



Practice guide for T-Ball and Farm Levels

Malden
YOUTH BASEBALL



Thank you for volunteering!

This document is meant to act as a guide, and is by no means firm direction as to how a coach should manage a practice or game.

For volunteers coaching for the first time, we hope this guide will offer you tips that will help make this a very enjoyable experience.

Baseball should be fun for coaches as well.

For more experienced coaches, use as much or as little of this guide as you wish, and we ask for your feedback with regards to methods you like to use in practices or games, that may not be included here.

You are not alone in this. There is a large support structure at your disposal.

General guidelines for these levels

- Keep them safe
- Keep it simple
- Keep it fun
- Keep them busy
- Keep them focused
- Not all players are created equal, both in skills and desire
- Explaining to the players “Why” we do something is just as important as showing them “How” we do something.



Players who have fun, feel safe, and stay busy...will learn and return

Keep them safe

1. Constant management of players handling bats.
 - Especially younger levels where “they just don’t know any better”.
 - No player should grab a bat unless approved/watched by a coach
2. Constant management of horseplay.
 - With bats and balls on the move, there is no room for horseplay
 - Keeping players in small groups and busy with drills...greatly reduces horseplay
3. Constant management of who/where players are throwing.
 - This is the “Nose” part of Nose-Toe-Throw (*talked about later*)... making sure both players noses are pointed at each other (*they are looking*)
 - Pair up younger players by skill level. Don’t pair up a hard thrower with a player who does not move his/her glove to stop a ball
4. Utilize your parents to help keep conditions safe.

Young players must be continually coached on the importance of safety

Keep it Simple and Fun

1. Keep it simple

- But you will quickly understand that some players can be offered more challenging drills.
 - Reference the slide related to “Not all players are created equal”.
- Younger minds do not respond well to long explanations.
 - You will do better with a visual presentation, and very short verbal commands
- Younger minds do not respond well to “mature” baseball terms.
 - You will find yourself using terms like “Knocker Knuckles, Nose-Toe-Throw, Alligator, etc.

2. Keep it fun

- Especially younger levels.
 - Baseball can be “slow”, so it has to be fun.
- The coach should have fun as well.
 - If you are too serious, the younger kids will think this is “work’ instead of fun.



Baseball is complicated at the older levels...for younger players...make it Simple & Fun

Keep them Busy and Focused

1. Keep them busy

- Players standing around are not learning...and start picking daisy's.
- Utilize multiple skills stations with help from your coaches/parents.
- Have a practice plan prepared before you arrive at the field.
 - It will make for an effective and efficient use of your time, keep the kids moving and learning, and allows you to provide it to coaches and parents so that they know what the drills will be...without needing you to tell them.

2. Keep them focused

- Drifting minds create safety concerns (not looking at balls coming at them, etc.) and loss of learning
- Constant verbal reinforcement will mentally “bring them back”
- Multiple stations offers a better adult-to-player ratio on the field which helps with keeping players focused.

Drills should be short 5-10 minute events...then change it up!

Not all players are created equal

1. Especially in T-Ball, where player/family expectations differ.
 - Some players have been waiting for baseball ever since they could hold a glove and ball, while others are being “dragged” to the field because their parents want them to play the game.
 - You will have some players arrive wearing cleats, baseball pants and eye-black, with others arriving in clothes they wore to school that day, with the price tag still attached to the glove because it has never been used.
2. As coaches...we need to adapt...for two primary reasons
 - **Safety:** You do not want a 5 year old fire-baller, throwing rockets from 10 feet away to a 5 year old who does not know how to use a glove.
 - At this age, the fire-baller does not know any better (“my dad can always catch it”)
 - One of the most difficult tasks as a coach is to find ways to keep our player development balanced, not holding better players back, while at the same time not pushing lesser skilled kids too hard.

Grouping by skill level allows coaches to tailor station instruction focus for each group

Fundamentals For All Levels



All Levels: Baseball Ready Position

- Shoulders and feet should be squared off, facing the batter.

Why: If the player is not facing the batter, it restricts quick lateral movement to one side. Ex: if the 3rd baseman is facing the pitcher as opposed to the batter, reaction to a hit down the 3rd base line will be slowed as the body has to rotate around.

- Knees slightly bent...and **BUTT DOWN!**

Why: Provides balance, and equal ability to quickly move in any direction.

- **Note:** The player should pretend to sit on the edge of a chair.
- For younger players, you can use a 5 gallon bucket to demonstrate.
- Tell players it much easier to start low and quickly stand tall (they have the ground to push against), rather than to stand tall and quickly get low.

- Feet slightly wider than shoulder width apart.

Why: Too close and you cannot get the butt down. Too wide, and the hips lock, preventing quick lateral movement.

- Weight should be slightly forward.

Why: Sitting on the heels influences the player to make the first move backwards. We want them moving to the ball.

- **Note:** You should be able to gently press back on a players forehead without knocking them over.
- When playing the infield...both hands should be presented out in front of the body, about knee height.
Why: Allows for quick reaction to hard hit balls both on the ground and at face level.
• **Note:** At the T-Ball age, it will be hard to keep their hands of the knees while in the infield. Constant reminder required.
- When playing the outfield, the players hands can be on their knees.
- The players head should be up, eyes focused on the batter (*both infield and outfield*).



Infield Ready Position



Outfield Ready Position

You will find that “Baseball Ready” is a command that needs to be issued constantly

All Levels: Hitting Basics

- The Bat should be an extension of the Hands and Eyes
- Aligning the Eyes, Hands and bat will improve contact.

Younger players often stand ram-rod straight, and drop their hands to waist high as they start the swing. Known as a “Hitch”, it not only delays how fast the barrel gets into the strike zone, but more importantly, it separates the Hands from the Eyes, and in turn the Bat from the Ball

- A.) Aligning the “Knocker Knuckles” (reference the single yellow line drawn over the knuckles in Figure A)

Why: The players wrists, elbows and shoulders are relaxed in this position, as well as being more flexible which provides the ability to quickly adjust to a balls location. Things are not “locked”

- B.) Do Not over-rotate the hands, misaligning the knuckles (reference the two yellow lines drawn over knuckles in Figure B)

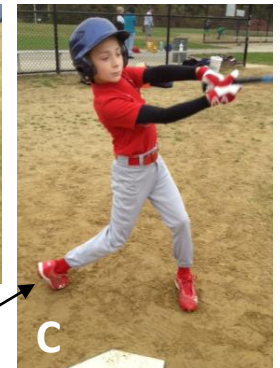
Why: This restricts a fluid motion in the swing, flaring the elbows and placing tension on both the wrists and forearms. The wrists will lock as the bat comes thru the strike zone, restricting the ability to quickly adjust to a low & away pitch. The bat head will also come thru the strike zone slightly higher than the player believes. They can “put their hands thru the ball” but the bat head may not perfectly follow.

- C.) Weight transfer to the front leg, Include the upper body in the swing, and SQUISH the Bug with the back foot.

Why: Keeping weight on the back leg during the swing reduces energy moving to the ball (lower part of the body is not moving forward), and can introduce a back shoulder drop which moves the head during the swing and often produces a big upper cut (bad news trying to hit a fastball). If the hitter uses the upper body properly during the swing, the natural reaction of the back foot is to “squish the bug”, produced as the knee of the back leg is drawn forward as the hips rotate (belt buckle facing the pitcher).



Notice the difference in how the elbows are flared (relaxed vs. tight)



“Squish the Bug”

More instruction is offered in the Rookies and Minors section of this document

All Levels: 1st Base Position

- First...find the bag...then square up to the fielder with the ball and look for the throw.

Why: TIME. Waiting for the fielder to make the play, and then finding the bag, allows the runner to advance far up the line. There is plenty of time to find the bag while the fielder is making the play and preparing to throw.

- The foot on the *throwing hand side* should hold the bag.

Why: Holding the bag with the throwing hand side allows the player to stretch farther to meet the ball.

Why: Better Balance. With the “glove side” foot holding the bag, the player can be “handcuffed” on a throw that is on the throwing hand side. In Photo A to the right, if the ball were to arrive to the players left, the glove arm would have to cross over the outstretched leg, creating balance issues (like playing the game Twister). The glove and glove side foot should move together. If the ball is moving to the left, the foot should move left also, not just the arm.

- Make contact with just the heel on the top edge of the bag

Why: SAFETY. Standing on top of the bag presents the opportunity for the runner to step on the ankle of the player.

- Let the ball come to you...do not run out to meet it.

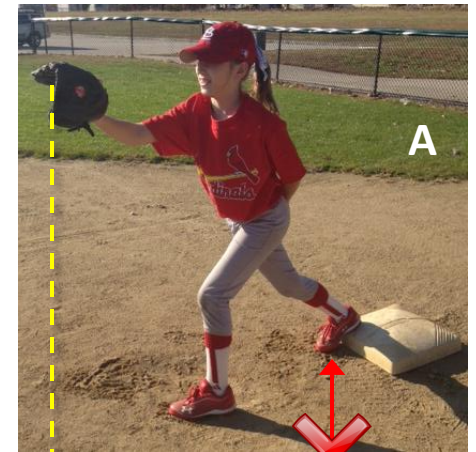
Why: It takes much longer to go out and meet the ball, and then turn and run back to the bag.

- But...if the ball is going wide...leave the bag.

Why: A ball getting by the 1st baseman will often allow the runner to advance to 2nd base, as well as other runners to advance. Coming off the bag to make the stop will at least hold the runners.

- If the 1st baseman fields the ball and is making the play at the bag, or if the pitcher is covering the bag, the fielder should not cross over the bag and run into Foul Territory.

Why: SAFETY. This creates an opportunity for a collision, as both the fielder and runner race for the bag. The fielder should approach the bag, but step on the inside edge of the bag only, and stay in Fair Territory.



Wrong Foot



The primary role at 1st Base is to cover the bag. Do not stray too far to field a ball

All Levels: Pop-ups & Fly Balls

- **SPRINT** to where the ball is going to land.

Why: Many players slowly “track” the ball as they move, chasing it as it moves to the landing spot as opposed to sprinting to where they think it will land. It is much more difficult to catch a ball while on the move, as the head is bouncing around. Of course...trying to catch it assumes that they got to the ball before it hits the ground.

- Try to get “behind” the ball

Why: It is much easier to make an adjustment to the ball by moving forwards toward the infield, as opposed to try and quickly adjust going backwards moving in the same direction as the ball.

- **Glove UP:** It is important to see both the Ball and the Glove.

Why: With the glove below the eyes...the fielder must “guess” on where to exactly place the glove to intercept the ball.

Also, as the ball transitions from above the eyes to below the eyes, it (appears to) pick up speed, because it is no longer coming at the fielder, but is now dropping past them.

With experience, catching a ball with a glove below the eyes is achievable, but for younger players...not recommended.

- Feet slightly wider than shoulder width apart.

Why: Just like the ready position, this provides good balance and the ability to quickly move laterally if needed.

- Slight bend in the knees.

Why: Allows the fielder to quickly adjust height to meet the ball without moving just the glove, helping to keep eyes and glove aligned.

- **DO NOT HOLD THE BALL** in the outfield.

Why: This will allow runners to advance freely. When in doubt where to throw...just get it anywhere into the infield.

- Try to keep the ball ahead of the lead runner

Why: Throwing behind the runner will let them freely advance to the next base. Ex.: On a hit to left field, with a runner advancing towards 2nd base, if the throw is made towards 2nd base, the runner will easily see this and make the turn for 3rd. By the time the ball gets to 2nd, and then to 3rd, it is too late.



For younger players, have them remember: Ball up high...Pinky's towards the Sky

All Levels: Running the Bases

- A.) At 1st Base when there is no chance to turn and advance to 2nd base safely, the runner must run through the bag and turn out.

Why: At the higher levels, a turn towards 2nd base that appears to be an “intent” to advance, allows the runner to be tagged out. Begin teaching the “turn out” at T-Ball levels using cones as a visual aide. Extend the cones for a distance past the bag before turning...to teach the players to run at full speed through the bag.

- B.) At 1st Base, when trying to advance towards 2nd Base, players should be shown the proper path that would be taken IF they are running at full speed through the 1st base bag.

Why: Younger players will often stop at 1st before turning to head towards 2nd base, or run through 1st base before turning, which takes time. As with the drill to run through the bag at 1st, cones can be used to show the proper path to be taken at full speed.

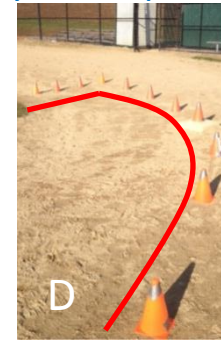
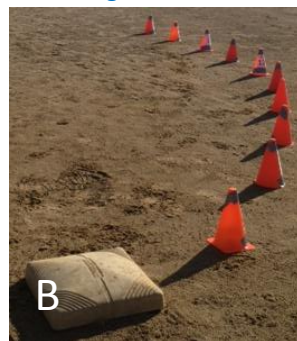
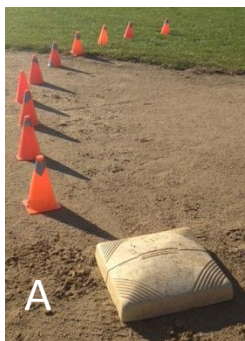
- C.) Rounding 2nd Base, the player should stay on the inside of the bag

Why: SAFETY. In some cases, stepping on the top of the bag can present a slip hazard (even with rubber cleats), which can cause and ankle injury.

Also, going around to the outside of the bag will slow the runner down, as there is nothing to push off of, as when they use the inside of the bag.

- D.) Rounding 3rd Base when a coach is not sending the runner home, we want the player to advance beyond the bag and stop to see how the play develops (Take a turn and hold)

Why: Positions the player closer to the plate should the ball is mishandled on a throw from the outfield or at 1st Base, without getting too far away from the bag. Use cones to show both the path taken to round the bag, as well as making a “wall” to show the players where they should stop



Even in T-Ball, have coaches use hand signals to indicate running through the bag or making the turn

Tee Ball



Baseball Basics Field Sheet: Tee Ball

Hitting

- “**Knocker knuckles**” are lined up
- Eyes focus on **top of ball**
- Keep the **head still**
- **Front shoulder** tucked into chin
- Keep hands back
- **Short Soft Stride** (if the player is comfortable with striding)
- **Level swing**, hands move thru the ball
- **Back shoulder** comes forward to meet the chin
- **Squish the Bug**

Hitting Drills

- Selecting a bat
- Setting up in the box
- Hit “the word” (**Contact**)
- Top of the Ball (**Contact**)
- Double T (**Contact**)
- Bat Behind Back / a.k.a. Squish the Bug (**Power**)
- Stick it in the fence (**Power**)
- Run the Bases

Fielding

- Shoulders and toes **squared to hitter**
- Feet slightly wider than shoulders
- **Weight slightly forward**, balanced on front balls of the feet
- Knees slightly bent
- **Butt DOWN**
- **Head UP**
- Use the “**Alligator**” to field a ground ball
- Point the **Bill of the Cap** at the ball all the way to the glove.

Fielding Drills

- Baseball Ready Position
- The Bill of the Cap
- Hand Circles
- The “Alligator”
- “Soccer Goalie”
- Pizza Slices
- “Pinkies to the sky if the ball is up high”
- Pop-ups w/ Tennis Balls

Throwing

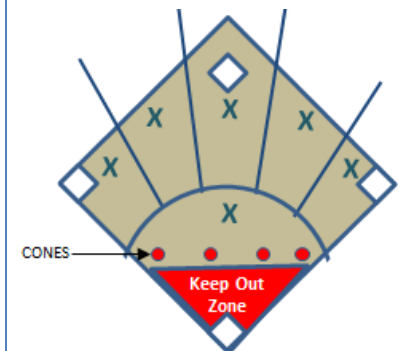
- Make sure the person being thrown to is looking (**NOSE**)
- Step towards your target (**TOE**)
- Point at your target with your glove
- Arm comes over the top @ 1:00 or 11:00 o’clock. (**THROW**)
- Hand should end up **near the opposite hip**.

Throwing Drills

- Nose-Toe-Throw
- Slap 5
- Loose Grip
- Throw to the Bucket (placed at 1st Base)
- Throw to the player (placed at 1st Base)
- Around the Horn

PIZZA SLICES


- To help fielders identify the general area they should cover at each infield position...slice your infield into pieces by drawing lines with a bat.
- **Safety Note:** If hitting, maintain a **Keep Out Zone** in front of the plate using cones, to separate fielders from the player swinging a bat.



This is a quick reference guide you can take to the field with you

Your first Tee Ball practice

1. Greet your players at their level
 - Go down on one knee so that you are not towering over them when you meet.
2. Be prepared to provide information
 - Answer questions before they are asked
 - Have league information that parents can refer to as you get the practice going.
 - Parents always want to know who is coaching their child. Let them know!
 - Have a crisp practice plan!
 - This will help with a productive use of the time, and keeps the kids from getting bored.

		WELCOME TO T-BALL! First Practice is May 3rd @ 5:30 PM
6 Year Old Program Information Pitching: Hitting off a Tee & Machine Base Running: One base at a time Helmets: Required (w/ cage when using machine) Cleats: Not required Groin protection: Recommended Bunting: No Umpires: No Scores kept: No Standings kept: No Time limits: 1 hour	Volunteers needed! Team Parent Coordinator: Coordinate the sideline efforts such as our annual fund raiser, team photo hand-outs, etc. Team Bench Parents: Keep the kids focused while waiting to hit. Keep the batting order arranged & moving Field Drill Station Parents: Assist during practice (no baseball skills required!)	
Opening Day <u>When:</u> Sunday May 2 nd - Arrive at 1:30 <u>Pictures at:</u> 1:45 - Parade at 3:40 <u>Royals Meeting Location:</u> Lower Major Field 3 rd base line dugout.	Lincoln Park can get cold For those new to the league... Lincoln Park can be several degrees colder than at your house... and windy. Always have a jacket or sweatshirt handy for the kids.	
Safety First! No child may pick up a bat unless instructed to do so by a coach. If you bring a bat to the field, please place it on the inside of the back stop behind home plate immediately. If the hitting station is running, any child entering the home plate area must be wearing a helmet. Players must bring a full water bottle to every practice or game to stay properly hydrated.		
Practices & Having Fun! Practices will consist of splitting up into groups/stations (Hitting, Throwing, Fielding, etc), with each station limited to 10 minutes to keep the kids moving and learning new skills. The kids are here to learn the fundamentals...but most importantly...to have fun!		
Meet the Coaches Bill Stapledon: 16 years as a Nashua Cal Ripken coach, moving through T-Ball to Major levels twice with two boys, and now enjoying my third tour as my daughter Paige plays. Steve Beaulieu: 2009 Spring & Fall T-Ball coach, Life long Nashua resident, 3 years as Boys Club Basketball coach, played Baseball, Basketball and Golf at Nashua High. Jim Ross: 2009 Spring & Fall T-Ball coach, Life long Nashua resident, 6 years as CYO basketball coach, played Baseball and Basketball at Bishop Guerin.		

Sample: Your informational handout does not need to be this formal, and can even be a verbal discussion with the parents.

Also tap parents to help. Most people love to help, but wait to be asked.

Your first Tee Ball practice

1. Have a practice plan
2. Enlist parents to help:
 - At stations
 - Frees up coaches to work on mechanics / fundamentals.
 - No experience needed.
 - Just need to roll a ball, catch a ball, or help keep kids out of the hitting area.
 - Keeping track of the time
 - Letting you know when it is time to switch stations
3. Assess players on the basics
 - Used to pair up groups at following practices, based upon similar skill level.

Assessment taken at 1st practice, and used to pair groups at following practices

T-Ball Practice Plan - Day 1				Station Strengths		
No	Name	Stars	Game Ball	Field	Throw	Hit
1	Sammy			1	2	2
5	Matt			1	2	1
6	Conor			3	3	3
7	Ben			1	2	2
8	Katie			3	2	2
9	Nick			2	2	3
10	Pierce			2	2	2
11	Paige			3	3	3
12	Jessy			2	2	1
15	Aidan			2	3	2
				Ratings: 1 = Beginner, 2 = Fair, 3 = Strong		
				Pair players up in future practices based upon similar strengths		
Start	Coach	Drill	Comments			
5:30	Group	Warm-ups (10 min)	Stretching. Some time allotted for stragglers to arrive			
5:40	Group	Ready Position	Basic demonstration of a good Baseball Ready position - Will spend more time at stations			
		Alligator	Basic demonstration of the fielding position - Will spend more time at stations			
		Nose-Toes-Throws	Basic demonstration of the throwing mechanics - Will spend more time at stations			
		Knuckle Knockers	Basic demonstration of the hitting grip - Will spend more time at stations			
Rotate Stations every 10 Minutes - Evaluate each player as they move through your station - Rating 1, 2 or 3						
5:45	Steve	Fielding	Ready & Alligator - 2 parents roll balls so two kids are working. Coach works on mechanics			
		5 tosses each - Repeat	Glove fingertips on ground to stop a rolling hit - Trap the ball in the glove with other hand			
	Jim	Throwing	Work Throwing - 2 parents to catch so two kids are working. Coach works mechanics			
		5 tosses each - Repeat	Looking at target - Stepping & Pointing at the target - Throwing to target			
Bill	Hitting	Work the grip and basic swing - Coach working mechanics - 1 players at a time (safety!)				
	5 hits each - 1 cycle	Knuckles aligned - Proper stance alignment with the plate				
6:15	Group	The Bases	Identify each base and home plate to the kids			
			Kids run forward to 1st, sideways to 2nd (in ready position), sideways to 3rd, Forward to home			
			Kids run the bases at 10 second intervals, yelling the base name as they touch it			
			Finish w/ a base race (running forward) - set intervals so players have to run hard to catch the next			
End @ 6:30						

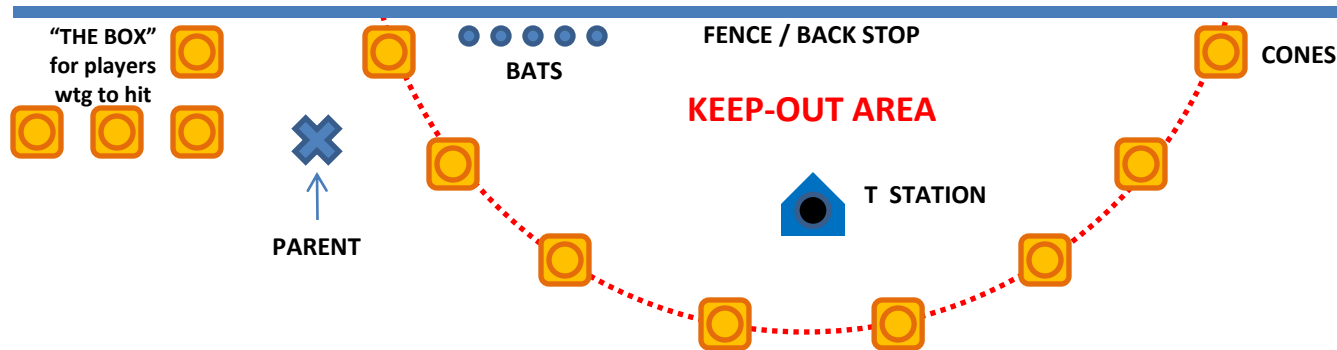
Sample: Your practice plan does not need to be this formal

Grouping by skill level allows coaches to tailor station instruction focus for each group

Keeping young kids safe around Bats

1. Constant management of players handling bats

- Any player near a bat in motion should be wearing a helmet.
- Tee Ball level (*these kids just don't know any better...so you have to be overly cautious*)
 - Any player bringing a bat to the field should immediately present it to a coach
 - Bats should be placed against the backstop behind home plate (not near/in a dugout)
 - No player should touch a bat unless with a coach who can quickly control the bat
 - For T hitting stations, a “keep out” area should be established (suggest using orange cones) providing players with a visual reference of where not to go.
 - And so that you can focus on the hitting drill, enlist a parent to keep other kids out
 - A baseball that gets away from a throwing drill...will always be followed by a player chasing it



Coach safety tip. Take physical control of the head of the bat if you get in close to a batter

Tee Ball Drills - Hitting

- The Bat should be an extension of the Hands and Eyes
- Aligning the Eyes, Hands and Bat will improve contact.

Younger players often stand straight, and drop their hands to waist high to swing, separating the Hands from the Eyes, and in turn the Bat from the Ball.



- One variable that can alter where the player “believes” the bat is travelling, is not having the knuckles aligned correctly. Aligning the “**Knocker Knuckles**” (knuckles used to knock on a door) of both hands allows the bat to be a true extension of the arms thru the strike zone.

Why: Over-rotating the hands so that the Knocker Knuckles are not aligned, most often produces a “high bat head”, as the wrist of the leading hand locks as the bat comes through the strike-zone, causing the trailing hand to roll over and upwards, taking the bat head with it.

Reference photos of knuckle alignment in the Fundamentals for All Levels section above, on the slide for Hitting Basics.

- **Selecting the Bat** (ensuring the bat is not too big for the player)
 - Have the player select a bat and hold it with one hand at the very end (down by the knob).
 - Have them raise their arm parallel to the ground, with the bat extended straight out.
 - For T-Ball aged players, they should be able to hold it there for a couple seconds.
 - If they cannot...switch to a shorter / less heavy bat.

Why: A heavy bat at this age often produces a drop of the hands, resulting in the player knocking the T over as opposed to hitting the ball. If they do happen to hit the ball, too big of the bat slows bat speed resulting in a “less than dramatic” hit. Most kids at this age want to hit the “bomb” off the T, but parents often buy too big of a bat, keeping their child from reaching this dream.

Hitting a ball consistently is just as much about focus, as it is about mechanics

Tee Ball Drills - Hitting

- **Setting up in the Batters Box:** Have the player lay their bat over the plate, so that the tip covers the far side of the plate. Have the player place their FRONT foot at the knob end of the bat, and then bring the back foot into position and pick up the bat.

This ensures that the “sweet” part of the bat can cover the entire plate, even when hitting the ball out in front of the plate

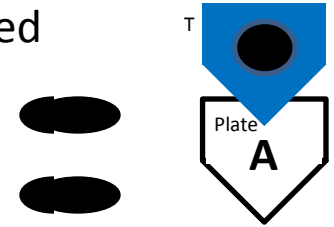
NOTE: When using a T, the player should always lay the bat across the “true” plate, not the base of the T (see below)



- If hitting off of a T towards the infield, have the batter set up as instructed above...but place the T in FRONT of the plate (A)...not on the plate.

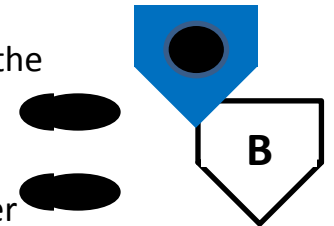
Why: This teaches the kids to hit the ball out in front of the plate, providing power thru arm extension and bat speed.

For advanced players, place the T slightly to the side of the plate (B & C) to help understand hitting inside and outside pitches.



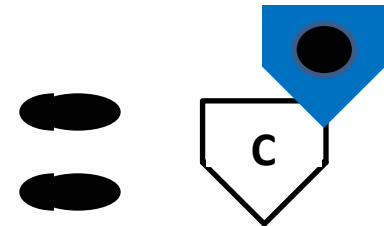
- When hitting into a fence or backstop:

- Place a rubber home plate on the ground or draw one in the dirt, so that you can give the batter something to align with.
- Place the T out in front of this temporary plate to promote hitting the ball out front.
- **Use only Safety balls.** Safety Balls will stick to the fence when hit hard, offering younger players reference of a good hit.



- The T height should be set no higher than the Jersey Letters.

Why: Setting the T too high promotes two bad habits. 1.) Swinging at a pitch out of the strike zone (too high) and 2.) Produces a “swing for the fence” upper cut which if retained a higher levels, reduces contact with fast pitching where balls come in flat.



Coach safety tip: Teach the kids not to swing at the T until you say “swing”

Tee Ball Drills - Hitting

- ❑ **“Hit the Word”**. Select a word on the ball (i.e., CHAMPRO, etc.)...instruct them to stare at it...and then instruct them to hit the word with their hands (the bat will follow).

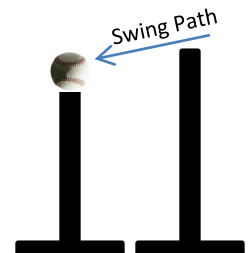
Why: At the T, young players eyes often drift towards you, parents, other players, etc., and not the ball. Staring at the word gives them a very specific task to perform, providing focus. **Note:** after telling them to stare at the word...if you offer any further verbal guidance...they will look at you. You will need to keep reminding them to “look at the word...not at me”. This drill is also the first training a coach offers related to “see the ball as it leaves the pitchers hand”.

- ❑ Hitting the **“Top of the Ball”** helps players who drop the hands while swinging. Place the ball on the T with the “focus word” on top, and ask players to swing straight thru the word, or thru the “Top of the Ball”. This helps focus their eyes. When they begin to hit the ball down, rotate the ball so the focus word is at the back, which should now produce line drives.

Why: Young players often drop the hands when swinging (you will always be picking up the T). This is often due to a long stride, which shifts the upper body weight backwards, dropping the rear shoulder and the hands, but some players just drop the hands.

- ❑ **Double T:** For a player that continues to drop the hands and hit the T.
 - Place a *2nd* T behind the T holding the ball, and adjust it slightly higher.
 - Instruct the player to hit the ball without hitting the T in the back.

They will struggle at first, but will eventually produce a downward swing (trading power for contact at first, but this will improve



Hitting a ball consistently is just as much about focus, as it is about mechanics

Tee Ball Drills - Hitting

☐ Shoulder-to-Shoulder (helping players understand how to load the hands, and follow through on a swing)

This can be done in groups (with no bats) at a station.

- Have the hitter(s) move into a load, pretending to get ready to hit.
- If the player's hands are in the correct position, and the eyes are looking out towards a pitcher, the front shoulder should be drawn back and touching the chin.
- But most players at this age do not draw the hands back far enough, addressing the ball on the Tee with their hands in front of their chest, or at best right next to the back shoulder.
- To correct this, tell the player to keep looking forward, and gently press on their front elbow, moving it backwards until the shoulder touches the chin. Note that the player will often ignore your instructions to continue looking forward...and will turn their head to watch what you are doing. This will cease after a couple of reminders.
- Once the front shoulder is touching the chin, have the hitter(s) execute a swing and have them FREEZE at the end.
- On the follow thru, the back should end up near the chin (shoulder to shoulder). If it does not, the player is not following thru far enough with the swing, losing power.
- WATCH ITEM: Younger players often want to bring the chin forward to their shoulder, as opposed to bringing the shoulder back into the chin...which moves the head...as opposed to moving the hands and upper body into the correct position.

Having the Front Shoulder up by the Chin also helps keep the head from pulling out

Tee Ball Drills - Hitting

- ❑ **Short Soft Stride** (helping players understand how a long stride creates too much body movement)

Many players at this age take a long stride, often resulting in them hitting the Tee.

With a bat in your hand, face your players and extend the bat out straight towards them, at about the height you would like to hit a ball at. Without swinging (*hold you hands right where they are*), take a short stride, and ask the players to watch how much the bat drops. Reset, and now take an extra long stride. Ask them if the bat dropped farther than the first stride. Explain that it is harder to hit a baseball when their head and bat are both dropping. Have them work on small strides. Power will come with the use of the hips, as explained in Squish the Bug below.

- ❑ **Squish the Bug / Bat Behind the Back** (helping players understand the proper follow through motion)

Many players at this age fail to follow through properly. They might take a stride but use only the arms to hit the ball, failing to get the hips involved, resulting in the loss of power.

To demonstrate how they should end their swing, have them **place a bat in the small of their back**, holding on to it with the crook of their elbows. Without moving their feet, ask them to twist the upper body (to the left for righty hitter, to the right for lefty hitters). This movement will produce a natural bending at the knee of the back leg, resulting in the lifting of the heel on their back foot, with the front ball of the back foot grinding into the ground, as if they were **squishing a bug**. After doing this a few times, have them take a couple swings with a bat to reaffirm the desired motion, and then move them directly into a T hitting drill. Have them focus on the follow through motion that results in the hip rotation, ending with the squishing of a bug.

A moving head...makes it difficult to hit a moving ball...with a moving bat

Tee Ball Drills - Hitting

- ❑ **Stick into the fence** (encouraging players to swing with power, accuracy, and level!)
 - Set up the T about 10 feet in front of the back-stop.
 - Have the player face the back-stop, and using the soft Safe-T style balls, have the player attempt to stick the ball into the chain link.
 - This is where we teach players to make a Level Swing with Power, in stead of the BIG uppercut.
 - Players who maintain an uppercut swing as they progress up the levels, will struggle against faster pitching and trying to hit a ball moving on a flat trajectory.
 - Give each player 10 balls to hit. Should any of them stick into the fence...be sure to announce it to all other players at the other stations to create excitement.
 - If you are planning to hand out any awards (iron on stars for their hats, etc.) for exceptional performance, this is always a good one to acknowledge.

- ❑ **Run the Bases** (to teach players how to run “through the 1st Base Bag” and Turn Out into Foul Territory)
 - Set up Cones leading from 1st Base, out towards the Right Field foul pole, and then turning out into Foul territory about 15 feet beyond the bag.
Reference photos in the section titled “All Levels: Running the Bases”
 - Teach the players to run at full speed through the bag and turn out (following the cones)
 - After the players have this down, also set up cones to make a turn towards 2nd Base.
 - Have a Coach at 1st Base telling players to “run through the bag”, or to “go to 2nd”
 - End practices with the players running the bases. As they touch each base, have them YELL which base it is. FIRST...SECOND...THIRD...HOME. (many players do not know what the bases are called)

Tee Ball: Catching with “Pinkies & Thumbs”

A hard thing for young players to understand is how to position their glove when receiving a ball that is High / Low (above/below the waist).

Why: Most kids are first introduced to baseball by ground ball after groundball...so they are used to fielding with their palms up. This positions their THUMBS pointing to the SKY...or their PINKIES touching each other. As we transition them to receiving throws above the waist...they naturally continue to keep the palms up / thumbs up / pinkies together, which presents a SAFETY issue. Balls will easily by-pass a glove presented at face level with the palm facing up, presenting a potential injury.

There are TWO ways to help players transition, the first being a rhyme:

- “If the THROW is up High...**PINKY’S TO THE SKY**”
- “If the THROW is down Low...**THE THUMBS GOTTA GO**” (to the sky)

Most players will naturally field a low ball with palms up, but you will get the occasional player who will want to “smother” the ball by slapping the glove down on top of it. These players will need the “Thumbs to the Sky” discussion.

You can also simply explain that for any ball below the waist, the pinkies will touch. For anything above the waist, the thumbs will touch.

- For teaching very young players to catch pop-ups
 - Start them out with whiffle or tennis balls, as they are not as scared of these
 - By bringing a tennis racket to the field with you, you can also have a parent running a pop-up station. Not everyone can consistently hit a pop-up ball with a bat, but it is almost guaranteed with a racket.
 - Height and/or lateral movement of the pop-up should be based upon each player's skill level.
 - As you transition to more solid Safety balls, if there is still concern with a player getting hit in the face, have them wear a batting helmet with a face guard.



Up HIGH...PINKY’S to the SKY
Or...Thumbs together



Down LOW, the THUMB’S gotta GO
(thumbs to the sky),
Or...Pinkies together

Tee Ball: “The Alligator”

- Players at this age often field a groundball by placing the glove flat on the ground (palm facing up), which the ball will often skip over.
- Also, because hands are not yet strong, the glove often stays in a “V” shape, providing very little leather to stop the ball.



- To present as much glove as possible to the ball, instruct the players to have the palm of their glove face the ball and to gently press the finger tips of their glove into the ground.

Why: Gently pressing helps spread the glove out, and makes a wall for the ball.

- The throwing hand should be ready just above the glove, with the wrists almost touching each other (*like an open alligator mouth*).



- Elbows should not be fully extended, or pulled in against the body. A slight bend will help with the players range and cushion the catch.
- As ball enters glove...the throwing hand follows and captures the ball (*the alligator's mouth closes on its food*).
- Player now moves into a throwing position / motion. (ref next slide)



The hand above the glove also protects the face on a bad bounce

Tee Ball: “Nose-Toe-Throw”

- After capturing the ball, the player stands up and faces their target. (the **Nose** part of Nose-Toe-Throw...**BOTH noses are pointed at each other**)

Why: SAFETY. The player throwing the ball must be sure that the player they are throwing to is looking at them before release.

- A.) Bring both hands up to the hip (right hip for righties, left for lefties).

Why: Kids this age will often have their shoulders squared to the target, and will use just the arm to throw. Bringing the glove hand up to the hip helps aide the turning of the upper body...adding torque which provides power and accuracy.

- B.) Have the player step (with the foot on the glove side) so that their Toe is pointing at the target. (the **Toe** part of Nose-Toe-Throw)

- B.) While bring the throwing arm back, this completes turning of the upper body so the glove side shoulder is now “pointing” at the target.

- B.) Have the player point to the target with their glove.

Why: This helps with aiming, as well as with power when the player pulls the glove back into the body (Ref. C below)

- C.) **Throw**...the arm should come “over the top” at the 1:00 o’clock position for righties, and the 11:00 o’clock position for lefties.

Why: Helps keep the ball on-line to the target. Coming across the body “sprays” the ball depending upon the release point

- C.) During the throw, the glove should be pulled back into the body.

Why: This adds power by squaring the upper body to the target, introducing the stronger core muscles to the motion

- On the follow-thru, have the player pretend to “Slap Five” with the target, reducing a side-arm motion. (ref the **Slap Five** drill on the next slide).

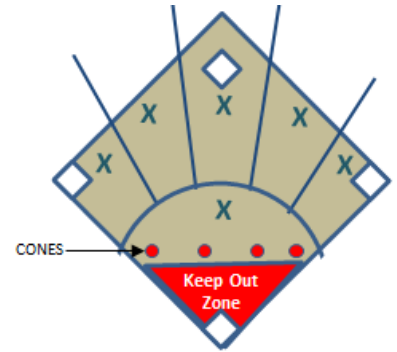
Why: This keeps the ball on line with the target, as well as improving velocity by ensuring the player follows through with the motion.



Tee Ball Drills – Fielding/Throwing

Fielding / Throwing:

- ❑ **Pizza Slices** (to counter the “piling on” process of all players running to the ball). Use a stick or the end of a bat to draw lines in the dirt, splitting the infield into sections. One section should be for a player at the mound, and then sections for the different infield positions. Players in the outfield can see the lines to understand their area. **Always place cones in front of any hitter, instructing “pitchers” to stay out of this area for safety reasons.**
- ❑ **“Hand Circles”** (to help players understand the importance of extending their arms while fielding a ball) While in a baseball ready position, have players tuck their elbows in against their body...and have them draw circles in the air with their hands. Now have them slightly extend their arms (but not fully extended) and have them draw circles again. Explain how the bigger circles created with the arms extended will give them bigger range of their glove while fielding a ball.
- ❑ **Slap five** (to teach proper arm direction, extension, and follow-through during a throw) Have a coach or parent on one knee, facing a player, with their arm extended and palm up (slap five position). The player (facing the coach), will be holding a small dish towel in their throwing hand, and on the coaches command of “throw” will attempt to “slap five” using the dish towel. Players that come around “side-arm” will not make good contact. Players coming over the top at the 1:00 (righty) or 11:00 (lefty) positions will make solid contact. As players progress and make consistent good contact, coaches should work on the players follow through motion, where the dish towel should end up slapping the player on the hip on the glove hand side. Coaches should also begin work the players stride during this drill, ensuring the foot is heading to the target.



Tee Ball Drills – Fielding/Throwing

Fielding / Throwing:

- ❑ **Bill of the Cap** (to help young players keep their head down while fielding a ground ball).
 - Have the player drop his/her glove, and take a ready position.
 - Have coach take a knee about 15 feet in front of the player and roll a ball to them, instructing the player to always “point” the bill of their cap at the ball, all the way until the ball is in their hands.
 - Once they get this down, have them put their glove back on and try it again.
 - As they progress, the coach can move back and roll the ball quicker, and possibly off to the side.

- ❑ **Loose Grip** (to help young players who have chosen to use the “iron grip”)
 - Players should treat the ball like an egg, holding it gently in their finger tips. However, younger players often hold the ball deep in the palm of their hand in a Kung Fu grip that often results in the throw being driven into the ground a few feet in front of them, as if spiking the ball after a touch down.
 - To help with this, place one of their middle fingers between the ball and the palm of their hand.
 - Have them begin with short distance and gentle throws (it will feel awkward), and work their way up in both distance and velocity.
 - Once the control is there, have them remove their finger from under the ball and have them throw.

- ❑ **Throw to the Bucket at 1st Base** (to help young players with throwing accuracy)
 - Set up a 5 gallon pail at first base, and split your players up into 3 groups, placing one group at 2nd Base, one at Short Stop, and one at 3rd Base. Assign a parent to each “team” to track the score.
 - Have each “team” throw 2 throws each to the bucket, with one point for every ball that go into the bucket. After 2 throws each, change positions and begin again. Total points for all 3 stations wins.

Tee Ball Drills – Fielding/Throwing

Fielding / Throwing:

❑ Throw to the Player at 1st Base (to help young players understand how to cover 1st Base).

- This is a Station Drill, which should only have 3-4 players working it at one time. Unlike the Bucket drill on the last page, where numerous players can throw from all the positions at the same time, this drill now has a player at 1st Base so there can be only one throw at a time. If you place your whole team at this drill...you will lose their attention quickly as they will, get bored.
- Place players at 1st, 2nd, Short Stop and 3rd base. If there are only 3 players in a group, eliminate 3rd.
- Have coach hit (or roll) a ball to the player at each position. This player throws to 1st Base. Note that most throws from 3rd and Short Stop will fall very short...this is normal. If they fall short, have the player covering 1st Base to run out and pick it up, and run back to 1st Base to finish the play. Be sure to hit or roll a ball to the player covering 1st Base, as this will happen often during a T-Ball game.
 - **SAFETY Tip:** This is where we begin to teach players covering 1st Base to NOT run across the bag and into foul territory, as this create the opportunity for a collision with the runner. Teach the player covering 1st Base to run at the bag, touch the inside of the bag (the side facing 2nd Base) with their foot, and then turn back into fair territory (running out toward Right Field)
- After every player makes 2 throws, rotate them (1st to 3rd, 3rd to SS, SS to 2nd, 2nd to 1st) and continue.

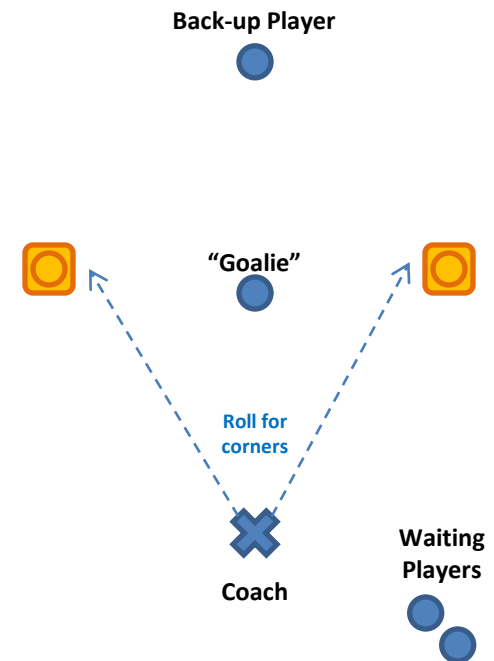
❑ Around the Horn (to help young players understand how to cover 2nd)

- It is never too early to begin teaching throws to 2nd base, followed by a throw to 1st base.
- Set players at Short Stop, 2nd and 1st base, and have a coach hit (or roll) a ball to the Short stop.
- The Short Stop throws to the player now covering 2nd base, who in turn throws to 1st base.
- Hit or roll a ball to the player in the 2nd base position, who throws to the Short stop covering the bag.
- No need to hit a ball to the 1st baseman in this drill. This play is most often too advanced for T-Ball.
- There will be many dropped balls! Have the players finish the play so they get used to the motion.

Tee Ball Drills – Fielding/Throwing

❑ **Soccer Goalie:** Set up 2 cones about 15 feet apart, and place one player centered between the cones. With a coach on a knee about 15 feet in front of the player, roll the ball in an attempt to “score” a goal on the player. As players begin to stop balls aimed at them, begin rolling the ball deeper into the corners of the “goal”, making the players move from side to side. For advanced players...set the cones farther apart. This is where we work the Baseball Ready position, and lateral movement.

- Tip: You will begin to see players “anticipate” where the ball is going to go, and begin to move before you roll the ball, which we want to discourage (i.e., the player should wait the ball to come off the bat before making the first move). To discourage, look at one corner, and when they move that way, roll it into the other corner.
- Begin to teach players about Backing Up the play: Take one of the players waiting for their turn in the goal, and set them up about 15 feet behind the “goalie”. Have them move in the same direction as the rolling ball, backing up the player making the stop.
- Competition: Coach against Player – Each player gets 5 rolls. If they stop the ball, they get a point, if the coach scores a goal



This works: Baseball Ready Position, Lateral movement, Backing up the play

Farm and Minors



Baseball Basics Field Sheet: Farm & Minors

Hitting

- Eyes focus on top of ball
- Keep the **head still**
- **Front shoulder** tucked into chin
- Keeps hands back
- **Loose grip** w/ fingers
- Balanced on feet
- **Short Soft Stride**
- **Level swing**, hands move thru the ball
- **Back shoulder** comes forward to meet the chin
- **Squish the Bug**

Fielding

- Shoulders and toes **squared to hitter**
- Feet slightly wider than shoulders
- **Weight slightly forward**, on front balls of the feet
- Knees slightly bent
- **Butt DOWN**
- **Head UP**
- Still use the “**Alligator**” to field a ground ball
- Point **Bill of the Cap** at the ball all the way to the glove

Throwing

- Make sure the person being thrown to is looking (**NOSE**)
- Step towards your target (**TOE**)
- Point at your target with your glove
- Arm comes over the top @ 1:00 or 11:00 o'clock. (**THROW**)
- Hand should end up **near the opposite hip**.

Hitting Drills

- Using a Tee or Soft toss: Stick it in the fence *using safety balls only* (**Power**)
- Bat Behind Back / a.k.a. Squish the Bug (**Power**)
- Double T (**Contact**)
- Goal Keeper (**Contact**)
- Soft Toss (**Contact**)
- Walk the Line (**Striding**)
- Happy Gilmore (**Striding**)

Fielding Drills

- Baseball Ready Position
- The “Alligator”
- “Soccer Goalie”
- Pizza Slices
- “Pinkies to the sky if the ball is up high”
- Pop-ups
- 3 Player Line Drill
- Passed Ball drill (catcher)
- Ball Blocker (catcher)

Throwing Drills

- Nose-Toe-Throw
- Slap 5
- Loose Grip
- Throw to the Bucket
- Throw to First
- Around the Horn
- 3 Player Line drill
- The QUAD
- Dish, Dart, Throw
- Balance Drill (pitchers)

This is a quick reference guide you can take to the field with you

Farm & Minors: Cut Off

- A.) Line up between the person throwing the ball, and the target you will be throwing to.

Why: SPEED. It is the shortest distance to your target, and if you line up prior to the throw (while the fielder is chasing the ball down)...you will not need to take the time to locate your target after catching the ball.

Note: As the play is developing, the coach should be instructing the cut-off person where to be positioning themselves, with instructions of Cut-2, Cut-3 or Cut-Home. There will never be a command to Cut-1, as this would place the incoming ball behind the runner, allowing them to advance.

When giving the cut instruction, always try to keep the ball in front of the lead runner to halt advancement.

- A.) Announce yourself as the cut-off person.

Why: Under the pressure of the game, after a fielder picks up the ball and turns to look towards the infield...they will see all of their teammates staring at them...all looking the same...which creates confusion and loss of time.

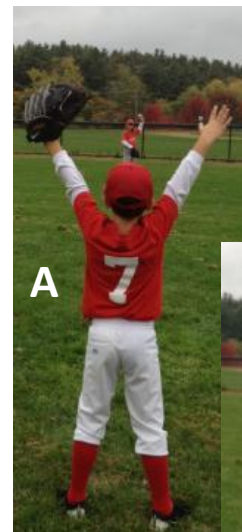
By raising the arms in a “touchdown” position, and yelling “Cut-Off” ...the fielder with the ball will know exactly who they are to throw to.

- B.) Turn to your power position as the person with the ball begins the wind up to throw.

Why: Receiving the throw on the glove side allows a young player to “instinctively” take just one step and throw (with speed and power). Young players who receive a throw on the side of the body opposite the glove, instinctively continue to turn in that direction, “spinning around” so that the throwing arm must come to a complete stop at the end of the spin. This motion completely drains all energy the cut-off player should have been developing for the throw to the target. The player must now “re-charge” that energy (normally by taking several steps) which takes time and is never truly as strong as if they had taken the throw on the glove side.

- C.) Take one step and throw to your target.

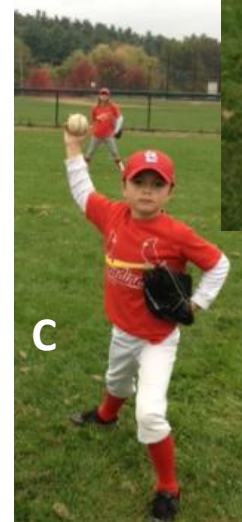
Why: SPEED. One step to throw will produce as much power as several steps and a throw... and is much quicker.



A



B



C

During warm-ups, have 3 players throwing in a line, working the cut-off process

Farm & Minors: Tag Plays

- A.) Body positioning at 2nd Base, taking throw from catcher:

- Inside of 2nd Base, between the bag and the mound.

Why: This keeps the baseman out of the path of the runner coming (and sliding) from 1st base, and allows for the baseman to see both the throw from the catcher as well as the runner.

The shortstop takes the throw, as they are moving towards both the bag and the runner, so eye contact can be maintained. As the 2nd baseman must turn their back to the runner to head towards 2nd base, they are used to take up a position about 15 feet behind the bag, backing up the throw.

- A.) Glove positioning at 2nd Base, taking throw from catcher:

- In the path of the runner coming from 1st base, just inside the bag (to the 1st base side of the bag), and low to the ground.

Why: Provides the catcher a target that (hopefully) will place the ball where the runner will be sliding, offering a quick tag.

- B.) The baseman should drop the glove on the ground

Why: Prevents the runner from sliding under the tag. (nobody ever slides “in mid-air”)

- C.) Body and Glove positioning at 3rd Base:

- Feet straddling the bag, glove just inside the bag ready to drop to the ground (ref Photo D).

Why: From this position, the baseman can see the runner coming at him while taking a throw from the field, and by turning his head slightly to the left can take a throw from left field, and turning the head slightly to the right, can take a throw from the catcher.

If taking a throw at 3rd from the catcher, the glove positioning would be lower than shown in Photo C, providing the catcher with a target that will place the ball where the runner will be sliding.



Proper positioning protects the baseman from a sliding runner, while still getting the glove down

Farm & Minors: Sliding into a Base

- A.) The runner should always be looking at the base they are running towards...not looking where the ball is.

Why: Runners slow down when they are not looking where they are going (self-preservation). Players should be 100% committed to running as fast as they can...not worrying what the ball is doing.

- B.) The player should begin dropping to the ground “about a body’s length” away from the bag.

Why: If the player drops too early...and they do not reach the bag. Too late, and it could result in an injury to the ankle or knee should the bag not give way or if they jam their foot into the baseman.

- B.) The player should tuck the bottom leg under the body (the leg of the hip the player intends to slide on)

Why: If the player keeps the leg they intend to slide on in a straight position, this results in more of a “crash landing on the hip or the butt” as opposed to a smooth slide.

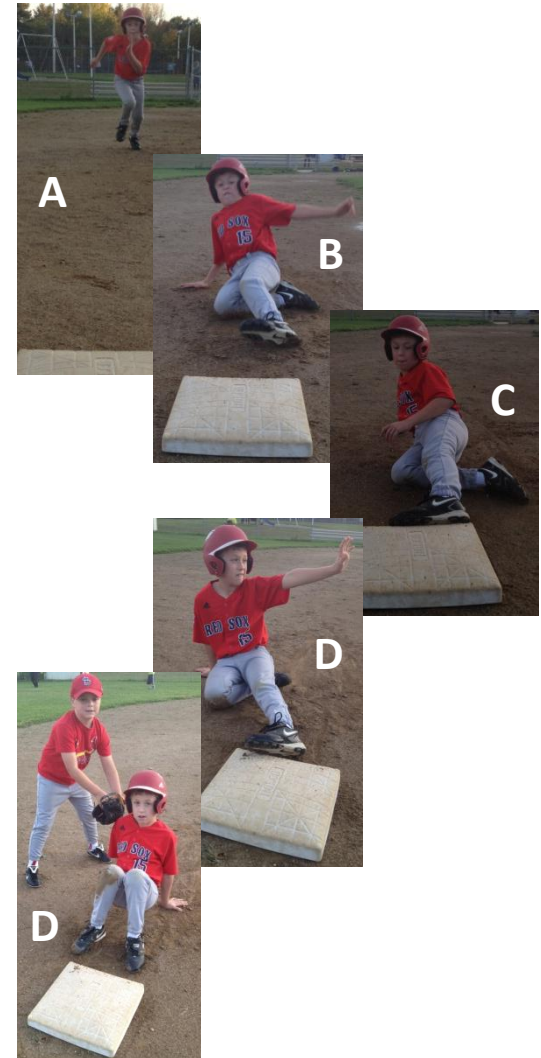
- C.) For advanced players, have them try sliding to the side of the bag which is farthest from where the ball is arriving from.

Why: This makes it more difficult for the fielder, offering the opportunity for a missed tag.

- D.) If the ball is at the base the runner slid into, they should request a time out from the umpire before trying to get up.

Why: Should the player break contact with the base while the ball is still in play, a fielder could tag them out.

Conversely: Fielders should be coached to always hold the ball on a runner as they get up from a slide, unless time has been called.



Practice sliding on grass with no shoes. Wearing just socks helps kids transition to the ground easier

Farm and Minors: Hitting

- **A.) Relax** (if the pitcher is not on the rubber, the batter should relax, watching the pitcher)

Why: If Kids stand in the load position the entire time they are in the batters box, they are too tense (both physically and mentally) which does not promote a fluid swing....and just burns a lot of energy.

Long durations at the load position also does not promote a good weight shift as the pitch is delivered.

Ideally, we like players to step out of the box between pitches to “reset”, but they do not always do this.

- **B.) Ready** (as the pitcher takes the rubber...move the hands to eye level, bend the knees slightly, bring the head down slightly, and slight twist of the upper body, loose grip on the bat):

Why: This begins the connection between the Hands and the Eyes...the Eyes and the Ball...which leading to a connection between the Hands and the Ball...and ultimately when the bat follows the Hands...contact.

Knees slightly bent helps in two ways, with vertical adjustment to ball location and to see the ball better.

Note the back elbow is up, but does not get above shoulder height, and appears to be relaxed (not forced to a high position)

Young players often stand tall, and will drop the hands to about waist level during the swing which separates the hands and eyes.

In photo D to the right, you can draw a straight line between the players eyes, hands and the bat during the swing.

Head slightly down brings the eyes in closer to the strike zone to better see the ball.

A loose grip promotes a quick swing.

A slight twist of the upper body (show the pitcher our number) brings the stronger core muscles into play (torque)

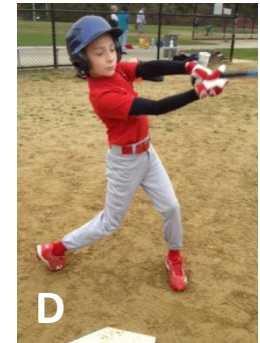
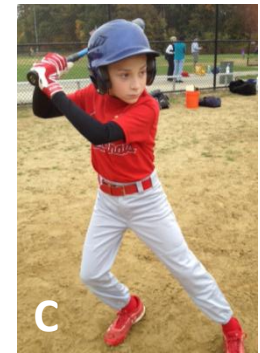
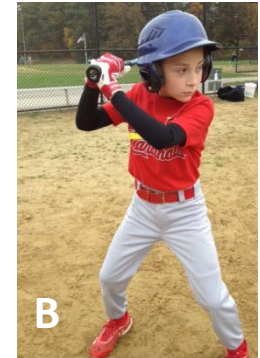
- **C.) Load** (as the pitcher comes to the set position, hands move straight back, front shoulder tucks under the chin, weight shifts to back leg):

Why: Just like throwing a ball...to gather energy...you must first move backwards before moving forward.

- **D.) Explode** (Short-Soft-Stride, Weight shifts to front leg, Back shoulder comes forward to the chin, Snap the hips open and “show the pitcher the team name on the jersey...and Squish the bug with your back foot)

Why: The body and swing must go together, and the weight shift aides in this. Weight shift is the process of taking your weight from the balanced stance, gathering energy as you shift the weight to the back leg, and then bringing it forward at to meet the ball.

A Short-Soft-Stride keeps the head on the same plane to help with ball tracking, and allows the hitter to “sit on a pitch” longer to help with hitting pitches of varying speeds. If the hitter uses the entire body in the swing, the natural motion of the back foot will be to “Squish the bug”



There is no one “perfect” stance, and no two hitters are identical. The player should be comfortable.

Minors: Bunting

- C.) Move up in the box, Keep the bat out in front of the plate, Keep the barrel of the bat above the hands, Simply pivot (do not square around).

Why: Moving up in the box gets the bat out in front of the plate, which provides much more fair territory to play with.

- C.) Keep the barrel of the bat above the hands, Bend the knees.

Why: This helps promote getting the bat on top of the ball, placing it on the ground as opposed to producing a soft pop-up.

- Having the barrel above the hands also gets it closer to the eyes...and if the eyes are tracking the ball properly...this places the barrel of the bat on the ball.
- The player should adjust to the height of the pitch by bending the knees...not by moving the hands and the barrel of the bat.
 - Bending of the knees helps to get the eyes closer to the strike zone, to track the ball.
 - Bending of the knees to adjust to the height of a pitch, as opposed to moving the hands, helps in identifying when the batter should pull the bat out of the bunt position when the pitch is not in the strike zone.
 - If the player has to stand up straight to get to a pitch...pull the bat away.
 - If the player has to bend the knees so far that the back knee is almost on the ground, pull the bat away.
 - Moving the hands only...separates them from the eyes tracking the ball...making contact more difficult.

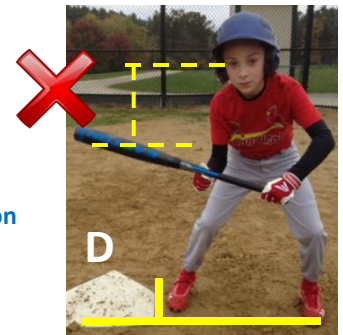
- D.) Do not “square to bunt”, simply pivot on the feet

Why:

1. SAFETY – Squaring exposes the upper body to a wild pitch. Players in this position often “freeze”, not making a quick decision of which way to move. In this position, the player does not have the shoulder or arm in place to protect the upper body.
2. Squaring presents the opportunity to step on the plate during execution, which could be registered as an out.
3. Squaring takes time, so the fielders get an earlier indication that a bunt is being executed.
4. Squaring involves a lot of body movement which often moves the head. Just as during a swing, we want the head to have stability during the execution of a bunt.

- D.) Do not drop the barrel of the bat too far below the eyes

Why: Separation of the eyes from the barrel of the bat make it difficult to make contact with the ball. If the player tracks the ball with the eyes (using the knees to range up and down), and the barrel is at the same height as the eyes, there is a higher probability of making contact.



Start the bat at the highest point in the strike zone, and only move down for a pitch

Farm & Minors: Catching

- A.) The player should not:

- Be sitting Butt LOW on the heels of the feet.

Why: Poor balance, Restricts vertical and lateral movement to block a wild pitch

- Expose their throwing hand.

Why: Safety concern with regards to a pitch, foul ball, or bat connecting with the fingers, especially if the hand is resting on the shin pads so that there is no give when the hand/fingers are struck

- Keep the glove tucked up close to the face.

Why: Restricts lateral and vertical movement of the arm to catch the ball, and because the glove is so close to the face, often encourages the player to close their eyes as the ball approaches.

- B.) The player should:

- Be balanced, with Butt UP (*thighs parallel to ground*), with weight up on the front balls of the feet.

- Protect the throwing hand from foul balls and swinging bats, by placing it behind the leg or the bottom of the foot.

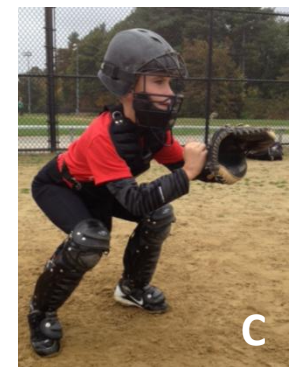
Check that the catcher does not shift the hand too far behind, as a low pitch between the legs may hit the hand

- Keep the glove extended out in front.

- C.) *Minors*: When runners are on base with a threat to steal, the catcher should come up into a *Secondary Position*, with the Butt much higher and the Throwing hand behind the glove (*making a fist*).

Why: This places the catcher in a position to get off a throw much faster. Making a fist keeps fingers from being exposed.

Check for catchers pulling the hand out too early in anticipation of a steal. The hand is much closer to the bat in this position.



Balance is critical. Young players will tip over backwards while catching a ball...when on the heels

Minors: Catching – Passed ball

A.) Blocking a ball, the player should drop to the knees, placing the glove between the legs. Upper body should lean forward with head down and chin tucked into the chest protector. Elbows should be brought in close to the body, which will “cup” the shoulders forward.

Why: We want to keep the ball in front of the catcher. Should the ball bounce up, players often lean back and turn their head, which allows the ball to either bounce off the catcher and get by...or worse...hit the catcher in an unprotected area around the neck. By leaning forward and cupping the shoulders, the ball should drop straight down or slightly forward. Tucking the chin into the chest pad protects the catchers neck area.

B.) Retrieving a passed ball at the back-stop, players should take a direct route to the ball...not a wide turn around the umpire.

Why: SPEED. Players often take their first step towards the pitcher, placing momentum in the wrong direction, and often leads to a wide turn around the umpire (ref yellow arrow below). Players need to practice making their first move in an Upwards and Backwards motion...rolling off of the umpire to gain balance.

C.) Place the foot on their throwing hand side to the back-stop, preparing to throw.

Why: SPEED AND POWER. Placing the glove side foot against the back-stop leads to the player picking up the ball with the glove first (wasting time), and makes them turn around to throw, placing the arm in a weak position. Placing the throwing hand foot against the stop leads to the bare hand picking up the ball, and places the arm and body in a power position to throw quickly.



Playing a Passed Ball is all about SPEED, getting to it and being ready to throw it

Minors: Catching

- A.) Positioning: Body and Glove

- Body far enough back so the bat will not hit any part of the catcher.

Especially important for catchers who extend their glove hand and exposed wrist forward as the ball approaches.

- Body & Glove: Center plate, Inside, Outside.

If your pitcher is consistently missing in or out, have the catcher help them out by shifting position out or in. Once the pitcher begins to hit the target, return to center plate

- Glove.

If your pitcher is consistently missing high or low, have the catcher drop or raise the glove target positioning.

Note the glove positioning in [Photo A](#)...bringing the ball across the belt...and...[take a look at the form of the batter!](#)



- B.) Force play at the plate:

- Glove hand and same side foot extended towards the ball, rear foot just making contact with the plate

Why: Just like a 1st Baseman, we want the glove hand to be able to extend as far as it can towards the ball. Leaving most of the plate uncovered avoids injury from sliding runners. For SAFETY, one exception is if a throw is coming down the 3rd base line, in which case a Right Handed player should maintain contact with the left foot to stay out of the base path.

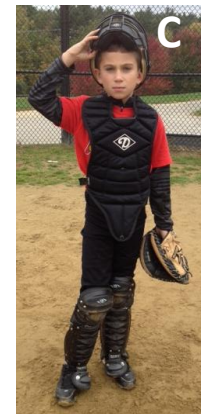


- C.) Energy Management: Temperature, Arm, Legs

•Temperature: The catcher is covered with equipment, including a helmet and padding which is often black and absorbing heat on hot days. When there is a break in the action, have them step away from any batter and lift the mask to vent heat. Have a water bottle ready to hydrate (even in the middle of an inning). When on the bench, have a cool wet towel to wrap around their neck or place over the head.

•Arm: The catcher make almost as many throws as a pitcher. If working multiple innings in one of the positions, avoid using a player as both a catcher and a pitcher in the same game.

•Legs: If time is called, have the catcher stand up and shake the legs. Too many young players stay in the crouch when they do not need to be in that position.



Catchers have the most physically demanding job, and we need to manage their condition

Minors: Pitching

- A.) Wind Up Set Position: Shoulders squared to plate, Heels on rubber.

Why: Squaring to the plate sets up body rotation which builds energy prior to the throw. Heels on the rubber allows for easier transition into the wind up.

- B.) Side step with glove side foot to begin hip rotation and repositioning the pivot foot.

Why: Hip rotation provides power. Also assists the in transition of the pivot foot from being on the rubber, to being in front of the rubber. (Note the heel of the foot on the rubber beginning to slide out). To keep the head over the pivot foot, the side step should be small!...just enough to get the hip rotation going.

- C.) BALANCE: Drive foot in front of & parallel to the rubber, Landing leg knee up high with upper leg parallel to ground, Hands away from body, Front shoulder pointing to the target

Why: Pivot foot should now be parallel to the rubber, or full hip rotation will not be achieved (loss of power), and pitch location will favor the left side of the plate (loss of control).

The foot planted against the rubber aides power.

The Landing Leg is high, influencing a strong drive to the plate which unloads the hips and creates power. Pitchers that do not get the knee of the Landing Leg up high, will often have the foot contact the ground early in the delivery, which often results in an early release and a high pitch crossing the plate.

Hands are away from body aiding in balance. The pitcher should keep the head in line with the pivot foot, and bringing the hands in too close to the body can introduce a backwards lean in the upper body.

The front shoulder should be pointing towards the target, which should be a natural result of the hip rotation if done correctly. If the shoulder remains "open" (pointing somewhere up the 1st base line for a right handed pitcher), loss of power and accuracy will result, as the player uses most just the arm to make the delivery.

The player should hold this position for a second, beginning the delivery with balance and stability.



During the entire pitch process...the eyes never break lock with the catchers glove

Minors: Pitching

- D.) Arm Action: Down, Backwards and then Up and Big Leg Drive.

Why: Moving from the balance position to power position, if the player removes the ball from the glove by simply pulling the arm straight back, both the shoulder and the elbow will lock before the arm can be fully extended, and loss of power will occur. The player should remove the ball from the glove in a downward angle and then swing backwards up, so that when the arm is fully extended backwards, the hand is on top of the ball. “Arm action” is created as the player moves to the power position as the hips unload, which creates a whipping motion in the arm as it begins to lag behind the body, and the hand moves from the top of the ball to behind the ball.

The elbow of the throwing arm should not be below the shoulder, creating a L shape which helps to generate power and to keep the ball low. The glove arm should start out pointing at the target, and during the throw, should be pulled back into the body (reference Photo C on the page in the T-Ball section titled Drill: “Nose-Toe-Throw”) which helps in squaring the upper body to the plate which generates power.

The landing foot should “drive” out towards the plate, helping to begin unloading the hips (rotation/power towards the plate), making contact with the ground on a straight line from the rubber to the plate. Both feet should be on the ground when the pitcher releases the ball. As mentioned on the last slide, without a strong leg drive, the foot may contact the ground early in the delivery, which often results in an early release and a high pitch crossing the plate.



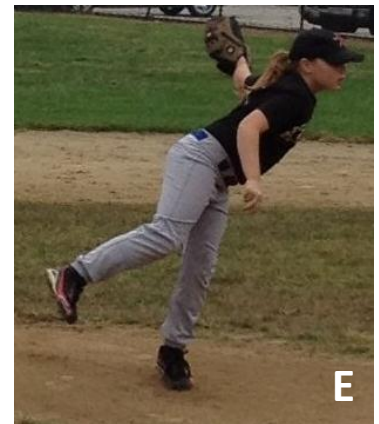
- E.) Follow through...For power and to transition into a fielder.

Why: SAFETY. The pitcher is the closest player to the hitter, and the only one who is not in a good fielding position as the pitch is on the way to the plate. A strong follow through helps the pitcher square up to the plate, and (as seen in this photo) the glove hand should begin to transition from being pulled back into the body...to moving around and to in front of the pitcher.

The pivot leg should transition from the rubber, to the side of the pitcher as they square up. If a good leg drive produces power from the lower body, the pivot leg should “step over the bucket”.

This is a drill that can be offered to new pitchers to help with squaring up to the hitter.

Have the player pitch a ball and then square them up to the plate to get a reference as to where their feet will be. Place a 5 gallon bucket about halfway between the leg (throwing hand side) and the rubber. As the pitcher throws the next ball, they should bring the leg up and over the bucket, landing their foot in front of it. Awkward at first, the player quickly forgets about the bucket and begins to step over it, squaring up to the plate.



Balance, Hip Rotation, Arm Action and Leg Drive all contribute to Power and Accuracy

Farm / Minors Drills – Throwing

- ❑ **3 Player Line Drill** (to help young players begin to understand the cut-off throw).
 - As opposed to two players playing catch, this is my player warm up prior to every practice or game.
 - Evenly space 3 players apart (distance depends upon skill level) in a straight line, with the player at one end holding the ball. The player with the ball is the “outfielder”, with the player at the far end being the “catcher”. The player in the middle is the cut-off.
 - Teach the player in the middle to “announce” themselves as the cut-off player by raising their arms (as if a ref indicating a Touch Down in football), and YELLING “Cut-Off”.
 - The player with the ball throws to the cut-off, who in turn throws to the player at the other end.
 - The player with the ball (the “catcher”) now becomes the outfielder and we reverse the direction.
 - Rotate players in and out of the middle.

- ❑ As players become accurate with throws, begin to teach more advance skills to improve on speed.
 - After “announcing himself” the player in the middle should turn his body so that one shoulder is facing the outfielder, and the other shoulder facing the catcher. The Glove side shoulder should always be facing the catcher.
 - Teach the outfielders that as they are looking at the cut-off player with the arms raised...to always place the ball on the GLOVE side of that player. This will help position the ball as the cut-off player turns his body as described above.
 - The goal here is to limit the amount of time the player in the middle has the ball. Every second the ball is delayed getting back to the infield...is 2 to 3 strides for the runner.

Farm / Minors Drills – Throwing

- ❑ **Swat the Mosquito** (to help young players understand how to “turn into their POWER”)
 - Players in the middle of the 3 Player Line Drill described on the previous page, have a bad habit of catching the ball with their glove coming across their body, which leads to a natural continuance of the turn in that direction, with the player leading the turn with the elbow of the throwing arm.
 - Leading with the throwing arm eliminates **all** the power they were beginning to generate as they moved to catch the ball.
 - As they complete the turn and are facing their intended target...they must come to a **complete stop**.
 - They will then need to take several steps (most often hops) towards the target in order to build up energy again...and this takes a lot of time to do.
 - Teach the player to *Swat the Mosquito* with their glove after they catch the ball.
 - After making the catch and removing the ball from the glove, have them swing their glove quickly out to the side (for right handed players, the glove will fly past their Left ear) as if swatting a mosquito with it. This will get the body turning in the proper direction so that they will not need to come to a complete stop, and will create all the energy for a throw, without the need for taking additional steps.

Farm / Minors Drills – Throwing

- ❑ **The QUAD** (to help players understand how to best receive a throw at 2nd, getting ready to throw to 1st base)
 - Create a square, with 4 players at the corners.
 - The players will be throwing a ball clock-wise from corner to corner.
 - Teach the players to present their gloves as targets...across their body, up by the opposite shoulder.
 - Teach them that this will speed up the transfer of the ball to the throwing hand, as well as help with speed as the throwing hand will be in a position to immediately begin movement to 1st base.
 - If the ball is caught on the glove side of the body, the throwing hand must take the time to come back into a throwing position.
 - Teach the players throwing the ball to aim to the OUTSIDE of the square when throwing to a player. This will help the player receiving the ball to make the transfer and throw.
 - This drill can either be a station drill, or set up as a competition between multiple 4 Player teams.
 - Competition #1: See who can get the most CLEAN throws and transfers in a row without a drop.
 - Competition #2: See who can make it around the square 4 times first
 - NOTES:
 - The size of the square will depend upon skill level.
 - The goal is accuracy...Accuracy = Speed. It is faster to make easy accurate throws as opposed to fast ones that sail past the receiver that they must now chase down.

Farm / Minors Drills – Throwing

2nd Base



2nd Baseman's Position



Throw



Dart



Dish

1st Base



- **Dish - Dart - Throw** (to help players understand the correct power to use in making a throw to a base)
 - Set up 3 cones, 1 at the 2nd baseman's position, and the other 2 evenly spaced towards 1st base.
 - Begin with a player at the cone closest to 1st base, and hit or roll a ball to them.
 - Teach the player to field the ball, and without standing up, to simply flip (*Dish*) the ball from the ground...to the player covering 1st base.
 - At the younger Farm ages, this will be one of the toughest things for a player to grasp...as they have always stood up straight to throw a ball. Teach them to aim at the knees of the player catching the ball. (you will see many balls sail over heads until they grasp the mechanics).
 - Move the player to the middle cone, and hit a ball to them. At this distance, the player will stand up, but will not take a full wind up to throw. The throw will start from the ear, as if tossing a Dart.
 - If a stronger player takes full wind up from this close range, the receiver is most likely ducking for cover.
 - Move the player to the normal 2nd base position, and hit a ball to them. From here, they can take the normal wind up.
- NOTES:
 - Once you take the cones away, you will find kids wanting to Dish the ball from the second base position. It will take time for them to calibrate when to Dish, Dart, or Throw.
 - The goal again is accuracy...Accuracy = Speed. It is faster to make easy accurate throws as opposed to fast ones that sail past the receiver that they must now chase down.

Farm / Minors Drills – Hitting

☐ Soft Toss (to help players work their mechanics with a moving ball)

- Using a portable rubber plate, or drawing one in the dirt, establish a plate and batters boxes about 10 feet in front of the Backstop...with the plate and batters boxes facing the Backstop.
- Have a player step into the batter box, facing the backstop (tell them the back stop is center field).
- A coach with a bucket of balls will set up just outside of the batters box not being used by the player.
- While on one knee, the coach will begin to softly toss (underhand) balls to the hitter.
 - The balls should be tossed out in FRONT of the hitter (not directly at them) so that we teach them to hit the ball out in front of the plate.
 - The ball should be tossed up between the belt and the letters, so that we teach to hit balls in the strike zone.
- If you have soft Safety balls used in T-Ball, use these as they will stick into the fencing on a good hit.
- For advanced players, you can vary the speed and location of where you toss the ball, making them adjust to these variables, improving hand-eye coordination.

☐ Goal Keeper (to help players work contact vs. power)

- You will need a Small hitting net, a Lacrosse or Street hockey goal, or tape this drill.
- Set up the goal directly in front of the back stop, or with tape, make a large square on the backstop.
- With a coach on one knee about 20 feet in front of the hitter, begin to toss balls towards the goal.
- The object of this drill is for the hitter to “block” the ball with the bat, softly hitting the ball directly back to the coach. The batter should **NOT** take a full swing in this drill.
- Once they are making constant contact, step back and let them take full swings.

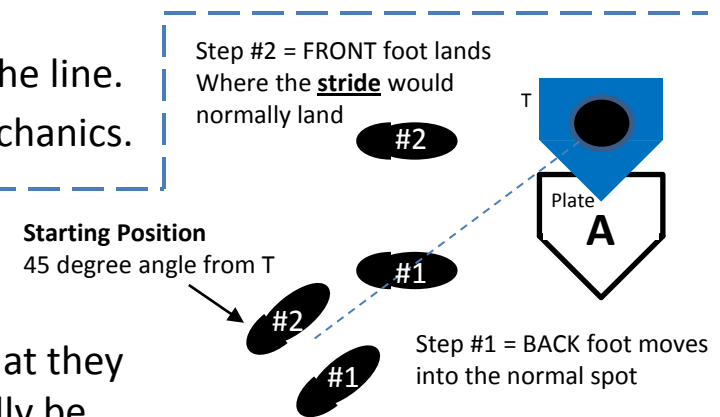
Farm / Minors Drills – Hitting

□ Walk the Line (to help players work taking a stride)

- **SAFETY:** If multiple players are doing this drill at the same, ensure there is adequate spacing between players, as they will be swinging bats. Highly recommended that all players performing this drill wear helmets while doing so.
- Set up players on either the 1st or 3rd base line...spaced safely apart.
- Have them take a swing, which will include taking a short stride with the front foot.
- After completing the swing, they should pull the BACK foot up to the front foot ready to swing again.
- Execute another swing, and recover the back foot.
- If performed correctly, the players should begin to walk up the line.
- Also assess Squishing the Bug and Shoulder-to-Shoulder mechanics.

□ Happy Gilmore (to help young players get the hips into a swing)

- Set up a T station, hitting into the backstop.
- Have the player set up at a 45 degree angle from the T, so that they are one step away from where their back foot would normally be.
- Have them take one step with the back foot, placing it where the back foot would normally be.
- As the front foot is brought into play, it will be in the form of a stride getting ready to hit the ball.
 - The FRONT foot should NOT touch the ground until it is being placed down as part of the swing
- The natural twisting of the body to get into the normal hitting position will drive the use of the hips as part of the swing. Ensure the player exaggerates the leg lift on the striding leg (Knee up high)



Minors Drills – Catchers

❑ Ball Blocker (to help players work blocking balls that are thrown in the dirt)

- Mask Required – Use Tennis balls.
- Set up a player in a normal catching stance, with a coach directly in front of them, about ten feet away, on one knee.
- The coach should toss balls at the dirt, trying to get them through the players legs, or bouncing them off the ground in front of the player.
- Players work on how to block balls in the dirt, placing the glove between the legs, and “cupping” their shoulders forward over the plate.
- For advanced players, the coach can begin to move the tosses "off the plate" to encourage lateral movement to make the block. The need for the mask is to provide the distraction of the cage which new catchers can struggle with.

❑ Track & Catch (to help players work on tracking balls with their glove hand)

- No Glove - Mask Required – Use Tennis balls
- Set up a player in a normal catching stance, with a coach directly in front of them, about ten feet away, on one knee.
- The coach should toss balls around the strike zone (not bouncing them like the Ball Blocker drill).
- Have the player catch the ball, teaching them "soft hands" in receiving the pitch and using the fingers (glove webbing) as opposed to the palm of their hand.
 - The ball will often bounce out if caught in the palm

Minors Drills – Catchers

- ❑ **Passed Ball** (to help players work on speed getting to a ball that has gone by them)
 - Mask Required, other equipment is optional.
 - Set up a player in a normal catching stance at the plate, with a coach directly behind them as if in a plate umpire position, with a ball in hand.
 - The coach will announce “passed ball” and toss the ball behind them to the back stop.
 - Players will work on their 1st body movement being Up and Backwards.
 - Normal reaction for players this age is to take their 1st step FORWARD, stopping, and then running off to the side, going well around the umpire. This takes too much time.
 - Teach the player to make the first movement up and back, using the umpire (the coach during this drill) as leverage to gain their balance, and then making a straight line back to the ball.
 - For instruction on how the catcher should approach the ball at the Backstop to achieve maximum power in a throw to 2nd, please refer to the slide titled **Minors: Catching – Passed ball**

Minors Drills – Pitchers

- ❑ **Balance** (to help players work their balance mechanics. No ball is used in this drill)
 - Have pitchers work on keeping their FRONT Knee up high, with the thigh parallel to ground (should be able to hold a glass of water on it)
 - While doing this, the player should also be able to "Look at their watch" on their throwing arm, promoting proper arm rotation as they bring the ball back to begin to drive (back of the hand should be pointing to the sky).
 - Secondary Goal: If the player achieves balance and arm rotation properly, have them also begin to add a slight turn of the upper body (show the batter their jersey number) which now adds power by bringing the Core muscles into play.
 - The player finishes with good leg drive, ending up square to the batter in a fielding position.

- ❑ **Glove Point & Pull** (to help players work on power through the use of their Core Muscles)
 - Players are shown how to extend their glove hand during the wind up so that it is pointing at the target
 - As the pitch is being delivered, work with the player to understand how the glove should be pulled back (up under the arm pit), generating power from the core muscle group as the upper body is pulled around, as opposed to using just arm strength.
 - As simple as it sounds...this is a very hard mechanic for young players to grasp.