

# 2014 HFLM Youth Baseball Coaches Clinic

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## *Coaching Youths Ages 4-10*

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## **Agenda**

1. More skill development for T-ball and Intermediate (Pre-game format)
2. Cast of Characters (Players and Coaches)
3. Philosophy
4. Drills and Demonstrations

## **Today's Clinic in 6 Bullets**

1. More skill development for T-ball and Intermediate through pre-game drills
  2. Make games quicker...eliminate dead time
  3. Coach the kids...not the team
  4. Separate throwing and catching drills for the young kids (T-ball and Intermediate)
  5. Hitting...stations and drills...not just Batting Practice (BP) with everyone shagging
  6. Energy
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## **Keep the changes from Last Year – More Focus on Skill Development**

### **T-Ball for 2014**

- Fewer players per team...7-8 instead of 10
- This does three things...
  - Shortens the games
  - Allow for more “touches” (i.e. reduce standing around time)
  - More 1on1 time with each player
- Greater emphasis on skill development through pre-game warm-ups and drills
  - 25 minutes of drills
  - 30 minutes of game (3 inning game)
  - Still done in 1 hour...if you **keep the game moving**
- We **do not** want you to “just start the game”
  - With 7 or 8 players, the 3 inning game goes quickly...no need to start it early
  - We will provide drills and ideas (today and through the season)
  - We will provide pre-game practice plans and things to focus on (throughout the season)

## Intermediate for 2014

- Similar to T-ball...we want a greater emphasis on skill development through pre-game warm-ups and drills
- We are going to **make it easier for you**
  - We will provide drills and ideas (today and through the season)
  - We will provide pre-game practice plans and things to focus on for first half of the season (3 innings instead of 4 is OK for first half of season)

## The Cast of Characters

- **4 year olds (Drills and Skills)**
  - Most...not physically ready to catch
  - Like to throw and hit and run...simple as that
  - Not ready for team concepts...focus on basic athletic skills (running, throwing, catching, hitting)
- **5 & 6 year olds (T-Ball)**
  - Looking for fun
  - Mix of “into it” and “will get into it if someone brings the energy”
  - Emerging team players...but they do not possess the skills to pull it off...so focus on **skills**
  - Teach basic game rules (running bases, how to make outs, etc.)
- **7 & 8 year olds (Intermediate)**
  - Do they get better skills because they are having fun or do they have fun because they get better skills? (For most, I say the **fun** comes first)
  - Need more skill development before we can expect right strategy decisions (teach some strategy but don't get too upset if they don't do it...it's probably because they can't do it)
  - Slow moving games are a major turn-off...**keep games moving!**
- **9 & 10 year olds (Minors)**
  - They get into games and competition (but they forget losses 10 minutes after game)
  - Have enough skills to start stressing strategy and team play
  - Not sure about this whole hitting off a real live human thing...need **confidence** first
- **21 to 80 year olds (Coaches)**
  - Like to talk (AKA “just want to make a point”)
  - Think players will listen to every word
  - Need to bring the energy. This is not hard...we are playing a game! Outside! Spring-time! Snacks after!

## Philosophy and Game-time

- Supply the energy!
- Promote the FUN...all of it is fun...before game, in the field, on the bench, while hitting, on the basepaths.

## Some comments on Games...

- Games need to be FASTER...better for kids, coaches, parents, siblings
  - Pitching to T-ball hitters
    - Single biggest time-eater!
    - 3 underhand pitches and then Tee
    - For first couple games (or more)...everyone hits off the Tee
  - Minimize time between pitches
    - T-Ball and Intermediate: Bucket of balls to mound...gather between hitters...better yet...gather after 3 hitters
    - Try to speak to kids 1on1...not to entire group. **Walk around and say the same thing to every player if you have to**
  - Minimize time between innings...run on-run / run-off...catcher get gear on early...limit warm-ups (Intermediate...start without a catcher if he/she is not ready)
- Catchers
  - T-ball
    - Don't use one...1) Safety concern (bats and runners) 2) Speed up game...adults are faster
  - Intermediate
    - All players should try it ("everyone gets to play catcher")...surprising how many like it
    - Great way to overcome fear of ball
    - **No throws back to pitcher**...slows game **WAY** down
  - Minors
    - Encourage all to play catcher...but reality is that only a few want to do it
- Positions and "sharing" hit balls (T-ball and Intermediate)
  - Put them in position and then don't crush their competitiveness...let them get anything (within reason)
  - We want a team full of "hit-the-ball-to-me" players
  - Move positions or adjust where they stand **before** the pitch to give others a chance
- Don't forget to coach the kids who are on the bench too...keeps them into the game...good time to explain finer strategy points (they have less to think about when they are on the bench)

## My Top 3 Drills for each Discipline

Area	T-Ball	Intermediate	Minors
<b>Hit</b>	Squish the bug	Tee – Up the Middle	Soft toss (1 & 2 hand)
	Tee – Up the Middle	Dart pitch (wiffle/L-screen)	Dart pitch (wiffle/L-screen)
	Hit 3 and run	Hit off machine	Hit or get-out
<b>Throw</b>	Throw 10 to coach	Throw 10 to coach	Long Toss
	Clean out the garage	Long toss	Throw from Knee
	Space Invaders	Wheel drill	Wheel drill
<b>Field / Catch</b>	3 Players & Coach	3 Players & Coach	3 Players & Coach
	Knock it Down	Knock it Down	Wide Receiver
	Ball Handling	Wide Receiver	Pepper or Grounders
<b>Baserunning</b>	Run Bases	Run through 1 <sup>st</sup> base	Home-Second Relay
	Run through 1 <sup>st</sup> base	Home-Second Relay	Roll the Ball Game
	Home-Second Relay	Roll the Ball Game	Hot Box
<b>Team</b>	T-ball game	Everybody Touch It	Corners & Middles
	Everybody Touch It	Corners & Middles	Fungo Scrimmage
	-	Scrimmage with pitching machine	Coach Pitch Scrimmage

## Technique and Drills

### Hitting

#### Hitting Technique...READY, LOAD, FIRE

##### READY

- Grip
  - Most non-level swings are caused by grip issues
  - Hold bat in FINGERS, not palms.
  - Difference of opinion on knuckle alignment (“knocking knuckles”). Debate is when to have the classic knuckle alignment shown below...before swing or during swing. For players aged 4-10, I think the most important thing is that the bat is in their fingers...let them grip it their way unless grip causes a non-level swing.
  - Classic, “knocking knuckles” grip shown below...



- Wide stance (I tell them “hands together, feet apart”)...pyramid (feet, knees, hips)
- Balance: knees slightly bent...on toes...ready to fire...probably not completely still (that whole physics thing about bodies in motion...)
- If you can jump, then you are balanced and ready (statues can't hit). Best advice for twisted up T-baller...tell them to “jump” to get ready.

#### LOAD

- Load (cock): hands up and BACK. Pull with top hand...do not push with bottom hand (avoid wrapping). (“It’s a LOAD, not a PUSH back”)
- Chin down and in (touch to shoulder), eyes follow all the way to bat (2 eyes)

#### FIRE

- Small stride (or no stride) – head and eyes move too much with big stride (we want head and eyes still and level)
- Weight should stay between your feet...land on inside of stride foot. (not the front foot hitting some of us learned)
- Hip and knee turn...squish the bug with back foot. But back heel should come up to get proper hip turn and drive.
- Palm up/Palm down (bottom palm down, top palm up). Can practice with top hand flat (no grip) to get the feel.
- Hit the ball in front of the plate
- Don't roll wrists (like we were all taught)...causes a bump in the swing
- Eyes follow ball all the way in (head still)
- Power L and Shoulder V...keeps the bat flat through the hitting zone.

What do you tell the kids during a game? (**Answer...not too much**)

- Balance (Jump), grip, swing hard, chin down, eyes all the way in
- Work on technique nuances during practice or home...NOT in-game...too much to process

Flaws I see most often

- Grip not in fingers (which causes non-level swings)
- Head (and eyes) moving vertically...we all see the head out...need to look for head moving vertically too
- CONFIDENCE (stress the positives...easy for coach to fall into...“don’t do this, don’t do that”)

For T-ball...

Don’t give too much information...I tell each player the same thing almost every time...

- Let me see you Jump (a trick to get them balanced and untwisted)
- Watch the ball
- Swing hard (and for added motivation...“get a little mad...it’s called hitting for a reason”)
- Don’t worry about correcting hands and arm issues too much...if they are balanced and can swing hard, then their hands will be OK
- For underhand pitch...too much arc on pitch is harder to hit than flatter and faster.

## Hitting Drills

(T=Tball, I=Intermediate, M=Minors)

### **Squish the bug [T,I,M]**

- Bat behind back held by elbows
- Turn hips
- Back leg – squish the bug with back foot toes. Back heel should come up to get proper hip turn and drive.
- Keep eyes steady – chin down
- Good group activity – all around in a circle

### **One and two handed soft toss [I, M]**

- Teaches Quick swing and the role of each hand
- For one-handed: choke way up
- Do with each hand
  - Top hand – pull
  - Bottom hand – barrel trails – hit opposite way
- Strive for up the middle hits with two hands
- Use sock net or wiffles into fence (don’t soft toss with real baseballs into fences please)

### **Dart pitch (wiffle balls or L-screen) [I,M]**

- Coach sits behind L-screen 15 feet from batter or on knee with wiffle balls
- Hit it up the middle (hit the screen)
- Hands back until they fire to the ball
- For advanced hitters, vary the location and speed (especially those crushing everything)

### **Tee – Up the Middle [T, I,M]**

- 10 swings...Most up the middle hits wins (good batting cage drill for older kids...hit back of the batting cage)
- Kids don't like hitting off the tee...need to make it a game

### **Pepper [I,M]**

- 1, 2, or 3 players and a coach
- Use incredi-balls (squishy) or RIF balls (for safety)
- Half-speed swings, bat loose in fingers (not check swings)
- Great for bat contact, grip, hitting out front, fielding grounders
- Lots of reps for hitters and fielders
- Make it fast and fun and SAFE (talk the entire time)
- Hitters...Swing at everything, hit until swing and miss (2 misses for beginners), object is to keep ball on the ground and hit to everyone
- Fielders...ready, hands out, catch a line drive and you get to hit right now, commit an error and you go to the end of the line (bad pitches are errors too)

### **Hit off the spring-machine [I]**

- Spring pitching-machine intimidates first-year players...they need to practice with it
- Gets players to adjust to the timing and speed
- Hitter focus on ready, load, fire basics (above)
- Builds confidence

### **Hit or get-out [M]**

- Coach pitches to batter
- If batter gets a hit (or foul) he stays for more pitches, if he gets a strike...next batter
- Good for aggressiveness and pitch selection
- Can play with fielders who must make the out, or coach judgment on hit-or-out
- Best to get 3 or 4 batters ready and have them cycle through 4-5 times before switching
- Good for batting cage or on the field

## **Throwing**

### **Throwing Technique**

#### Basics

- Warm up...arm circles, arm pendulums, torso twists, hugs, milk cans
- Grip – Across seams. 3 fingers for little hands
- Arm angle – 1 o'clock. (Not 12 o'clock...overhead is NOT straight over the top)
- Push Glove, Pull Elbow – creates trunk tension
- Reach back with throwing arm – fingers on TOP (not bottom...important)
- When reaching back, throwing elbow should be at 85 degrees (slight downward at shoulder...relaxed)
- Use your BODY to throw
- Release ball out in front
- Pull glove in toward body (do not swing it to the side)...keeps body on target

- Arm is pulled...throw with body...not a push (so focus on body)
- Hip rotation/trunk open should be late...that is, AFTER stride foot hits (otherwise it is a push and not a throw)
  - Saying it another way: angular momentum moves up the body in sequence...legs, hips, shoulders, arm. If out of sequence...lack of power and stress on the shoulder.
  - Don't crumple back leg...leads to early hip rotation
- Throw...don't aim...distance before accuracy

#### Flip vs. throw

- Underhand flip when within 15-20 feet
- Get glove out of the way (behind back)...distracting to receiver otherwise
- Yell FLIP!...both thrower and receiver
- Move toward target...use your momentum
- Release ball like shaking someone's hand (straight out...not hand to the sky)

#### Pitching (for righty...reverse for lefties) – For Ages 4-10

- Left foot point toward plate...on center line...check starting location on rubber
- Push off the rubber
- Follow through with body...not just arm
- Release point should be in front
- Stretch vs. wind-up: for beginners...stretch only (simpler...master this first)
- Shoulders should NOT be square to target when front foot hits (throwing...not pushing)

#### Pitches and Grip

- Four seam fastball
- Two seam fastball
- Two seam fastball with more pressure on one finger...Cut fastball ("cutter")
- Change-up – circle grip or 4 finger palm ball
- Teach strikes and speeds...more important than pitch-types
- Curve-balls
  - If they ask me how to throw a curve ball, I show them the cutter (I LIE)
  - Curve-balls don't hurt arms...kids and coaches who over-use curve-balls hurt arms
    - Because kids tend to fall in love with them before they know how to pitch
    - And coaches over-use pitchers who get batters out

### Throwing Drills

(T=Tball, I=Intermediate, M=Minors)

#### Long toss [I, M]

- Make sure warmed up first
- Players separated by 30-40 yards
- Long, loopy throws
- Encourages body...torso, legs. This is how you correct the pushing motion.
- Develops fluid throwing motion
- Take steps toward target after release...not launching from back leg
- Competition...first team to 20 catches? (keep them focused)

### **Throw from Knee [I,M]**

- Make sure warmed up first
- 2 players, 1 ball, 10-20 yards apart
- Throwing side knee down, opposite knee up and pointed toward target
- Break, reach, throw, follow through
- Emphasizes shoulder turn and follow through...quarterback drill
- Watch technique...not for distance and proper form important

### **Clean out the garage (T)**

- Use squishy balls or tennis balls (safety)
- Half the group on one side of a line, half on the other
- 10-15 balls on one side of the line (spread out) and 10-15 balls on the other
- On "GO" both teams pick up balls and throw them to other side...winner if one team can get all balls to other side
- Police the middle...don't let kids get too close...maybe enforce a "no-man's-land" area
- Kids figure out they should be quick and throw it long

### **Space Invaders (T)**

- Use tennis balls...need a bunch
- Line up the players
- Coach with barrel or garage can lid 10-15 yards away
- Coach moves back and forth...players try to hit barrel or lid with thrown balls. (They love hitting you)

### **Throw 10 to coach [T,I]**

- 1 coach, 1 player, 10 balls
- 10-15 yards separation
- Player throws 10 in a row to coach
- Count number player gets to coach in the air...strive for improvement from set to set

### **Wheel Drill (Man in the Middle) [I,M]**

- 3 players all in a line, 1 ball
- 10-25 yards separation
- Throw ball down line and back
- Man in middle must catch, turn, throw...quickly
- All three players...quick-hands and be ready to throw...move body to catch ball "in-the-circle" (within the torso area)
- Let them practice and then make it a race...first team to complete 10 down-and-backs

### Barrel Throw [I,M]

- Barrel or bucket at third base
- Players at second (or right field for older kids)
- Hit balls...players throw to barrel
- Preferable if bounce it to bucket...teaches low accurate throw
- 1pt for within 3 feet, 2pts for hit bucket, 3pts for into barrel

## Catching and Fielding

### Catching Technique

#### Glove

- Size...beware of the glove too large (12" glove too big for players 10 and under)
- Shape...beware of the book shaped glove...
  - Taco shape (thumb to pointer finger) vs. Book shape (thumb to little finger)
  - Taco is better...the glove is more open
- Push on fingers to open

#### Fielding a ground ball

- Feet wide & back straight (do not hunch over)
- Alligator hands – hands in front
- Push on fingers to open glove (Taco shape)
- “go get it” (AKA...“charge it” or “play the ball don’t let the ball play you”)
- Catch it out in front, preferable off glove-side eye

#### Fielding a ball in the air (line drive or fly ball)

- Keep eyes steady – run on **toes** so eyes do not bounce
- Hands Thumb to Thumb
- Below waist – bare hand covers from over the glove
- Above waist – bare hand covers from behind/under the glove
  - Turn glove vertical when ball at chest level or above...**important for their confidence and safety (especially for girls)**. Ball less likely to bounce off their glove and hit their face.
- Catch within small circle around chest and head (“in the circle”). Teach kids to move body to catch ball near torso.
- Don’t run with your glove in the air. Run to the spot, get there, then put glove up.

### Catching Drills

(T=Tball, I=Intermediate, M=Minors)

#### 3 players and a coach [T,I,M]

- Players fan out
- Coach throws grounders and line drives and flies to each kid
- Keep it moving...more than one ball?
- Make it random

- Award points? (2 points for catch, 1 point for good throw, earn fly balls?)
- For minors...star pattern...but keep a coach in the group
- For minors...coach can hit the balls rather than throw

### **Knock it Down [T,I]**

- Great for Kids who are afraid of the ball or who cannot catch very well
- Teaches fingers-up technique
- Use tennis balls or wiffle balls (grab a bunch...rapid fire more fun and more reps)
- Coach tosses balls at player's chest (dart throw...not underhand toss)
- Player uses back of glove (with fingers up) to knock balls away
- Great confidence builder and breaks the "always-catching-with-palm-up" bad habit

### **Flip game [T,I,M]**

- Good warm up game
- Players pair up
- Underhand flip...first pair to 50 wins
- With and without glove
- Advanced second step...Quick toss...Short throw drill...10 yards separation...watch the creeping in

### **Ball Handling [T,I]**

- No Glove, all players with a ball
- Like basketball drills
- Toss to self...two hands, one hand, alternate hand, catch after one bounce on ground, catch after bounce off knee, ball around waist, ball around knees, etc. Kids copy coach and then let kids come up with ideas
- Ball on ground behind player, pick up ball quickly when coach says go. Instruct kids to pick ball up with two hands quickly and bring to stomach (like picking up a grounder)
- Coaching Tips: Catch with two hands, fingers out, soft hands, watch ball all the way into hands

### **Wide receiver [I,M]**

- Line next to coach
- Run away like football wide receiver (or sometimes V-cuts back and forth)
- Run on toes, catch ball at high point (discourage the bucket catches)
- Bring ball back to line
- Vary the height and location of the throws
- Fun drill...keep it moving

### **Pick up drill [I,M]**

- 1 coach, 1 player
- Roll balls side to side
- Player fields grounder and tosses back to coach
- Shuffle feet (don't cross), hands out front (alligator), back straight
- Race another player...first to 25 wins

## Baserunning

### Technique

- Hit inside corner of base when rounding
- Hit foul side of first base when running through
- Run through first base...do not slow down
- Explain that base is "safe" to T-batters (not all of them know this)
- Sliding
  - Never at first base
  - Hands up – no jammed fingers or wrists
  - Front foot up – no jammed ankles

### Baserunning Drills

*(T=Tball, I=Intermediate, M=Minors)*

#### **Home-second relay [I, M]**

- Half of the team at home, other half at second
- Ball is the baton
- Round the bases – but not too much...they will figure it out...but remind them
- Great end of practice fun & conditioning drill

#### **Hot box drill [I,M]**

- 1 runner, 4 fielders
- Runner...start in-between bases...try to get to a base safely...stay in base-path
- Fielders throw and go behind
- Good drill for fielders too...quick catch and throw...and throwing around runners
- For intermediate: coaches are fielders and players only run

#### **Roll the Ball Game [I,M]**

- "Batter" rolls ball to infield (where-ever he wants)
- Defense makes the play and tries to get an out
- Lots of base-running opportunities and strategy
- Fun and competitive...play 3-out innings and keep score

#### **Sliding [T,I,M]**

- Wet outfield grass
- Hands up, front foot up
- Get a feel for the distance (not too early, not too late)

## Combination (Team) Drills

(T=Tball, I=Intermediate, M=Minors)

### **Everybody touch it [T,I,M]**

- Split teams – 5 or 6 per team
- Team #1 in the field, team #2 at bat
- Coach pitches to batter (for T-ball...coach bats to reduce confusion)
- Hitter runs until everyone on the fielding team touches the ball at least once
- Count total bases by batting team
- Switch teams after everyone hits
- Fielders may find clever ways to get all the players to touch it...allow it until last round and then maybe enforce some rules (ball needs to alternate outfield to infield or ball needs to go to at least 3 bases, etc.)

### **Corners and Middles Infield Drill [I,M]**

- Fielders at 3<sup>rd</sup>, SS, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1st
- Coach #1 at home with bat and ball
  - Hit grounders to SS and 2<sup>nd</sup> for play at second base
- Coach #2 on third baseline with ball
  - Roll grounders to 3<sup>rd</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> for play to first base (or third)
- Good rapid fire infield drill...keep players moving

### **Fungo scrimmage [M]**

- Split into two teams...adults in outfield if you need more players
- Batter tosses to self (or coach soft toss or hit off the tee)
- Can play 2 or 3 outs per inning
- Lots of baserunning, fielding, action, relays, covering bases
- Allow fielders to shift defense if hitters always hitting to same spot...teaches hitters to hit to different spots in the field

### **Coach-pitch scrimmage [M]**

- Split into two teams... adults in outfield if you need more players
- Coach as pitcher with bucket of balls, no catcher
- No called strikes unless obvious (or batter not swinging)
- Can play 2 or 3 outs per inning
- Lots of baserunning, fielding, action, relays, covering bases