

Arlington Little
League
Coaches Handbook
2003

FOREWORD

ARLINGTON LITTLE LEAGUE'S MISSION

Arlington Little League is a community of players and adult volunteers. Our community includes our volunteer coaches, adult umpires, teen umpires, team parents, and others who work together toward a common goal: to provide a nurturing environment in which our children can play baseball, improve their athletic skills, and most importantly, learn more about themselves and experience appropriate challenges so that they develop as individuals.

All the children are equally important, irrespective of their skill level or age. All divisions – Tee Ball, Rookie, Minors, Majors 2, Majors 1, and Challenger – are equal in terms of resources provided, and attention paid. We want the children to learn the skills of baseball, and we want them to have fun while they do it. We want the children to look forward to going to practice and games. And we want them to continually improve as players – and as persons.

As coaches, you are the primary point of contact between your players and the league. You are the face of Arlington Little League to the players and parents. And, as coaches, you have the single greatest influence on your players' achieving an enriching experience with baseball this season. Recognizing your importance to the success of our mission as a league, Arlington Little League strives to provide you – the coaches – with the tools you need to make the baseball experience the most positive one possible for our children. This handbook is one of those tools. It discusses the baseball skills to teach the players at the various age groups, and the techniques for teaching those skills. It also introduces the concepts of the Positive Coaching Alliance, which has been adopted by the league.

My own experience demonstrates that winning and losing is not all that important to the parents or the players even as quickly as 30 minutes after a game is over. When I first began in this league, I was told that parents like to have their children's team win. Over the next six years, I observed that most parents actually give winning a very low priority for what they want their children to gain from youth baseball. Instead, parents primarily want their children to play their share of innings, have fun doing it, and develop as individuals.

To provide a nurturing environment, we must first and foremost remain concerned with safety at all activities. The green Little League rule book you will receive has a list of the safety rules that you must follow. Please review them and get back to us if you have any questions. One safety rule that I always mention whenever I get a chance concerns bats: children may only swing if they are the batter and at the plate during a game or practice. Even on-deck hitters may not swing bats. Please make sure your players, assistant coaches, and parents understand this safety rule.

Thank you for helping develop our youth through coaching in Arlington Little League. You have our sincere gratitude, and I am sure your experience will be a rewarding one.

Philip Vitale
President
Arlington Little League
March 9, 2003

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INTRODUCTION

This first edition of the Arlington Little League Coaches Handbook offers our baseball coaches information and insights about baseball skill techniques in a summarized form. The Handbook is intended to aid our coaches as they decide how to best teach and manage their players and teams. Although every coach applies annually to Arlington Little League and is appointed according to their qualities and qualifications, Arlington Little League does not mandate that its coaches follow a certain training program or otherwise direct specific substantive baseball instruction. Instead, Arlington Little League supports its coaches in their efforts to create a training program and coaching method best for their players by providing instructional resources in its new Video Library and this Coaches Handbook.

This Handbook is divided into three sections: (1) Positive Coaching, an overview of the Positive Coaching Alliance program and effective practice tips; (2) Division Visions, or the developmental goals and objectives appropriate for players at divisional levels within Arlington Little League; and (3) Baseball Techniques and Drills, a set of tips sheets and reference notes covering the basic hitting, fielding, and pitching techniques and related drills.

The Arlington Little League Coaches' Handbook has been created with the input, and assistance of, Arlington Little League volunteers, including Paxton Baker, Sam Fox, Curt Nibert, Paul Toulouse, Laura Triggs, Phil Vitale, and Kathleen "Grumpy" Vitale. Arlington Little League welcomes suggestions and materials so that future editions of the Handbook provide the best possible and most easily accessible information to help support its coaches as they help develop the youth of Arlington, Virginia.

Casey R. Triggs
Player Training Coordinator
and Majors I Commissioner
Arlington Little League
March 9, 2003

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SECTION ONE

POSITIVE COACHING

POSITIVE COACHING: COACHING THAT COUNTS

Arlington Little League is committed to promoting a positive culture in our community for youth baseball. Towards that end, all Majors I and Majors II managers participate in a certification program presented by the Virginia Baseball Club and developed by the Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) at Stanford University.

This program includes classes and workshops focused not only on practice organization and the teaching of fundamental baseball skills, but also devotes considerable time to integrating these coaching techniques with the latest sports psychology research data and character-building tools. The faculty includes local high school coaches as well as former college and professional players and coaches.

The goal of PCA is to develop trained youth coaches who not only have the skills and knowledge to teach specific baseball skills, but who are also able to communicate effectively with young athletes. The PCA training works not only to improve players' baseball skills, but the training also creates a positive learning environment for teaching life lessons and the building of character.

While everyone likes to win, "winning at all costs" is neither the philosophy of Arlington Little League nor the goal that PCA envisions for youth sports. Rather, the PCA approach encourages a learning environment that focuses on maximum personal effort, positive reinforcement, and team building. The PCA approach has three themes:

- Redefining what constitutes a "winner" into meaningful life terms;
- Filling the "emotional tanks" of players to continue their efforts; and
- Honoring the game by respecting the rules and all participants.

By redefining what it means to be a winner in youth sports and by encouraging dynamic and positive interaction between players, parents, coaches,

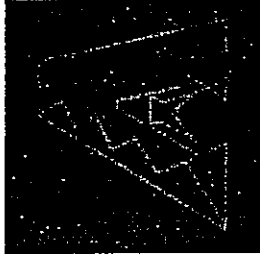
umpires, and league officials, the PCA's positive focus leads to skill development and emotional gratification for all players, without regard to their level of talent.

PCA and Arlington Little League believe that youth baseball provides fertile ground for committed and trained adults to teach young athletes not only how to play the game of baseball but also to be winners in the game of life. Arlington Little League welcomes your participation in this endeavor.

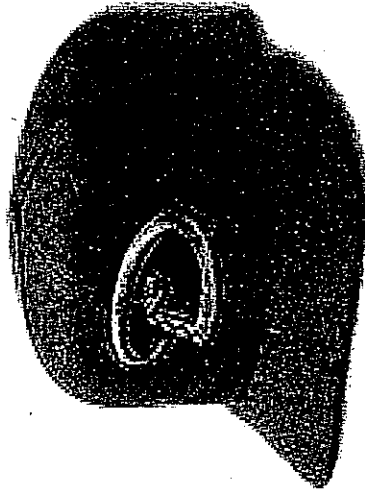
Paul Toulouse
Chair, Managers Committee
Arlington Little League
March 9, 2003

Diamondbacks

Arlington Little League



Hustle Award



June 8, 2002



Paul Toulouse, Head Coach



Double-Goal Coach Job Description

You are the most important person in our organization. You determine the kind of experience our athletes have with sports. We are committed to the principles of Positive Coaching. We expect our coaches to be "Double-Goal Coaches" who want to win and help players learn "life lessons" and positive character traits from sports. The following is what we expect from you during the coming season.

1. Model and teach your players to **Honor the Game**. Teach the elements of ROOTS--Respect for: **R**ules, **O**pponents, **O**fficials, **T**eammates, and one's **S**elf.
 - Appoint a parent to be "Culture Keeper" for the team.
 - Share with your players' parents your desire for them to Honor the Game.
 - Drill Honoring the Game in practice.
 - Seize teachable moments to talk with players about Honoring the Game.
2. Help players **Redefine** what it means to be a "**Winner**" in terms of Mastery, not just the Scoreboard:
 - Teach players the ELM Tree of Mastery (**E**ffort, **L**earning, and bouncing back from **M**istakes).
 - Use a "Team Mistake Ritual" (like "Flushing Mistakes") to help players quickly rebound from mistakes.
 - Reward effort, not just good outcomes. Look to recognize players for unsuccessful effort.
 - Encourage players to set "Effort Goals" that are tied to how hard they try.
 - Use Targeted Symbolic Rewards to reinforce effort and team play.
3. Fill your players' **Emotional Tanks**.
 - Use encouragement and positive reinforcement as your primary method of motivating.
 - Strive to achieve the 5:1 "Magic Ratio" of 5 positive reinforcements to each criticism/correction.
 - Schedule "fun activities" for practices, so players will enjoy our sport.
 - Use the "Buddy System" to teach players to fill each other's Emotional Tanks.
 - Develop "player coaches" by asking for player input and asking rather than telling them what to do.
 - Learn to give "Kid-Friendly Criticism" so players will be able to hear it. Criticize in private, "Ask Permission," use the Criticism Sandwich, avoid giving criticism in non-teachable moments.
4. Have **Conversations** during Team Meetings with your players at every practice and every game.
 - Review Honoring the Game, the ELM Tree and the Emotional Tank throughout the season.
 - Remind players about these three concepts before and after every game.
 - Ask questions and encourage players to speak and contribute during team meetings.
 - Use the Winner's Circle after a game to reinforce the positive things players did.

At the end of the season we will survey your players and their parents to give you feedback on how you did at implementing these Positive Coaching Alliance principles during the season. We will share the results with you. Thank you for all your time and effort!

Summary:

“TEN TIPS TO HELP MAKE SPORTS MORE ENJOYABLE”

**By Rick Wolff, Center for Sports Parenting
at the Institute for International Sport**

1. Hold a preseason meeting with players and parents to discuss goals, methods, playing time.
2. Ask parents at preseason meeting to let you know whether their child has any condition that affects their participation.
3. Make your practices organized and moving along; break down your practices into, say, five or ten-minute chunks. If you scrimmage, do so for last part of practice.
4. Take the personal approach with your players; chat with your players to keep them feeling that they are an important part of the team.
5. Teach sportsmanship. For example, explain how you want them to react after either a win or a loss, a strikeout or an error.
6. Act the way you want your players to act.
7. Let the kids choose their own captains or rotate so that every child feels special.
8. Listen to parents with concerns – at an appropriate time – for a good five minutes, thank them for sharing their concerns but you need not make any promises.
9. Kids and parents want playing time, so make a score sheet listing every player and mark the amount of time they play.
10. Wear a smile. Have fun and kids like to play for coaches who smile.



Elements of Effective Practices

Nothing is more closely connected to how a team performs in a competition than how they practice. And of all the challenges that coaches face, making the most of limited practice time is one of the most difficult.

The following framework is designed to help you plan effective practices. Practices should routinely include the following activities.

Written Practice Plan with Objectives & Priorities

A bad written plan is better than no plan. You don't have to follow a plan; if you find that you need to adjust once you are in the middle of a practice, say because players need more time with a given activity, you can change it on the spot. But there is never enough time to practice everything you want your athletes to learn. Write down activities in the order you want to cover them with a time period for each. This will help you make sure the most important things get done even if you don't cover everything you wanted.

Opening Ritual

Start practice in a way that signals to players that they are part of a team that has its own way of doing things—its own culture. It might be a warm-up exercise that emphasizes teamwork. It might involve an essential skill that always can be improved. Or something that fills Emotional Tanks. Starting each practice the same way helps build the team's culture. Opening rituals should involve movement so players can be active as soon as practice starts. Often they are coming from classes in which they had to sit for long periods. They want to move, so let them!

Skill Drills

This involves practicing skills that have been previously taught.

Instruction

Most practices should include time for teaching new skills or tactics as well as extending what has previously been taught.

Conditioning

Until puberty, cardiopulmonary conditioning has little impact on athletes. However, it is a good idea to have activity that is conditioning related for all children. It will signal to pre-puberty athletes that conditioning is an integral part of sport. Try to think of ways to make conditioning drills enjoyable.

Fun Activity

Plan an activity on a regular basis that reminds athletes how much fun it is to play their sport. Sometimes this is as simple as asking them what they love to do in their sport and then letting them do it. A great time for this is after skill drills or conditioning activities, especially ones which are not so enjoyable.

Scrimmaging

Players love to compete under simulated game conditions. It also gives them a chance to try out new skills "under pressure."

Conversation with Players (Not a Lecture)

Every practice should include at least one conversation with players. Many coaches use team meetings to lecture to athletes. But people learn more and are more willing to change when they are engaged in a conversation with someone they respect. Team meetings should be thought of as two-way communication sessions. Asking players a question about PCA themes (Honoring the Game, the ELM Tree, Filling the Emotional Tank, etc.) will reinforce life lessons.

Often the best time for a team conversation is after an activity in which they expend a lot of energy. When young athletes are tired, they are more ready to listen to the coach. It's generally better to have several short conversations during a practice than one long one. Several 3-minute conversations are more effective than one 15-minute conversation.

Ending Ritual

Ending practice the same way each time also helps build the team culture. The ending ritual might involve a drill that is especially enjoyable for players. Or a simple self-assessment of how practice went that day by each player. "On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 as the tops, how did practice go for you today?"

Assessment

As you're driving home from practice, review how you did with your objectives and what the team needs to focus on for the next practice.

Teams play like they practice.

So plan so you can practice like you want your team to play.

INSPIRATIONAL QUOTES

- * “He brings out all the little things. He tells us that it’s a game of failure, that three out of ten is good and that’s failing seven times. He tells us what determines a good baseball player is how he reacts to those failures.”

–Texas Pitcher and World Series MVP Justin Simmons on Texas Coach Augie Garrido, a four-time NCAA World Series champion.

- * “Run a squad of kids – of kids – now that’s a noble challenge. Sure, you’ll have to deal with parents who pester you about playing time and try to usurp your authority and degrade their underperforming offspring....Kids need to be coached. If you inspire them, they will listen. If you earn their respect, they’ll play their little hearts out. The biggest payoff is the vicarious thrill of watching your least capable kid, the one whose confidence you’ve been trying to boost all year, score his first goal ever and turn to you in stunned euphoria. That’s priceless.”

– “Underrated Sport,” Luis Fernando Llosa, Sports Illustrated

- * Leadership is “the ability to make those around you better and more productive.”

– Coach Jack Clark, University of California
12-Time NCAA Rugby Champion

- * Goals for the season: 1) have players be as healthy or healthier at the end of the season; and 2) have players love the game more than when the season started.

– John Dunning, Coach, Stanford NCAA Champion
Women’s Volleyball Team

- * A “competitor” is the person most ready to play and win the next play.

– John Dunning, Coach, Stanford NCAA Champion
Women’s Volleyball Team

EXAMPLE OF PRACTICE SCHEDULE

Saturday 3:00 - 4:30 p.m.

3:00 Jog & Stretch/Discuss practice schedule

3:10 Throwing drills on right field line

3:20 Pop-pull fielding drills - 3 groups on right field line w/safety balls

3:25 Instruction One: Pitching Mechanics

3:40 Two Technique Stations (6 minutes each, then players switch):

Hitting: 2:00 minutes each station; 4 players rotate through

- * Bat-behind back;
- * Wrist-rollers;
- * High Tee Drill (with one coach);
- * Soft Toss Drill (with second coach).

Fielding: 2:00 minutes each drill; 4 players and one coach in two groups

- * Pass Patterns
- * Tennis Racket Pop Ups
- * Circle Drill w/safety balls.

4:00 Game Speed Scrimmage - Coach pitches; 8 players in field; 4 in at bat; run on third hit Coach with bucket behind second to collect extra balls.

4:20 Players bag equipment

4:25 Run bases: H-1; 1-3: 3-H; 1-2: 2-H

4:30 End of Practice/Team Meeting

4:35 Players 1, 2, and 3 pitch to tarp on side (after practice or during stations if necessary)

SPORTS PARENTING TIPS

- * Let your child know that you appreciate it when he tries hard even if unsuccessful.

- * Ask rather than tell: let your child talk about his play by using open ended questions after practices or games (e.g., “What was the best part of the game for you?”).

- * Let your children know that you want them to honor the game.

- * Be a good role model: cheer both teams when good plays are made, and if a officiating mistake is made, be silent.

- * Fill the emotional tank of your child’s coach by thanking him or her for making the effort to be a good coach.

- * Be certain to attend the initial team meeting and understand coaches’ team policies, e.g.; how playing time is divided up.

- * If you need to speak to the coach, ask him or her the best time to talk and do not take a coach away from a practice or a game to talk; you may give your concerns about your child, but respect the coach’s decisions.

- * If you coach your child, strive to be only their parent off the field, *i.e.*, only coach them at games or practices (or if they specifically ask for advice at other times) – just as if they were a player on your team that was not your child.

SECTION TWO

DIVISION VISIONS:

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

DIVISION VISIONS: ARLINGTON LITTLE LEAGUE'S DEVELOPMENTAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The general goals for players within each of the Arlington Little League divisions are the same. But certain objectives may be unique based on the skill and physical and emotional maturity levels of the division's players.

The Three Common Goals of All Arlington Little League Teams

The Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) has defined a positive coach as a "Double-Goal Coach" or a coach who wants to win but who holds a second goal that is even more important: to use the sports experience to help young people learn "life lessons" and positive character traits that will help them be successful throughout their lives. Arlington Little League has embraced the three general PCA goals; these goals seek to maximize what youth sports has to offer maturing individuals. These simple yet high goals resonate for each of the teams across all Arlington Little League divisions.

A. Redefining "Winner." Helping each player redefine "winner" to be a player who:

- 1) Makes maximum effort;
- 2) Continues to learn and improve; and
- 3) Refuses to let mistakes – or the fear of making mistakes – stop him or her from trying.

B. Filling the Emotional Tank. Having coaches (and parents) fill the emotional tank of their players by using the Magic Ratio of five praises to each criticism.

C. Honoring the Game by respecting "ROOTS":

- 1) *Rules*: no bending; respect both the letter and the spirit.
- 2) *Opponents*: they give us the chance to play better; play to win but not to demean our opponents.
- 3) *Officials*: treat officials with respect even when we disagree.
- 4) *Teammates*: never do anything that would embarrass our team.
- 5) *Self*: we try to live up to our own standards regardless of what others do.

The Developmental Objectives of The Divisions

The developmental objectives vary across age divisions but may be roughly expressed in the following categories and descriptions. Individual players will of course progress during their Little League careers at their own pace.

Tee Ball (Ages 5-7)

1. Emotional Development: Tee Ball offers active fun baseball in an organized manner where the concept of individual and team effort and fellow teammates is introduced. A high level of coach direction (and parent assistance) is required at all times during games and practices. Players will learn how properly to participate in coach-led practices and station-based training drills. Players become more aware of their place within the team batting order and their fielding responsibilities as the season progresses. Some players may be performing in an athletic contest for the first time in front of a number of friends and their parents – some players may react in a negative way to failure or risk of failure. Redefining “winner” thus is important even though these games are less structured and formal.

2. Fielding: By the end of the season players should know, and be able, to move in front of a ground ball and position their glove in the alligator method. Many players will not be able to cleanly catch ground balls at this age; rarely would a player be able to catch a fly ball at this age. Players learn to back up teammates.

3. Throwing: Most players will have little accuracy and velocity and will likely not be aware of the mechanics of throwing; so the objective is to start learning the fundamentals. Though arms muscles are looser in children than adults and need less stretching, requiring some stretching before practice will build healthy athletic habits. Players should be taught how to line up the front shoulder with the target by pointing with glove (thumbs down) and front arm slightly flexed. Players should learn to: a) extend the throwing arm back with fingers on top of the ball; b) line up shoulder to target; c) rotate hips; d) throw with the elbow above the shoulder; e) bring throwing arm across body for full arm motion; and f) roll back hip after release to keep linear momentum toward target and to reduce force on the throwing arm.

4. Catching: Catching balls is a difficult skill to learn for this age group; the rudiments must be established, however, for players to develop sound mechanics in the future. By the end of the season, players should be able to bring “glove fingers up” for balls above the hip and “fingers down” for balls below the waist. (The cover hand – in a thumb to thumb position for balls above the waist and pinky to pinky position for balls below the waist – comes over the glove after the ball makes contact with the glove.) Players should be aware, but not necessarily able, to be in a balanced, ready position and move to catch balls.

5. Hitting: Few players will have experience hitting and their entire careers are ahead of them trying to execute a very difficult skill. The primary objective should be players swinging with: a) door- knocking knuckles lined up on the bat; b) flexed legs but relaxed hands and upper body; c) with a slight coil and quick hip turn assisted by “squishing the bug”; and d) a full follow-through. Keeping the back foot down and rotating on the ball of the foot is one of the more important aspects. A small percentage of hitters may be able to incorporate a short three-inch stride in their swing. (*Note:* The bat during a swing comes down in order to reach the contact plane most quickly; sweeping swings cover more distance, so players should never be instructed to “swing level.” In order to encourage proper swings, the tee should be placed in front of the front foot about a half foot or so for comfortable, full swings.)

6. Base Running: By end of the season, players will have learned to drop the bat safely after hitting it, run past first base before stopping, and not overrunning second or third base. Sliding is not permitted at this level.

Rookie League (Ages 7-8)

1. Emotional Development: Players learn teamwork and having fun in a cooperative endeavor. Players at this level face the significant challenge of making contact with a coach-pitched ball. Because hitting is both a difficult skill and a spotlighted individual performance within a team game, players – with coach guidance – have an opportunity to: (1) learn how to shape their expectations and redefine their goals from outcome goals to effort goals, and (2) to overcome their failures or the fear of failure.

2. Fielding: Players learn team fielding responsibilities, such as which base to cover when the ball is hit to another teammate, and which base to throw to after fielding a ground ball. And outfielders learn how to position themselves on balls hit to infielders. Players also learn when to tag runners and when to throw to a teammate to make the out. Because game speed becomes faster at this level, players will be exposed to the basic athletic training method of improving techniques through break-down muscle-memory drills that are run at slower speeds. Generally, during the first part of the season, most plays should be to first base. If the players demonstrate enough savvy, coaches may instruct that players make force plays at other bases. In many cases, players at this level are not able to make a fielding decision in time to get an out other than at first base.

3. Throwing: Players will learn the proper grip on the ball and how to release with a backspin through wrist flick drills. Players should learn on own through natural development or with coach guidance how to coil and move feet before throw (*e.g.*, crow hops) to increase velocity. Coaches may need to remind some players of the proper stance and ensure that the throwing arm is extended back fully as the throwing arm begins to move forward.

4. Catching: Proper glove position is learned for catching thrown balls as well as fly balls. All players will learn that fingers are up for balls – whether thrown or batted – above the waist. Some players will be able to catch short fly balls at the end of the season; players learn to run to a position first and then bring their glove up to catch the ball.

5. Hitting: Players will be taught through experience during the season and coach guidance that swinging aggressively at pitches with proper basic technique is what the player can control and is the team's hitting goal. Players learn where to stand and begin to gain understanding through repeated hitting experiences the best location of pitches for them to hit. (*Note:* Coaching for walks or frequently reminding batters not to swing at pitches outside the strike zone – especially with starting hitters – can unnecessarily increase anxiety and lead to players becoming reluctant to swing.) Players will learn to stride into the ball at this level.

6. Base Running: Players learn the situations in which they should run when on base (for example, whether to take the additional base or whether to run when not forced) and players begin to learn how to round bases.

Minors (Ages 8-9)

- 1. Emotional Development:** Players continue to transition as the game rules transform from Tee Ball to fully competitive Majors I games. The added component of players pitching mid-way through the season gives players additional opportunities to be challenged individually within the team format. As with each baseball skill and performance, players will be helped in defining effort goals that are within the control of the player instead of outcome goals (*e.g.*, prepare fully by stretching and throwing warm up pitches and use good mechanics instead of striking batters out). With increased maturity and experience, players are also able to better understand game situations and should consider alternatives prior to the play.
- 2. Fielding:** Players learn what plays to make through instruction and game experience. Players learn athletic readiness: to go from a mentally and physically relaxed position to a ready position when the pitcher begins his motion. Technique instruction increases at this level; some players will keep low with hands out in front of knees. A small percentage of players stagger feet properly when catching a grounder (in position to quickly throw) at this level.
- 3. Throwing:** Players who begin pitching will be exposed to basic mechanics (see ALL Handout on Pitching Mechanics). Some pitchers may be able to keep front shoulder on line, achieve a relaxed upper body, and follow through fully some percentage of time. Players may be instructed by his coach to pitch from the stretch until his line is consistent and he leg lifts under control. Players may benefit from guidance in defining pitching goals. For example, instead of getting outs or even throwing strikes, players could have the goal of proper game-day preparation and using proper mechanics or taking a deep relaxing breath before each pitch, actions that are within his control.
- 4. Catching:** Players improve throughout this level but many may need additional reminders to keep cover hand close to glove.
- 5. Hitting:** Batters are introduced to the additional challenge of facing possibly erratic player pitchers. Fear can be replaced by attention to effort goals, *e.g.*, taking an aggressive swing at the first pitch. And tennis balls or wiffle balls may be used with hitters in practice to reduce anxiety levels and/or to give the players the opportunity to learn how to move away from balls coming towards them.

(Note: Coaching for walks or reminding batters not to swing at pitches outside the strike zone can lead to players becoming reluctant to swing.)

6. Base Running: Player will gain experience in base running situations and be more aware of proper reactions to those situations. Players are introduced to sliding techniques.

Majors II Division (Ages 9-12)

1. Emotional Development: Competitive balance among teams is sought to ensure team and player challenges. Players are more knowledgeable about rules and game situations, and they begin gaining greater expertise at certain defensive positions. Players experience greater coach feedback and must learn to accept constructive criticism. Players engage in team building by being assigned to a team with a number of players that the player does not know, or know well, before the beginning of team practices. The introduction of umpires (provided by the ALL Teen Umpire Program) challenges players (and parents) to maintain respect for rules, opponents, and officials. Though a team at-bat is terminated after scoring six runs, players may learn to overcome the team failure of both close and large losses. Regular season standings and a post-season tournament enhance team competitions. Nine and ten-year olds who can compete at the higher level of play may have the additional challenge of All-Star competition.

2. Fielding: Infielders, by the end of the season, are fully schooled how to properly field a ground ball. During practices, coaches may instruct in coach-monitored break-down drills to build technique, as well as game speed drills which allow players to try their techniques at a faster pace. Players who have the capability to safely play a variety of positions are generally given the opportunity to try different positions.

3. Throwing: Players coil and use momentum with a full follow throw. A majority of players by the end of the season can make reasonably accurate throws from across the infield. Though some pitchers may pitch using only the stretch, a majority of pitchers – if they line up shoulders and load properly in a controlled manner – will use a full wind up. Pitchers will learn, but not necessarily be able to consistently execute, proper basic pitching mechanics (see ALL Handout on Pitching Mechanics). The more accurate pitchers will throw strikes over 50% of

the time. By the end of the season, most catchers can make throws to second base; some catchers will be able to consistently make accurate throws to second base.

4. Catching: Most players by the end of the season routinely catch thrown balls and properly turn glove depending on the height of the throw. Some players are able to quickly move to inaccurate throws.

5. Hitting: Players learn the mechanics of bunting, and players should be able to make contact, even if they cannot always place bunts in the desired direction. Players through practice off of a hitting tee improve their basic mechanics (see ALL Handout on Hitting Mechanics); perhaps top third of hitters will have a proper downward swing and open hips with extension. The quality of pitching varies which forces players to improve through game experience a better understanding of the strike zone. As the best pitchers are at the Majors I division (and no 12-year olds are allowed to pitch in this division), most hitters tend not to be overmatched in most games. As many games are competitive, hitters may be challenged with occasional pressure situations, which makes important coaching positively to take aggressive swings and not wait for a walk.

6. Base Running: Players, with assistance of base coaches will identify proper reactions. By the end of the season, players should be properly rounding bases and sliding when appropriate.

Majors I Division (Ages 10-12)

1. Emotional Development: Players learn persistence, commitment, and responsibility. Players will specialize among a few positions, which allows each player to build individual skills through the season; pitchers are more skilled and throw harder, which in turn challenges batters to improve their hitting technique. Majors I teams practice four times a week during spring training so players are pushed harder and must demonstrate significant effort. Increased practice time and multi-station practices allows for players to experience greater skill development. Players learn positional duties and gain greater understanding about their skill level and what they must do to improve. Competitive games offer many opportunities for individual failure (or fear of failure) and team failure; players learn to redefine goals and to overcome failures.

2. Fielding: Players work on refining defensive technique through repetitions and coach guidance; most infielders will cleanly catch balls hit reasonably close to them by the end of the season, and some infielders are able to make more challenging plays. Most players are able to play infield or outfield, and by the end of the season, most outfielders can catch routine fly balls and some can make running catches.

3. Throwing: Most pitchers will learn proper mechanics and consistently utilize them in game situations. Most pitchers at this level will throw strikes 60-75% of the time. (*Note:* Although pitchers are physically capable of spinning a ball to make it curve, leading experts recommend that youth pitchers do not throw a curve ball of any kind until they are age 14; instead, experts recommend the use a straight change, which will throw off timing just as well and avoids the risk of serious elbow injury either immediately or later in life).

4. Catching: Most players will catch virtually all balls thrown to them with proper technique, and most players set themselves in an athletic position so that they can move to catch inaccurate throws. Some players can catch balls bounced. Catchers learn blocking technique and can sometimes stop bounced pitches from getting past them; most catchers will be able to throw out average runners on cleanly caught balls. By the end of the season, most players are able to catch fly balls hit somewhat directly to them in the outfield; many outfielders can catch fly balls on the run.

5. Hitting: The top hitters properly swing down by throwing knob and hands to the ball, open hips, and roll wrists following contact. Extensive repetitions through tee, soft toss, and wiffle ball drills, and live pitching refine technique and hand-eye coordination. Players are more challenged by a consistently faster and more accurate group of pitchers. The vast majority of players aggressively swing bats and do not look to walk.

6. Base Running: Players, often without the assistance of base coaches, learn to identify proper reactions to base running situations. Virtually all players properly round bases by the end of the season and slide into bases when appropriate.

SECTION THREE

BASEBALL TECHNIQUES AND DRILLS

(See ALL's Web sites for instructional outlines and video library listings and checkout procedures: www.arlingtonlittleleague.org/instruction and www.eteamz.com/all/handouts)

FIELDING GROUND BALLS*

Improve your chances to cleanly field ground balls using the technique described below.

Relaxed Waiting Position: Infielders should be standing relaxed a step behind their position before each pitch. At this time you should consider the game situation, anticipate the plays you might need to make, as well as communicate with other fielders and the coach. As soon as the pitcher begins his motion, the infielder should take a “creep step” (a small step forward) to come to the ready position.

Ready Position: The infielder positions himself with his weight on the balls of his feet, the feet slightly wider apart than his shoulders, his knees bent, and his seat down. The head is up, and the hands are open and in front of the knees (they do not rest on the knees).

Moving to the Ball: The fielder stays down and moves low (*i.e.*, he does not stand up to an upright position to run) to a position behind the ball. As he approaches the ball, he keeps his hands thumbs up so that he only move his wrist one-quarter turn to receive the ball (instead of pulling the glove inward to his body, which then forces him to unfurl his glove to receive the ball, a more complicated and unnecessary maneuver). Shortstops may take a banana-shaped path to a ground ball in order to gain a better position for a strong throw to first.

Receiving the Ball: Keeping knees bent and seat down, the fielder positions himself in front of the ball with staggered feet (left foot is slightly ahead of right foot for a right-hander, which sets footwork for throw) and the hands are out in front of the knees for maximum flexibility (makes the classic baseball “soft hands”). The fielder watches the ball into his glove using the “alligator” – as the ball lands in your glove, your hands close together, palm facing palm.

Throwing to First Base: After catching the ball, grip the ball and look at the first baseman’s glove – do not watch the runner going to first base. Step towards first base with your power foot and spread arms in a flexed position with the glove pointing towards first base and palm facing towards the outfield. Pull through the throwing motion with a twist of your hips and bring your glove up to your heart; after releasing the ball, follow through with a hip roll (*e.g.*, you act as if you are stepping over a fence with your back leg coming forward). To keep the ball from sailing, grip the ball across the seams if possible and throw with a standard three-quarter motion.

Charging a Dribbler: Come forward remaining low to the dribbler and use the alligator method to pick up the ball; you may need to release a throw quickly without taking your regular throwing motion (because the throw will travel a shorter distance, quickness and accuracy are more important than a powerful throw). Use your glove to catch any ball that is moving; only reach for the ball with your bare hand if a ball has completely stopped moving.

Underhand Tosses: For very short distances, pitchers or the second baseman should use a stiff-wrist underhand toss to the first baseman. Keeping the wrist stiff during the toss minimizes the hand motion, which is less distracting to the first baseman. (Other fielders may use the stiff-wrist underhand toss: middle infielders starting double plays at second; third basemen tossing to the catcher on attempted squeeze bunts; and catchers tossing to the pitcher covering home plate after a passed ball or wild pitch.)

*By Sam Fox, Manager, and Casey R. Triggs, Commissioner, Arlington LL Majors I, 2003.

PITCHING MECHANICS*

Pitchers should jog, then stretch arms and legs before pitching if not already warmed up. To grip the ball for a standard four-seam fastball, hold the ball with two fingers and the thumb across the horseshoe shape created by two of the wider seams. Keep the wrist loose and the ball out on your fingertips. At the release, let the ball roll off of your two fingers with backspin (like a basketball). *Important:* let a coach know if any part of your arm is sore. Experts recommend that young pitchers not throw curves, which can damage developing arms. And an expert survey suggests that pitchers age 11-12 throw no more than about 70 pitches in a game; about 50 maximum for 8-10 year olds. Four days rest is recommended after pitching the maximum number of pitches.

The key pitching steps (written for a right-handed pitcher):

- Start with both feet over the pitching rubber and toes pointed slightly up the third baseline. Have the ball in your right hand with proper grip and hand in glove. The first motion is to take a deep breath and exhale to relax your upper torso.
- Step back six inches or so with left foot, 45 degrees from the pitching rubber, and transfer weight onto left foot, so right foot can pivot easily.
- Pivot right foot so it's in front and parallel with the rubber, just touching the edge.
- Lift up left leg to the load position by raising left knee above your waist and over the other knee to show hitter your left hip, and curl left shoulder in about 20%. Toes should be pointed up (so left foot is v-shaped). Acquire target.
- Bend right knee just a bit to permit gravity to pull your body forward straight towards the target, and slowly glide out to the power position.
- In the power position, have your arms extended and up; your elbows and knees should be slightly flexed. Your glove hand should be thumbs down, and your fingers on the pitching hand should be top of the ball. Keep your eyes on target.
- Turn right knee in slightly to open hip, then pull your glove hand up to your heart and rotate through the pitching motion with your shoulders diagonal and pitching elbow at ear level. After the release, roll back hip over so back foot lands up by the front foot. Keep your head up and eyes on target.

Practice the pitching motion without a ball; then practice by throwing up against a fence or tarp; finally, pitch to a strike zone. When pitching, keep a relaxed attitude. Act the same whether throwing a strike, a ball, or giving up a base runner through a fielding error or by a hit. The calmer you remain, the more likely you will focus and pitch better.

* By Casey R. Triggs, Commissioner, Majors I, Arlington Little League 1/19/03.

THE MECHANICS OF PLAYING CATCHER*

Starting Position: The catcher should position himself behind the plate and more than an arm's length away from the rear leg of the hitter (*e.g.*, the catcher could not quite touch the leg if he reaches) to be far enough back from the batter to avoid being hit by a swing and remain close enough to set up a good target for strikes and to receive most pitches comfortably.

Showing the Signs: When showing pitchers the signs, the catcher holds his fingers against the right thigh (assuming a right-handed catcher) with the glove resting in front of the left knee to shield the signs from the third base coach. After giving the sign, the catcher shifts from a relaxed starting position to the ready position by hopping or walking a short step forward.

Ready Position: When getting to the ready position, catchers adjust their weight to the balls of their feet with their thighs parallel to the ground. To maintain flexibility in the crouch position, the catcher should have his feet apart beyond his shoulders, and his right foot a few inches behind a parallel line with his left foot and his elbows bent slightly. The glove is held out (without locking the elbow) just beyond the knees and in the strike zone.

Receiving the Ball: As the pitcher begins his motion, the catcher should relax his wrist on the glove hand – like a hinge – then raise up the glove to create relaxed receiving hands, *i.e.*, to avoid freezing the hand and arm muscles during the pitch. If no runners are on base, the catcher should hold his right hand behind himself; with runners on base, the hand should be in a fist behind the glove.

Throwing to Bases: When attempting to throw out runners (on steals or pick-off plays), the catcher should take a short, controlled step (to avoid high throws) and throw overhand with backspin (to avoid tailing). The catcher should avoid stepping on the plate. Depending on age and arm strength, a catcher may need to bounce his throw into second base in order to keep the throw low, accurate, and quick.

Blocking Pitches in the Dirt: Catchers do not catch – but instead block and control – bounced pitches. To block a ball, a catcher drops to his knees in front of the pitch, puts his mitt to the ground between his legs (with his right hand open and completely underneath the glove for safety), his elbows in against his torso, and his chin down on his chest. (Coaches may want to use safety or tennis balls in blocking drills.)

Fielding Bunts and Dribblers: Catchers should spring up and arc a slight bit around a ball bunted or hit to the left side of the infield so that he has a better body position to throw to first. On balls up the first base line, the catcher, if time permits, should scoop up the ball, then drop-step his right foot away from the line to gain a better throwing angle to first base. (Catchers scoop up balls with both hands because the catcher's mitt is not shaped for fielding ground balls.)

* By Casey R. Triggs, Training Coordinator and Commissioner, Majors I, Spring 2003.

HITTING MECHANICS*

Practice the mechanics with practice swings and in team hitting drills. When hitting off live pitching, take a deep breath, focus on the pitch, and let your muscle memory do the work.

- **Bat:** If a bat is light enough for you, you can hold the bat out in your dominant hand with your arm extended parallel to the ground for about 20-25 seconds.
- **Grip:** Line up middle knuckles (or slightly more cocked if that grip feels better); rest bat across callus lines and on fingertips; do not push bat back into palms.
- **Stance:** Spread feet slightly farther apart than shoulders.
 - Flex knees; keep upper body loose. Be balanced like a basketball defender.
 - Eyes parallel to ground, both eyes facing pitcher, and focused on pitcher's cap, shifting to the ball when the pitcher's arm comes forward.
- **Arms/Hands:** Hands should be above the top of the strike zone (e.g., shoulders) because you swing down to the ball (instead of sweeping with a level swing, which takes longer).
 - The hands, two shoulders, and front elbow form a box.
 - The shoulders are relaxed and elbows point down.
- **Show Hip and Cock:** When the pitcher raises his front leg and shows his hip, you show your hip so that your front knee, hip, and shoulder all curl in slightly.
 - With "inward turn" or this coiling, your hands move back about three inches.
 - Cock hands back (c-shaped motion) so that the bat barrel extends through the slot between your helmet and back shoulder (so bat will come down during swing).
 - Cocking is easier if bottom wrists are slightly out and up ("radial deviation").
- **Stride:** When the pitcher moves hand forward to pitch, take a short, 3-inch stride towards the pitcher (or as some experts recommend, 45% towards the plate).
- **Swing:** Come down on the ball with barrel above hands for most of swing.
 - Do not sweep or swing level, which takes longer for the barrel to get to the ball).
 - "Squish the bug" with the back foot so that the knee points towards the pitcher and your back leg forms an "L" shape during swing. (Front leg is straight.)
 - The explosion in a swing comes from the hips quickly twisting the upper body.
 - Bring knob and hands directly towards the pitcher; keep elbows close to the body.
- **Contact:** At the contact point, the front arm straightens, and hands are palm-down, palm-up. Hit pitch on inside 1/3rd of plate 2 ft in front of plate, middle 1 ft, outside at plate.
- **Follow-Through:** Remain balanced as you bring the barrel of the bat around to the back of your body; hips fully open to the pitcher; you end with chin over your rear shoulder.

*By Casey R. Triggs, Commissioner, Majors I, Arlington Little League 1/19/03.

"What *Not* to Yell at Hitters
(And Darn Good Phrases to Use Instead)"

By Casey R. Triggs

1. The Swing

Silly: "Swing level!"

Darn Good: "Box up (or get bat in slot) and throw knob (or hands) at ball."

Reason: The barrel actually comes down during a proper swing. Trying to swing level makes the bat "sweep," which takes more time for the barrel of the bat to reach the strike zone. The hands are at the top of the strike zone at the beginning of the swing, and the hands remain under the barrel as the knob (and the hands) begin their path directly at the pitcher.

2. Swinging at Bad Pitches

Not Helpful: "Don't swing at that pitch; it was above your head!"

Darn Good: "That's the way to be aggressive, good job!"

Reason: Hitters learn the strike zone through trial and error; once a hitter is generally familiar with the strike zone (perhaps the first half of their first coach pitch game!) then he knows full well that he's swung at a bad pitch. Negative reinforcement during batting practice, scrimmages, or games will make a hitter less aggressive if a coach has taught him that, on his team, hitters risk failure by swinging at pitches. Praising an aggressive swing – regardless of the pitch or the outcome of the swing – teaches aggressive swings are what your team is about.

3. Arm Position

Very Silly: "Get your elbow up!"

Darn Good: "Hands at the top of the strike zone; and make a box (or bat in the slot)."

Reason: The back elbow does not dictate the swing; it becomes positioned as a result of proper hand positioning, so you must move your hands first. Further, by moving the elbow up, a player may shift his grip to a choke position, which restricts the swing and also forces an uppercut.

4. Weight Distribution

Not That Helpful: "Get your weight on your back foot!"

Darn Good: "Get balanced in your stance, like a basketball player."

Reason: The athletic, balanced position brings the proper lower body position for the swing. Weight back or weight forward limits a quick swing and/or gaining power from the lower body.

5. Ready Position

Silly: "Get relaxed up there!"

Darn Good: "Take a deep breath, then get into your stance."

Reason: Ever tried to relax when your coach is yelling at you to relax? Anyway, batters should not be relaxed, they should be flexed and ready. A more precise instruction is to take a breath so that the upper body's tension is reduced and the lower body can more easily twist the upper body during the swing.

"How Many Pitches Should I Allow My Child to Throw?"

James R. Andrews, M.D. and Glenn Fleisig, Ph.D.

American Sports Medicine Institute

February 12, 1996

"How Many Pitches Should I Allow My Child to Throw?" This is the most common question asked to sports medicine professionals by parents of youth baseball players. The question really is how many pitches can a child throw without injuring the throwing arm. Organized leagues have shared this concern for several years; as a result, most youth leagues limit the number of innings a child may pitch (Tables 1 and 2). However, most people now believe that limits should be placed on the number of pitches, rather than the number of innings.

To determine recommendations, USA Baseball Medical & Safety Advisory Committee commissioned the American Sports Medicine Institute (ASMI) to study pitch limits in youth baseball. ASMI sent surveys to 85 baseball experts, consisting of orthopaedic surgeons and coaches, about pitch limits and other injury factors. Twenty-eight of these experts responded. Results from the survey are shown in Tables 3 - 6.

Table 3 shows the maximum number of pitches recommended per game and per week. The large "standard deviations" reflect large variation in opinion among those surveyed. The recommended minimum number of pitches corresponding to 1-day, 2-day, 3-day, or 4-day rest requirements are shown in Table 4. For example, if an 8-year-old pitcher throws at least 21 pitches in a game, the survey recommends that he should be required to rest at least one day; if he throws 34 or more pitches in a game, he should be required to rest two days.

Several respondents commented on the concept and definition of rest. Issues such as whether a child should pitch at home or play different positions in games during the "rest period" was discussed. Some felt that youth pitchers throw too many total throws, while others felt that children today don't throw enough. ASMI supports the belief that, in general, youth baseball players in the United States do not throw enough. While young pitchers should be given adequate rest after pitching in competition, they should also be encouraged to throw in other settings (playing other positions, playing catch with parent or friends, practicing pitching, etc.). Throwing is necessary for a young pitcher to strengthen his/her arm and body. Common sense and listening to the pitcher for complaints of discomfort or fatigue can greatly help the coach or parent decide the right amount of rest and practice needed.

Opinions and comments on other safety-related issues in youth baseball were asked. Results are presented in Table 5. Many respondents commented that the quality of the pitcher's mechanics is an important injury factor. The importance of strength training was also mentioned. Table 6 shows the recommended age for pitchers to begin throwing various types of pitches. Because these results were based upon opinions and not observational data, their significance

should be interpreted with caution. The small sample size of survey participants (N=28) must also be considered. Based upon this survey, the following conclusions may be drawn:

- Number of pitches is more important than number of innings when determining rest requirements
- The maximum number of pitches allowed in one outing should increase with age.
- A pitcher should be limited to two appearances per week.
- Compared to younger pitchers, older pitchers can throw a few more pitches for a given number of days rest.
- Participation in multiple leagues, playing other positions, and practice pitching should be considered when defining and regulating rest.
- Breakaway bases should be used.
- In general, a child can start throwing a fastball at age 8, a change-up at 10, and a curveball at 14. All other pitches should not be introduced until high school age.
- Improper technique is a major factor in injury potential.
- Conditioning of the throwing arm and entire body can reduce a young pitcher's risk of injury.
- While the number of pitches should be limited, the young athlete should be encouraged to throw. This includes playing catch, playing other positions besides pitcher, and practicing pitching. When symptoms of arm discomfort or fatigue arise, longer periods of rest are recommended.

These conclusions and recommendations are based upon the opinions of baseball and medical experts. However, the great variation in opinions collected indicate the need for more facts. USA Baseball and ASMI plan to study pitching in youth baseball and measure the number of pitches thrown, types of pitches thrown, pitching mechanics used, and other factors of interest. How these factors affect the risk of injury can then be determined.

Table 1. Inning limits currently used in youth baseball

AGE	MAXIMUM INNINGS/GAME				MAXIMUM INNINGS/WEEK			
	Pony	Little League	Dixie Youth	American Legion	Pony	Little League	Dixie Youth	American Legion
8-10	3	6	6		6	6	6	
11-12	7	Unlimited	6		10	6	6	
13-14	7	Unlimited	9		10	9	10	
15-16	7	Unlimited	10	12	10	9	14	12
17-18	9	Unlimited		12	Unlimited	9		12

Table 2. Rest currently required in youth baseball

AGE	INNINGS/ APPEARANCE	REST		
		Pony	Little League	Dixie Youth
8-10	Less than 3	0	0	0
	3	40 hours	1 day	1 day
	4 or more	40 hours	3 days	3 days
11-12	Less than 3	0	0	0
	3	40 hours	1 day	1 day
	4 or more	40 hours	3 days	3 days
13-14	Less than 4	0	0	0
	4	40 hours	1 day	40 hours
	5 or more		3 days	
15-16	Less than 4	0	0	0
	4	40 hours	1 day	40 hours
	5 or more		3 days	
17-18	Less than 4	0	0	0
	4	40 hours	1 day	40 hours
	5 or more		3 days	

**Table 3. Maximum Number of Pitches Recommended
(Mean \pm Standard Deviation)**

AGE	MAXIMUM PITCHES/GAME	MAXIMUM GAMES/WEEK
8 - 10	52 \pm 15	2 \pm 0.6
11 - 12	68 \pm 18	2 \pm 0.5
13 - 14	76 \pm 16	2 \pm 0.4
15 - 16	91 \pm 16	2 \pm 0.4
17 - 18	106 \pm 16	2 \pm 0.6

**Table 4. Minimum Number of Pitches Thrown That Should Require Specified Rest
(Mean \pm Standard Deviation)**

AGE	1 DAY REST	2 DAY REST	3 DAY REST	4 DAY REST
8 - 10	21 \pm 18	34 \pm 16	43 \pm 16	51 \pm 19
11 - 12	27 \pm 20	35 \pm 20	55 \pm 23	58 \pm 18
13 - 14	30 \pm 22	36 \pm 21	56 \pm 20	70 \pm 20
15 - 16	25 \pm 20	38 \pm 23	62 \pm 23	77 \pm 20
17 - 18	27 \pm 22	45 \pm 25	62 \pm 21	89 \pm 22

Table 5. Other Safety Issues

Should face shields for batters be required?

Yes: 46%
No: 29%
Maybe: 25%

Should softer baseballs be used?

Yes: 21%
No: 43%
Maybe: 36%

Should breakaway bases be used?

Yes: 86%
No: 7%
Maybe: 7%

Should chest protectors for batters be used?

Yes: 14%
No: 43%
Maybe: 43%

Table 6. Age (in Years) Recommendation For Learning Various Pitches

Fastball: 8 ± 2
Change-up: 10 ± 3
Curve ball: 14 ± 2
Knuckle ball: 15 ± 3
Slider: 16 ± 2
Fork ball: 16 ± 2
Screw ball: 17 ± 2

Arlington Little League Baseball Techniques and Drills Video Library

Arlington Little League has purchased video reference materials for coaches, parents, and players to checkout. One or two videos may be checked out for one week at any one time.

- 1) **Little League's Official How-To-Play Baseball** Basic comprehensive starter tape; recommended for new coaches. (www.mastervision.com 1-800-876-0091)
- 2) **The 59 Minute Baseball Practice (DVD format)** A very good drills tape for newer coaches and even more experienced coaches. The tape offers over 30 practice drills so it can give the new coach a core set of drills, or the more experienced coach some alternatives to add to his practices. (www.youthsportsclub.com 1-800-511-2101)
- 3) **Dynamic Practice Organization (Emanski)** Outstanding technique and reactionary drills; helpful for all coaches. (Package discounts at World of Baseball 1-800-833-1551)
- 4) **Bunting, Baserunning & Sliding (Stockton)** Mechanics highlighted; drills demonstrated. (www.baseballexpress.com 1-800-937-4824)
- 5) **You Can Teach Hitting, Vol. 1 (Baker)** Good primary hitting instruction tape; provides good explanations and easy steps to follow from bat selection, through "show hip" and "Ike-to-Mike." Appropriate for all youth and coaches. (1-800-228-1248)
- 6) **Teaching the Mechanics of the Major League Hitter II (Emanski)** Comprehensive, detailed step-by-step explanation of proper hitting mechanics. More complex insights, including how using "radial deviation" and "bat in the slot" helps achieve a crisp, downward swing. This tape helps coaches spot what to monitor in their players' swings, and it also shows an excellent break-down concept for tee and soft toss hitting drills. Highly recommended for Majors and Minors coaches; and good for all coaches to see. www.champonline.com (Package discounts at World of Baseball 1-800-833-1551)
- 7) **Hitting II (Stockton)** Excellent series of hitting drills – shows circuit hitting stations. This drill tape builds upon Dr. Stockton's teaching methodology in Hitting I and reveals the concepts that Dr. Stockton teaches – box, slamming the triangle, and throwing hands. A must for Majors coaches. (www.baseballexpress.com 1-800-937-4824)
- 8) **Teaching the Mechanics of the Major League Pitcher (Emanski)** Comprehensive seven-step approach provides outstanding framework for coaching. No-ball drill shown helps kids learn good form; a must see. (Package discounts at World of Baseball 1-800-833-1551)
- 9) **Pitching I (Stockton)** Details pitching mechanics; emphasizes synchronized arm-leg movement and body twist. Shows coaches monitoring points. (www.baseballexpress.com 1-800-937-4824)

**“You Can Teach Hitting
Volume One: A Systematic Approach to Hitting”
Videotape By Dusty Baker (1-800-228-1248)**

Dusty Baker and his hitting instructing colleagues set out an eight-step systematic approach to hitting in this videotape. The approach is consistent with sound hitting principles, and a bit simpler to teach than others. The videotape is a fine place to start learning how to coach hitting, and it also provides good tips for veteran youth coaches.

– Casey R. Triggs

I. Bat Selection

- The greatest bat speed and distance is generated by the appropriate size bat. If his bat is too heavy, the player will drag the bat and not maintain control of the bat.
- To determine whether a bat is the appropriate weight, the player raises the bat in his dominant hand (shoulder high) and holds the bat parallel to the ground. A player can hold the appropriate weight bat for about 20-25 seconds.

II. Stance: Depth and Distance in Box

- You can teach a reasonable location for players to stand in the box by placing the player's bat on the plate, with the end of the barrel in the middle of the plate (the plate's mid-point is half way across what would be the common edge of the rectangular and triangular sections of the plate.)
- Hitter places front foot's toes at the knob of the bat. (Instruct hitters to ignore the dug out holes in the dirt left by other players because they may have different body and bat sizes.)

III. Stance and Balance

- Parallel stance generally is best to teach; if a player opens or closes his front foot in the stance, make certain that the player strides with the front foot in a direction so that foot returns to a parallel position when his foot touches the ground.
- Players maintain balance by bending knees, standing slightly pigeon-toed, and keeping their weight on the balls of their feet and the heels just up enough so a piece of paper could slide under them. (To test a player's balance, the coach may moderately push the player in the middle of his chest to make certain he can exert some resistance.)
- The head should be turned toward the pitcher so that both eyes can easily view pitch. The head should be straight – a tilted head makes it more difficult to accurately perceive the flight of the pitch (especially breaking pitches).

IV. Grip on the Bat

- The *standard* grip: bat across the fingers (like a golf club would be held); the middle knuckles are aligned so that the hitter has a full range of motion and can use the quicker muscles in hands, wrists, and forearms to react to the pitch. Dusty Baker prefers that hitters use this grip and believes that hitters using this grip will achieve higher batting averages.
- The *modified* grip: the middle knuckles of the top hand are moved to a spot in between the bottom hand's middle and big knuckles. This grip will cause the hitter's swing to have more arc (resulting in more fly balls) and a bit less range in motion. Dusty Baker is not against using this grip.
- The *choke* grip: the middle knuckles are all the way over the big knuckles or even more rotated. The bat is forced to arc; hitter has significantly less range of motion. Dusty Baker advises not to use this grip.

V. The "Box" and the Bat Angle

- You can help hitters properly hold the bat by showing them that a box is created by the arms and hands coming to the proper hitting position: the rectangle's sides are formed from the point of the back shoulder to the point of the front shoulder; from that point down to the front elbow; from the elbow to the lower hand's wrist; and wrist to the point of the back shoulder.
- Bat is held at a 45 degree angle so can be brought down through the strike zone. A bat held at perpendicular to the ground would force the hitter to uppercut.

VI. The Inward Turn

- Young hitters very frequently do not use the inward turn.
- The inward turn puts the body in the coiled position and ready to swing; adds strength to hitter, and allows batter to wait longer to see pitch, which is especially helpful for off-speed pitches.
- Hitters must coil to begin swing by tucking front knee, hip, and shoulder when the pitcher shows his front hip pocket as he begins to reach the load position.
- The coil movement of the front side causes hands to move back about three inches.
- Coaches may wish to instruct hitters, "Show your hip when you see the pitcher's hip."

VII. Stride: Stepping on Ice

- Hitters should step 45 degrees towards the pitch just several inches as if putting foot down on ice. (By using the 45-degree stride, the hitter steps into the pitch.)
- The stride step is meant to stop the body's momentum before starting the twist of the body and the snap of the swing – the batter “hits against his front side.”
- Players step to hit; they are not stepping and hitting at the same time.

VIII. Swing

- *Focus the eyes*: Hitters can start on the pitcher's eyes (or the top of the cap) and switch to the release point as the arm moves forward. Eyes remain level, and both are forward.
- *“Squish the bug”*: Too often youth hitters do not properly do this. To squish, the hitter pivots on the ball of his back foot, moving knees and hips toward pitcher.
- *Slap the hands down*: The hitter swings the bat on a downward plane to the ball. To teach the motion, use a no-bat drill: the coach holds out his open hand perpendicular to the ground, with fingers pointing towards player, belt high above the corner of the plate. With hands up in a hitting position – but open – the player swings both hands with first hand a back hand slap, and the second hand coming through a split second later. The hands make a quick, double-slapping sound. The coach watches to ensure that hitter is bringing hands through in a downward motion.
- *“Ike to Mike”*: With head remaining still through swing, the chin begins over the front shoulder and ends over the back shoulder.
- *Follow Through*: Hips are square to the pitcher at the end of the swing, the upper body must be relaxed so that the arms can follow through (otherwise, the swing is decelerated and power is lost).

"TEACHING THE MECHANICS OF THE MAJOR LEAGUE SWING II"
AN INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO BY TOM EMANSKI
(Notes by Casey R. Triggs)

Tom Emanski's instructions for an efficient swing derive from his years of research and observation as a major league scout and a hitting instructor for youths and professional baseball players. In this video, he offers his view that various successful hitters may appear to swing differently; however, there are several common key features within each portion of an efficient baseball swing.

Emanski shows still pictures and videotape of hitters, and explains the key features of each portion of an efficient swing. He stresses a building block approach to instructing youth hitters, and he demonstrates how to drill hitters during practice to generate muscle memory. He emphasizes that coaches should teach during practice and support hitters during games. An excellent videotape on hitting and instruction technique. (The tape, and other baseball instruction tapes, can be ordered by calling 1-800-833-1551.)

A. THE SEVEN STAGES OF A SWING

1. The Stance: Flexed and Comfortable.

There is no one correct way for a hitter to stand at the plate before the pitcher begins to throw the ball; different successful hitters hold the bat and their bodies at the plate in a variety of ways so that they are *comfortable*. In addition to being comfortable for the player, there are several important, common features of the successful hitter's stance.

* **The feet are spread and the legs are flexed.** Stand with feet shoulder width or farther apart and the knees bent to create tension, or flex, in the leg muscles. Because the bottom part of the body creates the force that drives the swing, the legs must be ready to generate the momentum that will be transferred to the upper body.

* **The upper body is relaxed and loose.** The upper body only must respond to the force generated by the lower body, so it should not be tense. (Shoulders and arms should be comfortable and relaxed. Some players may slightly rock or wiggle to maintain a relaxed upper body.)

* **The grip is relaxed with the lower and knuckles aligned.** The bat should contact the hands along the callus line; hitters should avoid choking the bat by placing it farther back so that there is no space between it and their thumbs. The large, lower knuckles of the bottom hand line up with the middle knuckles of the top hand. (The alignment of the knuckles help create the correct swing pattern; but note that many coaches between door-knocking knuckles should be aligned.)

2. The Stride: Radial Deviation and the Bat in the Slot.

The stride is the hitter's first movement as the pitcher comes to the point of releasing the baseball. The body starts forward, generating the linear motion, or momentum, that will fuel the rest of the swing. At the moment when the hitter's front foot lands forward (e.g., 6 inches), the position of the hands establish the location of the bat and the potential efficiency of the swing.

* **Radial deviation.** The bottom wrist is rotated outward away from the body, and the wrist is cocked slightly upward creating the desired radial deviation. With the proper grip (bat held along the callus line and lower hand's bottom knuckles aligned with the top hand's middle knuckles), hands right above the top of the strike zone, and radial deviation, the bat naturally extends above the shoulder and behind the head, a position called "*the slot.*" Viewed from behind the hitter, the bat barrel crosses an imaginary line coming out the back center of the helmet (but the bat does not touch the helmet). The radial deviation and the bat barrel's being in the slot will make for an efficient, quick stroke instead of a slower, sweeping swing.

3. The Power Position: Balance.

After the forward stride, the bat is still back and the hitter should achieve a balanced position over a wide base, looking like a linebacker ready to make a tackle, or a basketball player guarding a dribbler. The hitter's upper body should be balanced over the lower body — weight neither forward nor backward. (Coaches who tell their lunging hitters to keep their weight back may be misinterpreted as telling them to keep the weight over the back foot. Instead, coaches should instruct these, as well as all of their hitters, to keep their weight balanced.) At the power position, the hands will still be at the top of the strike zone and the bat is in the slot, which together means that the front arm will be flexed and the elbow pointed down. The hitter's eyes should be on the ball.

4. The Approach.

Before the hands swing the bat, the body must transfer the power of the flexed legs to the upper body. To begin this power transfer from the linear motion of the stride to the rotary motion, the hitter must first open his hips by turning the back knee slightly inward. (A hitter needs to slightly raise (e.g., one inch) the back heel off of the ground in order to move the knee forward and in towards the body.) The upper body and bat remain in position during the opening of the hips so that the upper body automatically forms resistance, building up energy to use when the hands begin to move the bat.

* **Coaching and the mental aspect of young players' hitting:** Emanski stresses that coaches should teach during practices; however, during games they should only encourage hitters to be aggressive at the plate and not criticize players for swinging at bad pitches. The players know when they make a mistake, so emphasizing a poor decision may only cause them to become tentative.

5. The Explosion Point.

When the hitter decides to swing, he is making a decision to release the upper body (that had been generating resistance to the lower body's momentum) and initiate a rotational force in the upper body (which leads to the centrifugal force of the swing). Emanski calls this moment of releasing the upper body and beginning the swing the "*explosion point*." There are three keys that a coach can observe as the swing progresses.

- * **The bat head stays above the hands.** Many younger hitters let the bat head drop down, forcing their swings to have a sweeping motion.
- * **The lead arm remains flexed.** If the elbow is not bent during the first part of the swing, the hitter ends up with a slower, sweeping swing.
- * **The lower body leans back slightly.** With the force of the forward swing, the physical law of an "equal and opposite reaction" means that the hitter's body naturally leans slightly backwards.

6. The Contact.

At the moment of contact — which lasts for only 1/1000ths of a second — the bottom hand's palm should be facing down and the top palm up. (The wrists are not rolling at contact as some believe.) The batter's ear is aligned with the back knee. As the shoulders are above the strike zone, the bat cannot be level to the ground at contact. (Hence, Emanski says that it makes little sense to ask hitters to swing level.) Because statistics show that ground and fly balls only have a percentage chance in the low 20s of becoming a hit — while line drives have a 71% chance of becoming one — Emanski advises coaching players to "hit the back half, middle of the ball."

7. The Follow Through.

After the swing, a hitter's body will continue to react to the forward force of the swing by moving in the opposite direction. This reaction causes the upper body to move and lean backward slightly.

B. DRILLS TO TEACH THE MECHANICS OF A SWING

1. Hitting Tee Drill.

Set up a hitting tee five feet or so away from a fence (it's best for the balls to hook a tarp on the fence where the players will be hitting), and place a ball on the tee.

1. Instruct: "*Take your stance.*" Check leg flex and whether shoulders/arms are loose.
2. Instruct: "*Stride and cock the bat.*" Pause and check for body balance, radial deviation, and whether the bat is in the slot.
3. Instruct: "*Rotate knee inward.*" Pause and check to make sure that the back foot heel is only raised about 1 inch, or else the hitter will make himself unbalanced. Also, check whether the shoulders are loose.
4. Instruct: "*Hit.*" Watch whether hitter hits a line drive into the fence. Pause to let the hitter follow through completely — and have him hold the end of the follow through for a moment to ensure that he does not rush the swing to ready himself for the next swing, (which could cause him to be an upper-body swinger).
5. Instruct: "*Return to stance*" and repeat drill.

2. Soft Toss Drills.

Use same instructions as the Hitting Tee Drill, except the coach tosses a ball to the hitter from a kneeling position instead of using a tee. (The coach should position himself several feet away from the outside front corner of where the plate would be.) Make sure the hitter follows through and holds the follow through before tossing another ball. Variations of this drill: (1) fake the toss to make certain that the hitter holds his balance and does not swing too early; (2) toss the ball higher in the air to simulate an off-speed pitch. The hitter should wait for the ball, and he should make contact when the ball is in the strike zone.

3. The Balance Drill.

If the hitter is not balanced after the stride-and-cock instruction, have the hitter hold his position and just open his hands to drop the bat. Then tell the hitter to shift to a balanced position (as a linebacker would assume when preparing to tackle a running back). When hitter gets in a balanced position, have him reach down and pick up the bat. Then toss him the baseball.

4. The Fence Drill.

Conduct this soft toss drill to test whether the hitter's swing is sweeping. Have the hitter take his stance perpendicular to — with his back foot next to the bottom of — a fence. Instruct the player to stride and cock, then toss him the ball and watch his swing. If he is sweeping his swing, the bat will hit the fence; however, a correct swing — with proper grip and radial deviation — will clear the fence.

TEACHING THE MECHANICS OF THE MAJOR LEAGUE PITCHING MECHANICS

Tom Emanski systematically breaks down in this videotape the steps in an efficient pitching motion that can be used to instruct youth players. Emanski's simple, logical seven-step approach offers coaches and players an accessible framework and a common language that will help coaches and players communicate when discussing technique. And Emanski suggests using a no-ball drill and a tarp drill to keep pitchers focused on their mechanics. No coach should attempt to coach pitching without first seeing this videotape. – Casey R. Triggs

Basic Concepts of Sound, Efficient Delivery Mechanics

- Your mental attitude on the mound is important: you should be relaxed and confident. A gunslinger's mentality helps keep you focused, and not showing emotion for bad pitches or plays encourages your teammates, too.
- Goals for proper mechanics: control, velocity, and a healthy arm.
- The best pitch in baseball is strike one. In the major leagues, hitters bat .228 when the first pitch is a strike, and .280 when the first pitch is a ball.

The Seven Steps of the Delivery

1. *45 Degree Transfer Step:* With both feet on the pitching rubber, your first motion is to step back off the rubber with one foot (left if right handed) to allow the body to rotate. Your body, when pitching, must turn 110 degrees to a leg up (or "load") position. To gain better body control and balance, you can reduce the turn by taking your initial back step 45 degrees instead of straight back towards second base.
2. *Pivot:* While allowing your weight to rest on the foot that has taken the transfer step, you pick up the other foot (right, if right handed) and pivot it into place on the ground just touching the front edge of the rubber. (A pitcher may look at the foot and then re-focus on the catcher, or he may feel his foot into place while concentrating on the catcher.)
3. *Lift and Load:* From the pivot position, pull your front knee (left knee, if right handed) up to about the waist or belly button with your toes pointed up. The front shoulder and hip naturally pull in a bit – about 20 degrees – as the hips load to store energy. The eyes pick up the target. The knees are aligned, and the rear leg has just a little flex in it.
4. *Flex and Glide:* By increasing the flex in, or bending, the rear knee just slightly when the pitcher is in the load position, the body naturally loses balance toward the plate and creates a linear motion. You should allow the body to glide slowly and naturally forward; do not "drive off the rubber" because the motion becomes rushed and the body will open up too soon. The flex and glide thus allows the pitcher to maintain greater body control.
5. *Power Position:* As the front foot lands, both arms should be up and extended, with both

elbows flexed. The glove is positioned perpendicularly to the ground, thumb pointing down. The pitching hand has the fingers on top of the ball.

6. *Rotating and Release:* The power position sets up the transfer of energy from a linear force to a rotary motion. With the eyes on target and the front foot pointing towards the plate, the glove pulls in towards the heart while the back knee and hips rotate, all which generate torque for the pitch. As the arm pulls through, the shoulders are on a diagonal, with the elbow at ear level.

7. *The Hip Roll:* After the release of the ball, keep your eyes on the target. You should allow your momentum (so that the stress on the pitching shoulder is relieved) to dissipate by bringing your back leg forward (as if climbing over a short wall) and rolling your back hip.

The Six-Step No-Ball Drill

1. "Transfer Step." Players take small 45 degree step back and transfer weight, so foot on rubber can pivot. Make sure that pitchers' belly button is pointed 45 degrees away from plate.

2. "Pivot." Players turn foot on rubber so parallel with the rubber and just overlapping its front edge.

3. "Lift and Load." Have players hold when reach position, and check:

- front knee to see if aligned with, and above, back knee
- front knee above waist and toes pointed up (so foot is v-shaped)
- back knee not flexed/bent yet
- front shoulder is about 20 degrees in

4. "Flex and Glide." Have players slightly break back knee and fall/glide forward (like a tall building that is being directionally demolished by having its third floor blown out) to the power position. When they are in the Power Position, check:

- Arms extended and up.
- Elbows slightly flexed.
- Knees flexed.
- Shoulder towards plate.
- Fingers on top of the ball.

5. "Rotate Back Knee." Players turn knee in slightly to open hip.

6. "Pull." Players pull in glove hand and rotate through the pitching motion, roll back hip to bring back leg and foot forward, and hold final position. Check to make sure the players keep their heads up and eyes on target.

The Tarp Drill

Players practice their mechanics by throwing baseballs into a tarp hooked onto a fence. Without a plate, the players can concentrate on mechanics instead of pitch location.

“DYNAMIC PRACTICE ORGANIZATION”
AN INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO BY TOM EMANSKI
(Notes by Casey R. Triggs)

Tom Emanski provides instructions for eleven practice drills. He stresses a building block approach to instructing youth players, and he demonstrates how to drill players during practice to generate muscle memory. Practices, he says, best teach when the coaches first brief players, then practice drills, and then debrief at the end of practice. (The tape, and other baseball instruction tapes, can be ordered by calling 1-800-833-1551.)

1. The Pop/Pull Drill.

The purpose of the exercise is to teach and drill the proper fielding mechanics. Players should be kept “current” by using this drill each practice. At the start, players stand in line behind two cones near foul line in outfield. One player is drilled at a time: he comes up to a position between another pair of cones spread about six feet apart.

The steps in the drill:

1. Player gets in ready position: knees (not waist) bent; hands open in front of knees.
2. Coach, standing about 15 to 20 feet in front of player slowly rolls ball on ground toward player.
3. Player takes step forward to field. Feet should be staggered (with glove-side foot forward slightly), knees bent, glove in front close to ground with hand over glove (like alligator).
4. Player freezes position when ball is in glove and waits for the coach’s instruction.
5. Coach instructs, “Pop!” And player step-hops into a flexed throwing power position with arms up, front shoulder 20 degrees in toward body, glove taking picture behind him, and throwing hand facing down. The player holds this position.
6. Coach instructs, “Pull!” And player starts lower body, pulls glove to heart, and throws, rolling hip over during follow-through.
7. Player returns to the line jogging, exiting glove-hand side (and his momentum), and the next player comes up to the cones.

2. The Ground Ball Circle.

The purpose of this drill is work on fielding mechanics at a faster pace. Five or six players stand about 15 yards apart in a circle. The players throw ground balls at a moderate speed with 2 or 3 bounces toward any of the other players in the circle, and the fielding player uses good technique (staggered feet, knees bent, and glove down in front with bare hand over glove). The fielder quickly hops up and throws a ground ball to another player. The players should be told that they must not be competitive or make players move sideways to get to the ground balls; instead they should make good feeds to help each other improve their skills and become a better team.

3. The Bare Hand Drill.

This simple, but challenging drill trains players to develop quick infielding techniques for catching the ball and transferring the ball to the throwing hand. Players work on keeping glove-hand finders pointed up, not closing the glove, and moving bare hand to glove after ball is in the glove. (A horizontal glove position pushes the throwing arm elbow up and gives the arm the wrong momentum for a good throwing motion when the ball is taken out of the glove.) Use the same cone setup as the Pop/pull drill, but the players do not use a glove.

Drill:

1. One player stands between the forward pair of cones with only bare hands, glove hand out in front of chest, with fingers pointed up.
2. The coach, standing 10 to 15 feet away, tosses a ball underhanded to the player about chest high.
3. The player keeps fingers up on glove hand and lets the ball hit the hand out in front of chest, but does not close the glove hand.
4. The player, as soon as the ball hits the glove hand, grabs the ball with the throwing hand and quickly brings throwing hand up. Player freezes his position, with the glove hand still fingers up and in front of chest.
5. Coach instructs, "Pop!" And player jumps to the flexed throwing position, and holds it.
6. Coach instructs, "Pull!" And player throws the ball back to the coach.
7. Player returns to the end of the line, and the next player comes forward.

4. The "V" Drill.

The drill is a fast-paced reactionary drill designed to teach players to move their feet to the ball with their hands out in front of their body.

Drill:

1. Three players set up in a "V" shape, a comfortable throwing distance apart.
2. The player at the bottom of the "V" throws the ball to one of the players, who throws it quickly back to the first player.
3. The first player then throws the ball quickly to the third, who throws it back.
4. After about 10 or 12 throws, the players rotate so that a different player stands in at the bottom of the "V."
5. One or more groups can drill simultaneously, just make certain that the groups are configured so that any overthrows do not fly into another group.

5. Pass Patterns.

The drill builds endurance, as well as practicing catching on the run. Players should run on the balls of their feet, not swing their arms in front of their body, and wait to raise their glove until the ball is close to them. When catching the ball, the player should use both hands.

Drill:

1. Players, one at a time, toss their ball to the coach and run at a sprint away from him.
2. The coach throws the ball so the player must catch the ball on the run about 150 feet away.
3. The player jogs back to the end of the line, bringing the ball with him.

6. Tennis Racket I. (Two Fielders)

One infielder, such as a shortstop, and one outfielder, a left fielder practice communication skills in this drill. Two rules are followed as the coach hits tennis balls into the outfield: (1) every ball is the infielders to go get; and (2) outfielders have priority so he can call off the infielder by yelling "mine." Outfielder yells at highest point if he calls for the ball. And the player who doesn't catch the ball veers off to be out of the other's way. Tennis balls make the drill challenging because the coach can hit high pop-ups and the balls are light enough to move in the wind.

7. Tennis Racket II. (Four Fielders)

Same as Tennis Racket I, except four players participate in the drill, two infielders and two outfielders.

8. Soft Toss Creep.

A fun drill combining hitting and defensive drills: a player soft toss hits with 7 fielders (all except pitcher and catcher).

1. Coach instructs, "One!" Hitter cocks bat and defensive players yell, "Ready."
2. Coach instructs, "Two!" Hitter turns knee inward and defensive players take one step forward into cat like flexed position, and they yell, "Creep!"
3. Coach soft tosses ball, and hitter hits ball.
4. Fielder catching ball throws to centerfielder, who places in bucket.
5. Each hitter gets 3 or 4 swings, then players rotate: H-RF-CF-LF-1B-2B-SS-3B-DECK-H

9. Greenie Board Batting Practice.

Coach throws to one of four player who are in; each gets five swings or good pitches before rotating. Another coach rates the hits on a 0-4 point scale. Then 4 Fielders rotate in. Records are kept for the day, as well as over practices for comparison.

10. Rocket Relay.

Four players stand in a line about 40 to 50 feet apart. Throws are quickly made and players catch the ball moving their feet and turning slightly when catching so they can more quickly throw to the next player. Players switch inside and outside position after several rounds, so each player can make throws while in the middle. Players should make chest-high throws.

11. Call The Cut Off.

Five fielders (LF, 3B, 2B, 1B, C) take their position. The coach, standing by the pitcher's mound with a bucket of balls, hits the ball to the left fielder who throws the ball to the third baseman. As the throw is in the air, the coach yells either "two" or "four." If "two" called, then the third baseman throws to the second, who throws to first, who throws to the catcher, who makes a "tag." If "four" called, then the third baseman throws to the catcher. The catcher drops the ball in the bucket.