Practice Plans and Drills

designed for D League – Girls 12-15

LeRoy Youth Softball League D
2012

Coaching Tips:

1.Prepare for practice before you arrive to the baseball field. Once you arrive at the practice location, you will be bombarded with kids, parents, other coaches, along with the task of setting up. Once you arrive, you will not have time to prepare activities, drills, etc.

2.Be clear of the goals and expectations of the day and season. Coaches quite often will assume that every player understands what they are supposed to do, and how they're supposed to act. Be sure to state the plans for the day and expectations as practice starts. This is also important to address at the beginning of the season when addressing the coaches, players and parents.

3.Ask for help. Be sure to invite others to be assistant coaches. This will be valuable for practices and games. The players will enjoy there experience and will get better instruction, if they can split up into small groups to run the drills. I recommend having a total of 4 coaches. One head coach and 3 committed assistant coaches.

4.Keep the practice moving. Many coaches like to talk (too much). Depending upon the age group kids typically have a short attention span and will lose interest. Be prepared to quickly explain the drill and then get it started. The more the kids are moving to various stations, the less likely you'll have to deal with other issues.

5.Focus on the fundamentals. Always keep player development at the top of the priority list. Many coaches play to win, and often forget they have 12 kids on the team. If you work to develop every kid by the end of the year your team will be better prepared than others. If each player leaves the season better than when they arrived, you have succeeded.

6.Encourage effort. Practice is practice. The kids are going to make many mistakes, some more than others. The players will be trying new things and advancing in there development at different paces. The one thing they can all be good at is EFFORT. This will instill confidence in the players and provide them with a base for getting better.

7.Don't worry about the small things. Kids will be kids.. There is nothing you or I will do to ever change that. There should be certain guidelines for conduct, but kids being kids is going to happen. Set basic guideline, and reinforce during practice.

8.Coaches are there for the kids, the kids aren't there for the coaches. If you missed your chance to play pro ball, coaching youth baseball is not the replacement.

9.Coaches are role models. Remember to always talk positive about players, parents, other teams, and coaches. Kids look up to the coach, so it's important to provide them with a positive image. What we say, how we say it, and how we act can leave a lasting impression on a young player. Always be positive, even on those days that seem most challenging.

10.Have Fun! Coaching kids should be enjoyable. Try to have fun, and keeps the season in perspective.

Practice Plans # 2 –(based on 90 minute practice).

10 minutes–Warm Up –it is important to start each practice with a warm up. This provides the foundation for an organized practice and gets the players prepared to start the day.

- ❑ Spread out with enough room to do an exercise.
- ❑ Lite stretching exercises –touch touches, hip rotations, arm circles, etc.
- ❑ Calisthenics exercises –jumping jacks, high knees, etc
- ❑ Light jog around the baseball field to conclude

30 minutes–Stations Drills -focused on the fundamentals.

- ❑ Divide the groups into to three stations -Rotate every 10 minutes
- ❑ Station 1 -Hitting -see hitting drills
- ❑ Station 2 -Fielding (Infield/Outfield) –see fielding drills
- ❑ Infield Drills-Working on fundamentals, both catching & throwing
- ❑ Outfield Drills-Working on fundamentals(Cutoff man, trying to stop advancement of lead runner, when to throw home for a play at the plate
- ❑ Example -Throwing into the second base, backing up first base, etc)
- ❑ Station 3 –Throwing/Catching –see list of drills

5 minutes –Water break between rotations
20 minutes –Infield Practice/Outfield Practice

- ❑ Players take their positions
- ❑ Coaches hit balls to various positions
- ❑ Important to call out situations and options for the players. (plays at first, second, etc)

25 minutes–Batting and infield practice

- ❑ Team takes the field in various position
- ❑ 10 pitches per player –run on final ball.
- ❑ Rotate players in to bat. Recommendation -3 players batting (remainder in the field).
- ❑ Although this is batting practice, the fielders should be taught the make the correct play batted ball

End-Water break/closing comments

Hitting

* Players should be able to be in a proper baseball stance and be able to make consistent contact with the ball

* Players should be able to tell the difference between a ball and strikes and not swing at bad pitches or help the pitcher out by swinging at balls out of the strike zone.

* Players should be able to control the bat at all times and be able to set the bat down after making contact and at know time throw the bat.

*Players should be ready to bat when its there turn one player up at the plate hitting and the next batter on deck in the caged area taking practice swings and ready to step to the plate to hit when its his turn. One player only should be in the on deck area at a time the rest of the players should be on the bench watching the game and ready to step up and bat when its there turn in the line up.

Fielding

*Players should hustle on and off the field if the catcher is not up to bat within that inning he should be ready to have gear on and warm up the pitcher at the start of the next inning all players should hustle due to games are timed and to get the maximum playing time out of each and every game. It is stated that one to two innings are wasted every game due to kids not hustling on and off the field each and every inning played.

*Players should be in a ready stance and prepared to make a play on the ball each and every time on the field. That should be all players both infield and outfield.

*Players in the outfield when hit to them should be able to make the play on the ball by positioning themselves in able position to react to a ball hit to them. Players in the outfield should always use the cut off man if the ball is hit to the left fielder or left center fielder the short stop should be the cut off man and the second baseman covers second ready to make a play. If the ball is hit to the right fielder or the right center fielder the second baseman is the cut off man and the short stop covers second and is ready to make a play when the ball is received from the outfield.

*Players playing the infield should be in the ready position every play and think about the situation of the game such as runners on base, outs in the inning, and be ready to make the play if possible always trying to put out the lead runner to prevent a score. Players in the infield should back each other up to avoid the ball getting out of the infield and runners advancing to additional bases. Important for all players at this age to understand fundamentals of basic fielding such as getting down on the ball and keeping it in front of them at all times.

*Players should understand what the infield fly rule is and also when fielding at first base the fielder always makes the play using the white bag and the runners always use the orange bag.

Base Running

*Players should hustle after making contact with the ball at the plate and always run through the orange bag at first except if the are going to round the base and head for second.

*Players should slide when possible and always avoid a collision at all times at any base including home plate avoiding contact with the catcher.

*Players should know how to tag up when a ball is hit to the outfield and they are at any of the bases. Players must be in contact with the bag at all times until the ball is caught in the outfield then the player can leave the base at there own risk to try to advance to the next bag.

*Players should be aware of the infield fly rule and that they may advance on a infield fly but at there own risk.

*Players should understand as a league we do not have a mandatory slide rule but we due have in all of our leagues a no collusion rule.

*Players should be aware of the rule of a appeal process which is made to the umpire due to a play that is considered close or to be a possible wrong call.

Sportsmanship

*Players should have a basic knowledge of the rules for there league and the basic fundamental rules which are provided to us by the umpires yearly in the official USSA rule books.

*Players should hustle both on and off the field of play each and every inning to take full advantage of game times and not to take playing time away from the opposing team.

*Players should be involved in the game from the bench by cheering there team on and respecting the opposing team at all times. At no time is it okay to taunt or harasses the opposing team on or off the field.

Umpires

*The umpires call is final and at no time is it acceptable for a player to argue with the umpire on or off the field examples balls and strike calls, or fare of foul balls it is the coaches responsibility to address issues with the umpire during a game only. The players who get in arguments with the umpire face ejections for the remainder of that game and or possible suspension from the League itself based on the facts of the situation which will be discussed and decided by the Youth Softball Board as to the status of that player or players involved in the incident.

*No jewelry can be worn at anytime during the game includes friendship bracelets and ear rings.

*No cell phones at anytime on the field of play. Coaches should not use cell phones during game times.

Equipment

*All equipment (bats, helmets, gloves, balls, etc) MUST be kept outside the fenced practice swing area to avoid injury.

Sample Drills

Hand and Eye

Two players are needed for this baseball hitting drill.

Take a bucket of balls and with a magic marker write numbers on the ball in 3-4 places. Have your player stand at the plate with or without a bat but he or she is not to swing only assume a batting stance.

Coach or dad begin throwing the balls across the plate the player is to call out the number on the plate. When the player starts calling out the numbers regular increase the speed. You can't hit what you don't see.

Hand and eye co-ordination is the secret to hitting, only use single digit numbers.

Power Hand Drill

The hitter uses only the bottom hand in its regular position near the knob of the bat. The coach or a player soft toss the ball above the batters waist. It is best for the ball to be numbers high. The batter steps into the ball and hits it one handed.

Range Drill

1 line at first base
1 line at third base
1 coach with bucket of balls at home
1 coach with bucket of balls at 2nd

Players at 1st run toward 2nd and players at 3rd run toward home. Coach at home hits ball into 2nd base gap for the player at first base – they must run and field the ball in this drill. Start with balls close to them and then extend the range.

Depending on age and skill level get them to the point of diving for the ball. The player fields the ball and puts it in the bucket of the coach who is at second base. Then they run to the end of the line at 3rd base. While this is going on the baseball coach at 2nd base hits a ball for the player on third – same thing. Start close and then work on their range and extending them. They field the ball and put it in the bucket of the coach who is at home. Then they run to the end of the line at 1st base. After you go through some series of fielding switch where the coaches hit to and where the players run to so you work their range to the other side. Coach at home hits towards second base and players at 3rd run towards 2nd – coach at 2nd hits towards home and players at 1st run towards home.

Ground Ball Drill

We use a baseball ground ball drill that has two baseball coaches at home plate with a bucket of balls each.

One baseball coach will hit to short stop and they will throw to 1st. The ball is put into a bucket there.
The other coach will hit to 2nd and they will throw to 3rd and the ball placed into a bucket there.

Once the buckets are empty the player exchanges them and the coaches then hit to different positions.

This baseball drill allows for a lot of ground ball work in a short time. It also keeps the players active fielding grounders and receiving throws. It helps with tag plays and double play work.

Rotational Infield

You put a position player at all infield spots except pitcher. No outfield. All remaining players are behind the shortstop.

* I hit a grounder to shortstop who throws to 1st base, 2nd basemen covers 2nd, 3rd basement covers third.

* Shortstop follows throw and sprints to 1st base; 1st base throws ball to 2nd base and follows 2nd base.

* 2nd base throws to 3rd base and follows to 3rd.

* 3rd base throws to home and follows to catcher.

* Catcher gives ball to baseball coach and sprints to back of line behind shortstop.

* Coach repeats to shortstop and baseball drill continues.

I try to get them moving as fast as possible and still make good throws. This gives players a chance at all positions and some conditioning work as well.

Judging Fly Balls

This is a baseball fielding drill I have used in all my years coaching baseball. It is great for judging fly balls, running and sliding techniques, and conditioning (without your players knowing it!).

Set-up four cones in a box about 20 yards long by 10 yards wide. The players make a single file line between the first 2 cones facing the coach. The baseball coach throws a ball over their heads and they need to turn their hips and run back to catch the ball (some over the shoulder, some set up behind the ball or some they just have to pick up the ball on a bounce).

The main idea on this one is getting back to a spot as quickly as possible. Run with just the head turned back, arms pumping together as they run; do not put glove arm up too early since it just slows you down.

Once they all go run through this baseball drill one direction, so they are all at the cones that are 20 yards away; they run in to catch balls in front of them. In this drill they learn how to come in hard on balls in front of them, and at times they will even need to slide into make the catch. Important they learn how to dive or slide (like into a base) properly first in order not to hurt themselves.

They really enjoy this drill, you can see how many the group can catch in a row to make a game out of it.

Teaching Fielding Fundamentals

If you've ever been to a softball practice before, chances are that you've seen a variation on the following: the coach lines his players up, hits the ball to them, and the ones with some existing skill or innate talent do a good job... while the new player or the less talented athlete struggles. The coach tells them to "get in front of the ball," to "get their glove down," and to "keep the ball in front of them." And that's about the extent of it.

Maybe this improves over the course of the season. Unfortunately, it has been our experience that this is all too often not the case - instead, the lesser fielders get dropped into the outfield in an effort to minimize their liability to the team. As a result, they get less practice reps than the infielders, and if anything, the disparity between the skill level of infield and outfield widens further.

Now, I'm not suggesting that you should place your weakest fielder at shortstop. What I am suggesting is that you, as the coach, need to make sure that you give all of your players the tools they need in order to succeed. The best way you can do this is by emphasizing - and then consistently teaching - the fundamentals of baseball fielding.

Remember the triangle. Before you begin fielding, line your players up with some space in between them. Have them set up with their feet about shoulder width apart. Now, have them reach their glove out on the ground in front of themselves about the same distance as the width betwen their feet, as if they are fielding an imaginary grounder. Have them hold the position, and point out that the three things on the ground - each foot, plus the glove - form the points of a triangle. This is the ideal position for fielding a ground ball; feet too close together take away the ability to move laterally, a glove too close to the feet gives no room for error when scooping up a grounder.

Use both hands. This is possibly the most critical aspect of fielding grounders that you can teach, and is oddly enough, the one most often ignored by coaches. When set to field a grounder, the glove should be placed on the ground, and the other hand should be open, above the glove, with the heels of the hand fairly close together (the analogy used for younger players is that of an alligator's mouth).

When the ball enters the glove, the secondary hand should automatically close over the ball and gather it in; not only does this ensure that the ball won't pop out, but it places the fielder into a favorable position to make a throw. The further, and less obvious benefit, is that balls that skip off of the heel of the glove cannot pop up and hit the fielder in the face if this basic fundamental is employed; the top hand will simply deflect the ball back down into the dirt where it can then be recovered.

Start low, then come up high. Teach your kids that, when fielding a grounder, they should always begin with their glove all the way on the ground. If the ball takes a hop, they can bring their glove up to it; even if they misjudge, odds are excellent that their top hand and/or their body will block the ball and keep it from going past.

However, if the player tries to start with their glove high and then go down to the ball, they will invariably let grounder after grounder go between their legs.

Keep soft hands. Ground balls come in with so much velocity that they will frequently bounce out of even a perfectly placed glove. Bringing the second hand in will help this, but sometimes, the ball will still pop out in the time it takes to bring that hand down.

The best way to reduce this effect is by having soft hands. In other words, teach your players to not lock their elbows in, thus presenting a brick wall for the baseball to ricochet off of. Instead, they should "give" ever so slightly - this will reduce the energy of the baseball enough to prevent it from popping out. If you have a player who always seems to get into the right position for fielding, who uses two hands, who gets his glove down, and yet still seems to lose a lot of balls, odds are excellent that he has no idea what soft hands are.

Watch that footwork! The first instinct that many young fielders have when fielding a grounder not right right at them is to turn to the side and run towards the ball. Unless the fielder is trying to make a stab at a ball deep in the hole (and even then they should give ground, taking a proper angle), this is the wrong way to do it.

If the player turns his head and runs, he loses track of the ball. Since the first rule of pretty much every phase of baseball is some variation of "keep your eye on the ball," we know that this cannot be correct! Furthermore, even if the fielder can pick up the ball in time, he then must turn his body and reset his feet in an effort to get back to a good "triangle" stance.

Coaches are often tempted to ignore fundamentals in the case of a talented fielder who can make plays, even when doing it the wrong way. The fact of the matter is that you are doing a disservice to your player if you take this path.

Instead of turning and running, players should "slide step" to the side, allowing them to keep the eye on the ball. Further, this allows for a simple stop in motion to place the fielder into proper triangle form. Practice this by lining your players up with several feet in between them, and have them simply "slide" to the left, then to the right. Repeat this for a minute or so, until you have them breathing nice and hard.

The idea is that the should be stepping wide to the side, then following the other foot over until their heels almost click together. In younger players, this will be somewhat of a hopping motion, but as they become more accustomed, it should become second nature and more of a glide.

You don't have to practice footwork every time you meet, but you should emphasize it and correct bad footwork whenever you see it.

Your job as a youth baseball coach is to teach your players, to give them the tools they need to improve. If your players are not improving, ask yourself if you are doing everything you can to help them succeed. If you are not teaching fundamentals - and thus, giving your players instruction on the correct way to play the game - then you are doing them a disservice.

Safety

Lastly, we want to let all Coaches know that it is extremely important to stress safety to our players. Keeping their head in the game is very important to limit any injuries. As the kids move up from one league to the next, they have to be prepared to accept the challenge and understand the need for safety.