

T-Ball Drills & Practice Plans

From A Player's Perspective

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Perspective of the Players

Before we start working with Tee-Ballers we need to understand *their* perspective of the game.

Batting, as far as their logic goes, is done with the arms. We face the challenge of helping them understand that their legs do most of the work when swinging the bat.

Running the bases and while on defense, Tee-Ball is just another version of tag. Playing tag is almost a daily rite at recess for kids ages 5-7. The central thought for these kids is the runner being safe at a base or being tagged out. Throwing skills, fielding skills, catching a throw at a base for a force out and even batting skills are secondary to the concept of 'safe' versus 'tagged out'. As we get into teaching skills and the basics to our kids, we must keep in mind that elements of 'tag' and being 'safe' will drive much of how the kids respond to activities on the field.

On offense, when the ball is in play, the kids' experience is a mad dash of anxiety in hopes of getting to the next base safely. They are not particularly conscious of the times when they are going to get to the next base without a play being made on them.

Some kids, because of the fact that when they are running between bases they are not 'safe', will be reluctant to leave a base even when play forces them to the next base, especially when it is clear they are vulnerable to being tagged out (or put out at the next base).

The defensive side of the ball is where the majority of our teaching challenges lie. For our kids this game of tag is a little more complicated because throwing and catching that darn ball doesn't always work out real well. Then, to make matters worse, we add the concept of tagging a base as an option for getting a runner out.

And we are trying to teach these concepts in an environment where simply being the one who comes up from the bottom of the pile with the ball is plenty to call it a successful day.

Realities of Tee-Ball

1. It's not baseball
2. Kids can't catch
3. Kids will find interests other than baseball during practice (and games)

Please do not view these statements as negatives. Accepting these points as the realities that they are, and being prepared to deal with them, will enable us to better enjoy the time we spend on the field with our kids.

It's Not Baseball

If, as a Tee-Ball coach, we go into the season thinking we are going to experience baseball we are setting ourselves up for a lot of frustration and disappointment. If we approach the season for

what it is, spending time with our child and their friends, watching them run around, laugh while they work to develop skills to catch, throw and hit that little ball, then we can have a great time as coaches.

As adults we are going to the park thinking 'baseball', while the kids are going to the park thinking 'I get to see my friends and run around a lot'. We want to see the activity from a kid's perspective and teach and manage them within their perspective and recognize that the activities at the park are not always going to look like baseball.

However, given the information in this section, over time, we can help our kids begin to learn the basics of baseball and develop some baseball skills.

Kids Can't Catch

Scientific research has determined that the human brain, on average, does not develop the capability to coordinate both eyes in what is called 'binocular vision' until around age 7 or 8. Until both eyes learn to work together we humans lack a keen sense of depth perception, which plays a big role in catching a flying baseball. It is important to recognize that, short of a few exceptions, the brains in kids this age have not developed to the point where they can catch a flying ball with much proficiency. Missing a thrown ball at this age has little to do with a lack of athletic talent.

In addition to the lack of brain development needed to track and catch a flying ball; the fact is that most have very little experience or practice in this skill. As the spring progresses the kids they will improve and they will begin to catch the ball more often. The most important that we go into our tenure as Tee-Ball coaches with an understanding of the developmental limitations of kids in this age group.

Kids Will Find Interests Other Than Baseball While On the Field

We can give our kids a glove, a ball and a bat, take them to a ball field and talk about baseball until we are blue in the face, but this is no guarantee that our kids will be thinking baseball the whole time they are at the park.

Other things they will find of interest include: other kids to poke, grab, talk to, and chase; bugs, dirt, birds, airplanes, fire trucks, etc. These all can and will trump baseball in importance at times during a practice or game.

Adults, who recognize these realities, accept them and work baseball in along the way will enjoy their time with the kids much more. Coaches who resist accepting the reality of the Tee-Ball world will experience high levels of frustration, bewilderment and blood pressure.

1. LEGS Power BODIES & moving feet
& controlling head

Three Primary Goals for the Season

1. The kids learn that their **legs** power their bodies; that moving their **feet** is the key to playing in the field and that controlling **head** movement is a big factor in successfully hitting and throwing a ball.

2. BBall = GAME OF MOVEMENT

2. They come to recognize that "**Baseball is a Game of Movement**". On defense when they are not playing the ball they have to cover a base. They always *move* somewhere the moment the ball is put into play.

3. BBall = fun - Always End on a fun note.

3. They remain active and having fun at all times that they are on the field (especially during practices, which always conclude with them scrimmaging). We want them to leave the field each day having had a blast. And at the end of the season express a **desire to play again next season**.

In the end, our primary purpose as Tee-Ball coaches is to help the kids develop a love of the game and create an environment that leads to them wanting to continue playing the game. We need to get the kids to stick around until age 8-9. At that time the game begins to resemble something like 'baseball'. Kids who make it to this age are likely to continue on with the game to age 12 ...and hopefully beyond.

Skills: Areas of Focus

- Batting
- Fielding
- Receiving Throws & Throwing
- Receiving Throws at a Base
- Defensive Positioning
- Defensive Responsibilities

Batting

The first statement we want to make to Tee-Ball kids (not to mention most other kids age 12 and under) is, "You don't swing the bat with your arms". Why?" ...because you don't. Nearly 100% of kids think (and many adults too) that the arms power the movement of the bat.

(This statement is made, initially, to get their attention and wake them up to the concept of utilizing their leg strength to power their swing. We come back later and acknowledge that the arms ARE part of the swing, but the use of the legs is a bigger part of the action being successful.)

The fact is the majority of the effort in moving the bat comes from the legs. Watch the baseball highlights on TV tonight. Only look at the batters from the waist down ...you'll see that there is a lot happening there.

* LEGS AS A SPRING

The **first** and most basic teaching point to convey to a young batter is that "Your legs swing the bat". We teach them to think of their legs as a spring. They want to turn their front knee back towards the 'catcher' a few inches (like they are compressing a spring) and then turn their legs and feet as fast as they can to start the swing. They "Turn back, then TURN FAST!" ...then they snap the bat with their wrists to finish the swing*. * SNAP PROCESS

While turning their legs and feet fast, the **second** aspect of a successful swing is to "Keep Your Head in Place". When watching the batters on the TV baseball highlights tonight notice that when they are in their stance their head is centered between their feet and at the completion of the swing their head is *still* centered between their feet.

Note: the phrase 'keep your eye on the ball' is incomplete; we must also include (or replace with) the teaching phrase, "Keep Your Head in Place". Watch their swings and note how much their heads move. Once they learn to "Keep Your Head in Place" it becomes difficult to swing poorly.

Stance - A very important point, which will positively impact the distance a player can hit the ball, is where a batter stands in relation to the Tee stem and the ball. A batter in baseball contacts a live pitch pretty much when the ball is even with their front foot. We want our little ball players' front foot even with the tee stem and ball when they are in their stance. Also they need their feet to be *wider* than shoulder width apart. Finally, we should be able to draw a straight line from their back toe to their front toe to the pitching rubber. See the article 'Herding Cats' at the bottom of this page. In the article you will find a diagram of the proper relationship of the players' stance to the Tee.



Fielding

Watch the baseball highlights on TV tonight and take note of the players fielding and throwing the ball ...watch their **feet**. You will notice they "Move Their Feet" to get into a fielding position, they get their "Feet Wide (apart) to Catch" the ball and they "Move Their Feet (shuffle) to Throw" the ball. Fielding and throwing is all about footwork and "Moving the Feet". (Occasionally the pro players, in situations where they need to make short, quick throws, will not move their feet to throw, but they are generating most of the power for their throws in their legs using a subtle weight shift.)

When working with kids on their fielding skills we want to be using the word 'Feet' and the phrases "Move Your Feet" and "Feet Wide" constantly, all day, every day, all season long.

The cadence in fielding and throwing is 'Fast, Slow, Fast'. We want the kids to run (move their feet) 'Fast' to the ball, 'Slow' down (and get their "Feet Wide") to catch the ball, and then move their feet 'Fast' (shuffle) to throw the ball.

Note: when delivering ground balls in practice, don't use a bat; instead throw or roll the ball. It is difficult to consistently hit a baseball accurately and at the correct speed when using a bat. When throwing or rolling we can consistently place the ball where we want it and deliver it at an appropriate speed.

This technique is used in college practices around the country and in pro training drills for the reasons mentioned above. If throwing/rolling a ground ball is appropriate at the college and pro level it surely is OK at the Tee-Ball level. We can make it through the entire Tee-Ball season and never hit a ball with a bat ...and we will be hugely successful in getting kids the repetitions they need to develop their skills.

Receiving Throws & Throwing — Do Not Focus on Result !! 😊

As noted above, kids this age are going to struggle with catching a thrown ball ...so how do we deal with this issue? First, when teaching and providing feedback we keep our remarks focused on the **actions** leading up to a catch. If we focus on the **result** we very rarely will have the opportunity to give the kids praise. When we focus on actions we can praise their efforts most every time.

Quality of Gloves Used By Your Players

— GLOVES ARE IMPORTANT

It is likely that a few of your kids will have 'toy' baseball gloves that are made of a 'plastic' type material and possibly have a picture of Spiderman on them. Their parents likely had the best of intentions when buying the glove and were not aware of the fact that some baseball gloves are not designed to really be used to play organized baseball on a team.

It is tough to suggest to a parent to go out and spend more money on a new glove. However, for the sake of the child it is something to consider discussing.

There are a lot of good quality 'leather' gloves on the market for under \$60 and many in the \$40-\$60 range.

Most sporting goods store that cater primarily to teams sports (football, baseball, basketball, soccer, etc.) will have a supply of 'real' baseball gloves that are affordable. Purchasing a glove at Toys R Us, etc. is not the best way to go. It also makes a unique difference when the child is able to catch the ball so buying a glove that has a workable pocket can provide loads of confidence to a new player, especially at the tee-ball level.

Receiving (catching) a throw has three key *action* points:

1. Ready Position (moving from a standing position to a Ready Position is an action)
2. Move Your Feet to Catch
3. Reach Forward to Catch

*WHEN CATCHING WE WANT OUR EYES
TO SEE OUR GLOVE & OUR HANDS
= LINE OF SIGHT

When a player, at any age, extends their arms and hands out in front of them; not necessarily 'in front of their face', but in front of the space occupied by their body. The result is they have *both* the ball and their glove in their line of sight. This positioning of the glove, within the player's line of sight, gives the brain a better chance of coordinating the glove with the ball. Most young children, because of the lack of shoulder strength to support the weight of their arms (and the glove), hold their glove (and elbows) close to their body when preparing for, and attempting to make, a catch.

Important: We will often see the kids position their glove outside their shoulders when attempting to catch. They recognize they will often miss the ball and are smart enough to not stand directly in the flight of the ball. However, a child can still extend their glove out 'in front' of where their standing and not have their glove directly in front of them.

1:1 Parent to Player
Note 1: Given the fact that this age group has great difficulty catching the ball, a most efficient playing catch scenario involves each player with an adult (mom or dad) as their throwing partner. Yes, you read correctly; we should strive to have a 1:1 adult-player ratio at Tee-Ball practice. Parents, how long will our kids be this small and cute? We can make 60 minutes a day, a couple days a week, to spend time with our own child.

It is important to understand that most Baseball Associations, especially Ontario Baseball and Canada Baseball specifically state that any time a player is throwing a ball that another player is to be catching the ball. The above suggestion is somewhat contrary to what you might think or have ready or even practiced at the blastball level. The rule is well intended, but given that scientific research supports the idea that asking a 5-6 year old human to catch a flying baseball is contrary to our knowledge of human brain development.

An adult throwing partner can make more accurate throws increasing the chance to the player catching the ball. The adult will catch throws more often. In this scenario the kids get many more repetitions resulting in quicker skill development.

NO CHASING MISSED THROWS.

*** If we find that each child does not have an adult to play catch with it is critical that we immediately establish this very important rule with the kids, "NO CHASING MISSED THROWS!!!" If we allow kids to chase missed throws our practices turn into kids chasing balls instead of developing skills. ***

The solution is to have an adult or two behind each row of kids playing catch. These adults have a few balls in hand and when the kids miss the throw, those adults roll another ball to them. - We don't throw the ball to them, because they can't catch ;)

If we do not have extra adults available to back up the throws, place 3-4 balls a couple feet behind each player. When they miss a throw they can immediately pick up another ball and keep the skill building process going.

Throwing at this age is not going to look pretty early on for most kids. Not much at this age will look pretty :) but it's all cute and fun if we adults see the game of Tee-Ball from the proper perspective.

Before teaching throwing we need to clarify a misconception that most every kid (and many adults too) has; they think the ball is thrown with their arm. We need to state emphatically to the kids, "You don't throw the ball with your arm!" (This is done, initially, to get their attention and wake them up to the concept of utilizing their leg strength to power their throws. We come back and acknowledge that the arm IS part of the throw, but the use of the legs is a bigger part of the action being successful), you throw the ball by "Moving Your Feet".

First, explain to the kids that when they are preparing to throw they want the *glove side of their body* pointing at their target - **NOT their chest**.

Next, they want to lift their elbows up to shoulder height and point their glove elbow at their target (or, if it's easier, have them point their glove). They are now in a "**Power Position**".

Now they are ready to 'throw'...

We instruct our players to '**Shuffle**' towards their target ("Move Your Feet") twice, with their head pointing at their target ("Your head is your steering wheel"). After two* shuffle steps they '**Pull**' their glove elbow back and '**Snap**' their throwing arm and hand *down*.

* Many kids will shuffle more than twice; some will shuffle many times. Not to worry. Moving their feet to throw is a new concept and action; it will take them some time and repetition to coordinate the transition from the shuffle action to the upper body (arms) action.

The teaching phrase used here is, "Shuffle, Shuffle, Pull, Snap".

It will take a couple days for the kids to do two things at once: shuffle their feet and throw the ball ('walking and chewing gum'), but they will get it and the result will be stronger and more accurate throws. (We will need to stretch out the distance between the kids playing catch with each other once they learn to move their feet, because the distance they are able to throw may double in a few days).

Most players will struggle with using their glove elbow to pull back when throwing. First, it won't compute that the arm with the glove helps the throwing motion. Second, it takes practice and coordination to execute this pulling action. Third it takes a fair amount of strength to use and control the action of the glove arm.

Even with instruction many players will not learn to utilize their glove arm in the throwing action over the course of the season. We want to keep teaching it however, so that the concept is in their head and in subsequent years they'll be better prepared to incorporate this into their throwing action.

Some kids have a tendency to throw the ball in a high arc. This is a habit we want to nip in the bud right away and eliminate. A simple and fun approach to the kids playing catch, in order to break this habit, is to instruct them to throw the ball to their partner on a bounce (which may turn into several bounces).

Instruct the kids when throwing to that the ball needs to be thrown 'level with the ground'. This discourages the high arcing Moon Toss. On the receiving end there are many benefits. The players have a better chance of catching (or stopping) the ball and they get experience with the ball taking a bounce in front of them...they will see this a lot over the season and their baseball careers

Receiving Throws at a Base

First, we need to explain a couple things to the kids (and continue teaching these points throughout the season):

1. The Base Belongs to the Runner

Kids on defense think if they are the first, second, or third baseman that that base is *theirs*. One of the first things they do when they go out to the field is stand *on* 'their' base.

A quick way to educate the kids is to take them over to a base (third works well). We stand at the third baseman's position (approximately 10' away from the base). We tell them "I am the third baseman", and then we point at the base and ask, "Who does that base belong to?" Their response will be "The third baseman's!!!" (kids love to show us how much they know).

Then we go stand on the base and ask them, "I am the third baseman. When I stand on the base, am I safe?" They will give you a silent and bewildered look. Then ask them again, "Who does the base belong too?" Hesitantly, and likely in a much softer voice, one or two will say, "The base belongs to the runner?" – BINGO! ...the base belongs to the RUNNER, ***NOT the fielder.***

We then tell them they are not allowed to touch the base unless they have the ball...

2. Ball First, Base Second

Ask the players, 'Does the ball come straight to you every time?' The response we will hear is a loud and clear, 'No!'

The ball rarely comes straight to us when we are at a base. And if the defensive player doesn't have the ball they can't get the base runner out. The defensive player's sequence of actions is "Ball First, Base Second".

To solidify the rule that a defensive player must first have the ball in order to touch the base tell them that the ball is the 'Key to the Base'. In order to touch the base they must first have the key.

An important thing to note is that in youth baseball the base works like a magnet. Once the defensive player touches the base with their foot they have a hard time removing their foot from the base, even if a throw is off line. Keep in mind kids see older players (HS, college, and pros on TV) catching accurately thrown balls while having their foot on the base. What the kids don't

understand is that they are playing baseball on a completely different level...and the game of baseball is played completely different by little kids.

Knowing the base is a magnet and that most throws will not be accurate, having the rule that the defensive player is not allowed to touch the base before they get the ball frees them from the powerful magnetic force of the base.

3. "Ready Position"

We teach the players that they need to be in a "Ready Position" anytime they might be required to catch the ball (when standing at a base, when the batter is getting ready to hit the ball off the tee, when a ball is being hurled in from the outfield).

Here in Seattle, the Seahawks are pretty popular, so I use the 'Football Helmet' analogy. I point out that Russell Wilson is *Required* to wear his football helmet on every play; it is not optional. Just like a football helmet is required on every play in football, a "Ready Position" is required every time the ball can be thrown or hit to a player.

4. Don't Look at the Runner

Kids recognize that the ball needs to get to the base before the runner in order to get the runner out. Understandably they are curious of where the runner is in relation to the base prior to them getting the ball. Unfortunately this curiosity often dominates their attention and they take their eyes off the ball.

We want to constantly tell our kids to not look at the runner and keep their eyes on the ball. They need to catch the ball first if there is any chance of getting the runner out. They can't catch the ball if they are not looking at it.

After a few scrimmages we ask our kids, "Is the runner safe more often, or out?" The obvious answer is the runner is safe most of the time. We can now emphasize the fact that the runner is safe a lot, so getting an out on each play is not a big concern. We want to teach our kids to put all their attention on the ball and catch it first. With that accomplished they have a chance of getting an out.

Another question is, "Can you catch the ball when looking at the runner?" This question helps them recognize that they need to keep their attention on the ball if they are going to have any chance to get the runner out.

Finally, we must be patient with the reality of the distraction the runner poses. The issue will not go away during the course of the season; it will remain an issue until the players reach, at least, the age of 9 or 10. At the Tee-Ball level we begin the discussion and it will continue over the next few years.

5. Stomp the Base

Safety (and fun) Point: When the kids tag a base we tell them to ‘**stomp**’ on the base. They think this is a lot of fun, but more importantly it has a safety component. A player cannot run *and* stomp the base at the same time. In order to stomp on the base they must slow down.

Over the course of a Tee Ball season there are times when a defensive player who is 15’-20’ from a base with the ball in their hand will race the base runner to the bag. In most cases the kids are running perpendicular to each other with the result of the kids reaching the base at the same time, while running fast, and a potentially dangerous collision occurs.

Positioning at the Base

First Base - stand between the base and the ball; right next to the base (but not touching).

Second and Third Bases - stand on the side of the base the ball is coming from; right next to the base (but not touching).

Home Plate - stand on the pitcher’s side of the plate; right next to the plate (but not touching).

These are the most basic teaching points for positioning at a base. As simple as they may seem, it will take the most of the season for most kids to get it; don’t be surprised if some still don’t. But just because they don’t get it exactly right doesn’t mean they are not benefitting. Much of the information we are giving them now will be incubating during the off-season and be ready to bloom when they get this information in the next season.

These basics do not put them in the correct position in all situations. Following these simple rules will result, at times, with the infielder in the way of a runner rounding second or third base. However, these situations don’t come up often...and kids (base runners) are pretty alert to avoid collisions.

We have two primary goals when teaching kids how to position themselves at a base:

1. Keep the defensive player from standing right on top of the base
2. Breaking the misconception that a player stands in a ‘Stretch Position’ to take a throw...

...oh, you didn’t know that a player at a base doesn’t *initially* stand in a Stretch Position to take a throw?!

I am not meaning to pop off to my readers. Actually I am chuckling a bit when I write this because many adults misunderstand how a player - including first basemen – stands at a base to get ready to take a throw.

Next time you go to a pro game, or college (many HS first basemen have not been properly taught how to take a throw), when a ground ball is hit to an infielder, instead of following the ball, shift your eyes to the first baseman.

A first baseman runs to the base and gets in a "Ready Position"! It is not until *After* the ball has been thrown and the first baseman sees that the throw is accurate that they Then move into a 'stretch' position to catch the ball.

PLEASE, do not allow the kids to stand in a stretch position when taking a throw at a base, or when playing catch (many stand in this incorrect position when playing catch). You will be saving them, as well as their future coaches and teammates a lot of grief. Breaking older kids of this improper habit is very difficult.

With that clarified we can move on to teach the kids where the defensive players' positions are, and their basic defensive responsibilities.

Note: Early in the season do not invest too much time and energy in teaching kids specifically where they need to stand at a base. Simply put, there are more important things for them to learn. Also, it takes more time and effort than we really want to invest to get the kids disciplined in standing correctly in relation to the base. This is another teaching point that we will address during the season, but not with high expectations for mastery. While some learning and application with take place, our fruits of our labors will pay off in subsequent seasons as the kids become more familiar with the game of baseball.

Defensive Positioning

Infielders - The first and third baseman stand 10' from the base. Do not tell them a distance (they will start doing a heel to toe measurement from the base to their position), tell them to stand "Four Giant Steps" away from the base when the batter is getting ready to hit.

Have the shortstop and second baseman stand half way between the corner base and second base. This is not 'regular' baseball positioning (remember: this is not regular baseball). The reason we position them exactly between the bases becomes clear when we start teaching 'Infield Base Coverage Responsibilities'.

Catcher - Strapping a 5 or 6 year old into ill-fitting catchers gear when they are not catching pitches is a bit illogical. Consider having the catcher wear only a helmet with a face mask (to protect them if they get hit by a bat). When I run camps for kids this age I use a 3' x 3' garden gate as a protective barrier. This is placed 10 feet behind home plate. The catcher squats behind the screen. After the batter drops the bat the catcher runs out to their position...

The catcher's *Defensive position* is just in *Front* of home plate; where they need to be standing in order to take a throw and make a play at home.

Defensive Responsibilities

“Baseball is a Game of Movement”

Young kids' idea of moving in the game of baseball is usually in relation to fielding the ball. When working with older kids a common coaching statement is 'Know what you are going to do with the ball when it is hit to you'. While this is very important it doesn't address the fact that the kids who don't have the ball hit to them also have responsibilities on defense. And those responsibilities involve the need to move around the field.

At the Tee Ball level our objective for the season is for the infielders to learn that when the ball is not hit to them they run and cover a base. The teaching phrase we will use over and over is, “Ball or Base” ...if you don't get the ball, you cover a base. And you *run fast* to the base to cover it!

The first few days we work with the kids on this concept, they will struggle. However, after a while most will get the idea. While they will get the concept, it will take longer for them to execute it well. Expect it to take at least half the season before some of the kids are reacting properly when they are needed to cover a base.

For most it will take till the entire season, but we will see progress being made along the way. As they progress in learning to move without the ball and cover a base it is very satisfying as a coach. And their coach the following season will benefit tremendously.

Teaching Base Coverage Responsibilities

Before we get into learning the drill regarding this fundamental baseball concept keep in mind that we will start working only with the four infielders. Initially we will leave the pitcher standing in the middle of the field with no instructions. Later, after the kids get some understanding of the concept of infielders covering bases we will then add the pitcher to the mix. In the next year or two, as coaches, we will come to learn that the pitcher has a lot of coverage (movement) responsibilities on defense.

We will drill our kids in this concept, but time they will get the most opportunities to develop the habit of covering a base when they don't get the ball is in our daily scrimmage.

Rules for base coverage responsibilities:

1. If an infielder does not field the ball they cover a base (“Ball or Base”).
2. The third baseman and first baseman have *one* base.
- 3a. The shortstop and second baseman have *two* bases; one to their left and one to their right.

3b. If the ball goes to your **left** and you aren't fielding it, *run* to the base on your **left**. If the ball goes to your **right** and you aren't fielding it, *run* to the base on your **right**.

It is understood that early in the year most of the kids on defense will want to attack the ball and will not recognize that some/many balls that are hit, are not 'theirs'. The 'positional movement' drills will start the kids on their way to recognizing that one infielder gets the ball and the other infielders cover a base.

Pitcher

The pitcher follows the same rules as the shortstop and second baseman. The base to the pitcher's left is first base, the base to their right is third base. If the ball is hit to the pitcher's **left** and they don't field it, they run to the base on their **left** (first base) and cover it **IF** it is unoccupied; otherwise they stop short of the base.

The same rules apply for balls hit to the pitcher's right. Ideally we only want the pitcher to go after balls they can field before it crosses the invisible line between them and first or third base. We don't want them running back towards the infielders after the ball. This is *much* easier said than done, however.

Why do we want the pitcher covering a base?

Often both infielders on the side of the field the ball is hit to will go after the ball and neither will cover the corner base (first or third). The pitcher is the 'insurance policy' to be sure the base is covered.

As stated earlier, we will not drill the pitcher in this responsibility early on. Our time will be used to get the four infielders to develop their base coverage habits.

This does not mean we will not teach the idea, verbally, of the pitcher covering a base. We will point this out each time it comes up. The reality is that verbal instructions are not nearly as effective as the players drilling the actual actions.

Later in the season, once the four infielders are demonstrating they are getting the concept of covering the *correct* base we can then start investing practice time on drilling the pitcher position.

Practice Structure

"Kids don't sign up to practice baseball, they sign up to PLAY baseball" – we want to incorporate a 50/50 practice which ensures that practice will be FUN every day and the result will be the kids wanting to go back to the park to play again.

To ensure the kids get to Play every day they come to the ball park we want to enlist a '50/50 Practice'. Half of practice time is drills and skill development and half of practice is playing the

game. Playing a game (scrimmage) is fun - and it is what the kids expect when they signed up to Play.

1. Warm-up (5 Min.)
2. Skills & Drills (25 Min.)
3. Break (5 Min.)
4. Scrimmage (25 Min.)

Warm-up

Base Running - this is a great group activity that also has an important socializing benefit. It is a fun way for kids to develop base running skills and become familiar with this fun aspect of the game. It also tires them out a bit, so they will pay attention to the instructions for the drills and skills segment of practice. Below are a few different base running activities. Only plan on each player having 2-3 repetitions in the warm-up base running activity each day. Over time they will develop their base running skills. When accounting for getting the kids organized before and after the warm-up, the actual activity only lasts about 3 minutes.

Run Around the Bases - I

Line the kids up at home and have them run around the bases - in the correct direction ;) Have them all run around at the same time. After two or three times around the bases they'll use up enough energy that they'll sit and listen for a few moments.

Run Around the Bases - II

Place a 2-3 kids at each base. Holler 'go' and the first player at each base runs. A second or two later yell for the next player at each base to go, and so on. After they are all running, let them run around the bases 2-3 times.

Running Through First Base

Simple line up the players at home and one by one send them down to first. Have the assistant coach or a parent stand about 3-5 feet past the bag waiting to give them a high five.

Modified Relay

Put half the players at second base and half at home. Place a cone three feet behind each base. The player getting ready to run stands at the base, the other kids line up behind the cone. Holler for the two runners to 'go'. Each player runs two bases, to the other group. The player who's turn it is to run next steps up from the cone to the base and stands with their left foot on the base and their left hand reaching back. The player running to the base tags the left hand of the player who is waiting.

Placing the cone three feet behind the base gives the runner coming to the base a clear path to run through, so to avoid a collision. Tagging the next runners left hand ensures that the runner coming to the base goes behind the runner and doesn't crash into them.

Relay Race

Save this activity for later in the season. Divide the players into two evenly matched groups; one at home, one at second base. In the relay race the players run all the way around the bases, returning to tag the next player on their relay race team. After tagging their teammate that runner sits down.

Don't be surprised if the kids want to 'do it again'!