat up and away from body, over back shoulder
- Eyes on the ball

The Swing

- Take a short step forward with front foot
- Swing level so that the bat hits the center of the ball
- Shift weight to the front foot; back foot stays on the ground
- Watch bat hit the ball and keep head down

The Follow-Through

- Hit through the ball
- Drop (don't throw) the bat

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Throwing

Nose, Toes and Throws

For beginning players, it is helpful to use a rhyme to help the players remember the proper throwing motion. Say "Nose, Toes and Throws" as they practice throwing. "Nose" is for looking at the target before throwing. "Toes" is for stepping toward the target with their glove-side foot and "Throws" is for throwing the ball. It works! Have them begin their throwing motion with their glove-side shoulder facing the target to force them to turn their shoulders as they throw.

Accuracy Counts

To develop accuracy, use a fun drill that will make them want to practice. Take a 5-gallon bucket and lay it on the ground with the open end facing the player. Have them practice throwing into the bucket using their throwing technique (Nose, Toes and Throws). You will see a huge difference in their accuracy. The best part is, it's a lot of fun. The kids won't even know their practicing.

Throwing

The Grip

- Thumb under the ball
- Middle fingers over the ball with little finger off to the side

The Throw

- Focus on the target
- Hand and arm back and up (make an L with elbow up)
- Front shoulder turned toward the target
- Big step towards the target with opposite foot
- Release the ball in front of the body
- Follow-through

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Fielding

Starting Right

With groups of three or four, teach beginners how to field by showing them the proper hand and body position for fielding grounders. With their gloves off, have them hold their hands in front of them and place their pinkies side-by-side, in a cupped position. Next, demonstrate for them how to bend their knees and get their hands near the ground while keeping their pinkies together. Remind the players to keep their backs straight as possible. With their gloves still off, hand roll grounders to them from eight to ten yards away. Roll it as slow as necessary for them to be successful. By starting this drill without gloves, it allows the players to see the correct hand position during fielding. Let them have several turns and then try it with their gloves on, using the same hand positions.

Speed Ball

To help young players develop quick hands and learn to hustle for a past ball, use a fun drill that encourages speed. Have three or four players line up side-by-side with enough space between them that they can't touch each other with their arms out. From about ten yards away have a coach hand-roll balls to each one, in order, as many times as possible in one minute. Do it again and try to increase the number each time you do it. Have them run for past balls and make it fun.

Fielding

1. Eyes on the ball
2. Watch the ball go into the glove
3. Cover the ball with the bare hand

Ground Balls

- Legs shoulder-width apart
- Bend knees and stay low
- Keep body in front of the ball
- Scoop or catch the ball, squeeze and cover it with the throwing hand

Fly Balls

- Run to where the ball is going
- Call for the ball, "I got it!"
- Hands together, fingers up, shoulder high
- Watch the ball into the glove, squeeze and cover

Thrown Balls

- Ball thrown above the waist: Hands together, facing out, thumbs up
- Ball thrown below the waist: Hands together, facing down, little fingers touching.

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Running Bases

Starting Point

Remember that beginning players will not know to run to first base when the ball is hit. Try something very simple that teaches base running. At the end of every practice, line up all the players on the first base side of home plate. During their first practice just let them take one turn running to first base, all the way around the bases and back home without stopping. Make sure the players in line at home plate are not blocking the runners path as they finish. With each practice, add something new like base coaches at first and third stopping the runners randomly at different bases. This will get the players to watch their coaches for instruction and reinforce the need to be on a base when they stop. Later, let them hold a bat before they start and be sure they drop it at the plate when they run. Make them start over if they sling the bat more than three feet from the batters box.

Run Through First

One sure way to get runners in the habit of running through first base after an infield hit is to have a base coach give the runner a high five. Have the base coach stand about four feet past first base and give the runner a "high five" as they pass. Have the player run seven or eight feet past the base. They can slow down when they give the high five instead of base.

Body and Mind Warm-up

Line your team up on the first base side of home plate for a base-running drill. Before each player runs, ask them where a different base or field position is located. For example, ask the player "where is center field"? After a correct answer, or a simple point of the finger, let the player run the bases. Let each player have one or more turns. This will help them remember where all positions are located and that will make it easier to get them in the right spot during games. They think running bases is fun.

Running

- Run on the balls of feet
- Pump (swing) arms back and forth
- Look forward
- Step on the edge of the base
- Never pass a teammate in front of you on the base path

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Example Practice:

- Team Meeting 5 minutes
 - Three Rules of Baseball
 - Baseball is “FUN” (louder and louder)
 - Always keep you eye on Ball
 - Make the play
 - Won't get hit
 - Always listen to coach
- Warm-up and Stretching 5 minutes
- Throwing and Catching Activities 10 minutes
- Fielding Activities 10 minutes
- WATER BREAK 5 minutes
- Batting Activities 10 minutes
- Running and/or Defense Activities 10 minutes
- Closing Meeting/Team Cheer 5 minutes

Sample Drills

Batting

- Set tee five feet from chain link fence (backstop) Do not use side of building
 - Have Kids hit into fence
 - Work on proper motion
- Set up cones 5 feet apart in front of tee
 - Have kids take ten swings
 - Earn points for each cone they get ball to (make it a contest)
 - Have kids better score each practice

Throwing

- Throw from knees to each other (10 Feet apart)
 - Work on Shoulder rotation
 - Arm stretched all the way back
 - Front arm stretched all the way forward (for balance and pointing to teammate)
 - Twist shoulders
 - Back elbow bent (90 degree)
 - Release
 - Cross throwing arm in front (across) body
- Stand up (10 to 15 feet apart)
 - Feet planted shoulder with apart
 - Throw with same motion
- Stand up (15 to 20 Feet apart)
 - Point , Step and Throw

Fielding

- Grounders
 - Alligator
 - Roll ball from 5 feet in front of them
 - Hand come down on ball like Alligator
 - Alligator with side step
 - Roll ball to one side or other have player shuffle feet to get body in front of ball. (many kids will have trouble with this at first)
- Pop Flies
 - Use a tennis ball throw 10 to 15 feet in air for them to catch