



“HELP! I’m a Coach!”: Tips & Drills for Coaches

So, you want to be a coach? Being a coach can be incredibly fulfilling and worthwhile, especially when done well. But it can also feel overwhelming and stressful. Coaching is all about development and in order to develop others, you need a plan. Here is a brief plan to help you get started. You will find tips for various ages and a handful of drills as well.

Good luck this season, coach! Go Elks!

Coaching Tips

- ① **Have fun!** - Aim to make Practice as fun as games, especially for the younger kids. We want kids to fall in love with baseball so they will play it for a long time.
- ① **Be organized** - Nothing is worse than the coach showing up for practice without any plan for the night. Take a few minutes before each practice and game and come up with a plan. Also, begin and end your practices on time...this will go a long way with parents.
- ① **Be an effective communicator** - Email parents early and often. Send out a short practice plan the night before practice so parents know you have a plan. Host a parent meeting to communicate goals and expectations at the beginning of the season so parents know what to expect. Parents love a coach who is organized and concerned.
- ① **Use stations during practice** - Keep the groups small and moving relatively quickly. This will help give kids a high number of reps and keep their attention. This will also allow other coaches to feel useful.
- ① **Be a good role model** - We live in a culture which desperately needs positive male and female role models. Teach the kids to be good teammates, to be coachable, to work hard, how to win and lose well. (And remember, they will take their cues from you, mostly.)

5 Goals For Each Age Group

4-6 year olds:

1. Learning the basic rules - the right direction to run when the ball is hit; runners must touch the bases; how to record outs (catch the ball in the air, throw to first, or tag the runners); running past first base; scoring a run; three outs constitute an inning.
2. Throwing mechanics - turn the body so that the front shoulder points toward the target; keep the elbow above the shoulder; step toward the target with the non throwing foot and release the ball.
3. Tracking - follow the ball with the eyes into the glove, whether on the ground or in the air (use softer balls); use two hands to catch and field; try to catch the ball out in front of the body.
4. Hitting - how to hold and swing the bat; batting safety (when not swing bats, wearing batting helmets); hitting off a tee; hitting softly tossed pitches.
5. Learning positional play - if the ball is hit to your buddy, let him or her field it.

7-9 year olds:

1. Learning the basic rules - force outs; tagging up; base running (when you don't have to run; not running into or past team-mates on the base paths); balls and strikes.
2. Throwing mechanics - introduce the four-seam grip (players should always seek to use this grip as produces the straightest throw); point the front shoulder, step, and throw; introduce the concept of generating momentum toward the target and following the throw.
3. Catching and fielding - thrown and hit balls; fingers up versus fingers down; see the glove and the ball; use two hands; forehands and backhands; introduce the underhand flip; first base fundamentals; crossover and drop steps.
4. Hitting - choosing the right bat; proper grip; hitting pitched balls; introduce drill work (tee, soft toss, short toss).
5. Learning positional play - learn the positions and the areas each player should cover; cover the nearest base when the ball is not hit to you; basics of cutoffs and relays.

10-12 year olds:

1. Learning the basic rules - infield fly rule; balks
2. Base running - leads; steals; extra base-hits
3. Pitching and throwing mechanics - wind-up versus stretch; four-seam grip; shuffle, throw, follow; pitcher covering first base.
4. Hitting - repetitions; drill work (tee, soft toss, short toss, stick-ball, lob toss, one-arm drill); bunting
5. Learning team fundamentals - cutoffs and relays; basic bunt defenses; basic first-and-third situations; underhand flip (box drill) and double plays; defending the steal; infield and out-field communication and priorities.

Throwing Tips & Drills

Key Points:

- ① Use a four-seam grip - this allows the ball to travel on a direct line (without curving or dropping). The four-seam grip should be taught early, and should be used by infielders and outfielders alike.
- ① Take the ball down, out, and then up out of the glove (circular motion). Once the ball is up, the thrower's palm should be facing *away* from his or her face, with knuckles to the sky (hand in the cookie jar, cobra position). Front elbow or glove pointed at the target.
- ① Step toward target while bringing ball down and out of glove.
- ① Elbow should be above the shoulder when throwing - this prevents injury and allows for the most power when throwing.
- ① Release ball
- ① Follow through

Images below represent the proper throwing technique:

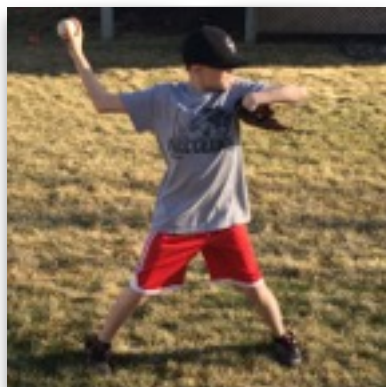
Proper Four-Seam Grip



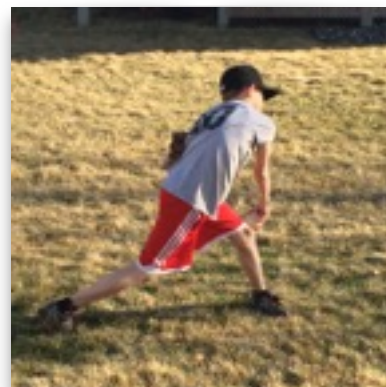
Starting Position



“Hand in the Cookie Jar”



Release Ball - Follow Through



Throwing Tips & Drills

1. Long Toss:

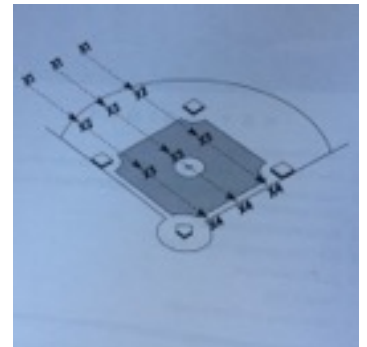
Long toss is a great drill for younger players as it builds arm strength. Players partner up and begin throwing back and forth, stressing proper throwing mechanics. After several throws, one partner will back up several feet. After several more throws at this new distance, players will back up once more. Players will continue to throw and back up until players can no longer get the ball to their partner without a bounce. Coaches monitor players for correct form each throw.

Coaching Tips for Long Toss:

- ① As the distance grows, players should be generating momentum towards their partner - even “crow-hopping” at the greater distances.
- ① Players should work towards an arc in their throws, getting the ball to carry. However, players should avoid “moon balls” or pop-up looking throws.
- ① Players’ shoulders should remain on the same plane throughout the throw. No dropping the back shoulder.
- ① Remind players that a bounce is OK. An accurate throw with a bounce is better than a “moon ball” or a throw off-line that goes for miles.

2. Cutoff Relay Race:

Create groups of three, four, or five players to race. Players stand in a straight line with the others in their group. (One player in the outfield, one on the edge of the dirt, one around the pitchers’ mound, one at home plate.) A ball should be placed on the ground out past the player in the outfield. All teams go at the same time. The outfielder picks up the ball, generates momentum, and throws it to the first teammate. That teammate turns his body, catches, generates momentum, and throws to the next teammate. The first team to get the ball all the way to the final player in their line wins.



3. Twenty-One

This is a drill for players at all levels. As players play catch, award 1 point to the thrower for each caught ball at chest level. Two points are awarded for a ball caught at head level. Points can also be deducted for uncatchable throws. If the throw is accurate but the receiver misses it, points are still awarded to the thrower. The first player to 21 wins!

Coaching Tip:

- ① The biggest mistake players make is turning the wrong way. When a player catches the ball, he should turn towards his glove, then make the throw. And players should not remain flat footed but be moving!

Fielding Tips & Drills

Key Points:

Teach and stress the proper position (which has three parts):

- ① **“Wide base”** - a wide base brings balance and keeps the player strong.
- ① **“Butt low”** - keeping your butt down low maintains your solid base while allowing your eyes to be up and looking for the ball. Don't bend at the waist.
- ① **“Hands in front”** - we want to field the ball out in front of us and watch it all the way into the glove.

***Use these same key phrases over and over so kids begin to grasp proper position.**

1. Rolled Ground Balls

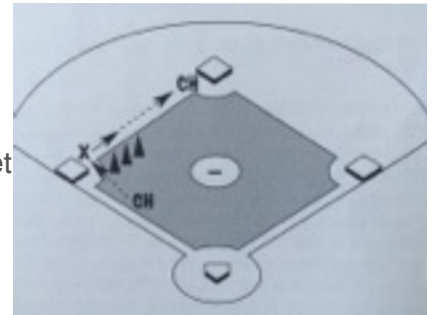
This is a simple and effective way to create muscle memory for receiving ground balls. Baseball is a game of repetition and learning to repeat the proper motion again and again is important. Player stands about 10 feet away in the “Ready position” (**Wide base, butt low, hands in front**) and the Coach rolls him balls as soft or as hard as necessary. Have receiving players hold their position for several rolls in a row so they will feel the burn in their thighs a bit. As players get comfortable, Coaches can move back and roll balls harder.

Coaching Tips:

- ① Stress proper position
- ① Ball should be caught out in front and watched all the way into the glove
- ① Players should have relaxed glove wrists with fingers pointing down

2. Throwing After the Catch Drill (3-Cone Drill)

Set up three cones several feet apart, placed in a line toward the target where the throw will be made. The first player sets up with his right foot next to the first cone and assumes the “Ready position” (**Wide base, butt low, hands in front**). A ball is rolled by the Coach to the player, who fields it. The player then shuffles his feet to the second cone (staying low), releases the ball, and follows the throw past the third cone and toward the target (using the four seam grip). Another player can be receiving the throw. Having players run *through* the third cone teaches them about momentum - do not let them stop before the third cone - they should run *through* it.



3. First Base Drill

Players line up in foul territory near first base. The coach sets up anywhere in the infield with a bucket of balls. An empty bucket is placed near first base. The first player comes to first base and puts the heel of the throwing side foot on the base. The coach throws the ball to the player. The player sees the ball coming across the diamond and takes his or her glove *and* glove-side foot directly toward the ball together. The ball should hit the glove at the same time the foot lands on the ground. This prevents stretching too soon. The first baseman should get to the bag quickly, stand tall, square shoulders to the infielder making the throw, and take the glove and glove-side foot toward the ball together.

Fielding Fly Balls Tips & Drills

Key Points:

- ① Get to the spot where the ball will land quickly - no drifting
- ① Catch the ball above the head and out in front, using two hands whenever possible (having two hands in the air helps youngsters track the ball better as it gives them a better sense of their body in space).
- ① Move forward slightly as you catch the ball - this creates momentum for your throw back to the infield (and potentially to throw out a runner).

1. Thrown Fly Balls

Players will be better outfielders when they learn how to catch fly balls properly and from short distances at first. For younger players, larger balls (like dodgeballs) can be used without gloves on. This teaches the young ones how to track a ball in the air - a difficult skill for youngsters. As players advance, move players back and eventually to hit fly balls.

2. Pass Patterns

A coach or player serves as the quarterback. The fielding player tosses the ball to the quarterback and then uses a crossover or drop step in the appropriate direction before running a “pass pattern.” The QB throws the ball high enough for the receiver to run under the ball and make a one-handed, over-the-shoulder catch.

3. Communication Drill

Communication in the field is essential, especially between fielders. Outfielders form two lines at least 20 feet apart. The first players in each line step forward. The coach throws fly balls in between the two fielders, who must communicate and make the play. The player fielding the ball yells, “I got it!” at least three times. The other player backs up the other player. The player who catches the ball should deliver a strong, accurate throw to the coach or cutoff player. For younger players, use soft baseballs, sponge rubber balls, or tennis balls.

Hitting Tips

Key Points:

- ① Stance
- ① Grip - loose grip with fingers in “door knocking” knuckles lined up to unlock the wrists during swing.
- ① Weight Shift - weight shifts to backside, gathering energy, before being taken forward. **“You have to go back to go forward.”**
- ① Stride - Short, soft, and towards the pitcher.
- ① Swing - Short and quick, using hands, wrists, and forearms.
- ① Follow Through - one or two hands; takes care of itself if all the other elements are in place.

Hitting Drills

1. Tee Work (momentum, for distance)

Tee work is a great way to teach hitting, since the ball doesn't move. Players adjust the tee to a height that makes them swing down slightly to get the barrels of the bat to the ball. Players hit into a screen or a net. Work on weight shift (“Go back to go forward.”) Take all the weight to the back side before exploding forward. Keep the head down and eyes on the ball. Take the front foot and shoulder directly toward the pitcher. Avoid an uppercut swing. (Never hit baseballs into a fence.)

2. Soft Toss

Teammates can toss to one another or a coach can toss to a player. The batter takes his or her stance; the tosser kneels across from the hitter, slightly in front of home plate in foul ground, not in the direction the ball will be hit. The ball is tossed underhand so the batter can hit it out in front of the plate. The hitter wants to concentrate on having a loose grip in the fingers with the “door knocking” knuckles lined up. Batters should have *loose hands, and a quick bat*.

3. Bunting Drill

Set up two cones down the first base line about halfway between home plate and the mound. One should be about 3 feet inside the baseline, the other about 8-10 feet inside the line toward the mound. The same thing should be done on the third base line. A coach can throw from a shortened distance with players taking turns bunting. The idea is to stop or push the ball between the cones. Try not to make the bunts too perfect. Make the pitcher come off the mound to field the ball. Stress that players pivot both feet, pointing their toes toward the pitcher, in an athletic looking position. The barrel of the bat should be above the hands, at an angle (this will prevent pop-ups that occur when the hands are below the head of the bat). Players should give with the pitch to deaden the ball and use the bottom hand as a rudder to guide the bat and push the ball in the desired direction.

Additional Drills

Hitting:

1. Knock Out the Catcher
2. Soft Toss
3. Lob Toss

Throwing:

1. One Knee Drill
2. Balance Position Drill

Fielding Ground Balls:

1. Backhand Drill
2. Underhand Flip (High-5 Drill)
3. Underhand Flip (Box Drill)
4. 4-6/6-4 Drill

Fielding Fly Balls:

1. Crossover Step Drill
2. Drop Step Drill

Any comments or questions visit our website: www.elkriverbaseball.com