

## Quality Coaching

**Coaching Tee Ball and Coach Pitch  
Making it Fun for You and the Kids**



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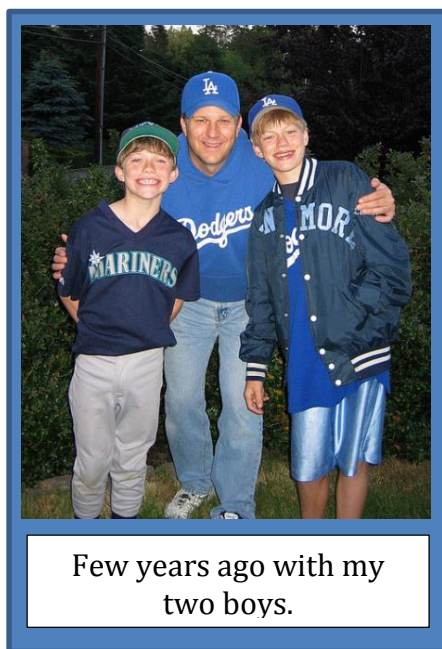
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## About the Author

Don Edlin is the founder of the website Quality Coaching – Baseball ([QCBaseball.com](http://QCBaseball.com)) which has been publishing baseball focused instruction and coaching information since 2000. Don has over 20 years of coaching experience at the youth level for multiple sports and has coached baseball from tee ball through high school. As a believer in positive coaching, this manual is an attempt to get coaches started in the right direction and learn from his experience. Please check out [QCBaseball.com](http://QCBaseball.com) for more coaching and instruction information. First published in 2004 this manual has been updated and republished in 2014.



My kids have grown up since this manual was first published. My older son (left) has graduated high school and my younger son (right) is currently a junior. They've always enjoyed being involved in multiple sports.



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## Chapter 1

### **Introduction**

Ask a good coach why he coaches and you'll get a number of worthy reasons. If you were able to nail down the most important reason, I believe the majority would tell you that they coach because they enjoy it. You can say you're giving back to the community or you want to spend some quality time with your child; but in the end, if you don't enjoy the experience, you won't be doing your best and your coaching career will be short.

This manual attempts to present a quick overview of coaching this level, with the overriding goal that the experience not only be positive for your players, but for yourself as well. I take my role as a youth coach very seriously and I hope you do also. I try to continually learn more and improve as a coach. I wouldn't have that desire if I didn't enjoy being a coach. If you take just one thing from this manual, I hope it's an understanding that you need to try your best to make the experience a great one for you. If you can do that then I believe the kids will also enjoy the experience.

As a coach you'll have a direct influence on your players. It isn't a question of whether or not you're a role model; the question is "what type of role model will you be?" Youth leagues need as many positive role models as they can get. We've all seen coaches who we wouldn't consider to be positive role models. Many of them are very good people who for one reason or another get caught up in the moment or are overwhelmed by the responsibilities and let that impact them in a negative way. I believe anyone with good intentions and the ability to self regulate in pressure situations can become a good coach and role model. The recipe includes a good deal of dedication and hard work, but the end result can be both rewarding and fun.

The next chapter in this manual will talk about making the decision to coach or not. I realize that many leagues are desperate for coaches, but the fact is many people can't effectively coach, especially at this age level. If the decision has already been made, but you're not excited about it, make sure you read [Appendix A](#) which discusses strategies you can use to offset problem areas.



## Chapter 2

### **Should I Coach?**

Coaching is a huge responsibility and the decision to coach should not be taken lightly. In this chapter I'll present a number of topics that should be taken into consideration when making the decision.

- Motivation
- Personality
- Coaching Your Own Child
- Other Responsibilities

### **Motivation**

The first item for you to consider is your motivation for coaching. Why do you want to coach? What are the first few reasons that come to mind? (Pause here why you think about it). Those reasons may be something like:

- "They needed someone."
- "Nobody else would do it."
- "The other parents don't know anything about baseball"
- "I was a good player growing up, so I'll make a good coach"
- "My child wants me to"
- "It will be a good opportunity to spend some quality time with my child"

If those are some of your first thoughts then I think you may be getting into more than you bargained for. Many people who volunteer don't realize all the time, effort, and organization that is required when coaching. They also may not be prepared for the high expectations that the other parents will have of the coach. For the last minute volunteer this last point can come as quite a shock. I once received an email from a first time coach pleading for help. In his email to me he stated:

***"Nobody would step up and volunteer, so finally I said I would do it. The parents were thrilled when I said I would do it and now those same parents are unhappy with the way I'm handling the team. I told them I hadn't coached before and now it seems like everyone has an opinion about what I'm doing wrong."***

This is not an uncommon comment from new coaches who are taking on the responsibility of coaching for the first time. They feel, and rightly so, that they are making a big sacrifice to help out the kids and it isn't fair that the other parents who wouldn't volunteer are now complaining. Unfair or not, the criticism will still occur and most often will lead to negative feelings about the coaching experience.

I believe to truly enjoy coaching at this level, or any level for that matter, you need to expand on your reasons for coaching to include items that provide a personal sense of happiness and reward. Put aside all of the community service reasons and think about aspects of coaching that can give you a feeling of satisfaction and joy. If you can come up with reasons that enhance your happiness and personal feelings of satisfaction, you will find greater motivation to be the best coach you can. To give you an idea, here are a few of my personal reasons (things that benefit me) for coaching.

- **I enjoy being part of a team.**

I think one of the reasons I'm not a good golfer is I don't really enjoy going to the driving range and hitting a bucket of balls. It may be necessary to improve, but hanging out at a driving range is like hanging out at a library. It's too quiet. I enjoy golf because I get to hang around with my friends and family. It's that interaction with other people that's half the fun. I feel the same way when I'm not coaching my son and I sit and watch the game. I'm sitting in the stands and while I enjoy watching the game, it's not the same as being in the dugout with the kids and being part of the team. I always tell my players that being

part of a team is something special and it's really true. The interaction with the players that takes place on the field is something that can't be duplicated when you sit in the stands.

- **I like to teach.**

Showing your team or an individual player how to perform a skill can be a lot of fun and very rewarding. With this age group the kids try really hard to do exactly what you say. It's a thrill to see the happiness that occurs when a player has learned something new and is able to perform that skill.

- **I enjoy acting like a kid.**

Tee ball and coach pitch give me the opportunity to get right in there and play. The kids don't understand the concept of working or practicing hard, nor should they be expected to. What they do understand is the concept of playing hard and having fun. I try to take advantage of that and play hard right along with them. What a great excuse to act like a kid again. The other benefit, kids love when you play along with them. They have a blast and while playing hard they're learning.

- **Coaching is a challenge.**

One of the intriguing aspects of baseball is that while you may be a good player, there are always ways to improve. This is of course true with most everything in life, and coaching is the same way. Each year I write down notes of things that didn't work the way I wanted them to. Ideas of how I can improve. I read books about coaching and books by great coaches. I find the challenge of becoming a better coach each year exciting. For my personal satisfaction I want to be able to look back on each season and know that I gave it my best effort. Do I make mistakes? Of course. Are there things I wish I would have done differently? Every year the answer is the same, yes! In the end, I love the challenge of trying to continually improve and get better. For both players and



coaches that concept is really one of the main lessons that sports can teach us. The added bonus is it can be used in every part of your life.

- **I love spending time with the kids.**

I saved this for last, but it's really first on my list. Being out on the field with the kids is a great way to spend time. I coached youth teams before I had kids and I'm sure I will still be coaching them when my kids are out of organized athletics.

It's important to realize that to be good at coaching you have to be doing it for reasons other than "they needed someone". Almost anyone can become a very good youth coach, but it's like anything else you're good at, it takes a desire to become good at it. Many youth organizations are requiring that all their coaches take some type of training before coaching a youth team. I think this is a great step forward in making sure that youth coaches are prepared prior to getting on the field. Your league may or may not require that training, but either way there are always things to learn and ways to improve. I believe the best coaches are self motivated. They want to improve and get better because they enjoy what they are doing. My feeling is that desire will come naturally if you can turn coaching into an activity that you can enjoy and feel good about. If it's personally rewarding for you to coach, you'll want to do the best you can to maximize that reward.

### **Age of Kids**

In the list above I stated a personal reason for coaching as "I love spending time with the kids". That item was listed last because it leads right into this section. Tee ball and coach pitch normally has kids ranging from 4 to 7 years old. While I think it's a lot of fun coaching and spending time with kids this age, you may not feel the same. It takes an amazing amount of perseverance and patience to coach this age group. Listening and following directions for any length of time (over 30 seconds) can be a challenge for the kids. You'll be teaching many of the same skills over and over again

with many players often showing little improvement from practice to practice. Any dreams of turning your team into a well oiled machine should be abandoned before you start your first practice. I don't mean to sound like a defeatist, but you never know what kind of talent you're going to get. Try as you may, you might have players at the end of the season that can't throw or hit at what you might consider and acceptable level. This can be difficult for a coach with high performance expectations.

In addition to enjoying this age group of kids, you also have to ask yourself if you can handle coaching at this beginning level.

### **Can You Coach Your Own Child?**

This is a big question that can change from year to year. I've only had one bad season with my son where I probably should not have coached him. It was a 9 year old basketball team and although I had coached him in the past with no problems, this season he could not separate coach from Dad and he didn't want to listen to Dad this season. Now basketball isn't his favorite sport and he didn't want to play the next season, so that may have had a lot to do with our problems. He wanted to play because his friends were playing not because he really enjoyed basketball. Whatever the reason, I'm sure there are others; it was a difficult season that was tough for both of us. I didn't see it coming and you might may not either. On the other hand I've seen other coaches who struggle with the same issue on a yearly basis and it seems crystal clear to me that it's simply not working. In the end, you want coaching to enhance your relationship with your child, not take away from it.

We've talked about your motivation for coaching, but what is your child's motivation for playing? With my son, the motivation for that one season was to spend time with his friends. With that being the goal, he was more interested in a playground type of atmosphere where messing around and having a good time with his buddies were the primary objectives. Now he was a little older than the kids you're going to be

coaching, but I've seen the same problems at the tee ball and coach pitch levels. The reasons for a child not behaving at practice may be many, but if it's your child (and you have a difficult time applying consistent expectations and discipline), it will be a long season for you and the other kids on the team.

In addition to the motivating factors for your child wanting to play, think about your relationship with your child and especially how he or she interacts with you when his/her friends are around. Does your child stop listening to you in those situations? Does your child start talking back or behaving in a wild or inappropriate manner? Do you let your child get away with inappropriate behavior because you don't want to embarrass him/her in front of friends? In general, parents that have a difficult time being consistent with disciplining their children will run into more problems trying to coach them.

Now, all of the above can be true and you can still have a very successful season coaching your child. How? You ask. The key is having an assistant coach that has the same or similar coaching philosophy as you, especially when it comes to team discipline. This way if there is an issue with your child, you will have an assistant coach who can jump in and take care of any situation that may come up. You may find that the assistant coach will need you to do the same for his/her child. A good assistant coach is invaluable for many different reasons, but if he/she can help ease any friction between you and your child then that coach can be the difference between an enjoyable season and one that you would like to forget.

Now you may find that a perfect assistant coach doesn't approach you at the first practice or team meeting and volunteer. If you don't know the parents well or who might make a good assistant coach, this is for the best. At this level you want as many parents helping out at practice as you can get. Ask for help from all the parents rather than asking for someone to volunteer as an assistant. Once you see them work with the kids at a practice or two, you'll have a much better idea of the parent(s)

you feel would do the best job. You can then approach him/her individually and ask if he/she will take on a more official role of assistant coach.

In the start of this section I stated I had one season where I shouldn't have coached my son. Now that I've gone over the importance of selecting an assistant coach, it's important to note that the assistant coach should have a similar style in order for you to work well together. That season, I had a parent volunteer to be an assistant during the first meeting. I said great, just happy to have someone to help me. The problem was that his coaching style didn't match mine at all. I really like to have structured and well organized practices no matter the age of the kids. I also have expectations that the kids will listen and not talk or mess around while I'm talking. This coach didn't enforce those principals during practices or games. The kids picked up on this and when he was in charge of a drill or other activity it quickly turned into a playground activity where the kids pretty much did what they wanted and got away with it. As I look back on it I don't think I made a mistake in accepting a willing volunteer, but where I made a big mistake was in thinking that it would get better as the season went along. I talked to him about wanting the kids to listen and not trying to talk over them. I told him how I liked practices to be run and could he help make sure that players followed team rules when he was in charge of a drill. He agreed with everything I said, but nothing really changed from week to week. What I believe I should have done was asked another parent to start helping out and explain what the expectations were as far as discipline and behavior. Then I could have changed the role of the coach who was having a difficult time. I could have had him do more one on one teaching for example.

Coaching your own child can be a great experience. I've been doing it for years and the majority of the time it's been great.

## **Manage (Head Coach) or Assistant**

If you're reading this there is a very good chance that the decision has already been made. It's still worth discussing if only for future reference. Managing a team certainly means more work and more time involvement, unless you're excellent at delegating tasks. For the majority of coaches it requires a greater commitment of time and energy. Now you may be thinking "why take on the headache of managing a team when I can be an assistant and still enjoy coaching without the added administrative effort?" It's a valid question and for me it really comes down to a couple of things.

First, I like to organize practices and make decisions about how the team is going to be run. I believe my background and commitment to coaching provide a basis for a well organized and enjoyable learning environment for the kids. I really feel a sense of responsibility. If I feel like I'm more qualified than the other parents than I should follow through and coach.

Second, I enjoy the experience of being a head coach more than I have being an assistant. It's not that I couldn't be happy being an assistant. I've been an assistant coach many times in the past and I'm sure I'll be in the future. I would never volunteer to be an assistant without knowing who the head coach is. To be an assistant and to be happy doing it, I believe you have to be in agreement with the coaching philosophy and methods used by the head coach. If not, it will be a struggle to contribute and help when you don't agree with what the coach is doing or how he/she is doing it. I happen to believe that I can do a better job than a parent who doesn't want to do it, but volunteers because nobody else would. In that case, if I simply didn't have time to coach, then it would be difficult for me to be an assistant until I found out more about the head coach. I've known parents who will assistant every year and they always have seasons that don't go well because of differences in philosophy between them and the head coach. I wonder what keeps them from

taking the reins and having a good season each and every year by being the head coach.

So, when making the decision to manage or assist, be honest about the situation. What's your experience, knowledge, and personality? With that information try to determine if you're the best candidate for the head coaching position. If you think you are, then go for it and do the best you can.

If not, then you have to ask yourself whether you like the head coach and are in agreement with his/her coaching philosophy. If you are, then being an assistant coach may be a great opportunity to learn from someone with more experience. The knowledge you gain will help you get ready to take on the head coaching responsibility in future seasons.

### **Not Sure If I Have Time to Coach**

For most people this really comes down to your work schedule. Often games and/or practices are scheduled in the late afternoon or early evening and can be difficult for people that have to work to a certain time or commute a long distance to make it. If this is you then I would check into a few things prior to making a decision. First, many companies allow a certain amount of time to be used for non-profit volunteer work. You may not think of coaching in those terms, but many youth leagues are set up as non-profit organizations. So check with your work and see if this is the case. You may find that your company will allow you to can take some time off or rearrange your schedule during the season to help you make coaching an option.

Second, most leagues will allow you to schedule later practices if you have a work issue. Check with the scheduler and tell him/her that you need a later practice time or you won't be able to coach.

Third, a supportive spouse and/or assistant coach can help get practices and/or games going if you're going to be a little late.

For some the “lack of time” excuse is just that, an excuse. Most coaches and league administrators are short on time and many of them could use that same excuse if they wanted to.

### **No...Really I don't have time to coach!**

If you really have a schedule that won't allow you to be on time for practices or you'll have to miss a number of practices and/or games, then this schedule conflict could pose a real problem on your ability to coach successfully. If parents and players are continually waiting for you to show up, this will usually result in negative feelings about you by the other parents.

If you fall into this category, then you have a decision to make.

1. If there's another willing and able coach, then you may want to step aside and let the other person coach.
2. If there's no other willing and/or able coach, then you will need to make sure you have the necessary help to make this situation work. Be honest with yourself about your ability to get to practices and game on time. If you can't, then have someone lined up to bring the equipment and get things started until you can get there. Being 10 minutes late for each practice, but being prepared and planning for it, is different from being late to half the practices and not having a plan for it. You simply can't perform as a coach if you're only there part of the time and can't delegate properly to make up for your absence.

To give you an example, a postal worker once signed up to coach my son's basketball team. He had played for a number of years and loved the game. Unfortunately the games were on Saturday and he worked on Saturday. There was no way for him to get out of work and so he missed most of the games. His schedule just didn't work and it would have been better if he would have let someone else coach the team and he could have just helped at practice.

## Your answer is?

1. **Can't do it.** Even though you have decided to step aside and let someone else coach, still try to be involved as much as possible. This won't be your last opportunity to coach a team, so try to help out and learn as much as you can. Watching and working with other coaches and parents can help shape your coaching philosophy and prepare you for coming seasons.
2. **You don't have time but you're still coaching.** A tough thing to do, but certainly not impossible. Here are some ideas to help you not only survive, but enjoy the experience:
  - **Communication**
    - Parents need to know what your schedule is and how that's going to affect the team. When you provide a practice schedule, let them know what time practice will start and what time you will be there. Let them know who will be in charge while you're gone.
    - Players don't need to know your exact schedule, but they will be curious when you're not there. Let them know what to expect when you're not there. "I will be about 10 minutes late to practice each night. Coach Sally will be in charge and she will help you get warmed up..."
  - **Delegate**

There is nothing worse than parents standing around with their kids waiting for the coach to show up. If you can't make it on time, don't keep the equipment with you. Have a parent who can be in charge of taking the equipment to and from practice. Have an assistant coach who will be in charge when you're not at practice. If you need to pass out information at practice, have a parent who can organize, print, and distribute team



information. That way you can just email him/her changes and he/she can make sure everyone is informed.

○ **Routine**

Assistant coaches will often not know what to do with the kids when you're not there. If you're going to be late to practice, come up with a routine to start your practices with.

- Team jog around the field.
- Team stretch and warm-up.
- Play catch with a partner
- Some fun activity

By having a routine for the start of every practice, the kids will know what to expect whether you're there or not. In addition, the assistant coach will also feel confident stepping in until you get there. Have a list of other activities that the coach can choose from in case traffic prevents you from making it to practice at your normal time.



## Chapter 3

### **What Personal Characteristics or Experience do I need to be a Successful Coach?**

The first excuse a potential coach may give is that they don't know much about baseball and/or have little playing experience. While at higher levels of baseball this might be an issue, it's not an issue in tee ball or coach pitch. Certainly you'll want to learn about the game and how it's played as you go along, but it's really a secondary issue when deciding if you want to or can coach at this level. To take it a step farther, coaching will provide you with a great opportunity to learn more about the game. If you're the type of person who's not afraid to learn something new, then "lack of knowledge" can provide some of the same excitement for learning that your players will experience. The "how to" as far as baseball skills is well documented and covered not only within this guide, but in many other places as well. Now that we have that out of the way, let's look at some more important personal characteristics and experience that will help you as a coach.

### **Nurturing**

I love the line "There's no crying in baseball" by Tom Hanks in the movie "A League of Their Own" after one of the women on the team is seen crying in the dugout. In tee ball and coach pitch, there's plenty of crying to go with about every other emotion you can think of. I've often wished I had a degree in child psychology so I would know how to deal with all the emotional issues that come into play during a baseball season. I'll try to sum it up in one word by saying that you have to be nurturing. The reason I use this word is it encompasses more than just being supportive or positive. A pat on the back and "you'll get 'em next time" may be a positive statement, but often it's not enough to help the player improve and be prepared for the next opportunity. Confidence is fleeting at this age and one bad play can ruin an otherwise good practice or game. You need to remember that this may be the first time a player has played on a team. Not being able to hit the ball or catch the ball with

everyone watching can be tough on a young player. Many kids will look to the negative side of things and they need a coach to help them believe that they can do it. Continual positive reinforcement is necessary to keep some kids on track and is harmful to no one.

## **Decision Making**

Kids in general are great at badgering. If they learn that after being told “no” nine times that you’ll say “yes” on the tenth time, then get prepared to be badgered. When you make a decision about batting order, positions, or who is going where during practice, stick with it. I let the kids know that I come up with the batting order and positions in advance and it will do no good for them to ask. I let them know that the same is true during practice and I tell them my rule, which is: “If you ask to play a certain position, or hit in a specific spot in the order, or go to a specific station during practice, I will make sure to put you somewhere else even if I was planning on putting you where you asked.” I tell them the same holds true for asking to go first. By asking they end up at the end of the line. Now that may sound a little strict to you, but it really goes back to making baseball a fun experience for both you and the kids. If you have every kid asking you to go here or there every time you start a drill or an inning is starting, you’ll never get anything done. Kids respond well to organization and structure. Believe me it’s a key to coaching happiness.

## **Leadership**

Being prepared and organized; executing your practice plans; having fun with the team; enjoying the games: These items will all lead to you gaining confidence as a coach. I believe it’s important to show that confidence right from the start whether you have it or not. There are all types of leaders, so if you’re not a “rah rah” type of person, that doesn’t mean you’re not a good leader, it just means you wouldn’t make a good cheerleader. As a coach you’re in a leadership role, so act like a leader from day one.

The kids will follow your lead and try their best to make you happy and meet the expectations you have set. What happens if a player misses practice? The player misses out, but the team still functions. What if the coach misses practice? The whole team misses out. As the coach you're the driving force for most things that happen during a season. Decide right from the beginning that you're going to take charge and lead. Are you going to make mistakes? Of course, everyone does. Nobody ever said the coach can't make mistakes. Handling those mistakes in a productive, positive way provides a great example to your players.

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### **Turn your mistakes into a positive teaching tool.**

With older kids, I'll often summarize our previous game, going over some positive aspects of the game we played and a few items that I feel we need to improve on. I try to focus on the team and not individuals and as a member of the team I include things that I could have done better as a coach. I want my team to see that I make mistakes and rather than dwelling on them, I try to learn from them so I'll do better next time. I want my team to understand that we all make mistakes and we can learn from those mistakes.

With younger kids, there really isn't much during a game that could be modeled in this manner. However, there are items that are going to come up during practice that you can use. If I didn't explain an activity correctly for example and it isn't going well. I may bring the team in and say, "Sorry team, I really messed up on explaining that activity. Coaches make mistakes too. Let me try this again and see if I can do better." Now this may not seem like a big deal and maybe it isn't, but at the next game when a player misses a groundball and is upset, you may be able to make him/hire feel better by referencing the previous practice. "Remember at last practice when I messed up that drill and nobody knew what to do? I was trying my hardest to explain it so everyone would understand and it didn't work out. Just like I know you

were trying your hardest to catch that groundball. Keep a positive attitude and remember to put your bare hand over the ball after it hits your glove. Now you've caught many groundballs that were just like that, so I know you can do it and you'll get the next one that comes to you."

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## Patience



Repetition is essential to master a skill and with this age group repeating instructions is essential also. Many young players have a difficult time getting their bodies to follow what you have modeled for them. You will need to break your instruction down into pieces that can isolate certain movements. For example, I teach throwing by working with the kids on the different parts of the body separately and then we put those pieces together to make a complete throw. This will often need to be repeated many times for a player to show improvement. You will

have to work on many of the same fundamentals all season long. To do this takes patience. Part of having patience is starting out with realistic expectations. Tee ball and coach pitch are games filled with ground balls going by players, poor throws to the wrong base, fly balls that fall innocently to the ground. While good plays will be made, they are the exception, not the norm. I want the kids to improve and even though it often isn't noticeable week to week, they do make big improvements over the course of the season. More important is that they have a fun season and hopefully develop a love for the game. A patient coach who provides a fun learning environment goes a long way toward achieving that goal.

## **Ability to Teach**

Being organized and having patience are two important skills already covered that are important to teaching. I use the term teaching rather than coaching because I want to differentiate between what you do in practice vs. what you do during a game. If you teach as much during a game as you do in practice, then I bet you're not handling one of the two properly.

What teachers understand that many coaches do not is that kids learn in many different ways. Coaches who don't understand this will try to teach the same skill to all of the kids in the same way over and over again even if it's not successful for some. Week to week you need to be evaluating your players on the basic skills. You'll find that two or three may be struggling with throwing, another couple with hitting and a few more with fielding. This is struggling in relation to the other kids on the team. As you identify players that are having problems, come up with a plan to address those needs. Here are a couple of ideas of how to provide alternative learning opportunities without taking away from the team during practice.

## **Special Stations**

I like to have a number of activities going on at one time and have players rotate through the different stations. One nice feature of this is the ability to work on certain skills with certain players and have other players focus on other skills. For example, early in the season, I want to get the kids hitting, so a player who is having trouble hitting may spend the entire rotation working with a parent on hitting. He/she will get a full 20 minutes of individual hitting instruction or 2 kids can get 10 minutes each. You can do this with various skills throughout the season.



## Before or After Practice

If you have the time and a parent is willing to either bring their child early or stay late, this can be time to provide extra instruction without having to work it into practice.



## Chapter 4

### Before the First Practice

#### Safety

Baseball can be a dangerous game if precautions aren't taken. A player swinging a bat 5 minutes before practice is a danger to other players and parents on the team. Emergency rooms are visited on a regular basis every spring and summer by youth baseball players. Some are accidents that really can't be prevented, but many could be. Before the first practice, identify possible safety issues and have a plan on how you're going to deal with them. Here is a list to get you started:

1. **Check with your league regarding their safety information.** They should have some type of information and plan in place. Make sure you're aware of the procedures for your league.
2. **Player medical conditions** – The league should pass this information along to you, but even if they do, I would check with all the parents and see if there is anything you need to be aware of. If you're not comfortable coaching a child with a certain medical condition because of safety issues, consult with your league safety officer on how to best handle the situation. Resolving issues like this may be as simple as having a parent present at all times.
3. **Emergency contact information** – Again, the league should be providing you with this information, but double check with all parents to make sure the information is correct. Many parents will just fill out the one emergency phone number because that's all that's asked for on the form. They may have additional contact information that you can use in case of an emergency.
4. **Cell phone** – Ask a parent who will be at most practices to make sure they have a charged cell phone at all practices. This is normally not a problem as



there may be many parents who will have a phone on them, but it's good to know who you can turn to if a call needs to be made. I always bring my cell phone to practices and games, but if I'm out on the field with an injured child I don't want to have to run and find my phone.

5. **Empower parents to help preventing safety issues** – Often parents will sit in the bleachers and may not feel like they can say or do anything. So during that first parent meeting, I make sure to let parents know that I need their help in making sure that there are no safety problems going on during a practice or game. If they see a player swinging a bat in a spot that they think is dangerous, I want them to know that I expect them to help out by letting me know or stopping the player until they can get my attention. Try as I might, I can't see everything that is going on and since safety is a top priority, I want to make sure I get as much help as I can.
6. **See if any parents have a medical background or occupation** – If you have a mom or dad that's a doctor or nurse, this can be a great asset. Make sure you check to know if there is someone who can help if needed.

## **Organization**

I've already covered a number of topics and about your enjoyment as a coach. Being organized is probably the foundation of everything else. You really need to prepare in advance for your first parent meeting, practices, games, etc. If you plan things out you'll have a much better chance of being successful. It's hard to wing it at practice with young kids.

## Chapter 5

### **Parent Meeting**

A parent meeting is one of the most important aspects for getting off on a good start and setting the groundwork for the season. If you ask any parent why they were displeased with a youth coach, you will get a wide variety of answers, but most of the complaints will boil down to the coach not meeting the expectations of the parent. While I can't guarantee that a parent meeting will take care of all parent related issues, I will guarantee that if your parents aren't happy; you won't be happy. At the parent meeting you will want to provide information about how you're planning to run the team. You're letting the parents know what they can expect and as important, you're providing them with the opportunity to let you know if they don't agree with any part of how you're planning to coach.

What parents get out of a parent meeting:

- Background information about you.
- Clear understanding about how you're going to manage the team; including coaching philosophy, discipline, etc.
- Learn the expectations you have for players and parents.
- An opportunity to get to know you and provide feedback.

What do you get out of a parent meeting:

- A chance to get to know the parents.
- Present your viewpoints and get buy off from the parents (signed parent letter).
- An opportunity to resolve any potential conflicts before the season begins.
- Get your volunteer sheet filled up.

Other Benefits:

- Parents will know that you take your role of coach seriously.

- You get a chance to see if there are any potential problems that need to be addressed.

## **Background Information**

Parents are going to want to know more about you than just your name and who your child is. They may be interested to know if you have coached before or have any other coaching or teaching experience with children this age. They may be interested to know what kind of baseball background you have. Now, if you're thinking, "I never played organized baseball; I've never coached; I've never worked with kids this age, except for being a parent, what do I tell them?" – The answer is you tell them the truth. Let them know that you're going to learn to be a good coach while their kids learn the fundamentals of baseball and hopefully while you develop a love for coaching, they will develop a love for the game. No matter what your experience, the parent meeting is a great opportunity to show that you take the role of coach seriously.

## **Parent Letter**

Provide a parent letter that outlines the info covered in the meeting. You may want to provide more than one copy and have them sign and return one to you. Let them know that by signing the sheet they are acknowledging that they have read the letter and agree to let you coach their child in the manner described. You may think this is going too far, but having a signed agreement can be a savior during the season. Here is an example: At this level you most likely want to give players a chance to play a number of different positions. Midway through the season a parent may approach and ask why their son isn't playing shortstop more. He's the best player on the team according to the parent and deserves to play there more than the other less talented players. Now if you never stated your philosophy during a parent meeting and/or never provided a letter to the parents stating your philosophy on playing time, then they may be under the assumption that you're basing playing time and positions on talent rather than giving everyone a chance. Although you never said you were going

to play the more talented players in the most important positions, you also never said that you weren't. Without setting the expectation in the beginning you're now in a spot where you have an unhappy parent. One unhappy parent can really decrease your enjoyment of coaching the team.

If you did have the meeting and provided a parent letter, you're now in a position to make this a very simple and straight forward conversation. "(Mr. or Mrs.) \_\_\_\_\_, I agree that your son is a very good player and does great at shortstop. However, as I explained at the parent meeting and in the parent letter, I believe kids at this age should have the opportunity to play many different positions. I think it's important for building a variety of skills, gaining a sense of team, and developing a love for the game no matter what position you play."

I've included a sample parent letter at the end of the guide – [Appendix B](#). There is a Word version of the parent letter available on [QCBaseball.com](http://QCBaseball.com) that you can download and edit.

## Coaching Philosophy

A coaching philosophy defines what you believe in as it relates to coaching this age group. It's important that you think about it and define one for yourself. It's the rock against which other emotions are going to push against. For many coaches their own competitive nature will take control and they will make decisions that don't fit in with their own coaching philosophy. When this happens you're not meeting the expectations that you set.

My coaching philosophy with this age group is to develop a fun learning environment where developing basic skills, a concept of team, sportsmanship, and a love for the game are the priorities. I believe that all kids should be given an equal opportunity to play and they should

be able to play multiple positions. I think this is important in emphasizing the team aspect of the game. So what happens if I state my coaching philosophy, let the parents know that playing time will be divided equally, and then after 3 games I am now playing the more talented players more? What happens is that I have failed to meet the expectations of the parent and worse, I was the one who set the expectations. Believe it or not the parents and players listen to what you say and they expect as the coach you will do what you say you're going to do. I found that with this age group my coaching philosophy is fairly easy to stick to. Score isn't kept in our league for this age group so the pressure and competitive nature to win can be set aside. I know that some leagues do keep score and this can make your game time decisions more difficult. If you're a competitive person, are you going to be able



to follow through with what you say when you're team is down by 3 runs in the top of the third inning?

### **One Final Warning**

No matter what your background you have to be careful to make sure that parents understand that you're the one in charge. Other parents may have more experience, may know more about the game and while you will hopefully be open to input, make sure you don't give up control. I get numerous emails each season from new coaches who have a parent that "takes over" when given the opportunity. Even if this person is knowledgeable and a good coach, it will make it very difficult for you to plan and run the team if you don't stay in control. So while you're honest about your background, make sure you're clear that since you're the coach you will be running the team.



## Chapter 6

### **Equipment**

I understand that as a volunteer youth coach you may not want to spend your own money buying a bunch of equipment for your team. You have a few choices when it comes to equipment. First, you can just use what is provided by the league. Second, you can buy some additional equipment yourself. Finally, you can ask the parents to contribute a few dollars each to buy some equipment for the team. Some cones or throw down bases can be very helpful when running drills.

### **League Equipment**

If your league is anything like mine, you'll get a tee, a couple bats, some batting helmets, and a dozen or so soft-stitch training baseballs. Most tee ball leagues don't allow a catcher behind the plate (coach pitch may be the same), so you probably won't be getting catching gear.

### **First Aid Kit**

A first aid kit may be provided by your league. If not, it's something you will want to buy. In addition I always check with parents to see if any of them has first aid training and will be at the majority of practices and games. I have just created a spot on the volunteer sheet for first aid parent. I ask that parent to also bring a small cooler of ice to each game in case we need ice for an injury.

### **Tennis Balls / Whiffle Balls and Bats**

Although the safety balls used with this age group help with safety, I find there are a number of times that I prefer to use tennis balls. In addition to being softer and lighter, they also will pop out of the glove easily, which helps when you're trying to get the kids to use their free hand to cover the baseball in the glove. Whiffle balls and a couple whiffle bats are also great for kids to be able to work on hitting as a station.

## Chapter 7

### **What Should I Teach?**

Ask anyone what you should teach at this level and they'll probably answer that "you need to focus on the fundamentals". Well, you could say that about any level of baseball. Although the skill level and intricacies of the game increase from year to year as players grow older, the game still comes down to playing catch, hitting, and base running. Those are fundamentals that are important at all levels of baseball. As a coach you want to help the players develop a good foundation on which they can build and improve on. Certainly developing physical baseball skills are an important part of coaching, but the mental side of the game is also important. I really need to qualify what the mental side of the game is for this age group. If you mention the mental side of baseball to a coach of a high school team for example, he will probably think of mental toughness, concentration, or being a clutch player. He may also think of a player who is knowledgeable about the game and always seems to be in the right place. The mental side of the game is often seen as part of the players' competitive nature. For the 5 and 6 year old, the mental side is different and as a coach you need to make sure you're fulfilling the needs of the players and not the needs of your own competitive nature. In this section I'll go over the physical skills you will want to teach. More in depth information including videos can be found on [QCBaseball.com](http://QCBaseball.com).

### **Skills**

As mentioned before, the skills you want to teach are the same skills the players will be learning and improving on for as long as they play the game. At a basic level baseball involves moving your body and following the ball. These are key skills that are required to playing catch, field and hit the baseball. As you teach kids the basics of throwing, catching, hitting, and running the bases; keep in mind that kids need to learn how to move their bodies in order to accomplish the skill. They also need to learn to watch the ball by moving their eyes and their head. It's important to recognize that there may be a large discrepancy in the skill level among the players



on your team. You will need to adjust your level of teaching and level of expectations from player to player.

## **Movement**



I've watched many practices where tee ball and coach pitch teams will have parents roll the ball right to the player for them to practice fielding a ground ball. While that's an okay first step when first learning how to bend and where to place the glove, it soon outlives its usefulness in teaching the player. Players need to

learn right away that they must move to the ball. Too many players get used to standing in one spot and if it doesn't come right to them, then they won't get it. Try to get the kids moving in all your drills and get them moving to the ball.

## **Hitting**

At the beginning of the season, my first priority is to try and get everyone hitting the baseball as consistently as possible. When a player gets up to bat, he is out there by himself. He is often nervous, everyone is watching, and he is often afraid of failing. A player may let 5 grounders go through his legs and may not seem bothered by not making the plays. If that same player goes up to bat the next inning and can't hit the ball, that's another story. Players that struggle to make contact become embarrassed and are very disappointed after the at bat. Ask your team why they play baseball and you'll find most of them want to play because they want to hit the ball. They didn't join to play in the field, they joined to hit! For tee ball and coach pitch success or failure for a child is measured at the plate. I'm not talking from a coaching standpoint, but from the players' perspective. As much as you try to make all aspects of the game equally important, the players will still be down about a game in which they struggled at the plate, even if they played well in the field and they will feel happy about a game in which they hit well, no matter how they played in the field. I hope this helps you understand why I focus on hitting at the beginning of the season.

I want the kids to develop a love for the game and that's just hard to do if you can't hit the ball.

Okay, you're convinced. So how do you help out a player who is having a difficult time making contact?

## **Tee Ball**

Since the ball is in a stationary position, you may only have 1 or 2 players who have a difficult time hitting the ball. There may be a dozen reasons why they can't hit, but you have to avoid the urge to try and fix everything at once. Chances are if they can't hit the ball off of the tee then they haven't developed much hand-eye coordination yet and/or they may not be strong enough to swing the bat without the head of the bat dropping during the swing. This will often result in the child hitting the tee under the ball. I watched many coaches spend a bunch of time getting the player in the proper stance, holding the bat at just the right position and then watching the player miss the ball completely. While proper setup at the plate is an important skill for the player to learn, it's usually not going to be the modification that will turn the player into a contact hitter. Start by having the player take a couple of swings without trying to hit anything. Do they swing with their arms fully extended or are they bent? In the picture below the player swings with his arms fully extended so I have him measure his distance to the tee with his arms straight out.







## Coach Pitch

With coach pitch it's a little more difficult because we're adding a moving ball into the equation. It might not be bad if the moving ball would come in at the same speed and angle every time, but most often it doesn't. I've seen many kids struggle simply because the coach can't pitch. So, first you need look at yourself and determine whether you have the skill to pitch to the kids. I think I can do a good job of pitching to the kids, but I had one season where I had a parent who could put it in there just perfect. Once I saw him pitch, I didn't throw another game pitch all season long. I believe there are three things you can do to make it easier for a child to hit a pitched ball.

1. Put enough on the pitch that it comes in on a slight arc. Don't loop the pitch so much. Many coaches try to throw the ball as slow as possible to a player that's struggling. The ball comes in like a slow pitch softball toss. That's a hard pitch for kids to hit unless they swing with a huge uppercut.
2. Get down to their level. I like throwing from one knee. It puts me at a height that allows me to throw a nice pitch at their level. It helps accomplish point 1 also.
3. Vary the distance. I move up closer to a hitter that is having difficulty. It allows me to be more accurate. You'll find that many players who struggle

making contact will swing along the same path no matter where the pitch is. By getting closer I can try to “hit the bat with the ball”. As they gain confidence you can work with them on hitting pitches at different heights. This is a good time to use the tee. Modify the height of the tee and have them practice at swing at balls in different locations.

Those first few games you will probably have players that will need to use the tee. I tell my team before the first game that it can be difficult for the coach to pitch well to everyone. So there may be a time when you’ll have to hit off the tee because I can’t get the ball over the plate. That seemed to help with them not feeling like a failure at the plate.

### **Kids Pulling Their Heads**

As former baseball great Walter Johnson once said, “You can’t hit what you can’t see.” Many players of all ages struggle with watching the ball all the way from the pitcher’s hand to the bat. With young players this is an especially difficult thing to learn. They often will keep their head pointed toward the pitcher throughout the entire swing. They are following it to a point but don’t continue to watch it as they swing. Some of the problem arises from the terminology that is used. You tell a child, “Watch the ball all the way in.” A child may believe they are doing just that even though their head is still pointed towards the pitcher. It’s important to explain to the player that their head should move to help their eyes keep focused on the ball.

Even though its coach pitch, I would have them still work off the tee some of the time. Try this series and see if it helps them learn how to watch the ball all the way to the bat.

Put a tee up at home plate. Stand up to the plate with a bat.

Ask the team: If I’m going to hit the ball off the tee where should I be looking?

(Hopefully the team will respond: “at the ball”)

Why should I be looking there? (“So you can hit it”)

Move the tee away and ask:

If the coach pitches the ball where will I hit it? (“Over the plate”)

Where should I be looking? (“Over the plate...at the ball”)

How can I do that? (“Follow the ball”)

Demonstrate following the ball with your head.

Then have another coach or parent throw you a pitch. In this drill you don't swing, you simply watch the ball from the pitchers' hand until it hits the backstop. Use that drill as a station for a few practices to get the kids used to following the ball with their heads. With 7 year olds, they are often so concerned about hitting the ball that it's difficult for them to grasp or remember anything you may have told them while they are trying to hit. Using this drill takes the hitting out of the equation and will hopefully get them in the habit of watching the ball.

## Throwing the Bat

Throwing the bat is not only a dangerous; it's also embarrassing for the child. You can help avoid this situation by having the players drop the bat in the same place



after every hit. Before batting practice or a game go over and draw a circle in the dirt with the handle of the bat. This should be a few feet down the first base line and in foul territory. The basic premise is that the player has to carry the bat for a couple of steps after completing his/her swing. This will help instill the concept of completing

the swing and starting to run before dropping the bat.

## Throwing

When kids are taught to throw, often the instruction is watered down into just a couple of steps. The act of throwing a baseball is not that simple. Throwing requires the entire body to work together in order to throw the ball accurately and to put something on it. All positions on the field require the ability to throw the ball accurately. Teaching good throwing mechanics is a critical piece of coaching at this level.

The knee drill below is a good drill for kids to isolate their arm and upper body when learning how to throw. In this drill you'll have the kids throw the ball only partially in the air to their partner. This will make it easier for the other player to get the ball as many of them will have a difficult time catching the ball while on one knee. The focus of this drill is for the players to bring back the ball in a circular motion and point their front shoulder toward the target. You can make this drill fun for the kids by seeing how many throws in a row two players can make without having to get up off their knee to get the ball.

## Knee Drill



After the knee drill you can have the players stand up and start playing catch. We want to emphasize getting the entire body in a good position to make the throw.

- Back foot perpendicular to the target.
- Front shoulder and body lined up towards the target.
- Good circular (more of an oval actually) throwing motion.
- Step toward the target (it's actually a little easier if the player can step with the lead foot being slightly open to the target, that way the player can have really good balance throughout the throw. So instead of the front foot landing in a straight line from the back foot to the target, it would be slightly left of center for a right-hand thrower and slightly right of center for a left-hand thrower.)
- Good follow through.



## Catching the ball

Catching the ball can be very difficult for some of the players at this level. One thing I try to do when working on playing catch is to pair kids up based on ability. You don't want the really good player throwing bullets at the kid who can't catch the ball. This can also be a good opportunity to use either tennis balls or a softer baseball. You want to have the kids gain confidence in their ability to catch the ball. Nothing will take that away faster than being hurt by a thrown ball.



The easiest way to help a player avoid being hit by a thrown ball is to teach them to move to the correct position in order to catch it. For a right-handed thrower have the player move to the right of a ball that is thrown above the waist. Some players will want to move too far and try to catch the ball with a completely extended arm. This is a very difficult for this age group. Try to get them to move to the ball and position their glove just outside their shoulder. This will keep it away from their face but still in a good position to be able to make the catch.

For balls that are thrown below the waist try to get them to center up on the ball and catch it in a similar fashion to catching a ground ball. Again emphasize that they need to move to get in the correct position.

## **Fielding**

### **Groundballs**



For ground balls it's important that you work on getting kids in the proper position to catch the ball. Start the kids out in an athletic position and then before the ball is hit have them move their glove and throwing hand out front. As the ball comes toward them work on having them move side to side to get in front of the ball. I teach the kids to put their throwing hand in front of their chin. This helps protect them from a bad hop. As the ball gets closer they should put the tip of their glove on the ground. Many kids want to lay the glove flat on the ground. This is incorrect as the ball will

often roll or bounce over the top of the glove. Try to have the kids position the glove vertically to give them the best chance of catching the ball. As the ball enters the glove, work with them to place their throwing hand over the top of the ball in the glove as they move from catching to throwing.

Remember to access and bookmark [QCBaseball.com](http://QCBaseball.com) for additional coaching information and drills.



## Chapter 8

### **The First Practice**

Whether or not you've had an opportunity to have a parent meeting, practice is the first chance to interact with the kids as their coach. Before I get into a specific practice plan that you can borrow from, it's important to realize that you're setting the tone for the rest of the season during the first practice. You must be organized and clear on how you're going to interact with your team. Listening, expectations, rules, and discipline guidelines need to be clearly stated and understood by the players. Some coaches will have players help in creating team rules during this practice. I tried it once and for me it didn't work. The kids came up with some rather strange rules and punishments that I couldn't and/or didn't want to implement.

### **Practice Outline**

- Team Meeting – Rule 1 - Listening
- Warm-up and Introductions
- Team Meeting – Rule 2 – Safety in the field / playing catch
- Play Catch – evaluation
- Team Meeting – Rule 3 – Safety – hitting
- Hitting – evaluation
- Baserunning relay race
- Team cheer / stamps stickers

### **Team Meeting**

The first thing I do at this practice is get the kids together for a team meeting. I show them how to form 2 lines in front of me all on one knee and I have them place both hands on their knee. This keeps them from picking grass or touching other players. I let them know that our first team rule has to do with team meetings.

Rule 1: When the coach is talking you need to have your eyes on the coach, be listening, and not talking or acting in a distracting manner. If you want to say something or if you have a question, raise your hand and wait to be called on.

I won't talk to the team if one or more players are talking or acting in a distracting manner. At all meetings I expect the players to take a knee and be quiet. I'll wait for them then I tell them that we can sit around in this position all practice if they want to talk or we can have a quick team meeting and get right to playing. I try to get the kids to monitor themselves and make sure as a team that they get quiet.

You'll find that the shorter the meeting the better. So after showing them how to take a knee and going over this first rule, we all take a jog around the field and then warm-up with some jumping jacks, arm circles, etc.

## **Jog**

Once you're done with your first team meeting, have the kids stay in the 2 lines and jog together as a team. This could be to a fence and back or around the field. You may want to lead this first team jog to help them understand.

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Terminology that we take for granted is often unknown to the kids. Kids don't jog anywhere unless they are tired, they either walk or run. If you don't explain to them what it means to jog and why you want them to jog, then you will end up with a race. Not the best way to warm-up.  
.....

We will be covering this many times in the book, but a proven teaching technique is to explain what they will be doing, model that skill, and then let them practice it. This first time they take a team jog, you will be modeling the skill by leading them in the jog.

Warming up is important no matter what the age. Although I wouldn't take it to the level you would with an older team, it's still beneficial to the player and a good habit to get the kids into. It's also a good chance for the kids to build leadership skills. Appoint a different team captain for each practice and game to lead the team in stretching and warming up. The first practice you can be the team captain, but after that assign a player. Here is the blatant self-promotion, so be warned. I use (and sell on [QCBaseball.com](http://QCBaseball.com)) motivational patches. These patches can be used in a variety of ways to motivate and reward players. The "C" patch I use for captain and I give out the "C" patch to each player that is a captain at practice. You can find out more at [QCBaseball.com](http://QCBaseball.com) on how to use the patches. For this age group it's a great way to reward kids based on behavior. You'll be shocked how great the kids behave as they try to earn a patch.



.....  
Allow really shy kids to be team captain later in the season when they have had an opportunity to get to know the kids and are comfortable with you and the team. I once had a girl on my coach pitch team who was so shy she didn't say a word all year. When it was her turn to be team captain, I would ask her yes and no questions during stretching. "Holly", I would say, "Since you're team captain, should we start out by stretching our legs?" Holly would smile and nod her head. Then I would tell the kids to follow Holly as she touched her toes. At the end of practice, I asked her if she liked being the team captain and got a big smile and a good nod of the head confirmed that she did. That's all it took to make my day.  
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### **Stretching and Warming Up**

There is pretty good evidence that warming up the players muscles prior to a light stretch is beneficial and better than stretching first.

So I suggest starting the kids with a warm-up routine that they can perform at the beginning of every practice. The footwork required in baseball can be difficult for young kids to learn, so this is a good time to get the kids working on that footwork.

### **Warm-up**

Have kids line-up on the foul line and they will approximately the distance between first base and second base. This is not a race, so make sure the kids get in a good habit of warming up and not racing.

#### Down and Back

1. Jog down and back
2. High knees down and back
3. Cross-over sideways, down and back. Swivel hips and cross left over right, then right over left. Keep arms out for balance.
4. Shuffle sideways, down and back. Don't cross-over legs.

This should get the kids warmed up and ready for a light stretch. During this first team stretch, I take the time to have all the kids introduce themselves to each other. I have them say their name, what their favorite position is (if they have one), and what they like to do when they aren't playing baseball.

I start things off by telling them my name and that I like playing all positions but especially the outfield. When I'm not playing baseball I like swimming and playing video games with my son. I want the kids to know that I like some of the same things that they do. Each player then takes a turn as we continue to stretch.

### **Team Meeting – Rule 2**

Rule 2: Safety when playing catch. It's important that the kids understand that a thrown ball can hurt someone. So rule 2 is that they are never to throw a ball toward anyone who is not looking or not ready to catch it.

## Playing Catch

For some kids throwing a baseball comes naturally, for others it appears to be the most unnatural movement in the world. Even though you haven't seen them play yet, use a best guess on pairing up players based on ability.

I start by lining half the players along the foul line and explain that they need to have space. Then I take the other half and put them about 10 yards away in a line opposite of their partner. No balls have been given out yet. Even though I'm evaluating their throwing at this point, I still want to give them some instruction and something to concentrate on. For catching the ball, I tell them I want them to catch every ball on the side so if they miss it, it won't hit them. I have a parent throw a couple of balls to me and I demonstrate how to move to the side and catch the ball.

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### Coaching Tip:

It may seem like you're going against standard baseball instruction where the goal is always to move to the ball and get in front of it, but that's something the kids will be able to do as they gain confidence. It's hard to believe, but some kids may have stopped with their parents at the sports store on the way to practice to purchase their first baseball glove. Gaining confidence in their ability to perform a skill is essential to a player's ability to improve. If a player gets hit with a thrown ball on the first day, they may become afraid of the baseball and lose confidence in their ability to learn how to catch it. Building baseball skills is a process and you want them to feel safe while they are gaining those skills. When that child doesn't have confidence or the ability to correctly judge a ball coming at them, it's not going to help them improve if you tell the child to get in front of the ball. You simply have to realize that some kids don't have the physical ability at this age to judge a thrown baseball, so it's important that you're aware of that.

For throwing, I show them that I want them to point their hip and shoulder on the glove hand side toward the person they are throwing to. Then step with the front leg and throw. Again demonstrate what you want them to do before having them try.

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### **Make it Fun:**

I found through experience that kids this age will perform better if they have an objective and are having fun. Now you may think that playing catch is fun and most of the kids will also, but add an objective and an element of make believe and they will have a blast. In addition, you will see better results and you can use it throughout the season. Be creative and anything on the baseball field can have added fun and objectives. So how can we add those elements to playing catch? Here's one idea:

Give your best detective Watson impression and say something like "I was worried about your ability to listen to instructions, so I had each of your parents put a tiny camera the size of a grain of sand on your left shoulder, right shoulder if you're a lefty. Furthermore, in your left shoe, right shoe for you lefties, is a clicker that is activated when you lift your foot and step towards your target to throw the ball. At that exact moment a picture is taken by the camera on your shoulder. In addition, I have special contact lenses that allow me to view the picture of any player's camera at any time. The proof of your ability to follow instructions and point your hip and shoulder and step toward the target will be in those pictures. If your camera isn't taking pictures, then you're not stepping. If your camera is taking pictures of something other than your throwing partner, then you're not pointing your shoulder."

I sometimes will have the kids give their hat a quarter turn when they do something incorrectly. When they have performed 3 turns, they can get the hat back on straight by doing something goofy. Without making a sound give me your best impression of a chicken. Something like that is fun. If a player is shy and doesn't want to do it



then just have them give you a high five or something. It shouldn't be a punishment, it should be fun.

So when they start playing catch I will watch and call out names letting them know that their camera didn't take a picture because they didn't step. Or instead of taking a picture of their throwing partner then took a picture of the player next to them. They then give a quarter turn of the hat and continue to play catch.

You may think this idea is stupid and you may be right. It's just an idea and it has to fit with your personality, but in general kids of this age really are fun and if you can come up with ways to have fun with them and be "part of the team" by goofing around, then it can be a great experience. Make sure you can get control back when you do start goofing around a little.

.....

I hope this gives you an idea of how I structure practices and how I provide instruction. My advice to you would be to be organized and creative. It's easy to think of fun little games for kids to work on skills. For example, when working on fielding I want kids to get in front of the ball. So one drill I do is have three balls in my hand and I roll them from side to side. The player has to run and let each ball roll between their legs. If they get all three then I make it harder for them the next time. They enjoy trying harder and harder skills and it's a great way to learn how to move to get in front of the ball.



## Chapter 9

### **Communication**

Communicating with young kids can be frustrating, but it can also be fun. I remember helping a player on my team a few years back. He was having a hard time hitting the ball off the tee and like many kids he had a tough time getting his body to do what he wanted. I pulled him aside and put a tee next to a fence so he could hit into it. I put him in position and I moved his bat to the ball and then pulled it straight back a few inches and had him hit the ball. I kept moving his bat back a little farther on each successful hit. After a few more successful hits I told him, "That's exactly how I want you to hit in the next game, don't try to hit it too hard, just concentrate on making a nice smooth easy swing." He got a big smile on his face, which I took as a good sign, so I followed up with, "So Tyler, how are you going to swing the bat next time you get up to bat?" He said, "You know what coach?" "What" I said, sure he was going to give me an exact recount of what he had just learned. He said, "I got this really cool blue truck at home that I got for my birthday." Now, I could have been frustrated that he hadn't listened, but I just had to laugh and told him that sounded like a great gift. He may have been concentrating when he was hitting off the tee, but as soon as I started talking his mind was at home playing with his new truck.

### **Keep it Short**

As you already know, the attention span of a 5-7 year old is very short. Still, it's easy when trying to teach young children a skill to lose track of time and try to instill that knowledge by repeating it in different ways. What started out as a couple minute talk can turn into a 5-10 minute lecture. The easiest way I have found to make sure I don't talk too long is to break the instruction down into very small pieces. If you're teaching hitting, don't talk about the entire swing. Start by showing them how to grip the bat while you explain what you're doing, then have them do it. That's one lesson on hitting and you can think of it as a separate piece of instruction. That way when

you're explaining it to them you will be less likely to go off in another direction or talk too long.

I think it's important to be consistent in how I present group instruction. I want the kids to know that this is a time for them to learn something new and a time to pay attention. I'll call the team together and have them take a knee. They learn quickly that this is a time to be quiet and listen. Now, I want to give them the instruction and as we know, I want to keep it short. I use a method of "Explain - Model - Practice". When I think about what I'm going to cover the night before practice I try to have an objective or two with each skill I'm teaching. I'll use "gripping the bat" as an example. I have two objectives the first time I teach this skill. The first objective is to introduce the concept of how to pick up the bat. The second objective is for them to understand how their knuckles should line up when they pick up the bat. I'll introduce other objectives of "how hard to grip the bat" and "choking up" at another practice. Here's an example of how I would go about teaching the first example.

"Today, we're going to learn about how to properly grip the bat. Let's start by learning how to pick it up. I'm going to put the bat in front of me and have the handle of the bat across my fingers. Now, I'm going to grip the bat and pick it straight up to my shoulder."

Now that I've explained, it explain it again as I "model" it for them, showing them how to do it. Finally I have them practice that skill. Make sure they understand that nobody is allowed to swing the bat while you practice this and make sure they have plenty of space around each player. Another way to do it, is to have them use an imaginary bat while teaching it so you don't have to worry about the safety issue. Also helpful if you don't have enough bats for everyone.

"With an imaginary bat, I want you to follow me on the proper way to pick up and grip the bat. Try it a few times and check your knuckles when you have your imaginary

bat on your shoulder. I'm going to come around and put a mark on your hand to help remind you of where your knuckles should be."

I bring a marker to practice on this day and I put a line on the top hand that they can use as a guide for the rest of practice when picking up the bat.

That completes the instruction on this short lesson. I would then have them break out into hitting stations where they would be able to practice this skill.

### **Terminology and Jargon**

Most of the kids won't know baseball jargon. You'll need to explain to them what it means to "choke up" or to "step in the bucket". During a game you can't take the time to remind them of something by explaining it in long sentences. You'll want to give them some key terms that they understand as reminders of the skills they have learned. One time I yelled to the batter to "choke up" on the bat. He looked at me and switched his hands around putting his bottom hand on top. He still had his hands on the knob of the bat, but now he had the additional problem of having them backwards. I had to call time and get him straightened out. It would have been much easier if I had explained to the team what it meant to "choke up".



I remember another coach who told his third baseman to "keep your glove down and make sure nothing gets between your legs". The third baseman said okay and the next time a ball was hit to him he moved to the side and tried to make a difficult play. The coach asked him why he did that and the players said, "You told me not to let anything get between my legs".

## Compliment Sandwich

The compliment sandwich is something I learned about one year at a coaching clinic by a guest speaker, Bruce Brown. The concept is to give instructional instruction between two positive statements. It applies more as kids get older and realize that they have made a mistake that has hurt the team. The reason I give it here is that it takes some practice and is a great game time coaching tool. The trick is to make sure your two positive statements are true and not something you're throwing in just because. Sometimes it can be difficult to find two positive statements so occasionally I can only provide half a compliment sandwich.

It's a very good method of providing instruction in situations where a player already feels bad for making a mistake. Here's is an example of how it works. A player misses a ground ball that he normally could have caught. When he comes to the dugout at the end of the inning, you can give him a compliment sandwich as a way of providing feedback and confidence.

"Mark you did a great job of getting in front of that ground ball and getting ready." (Positive statement about what he did right)

"On the next ground ball, remember to keep your glove on the ground until the ball gets there." (Instructional statement on correcting the mistake)

"You've made that play a bunch of times before, so I know you'll be ready for the next one." (Positive statement that you have confidence in him)



## Chapter 10

### **Expectations**

When discussing expectations with a coach, the expectations are often focused on performance. A coach may say “I’m expecting a good year. We have a few kids that can really play.” It’s always nice to have a team perform at a high level, but to expect a certain level of performance will often lead to a feeling of failure if things don’t work out like you planned. This can be a problem for coaches at all levels of the game, so try to get in the habit early of having expectations that are tied to things you have control over. Providing a fun learning environment; seeing kids improve throughout the season; developing a team where the kids treat each other well and are supportive. Those are expectations that can be met no matter what your final record is.

One of the great things about coaching youth sports that is often missed by coaches is that success should be measured by the individual experiences of the players on the team and shouldn’t be tied to team record. We tell the kids those very same things but as coaches we often don’t feel successful if the team doesn’t do well. It’s really a shame if a coach doesn’t feel like a season was successful if the only gage to measure that is the team record. I’ve had teams that have done well and teams that have not done well based on record. Some of my proudest moments as a coach have come on teams where we didn’t do so well. One of my lowest moments as a coach came in the very same situation where we didn’t have a very good season. So why do I feel proud about some of those situations and poorly about the other? It came down to my expectations about the season. Expectations that I had before ever stepping on to the field. Now I don’t feel bad about the final record, what I feel bad about is how I coached that season, how I pushed the kids to improve, and how I didn’t coach like I normally did because of those expectations that I had. It was a great learning experience for me, but one I still feel bad about, because I failed to provide a good team environment that season and I lost focus of what was truly important.

## Chapter 11

### **Discipline**

It's essential that you have a plan for how you're going to deal with discipline. If you can't keep control of 12 or 13 kids, the first ones to realize it are the kids and they'll take advantage and make you pay. I don't want to make it sound like they're mean spirited because they're not. If they can turn practice into recess though, they will. Some kids may enjoy it, but others who really want to learn will not. Parents will hate it. Period.

Even if you're a laid back person, it doesn't mean that you can't have great control at practice. The key to getting the kids to behave is to have a set of rules and consequences that are agreed upon by the team and then follow through with it.

Kids are learning in school not to talk when the teacher is talking and follow classroom rules. You need to provide the team with that same consistent approach on the field. The benefits are many including a better baseball experience for everyone involved, including you.

It's important to start off on the right foot. If you lose control early, it can be difficult to get things back on track. At the first practice I get things started with a team meeting. I show them all how to take a knee.

I explain that when they are asked to take a knee, that means the mouth is closed as soon as the knee is on the ground. The hand closest to the knee that is up is resting on the knee and the other hand is to the side. This keeps them up straighter and keeps them from playing with a ball they may have.

The other requirement I have is for their eyes to be on me or any other parent/coach that is talking. I feel this is a courtesy/respect issue and I will stop what I'm saying

and repeat, "eyes on me" if it's obvious that a player isn't paying attention. I present this information as a team rule and as a team rule there is a punishment associated with it. I let them know that all team meetings are short and important. If they won't be quiet and attentive, then team meetings will be long and boring. If I have to say "eyes on me", that's a warning. If in the same team meeting, I have to say it again, I stop and as a team we sit silent for one minute. If they talk during that minute, I say "start over" and we try again. After the time is up I say, "If as a team you're not going to have the courtesy to listen then I will stop practice and we'll wait until you've decided to show me that you can listen."

By doing this, you do not have to single out a player. I treat this as a team issue and they will quickly learn to police themselves. If you have a player that likes to get the team in trouble, then this is a little different and I will remove that player from the team meeting and next activity. Unless the child doesn't like baseball, he/she will hate sitting on the bench while the other kids are playing.





## Chapter 12

### **Practices**

I've found with this age group especially, practices can be where the fun is. I say "can be", because it's up to you as the coach to plan practices that will be fun for the kids. If you put one player up to bat and have 9 kids standing in the field waiting for the ball, then you better bring a shovel to fill in the holes they'll dig with their feet while they die from boredom. You can't watch an older team practice and use it as a model for this age group. Kids this age have very limited attention spans; they need to be active and moving. In practice you can keep them all active. They love moving from activity to activity. Practices are really the make or break for how much a child will enjoy the season. Games are pretty much the same and are a little slow for many of the kids. They will have a difficult time paying attention when on the bench or in the field. I've found that if I do a good job of planning practices the kids enjoy the games, but they love practice.

### **Aspects of a Good Practice**

#### **Duration**

My practices are usually from an hour to an hour and 15 minutes. It's hard to get much done if you practice less than an hour, but if you keep them going too long you'll find the end of practice will become unproductive. One way to handle this is to schedule practice for an hour and a half. Tell parents that practice may or may not go for the entire time. When planning your practice, plan for an hour, except for the last activity. Save the most fun activity for the end. That way if the items you have planned for practice take longer than you expect (this is the rule, not the exception) you still have plenty of time for the fun activity. If everything goes smooth as silk and you're right on schedule, you can either end practice a little early or play that last fun activity for a little longer.

If your league only has one hour time slots for practice, schedule practice to begin 10-15 minutes before you get the field. At that time you can get your team warm-up in and if you have some space, kids can begin to play catch. That way when you get the field you're ready to go.

### **Focus on Certain Skills**



It's confusing for kids to be taught multiple skills during a practice. Think about everything that's involved in throwing a baseball, hitting, or fielding. You can't teach them all skills at each practice or they will become overwhelmed, confused, and often frustrated. This doesn't mean you can't have the kids practice more than one skill at a single practice, but your main objective and teaching time should be focused. Remember their attention span is short. You can't go over every aspect of the swing and then have them go hit. They won't remember a word you say after the first minute. Other practice skills should be based on skills they have already been introduced to.

### **Vary Station Difficulty Based on Ability**

There's most likely going to be a large disparity between the skill levels of the players. Some players will have played in the back yard with their families and friends and are quite skilled. For others the first time they put on a glove may have been the first practice with you. When you're organizing your practices try to take into account the skill levels of the players. Try to set up some of the practice activities so you can vary the difficulty. For example, let's say you have a station where a parent throws fly balls to the kids. Have the kids start out at a very short distance, 10 feet for example. As they catch the ball, have them move back until you find a good distance that will challenge them. Kids that are having a difficult time will stay at a short distance that is at a more appropriate level.

There are a couple of ways that you can keep your practice focused on certain skills without the practice being boring or the players being overwhelmed.

1. Teach a skill from beginning to end, but break up the teaching into smaller pieces. Spend a minute showing them how to perform the first piece of a skill (gripping the ball for example), have them do it with you, and then provide an activity to practice it. After the activity, bring them back in and introduce the next piece and so on. This keeps them active and learning without giving them everything at once.
2. Teach them a portion of a couple different skills. Show them how to properly grip the bat. Let them practice and hit without worrying about other portions of the swing. Then show them how to shuffle their feet to get in front of a ground ball. This allows them to practice more than one skill during practice, but again doesn't overwhelm them.

I find a combination of the two methods allows you to start them learning from the ground up and allows you to create practices that build upon each other.

### **Organizing Practice**

Good practices simply don't happen, they're planned. It can be tough to decide on what kind of activities you should have during each practice. You want the kids to improve, but you also want them to have fun. The goal is to plan practices that can accomplish both. I find it easier to plan one practice at a time, so I can use the information from each practice and/or game to help me determine what needs to be worked on. With that said, at this level it still comes down to working on the basic skills each practice. So here is an example of how you might organize a practice. I have included a blank template at the end of this guide and you can download a Word version of the guide at [QCBaseball.com](http://QCBaseball.com).

# PRACTICE PLAN

Date:

Page: 1 of 1

Objective:

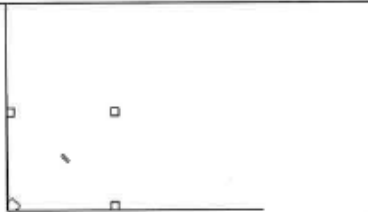
NEED TO WORK ON DEFENSE. MOVING TO THE BALL TO CATCH IT IS IMPORTANT. KIDS ARE TENTATIVE; REMIND THEM TO USE THROWING HAND IN FRONT OF FACE TO PROTECT AGAINST BAD HOP; CATCH FLY BALLS ON SIDE.

QCBASEBALL.COM

Time: 5:00 - 5:10

Activity: WARMUP + CATCH

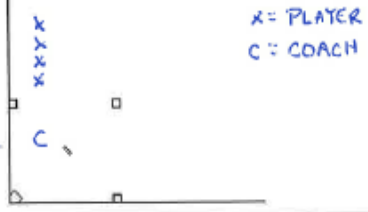
Details: JOSH WILL BE TEAM CAPTAIN AND LEAD WARMUP. WORK WITH KIDS DURING CATCH ON POINTING AND STEPPING TOWARDS THE TARGET.



Time: 5:10 - 5:30 STATION 1

Activity: GROUND BALLS

Details: 4 PLAYERS IN SINGLE LINE - COACH THROW GROUND BALL, PLAYER MAKES GOOD THROW BACK. ROUND 1 - DIRECTLY TO PLAYER. ROUND 2 - MOVE TO RIGHT, GET IN FRONT. ROUND 3 - MOVE TO LEFT, ROUND 4 + RANDOM



Time: 5:10 - 5:30 STATION 2

Activity: FLY BALLS

Details: SAME ACTIVITY AS GROUND BALLS ABOVE



Time: 5:10 - 5:30 STATION 3

Activity: HITTING

Details: 5 HITS PER PLAYER, THEN ROTATE. ON 5<sup>th</sup> HIT, PLAYER RUNS TO THROW DOWN BASE AND BACK TO TEE, TRYING TO GET BACK BEFORE FIELDERS CAN GET THE BALL BACK IN.



Time: 5:30 - 5:50

Activity: SCRIMMAGE

Details: 4 HITTING - 8 IN THE FIELD. SAME GROUPS AS STATIONS. EACH PLAYER GETS TO HIT ONCE, THEN GROUP ROTATES. IF PLAYER IS ON BASE, LET THEM STAY UNTIL OUT OR THEY SCORE, THEN ROTATE THAT PLAYER.



Notes:

5 MINUTES FOR EACH GROUP AT EACH STATION.

Time: 5:50 - 6:00

ACTIVITY: RELAY RACE - ATTACHED

The following drill was copied and pasted from [QCBaseball.com](http://QCBaseball.com) and is listed as the attached activity at the end of the example practice plan in [Appendix C](#).

## Drill: Relay Race

### **Purpose:**

This is a good conditioning drill and helps players work on making good turns when taking extra bases.

### **Equipment:**

2 baseballs

### **Setup:**

Split your team into 2 equal squads. Have half the team at home and half at second.

### **Execution:**

Have the first player in line start with the ball in his hand.

On your signal each team will start running around the bases. After each player runs around the bases, he will hand the ball to the next player. First team to get all players completely around wins.

Keep activities short and keep kids moving. In the example above I have allocated 20 minutes for kids to mover through 3 stations. This gives them 5 minutes to work on an activity and then they are on to the next. Rather than having your entire team stand in line waiting for their turn, you now only have 4 kids rotating through. That makes a big difference and gets the kids more time to practice.

## Chapter 13

### Home Activities

You'll see your players improve dramatically if they practice at home in addition to the time they spend at practice. Encourage the parents to play catch and work on skills at home. You might want to make up a catch card or other card for the kids to record what they do at home. I have included one you can print out on the next page.



Self Catch – Toss a ball up in the air and catch it in front of you (basket catch). See how many the players can catch in a row. Have them record their best 3 scores.

Catch with Parents – Have the parents play catch with their kids and record the days that they play catch.

Move to the Ball – Parent will underhand toss the ball a couple of feet to the side of the player. Player will move to and catch the ball and see how many they can catch in a row. Have them record their best 3 scores.

Working on hitting at home can be more difficult for some parents. So I generally stick with playing catch and defensive skills. Be creative and try to come up with things that can be fun for the parents and kids.

### Parent/Player Catch Card

Please play catch with your child every day. Mark your card for each day of catch. Please bring your card to each practice.

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Week 1							
Week 2							
Week 3							
Week 4							

Player Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Parent/Player Catch Card

Please play catch with your child every day. Mark your card for each day of catch. Please bring your card to each practice.

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Week 1							
Week 2							
Week 3							
Week 4							

Player Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Parent/Player Catch Card

Please play catch with your child every day. Mark your card for each day of catch. Please bring your card to each practice.

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Week 1							
Week 2							
Week 3							
Week 4							

Player Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Learning Positions**

It's tough for kids to remember where left field or right field is. One way to help them accomplish this is by going over the positions in practice, showing them where to stand and then after practice give them the home coloring activity on the following page. This will provide them with a fun home activity that will help reinforce the positions that they have learned. Have them bring back the completed fields and hang one or two of them in the dugout each game. It will be a reminder of where all the positions are as well as a nice way to recognize each player during the season.

One drill I do early in the season is have all the kids at home plate and then I tell them a position and the whole team runs to that spot. Then I call out another position and we do the same thing. This is a good at the end of practice drill to get some running in while learning the positions. After a few weeks I may do the same drill but have kids go to different positions so they figure out where to go on their own. We will usually use second base as the spot they start from and come back to.



# Baseball Positions

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Color each glove at the top of this page a different color. Color the matching glove (by position) on the field the same color. Then color the rest of the field the way you want to make your own unique baseball field.



Pitcher



Second Baseman



Left Fielder



Catcher



Shortstop



Center Fielder



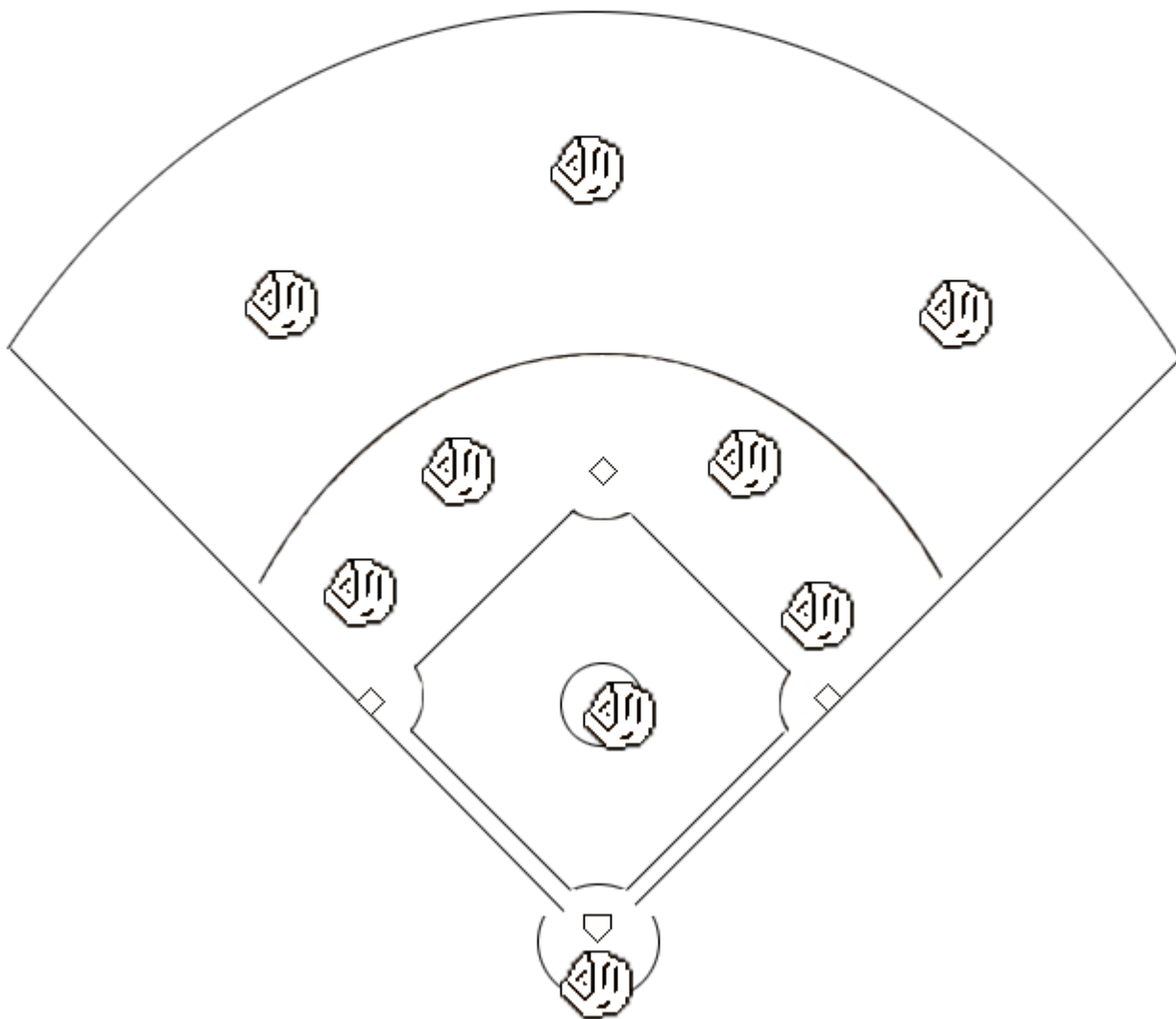
First Baseman



Third Baseman



Right Fielder



## Chapter 14

### **Game Time**

#### **League Rules**

It would be nice if I could list out the rules of tee ball in this guide, but the chances of those rules matching your league rules are slim. Before your first game, make sure you have read your league rules as they apply to tee ball. You may have a general idea of the differences and how the game is played, and if the opposing coach is like you, then there shouldn't be a problem. Some coaches will know the rules inside and out and the problem is not in your ability to adapt to the changes from game to game, but rather the kid's ability to adapt. If at one game they can swing as many times as necessary to get a fair ball and the next game the opposing coach wants to implement the league strike out rule to make sure the game moves along, you'll have some upset kids who don't understand why they struck out and didn't get to run the bases.

Most leagues have a coaching meeting before the season. Make sure you attend the meeting and ask some of the other tee ball coaches about the rules and how strictly they are enforced. Make sure you understand the league rules and ask any questions that you have about those rules at the meeting. If you don't get all your questions answered, email league officials and ask them your specific questions. You may want to print out those responses and bring them to your games. All levels of baseball have coaches who volunteer that really have no business being involved in youth athletics and tee ball is no exception. By knowing the rules you put yourself in a position where you won't be doing something during a game that you don't feel is correct.

The most upsetting thing that can happen to a young player is to be told that he/she struck out when he/she is not expecting it. Tears will most likely follow. Understand the rule and how it's applied in your league before the first game and make sure the kids know the rule also.

I've had very few problems with opposing coaches at the tee ball level, but by knowing the rules you will be prepared for that one or two coaches in your league who may turn a fun day of baseball into an exercise in frustration.

## **Kids**

Playing the game is supposed to be the reward for practicing. Often the game can become a very stressful situation for the kids. Make sure to monitor your behavior and track the behavior of the parents to make sure that game time is enjoyable for the players on your team. Plenty of positive reinforcement is necessary on game day, so spread it around.

## **Coach**

- Setting the lineup
- Preparing the field
- Hoping players show up on time
- Making substitutions
- Dealing with player disappointment
- Monitoring player behavior

## **Lineup**

As I've stated before, I set the expectation that I'm going to give everyone an equal opportunity. In order to do that, I feel the need to be organized and to track the playing time and positions that the kids play. I set the lineup in advance and let the kids know that I will set the positions, so don't ask "can I play shortstop" or "can I play third". If you start down that path, things will get ugly very quick as you'll have kids continually ask you to play their favorite position.



I define positions as either an action or a non-action position. Then I move players from an action to a non-action position then back to an action position. This flows from game to game; I don't start fresh each game.



For tee ball the outfield is generally a non-action position as there normally aren't many balls that get hit that far. Infield has more and pitcher and first base will often get the most action. So try to rotate kids that haven't got the ball hit to them much to pitcher or first base.

## Chapter 15

### **Parents**

Many ex-youth coaches will tell you the reason they quit coaching wasn't because of the kids, it was the parents. As a volunteer, you would like to think that all parents will be helpful and supportive of the effort you're putting forward to help their children; this of course isn't always the case. For the most part I find that the parents are pretty easy to get along with as long as you meet or exceed their expectations. A key component of meeting or exceeding their expectations is for you to know what those expectations are. If you ask a parent about their expectations, you'll most likely get some real basic answers about learning baseball, gaining skill, and having fun. Those answers are fine, but they are too generic to provide much of a measuring stick about how you're doing.

### **Exceeding Expectations**

In an earlier chapter I wrote about the parent meeting and the importance of setting expectations for the season. That's an important first step in making sure that you and the parents are clear about how the team is going to be handled. At that meeting you're helping parents take the next step from the basic expectations to more detailed expectations about the season. By doing this, you will most likely exceed their expectations and get the season off to a great start. That's a good start, but at that point you haven't done anything.

### **Communication**

We've already covered some communication issues, but it's worth highlighting again in this chapter. It's important that you keep parents informed about any team related issues and to do it in a timely fashion. If you tell parents that you're going to try and have a practice on Saturday and you will call them to let them know. Don't wait until Saturday morning to let them know if it's on or off. Everyone is busy and it can be difficult for people to plan if you don't give them enough warning. It really comes

down to following through with what you say you're going to do. Personally, I hate making phone calls to my entire team to keep them informed about changes and updates. I have a team web site that I set up and use in combination with email and group text messages to keep the team informed. I only call when there is a last minute change because of weather or some other unexpected event. I let the parents know at the first practice that communication will be primarily handled through email, text messages, and the team web site. I find out if anyone doesn't have the ability to check the website, doesn't get text messages, or doesn't have an email account. For people that don't get text messages, I let those parents know that I will call them. Now instead of making 11 or 12 calls, I just have to make 1 or 2. Phone trees can also be set up so you don't have to call everyone. Whatever method you use, the most important aspect is to follow through and keep parents informed.

As the season moves along, you'll have parents that have questions or may want to provide feedback. Create an atmosphere where parents are free to approach you and let them know when it's a good time. I tell my parents that if they would like to discuss anything with me the best time is right after practice or they can call me in the evening. I let them know before a practice or game isn't a good time for any discussion unless it's important for me to know right then (such as an injury, or leaving early). It's important to ask the parents or remind them on a regular basis to let you know if they have any questions or comments. I find many parents won't tell you unless you ask. Make sure you let the parents know that you want and need to know if there are any issues that are bothering their child. Kids will often not talk about problems to their coach and instead tell their parents after they get home. If there is a problem at practice, such as a child picking on another child, you need to know. You may only get that information from a parent, so make sure they understand that you want to know.

## **Be Open Minded**

When asking for feedback, you have to be able to take suggestions without becoming defensive. Two strategies that I have found helpful in this regard:

1. Ask for feedback on a night when you're in a good mood. If you've had a horrible day at work, you don't want to hear negative or even constructive criticism types of comments from parents.
2. Have the ability to tell the parent that you'll think about the suggestion and get back to them. This should be your standard response. Go home, unwind and relax for a little while. Then think about the parent suggestion or complaint. What may have initially seemed like a ridiculous comment may have some merit after you think about it away from the field. It may end up giving you some ideas that you can implement at the next practice or game. Even if it still seems like a ridiculous comment, you'll most likely be able to respond in a way that shows the parent that you gave the suggestion consideration and you'll have time to prepare an explanation about why you're not going to implement the suggestion.

Parents can provide some valuable feedback that can help you improve as a coach. I've seen a number of coaches with years of experience that seem to be offended that a parent has a suggestion. If you really want to improve as a coach then be willing to take input from multiple sources, consider that input, and see if it can help you improve as a coach.

## Chapter 16

### Learning the Game

It's important to spend time learning the game and developing the skills you're teaching the team. It's hard to teach them to perform a skill properly if you can't show them the proper way to do it. They will try to mimic your actions, so practice the skills you're going to teach before you teach them. Show the proper way to perform the skill and model it for them the correct way throughout the season. Throwing is a perfect example. I see coaches over and over who throw using poor mechanics. With tee ball and coach pitch this may happen as a result of trying to throw the ball softly. There's no reason you can't throw the ball softly using good throwing mechanics. The kids watch you and learn from you even when you're not teaching. With coach pitch, think about how many times the kids will be watching you throw. Each practice and game you will be out on the mound pitching to the kids. Provide a good example by using the skills you're teaching.





## Chapter 17

### **Competition**

Your players will understand the concept of winning and losing, and whether you keep score or not, kids will try to keep score on their own. The good news is they can't count worth a darn over the course of a game. They will be happy when they think they have won and disappointed for a few moments if they felt like they lost. In general most kids will be running for the post game treats and really don't care one way or another. You may take their desire to keep score as a desire for competition, but their idea of competition is much different than an adult or children that are a few years older. One of the big differences is that an older player can determine that his performance had a positive or negative affect on the outcome of the game. A tee ball or coach pitch player most often can't make that distinction. So making a speech about each player playing their hardest so we can win the game has little to no effect on your team. In the book "The Cheers and the Tears", Shane Murphy discusses two types of competitive orientations, "Ego Orientation" and "Mastery Orientation". Without going into the details a person who is ego oriented is motivated by how he looks. Winning is important because he looks good when he wins. How he compares to other players is very important. He is motivated to get better in order to look better as a standout player.

A player that is mastery oriented is motivated by the desire to improve their skill and become an expert in the sport. The outcome of the game may be important, but not as much as his play during the game. Murphy describes how most sports are set up to feed the ego of a player. Players are given positive feedback if they win or have a great game. The result and how they look is most important. This may or may not be interesting to you and I haven't gone into much detail, but the important thing as a youth coach to understand is that athletes that achieve high levels of success will inevitably have a high level of mastery orientation. They may also have a high level of ego orientation, but the mastery orientation is the most important for them to

continue to improve and succeed at higher levels of competition. On the other hand a player that has a high ego orientation and a low mastery orientation may develop many problems in competitive situations if they aren't successful. This relates in the way you want to deal with competitive situations during practice and games. Try to motivate players to improve and get better as they play, don't focus on the results. Coaches and parents have a huge influence on the development of a child's competitive nature. You want to try and influence them in a way that will develop them into wanting to master the game rather than focusing on the results. Let's take a typical practice for example. You may decide to have a groundball competition. You hit a groundball and if the player fields it, he/she stays in the competition. If he/she misses it he/she goes to the side and watches the other players continue to play. In the end though the player will focus on whether they are still in the competition or not, rather than how well they attempted to perform the skill. As a coach you can help them focus on the skill by letting them back in the game. So I'll explain before the game that if they miss a ground ball they can go over to coach Mark and field two groundballs in a row. Once they do that, run back here and get back in the game. The winner can be the one that caught the most ground balls cleanly but the other kids can keep getting back in the game and keep practicing.



## Chapter 18

### **Having Fun as the Coach**

Coaching can be a rewarding experience in many ways. One aspect of coaching that is often overlooked is the need for the coach to enjoy the process of teaching and coaching. Practice and games should be a fun experience for you as well as your team. The instructions for this chapter could be as simple as “you love baseball, so go out there and have fun.” Sounds like something we might tell our kids. For kids, that’s their main purpose and they’re good at it. Adults on the other hand sometimes have a difficult time enjoying themselves when placed in a position of leadership. We tend to focus so hard on the responsibilities and trying to be successful that we forget to enjoy the experience.

Having an organized practice takes planning; having fun at practice also takes planning. Set your practices up in such a way that you can enjoy the experience.

Here are a few hints that I have found helpful.

1. Have a parent or two get the equipment out, put down the bases, and rake the field if necessary.
2. This will allow you to get involved with the kids right away. While waiting for everyone to get there, play something fun with the kids that show up early. I like playing “flip” with a tennis ball. This is a really fun game where everyone stands in a circle and you flip the tennis ball to each other using your glove. You cannot use your throwing hand to touch the ball, but you can use your body along with your glove to stop it. The goal is to not have the ball hit the ground. At older levels this is an elimination game and the ball can’t be caught, but at the tee ball/coach pitch level I allow the kids to catch the ball and flip it in a separate motion. We count how many times we can flip it successfully to another player. The competition is

then to beat the record which happens quite a bit as kids get better. This does a couple of things:

- a. Kids will want to show up early to play the game.
  - b. It's a great skill improvement game for catching and using your glove.
  - c. You get to relax and have fun right out of the gate. This will help relax you if you were rushing to get there on time.
3. Warm-up with the kids. Warm-up is not only good for the kids, but it's a great stress reliever for you. If you're still thinking about a problem at work or something else, use this time to release that stress and set those problems aside for awhile.
  4. Have one game each practice where you can participate. Get involved in the relay race around the bases or get involved in fielding ground balls from a parent. The kids love to see you having fun playing the game and you'll enjoy it also.
  5. Whether a practice or game keep giving the kids positive feedback and keep them moving.



## Chapter 19

### **Things to Avoid**

As I've stated a couple of times in this manual, you need to be true to your own personality when developing a coaching style. No matter what your style is, there are some things you want to avoid while coaching. While most apply to all levels of coaching to one degree or another, they are particularly important for this age group. The first thing you must realize is that you're a role model. I hope that you will take that responsibility of a role model as serious as you take any other aspect of coaching. Kids look up to their coach and that title will provide you with some instant respect from the kids. Don't let them down by acting in a way that is inconsistent with how a positive role model would behave. The second thing you should remember is that your primary responsibility isn't to win games. It's to develop fundamental baseball skills in your players and to help each player develop a love for the game. This is accomplished through a combination of positive instruction, repetition, and fun. Other goals relate to teamwork, respect, developing confidence, etc. are also important for the development of the player. In short, you want to avoid coaching in any way that takes away from those goals. The desire for competition will develop over time as the kids get older. For now, there is no need for you to teach them to compete. Teach them to enjoy the game and enjoy being part of a team. Being part of a team and playing with friends is often overlooked as an important part of baseball. Teach your players to be a good teammate and your teaching them the same qualities that will make them a good friend.

### **Personal Habits**

What are you teaching your players if you run to the car after practice and light a cigarette? Or put in a pinch of chewing tobacco? What if you show up to practice with alcohol on your breath? If you buy into the fact that you're a role model, then you're teaching your players that it's okay to do these things. It may not have a lasting

effect if you're a lousy coach. On the other hand, if you're a coach that your players will remember for years then the lasting impressions will be strong and remembered.

## **Language**

Kids this age can't hear half of what you're saying if you're standing right in front of them. Mutter a swear word under your breath from the coaching box and the right fielder will yell "coach said a swear word". Most parents will be very sensitive about this issue. The expectation is simple, don't swear around the kids. In addition to parents and players being sensitive to it, it's simply not a positive way to handle any coaching situation.

## **Lectures**

Coaches tend to talk too much. I know I'm as guilty as anyone. The kids will listen at any given time to about 30 seconds worth of instruction. After that you will quickly lose them one by one. It's much better to have multiple short meetings during practice than trying to explain everything at once. Same is true with instruction. You may be able to give a great 5 minute talk of all aspects of fielding a ground ball, but you would be better off breaking up the instruction into small pieces and have the instruction build on itself.

## **Exercise as Punishment**

I've seen many coaches and have had coaches who have players either run or do pushups as a form of punishment. In reality we want to promote exercise as an important part of a healthy life. So don't send a bad message by having to have a child exercise when they do something wrong. Sitting out and not being part of what's going on is a much more effective form of punishment.

## Chapter 20

### **Self-Evaluate**

In the mad rush to organize and execute all the duties you have at work, at home, and on the field, it's easy to overlook or not be aware of the results of your efforts. Although improvement in skill can be an important indicator, with this age group measurable improvement can take time to see. You may think you're not doing a good job because you don't see the improvement from practice to practice that you anticipated. On the other hand, you may think you're doing great simply because the kids can field and hit. I believe in addition to learning new skills, the other primary objectives for a coach are to: help kids develop a love for the game; teach kids about being a positive and supportive teammate; help kids learn what it means to be a good sport; provide a fun and positive learning environment. As you can see these other important objectives can't be evaluated by looking at skill improvement over the course of a short season.

Self-evaluation of these and other objectives require you to be aware of the signals being given to you by players and parents. Players at this age are great for providing feedback since they don't hold back. If every time you start a drill you get groaning and "do we have to" type of comments from a number of players then it's a safe bet they don't enjoy that drill. Does that mean you should abandon it for something else? Maybe and maybe not. First, ask yourself if the activity is age appropriate. Older kids will love working on trying to backhand a ground ball. Young kids may not enjoy it simply because it's too hard for them. The opposite can be true where they are bored because it's the same drill over and over and they are ready to move on and try more difficult skills.

Be aware of the signals the kids are sending you and make adjustments appropriately. Here are some questions you should ask yourself if you're getting negative signals.

### **Is there a lot of waiting involved?**

As covered in before, kids need to be active and moving or they will get bored. If a drill has one player catching a ball and the rest of the team waiting for a turn, get some parents and break the team into as many groups as you can. They will get more practice and have more fun. Another example is a batting practice where one player hits and the rest of the team is in the field waiting for a ball to be hit their way. This may be the batting practice used when you were young, but there are much better ways of providing many kids the opportunity to be involved during batting practice.

### **Are the kids afraid of getting hurt?**

Trying to teach a young player to get in front of a fly ball is an example of a drill that might make the player afraid of being hit. Most young players haven't developed the ability to judge a fly ball. They will develop that as they grow but it may not be something you can teach them at this age. It's a physical limitation, not a skill limitation. In cases like this, come up with a safe alternative such as catching the ball on the glove-hand side. This way the player can gain confidence by trying to safely catch the ball without fear of being hit.

### **Does it involve competition?**

Many people stay away from games of competition, but I've found them to be a lot of fun for the kids if handled properly. The biggest problem stems from a child being eliminated and then having to sit and watch the better players continue on. Not only do they feel bad about losing, they are no longer participating or practicing. Stay away from games of elimination and keep all kids participating.



## Appendix A

### Strategies for the “Reluctant Volunteer”

If you're reading this, then chances are you fit into one or more of the following statements: you really didn't want to coach; have never coached before; have had a bad experience coaching; don't have time; don't feel knowledgeable enough; don't think you'll like it; don't think it's a good idea to coach your own child.

Without a doubt coaching this age group can be a daunting task. A problem, when forced to do something you don't really want to do, is that often people just go from day to day, just trying to get by and get it over with. The object of this appendix is to first change your mind set and secondly help you prepare and overcome the obstacles that might be in the way of you becoming a successful baseball coach who enjoys the experience.

#### **Attitude**

The “Reluctant Volunteer” most often will perceive their role as a coach in a negative way before even starting. Instead of seeing an opportunity, they see failure or burden. Starting out in this manner obviously decreases the chances of being successful. So our first order of business is to get in a positive frame of mind so you can tackle the tasks (not the children! Never tackle the children) of coaching in an orderly manner. I'm no psychiatrist, but I've spent enough time procrastinating over my life to know that once you know have to do something, it's never as bad as it seems if you get right to it and do the best you can. If you sit around going over and over in your mind why you're going to hate something or why you can't do it, things only seem worse and you make no progress in accomplishing the task.

So, since you have committed to coach, let's take this opportunity for you to convince yourself that you're going to approach it with an open positive mind and see if it's going to be something that you can enjoy.

Step 1: Convince yourself now.

Step 2: Ask yourself are you convinced?

Step 3a: If answer to step 2 is no, go back to step 1 and repeat.

Step 3b: If answer to step 2 is yes, continue on.

Step 4: You're ready to get started.

Did you feel the nervous tense feelings just flow out of your body once you got to step 4?

If no, go back to Step 1 because you're lying to yourself.

If yes, continue.

## **Positive Experience**

Let's reinforce that decision to approach coaching with an open positive mind by going over some of the positive experiences that can occur as a coach. First, if it's done right, it's a lot of fun. Now I know the "done right" part is one reason you may be worried, but you shouldn't be. There are all types of coaches out there who do a great job coaching in many different ways. The key is to find a style and system that fits in with your personality. It's difficult to try and fit into the mold of how you think a coach should act, so don't! Now this doesn't mean you don't have to be careful about your behavior, but it does mean that you don't want to try and become someone you're not. If you come from a military background for example and want everything to be just so, then don't try to abandon that because you feel like it won't work for 5 and 6 year olds. Being orderly and having structure doesn't mean that you can't still have fun and enjoyable practices.

## **Get Organized**

This has already been covered, but is critical to setting yourself up for success.

## **Get Help**

There's no reason you have to do this by yourself. Coaching with other people can reduce the burden and stress. It also allows you to talk things over with people that are helping you.

## **Don't Be Too Hard on Yourself**

You're going to make mistakes, just like the kids are. Be willing to admit those mistakes and learn from them. You want to model this behavior for your players who will be making mistakes, learning from them, and improving. Treat yourself the same way.

## **Have Fun**

If you're enjoying coaching then chances are your players are enjoying having you as a coach. So your ability to have fun is critical and shouldn't be seen as an afterthought.



## Appendix B – Parent Letter Sample

Dear Parent(s):

I wanted to take this opportunity to put in writing my coaching philosophy and my goals for your child and the team this season. Youth baseball can be an exciting and fun opportunity for your child to learn new skills, make new friends, and have fun. As fun as it can be for your child, different expectations from the coach, parent(s), and player can take away from that positive experience in a number of ways. As you read through this letter please make sure that my philosophy fits with your expectations of what you want for your child and how you believe the team should be run. If not, this is your opportunity to let me know.

### Coaching Philosophy

- I believe that kids gain confidence and a love for the game through positive feedback from parents, coaches, and other players. Skill level develops at different rates for kids, but effort and having fun can always be achieved. I try to always provide positive feedback for effort.
- I think it's important that a coach takes more than a casual interest in the players. I strive to talk with all the players 1 on 1 at some point during the practices and games. I may not be successful getting to every player each day, but I want them to know that I'm interested in what they have to say and more importantly, I want them to know that their coach likes him/her as a person.
- I believe in trying to make practices as fun and entertaining for the kids as possible, while providing the practice and instruction that they need to improve. I've found that kids expect and respond to well-structured and organized practices. Attention span is often limited with this age group, so I will strive to keep them moving and active.
- Teamwork and developing friendships is an important part of any team sport. I always try to tell the kids how important it is for them to support each other and to always be positive towards their teammates.
- Competition is an important element of any sport and as kids grow they naturally become more competitive. I don't talk to the kids about "needing to win a game" or "how important it is that we win". I feel my role and that of the parents is helping the kids develop the ability to deal with competition in a healthy way. Effort and attitude is my focus. If we can achieve that, then chances are we'll win the number of games that we are capable of winning.

I will work on teaching fundamentals and skills during practice, but I believe the game is their time. I will give instruction during the game if I feel it will help with their

performance during the game, but in general I try let them enjoy the game. I don't think any of the kids want to be told what they did wrong during the game. I hope as parents you will do the same. At this age, one missed ground ball can ruin the game for some kids. If your child misses a ground ball, tell them how proud you were of the effort they made to get in front of it. Strive to make them feel good about their contribution. My goal is to have every child feel that they played a great game that day.

### Objectives

With this age group, I have 5 primary coaching objectives which I believe are equally important.

1. Help your child develop the skills necessary to be successful at this level and to prepare your child for next season.
2. To have fun and have the kids develop a love for the game.
3. Learn about the importance of teamwork and sportsmanship.
4. Give positive reinforcement based on effort rather than results.
5. Provide a safe and healthy environment for all the kids on the team.

### Playing Time and Positions

For this age group there is a drastic difference in skill level among the kids. I want to give the kids an opportunity to play a number of different positions and I'll make sure each player gets a chance each game to play in the infield for a couple of innings. I will not have a player pitch or catch that I don't feel has the ability to play the position at this time. This really is a safety issue as much as anything. Plus, I want to put kids in positions where I feel they have the best chance of being successful. That doesn't mean they won't have the ability by the end of the season and I will always work with the kids at those positions during practice if they are interested.

### Team Rules and Discipline

We will have a few team rules that we will make at the first practice. Rules may be added during the season if necessary. I use a "penalty box" for the kids when they are not behaving or break a team rule. This takes the child away from the team and they are not allowed to participate in practice for a few minutes.

### Player Expectations

1. Have fun and always give your best effort.
2. I expect players to always show respect for the coaches, parents, and other players on the team.
3. Spend time outside of practice playing baseball.

### Parent Expectations

1. Please try to get your child to practice and games on time. I know this can be difficult at times and impossible at other times, but it's really hard to conduct practice or get ready for a game when players continually show up late. If you

know your child will be late or won't be able to make it to a practice or game, please let me know in advance if possible.

2. Help out with team volunteer opportunities. We have a number of items that require parent help.
3. Get involved in playing baseball with your child. This may be helping out with at practice or playing catch in the yard on days we don't practice. Kids love it when their parents get involved. Repetition is also crucial for skill improvement. There simply isn't enough organized practice time for the kids. They need to work on the skills they learn at practice at home also.
4. Please encourage good sportsmanship by demonstrating positive support for all players, coaches, and officials at every game and practice. Please cheer for your child during games, but try to keep from yelling instructions to them. Remember this is their opportunity to enjoy playing in the game. Much of the fun is lost if their Mom or Dad is always yelling instructions.
5. Please let me know if you have a problem with me or something that is happening. Same holds true if your child isn't happy about something. I want to know if there is a problem right away. With this age group, very small things can cause a child to be upset. These problems can be fixed very easily if I know about them.
6. Safety is a primary concern for me. Unfortunately, I can't watch every child every second. If you see any situation that you believe is a safety concern, please step in and help. Make sure you follow up with me so I know what has happened.

I'm looking forward to a fun and rewarding season. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to call me.

Sincerely,

Name

Phone Number

Email Address

## Appendix C – Practice Plan Template

## ▲ PRACTICE PLAN

Date:

Page:

Objective:

QCBASEBALL.COM

Time:

Activity:

Details:



Time:

Activity:

Details:



Time:

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