



BASEBALL SKILLS & DRILLS



Coaching baseball is a challenge, but if you simplify, use a progression with your drills and teach the basics while making sure that the kids enjoy what they are doing, they will learn, become more confident and improve!

- 1. Use drills that teach**
- 2. Create fun with your drills**
- 3. Project enthusiasm as you coach**



SKILLS

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ✓ Throwing | ✓ Fielding Ground |
| ✓ Balls Catching | ✓ Fielding Fly Balls |
| ✓ Pitchers | ✓ Base Running |
| ✓ Catchers | ✓ Hitting/Bunting |



**Presented by Aaron Locks and
the National Academy of Athletics**

Throwing

Throwing a baseball properly is one of the most basic and important skills that all baseball players must learn. Do not teach your players to AIM the ball, rather teach them how to throw the ball correctly to the target.

Grip - Cross the seams of the ball

Hands - Start close to the chest, together

Throwing Arm - Wind up or reach back and extend to a 45% angle

Glove Arm - Extend into the direction of the target

Wrist - Bend wrist back fully to give more rotation and speed

Eyes - Maintain eye contact with their target during the entire throwing motion

Arm and Wrist Follow Through - Be sure to complete the throw fully

Body - Move the body forward as their throw - Step with the opposite leg of their throwing arm. For more strength, teach the players to rotate their hips as they release the ball.

NOTE: As they bring their arm around in front of themselves, release the ball when it lines up with their target.



Playing Catch - Drill

It might seem obvious but simply playing catch is one of the best ways for players to improve upon their throwing skills. To do this simply divide players up into pairs of two and then have them stand a few yards apart from each other.

Then simply have one partner throw the ball focusing on using proper technique to their partner and then have the partner throw this back and then just repeat the process. Go slow and we suggest that the coach, once the kids are lined up, be the one to dictate when the kids will throw the ball.

One Knee Arm Action - Drill

Just like the Pating Catch Drill, line your players up in rows equally. Have the players take a knee on the same one that is their throwing arm. Have them practice throwing the ball and following through. This will help with their accuracy and arm strength.

Be sure that your players follow though with their throwing arm extended over and beyond their front knee and rotate their hips while throwing the ball.



Stepping & Throwing - Drill

This throwing drill will help players to get used to quickly getting into the right position to throw the ball right after they have received it. For many players their instinct is to simply throw the ball as soon as they can without thinking about proper footwork and aiming first but this drill will help to change that.

To perform the drill three players must stand in the shape of a triangle with one player at each corner of the triangle and around 50 feet of distance between each player. The first player must then throw the ball to the player to their right and then that player must then turn their body and step towards the player to their right so that they can throw the ball directly to the next player.

Fielding Ground Balls

Teach your players to approach the ball in a controlled manner that is aggressive but not out of control. This allows you to make adjustments so they're not catching it off a short hop or taking it off the first bounce on the infield dirt. As they get closer to the ball, they will begin breaking down to get into position to field the ball. To do this, they would shorten their steps and widen their feet. Bend not only at the knees but also with their back. Put their hands out in front of their body and open their glove toward the ball with their bare hand on top.

Teach players about the "TRIANGLE"... Set their feet wider than shoulder width apart and put the glove out and down in between their knees, forming the triangle. Keep soft hands, watch their feet movement, stay low then come up and use both hands. They should have their palms up and "pinkies" close together.



Form Fielding - Drill

The best way to practice catching with two hands and working on soft hands is to do your infield drills with and without a glove. The glove is obviously an incredibly important tool, but it can sometimes get in the way of learning the best fundamentals.

Have the player get into their "ready" position and then roll or soft bounce the ball toward the player. The player will move slightly forward to engage the ball. Remind them to use two hands, receive the ball in front of their knees, stay down and always remind them "BALL FIRST".

Once they have secured the ball, have them come up into the "throwing position". We suggest that the coaches throw the ball for these drills until such time as they feel comfortable that the kids can perform the skill confidently and that the kids will go slow, steady and perform the drill properly.

Move - Set - Gather - Drill

Similar to the Form Fielding Drill - get your players lined up and staying low - once you feel comfortable that they understand the basics, bring in the glove. The ball will not always be hit directly to them in the game so they will need to know how to move to pick up ground balls.

Have the player get into their "ready" position and then roll the ball to the right or left of their stance. The players should take a step or two to get behind the ball and then move forward to "scoop" up the ball. Have the coach toss it to the right and then the next time to the left. The more advanced the players, the further coaches and toss the ball. As they advance and improve then the coach can step back and hit the ball to them.

We do suggest that the coach throw or bat the ball with control to help the players to have success, build confidence and not waste valuable practice time. Remind the players that it is important to receive the ball between their legs whenever possible.



PRACTICE DOESN'T MAKE PERFECT, PERFECT PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT -

Teach your players the right way to do the skill...
Reinforce the effort rather than the result and
good things will happen....

Aaron Locks

Catching

Catching a baseball is not an easy skill for beginning players, especially if they are afraid of the ball hitting them. We suggest that the coach pay special attention to which players are very afraid of the ball and work to help them get over their fear.

Catching the ball is based upon a few simple skills, but they all have to be performed at the same time. We suggest that players start with soft baseballs or even tennis balls that don't hurt when they bounce off their shoulder or wrist.

Pinkies and Thumbs

This "pinkies & thumbs" drill puts their hands in the perfect position to catch the ball in their glove; secure it with the bare hand; and be ready to pull the ball out for the throwing motion.

It's really simple and easy for your kids to remember. You can easily run this drill with a repetitive hand motion (not even throwing balls) by calling out loud "pinkies" or "thumbs" and mimicking the proper hand placement with them. Plus it provides you as the coach with a quick and subtle verbal reminder during the game if a player misses a ball. Just simply call out "pinkies" if a player misses a grounder... or yell "thumbs" on those fly balls or pop-ups.



Two hand catch - Drill

Have your players stand 5 feet from each other and toss the ball to them. Have them catch the ball with two hands every time. After a few reps, add the glove. Teach them to still use two hands but now the glove hand receives the ball and the bare hand traps the ball in the glove.

As you throw the ball to the players remind them that if the ball is above their mid section or chest, they should catch the ball with their thumbs pointing toward the ground and if the ball is to be received below their chest their pinkie fingers should be close to each other.

To help the players be prepared to catch and then throw, remind them a few things. Always catch the ball first, then prepare to throw the ball. Teach your players to receive the ball then turn their body and begin their throwing action..

Throw and Catch - Drill

Now that you have taught the basics of throwing and catching, it is time to put it all together. The goal is to play catch, rather than play throw, go chase the ball down and throw again.. Right?

Be sure that you have good spacing, line the kids up and teach them to play catch. Remind them to use all the fundamentals that help them to be successful. Do not let them get too far apart. Only as far as they can comfortably and accurately throw the ball to their teammate.

Challenge the players to see how many they can catch either in a row or in a timed atmosphere.

Remember to practice with them regularly... but most of all remember to make it fun!



Fielding Fly Balls

Work with all of your players on the following fly-ball basics:

Get your glove up in-line with the ball with your fingers pointing to the sky.
Elbows are bent and relaxed (do not extend arms straight to catch ball).
Catch the ball in front of your head off the throwing side of the body.
Catch the ball with one hand (glove), covering the ball in your glove with your bare hand.
Position glove close to top of head on throwing shoulder.



Fly ball soft toss - Drill

Start your players on the field in a line - Using a soft toss ball or tennis ball toss the ball in the air and the player will step into the ball to catch it above their head. Remind the players to use Two- Hands each time.

Have the players catch the ball the first time through the drill. After they have become more comfortable catching the ball with their bare hands, add in the glove -

NON-GLOVE HAND UP NEAR THE GLOVE (NOT TOUCHING THE GLOVE). 2 hands! Two reasons for this – to keep the ball secure in the glove and erase mistakes, and a ball transfer is going to be quicker if the hand is already near the glove. I suspect this might also give your child another sense of protection, which could help their confidence.

All kids can learn to track fly balls, but it takes tons and tons of work. Don't forget to make lots of time for fly-ball practice and tons of reps following this progression.



**DON'T EVER, EVER, EVER BRING A
HARD BASEBALL TO A 4,5,6,7 YEAR OLD
TO TEACH THEM HOW TO CATCH FLY BALLS.**

Fly ball catch and cut-off - Drill

One of the keys to a good outfielder is to not only make the catch but get the ball back into the infield quickly and accurately.

One of the drills that is important is the catch and cut off drill.

Line players up in the outfield. Throw the ball up to the outfielder. While the outfielder is catching the ball, have your infielder, cut off, get in a straight line between the base that you want them to throw the ball. Example. If you want the ball to go to 2nd base. When the right fielder catches the ball, the 2nd baseman should be lined up between the right fielder and 2nd base.

If the player is strong enough to throw it on a straight line to 2nd great. If not, then they can use the cut of person. Note: Teach the cut off to catch the ball and turn to their glove side as they pivot to throw to the base. This will help them to be quicker with the relay and have stronger throws.



Pitchers

When it comes to pitching in your league it will be important that you have players with the stronger throwing mechanics, confident and able to get the ball over the plate. It is no fun for anyone, even the pitcher, to just continually have walks. One mistake is telling the pitcher to Aim the ball. Instead, team them to throw to their target. The difference is a full arm motion rather than a toss.

There are not a ton of drills for pitching other than throwing the ball. With that said there are some basics that you should be aware of, reinforce and teach.

The Full Wind Up (Right Hand Pitcher)

You use the full windup when there are no runners on base.



Step 1 - Rocker Step Back

- a. Rock left foot straight back on ball of foot.
- b. Keep chin over pivot foot.

Step 2 - Pivot And Turn Your Hips

- a. Turn right pivot foot in front of rubber.
- b. Turn upper body so front shoulder facing target.
- c. Glove should be six inches off chest.

Step 3 - Balance (But Don't Stop!)

- a. Lift knee to belt with foot at 90 degree angle and toe down but don't stop here, keep moving.
- b. Weight should be even on back foot.
- c. Stay up right don't sink on back foot.

Step 4 - Break And Stride

- a. Take ball out of glove break thumbs down and away from each other towards thighs.
- b. Slightly collapse back leg to keep weight back.
- c. Bring heel into body then out towards target (this keeps front hip closed).
- d. Stride towards home plate with heel, inside of big toe should hit ground first at 1 o'clock.
- e. Hands should spread into POWER T position with glove down elbow pointing at target.
- f. Ball in hand should come out of glove down with fingers on top (knuckles to sky) and rotate up giving high five to centerfield or reaching to the sky.

Step 5 - Tuck And Throw

- a. Front elbow drives down into hip.
- b. Glove tucks.
- c. Back hip rotates towards home plate.
- d. Throwing elbow stays high.
- e. Fingers stay on top.
- f. At release body stays behind the ball pushing ball with body.
- g. Wrist snaps down and through.
- h. Arm continues to follow through until back of shoulder faces target.
- i. Back heel goes up towards sky then rotates over and parallel to the stride leg.
- j. Into ready fielding stance.

Pitching accuracy is a matter of reps and throwing with confidence. The more you can build up your pitchers confidence the more accurate they will throw. With that said, be very aware of pitch counts on all players who you use as pitchers.



Base Running

Depending on your division and age group, base running or stealing will become a factor in your games. The focus is really having the players ready to run, explode out of the box and run through the bag at 1st base. The drills we will be focusing on are not really geared to get the players in shape, rather to teach them how to run the bases in youth baseball.



Out of the box - Drill

Have the batter in the box, take a swing, drop the bat and explode out of the box. Do not have them run the entire distance to first base yet, the first few times, focus on how quickly you can get them out of the box and taking 5 or 6 strides down the 1st base line. Be careful that they do not throw the bat!

Through the bag - Drill

Many players will slow up as they get to 1st base. This is exactly the wrong thing to do. Instead teach them to run through the base 3 extra steps then turn to the infield and look for the ball.

The drill is simple. Start the kids half way down the line between home and 1st base. Have them run as hard as they can, through the 1st base and then break down, looking to find the ball.

Two or more - Drill

Just like the Through the Bag drill you will start midway between home and 1st base but this time you will teach them how to turn and run out a double.

The key is to have them get good running angles. In a double or anytime you want them to turn and possibly advance, have the players run up the line and then step out wide, 2 steps of the 1st base line then as they approach the 1st base have them turn in and try to hit the bag with their left foot. This will allow them to have a good angle and be quicker on their way to second base. You can continue this for doubles, triples and even home runs if you like.

Pickle - Drill

Sometimes players get caught up in between bases. We use pickle (with a tennis ball only) to teach the players how to keep their head up when they are running and try to avoid getting tagged. This is a fun drill for both the runner and the defensive players.

Start a player on 2nd base, with a helmet on, & have your defenders in regular defensive positions. Throw the grounder to the short stop, have the runner on 2nd head to 3rd base. The goal is for the short stop to make the play at third while the runner either avoids the tag or returns to 2nd base.



Stealing and Sliding

Depending on what age group you are coaching will depend on if your players can steal a base or slide for that matter. It is actually much after for players to slide into 2nd, 3rd or home then it is to try to run to the bag and stop or through the catcher at home.

Stealing - You will need to teach the players when they can leave, get a lead off the base or not and when to go.

Sliding - It is important to overcome the fear factor in sliding. Fear of being hurt is the one thing that makes a base runner tentative and can cause injury rather than prevent it. Proper sliding must be executed at full speed and when a player slows down he is susceptible to injury. Don't leap, jump or tumble into a slide and don't slow down to prepare for one.

Bent Leg Slide - This is also called the "Figure Four Slide". Basically sliding is "controlled falling." Simply run and sit down at full speed, landing with one leg folded under the other. Slide on the side of the calf and hamstring, not the buttocks. Slide straight into the base. Runners should also slide with their hands high to avoid injury.

The lead leg (top leg) should be slightly flexed at the knee and extended toward the base with the toes up. This is the leg that makes first contact with the base.

The hands should be thrown back and up, not dragging on the ground.

The head should be up and watching the base.

The 'tuck' and lead legs should form a figure four.



Catchers

In the beginning it will be most important for your catchers to learn to keep the ball in front of them. The following are the skills and a few drills to help.

When it comes to catchers, they are really 4 major skills that they will need to develop for your games.

Receiving the ball

Making accurate throws to the pitcher or 1st base

Blocking the ball

Throwing out runners

As they get older and move up in divisions and leagues they will need to learn how to call pitches and manage the pitchers.



Receiving the ball - Drill

Catcher assumes the receiving stance holding his mitt in front of his sternum. This can be done with or without gear. Coach stands 6-8 feet away and tosses the baseball so the catcher can catch it easily.

The goal is to teach the catcher how to catch pitches in different locations and with “soft hands.” If the catcher attempts to catch the ball with “hard hands,” he will not be able to hold the ball. Young catchers must learn to assume the proper receiving position and catch balls above their waist with one palm facing the ground. If the ball is thrown below the catcher’s waist, he should catch it with his palm facing the sky.

Blocking balls in the Dirt - Drill

The catcher wears gear for this drill. Some coaches will use tennis balls for this drill then progress to game balls.

Coach tosses baseballs on the ground 1 or 2 feet, either directly in front of the catcher’s body or his knees. Each throw represents a ball pitched in the dirt. Catcher practices dropping to his knees and lining up his sternum with the ball.

As the catcher progresses, the coach speeds up the velocity and the number of baseballs tossed per set, forcing the catcher to perform at a faster pace.



Throw Down - Drill

Coach stands about 20 feet from the catcher.

Catcher throws with a four-seam grip and keeps the ball on line with the coach.

Catcher makes sure the ball rotates with backspin.

Increase the distance of throws until the catcher reaches the appropriate distance for throws to second base. This drill allows the catcher to gain confidence when throwing to second base with consistent accuracy, increasing the distance after learning how to throw on a line.

Hitting/Bunting

In baseball, hitting is one of the toughest skills to excel at. The fact is that if you played Major League Baseball, got out 7 of 10 at bats and struck out half of those at bats, you would potentially be a hall of famer. So remind your players to hit the ball and realize that they most likely will not have huge success. With that said, here are a few drills that can help.

T work - Drill

The pro's do it almost every day, so I suggest that you do as well. Get a batting T. Put the ball on the T and have the players take proper, quick swings through the ball. As the batter bats, a coach should make sure they are using proper mechanics. Vary the height of the ball to insure the batter keeps eyes on the ball.



Batters Hitting To The Infield - Drill

Have a coach pitch or use a pitching machine to pitch to players as they rotate in from field position. Have the infield and outfield players try to make a play on first base if possible and perhaps even designate a runner. Make sure you are pitching hit-able balls. They don't have to be fast balls. The advantage of this drill is that you get fielding practice and the coach can closely watch the batter to see that proper form is used. The disadvantage of this drill is that each player only gets a few at-bats and a lot of players are not doing anything. Still, it is worth doing once in a while as it reproduces the full game experience. Don't have one of your pitchers pitching as you may spend a lot of time chasing wild pitches with little actual batting or fielding.

Hitting Whiffle Golf Balls - Drill

Have your players split up in groups of 3 or 4 with a helper/coach tossing whiffle balls to a batter in each group. The coach or helper underhand tosses a whiffle golf ball to the batter and the batter takes their full stride and swing to hit the whiffle golf ball. Have the coach or helpers watch for correct form and make sure no other kids are near the batter (for the sake of safety). The advantage of this drill is that a lot of hitting takes place by all players and batters can focus on watching the ball and using good form.

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Bunting - Drill

Only use this drill if bunting is allowed in your league or division.

Have a group of 5 to 6 players spread out about 20 feet in front of you. Each player will take their stance and get ready for the pitch.

Coach will simulate a stretch and deliver an imaginary pitch. Each player will work on the proper timing of getting in position to bunt. Once you are comfortable that they have the form you can get them in the box and go to work.

Remember that one of the keys is making contact, controlling the bat and ball and getting out of the box quickly.

Hitting Skills

Top Hand - Drill

This drill helps batters develop strength in the top hand of their grip. Strength in the top hand is important because the top hand guides the bat toward the ball. There are two versions. 1. put the ball on the T and have the player work on driving the ball downward. 2. The coach softly tosses a ball above the batter's waist. The hitter holds the bat with only his top hand and tries to hit the top of the ball, sending the ball straight to the ground.



Common Mistakes Young Batter Use When Hitting

Wrong Batting Grip:

Young players will often grip the bat with both hands apart, grip the bat too tight or grip the bat too far in the palm of the hand.

The Fix: Teach the kids to lay the handle of the bat in the knuckles of their hands. The bottom hand (the hand closest to the knob of the bat) may be slightly deeper in the hand than the top hand (the hand closest to the barrel of the bat). Once everyone is happy with the position of the bat handle in the hand, instruct the kids to gently lift the bat to their chest area. Check the kids are not gripping the bat too tight (look for whiteness around the knuckle area and muscle tension in the forearms).

Weak Lower Half With The Batting Stance:

When setting up in a baseball stance for the first time you may find that kids will not get into an athletic and balanced lower half.

The Fix: Have the kids spread out in a straight line with their feet shoulder width apart, once they have reached this position instruct the kids to stride out another 6 inches. Next ask the kids to bend slightly at the knees, (as if they were getting ready to tackle someone in football).

Stepping In The Bucket Or Diving In The Plate:

When striding toward the baseball young kids have a tendency to either over-stride away from home plate (stepping in the bucket) or dive toward home plate (diving into the plate).

The Fix: The front foot stride can be influenced by the subconscious mind, meaning if a young kid has a fear of being hit by the baseball his subconscious mind will trigger his front foot to step in the bucket to avoid being hit. Another subconscious trigger for stepping the bucket can result from trying pull the baseball. In both these scenarios you should instruct the kids to focus on seeing the baseball out of the pitcher's hand (close your mind and open your eyes) and try to hit the ball over the second baseman's head (for a right handed hitter) or short stop (for a left handed hitter).

Pulling The Head Off The Baseball:

The biggest mistake young hitters tend to make is not keeping their head down for the entire baseball swing (even after the point of contact).

The Fix: Train kids to keep their head down when swinging. Some coaches say chin to shoulder or other cues to remind players to keep their head locked and down during the swing. This is often able to be shown by a quick video and review. We suggest that you have the player take four or five swings on the T and then site and review it on your phone or Ipad.