

BASEBALL FUNDAMENTALS

GENERAL TIPS:

1. Keep players moving and busy; avoid standing around.
2. Utilize as many parents as possible to coach.
3. Keep instruction simple and ease into complexity.
4. Error on the side of too little versus too much.
5. Repetition is important.
6. Stress fundamentals (catching, throwing, running and hitting)
7. Emphasize safety (properly equipped, eye contact before throwing, bats down when not hitting)
8. Teach the rules of the game (infield fly, tagging up, appeals, drop third strike, interference)
9. Utilize different types of drills:
 - a. Stations (2 to 4 players per station); allows for individual instruction.
 - b. Total team participation (base running, catch, rundowns, relays, situational)
10. Conditioning is an intricate part of improved play and accident prevention. Proper warm-ups prior to practice and games include stretching, large muscle exercises, and running (begin with easy jog, phase into a faster pace). Seek a good cardio-vascular workout.

BUNTING:

1. Bunt in an athletic position. Use your legs.
2. Maintain the proper bat angle. Barrell above your hands, out in front, in fair territory.
3. The biggest mistake is dropping the head of the bat.
4. Begin with whiffle ball soft toss and graduate to pitching hard balls.
5. Excellent station drill; adult pitcher, batter, and 2 ball retrievers who rotate bunting.

HITTING:

1. Keep instruction simple; deliver consistent instruction.
2. Every player is different and has unique styles and comforts; instruct accordingly.
3. Mental approach should focus on concentration, relaxation, and confidence.
4. Physical approach should focus on utilizing the back-side strengths; many players glide through the ball (front foot hitter) rather than turning on back foot.
5. Initiate with a coil and finish the swing.
6. Hit where the ball is pitched.
7. Utilize soft toss and tee work; excellent station drills.

FIELDING:

1. Emphasize proper fielding position: wide feet, bent knees, butt down, glove on ground, hands out in front (feet and hands should form a triangle).
2. Catch ground balls in front, not down, and with two hands when applicable.
3. Nose down in the glove, not pulling it up to the sky.
4. Avoid flat footed fielding; be on toes.
5. If possible, ground (and fly balls) should be fielded moving toward the desired throwing point.
6. Teach infielders how to throw on the run. This allows a quicker release on slow hit ground balls.
7. Drills include repetitively hitting/rolling ground balls; forehand, backhand, short hop, large bounce, soft rollers, diving.

FLY BALLS:

1. Explain that a fly ball, at the top of its arc, continues forward (not straight down).
2. Most fielders take an improper angle and do not track the ball properly.
3. Run on toes; otherwise, the head bounces which will impair the vision.
4. Emphasize keeping the elbow down; not running with their glove reached out.
5. Repeatedly hit fly balls; make the fielders move. Most can catch the ball hit directly at them but have difficulties catching on the run.
6. Track the ball by bringing it to your nose; catch it high with two hands when possible.
7. Start with tennis balls, then soft balls, then hard balls.
8. Work on backup duties of the outfielders.

THROWING:

1. Probably the single most fundamental flaw with youth.
2. Most youth short arm the ball and transfer their weight too soon and throw off their front foot.
3. Emphasize staying back and utilizing the strength of their back-side legs and muscles.
4. Throw with your legs.
5. Stay on top (versus 3/4's).
6. Emphasize 4-seam grip in all practice drills, especially warm-ups.
7. During warm-ups, a coach can back up the players and provide a replacement ball when an overthrow occurs; this will save a significant amount of time.

CATCHING THE BALL: Most of the youth catch with one hand. This results in

risky catches, but also unnecessarily prolongs the amount of time to throw. Best drill is to play soft catch bear-handed. Immediately, the player catches with two hands. Drills also include four square and pancake gloves.

BASE RUNNING:

1. Most coaches do not teach or stress proper base running. Do not overlook this aspect of the game.
2. Run through 1st base and quickly breakdown looking to advance. Do not over run 2nd or 3rd base.
3. Utilize aggressive and timely leadoffs; teach anticipation, especially to passed balls and hit balls. Find a reference point of the pitched ball for leading off.
4. Emphasize the proper contact with the base (the side nearest the next base). This point of contact allows for the best push off.
5. Step on the inside corner while rounding bases. Avoid wide turns. This prolongs the time to reach the next base.
6. Teach situational (smart) base running; tagging up.
6. Many drills to keep the players attentive:
 - a. Timed - Challenge them to beat their best time.
 - b. Relay race - Split team in half; one team starts at home plate and the other starts at 2nd base.

SLIDING: Keep your momentum going forward, do not fall or jump into a slide; form a figure four with legs, tuck foot under knee, extend other leg out with knee slightly bent, toes up, foot elevated off the ground; stay centered, not on your side; hands up, keep core tight and chin to chest; lead with heel into bag, pop up if possible. You can start teaching it on the grass with no cleats or on a piece of cardboard. You can have them hold a bat over their head to work on keeping their hands up.

PITCHING:

1. Keep instruction simple; deliver consistent instruction.
2. Every player is different and has unique styles and comforts; instruct accordingly.
3. Mental approach should focus on concentration, relaxation, and confidence.
4. Physical approach should focus on utilizing their back-side strengths and consistency.
5. Some basic instruction:
 - a. Throw downhill, not uphill.
 - b. Most youth drop their arms which forces the ball up; emphasize staying on top.
 - c. 4 seam and 2 seam rotation (both are effective).

- d. Finish; follow through.
6. Work on velocity, location, movement, and deception.
7. Goal is to keep hitters off balance not necessarily striking them out.
8. Pitchers need to practice fielding after a pitch is thrown and covering home on a passed ball.

CATCHING:

1. Emphasize framing the ball (stay within the square above home plate).
2. Stay low, and compact; help the umpire see the pitch.
3. Teach blocking the pitch thrown in the dirt. Knees down, glove down, barehand behind glove, shoulders forward, chin to chest. Look down at the ball, don't turn head away.
4. Practice on fielding passed balls and throwing them to the pitcher covering home.
5. Pop fly's--turn back to the pitcher; the ball will come back due to its spin.
6. Practice throws to 1st (pick off, drop third strike), 2nd (jab step) and 3rd base (drop step).
7. Practice receiving throws from the infield and outfield (force outs and tagging).
8. Practice bunt defense with the catcher.
9. Practice 1st and 3rd situations. Youth love to be part of a plan/play.
10. Practice how to give signs, primary stance, and secondary stance when players are on base.

COVERING FIRST BASE:

1. Get to the base as fast as you can. Put your non-glove side heel on the inside of the base.
2. Square up to where the ball is coming from and provide a good target. Always assume it will be a bad throw
3. Glove-side foot and glove act as one. As the ball travels to you, step out with your foot and reach out with your glove. Catch the ball at the same time as your foot is landing. Lean out on your leg with your foot pressed firmly against the base.
4. If it is a bad throw, come off the base and get the ball. If the throw brings you down the baseline toward the hitter, catch the ball and tag the runner.
5. Always keep your head in the game and be aware of other base runners after you make a play.