

# YOUTH BASEBALL COACHING KIT



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Dear Coach,

It didn't seem so long ago that we were playing in youth leagues. Besides making friends and having a lot of fun, a large part of what we know about baseball today had its beginnings on those fields. And the most important part of our early baseball education started with our youth league coaches.

All of us on the Louisville Slugger Advisory Staff would like to thank you for your involvement in youth league baseball and softball. You will undoubtedly get just as much out of the experience as the kids will.

The purpose of this Youth League Coaching Kit is to help you become a better coach. Inside you'll find a valuable playing guide with instructions on hitting, fielding, conducting practices, even dealing with your players' parents. We've also included a chart to help you select the proper bat for your players.

We've packed a great deal of baseball knowledge into this year's Youth League Coaching Kit, and we certainly hope both you and your players benefit greatly from this information. So, please, take time now to thoroughly read through this material before you take to the field.

Who knows, maybe a few years from now you'll see one of your former players in a college baseball uniform.

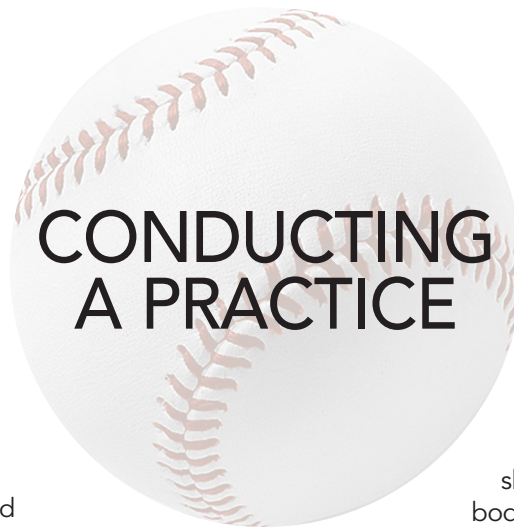
Good luck on a winning season!

Louisville Slugger College Advisory Staff



When conducting a practice, it's important to use your time efficiently. Keep your practice simple and use drills that involve all players. The following are points to consider when planning a practice schedule:

1. It's helpful if you can secure a staff of at least two assistant coaches. The basic philosophy of the team should be established and agreed upon by all the coaches.
2. It's important to have enough balls, bats, helmets, etc. on hand for practice and games.
3. Try to secure a field that is properly maintained. It's difficult to teach proper fielding techniques on a poor field.
4. Know the attitudes of the players and parents. Hold a general meeting prior to the season to let both the players and parents know your philosophy and expectations.
5. Try not to get in a rut as you set up your practice schedule. Add new drills and change procedures to keep practice interesting.
6. Require all your players to obey instructions.
7. Practice means work, but it should also be enjoyable.
8. Require your players to always give their best efforts. Hard work and hustle should be expected and rewarded.
9. Teach your players to encourage their teammates at all times. Make it clear that one player criticizing another will not be tolerated.
10. Understand the difference between correction and criticism. Correction deals with the problem. Criticism is directed at the player and almost always has a negative effect.
11. Remember that each player is someone's child, and develop a caring relationship with each one.
12. Most importantly – STAY POSITIVE AND HAVE FUN.



## SUGGESTED PRACTICE SCHEDULE

The time and order of each activity will be dictated by the length of practice.

### 1. Warm-Up

A. Run. A slow jog stimulates blood flow to the muscles and joints.

B. Stretch. Stretching exercises should include upper and lower body muscle groups.

C. Throw. Begin with short throws to get loose and slowly progress to long throws, which will stretch and strengthen players' arms.

### 2. Drills

Divide the team by position, and work on fielding fundamentals.

### 3. Batting Practice

Only one player at a time can hit live pitching, so it's important to incorporate a number of hitting drills to ensure everyone gets plenty of swings. The three-station approach will allow hitters to rotate from the tee station to the soft-toss station to live batting practice. Fielders should also be getting in quality work during batting practice. They can either play the ball live off the bat or take fungoes between pitches.

### 4. Simulated Game

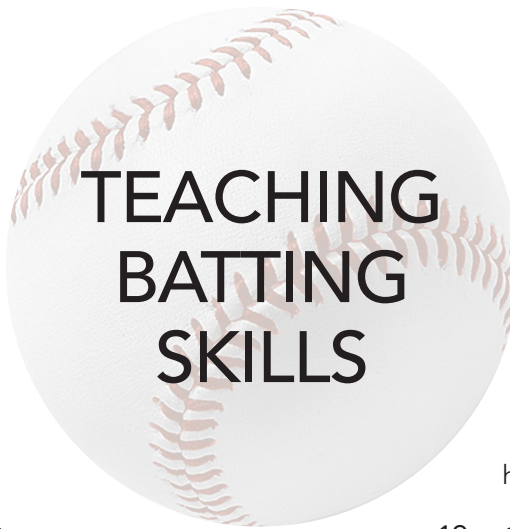
The simulated game pulls together everything worked on in practice. Players practice reacting to game situations and learn about the value of thinking before every pitch. Start with one player at each position and have the remaining players be base runners. The coach first gives a situation, then hits a ball in play. The fielders and base runners then react accordingly.

### 5. Conditioning

The last part of practice should be devoted to conditioning. This is a great opportunity to combine a base running drill with conditioning. Have players take turns simulating a swing and running out a single. After a short rest, continue with a simulated double, triple and home run.



When teaching young hitters, it's important to keep one fundamental thought in mind: consistent, solid contact makes hitting fun and leads to success. Coaches should emphasize the importance of hitting the ball hard, rather than hitting the ball far. Here are some basic fundamentals to help young players become better hitters:



1. Select the "right" size bat. The "right" bat is the one with which hitters can generate good bat speed. It's neither too long nor too heavy. Refer to the Bat Selection chart for guidelines based on a player's height and weight. The bat that feels comfortable and easy to swing is the bat that should be selected. Bat speed, not bat size, is important in hitting the ball.
2. Hitters' hands will automatically tighten up when they start to swing, so it's essential to keep them relaxed in the stance. This will allow hitters to take smooth, quick swings.
3. For the best look at the strike zone, hitters should stand in the batter's box with the plate in the middle of their stance. They may find it helpful to move deeper in the box when facing a good fast ball pitcher and up in the box for a junk ball pitcher.
4. Hitters' stances should be balanced with the feet spaced shoulder-width apart and weight evenly distributed on the balls of the feet.
5. Hitters' heads should be turned toward the pitcher, so that both eyes can focus on the pitched ball. This will allow for a better view of the pitch. Remember, too, that the most successful hitters keep their heads and eyes level.
6. Hitters must look for good pitches to hit. They should be comfortable with the strike zone and swing at strikes. With two strikes, hitters should consider choking up on the bat, expanding the strike zone and protecting the plate.
7. Hitters should take a short stride toward the pitcher. This will allow them to stay balanced and generate greater power. If hitters finish their swings off balance, try shortening their stride.

8. Good hitters accelerate the bat through the hitting zone. Their bats are always moving full speed at contact.

9. Hitters need to keep their head on the ball through the swing. This helps them track the ball into the hitting zone, as well as maintain balance.

REMEMBER – hitters can't hit what they can't see.

10. After contact, hitters should focus on getting out of the batter's box quickly and running straight to the base. The first few steps out of the box can be the determining factor as to whether the hitter, now the runner, is safe or out.

11. Be positive. Hitters must believe in their ability to hit the ball.

## DRILLS

A problem most young players face is that they don't get enough swings in the course of a practice. Most practices use one drill for hitting: pitching to the batter, one hitter at a time. The following drills will allow hitters to isolate key fundamentals of their swings and take enough swings to improve their hitting:

### 1. Tee Drill

In the Tee Drill, a player sets up to the tee in the normal batting stance. The tee should be placed so that the ball is in the hitting zone. Sharp line drives are the desired result. This is a good indication that the player is taking the proper swing path to the ball. Hitting off the tee simulates all aspects of the swing, which makes it an ideal drill for young players. The coach can then evaluate each player and make the proper adjustments before bad habits are formed.

### 2. Soft-Toss Drill

The Soft-Toss Drill requires two players – a tosser and a hitter. The tosser sets up next to a net at a 45° angle to the hitter, who stands about 15 feet from the net. The hitter assumes a normal batting stance and waits for the tosser to underhand the ball into the hitting zone. The same as when hitting off the tee, the desired result is a sharp line drive. This drill works on all aspects of the swing with the added benefit of tracking a moving ball.



# BAT SELECTION CHART

The right bat for you is the one that lets you generate maximum bat speed. The best way to find the bat that's right for you is through trial and error. A quick swing is the key to good hitting, so try out different weights and lengths to find the one you feel most comfortable with. Extra length and weight in a bat won't make the ball go any farther if it's too heavy to swing.

BATTER'S WEIGHT	BATTER'S HEIGHT								
	3'-3'4"	3'5"-3'8"	3'9"-4'	4'1"-4'4"	4'5"-4'8"	4'9"-5'	5'1"-5'4"	5'5"-5'8"	5'9"-6'
under 60 lbs.	26"	27"	28"	29"	29"	-	-	-	-
61-70	27"	27"	28"	29"	29"	30"	-	-	-
71-80	-	28"	28"	29"	30"	30"	31"	-	-
81-90	-	28"	29"	29"	30"	30"	31"	32"	-
91-100	-	28"	29"	30"	30"	31"	31"	32"	-
101-110	-	29"	29"	30"	30"	31"	31"	32"	-
111-120	-	29"	29"	30"	30"	31"	31"	32"	-
121-130	-	29"	30"	30"	30"	31"	32"	33"	33"
131-140	-	29"	30"	30"	31"	31"	32"	33"	34"
141-150	-	-	30"	30"	31"	31"	32"	33"	34"
151-160	-	-	30"	31"	31"	32"	32"	33"	34"
Over 160	-	-	-	31"	31"	32"	32"	33"	34"

## BAT CARE TIPS

A good aluminum bat is an investment. Here are some suggestions on how to care for this high-performance piece of equipment and protect your investment:

1. Don't use an aluminum bat in extremely cold (Below 60°F) weather. Balls become more dense in low temperatures and could dent the bat when you hit them.
2. Aluminum bats with end caps are also sensitive to hot temperatures. That's because an end cap expands and contracts at different temperatures than the rest of the bat. So don't store the bat in a hot place like a car trunk. Fortunately, if the end cap ever gets damaged, it can be replaced.
3. On each trip to the plate, make sure your players rotate the bat. This prevents denting that results from hitting the ball repeatedly on the same side of the bat.
4. Use older bats for batting cage practice. Today's high-performance bats are not designed for batting cage balls, which are more dense than regular balls. Save your good bats for games.





A majority of the fielding mistakes young players make are the result of improper fundamentals. Your role as a coach is to teach your players basic fielding techniques. With practice, all infielders can improve their play. The first lesson to teach a player is to be mentally prepared for each play. All fielders should be thinking, "What do I do if the ball is hit to me?" and "What do I do if the ball isn't hit to me?" before the batter even comes to the plate.

## INFIELDERS

1. As the pitcher goes into the wind-up, fielders need to be in the proper "ready" position – a well-balanced stance with the feet shoulder-width apart, weight evenly distributed on the balls of the feet, and a slight bend in the knees. The glove and throwing hand should be extended in front of the body at waist level.
2. When fielding grounders, fielders need to be aggressive and go after the ball. Their feet should continue to move as the ball is fielded.
3. Players should stay low when fielding the ball. They should have their butts down and backs parallel to the ground.
4. The ball should be fielded away from the player's body with two hands. Right handers should field the ball between the inside of the left foot and the middle of the body, while left handers should field the ball between the inside of the right foot and the middle of the body.
5. Players need to watch the ball. By keeping their heads down and eyes focused on the ball, players can track it all the way into their gloves.
6. Players should come out of their fielding position ready to throw. When throwing, they should hold the ball across the seams, aim for a specific target (i.e., the letters on a jersey), step toward that target and follow through. Players should allow their momentum to carry them toward the target after releasing the ball.

7. If a "hot" grounder is not playable, players should attempt to knock it down. Remember, players should be instructed not to turn their heads. Turning away will only increase the chance of injury.

8. On pop-ups, players should always use two hands to catch the ball. Also, they need to clearly communicate with the other fielders to avoid a collision.

9. When tagging runners, players need to secure the ball in the glove with the throwing hand.

10. On "run-down" plays, players should attempt to limit the number of throws to two. The objective is to make the tag while forcing the runner back to his original base.

11. All players need to be alert and back up plays that don't directly involve them.

## DRILLS

The following drills are designed to employ skills which fielders will perform during the course of a game:

### 1. Pick-Up Drill

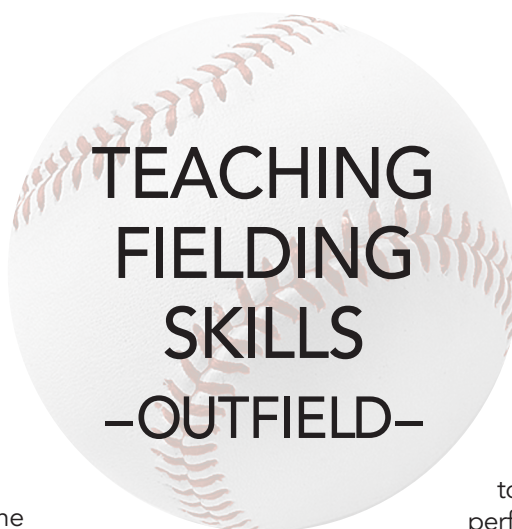
Two players face each other about 20 feet apart. One player, the tosser, kneels down while the other player, the fielder, takes a fielding stance without a glove. The tosser then rolls the ball to the fielder's left or right. With palms facing up, the fielder shuffles to the ball, fields the ball, and throws it underhanded back to the tosser. The two players reset and continue the drill until the fielder handles 10 balls to the right and 10 to the left. Once done, the players should switch positions and begin again.

### 2. Short-Hop Drill

The Short-Hop Drill also requires two players and uses the same alignment as the pick-up drill. The only difference is that the fielder uses a glove for this drill. The tosser throws sharp, one-hop grounders to the fielder. The fielder works on watching the ball into the glove and developing fluid fielding motion. Continue the drill until each player has fielded 10 chances cleanly.



A majority of the fielding mistakes young players make are the result of improper fundamentals. Your role as a coach is to teach your players basic fielding techniques. With practice, all outfielders can improve their play. The first lesson to teach a player is to be mentally prepared for each play. All fielders should be thinking, "What do I do if the ball is hit to me?" and "What do I do if the ball isn't hit to me?" before the batter even comes to the plate.



## OUTFIELDERS

1. As the pitcher goes into the wind-up, fielders need to be in the proper "ready" position – a well-balanced stance with the feet shoulder-width apart, weight evenly distributed on the balls of the feet, and a slight bend in the knees. The glove and throwing hand should be held in front of the body at chest level.

2. When fielding a ball, fielders need to always listen to their cut-off for instructions on where to throw the ball.

3. When catching fly balls, fielders should move toward the ball and catch it with two hands at eye-level on the throwing side of the body. This will best prepare them to make quick throws to the infield.

4. When pursuing fly balls, fielders should try to keep their eyes on the ball. If a ball is hit to the right, they should turn to the right and look over the left shoulder. If the ball is hit to the left, they should turn to the left and look over the right shoulder.

5. Outfielders represent the last line of defense, so if players are unable to field a ball cleanly, they should be in position to keep it in front of them and thus prevent extra bases.

6. Players should keep throws on a line and aim for the cut-off.

7. On balls hit in the gap, players need to clearly communicate with each other to avoid a collision.

8. All players need to be alert and back up plays that don't directly involve them.

9. A glove with an open web is the preferred outfielder's glove because it provides maximum visibility.

## DRILLS

The following drills are designed to employ skills which fielders will perform during the course of a game:

### 1. Drop-Step Drill

The Drop-Step Drill is designed to teach young players how to catch balls hit over their heads. Two players face each other about 30 feet apart. One player acts as the tosser while the other is the fielder. The tosser throws a flyball in one of three directions: over the fielder's left shoulder, right shoulder, or straight over the fielder's head. The fielder breaks from the fielding stance and runs the ball down. Players must remember the first movement is to open up and step in the direction of the fly ball without back pedaling, and that they must focus on the ball by looking over their shoulders.

### 2. Proper Catch Drill

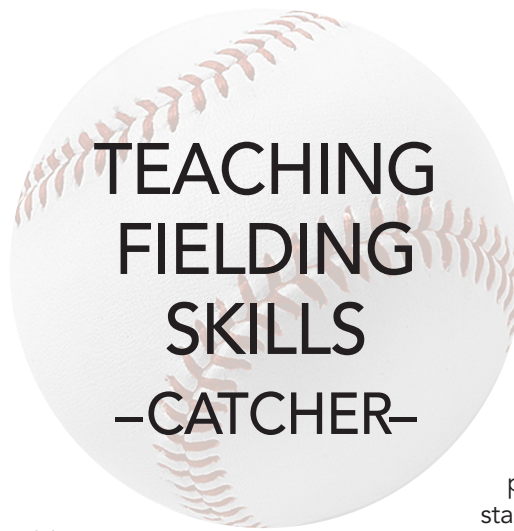
The Proper Catch Drill is designed to teach players how to move forward when catching a fly ball. This gives outfielders the momentum required to make quick, strong throws to the infield. Use the same two-player alignment as the drop-step drill. This time, the tosser will throw a short fly ball that the fielder must break in on. The fielder times it so they catch the ball on the move – never flat-footed – and follow with a throw. Players must remember to catch the ball at eye level on the throwing side of the body, thus allowing for a quick release.



The catcher is your team's "field general." Since the catcher directs all defensive play, he should be the leader and willing to be vocal. Catchers must know the situation, read the batter, and call pitches accordingly. The following guidelines will help you develop better catchers:

## CATCHERS

1. Catchers should always be aware of their position behind the plate. When squatting, their feet should be shoulder-width or a little more apart and their weight should be on the balls of their feet.
2. To conceal signals from opponents and the first and third base coaches, the catcher should give signs close to his body. Hanging their glove hand below the glove-side knee will also help conceal the signals.
3. Catchers should always give the pitcher a large stationary target with their mitts.
4. When blocking balls in front of the plate, a catcher's first priority is to stop the ball. To do this, the catcher should drop to both knees, place his glove between his legs, and keep his head down and body in front of the ball.
5. On foul balls that are popped up behind the plate, catchers should first visually locate the ball. Next, he should take off his mask and hold it until he gets under the ball. After he is "camped" under the ball, he should toss the mask out of the way and catch the ball with two hands.
6. On grounders hit to the infield with no one on base, it is the catcher's job to back up first base. Running, he should take an angle towards first base that will put him about 15 feet behind the base. This will give him enough room to field any poor throws.



## DRILLS

The following drills are designed to develop skills which a catcher will perform during the course of a game:

### 1. Blocking Drill

The Blocking Drill is designed to teach catchers how to block balls in the dirt. The catcher, in full gear with mask on, takes position behind the plate. A coach standing about 20-30 feet away throws tennis balls or wiffle balls in the dirt. This forces the catcher to work on keeping the ball in front of the plate. Mix it up by throwing balls in the dirt to the right, left, and directly in front of the catcher. Make catchable throws now and then to prevent the catcher from anticipating balls in the dirt.

### 2. Pop-Up Drill

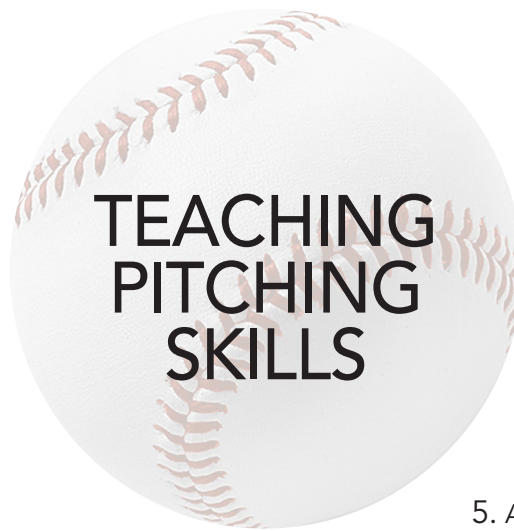
The Pop-Up Drill is designed to teach catchers how to catch pop-ups behind the plate. The catcher, in mask and full gear, takes position behind the plate. A coach stands a few feet in front of the catcher with a bucket of balls. The coach then throws balls high over the catcher's head. The catcher should work on finding the ball, getting under the ball, tossing the mask out of the way and catching the ball with two hands. Mix it up by throwing balls over to the right, left, and directly over the catcher's head.



Good technique in pitching has two benefits: better game performance and avoiding injury. Keeping the pitching arm in good shape is especially important for young players. Here are some tips to consider as you work with pitchers:

## PITCHERS

1. Your pitcher's pre-game preparation should include the following three steps. First, stretch arms and legs. Second, play catch for about 10 minutes to get loose. Third, throw to the catcher on the side until he feels ready to pitch.
2. To be effective, at any level, a pitcher must throw strikes. The best pitch in baseball is a first pitch strike.
3. Change speeds. Young pitchers don't need to throw breaking balls to get outs. They can be very successful by just throwing fast balls and change-ups.



4. Right-handed pitchers should start with both feet on the rubber. The first movement is a six inch step straight back with their left foot. The right foot then moves into place against the front of the rubber, which allows the pitcher to push off and generate velocity on his throw. (For left-handed pitchers, just reverse the feet.)

5. A right-handed pitcher's left hip and shoulder should rotate so they are pointed to the target. The pitching hand comes out of the glove when both are over the left knee and thigh which are now parallel to the ground. This allows the pitcher to maintain his balance. (Reverse the set-up for left-handed pitchers.)

6. As the pitcher strides forward, his shoulder and hip should move directly toward the target. The stride length will depend on the player's height, but is generally a little longer than shoulder width. The left foot should point toward the target.

7. Eyes should always remain focused on the target (the catcher's mitt) throughout the wind-up and delivery.

8. As the pitcher releases the ball, his arms should extend out, as if he is reaching for the catcher's mitt. He should then follow through by reaching down, as if trying to pick up dirt.

9. Pitchers should finish their delivery in a good, balanced position – facing the hitter – and ready to field.

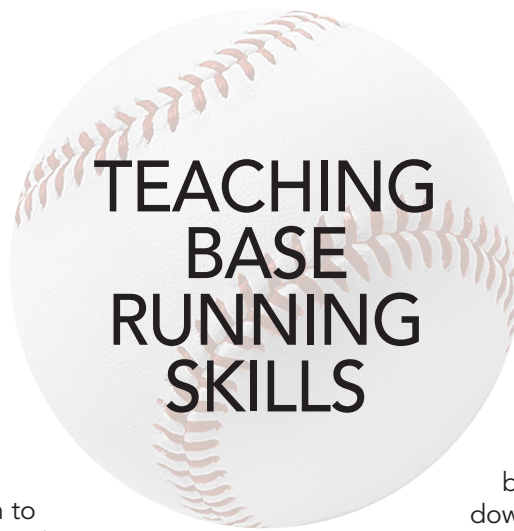
10. Pitchers should always cover their arms after pitching in a game, regardless of the temperature.



Good base running is smart base running. Players must understand their own capabilities as well as those of their opponents (i.e., knowing who has a strong arm), and make sound decisions based on those factors. Remember, the fastest runner is not always the best base runner.

### BASE RUNNERS

1. When players make the decision to slide, they shouldn't change their mind. Most sliding injuries occur when players change their minds in the middle of a slide.
2. When tagging up on a fly ball, a runner's eyes should follow the ball. One foot should be on the edge of the base ready to push off, and the other foot in a direct line to the next base.



3. All batted balls should be run out, fair or foul.
4. Base runners should always know the count, the number of outs and how important their run is. Most importantly, they should always know where the ball is.
5. Runners should touch every base. They should never slow down, even if they think they're out. Remember, it's the umpire's decision whether a runner is safe or out.
6. Runners should be alert, aggressive, and confident. They should always anticipate the play before it happens.
7. Every runner should be sure to pay attention to the base coach for instruction.





Coaching a youth league team is exciting and rewarding. But from time to time, you may experience difficulty with parents. Some may want their children to play more, or they might question your judgment as a coach. This is normal, so don't feel that you're alone if this happens. Here are a few thoughts to remember when dealing with parents:

- Know what your objectives are, and do what you believe to be of most value to the team, not the parents.
- Encourage parental involvement. Always listen to their ideas and feelings. Remember, they're interested and concerned because it's their children who are involved.
- Express appreciation for their interest and concern. This will make them more open and at ease with you.
- No coach can please everyone. Don't try.
- Most importantly, be fair. If you treat all players as equals, you will gain their respect.
- Resist unfair pressure. You are the coach, and it's your responsibility to make the final decision.
- Don't blame the players for their parents' actions. Try to maintain a fair attitude.
- Make certain all parents know your ground rules. Have your rules, regulations, philosophy, practice dates and times, etc. printed and distributed to all parents. If necessary, have a parent meeting before the season begins to discuss your operating procedures.

- Be consistent! If you change a rule or philosophy during the season, you may be in for trouble. If you do change something, make sure the parents are informed as soon as possible.

- Handle any confrontation one-on-one and not in a crowd situation. Don't be defensive. Don't argue with parents. Listen to their views and be thankful.

- Don't discuss individual players with other parents. The grapevine will hang you every time.
- Ask parents not to criticize their children during a practice or game. Don't let your players be humiliated, even by their own parents. Explain that you as the coach must be given complete control of your team when they are on your "turf."
- Parents must accept the fact that umpires, coaches, and other league officials are volunteers and should not be subjected to public criticism.

Always remember that you will be dealing with children and parents with different backgrounds and ideals. One of your main challenges as a coach is to deal with these differences in a positive manner so the team's season will be an exciting and enjoyable experience for all.

