

TEAM INFORMATION

A Reference Guide for
Effective Organization, Instruction, and
Management of Youth League
Baseball Teams

Welcome to The 3&2 Baseball Club of Johnson County. The League is happy to have you as a manager for the coming season, and wishes you every success with your team.

This Handbook is supplied to every manager. It is a source of information for coaching a youth league baseball team. Whether a first year manager or an experienced one, the information provided can help with organization, instruction, and management of the team. The baseball fundamentals included can help the first year manager who needs new ideas. For the experienced manager, it presents ideas that can be used with pre-existing knowledge.

Please ask if you have any questions on the material in the handbook. Though each of us will be involved in a competitive situation, we all share the common goal of teaching the kids to become better ballplayers. This includes the physical skills necessary to play the game, the mental skills needed to learn how to compete, and the aspects of good sportsmanship and fair play.

Thank you for being a part of The 3&2 Baseball Club of Johnson County. Best of luck to you and your team!

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1. Team Organization

Effective early season organization can set the tone for the season to come. The manager can save time and headaches by being prepared before the first practice.

One way to meet the players is by a letter of introduction. This letter may include any pertinent information such as a roster with names, addresses, and telephone numbers, or a practice schedule. This information could also be distributed at a meeting with the players and parents present. This enables the manager, coaches, parents to get to know each other prior to the first practice. Communicating information and expectations regarding behavior and attendance will quickly earn the respect and support of the team.

Behind every successful team are good assistant coaches. Providing more efficient practices, presenting new ideas, and giving support in every facet of the game describes the effective assistant coach. Ideally, the philosophies of the manager and assistant coach(es) should be similar. However, if not, the combination can still work. The coaching staff should be in agreement about what the individual responsibilities are and what is to be taught. Any disagreements among coaches about strategy, fundamentals, or players should be worked out first, and a united front presented to the players. Good coaching staff rapport is critical; even the youngest of players are aware of it. If one coach cannot commit to all practices, the duty is best split among several who can. The most effective assistants are those who know they are needed and will be used.

Managing a team is work enough without having to shuffle paper as a secretary. An organized TEAM COORDINATOR can be of great value to efficient team administration. A parent who does not work is the best kind of candidate for this position, as they can easily be reached on short notice. The Team Coordinator's chief function is communication between the manager and the team. This is especially important when schedule changes occur, or when games are rained out. A properly administered telephone net, originating from the Team Coordinator, can get important information to the entire team within five minutes. The information is dispersed systematically, preventing any confusion. In addition to communication, the Team Coordinator can collect money for team drinks, Royals Night, check on uniform conditions and sizes, and mail information that needs to be in writing. The possibilities are endless. Find a good Team Coordinator and the team will benefit all season long.

A good scorekeeper can help the team on the field, as the Team Coordinator does off the field. This allows the manager the freedom to run the team without being tied to a scorebook. Scoring a practice game, or a game on television, can help the new or experienced scorekeeper get used to tracking everything during a game. The scorekeeper and the Team Coordinator should not be the same person.

Other organizational hints include:

1. Practice schedules should include the date, field, and/or location, and starting and ending times. Parents will appreciate the prompt dismissal of the team.
2. Game schedules should be distributed to the players, as quickly as possible. Prompt notification of rescheduled rainout games will likewise be appreciated by the parents.
3. Remind players and parents that they should always assume there will be a practice or a game unless they get a phone call stating otherwise. This will avoid attendance problems because "it was starting to drizzle at my house so I assumed it was rained out. "It will also save the manager the trouble of answering the phone fifteen times to "Is the game rained out?"
4. Encourage players and parents to give advance notice of they will be missing a practice or a game due to vacations, etc.
5. A newsletter distributed every two weeks during the season is an easy way to keep the team informed of any upcoming events.

Good team organization does not happen by itself; once in place, however, it can have everything running like a well-oiled machine. Dedicated support personnel and efficient communication will keep the little things “little,” and allow the manager to put energy into the best interests of the team.

The following is a sample letter managers may wish to send to parents before the season starts.

Dear parents:

As the manager for the (team name), I welcome you and your son to the team for this season. I appreciate your participation, and assure you I will give my best efforts to making the coming season one to be proud of. The purpose of this letter is to communicate the various upcoming events, explain team policies, and to supply you with a team roster and practice schedule. Please take a few moments to read through these items as they all benefit the best interests of the team.

1. Please provide advance notice of any games you may miss due to vacations or other activities. If possible, schedule them around games.
2. The players have been instructed to notify me if they cannot attend a practice or a game. (This may not be practical for very young players.) While I believe this responsibility belongs to them, a parental “nudge” certainly won’t hurt. A no-show is one of the few ways a player can get “in the doghouse”.
3. If you have questions regarding the playing time or position your son is getting, please ask. Not everyone will get to play the same number of innings, or always play their “favorite” position. I strive to be as fair as possible, and encourage players to learn two positions they can feel comfortable with. But, remember, the policy is open door. Just ask.
4. The tentative start date for the season is _____. The season will conclude in mid-July, though a specific date is not set, pending the outcome of rainout rescheduling.
5. The Annual The 3&2 Baseball Club of Johnson County Nights at Royals Stadium is scheduled for _____. The League receives first ball ceremonies and tickets are reduced to _____. It’s a fun evening, so let me know how many tickets you’ll need.

After the season begins, there are three important points to be aware of as any game you attend:

1. Constructive criticism only. Shouting encouragement is the only way to help young players during a game situation. There is enough pressure in a game without having to listen to negative comments. Keep it positive and everyone will benefit.
2. No unnecessary comments to the umpires. Though they are paid and have been instructed at rules clinics they will still make mistakes, and pressure from anyone other than coaches will affect their judgment and their game control.
3. Alcoholic beverages are prohibited at practices and games.

A practice schedule and team roster enclosed. As soon as a Team Coordinator is found, a telephone net will be issued. Game schedules will be issued in late April.

I run a relaxed, yet educational program designed to help every player improve their skills. Thank you for taking an interest and for supporting the team in the coming season. I look forward to seeing you and the team this summer.

2. Equipment

A complete set of equipment, whether it be second grade or high school, is essential for player protection and proper instruction. The following is a list of all necessary equipment:

- equipment bag
- 100’ tape measure or string
- 1 scorebook
- 3-4 bats of a variety of appropriate sizes(optional, kids will usually already have some bats)

- 5 batting helmets with NOCSAE stamp, assorted sizes
- weighted bat ring (“donut ring”)
- 8-10 baseballs
- catcher’s mask and throat protector
- catcher’s helmet
- catcher’s chest protector
- catcher’s shin guards
- catcher’s mitt
- 5 gallon water jug for team drinks during game
- 3 practice bases
- 1 home plate
- 1 pitching rubber with two or three spikes

Catcher’s equipment is often difficult to fit if the team has two catchers of contrasting sizes, but a proper fit will insure safety. The mask should have ear guards extending from the sides. (Softball masks do not.) The chest protector should fit snugly, without hindering the throwing motion. The shin guards should be worn with the straps fastened on the outside of the legs. The mitt should be broken in by the coach before the season starts. This is very important for young players who are learning to control the larger mitt. All catchers should be required to wear a protective cup.

3. Conditioning

Full scale conditioning programs are not appropriate for youth league teams. Managers can help prevent injuries by having players perform stretching exercises before practices and games.

Players must be taught to stretch the muscle slowly and carefully, being careful not to “bounce.” The most effective muscle stretches are those held to a point of slight discomfort for about 30 seconds. A stretching session before a practice or a game can be run by a player after the team is familiar with the exercises.

Stretching exercises are a must before beginning to throw. Early spring is prime time for muscle pulls.

Take precautions in April and the benefits will show in July of an injury-free pitching staff.

- 1) The Back Stretch With Partners: Each player pairs off with a partner. Interlocking the fingers behind the back, the player keeps the arms straight as the partner slowly raises the arms as far as possible. As with all stretching exercises, players must use caution to avoid unnecessary injury.
- 2) Triceps Stretch: This can be done with a partner or alone. The arm is bent at the elbow, the forearm is behind the head. Pulling towards the head with opposite arm and holding for thirty seconds will loosen the triceps before throwing.
- 3) Back Stretch: Known as “toe-touches,” they would be done slowly and the position held for thirty seconds. The legs must be kept straight.
- 4) Quad Stretch: Sitting on the ground with the lower leg under the rear, lean back slowly to stretch the quad muscles.
- 5) Hamstring Stretch: Done the same as The Quad Stretch, players should lean forward, trying to touch their head on the knee of the extended leg. Standing with legs as far apart as possible and leaning to the left or right is also good for both quads and hamstrings.

4. Practice Organization

Practices that are fun and well organized are part of the success of every team. This is where the learning actually takes place. Managers should know in advance what activities will take place at the practice. An improvised practice session will move slowly and produce few results. The following are some practice guidelines to consider:

1. At the first practice, spend a few minutes discussing rules, philosophies, etc. to establish what will be expected during the season.
2. Consider variables of time, facilities, and number of players before planning a practice. Most practices will be on one infield. However, if it is possible to use two fields within close proximity of

one another, the additional space is a big advantage. A practice length of 1 1/2 to 2 hours is sufficient for most youth league teams.

3. Establish a warm-up routine prior to the start of practice. Stretching exercises, basic calisthenics, and a few sprints will greatly aid in the prevention of injuries. It will also put the team in the right frame of mind to practice. Warming up by playing catch is most effective if done with players the same distance apart from one another. Careful attention would be given to proper throwing techniques at this point in the practice routine.
4. Keep everyone busy. Use drills that involve the whole team or small groups. Avoid the “one pitcher, one hitter, everyone else standing around” routine. This is especially important during batting practice.
5. Insist on proper attire. Practice pants, jeans or sweats are fine to practice in. Shorts, whether those used for running, or just to stay cooler, are not conducive to a professional atmosphere during practice. The only hats worn are the official team hats.
6. Make it fun. Players must enjoy practice, willing to come to the next one. In hot weather, have a water break at least once an hour. This is a good opportunity to explain the next activity.
7. Batting practice is at the heart of the practice routine. With few exceptions, it should occur every practice session. Refer to the section on practice drills for ways to organize an efficient batting practice.

5. Practice Drills

Drills are the best way to focus on individual and team skills. Coaches must determine which drills will be used and when. They must be repeated to give the players a chance to learn and to improve the skill. The following drills can be used at any level of play, and can be modified to meet the individual needs of the team.

Defensive Drills

1. One Knee Throwing. This is an excellent reinforcement of the proper throwing motion. The throwing side knee is down. Concentration should be on extending the arm fully to the rear and following through by bending at the waist. The throwing hand should end up outside the opposite knee.
2. Around the Horn. Three or four players line up single file at home plate and at each base. Beginning at home, the ball is thrown around the horn to the first player in each line. After throwing, the player then advances to the next base and goes to the end of the line. Coaches can challenge the team to see how many consecutive throws can be made without a wild throw. This is great for throwing, conditioning, hustle and concentration.
3. “Hotbox” Drill. Good reinforcement of the proper execution of a rundown. Using three players and a pitcher at the stretch, the runner gets “picked off” and the rundown begins. This drill should be practiced between all bases.
4. Soft Hands Drill. Good review for learning to “give” with the ball. Each player throws ground balls to a partner from a distance of twenty feet. Players should strive to “give” with the ball, as it hits the glove, it is brought up to the stomach area to absorb the force of the impact. Catching an egg is a good analogy to use.
5. Pick-Ups. This is another conditioning and hustle drill. Players stand twenty feet apart from each other. Each takes a turn rolling the ball to the left, then to the right, of the partner. After 20-25 chances, the players switch positions. Proper fielding stances should be emphasized.
6. Cut-Offs and Relays. This drill requires an outfielder, a cut-off man, and a fielder at the base where the play is going. Starting with the players in the regular fielding position, the coach hits fly balls or base hits to the outfielder. The cut-off man must get in a straight line between the outfielder and the base. The fielder at the base is responsible for telling the cut-off man whether to move to his left or his right to be in the straight line. The play should be practiced using different combinations of players for every possible play situation.

7. **Defensive Situations Drill.** This drill works best with a complete defense, but the coach can fill the position of pitcher if only eight (or nine) players are available. The key to success in the drill, and in turn, during a game, is for players to know what to do with the ball if it is hit to them. Coaches call out the number of outs, the position of the runners, the inning, and the score. The ball is hit by the coach, and the defense reacts according to the situation, and where the ball had been hit. Learning where the play should go takes much repetition, and coaches should use patience when teaching very young, inexperienced player. As simple situations are mastered, more complex ones can be added. This must be done gradually, as young players must experience success to have confidence to try new things.

Intra-Squad Games

Sometimes known as a controlled scrimmage, this is a good drill to use at the practice before the next game. The team is divided into four “teams” of three. Each team takes a turn at bat while the other three teams combine to form a complete defense. After three outs, another team comes to bat. Extra batting practice for the “winning” team is a good incentive to succeed. Other intra-squad options are: six players on a side, all outfield hits are ground rule doubles; instead of playing to three outs; each player bats twice.

Hitting Drills

1. **Batting Practice.** Though more than a drill, batting practice provides many of the benefits of a drill all rolled into one. The best batting practice system will have some members “shagging” balls, some getting ready to hit, and some doing other hitting drills. One pitcher throwing to one hitter while the other players stand around is not batting practice. It is best the coach pitch batting practice to very young players. This will insure more strikes, and reduce the fear of being hit. Limit players to four or five minutes per round. Have them “run out” the last “hit.” Try to get two rounds of practice completed before the end of the session. If time runs out, start with the next hitter at the next practice. If a pitcher is used, They must understand that batting practice is for the benefit of the hitters. They must throw strikes, and not try for strikeouts. As each player finishes their time at bat, they take the place of a defensive player or someone working on another hitting drill. The routine of batting practice must be established early in the season, to allow for maximum benefit as the season progresses.
2. **Pepper.** This drill is designed to improve contact and eye/hand coordination. Three fielders stand facing the hitter about twenty feet away. The fielders toss straight but soft pitches to the hitter, who attempts to hit the ball back to them. Hitters should not take a full swing. After 25 hits, the hitter becomes a fielder and a fielder becomes the new hitter. This drill is fun, but it takes time to learn. Coaches should encourage players to keep trying to make contact. It works great as batting practice warm-up. A team of twelve can have three or more groups of pepper working at the same time. The better the players get, the faster the game moves.
3. **Soft Toss.** This drill is practice for the swing. The coach squats on one knee 10-15 feet to the right of the batter’s box . (Right hander.) Tossing balls into the strike zone, hitters can work on coming down on the ball, hitting pitches in different parts of the strike zone, and concentrating on watching the ball. The trajectory on the ball is nothing like a real pitch, making this drill most effective as help for upper-cutters and those struggling with contact.
4. **Ball-On-A-Rope.** This is an easy way to pile up the hits without chasing the ball. Drill a hole through the center of a practice ball. Do not drill a hole through the threads. Pull a fifteen foot piece of nylon clothesline through the hole and tie a knot on one end. Slide the ball to the end by the knot. The hitter stands 8-10 feet away from the coach. The coach twirls the rope counter-clockwise towards the hitter. As it comes by, he swings at the ball. Hitters must be encouraged to watch the ball with their eyes while keeping their head still. Swinging every three of four rotations, it is important to take enough time to get ready. Like pepper, this drill takes time to learn, especially

watching the ball rotate. It serves as an excellent eye trainer and builds confidence quickly once the player masters it.

5. Swinging the bat with a weighted donut on it is usually part of the on-deck circle routine. It can also be part of the hitting drills. Taking 10-15 swings at a time builds strength in the forearms and wrists. Players should be cautioned to look around them before swinging a bat with a donut.
6. A good contact drill for players struggling in this area, was developed by Manny Mota of the Los Angeles Dodgers. It graduates from a very short pitching distance and a slow pitch to a standard pitching distance and a faster pitch. It is a great confidence builder, and lets both coach and player see the progress as it occurs. Starting 15-20 feet away from the hitter, the coach tosses straight pitches (no lobs) into the strike zone. A full but slow and deliberate swing is the goal. This stage is similar to pepper. As the contact improves, (25-30 hits), the coach moves back five to eight feet and continues the same procedure. If the contact decreases, the coach moves closer again. Eventually, the coach moves back to the standard distance for the age group. This drill is most effective one-on-one, or with small groups, but not with the entire team.
7. Of all the instructional tools a coach can buy, the batting tee is the best investment. It allows coaches and players to work on improving the swing without being concerned with timing the pitch. The height of the tee is adjustable. Hitters will quickly learn that to hit the ball, they must watch it. Most will already believe they do watch the ball. Most will also “whiff” their first few tries at a ball on a tee. It is not a substitute for batting practice, but should become part of the regular hitting routine at every practice. It is excellent for any age group, second grade or high school.

6. Throwing and Catching the Baseball

Of all the necessary skills required to play baseball, throwing and catching are the two most fundamental to learn at an early age. Often neglected, young players easily pick up bad habits that are difficult to correct. The coach should watch the throwing and catching of each player and for early signs of poor techniques.

Basics of Throwing

The ball should be gripped cross-seams. The first two fingers and the thumb hold the ball. Younger players may have to palm the ball until their hand is big enough for the standard grip.

As the arm is brought back, it should be fully extended. At the point of extension, the hand turns to place the fingers “on top of the ball.” The arm continues forward, the elbow at or above the level of the shoulder. Lowering of the elbow results in “pushing” the ball. The follow through motion starts with a downward snapping of the wrist just before the ball leaves, and ends with the arm coming across the body towards the glove side.

The footwork used in throwing is critical to the proper execution of a throw. As the throw is made, a step with the opposite foot directly towards the target begins the motion. Many young players throw off the wrong foot, while some do not step at all. This will cause a weak and inaccurate throw. These mistakes should be corrected immediately regardless of the age group. As the throw is made, the eyes are fixed on the target. Looking at the chest of the player being thrown to will improve accuracy. Using the glove hand as a guide, “pointing” the glove to the target will also improve accuracy.

Basics of Catching

Whenever possible, the ball should be caught with two hands. By having the throwing hand to assist in the catch, it enables the fielder to guard against the ball falling out of the glove. It also speeds the transfer to the throwing hand. The catch should be made with a relaxed hand, “giving” with the ball as it hits the glove. Balls that pop out of the glove are frequently the cause of “stone hands.” Strive for “soft hands.” Balls above the waist should be caught with the thumbs together. Those below the waist should be caught with the little fingers together. Proper glove angles will result in fewer dropped balls.

7. Basic Infield Skills

A solid defensive infield can keep a youth league team in every game. The skills necessary for good defensive play vary from position to position. However, there are some basics common to all:

Ready Position. The basic stance finds the infielder on the balls of the feet, glove face towards the hitter, hands relaxed, knees slightly bent, and head up. A step or two as the pitch is delivered starts momentum, assuming the ball is hit. **Charge the Ground Ball.** This fundamental almost always makes the difference between safe and out.

Charging the ball allows the fielder to play the ball, instead of letting it play the fielder. Bad hops frequently can be prevented by getting to the ball before it has a chance to change direction.

Look the Ball Into the Glove. Concentrating on the ball all the way into the glove encourages keeping the glove down and avoids letting the ball play the fielder.

Give With the Ball. “Giving” with the ball, or “soft hands” allows greater control on hard hit grounders.

Tag Plays. On tag plays, the runner should be allowed to tag himself out. The infielder should lay the glove down in front of the base to tag out the sliding runner. Infielders should never go out to meet a sliding runner. Meeting a runner often results in a high tag at the waist, and a call of safe.

8. First Base

Qualifications:

- ”soft” hands
- agility and quickness
- able to handle many types of throws
- alert, always thinking

These characteristics are important anywhere, but especially critical at first base. Many of the traditionally first base qualities such as tall, left-handed, and a power hitter are important in professional baseball, but not in a youth league. A left-hander is certainly an advantage, but that alone is not basis for placement at first base.

Fielding at first base should include practice on catching a variety of throws. Handling high, low, and wide throws is vital to good first base play. Young first basemen must be taught to leave the base if necessary to stop a wild throw. Practice with a tennis ball will help younger players become more at ease in stopping errant throws, especially those in the dirt. Keeping the foot in proper position while taking throws will make the fielding easier and prevent injury. First basemen should have the foot in contact with the side of the base; never the top.

Holding a runner on requires the right foot to stay in contact with the side of the base, and the left foot just inside of the foul line. The glove is open with the arm fully extended to give the pitcher a target. First basemen must watch the pitcher at all times in anticipation of a move to first. Tags should be applied in front of the base. Fielding a throw in the lane often results in a collision with the batter-runner and the first basemen. If the throw goes into the lane, the first basemen must go into the lane to field it. If a collision occurs, it is not considered interference if the first basemen is chasing an errant throw. Acting as the cut-off man in throws to the plate from right field, the first baseman must listen for instructions from the catcher to “let it go,” or to “cut it,” for a possible play at a base. Some coaches prefer to have the pitcher fill this responsibility, especially on smaller infields or with very young players.

9. Second Base

Qualifications:

- good range, left and right
- average to above average throwing arm
- quickness, especially feet

- intelligent
- good glove

Good steady play at second part of the “strength up the middle,” the foundation of a strong defense. At the youth league level, the majority of balls are hit to the right side, calling for steady play at second base. Taking throws at second on stolen base attempts finds the second baseman straddling the base while waiting for the throw. Second basemen must be taught to get to the base first and wait for the throw instead of watching the runner. If the shortstop takes the throw, the second baseman becomes the backup, 15-20 feet behind the base. Acting as the cut-off man, the second baseman takes all throws from right field that are going to second or third. On throws from left or center, the second baseman is the back-up for the shortstop.

On balls hit to the left of the second baseman, (that could be fielded by either first or second), the second baseman must take charge of the play. This allows the first baseman time to get to the base.

Throwing to the shortstop for a force out at second is a routine play that becomes routine only with repetition and drill between the two players. If the fielder is within twenty feet of the base, the toss should be underhand. This distance will vary with the size of the infield.

Communication between second base, shortstop, and pitcher is vital in pick-off and stolen base attempts. Each must know their responsibilities and where the other will be when a play occurs. Second basemen must communicate with the catcher if they will be taking the throw.

10. Third Base

Qualifications:

- excellent range
- quickness
- strong throwing arm
- aggressive, “gutsy” player

Known as the “hot corner,” third base earns the nickname from the hard ground balls found nowhere else on the infield. Quick hands and courage are other keys to good third base play. The ready position stance for third basemen is lower and wider than the other infield positions. This stance lowers the center of gravity and enables the third baseman to move left or right quickly to field sharply hit ground balls.

Tag plays at third can come from several different directions: any outfielder, the pitcher attempting a pick-off, or the catcher on a stolen base attempt. In each case, the third baseman must get to the base first and straddle it while waiting for the throw. Applying the tag in front of the base is critical to getting the runner. Going out to meet the runner with the tag results in more successful steals of third than any other mistake the third baseman can make.

Acting as the cut-off man, the third baseman takes all throws from left field that are going to home plate.

Throwing to second base for a force out must be practiced with both middle infielders. A team that can execute this play will save the third baseman many long throws across the infield.

11. Shortstop

Qualifications:

- strong throwing arm
- excellent range
- quickness
- baseball sense, take charge attitude

The shortstop must be the best infielder in the line-up. More balls will be hit to the shortstop than any other infielder. This makes the position a vital part of the “strength up the middle.” Covering second base on balls hit to the right side of the infield requires the shortstop to communicate with the second baseman.

Fielding a ball hit “in the hole” is the true test of a shortstop. However, it rarely results in an out at the youth league level. If the shortstop can keep the ball in the infield, it may save a run or prevent runners from any further advance. It is for this reason that range is so critical for the shortstop. Taking throws at second on stolen base attempts is the same for the shortstop as it for the second baseman: straddle the bag and wait for the throw.

The shortstop covers third when the third baseman is the cut-off man, and covers second when the second baseman is the cut-off man. These defensive responsibilities are important to good team defense and must be drilled to become reflex.

12. Basic Outfield Skills

Qualifications:

- good speed
- strong throwing arm
- ability to judge fly balls
- quick thinker, knows what to do with the ball
- must love to hustle

The ready position stance is the same for outfielders as it is for infielders. For an outfielder, being on the balls of the feet as the pitch is delivered will put the outfielder in position to move in any direction when the ball is hit.

Communication in the outfield is just as important as it is on the infield. Players must shout “I’ve got it!” to avoid collisions and letting the ball fall untouched. Centerfielders have priority over balls that could also be caught by another fielder. Communication skills must be practiced to be effective in a game.

Going back on a ball starts with a crossover step with the foot opposite the direction the ball is hit. (A ball hit to the outfielder’s left means a crossover step with the right foot.) Running while looking over the shoulder is the key to getting to the ball. “Back-pedaling” is a common flaw in young outfielders. A wide receiver running a pass pattern may be a helpful analogy to encourage looking while running. Coming in on a ball near the infield required communication with the infielders. Outfielders coming in on a ball have priority over infielders going out on one.

Throwing to the cut-off man is the most important play an outfielder can make after fielding the ball. The outfielder must make a straight line throw chest high to the cut-off man. High, arching, “rainbow” throws will be too late. Getting rid of the ball quickly is another key to throwing out a runner. Young players often hold the ball, not knowing where to throw it. Coaches should discourage infielders from shouting, “Here! Throw it here!” This will confuse outfielders and cause them to hold the ball longer than necessary. If unsure, the throw should go second base. Though, with proper drill, a cut-off man should make himself obvious to the outfielders. The centerfielder is the “quarterback” of the outfield and has priority on balls that could be caught by more than one outfielder. This priority system must be drilled for it to be successful in a game. Proper back-up of outfielders must be a reflex. Be it a ground ball or a fly ball, back-up outfielders must react as soon as the ball is hit for the back-up to be ready in time. Outfielders acting as a back-up should be 15-20 feet behind the player they are backing up. Getting a jump on the ball is largely instinctive, but players should still be encouraged to watch the hitter swing. How the hitter swings can tell the outfielder where the ball might be going. This is an advanced skill, but can still be introduced to young players.

Fly Ball Fundamentals

- Watch the bat to get a jump on the ball.

- Run to the place where it appears the ball will come down. Avoid “drifting.” (“Drifting” means running at three-quarter speed.)
- The outfielder should position himself under the ball where it appears it will land on the forehead.
- Whenever possible, catch the ball with two hands.
- On catches below the waist, the little fingers are together (basket-catch);
- On catches above the waist, the thumbs are together
- Catch the ball over the throwing shoulder

Fly ball practice with young players should be taught first by throwing a ball to the outfielders. After they are able to judge the ball, coaches should begin using a bat. The ball should be hit so that it will be similar to what an outfielder for the age group would see in a game. Players should call out, “I’ve got it!” or, “Mine! Mine!” to avoid communication problems. This fundamental is well known to even younger players, but frequently breaks down in a game because it has not been practiced. Insist on players shouting for the ball and the defense will become alert and aggressive at all times.

Special Considerations for Outfield Positions

Center Field- “Quarterback” of the outfield; best speed among all outfielders.

Right Field- Strongest arm, though not critical for younger teams.

Left Field- Strong arm not as important; must get good jump on balls pulled hard by right-handed hitters.

Many individual considerations for outfield positions vary with the age group. Fly ball judgment and quick thinking are the abilities to look for in younger players. As they mature, more specialization for each outfield position is necessary.

13. Catching

Qualifications:

- aggressive, hustler, physical, desire to work hard
- quick thinker, smart with baseball sense, mentally tough
- team leader, sparkplug, “holler guy”
- strong throwing arm

A team with a hustling sparkplug of a catcher is in for a treat. The catcher is the team leader on the field, in charge of team defense and pitching, which are two great responsibilities. Young catchers just starting out will have to “grow” into the position. They can still begin to work on skills that will make them competitive at a higher level. Finding a player (or two) that wants to catch is tough. But, if the position is presented as one that involves more action and responsibility, several candidates are likely to emerge.

Young catchers may not have all of the above characteristics, but can still be successful if they have desire and a throwing arm. Putting a player behind the plate “because he can’t play anywhere else” teaches the team that catchers are not important. Find a hustler with a decent throwing arm and catcher will start to grow.

A. Stance

The feet should be slightly more than shoulder width apart, the back arched in a crouching position. The elbows should be outside of the knees. The right foot should be back slightly farther than the left, and the toes of the right foot should point toward the second baseman. Every catcher will vary in his appearance, but the fundamentals are the same for all. Being comfortable within the fundamentals is the key.

B. Distance from the Hitter

Taking a position that places the glove just behind the hitter’s back elbow will allow the catcher to be close enough without any danger of catcher’s interference. Catching too far away from the hitter makes the pitcher work harder and gives the umpire a distorted view of the pitch. Young catchers must be taught not to reach out for the pitch, but to wait for it. This is the most common cause of catcher’s interference.

C. Receiving the Ball

Though the catcher's job is to catch, there are an alarming number of passed balls in youth league games. Being able to catch the ball consistently is a skill that must be drilled and drilled into all young catchers. As the pitcher is set to deliver, the catcher should slightly relax the glove hand and wrist. The glove should be held still to allow the pitcher to concentrate on the target. The throwing hand should be folded, thumb in, fingers toward the ground, all relaxed behind the glove. This position minimizes the chances of being hit with a foul ball, and reduces the chances of serious injury if the hand is hit. The ball should be caught in the pocket, not the web. Catchers that have developed the habit of catching the ball in the webbing should practice with an old glove that has no webbing. Use a mask! Young catchers must be taught to stay down in the crouch as they catch the pitch. Catchers who habitually raise up will cost their team a number of strikes over the course of the game. This will block the umpire's vision. Coaches should be certain the catcher's glove is well hinged and broken in properly before the catchers use it to practice with.

D. Footwork in the Throwing Motion

Proper footwork is the key to getting a throw to a base quickly. The quickest way to get rid of the ball is by taking a short step with the right foot just before catching the pitch, and then taking a step towards the base. This is difficult for young catchers and it is easier for them to "crow-hop" before throwing. ("Crow-hopping" is a step with the left foot, while hopping quickly on the right foot and striding with the left foot to throw.) This is slower, but much easier for young catchers to understand and execute.

E. Stopping Balls in the Dirt

The pitchers in youth league games often experience control problems, making it essential to have a catcher who can stop pitches in the dirt. Development of this skill takes patience and hard work, but the reward is well worth the effort. Low pitches escape most young catchers simply because they try to catch the ball. Teaching them to block the ball with their body is the first step in mastering this skill. The position for blocking the ball is with both knees on the ground, glove on the ground, head down, and feet positioned on the instep, not the top of the toes. This position makes it impossible for the ball to get past the catcher, and protects the throat area from injury. The mask must stay square to the ball for the catcher to avoid being hit on the side of the head. Catchers must drilled on dropping to their knees first and assuming this blocking position. Keeping the ball in front will discourage baserunners from attempting to advance.

F. Plays at Home Plate

1. Force Outs.

Proper footwork is the key. Catchers should face the direction the ball is coming from, while placing the left foot on home plate. A pivot with the right and another step with the left will allow a throw to first base for a possible double play. Catchers must be drilled in practice on knowing whether the play at home is a tag or a force.

2. Tag Plays.

Catchers making a tag at home plate must remember to leave room for the runner to slide. This is contrary to professional baseball techniques, but collisions at home should be avoided at the youth league level. These collisions often occur when catchers try to block the plate with or without the ball. By allowing the runner a place to slide, the catcher knows where the runner will be to apply the tag. Kneeling on the right knee, the catcher protects the ball held in the bare hand with the glove. The tag should be made with the back of the glove, and should be pulled away after the tag, to keep the runner from kicking the ball loose. Catchers should never go up the baseline to meet a sliding (or almost sliding) runner. The runner has momentum that could cause injury. Always teach the catchers to wait for the runner to "tag himself out." Catchers should stay out of the baseline and off of the home plate if there is no play, or if they are waiting for a throw. Blocking the plate is an invitation to serious injury and controversy.

G. Fielding Bunts

Balls bunted in front of home plate should be scooped up into the bare hand with the glove. Bare hand pick-ups should be avoided.

H. Catching Pop-Ups

Balls that are popped up behind the plate (or near it) have considerable back spin on them and should be caught facing the backstop, just like an infielder. As soon as the ball is located, the mask should be tossed away to avoid being stepped on. Catchers should yield to other infielders on pop-ups, as their gloves are better suited to make the play.

I. Defensive Responsibilities

Sometimes called the “Field General,” the catcher is responsible for many defensive plays. Young catchers should not be given too much responsibility without the benefit of experience. They can be taught gradually what the role of the position is on defense. Directing the cut-off man to let the ball go through to home or cut it off for a throw to a base is a major responsibility. The decision must be made quickly and shouted to the infielder acting as the cut-off man. If the field has a large area of foul territory behind first base, the catcher should trail the runner on ground balls hit to the infielders. This back-up can keep the ball in play, should a throw get by the first baseman. Catchers can also direct the pitcher where to throw on balls hit back to the mound. Since the catcher has the best view of the infield, he is the best judge of how close runners may be to the next base and if a throw will be in time.

J. Equipment

A face mask with throat protector, helmet, chest protector, shin guards, and a cup must be worn at all times, practice or game. The equipment must be in good condition and be fitted properly. The mask should fit snugly to the face while allowing the catcher to talk. A protective helmet covering the top and back of the head should be worn at all times, even when warming up the pitcher in between innings, in the bull pen area, or at practices. If the helmet does not cover the ears, the mask must have deflective ear guards. (It should anyway.) A throat protector must be attached to the mask. The chest protector should fit loosely enough to allow freedom of movement, but still offer protection. Avoid loose fitting protectors that do not protect the upper chest and collar bone area. Shin guards should be worn with the clips fastened on the outside of the legs. Straps that are too long can be crossed to the upper or lower clips to use up the slack. Catchers in older age groups should use shin guards with additional protection on top of the knees. A well formed pocket in the glove will make it easy to control and can keep the catcher from trying to catch the ball in the web. Young players may be reluctant to wear a cup, but should be instructed that it is standard equipment for a catcher.

14. Pitching

Qualifications:

- good athlete, competitor
- good throwing motion, strong arm
- mentally tough
- confident

At the heart of a good baseball team lies good pitching. Be it nine year-olds or Major Leaguers, pitching is the mainstay of every consistent team. While the quality of pitching in youth leagues has more to do with the team’s success than any other single factor, fundamentals in this area are often weaker than anything else. The fundamentals of good pitching are the same at any level of play, but must be approached differently for younger players. As with any base ball skill, it is easy to “over teach” by deluging the players with everything at once. Gradually, and a step at a time, will yield the best results in teaching the basics of pitching.

Volunteers for the pitching staff are usually easy to find. The job of the manager is to determine which of these volunteers has the most potential for developing into a pitcher. For teams with experienced pitchers, the manager must provide a routine for the pitchers to continue to improve on their mechanics. But whether rookie or veteran, the pitcher must have a good sound throwing motion, a mental toughness

for those bases loaded situations, and the desire to compete. In first year pitchers, these qualities will just be developing, making a good throwing motion the best place to start.

Pitching Mechanics

Entire books have been written on the proper teaching and execution of a good pitching delivery. Though the list of fundamentals is lengthy, a delivery can be broken down into six basic steps: stance, pivot, leg kick, point of release, stride, and follow-through. Within each of these steps, there are fundamentals that are important to the success of a pitcher.

An old baseball adage says, “The Good Lord makes more pitchers than all the coaches combined.” This is true to certain extent, but quality instruction can make a big difference in the success of a young pitcher. But, either poor or no instruction can cause undue frustration with the most difficult position on the field. As the pitcher develops, knowing these fundamentals allows the coach to correct faults. Though there are many fundamentals to teach, they should be introduced to the players gradually, a few at a time. Players must be comfortable with Step One before learning Step Two. This takes time and patience, but it is essential in effective pitching instruction. Below is an outline of the pitching mechanics discussed on the following pages.

- I. Stance
 - A. Facing hitter
 - B. Feet together
 - C. Ball in glove near chest
- II. Pivot
 - A. Step back
 - B. Hands over head or to shoulder
 - C. Turn pivot foot parallel to rubber
- III. Leg kick
 - A. Thigh brought up parallel to ground
 - B. Hips rotate to 90 degrees
 - C. Pivot leg bends at knee
- IV. Point of Release
 - A. Consistency
 - B. Grip
 - C. Wrist snap
 - D. Keep eye on target
- V. Stride
 - A. Directly at home
 - B. Land on ball of foot
 - C. Leg gives at knee when landing
- VI. Follow through
 - A. Bend at waist
 - B. Throwing hand ends outside of knee
 - C. Land in fielding position

A. Mechanics of the Wind -Up Position

1. With both feet together, the pitcher faces the hitter with the ball in the glove in front of his chest. The front spikes of the shoes should be in front of his chest. The back spikes on top of the rubber. Never allow a pitcher to throw completely off the top of the rubber.
2. Stepping back with the free foot (left foot for right-handers) allows the weight on the pivot foot to be lifted long enough to turn it parallel to the rubber. The step should be short and straight back. The spikes of the pivot foot should remain in front of the rubber. The foot is placed parallel, in front of, and touching the front edge of the rubber. The turning of the pivot foot may be made easier by turning the foot 45 degrees before starting the delivery.
3. As the free foot goes back for the pivot, some pitchers bring the ball and glove to the throwing side shoulder, others bring the hands straight over the head. Whatever the method, the ball should stay hidden in the glove as long as possible and not interfere with keeping the delivery smooth. The eyes should concentrate on the catcher’s glove through this part of the delivery.
4. The leg kick occurs immediately following the turning of the pivot foot. The height of the kick will vary, but the leg should reach a point where the thigh is at least parallel to the ground. The leg kick is simultaneous with the hip rotation. The hips rotate 90 degrees, putting the pitcher in position to begin the drive towards the plate. At this point, the pitcher should be facing in the direction of the third baseman. (Right hander.)

5. The pivot leg bends at the knee to allow for the push off. This fundamental will make the difference between a pitcher and a thrower. The body weight should go straight down without arching the back or neck. Leaning against a wall with an extended arm, while supporting the weight on only the pivot leg, is a good simulation for the feel of proper leg bending and push off.
6. As the push off starts, the throwing hand and glove separate, the arm extended to the fullest behind the pitcher. The glove stays tucked near the shoulder which in turn, drives towards the plate as the stride begins.
7. The stride should be directly at home plate, landing on the ball of the foot, not the heel. Striding in the wrong direction can result in throwing across the body, which will adversely affect control. The stride leg should bend at the knee, just as the weight of the pitcher lands on it. Throwing off a “stiff leg” will tire a pitcher’s arm very quickly.
8. At the end of the arm motion the wrist snaps down, as the ball is released. Throwing fundamentals discussed in Chapter 6 apply to pitching as well. It is this point of release that must be consistent for a pitcher to have good control.
9. A follow-through consists of bending at the waist and completing the throwing motion. A good follow-through allows the above mentioned mechanics to work to their fullest. Pitchers that stop their forward momentum (by not using a follow-through eliminate the force behind the ball that builds up throughout the delivery. The throwing hand should finish outside of the opposite knee. A good follow-through also places the pitcher in proper fielding position in case a ball is hit back to the mound.

B. The Mechanics of the Set (Stretch) Position

The set position, usually referred to as the stretch, is used with runners on base. Pitchers in divisions that do not allow runners to take a lead-off should still use a stretch, as they will eventually be holding runners on base.

1. The pivot foot should be placed against the side of the rubber, never on top. A slight angling of the foot enables the right handed pitcher to get a better look at the runner at first.
2. The stride foot is placed slightly more than shoulder width apart from the pivot foot while the glove and throwing hand are separate. As the ball and glove are brought together in front of the chest, the stride foot moves in next to the pivot foot. It is at this point the pitcher must come to a complete stop before throwing to home. A complete stop is not necessary before throwing to a base.
3. From this point the mechanics are very similar to the wind-up. The stride leg kicks, the pivot leg bends, and the delivery finishes with a follow-through.
4. From the stretch position, the pitcher can throw to a base, deliver a pitch, or step off the rubber. A throw followed by a step is a balk, if the pitcher wants to step off the rubber after coming to a set, the pivot foot must first move backwards, towards second base. Any other movement prior to stepping off is a balk. Young pitchers often experience control problems, especially from the stretch. This is usually because they do not get enough practice throwing from the stretch position. By working at least half of the practice time from the stretch, pitchers can feel confident using the stretch in a game situation.

C. Pick-Off Moves to the Bases

The most common move to first base uses a pivot on the ball of the right foot, with a short step with the left. The pivot and the step are nearly simultaneous. Pitchers can also throw to first after coming set, by stepping back off the rubber with the pivot foot, towards second base. At this point, the pitcher is considered an infielder and is no longer subject to the special pitching regulations regarding balks. Faking (“feinting” as the rule book says) a throw to first base is a balk, though if the pitcher steps off with the back foot first, faking a throw is no longer a balk, as the pitcher is now an infielder.

Stepping off the rubber and throwing is the simplest move to second for young pitchers. After gaining some experience, there is another method more effective. After coming set, the pitcher lifts the kick leg

straight up and not toward home, and steps towards second base. This move always draws a cry of “balk” from the opposing bench, but it is completely legal as long as the leg goes straight up and towards second. A step towards third with the left foot makes it an easy move to execute, but pitchers must be careful to step first before throwing. Pick-off moves can work well as an element of surprise, as many youth league teams do not prepare for them. Each pitcher must work on throwing to each base (primarily first) before attempting it in a game. Solid defense must also back up the throws from the mound. Throwing to a base for the sake of throwing, and without any real purpose is an invitation to unnecessary advances by the runner(s.)

D. Teaching Pitching

Because pitching is such a specialized position, the pitchers must have individual attention throughout the season, especially in April. It is best to work in small groups. A practice called solely for the pitchers is the most efficient method for teaching pitchers, new or experienced. If several players are interested in pitching for the first time, it is best to work with four or less. The fundamentals can be covered in about an hour, allowing for two groups in one practice session. Invite the catchers too, but keep the numbers even; i.e. four pitchers, four catchers, etc.

After a proper stretching period (see Chapter 3), warm up the arms by using the One-Knee Drill (see Chapter 5). The fundamentals of this drill should carry over to a complete pitching delivery.

After 10-15 minutes of stretching and throwing, set up three or four pitcher/catcher stations and let each pitcher begin to throw. These throws should be at three-quarter (batting practice) speed.

Watch each of them for several throws before correcting anything. Chances are they will naturally be doing some things correctly. Correct only major mistakes early. Being too specific at the first session creates a pitcher who thinks too much. Concentrate only on the six basic areas (or work with only two or three) and let them feel they are making some progress. While fundamentals are important, no two pitchers will do everything exactly alike. Allow for individual styles and preferences, (if a preference is allowed), and work the basics into each pitcher gradually.

Experienced pitchers will not need to start at ground zero, but should participate in a mechanics review. Success is built on consistency and good mechanics. No pitcher can continue being successful without going back to the fundamentals. Encourage pitchers to throw ten minutes a day in the early spring. The routine should consist of stretching, one-knee throwing, and throwing from the wind-up position and the stretch. Arm soreness that results indicates the arm is building strength. Injuries and “Little League Elbow” (epiphysis) result from too much throwing too soon, and usually without a warm-up. Soreness after pitching is normal, but any pain should receive medical attention.

As the season approaches, and each pitcher gets into a routine of throwing, coaches must be alert to the development of bad habits. This is the proper time to be more specific about mechanics and flaws in the delivery. A few minutes in practice one-on one can usually correct any mechanical problems. If it appears to be more serious, an individual or small group session may be in order.

E. Pitching Changes During a Game

As game situations change, coaches must be aware of possible pitching changes. Arm injuries can result from pitching too long in a game, making it necessary for coaches to be aware of the signs that a pitcher is tiring:

1. Pitching consistently high in the strike zone. This results from a lack of good follow-through.
2. Little or no leg kick. This also causes pitches to be high. Tired pitchers should be pulled from the game. This is to avoid injury, and to prevent continued frustration-- an important consideration at the youth league level.

Other considerations for pitching changes include:

- 1) Loss of control. Walk after walk is a slow, painful, demoralizing process for young pitchers. Being pulled is preferable to the embarrassment of many walks.

- 2) Loss of poise. To pitch effectively, a pitcher must be under control; a “cool” head. If the events of the game affect the pitcher’s poise, the effectiveness will also suffer. Managers can help by teaching the importance of poise early in the season.
- 3) Loss of effectiveness. Every pitcher will have days where nothing seems to go right. Though not tired or upset, the only result is hit after hit. Chalk it up to experience and try again next time.

The majority of youth league pitching changes occur too late. Whether the coaching philosophy is that of a “quick hook” or a “slow hook,” decisions need to be made quickly at the first sign of trouble. Leaving a young pitcher on the mound to struggle is not beneficial to the pitcher or the team. Discussion of pitching changes with the pitchers early in the season can teach them that changes are made in the best interests of the team, and should not be thought of as a punishment or embarrassment to them.

E. Other Pitching Hints

Batting practice is a good way for pitchers to keep the arm loose, but not for working on mechanical problems. Batting practice is practice for the hitters, not the pitchers. Problems should be given attention during practices for pitchers instead of during batting practice.

As pitchers mature and work their way up to the more competitive divisions, the condition of the legs becomes more and more important. A few wind sprints and some stretching exercises at each practice can build and keep leg strength at the maximum. This will keep the pitcher from relying too much on the arm at the end of the season.

As mentioned earlier, (but worth repeating), pitching is easy to over teach. When problems are occurring in a particular phase of the delivery, it may take several weeks to overcome it. Even deliberate and well planned instruction is no guarantee the problem will go away immediately. Making a comment about a recurring problem every time it shows up will only serve to frustrate. The wise coach tempers the instruction with a combination of correction, encouragement, and patience. Pitchers who know their coaches are supportive and patient will respond to instruction much better than those that are constantly pushed. Developing a quality pitching staff with any age group is never easy, but with proper planning, step-by-step instruction, and a positive atmosphere to work in, any youth team can have pitching that will earn the respect of coaches, teammates, and opponents.

15. Hitting

Pitching is to defense, as hitting is offense. Coaches that spend time on the fundamentals of hitting will see the benefits all season long. Hitting is very much an individual skill; no two players will perform the process exactly the same. And though all hitters have, as common denominators, the fundamentals of good hitting.

The number of hitting fundamentals is infinite. Remembering them all during every at bat is impossible, making essential that the coach simplify and break down the basics to a point that young players can succeed without being overwhelmed. Along with teaching the physical skills of hitting, the coach must teach the mental approach too; confidence, concentration, and determination to name a few. There is no absolute formula for successful hitting instruction, but there are many different approaches that can be taken to help young players improve. A combination of batting practice, a batting tee, and hitting drills can give hitters a chance to work on every aspect of their hitting skills.

A. Selecting a Bat

Most players have a “favorite” bat they like to use. This is fine, but the coach should check to see that the bat is one the hitter can handle. Young players often select too heavy a bat thinking they can hit the ball farther with it. Still others look at swinging a large bat as a sign of a better hitter. Coaches must help each player find a bat they can control. A youngster who cannot control the bat will never be successful at the plate. Preferences thick or thin handles, big or small barrels can usually be accommodated with the variety of bats available. The aluminum bats are marked with their length and weight on the barrel. One

inch of length for every ounce in weight is a good rule of thumb. Aluminum bats are often balanced so the weight is less than the length. (30 in., 28 oz.) Still, if the player cannot control it, a lighter bat is needed.

B. The Grip

Most players just pick up the bat and never look to see what their hands are doing. It can make a difference. The most common grip taught is with the large knuckles of both hands lined up. This allows for proper wrist roll during the swing. Young players often grip the bat too tightly, causing tension in the forearms. Checking to see that the forefinger of each hand is loose can help eliminate this tension. Also, choking up on the bat will allow the hitter to come around quicker. These characteristics are common among most successful players, but if it is a little different, and comfortable, it probably will work. Check each hitter's grip at the first batting practice and determine who might need some help.

C. The Stance

There are as many stances as there are ballplayers. Different stances are used by different players to accommodate their style of hitting. Most young players have yet to establish "their style" and are better off using a "middle-of-the-road" approach to a stance.

The feet should be shoulder width apart, the weight evenly distributed on the balls of the feet. Watch to see that young hitters do not place their weight back on the heels.

The knees should be slightly flexed. Most players also prefer a slight bend at the waist. Both of these positions encourage a relaxed stance at the plate.

The hands should be held high and away from the body, but coaches must watch for the youngster who takes this to the extreme. Hands held too high will cause the swing to be late. Wrapping the bat behind the head (cradling) will also cause a late swing. A proper bat angle (relatively straight) is as important as the placement of the hands.

The elbows should point down and away from the body. This is the most natural position from which to hold a bat. The phrase "keep your back elbow up" can often be heard at youth league practices and games. While the elbow should not drop down, players often respond to this comment by pointing the elbow straight back; an awkward position to hit from.

The head should be focused on the pitcher, completely still throughout the swing. Moving the head (pulling the head) is one of the most common hitting flaws among youth league players. A batting tee can help correct the problem.

Most players will set up even with or slightly behind the plate. The farther back in the box a hitter stands, the longer he can look at the pitch. Position in the box also affects plate coverage. The hitter should be able to reach the outside corner of the plate with his bat. Many players do not stand close enough to the plate to cover the outside half. Coaches should encourage players to extend the bat to the corner to see if they are close enough. When faced with pitchers who are throwing much slower than usual, hitters may find more success by moving to the front of the batter's box (towards the pitcher).

D. The Stride

Once the stance is established, the initial movement towards hitting the pitch begins with the stride. The stride is the preliminary movement before the swing consisting of a slight inward turning of the hips and shoulders, and a step towards the pitcher of 6 to 8 inches.

Striding away from the pitcher, over straining, or not striding at all are common problems related to the stride. Because the stride affects timing, any problem relating to the stride will cause either an early or late swing. Over straining will cause a lunging at the ball as a longer stride forces an early commitment to the pitch. Stepping away from the pitcher will pull the body and head away from the ball. No stride at all will force the hitter to swing only with the arms. These hitters are always late. A no-stride hitter needs individual attention quickly. As the player strides, the weight should land on the inside of the foot,

not on the heel. Keeping the back foot firmly planted can also assure a proper stride. Many young hitters move the back foot, causing timing problems and movement of the head.

E. The Swing

As the hips rotate, the hands come forward through the strike zone. The swing should generally be level (but not flat), with a slight downward approach to the ball. Ideally, contact with the ball occurs in front of the plate.

The hips act as a pendulum motion for the swing. This movement is essential for getting the most out of the bat speed generated. “Throw your belly button at the pitcher” will give players a good visual image of rotating the hips.

The arms should be fully extended as contact is made. A bent-arm swing will tie up the hitter, reducing the chances of good bat speed or contact.

F. The Follow-Through

After contact, the top hand rolls over the ball, and the bat finishes behind the hitter. Some players will end the follow-through in the middle of the back. Others will finish with the barrel end of the bat on the ground. (The latter requires the top hand to let go after the wrist roll.) Assuming the grip is correct, a natural wrist roll will occur in the follow-through. To check for a proper follow-through, watch the chin. It should be resting on the back shoulder after the swing. This “tucking” of the chin can keep the head down and in the strike zone.

G. Watching the Ball

The most critical part of hitting is watching the ball to the bat. Yet, the most common flaw in young hitters is usually not watching the ball. Keeping the eyes focused on the ball until contact is possible though actually seeing the ball make contact is almost impossible. (Ted Williams has always said he could see the ball make contact with the bat.) Most young players lose sight of the ball because they have pulled their head. Pulling their head off the ball or out of the strike zone is often caused by over swinging. Known as “peeking,” players who do so are looking to the outfield to see the hit before they actually have it. Keeping the head down before and during the swing can eliminate this. A batting tee is also beneficial.

H. Fear of the Ball

Whether they admit it or not, most young players have some fear of being hit with a pitch. Major Leaguers readily admit their respect for a pitch thrown close to them, though they have learned to control the fear.

Young players can be convinced they are quick enough to get out of the way by using the “Bomber Drill.” The batter takes his stance and the coach throws tennis balls high and inside. The players practice turning their face away and diving to the ground with the bat. Once players understand they are well protected by the batting helmet, and can quickly get out of the way, they should be on the way to eliminating the fear of being hit by the pitch. Coaches must adjust carefully, as some players will naturally be more or less fearful than others.

Common Hitting Problems and Their Solutions

1. **Stepping in the Bucket.** Striding toward third base or moving the rear foot backwards is usually caused by fear of the ball. Use the “Bomber Drill” and an open stance at the plate.
2. **Pulling the Head.** This can be caused by over swinging, or may just be a bad habit. If over swinging, easing up on the swing may correct the problem. Whatever the cause, place a glove on top of the batting helmet and have the batter swing. The goal is to keep the head still and prevent the glove from falling off. Using the batting tee and not allowing the hitter to look to the outfield can also help. Beginning the swing with the chin resting on the front shoulder and finishing with it

resting on the back shoulder can encourage the head to stay motionless. “Swing shoulder to shoulder.”

3. **Uppercutting.** An upward arc towards the pitch, uppercutting usually results in a pop-up if contact is made at all. Most uppercutters do not realize they are swinging up and must be taught to come down on the ball.
4. **Hitching** is movement of the hands and bat just prior to the swing. Nearly all hitters have some hitch in the swing, but too much will prevent the bat from making contact soon enough. Any preliminary movement that does not interfere with the swing is acceptable.
5. **Sweeping** is caused by the hitter keeping the arms completely extended through the swing. The arms should be extended only when bringing the bat across the plate.
6. **Dragging** the bat is usually due to lack of strength or a bat that is too big to handle. Choking up on the bat and swinging 50-100 times a day will help the bat come around quicker and build strength too.

Teaching the Strike Zone

Before young players can become effective and consistent hitters, they must understand the strike zone. The dimensions are easy enough: the top of the knees to the armpits, the width of the plate and a baseball’s width on either side. Judging the strike zone as a hitter takes practice. Have the hitter call the pitches while standing at the plate. This is great practice for seeing the strike zone and for watching the ball’ the hitter should not swing during this drill. Outlining the dimensions of their strike zone on a basement wall with masking tape can provide a visual image for the hitter. Avoid learning strike zone from center field television cameras during Major League games. The strike zone is distorted from the angle, and is used only in professional baseball. The Major League strike zone stops at the belt; anything above it is a ball. These pitches in youth league games are strikes, though considered “high” by the pros. Coaches who teach their hitters and pitchers to use the entire strike zone will find the team scoring runs and throwing strikes consistently

16. Bunting

A team that can bunt has several surprises in store for it’s opponents. Too often a lost art, a good bunt at the right time can move a runner or score a run just when it is needed.

A. The Stance

As the pitcher begins the delivery, the hitter takes a short pivot step forward with the left foot and brings the right foot up parallel with left. The hitter should be facing the pitcher. Young players often swing the right foot out of the batter’s box and onto home plate. If contact is made, the hitter will called out. As the feet move to the proper stance, the top hand slides down the bat to a point near the label. Supported by the thumb and first two fingers, the handle of the bat should be held lower than the barrel. The knees should be flexed and the arms extended slightly to meet the ball in front of the plate.

B. Contact

The ball should be met so the hitter does not have to move the bat higher in the strike zone. Moving the bat up will result in a pop-up. Bunting the ball with the bottom of the bat will ensure the bunt will be on the ground. As the ball hits the bat, the hitter should give slightly, much like catching a ball with a glove. Is the bat does not give, the ball will either be fouled off, popped up, or bunted too hard to be effective.

C. Squeeze Bunts

When the rules permit, an effective squeeze bunt is a great way to score a run. The safety squeeze bunt protects the runner by requiring him to wait until the ball is on the ground before breaking for home. The suicide squeeze bunt is nearly impossible to defend if the hitter makes contact. The runner must break for home as soon as the pitcher has committed to the pitch. The hitter has the responsibility of making contact. Each of these special bunts must be practiced with a runner at third, and a hitter who knows what

the responsibilities are to get the runner home. Communication between the hitter, the runner, and the third base coach is essential for success of either the safety of the suicide squeeze.

Bunting is a skill that to accomplish must be practiced. Two bunts before batting practice cannot prepare hitters to bunt in a game. A bunting practice or round of batting practice designated for bunting can help each player become confident enough with it to execute in a game situation.

17. Baserunning and Sliding

Good fundamental Baserunning skills can make many exciting things happen. Stealing bases, moving runners, rounding the bases, and sliding are each individual skills that must be worked on throughout the season.

A. Getting Out of the Batter's Box

Good base running starts with the first step after the swing. After laying the bat down, the runner digs in with the balls of the feet, taking short steps until gaining enough momentum to break into a full stride. Proper running form includes arms pumping back and forth, (not across the body), head up, eyes focused on the next base, and running on the balls of the feet.

Young players (some older, too) often slow down as they approach first base. The team must be drilled sprint to first and run through the base. Assuming the runner is safe, he may return directly to first without being tagged out. It makes no difference which way the runner turns; left, right, fair territory or foul. As long as the move is back to first and there is no attempt to go back to second, the runner cannot be called out.

B. Rounding First Base

If the ball has made it through the infield for a hit, the runner circles into foul territory 15-20 feet in front of first base. The runner must hit the base on the inside corner while leaning towards the infield, all without breaking stride. After crossing the bag into fair territory and finding the ball, (first base coach helps), the runner must make a decision whether to go on to second or return to first. When crossing first base, the shoulders should be square to second to put the runner in a position to continue. "Round it and look!"

C. Leading Off the Bases

First base. The speed of the runner and the philosophy of the coach dictates what kind of lead the runner takes. A normal lead from first is usually one that allows the runner to be back on the base with one step and a dive. Some coaches prefer to have all runners take a lead of three or four steps or six to eight feet. The lead off should always be in the baseline and not behind it. Once the lead off is established, the runner takes a stance with the weight evenly distributed on the balls of the feet. A slight crouch with the arms hanging in front allows the runner to move quickly in either direction. Runners must never leave the base unless they know who has the ball. The hidden ball trick is illegal in most youth leagues, but runners still have the responsibility to know. Watching the pitcher's feet, and right heel (right-handed pitchers), will be the tip off for a move to first.

Second base. The lead at second can be larger than from first, but the runner must be aware of the shortstop or second baseman moving over to cover for a pick-off play. Third base coaches will normally watch the shortstop and the runner will watch the second baseman. Watching the pitcher's rear foot will let the runner know if a move to second is coming. Moving off as far as the shortstop is a good rule of thumb, but runners must be taught to be aware of the pitcher and his move.

Third base. The lead from third must be in foul territory to avoid being called out if hit by a batted ball. Runners should take several steps toward home as the pitcher begins the wind-up, and watch the catcher after he has the ball. The return path to third should be in fair territory, preventing a good throwing lane for the catcher. Even if no throw is made, runners must never turn their back on the ball. When the pitchers throwing from the wind-up, runners can take a larger lead than when the stretch position is used.

D. Stealing Second

Part of good base stealing is getting a good jump. Pivoting on the right foot, the left foot does a crossover step as the left arm swings across the body. This must happen quickly and vigorously for the runner to get a good jump. Using small steps on the balls of the feet, the runner breaks into full stride before sliding into the base. Whether to attempt a steal of second is determined by several factors: the inning, the score, the speed of the runner, how effective the pitcher's move is, and the strength of the catcher's arm.

E. Stealing Third

The steal of third should be attempted only if a good jump can be combined with a catcher with a weak arm. An out at third base is not good baseball, requiring the steal of third to be a certainty before any attempt is made.

F. Sliding

An important part of being an effective base running team is the ability to slide. Players who do not know how to slide properly are vulnerable to injury. Spending part of a practice session on the basics of sliding will make the team aggressive and confident in a game.

The bent leg slide is the easiest to learn and should be taught first. With shoes off, players sit in the outfield grass to learn the landing position. The right leg bends at the knee, underneath the left leg, which is straight. Left handed players can slide on their left side if they prefer. At full stride, a runner should begin the slide six to eight feet from the base. Sliding into a base that is not anchored can help avoid injury until players learn when to begin the slide. Since sliding is really a controlled fall, momentum should carry the runner to the base. Once a runner decides to slide, he must never change his mind. Severely sprained and broken ankles result from indecision. Slowing down is another common mistake. To a young, inexperienced player, slowing down will seem the best way to take the sting out of a slide, but "full speed ahead" is the best way to go. As the runner slides, he must use his stomach muscles to keep his back off the ground. The arms should be overhead to avoid injury to the fingers, and the chin should be close to the chest. Sliding should be practiced in the outfield grass first, before trying it on an infield. Once players accomplish the fundamentals of a good slide, they must learn to execute one at any base when there is a play. Sliding into second should be automatic, and at third and a home is there is a play. A proper slide on a close play will give the umpire an opportunity to see if the runner avoids the tag. A poor slide will give the benefit of the doubt to the defense. Runners must also be taught to slide even if the fielder is blocking the base path. If the fielder is guilty of obstruction, the runner will be awarded the base.

18. Team Defense

A team that is well schooled on defensive responsibilities will likely be difficult to score against. It is one of the most neglected areas of instruction in youth leagues. Mistakes on team defense account for a large percentage of runs scored.

Fundamentals

1. All players must know what to do with the ball before it is hit to them. This process begins before each pitch, when players must be taught to think about what they will do.
2. If not fielding the ball, every player must know their responsibility: covering a base, backing up another player, acting as the cut-off man, etc.
3. Communication is critical. Listening or giving directions as the play develops will often spell the difference between safe or out and run scored, or end of inning.

Drills for team defense (see Chapter 4) can never be repeated too much. It is the most effective way for young players to see and think through their responsibilities.

Defensive Responsibilities for Cut-Offs and Relays

	Left Fielder to			Center Fielder to			Right Fielder to		
	2B	3B	Home	2B	3B	Home	2B	3B	Home
Long Relay	-	-	SS	-	-	SS/2B	-	-	2B
Cut-Off	SS	SS	3B	SS/2B	SS	1B	2B	SS	1B
Back-Up	1B/RF	P*	P*	P	P*	P*	3B/LF	P*	P*

* On many youth fields, there is not enough foul territory to require a back-up at third base or home. Coaches may prefer to use the pitcher as the cut-off man on the infield to prevent further advance by the runners.

Defensive Responsibilities in Rundown Situations

The successful put out of a runner trapped between bases takes a great deal of repetition, but it can be learned by even the youngest of players. Knowing their responsibility is half of the battle for players involved in rundowns. Some basics to remember in discussions about a “Hotbox:”

1. The four players involved must go immediately to their proper position. Any hesitation will give the runner more time.
2. The runner should be run back towards the base he came from if possible. The most important point is to get an out. But, if a throw should get away, having the runner near the previous base can make a big difference.
3. The runner should be out in three throws or less. Most youth league rundowns collapse because players either do not know what to do or there are too many throws.

Below are the responsibilities for each player in rundown situations.

Other defensive fundamentals:

1. Cut-off men must go into the outfield, waving the arms overhead.
2. The most important part of a relay throw to a base is the throw from the outfielder to the cut-off man.
3. The player at the base where the play is going is responsible for lining up the cut-off man in a straight line between the outfielder and the base.
4. Catchers are in charge of calling out where the play will go. “Cut three!” is one way to call for cutting the ball off and throwing to third. Cut-off men in the infield can be either the pitcher or the first basemen.
5. Outfielders must back up each other and any base where there is a play.
6. Outfielders should never throw to first base or behind any runner(s).
7. Throws in any cut-off or relay situation must be on a line, without an arc. No rainbows.
8. On deeper hits to the outfield, a long relay man takes the throw from the outfielder and then throws to the cut-off man.
9. Outfielders and cut-off men must never hold the ball. The decision on where to throw the ball must be made instantly.
10. Communication between infielders on pop-ups should be directed by the pitcher or the coach. This will prevent collisions and balls falling untouched. Make “I’ve got it!” a routine for all infielders and outfielders. Communication is especially important on pop-ups that could be easier for the outfielder coming in. Infielders should stay with the play until the outfielder calls them off.

19. The Role of the Manager

Of all the influences a youngster is under while participating in youth league baseball, the single greatest influence comes from the manager. It is the manager who sets the tone for practices and games, and whose leadership and instruction will be the guiding forces of the team all season. This is obviously a big responsibility and one that should be taken seriously. Players look to the manager for the necessary skills to become better ballplayers. It is for this reason, for the benefit of the players, that youth leagues exist in the first place. And while it is a challenge to manage a youth league team, keeping the best interests of the players as Priority One will pay dividends for the manager and team.

Below is the "Checklist for Little League Managers" published by Little League Baseball, Inc., Williamsport, Pennsylvania. The attributes and skills listed apply to any youth baseball program. Personal Attributes-- The manager's Personality is an important factor in the success of Little League Baseball.

- A. Appearance. Do you...
 - 1. Dress suitably
 - 2. Groom properly
- B. Disposition. Do you display...
 - 1. Pleasantness
 - 2. A sense of humor
 - 3. Even temper
 - 4. Courtesy
 - 5. Sympathy
 - 6. Enthusiasm
- C. Poise. Do you...
 - 1. Have self-control
 - 2. Behave in an adult manner
- D. Character. Are you...
 - 1. Sincere
 - 2. Truthful
 - 3. An example of Little League ideals
- E. Leadership. Do you...
 - 1. Accept responsibility
 - 2. Have the ability to plan and organize
 - 3. Have a good understanding of the emotional and psychological characteristics of pre-adolescents (9-12 years.)
 - 4. Have a good rapport with each player
 - 5. Try to realize the personal needs and problems of players and adapt accordingly.
 - 6. Have discipline suited to the age level of the players
 - 7. Discipline fairly and impartially
 - a. Temper discipline with judgment and humor

Relations with others-- The nature of a manager's work brings one into close contact with many people.

- A. With Parents. Do you...
 - 1. Seed their cooperation and understanding in trying to achieve the goals of the Little League Program.
 - 2. Show consideration for their feelings and opinions
 - 3. Display friendliness and courtesy
- B. With Colleagues. Are you...
 - 1. Friendly
 - 2. Cooperative
 - 3. Courteous
 - 4. Considerate

- C. With Game Officials. Do you...
1. Display courtesy
 2. Respect their decisions and accept them gracefully
 3. Avoid bickering and “umpire baiting”

Managerial Duties-- The manager should have a fundamental knowledge of the game of baseball, its fundamentals and its strategy.

A. Coaching Procedures. Are...

1. Practice sessions well planned, and conducted as coaching and learning situations
 - a. Practice sessions snappy; everyone busy
 - b. Players properly taught fundamental skills and game strategy through the use of various drills
2. Practice sessions ended before the players become bored or disinterested
3. Practice sessions spaced so they do not become a chore for players and managers alike
4. Adequate precautions taken to prevent accidents or injury
 - a. Items of protective gear are used and are in good repair
 - b. Players kept from reaching extreme limits of physical and emotional fatigue
5. Players continually encouraged

B. Development of Desirable Habits in Players. Do you...

1. Encourage promptness
2. Encourage clean living and good health habits
3. Encourage responsibility and leadership
4. Encourage sportsmanship and fair play at all times
 - a. Teaching good manners and courtesy
 - b. Congratulating opponents after each game
 - c. Accepting defeat gracefully
 - d. Accepting victory humbly

The National Youth Sports Coaches Association (NYSCA) employs a Code of Ethics Pledge for each coach that it certifies:

- ❖ **I will place the emotional and physical well being of my players ahead of any personal desire to win.**
- ❖ **I will remember to treat each player as an individual, remembering the large spread of emotional and physical development for the same age group.**
- ❖ **I will do my very best to provide a safe play situation for my players.**
- ❖ **I promise to review and practice the necessary first aid principles needed to treat injuries of my players.**
- ❖ **I will do my best to organize practices that are fun and challenging to all my players.**
- ❖ **I will lead, by example, in demonstrating fair play and sportsmanship to all my players.**
- ❖ **I will ensure that I am knowledgeable in the rules... and that I will teach these rules to my players**
- ❖ **I will use those coaching techniques appropriate for each of the skills that I teach.**

❖ **I will remember that I am a youth coach, and that the game is for children and not adults**

Finally, a closing comment from Skip Bertman, head baseball coach at Louisiana State University:

“Each coach must sincerely love the game. Encourage your boys to play baseball as long as they can. Make them work hard but have fun, too. They probably won’t be among the chosen few who make the major leagues, but years later when they are seated behind desks, working in stores, or doing whatever their professions might require, they will remember timely base hits, happy victories, and yes, heartbreaking defeats. They will remember their teammates, and most of all, they’ll remember the coach.”

20. Playing Time

Effectively managing the playing time of 12-15 ballplayers will go a long way in building rapport and respect from players and parents. Every player wants to play as much as possible. But, with only 9 or 10 positions on the field, someone will have to be on the bench.

Who plays where and for how long is the puzzle each coach must solve before a game. Since the majority of the age groups have roster batting, everyone will get a turn at bat. Defensively, the situation is different.

The minimum playing time requirement must be satisfied before the fifth inning. This is to ensure participation in the event that game does not go seven innings, a common occurrence in youth leagues.

Give every player an opportunity to start. By varying the starting nine, (or ten) , all players feel a sense of importance to the team. Players who always sit in the bench to start the game are being sent a subtle message they are not important. It is also beneficial for every player to play the entire game at least once, preferably more. It may take some advance planning on the part of the coach, but the reward of making each player feel part of the team is well worth it.

21. Writing a Line-Up

After determining the playing time for each player, a batting order and the defensive assignments complete the necessary framework a manager needs during the game. There are two common methods to construct a defense: 1) players are assigned a different position every inning, or 2) pitchers and catchers are assigned and the remaining defense determined as the game progresses. There are an infinite number of variables to use with either of these methods, and the manager should determine which one best suits the team and it’s personnel. Changing positions every inning does not provide much continuity. It is a good way for very young players to get experience at several positions, however. Whichever method is used, the coach must know at least an inning in advance what changes will be made. The following is an example of how a defense may be determined:

Start with the battery first; pitchers and catchers. Decide who will start on the mound and how many innings they will pitch: two, three, or the maximum allowed. Know when the second pitcher will be brought in (ideally), and if a third will be needed. Pitchers and catchers should change the same inning. Though not always possible, it helps these players in becoming more comfortable working with each other. After the battery is set, the remaining positions can be late innings; others prefer to go an inning at a time should the game only last four or five innings. Either way, the coach must have some idea of what the defense will look like as the game progresses.

Determining a batting order that will produce “runs in bunches” takes accurate assessment of hitting skills and a few games of guesswork. Though most youth league teams do not have enough depth to contain each type of hitter required, here are suggested characteristics of each position in the order:

- No. 1: Able to reach base several ways; good baserunner, good bunter, good on-base percentage

- No. 2: Similar to lead-off man; good bat control, does not strike out often, good speed
- No. 3: Best overall hitter in line-up
- No. 4: Can hit with power, though not critical in youth leagues; good for RBI's
- No. 5: Good hitter like No. 4, but also good contact; another RBI man
- No. 6: Like a second lead-off hitter
- No. 7: like No. 2, good bat control, contact speed
- No. 8: OK hitter; weakest hitter, but No. 8 and No. 9 back to back can be a disadvantage
- No. 9: Weakest hitter in line-up in Major Leagues, but with youth leagues, a good place for "table setter" for lead-off man

No team will have players that can fulfill these exact requirements. Coaches should remember to determine the batting order to maximize the potential of scoring runs, rather than to satisfy a theory for placing the good hitters together. But good hitting is not the only contributing factor to an effective offense. Baserunning and bunting also play a role in manufacturing runs.

22. Pre-game Check List

Proper planning before the game will make the game itself easy and hassle free. Considerations prior to the arrival at the field include:

- ✓ Scorekeeper, scorebook, and two pencils
- ✓ Extra coaches (if needed)
- ✓ Bat boy or girl (should be at least four years old)
- ✓ Team water of Gatorade (no soft drinks)
- ✓ Cups for water
- ✓ Team drinks for after game (soft drinks are okay now)
- ✓ First aid kit
- ✓ Equipment check
- ✓ Injuries, illnesses, absences
- ✓ Rule books (League rules and Official Baseball Rules)
- ✓ Game baseballs

Many of these responsibilities can and should be delegated to an assistant coach or parent. Managers spend time organizing and teaching the team and should not be required to be a full time administrator too. The well prepared manager who will take care of the above responsibilities by delegating them to others will be able to concentrate on baseball. By having the entire team involved with different responsibilities, it will create a teamwork atmosphere on and off the field.

23. During the Game

Once the game is underway, the manager's job is finished. All the practices, drills, and instruction are complete. It is now up to the players. Managers should keep in mind the age group, and that mistakes are inevitable, both physical and mental. This can help keep a perspective on the situation. Even with repetitions and drills, mistakes will still happen. Most players respond well to reassurance and some instruction on what could be improved next time. A concerned and caring attitude will put the players at ease and allow them to play their best. Outside pressures in a game are often too much for youngsters, who are putting pressure on themselves as it is, whether it shows or not. Encouragement, support, instruction, and enthusiasm will bring the most out of any team.

Logistical considerations during the game include:

- Require players to stay on the bench with the team. Players should not go sit with their parents. No playing catch, swinging bats, etc., near the bench. Pay attention to the game at all times!

- ❑ Post the line-up on a clipboard hanging on the fence. This is very helpful for young teams. “When do I hit? When can I pitch?” Include defensive changes at least an inning in advance.
- ❑ In extremely hot weather (90 degrees with heat index over 95), bring a water jug or cooler filled with ice water and put clean hand towels in it. Between innings players can wipe off and cool down (it’s very cold) for better endurance under tough conditions. Require players to wear cotton T-shirts under the uniform shirt. This sounds hot, but the shirt soaks up the perspiration and lets the skin breathe easy in the heat.
- ❑ Require players to hustle on and off the field. For players who enjoy the game, it takes no special effort to hustle. Reminders will be necessary, but a hustling team is usually a winning team. This is especially important in hot weather.

24 Field Decorum

At all levels of baseball, there is a correlation between the appearance of a team and the quality of their play. In short, the better they look, the better they play. Though league teams are amateurs, it takes no more effort to dress as a professional than to dress as an “amateur”. Whether in complete uniforms or just T-shirts, a team can say much about itself by their appearance on the field. Suggestions for uniformity:

- ✓ Coaches should set standards by wearing a shirt with the team colors, name, or sponsor.
- ✓ Players should keep sanitary socks pulled up and stirrups on straight. Avoid sweat socks with colored stripes under the stirrups.
- ✓ Baseball pants should be no lower than mid-calf. They should never hang loosely like a pair of jeans.
- ✓ All shirts should be tucked in, players and coaches alike.
- ✓ Coaches should avoid tank tops, cut-off or worn down shorts, and sandals
- ✓ Everyone wears the team hat!

Requiring a team to look sharp will do amazing things for unity, pride, and teamwork-- all parts of a winning organization.

25. Team Intangibles

The ingredients for a winning team extend beyond pitching, hitting, and defense. Personalities, discipline, and hustle, to name a few, all contribute to a winning cause just as much as a crucial base hit or an important strikeout. It is the manager who must shape the intangibles; to create an atmosphere that supports the growth and improvement of each players’ skills.

Personality of the manager and coach(es)

The personality players see in their manager and coaches will have an influence on their performance. Characteristics of successful coaches always seem to be similar, even though their individual styles may differ. Common characteristics include:

- ◆ The enjoyment of working with kids
- ◆ Love of the game
- ◆ Enthusiasm, win or lose
- ◆ Consistent and fair discipline
- ◆ Ability to teach youngsters
- ◆ Sense of humor

A. Team discipline

The successful team is a well disciplined team. Focused on the job at hand: practice, drills, game, etc. All youth league teams require a discipline to enable coaches to instruct and for players to learn. Suggestions include:

- Establish discipline at the first practice; team rules discussed

- Consistent and fair for all players, regardless of ability
- Appropriate expectations for the age group
- Follow through; idle threats destroy credibility
- Parents must understand discipline is in the hands of the coach at practices and games

B. Coach/Player rapport

The ability of the coach to relate with the players will aid the team in many ways. Hustle, concentration, work ethic, and pride are a few examples. Mutual respect for one another is the foundation for a healthy player/coach relationship. Coaches and players alike must earn respect from others by their actions-- respect cannot be commanded. Coaches can promote rapport by taking a personal interest in each player's progress. As much individual attention as possible should be given during practices.

The following outline is taken from "How to be a winner" by head baseball coach Dan Drake, the University of LaVerna, California. Regardless of the age group, every coach can strive to achieve the objectives listed.

I. State of Mind

A. "Pride, winning, and production are mental before physical."

B. Success is at least 75% mental

II. Goals and Objectives

A. Team goals

1. Baseball is a team sport

2. We win or lose as a team

3. No one thing or one individual is more important than the team

III. Pride

A. This team is built on pride! Pride in:

1. Your ability as a player

2. Yourself as a person

3. Your teammates

4. Your coaches

5. Your league

IV. Respect the Opponent

A. Respect their ability

B. Respect them as people

V. Fundamentals

A. Practice

B. Practice right

C. Practice harder

D. Practice more

E. Practice doesn't make perfect, perfect practice does

VI. Price for Success

A. Hard work

B. Dedication

C. Determination

D. Concentration

E. Discipline

VII. Enthusiasm

A. Have it all the time; practice and game

B. It's contagious-- get sick with it.

C. Impresses opponents

D. Improves play and keeps you mentally alert

26. Parents

One of the toughest jobs any youth league coach will undertake is dealing with parents. It is the wise coach who has a strategy with which to deal with the occasional irate or upset parent.

Louisville Slugger publishes a youth league coaching kit containing some tips on handling parents:

“Coaching a youth league team is exciting and rewarding. But from time to time, you may experience difficulty with parents. Some may want their children to play more or they might question some of your judgments as a coach. This is normal, so don’t feel that you’re alone if this happens. Here are a few thoughts to remember when dealing with parents:

- Always listen to their ideas and feelings. Remember, they are interested and concerned because it is their children that are involved. Encourage parental involvement.
- Express appreciation for their interest and concern. This will make them more open and at ease with you.
- No coach can please everyone. Don’t try.
- Know what your objectives are and do what you believe to be of value to the team, not the parents.
- Make certain all parents know your ground rules. Have rules, regulations, your philosophy, practice dates and times, etc. printed on a sheet of paper you can pass out to all parents. Have a parent meeting before the season begins to discuss your operating procedures if necessary.
- Resist unfair pressure. You are the coach and it’s your responsibility to make the final decisions.
- Most important, be fair. If you treat all players equally you will gain respect.
- Be consistent! If you change a rule or philosophy during the season, you may be in for trouble. If you do change something, make sure the parents are informed as soon as possible.
- Handle any confrontation one-on-one and not in a crowd situation. Don’t be defensive. Don’t argue with a parent. Listen to their viewpoint and thank them for it.
- Don’t discuss individual players with other parents. The grapevine will hang you every time.
- Ask parents not to criticize their children during a practice or game. Don’t let your players be humiliated, even by their own parents. Explain that you must be under complete control of your team when they are on your ‘turf.’
- Don’t blame the players for their parents’ actions, if negative. Try to maintain a fair attitude.
- Parents must accept the fact that coaches and other league officials are volunteers and should not be subjected to criticism during a ball game.

Always remember that you will be dealing with all types of children and parents with different backgrounds and ideals. One of your main challenges as a coach is to deal with these differences in a positive manner so the team’s season will be an exciting and enjoyable experience for all.”

27. Umpires

The average first year youth league umpire is a 16 year old high school sophomore. He is umpiring during the summer because he enjoys baseball, would rather work outside, enjoys working with kids, enjoys the competition, and earns some extra money. His umpiring experience is usually none at all, though he probably has six or seven years of playing experience.

Guidelines for getting along with umpires

1. Respect. No coach will agree with the umpires 100% of the time, but respect for their efforts must be maintained. Nothing is worth the loss of respect. Simple ways to earn and keep respect:
 - a) Never get personal. The call may have been a bad call, but that does not make the umpire bad.
 - b) Never “show-up” an umpire. “Showing up” an umpire is any action that embarrasses them or mocks their authority.
 - c) Do not shout across the field. Ask for time and go discuss the problem.
 - d) Do not be a “whiner.” Anyone that comments on every pitch and every call will not receive serious attention about anything.
2. Know the rules. The umpires at the professional level have studied and enforced baseball rules for years. At the youth league level it is different. The coach that studies the rules may find a game situation that can be brought to the attention of the umpires.
3. Be yourself. Whether the umpire is 16 or 60, a sincere attitude from the coach will go a long way towards a successful relationship and a smooth game.
4. Be flexible. Every umpire has a different strike zone and coaches and pitchers must adjust to it. Find it in the first inning and use it. Complaining that “it wasn’t a strike in the last game” will not help.
5. Be calm. Regardless of the disagreement, nothing is worth loss of control. Managers that relax and calmly explain their viewpoint will do much for helping the situation and their team.

28. Sportsmanship

Of all the attributes that comprise a youth league baseball program, it is the quality of sportsmanship that is most likely to influence the public’s impression of the organization. Be it managers, coaches, players, or spectators, sportsmanship is visible for all to see. It is a shared responsibility that insures the players will have a positive experience, win or lose.

Good sportsmanship is no accident. It is planned, intentional, and it must come from the manager. The actions and philosophy of the manager will influence the team and its spectators. For this reason, it is critical that every manager understand the importance of the responsibility of communicating and following league sportsmanship policies.

1. The manager is responsible for the behavior of the spectators and may be asked by the umpires to address any sportsmanship problems.
2. Chatter on the field should be limited for support of the player’s own team, rather than criticizing the opponent. Positive support of the team is always the best kind of cheering.
3. Players learn sportsmanship by the examples they see. Managers, coaches, and parents must strive to be good examples on and off the field. This is especially important in reacting to judgment decisions by umpires. Adults who display inappropriate behavior directed towards umpires or coaches are teaching players to blame someone else instead of taking the responsibility themselves.
4. A handshake after the game, win or lose, is the baseball way to show good sportsmanship.