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Coaches' Tips & Advice





This section contains coaches' tips and advice on scores of topics — everything from holding pre-season parent meetings, to developing practice routines, to setting fair and appropriate game line-ups, to dealing with umpires, to tracking pitch counts and maximizing player safety, to motivating and rewarding players — and on and on. We organized this wealth of information into five sections:

- *Organizing Your Team*
- *Conducting Practice*
- *Coaching During Games*
- *Making It Fun*
- *Advice from the Experts*

You can quickly browse through each section and pick up the main ideas by reading the statements next to block bullets on each page. If you prefer more detail, read the information in paragraphs underneath the block bullets.

Whether you're a rookie coach or a seasoned veteran, we bet you'll find loads of new ideas for promoting excellence, fun, success, sportsmanship, pride, and teamwork while teaching kids baseball!



Organizing Your Team

- Learning to Coach Baseball
 - Communicating With Parents
 - Recruiting Parent Support
 - Checklist for Organizing Your Team
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One of the most important activities you will perform as a coach during any baseball season is to organize the basic elements of your team. Basic elements include items like learning your league's rules, developing a clear coaching philosophy that you can demonstrate at practices and games, creating a written plan for practices, and determining where you will need assistance from parent volunteers — then communicating all that information to your team's players and their parents. Our hometown hero coaches offer some valuable tips for organizing your team successfully.

Learning to Coach Baseball

Everybody is a rookie coach at some point. We asked our hometown heroes to give us their practical advice on learning to coach baseball.

- Read, observe, and search the Internet for good coaching tips.*

Many of the coaches recommend learning resources such as reading coaching books, observing games, and searching the Internet for youth baseball coaching tips.

Lloyd Rue suggests that new coaches read as much as they can and really understand the general game rules and the specific rules within their own league. Lloyd says the Internet is a great resource. New coaches should search for “coaching” and “youth baseball” and look at some of the many coaching web sites for drills and tips.

Some of **Dennis Dunn’s** best learning experiences have come from the numerous baseball schools, clinics and camps that his son has attended over the years. Dennis suggests sitting in on a camp or clinic and taking notes while watching the instructors teach.

Dennis has also learned a lot from watching as much baseball as he can. He watches the pros and colleges, and attends as many youth baseball games as possible. Then he observes the coaches and players to see how they handle different situations. He is also constantly reading and searching for new books and tapes about coaching, always searching for one more tip that can help him improve as a coach.

Tap into the training resources offered through your league.

Phil Swan believes that uniformity when training coaches within a league leads to more successful leagues. Everybody hears similar messages and learns similar skills. Phil and another coach within his league help with coach training by using one practice early in the season to conduct a clinic where the players are the instructors. Phil says ...

“Why not ... the players usually know the fundamentals better than any parent coaches out there. We use 10- to 12-year-old players from our majors and our upper levels and we have them come out and be our demonstrators and teachers. We conduct a 90-minute practice as a clinic.”

Ryan Callaham encourages any coach, whether they’re just starting out or they’ve been coaching for awhile, to get involved with their league, not just be a coach. Ryan

believes that getting involved in your league will allow you to gain insight into what's going on, how to approach issues, and why things are done a certain way.

"It has made a world of difference to me ... I've seen why things are done the way they are ... I also like to think on some form or level that I have helped shape where we're going as a league."

Communicating With Parents

Letting the parents of kids on your team know what's going on and keeping them updated as the season progresses is a key aspect of any successful season. Here's what our hometown hero coaches recommend to ensure good communication with parents.

Hold a pre-season parent meeting.

Many of the coaches we spoke with emphasized the importance of communicating with parents before the season starts to let them know what the coaches' expectations are and to tell them about their coaching styles. **Lloyd Rue** put it nicely:

"Preparation, organization, and communication are the keys. I've never coached a baseball season yet where I haven't begun with a parent meeting. I know that at least the appearance of organization ... laying out the schedule, the practice and game times, and so on, saves an awful lot of difficulty later on. I like to think of it as the splinter that you don't get if you're wearing gloves. I tell them what my philosophy is and what they should expect with my coaching style, and if they're not seeing that, they need to talk to me or somebody who can come to me...."

Gilbert Lopez agrees that the parent meeting is critical.

"To me, the parent meeting is the most important part of the season because if you don't handle that



**COACH
LLOYD RUE**

**Helena Babe Ruth
Baseball Association
Helena, Montana**

Talk about productive ... this creative coach provided fifteen drills and just about as many tips from which to choose, including some of the most creative ideas we ran across. Our guess is that the kids on Coach Rue's team don't get bored with the same drills too often!

As far as coaching goes, Lloyd believes that preparation, organization, and communication are key. He is a believer in making sure that everybody understands the coach's philosophy before the start of the season — players and coaches as well as parents. Lloyd points out that it's important to be honest and fair with your team members. If you coach to win and don't like to move players around, then you ought to say that to the team at the beginning of the season. If you coach to rotate players, then that ought to be said as well. We like the straight forward approach to communication that Lloyd Rue practices.

right, it's really not going to work out the rest of the season. I know that from experience. I had one bad year where I didn't have a meeting and I went straight into the practice and it was just chaos. Parents were asking "Why this? Why that? Well, how come my kid is not over here?" Team parent meetings are the first thing that I do before any season starts, whether its spring ball or fall ball."

Gilbert suggests that you call your team players and their parents as soon as you get your team roster. Let the kids know that they are going to be on your team and let the parents know when you are holding your first team meeting. Use that meeting to speak mostly to the parents while the kids go out to the field and throw around some Whiffle® Balls or tennis balls so they don't get hurt.

What do you cover at the parent meeting? Here are a few good thoughts.

Tell parents about your coaching philosophy.

Gilbert Lopez introduces himself and lets parents know what he is all about ...

"I'm all about teaching ...winning comes second. I mean, I want to win just like the next guy, but I won't do it at all costs. Then I'll also give them my coaching background. I think everybody needs to know what I've done so they feel comfortable that I know what I'm doing."

Set the season's ground rules for parents.

Let the parents know what your rules are about player and parent attitude as well as player effort, focus, and participation.

At his pre-season parent meeting, **Rob Cruz** lets parents know his expectations for them, emphasizing that their

main job is to cheer for all the kids. He also emphasizes to them that no one talks to the umpires except the coaches.

“I think it’s the coach’s responsibility to make sure that he treats the umpires fairly and sets a good example for his players and their parents. Good call or bad call, the coach has to move on ... and if you do that as a coach, I think the parents will move on, too.”

Colonel John Parker merges his expectations with his philosophy for his teams.

“Typically in all the teams, you end up with a couple of kids on one end of the spectrum who are newcomers to the game, and a couple kids on the other end of the spectrum who have been playing for four or five years and are quite experienced. As a coach, I have to try to meld that together to become a baseball team. I try and let the parents understand philosophically where we’re trying to go, and that the whole idea of playing this sport is to teach the kids not only the fundamentals of baseball, but to teach them all to give and take and teach and share and put forth a great attitude and effort. They’ll make a lot of new friends, they’ll enjoy the game of baseball, and they’ll learn through this sport how to deal with other things in life.”

Daryl Wasano also makes it a point to tell his parents and players that he doesn’t tolerate any display of bad sportsmanship or bad attitude on the field. If his players start to display either of these traits, he immediately pulls them off the field and benches them. By setting this tone with parents and players right away, Daryl says he rarely has any conflicts during a season.

Explain why parents should not “coach from the stands.”

Several of our hometown hero coaches use the pre-season parent meeting to cover coaching from the stands. **Gilbert**

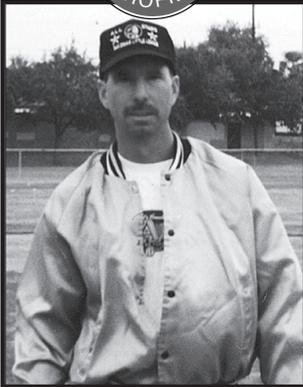


**COACH
GILBERT LOPEZ**

**Round Rock Youth
Baseball
Round Rock, Texas**

Coach Gilbert Lopez has a pretty simple coaching philosophy ... as a manager or as a coach, commit to giving it everything you’ve got. Coach Lopez likes to spend time getting to know each of his players, their personalities, their skills, and their interests. He spends most of his time working with the players with weaker skills. His reward comes near the end of the season when he sees a player fielding and throwing, who at the beginning of the season couldn’t catch a single ball.

Keeping the kids busy at practices is a priority with Coach Lopez. So, he likes to run highly-organized practices with lots of drill stations active simultaneously. Of course, he needs good parent support to help run his practices, and he helps to ensure this by his savvy drafting philosophy ... he usually drafts 50% player, 50% parent! Coach Lopez offers more goods tips in “Conducting Practice” in Coaches’ Tips & Advice.



COACH
JON BRAINARD

San Dimas
Little League
San Dimas, California

In his years of mentoring young baseball players, Jon Brainard has developed a very healthy perspective about coaching. As he pointed out to us, most of the kids you'll get on a team will be average or below average baseball players. They're not trying to do anything to hurt you personally, they're not trying to make an error, and they're not trying to strike out. So there's not any reason to get upset with them over their baseball skills ... none at all.

Coach Brainard's priority is to make sure his players are enjoying the sport, but also to coach each player to the individual level he shows the coach he is ready to handle. On every team, some kids will be ready for a little more competition and to be pushed a little harder. But, no matter what, a coach's main job is to make sure that every player, even while being competitive, is enjoying himself and learning.

Lopez instructs the parents not to coach from the stands because it can give conflicting information to the players. He uses the example of himself or an assistant coach trying to communicate something to a player such as teaching a player not to run in a particular situation, then a parent starts yelling "run, run, run," which can be very confusing to the player. Basically, Gilbert tells parents to please leave the coaching to the coaches.

"Let us coach. If there's something that you disagree with, if you don't understand why we're teaching something in a certain manner, then take it up with me after the game."

Phil Swan is a big proponent of telling parents that there needs to be one voice on the ball field ... the coach. **Ryan Callaham** agrees. As he told us ...

"At the first practice every season, I try to make it a point to let the parents know that I understand that it is their son or their daughter ... but on the field (whether it's practices or games) their kids belong to me. They are here to cheer for the kids ... I don't want anybody coaching from the stands because it puts the kids in an awkward position."

Jon Brainard also urges parents not to coach their kids during a game. He actually gives parents examples of welcome and unwelcome support. He encourages parents to motivate their kids with statements like, "Hit the ball hard!" or "Get a hit here!" But, he discourages parents from yelling out statements like, "Get your elbow up!" or "Get your knees bent!" or "Why did you swing at that pitch?"

Talk with parents about player safety.

This tip is especially important for coaches of young players. **Gilbert Lopez** suggests that coaches use the pre-season parent meeting to cover some issues on player safety. He explains that you get a lot of parents who want their young child to begin immediately playing the key field positions

like pitcher, first base, second base, third base, and so on. But Gilbert reminds us that putting inexperienced or immature players into these key positions can be an unsafe coaching decision. He calls these types of players “sand angels.”

“Dealing with T-ballers, you see a lot of what we call ‘sand angels’ ... you know, those are the kids that play in the dirt or sand or grass. They’re not paying attention to what is going on with the game ... they’re just in their own little world. Normally, when I have sand angels on my team, I position them in the outfield. Then I make sure to let the parents know why they are out there. I can’t put a player in a position where he or she might get hurt by a runner or a fast-moving ball because of not paying attention. I’ve seen kids get hit in the face and I’ve seen kids get hit in the head because they weren’t paying attention to what was going on. I wouldn’t want that to happen to any of my kids.”

At the parent meeting, Gilbert makes it clear that he is not going to put players in positions where he thinks they will be unsafe. Instead, he puts each player into a position that he thinks they can handle. When he can teach them to pay attention and to watch the baseball everywhere it goes, he’ll move them into the infield and give them more of that kind of playing time.

Tell parents to come to you at appropriate times with questions or concerns.

Colonel Parker emphasizes to his team’s parents that they should feel comfortable approaching him to talk about any issue or concern they may have. But, too many times he’s watched a parent discuss a situation with his or her child present or make comments in front of a child that should be discussed adult to adult. Coach Colonel (as many of his players call him) also likes to remind parents that various coaches won’t necessarily do everything the same way, or the way a particular parent might have chosen, but if



COACH
BRIG SORBER

**Okemos
Baseball/Softball Club**
Okemos, Michigan

We agree with Brig Sorber that youth baseball is all about fun and fundamentals. Coach Sorber believes that if you can keep the season fun as well as teach the players something, they will continue to come back and play again. In the Okemos Baseball/Softball Club, the coaches are all encouraged to develop their players on many levels — making sure they are focused and their attitudes are on straight, that they're supporting each other, and that there is teaching going on for the most gifted player as well as the most challenged player.

Brig makes sure that his team parents understand this philosophy and how many balls a coach is usually trying to juggle in order to give the kids a good experience. That helps him to emphasize why it's important to have as many parent volunteers with positive attitudes as possible. We salute this hometown hero for his great coaching attitude!

a parent feels there is an issue they should bring it up for discussion.

As with many of the coaches we spoke with, Colonel Parker advises that, during practices and games, coaching calls need to be left in the hands of the coaching staff. **Ryan Callaham** agrees with the Colonel.

"If parents have a problem with the way their child is being coached or where he is being played, or if they have a question about the team, they are more than welcome to come to me to discuss it. But, please, don't ask me during the game. Instead, contact me when the kids aren't around."

- Suggest to parents what type of equipment they should get for their kids.**

Every year, **Gilbert Lopez** gets questions from parents about the kind of bat or other playing equipment they should get for their child. He tells parents that a good tactic for determining when the bat is too heavy is to have their child hold the bat out in front of their body using just one arm, with their hand grasping the very end of the bat. If they can't hold the bat steady for at least five seconds, then it's too heavy for them.

JC Petersen always tells parents to try getting their children used baseball gloves because they are broken in and they bend so much better. He also lets parents and players know about his rule for bringing special baseball equipment (like catcher's equipment or a first baseman's mitt or a donut) to practice. JC makes it clear that anything brought to a practice "belongs" to the team during that practice, so anyone on the team can use it.

- Put important information in writing.**

Brig Sorber likes to communicate his coaching thoughts and rules to parents in a letter. He does this as soon as he

gets his roster for the season. He explains his goals for the team and emphasizes his team rules. For example, Brig takes this opportunity to let the parents know that he, as the coach, will be the only one speaking with the umpire during games.

Monie Duran is a big advocate of both coaches and parents knowing the basic rules of the game, especially because there are specific rules for each level of baseball. She likes to put out a newsletter for the parents specifying the rules for the level of baseball that she's coaching. In Monie's case, since she coaches primarily T-ball, she also wants parents to know that there is no keeping score at that age level and that she will have all players on the team play all the positions. Monie reminds the parents not to coach the kids from the stands and offer them only positive comments.

Recruiting Parent Support

Almost every team can always use parents to volunteer as assistant coaches or to support the team in other ways.

Use the parent meeting to recruit volunteers.

Gilbert Lopez uses the parent meeting to ask for all the help he can get. Even if he already has three or four coaches, he always tries to get all the parents involved as much as possible.

Coaching isn't the only place that Gilbert asks for help. He also asks for volunteers to take responsibility for organizing the team snacks to be distributed after the game, announcing the game, keeping score, and helping get kids ready for their at bats. If a parent is not able to help at practices or games, Gilbert asks them if they can organize an outing for the team, an end-of-season party, or whatever else the parent would like to do.

"If you make parents feel like a part of the team, they will bend over backwards to make it a success."

Rob Cruz

□ *Give parents a specific supporting role for their player.*

Jon Brainard gets his team's parents involved in a very creative way. At the beginning of the year, he creates a goals sheet for every player on his team. Jon creates a list of up to ten goals for each player such as "participate in making an out on defense," "get a hit," "get a double," "hit a fly ball," and so on. He tries to make the goals attainable for everyone, listing things that he as a coach can control (like getting a player to steal at least once during the season). Then Jon gives each child's sheet to his or her parent at the first team meeting and charges the parents with keeping track of the goals for their child.

This gets all the parents involved, and most of the parents willingly participate in the activity. Jon has also seen parents send an older brother or sister to keep track of a player's goals when the parent couldn't make a game.

"I've had kids that make a play on the field and then shout back to the stands to their parents, "Did you get that?" They like to make sure that their goals are being recorded!"

As incentive to reach the goals, Jon makes tokens on his computer (you can also buy stickers) and he awards the tokens for goal achievement to players at several points in the season. The tokens can be traded in for quarters (provided by the coach) to use in the arcade at the local pizza parlor.

□ *Use the league volunteer recruiting process.*

Bob Karol says that his league also solicits parent volunteers at the league level to coordinate the Opening Day Parade, the Closing Day Picnic, securing team sponsorships, and so on.

“Our attitude is always anybody who wants to coach, let them coach. Especially in a situation where there are lots of parents who may travel for business and can't get to every game, it helps to have backup coaches and other assistants.”

- Promote consistency in volunteer style and philosophy.**

Lloyd Rue cautions, however, that volunteer coaches should have a little consistency in style and philosophy. Lloyd suggests the following:

“If parents are going to help, I want them to start helping at the beginning of the season. One time I had a parent who came in to help in the middle of the season and he had some very different coaching philosophies from me. He volunteered as a coach for just a few games and then he left. That created a real problem. So, I prefer to do my parent volunteer recruiting at the beginning of the season.”

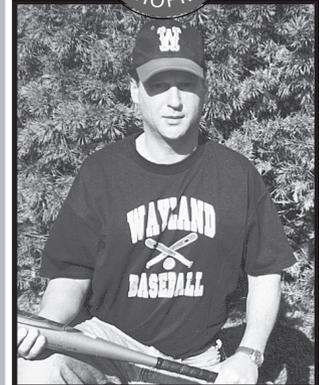
Checklist for Organizing Your Team

Pre-season organization is a critical element of a solid start to any season. Therefore, we've provided you with a summary checklist of tips recommended by our hometown hero coaches (as well as a few we added ourselves!)

Learning to Coach Baseball

- Read, observe, and search the Internet for good coaching tips.*
- Tap into the training resources offered through your league.*

checklist continued on next page



**COACH
BOB KAROL**

Wayland Baseball & Softball Association
Wayland, Massachusetts

Coach Bob Karol believes his primary role in coaching kids is teaching them how to be good human beings ... that is, being a good sport, handling success as well as failure, being part of the team, honesty, and improving yourself ... all the things that they'll encounter as adults.

Bob Karol structures his practices so that he can pay special attention to the weaker players. During a practice, he'll hit 50 ground balls to his starting shortstop, but 150 ground balls to the player who can't catch the ball at all.

Bob also tries to remember to look at the outcome of any game from the eyes of the players. For most kids, winning is not all that important in the long run. Being with their friends and having fun is what's important. Kids very quickly get over that two to one loss as soon as the coach says, "Anybody want ice cream?"

(checklist continued)

Communicating With Parents

- Hold a pre-season parent meeting. At that meeting:*
 - Tell parents about your coaching philosophy*
 - Set the season's ground rules for parents*
 - Explain why parents should not "coach from the stands"*
 - Talk with parents about player safety*
 - Tell parents to come to you at appropriate times with questions or concerns*
 - Suggest to parents what type of equipment they should get for their kids*
 - Recruit parent volunteers*

- Put important information in writing.*

Recruiting Parent Support

- Give parents a specific supporting role for their player.*
- Use the league volunteer recruiting process.*
- Promote consistency in volunteer style and philosophy.*

Before the First Practice

- Check out your team's equipment (usually provided by the league) to make sure it's complete and in good shape so it can be used safely and effectively in your practices and games.*
- Check out the practice field you've been assigned and make sure you communicate driving directions to that field to all your team's parents. When you give directions, use the proper name of the school or park where you will practice, not the league "nickname" for that field. Otherwise, some parents will be confused, especially those who are new to the league.*
- Set up an email list for your team so you can quickly and efficiently distribute information like directions to fields or changes in the practice schedule.*