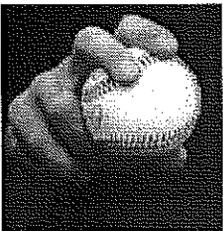


## Pitching Fundamentals with John Habyan

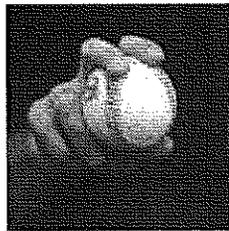
- Observe before teaching – watch pitchers throw and look for:
  - Strikes
    - Most important
    - If pitcher is throwing strikes, resist the urge to tinker
  - Velocity
    - Can be improved by throwing fastballs
  - Ball Movement
    - More advanced
    - Happens as players get older
- Celebrate individual talents – all mechanics a little different
  - No two pitchers alike
- Gripping the ball
  - Four-seam fastball – stays straight; good foundation for strikes
    - Two ways to hold – open and closed end of horseshoe
      - Either is acceptable if results are good
      - Smaller hands – open end closest to index finger
    - Fingers not too far apart (comfortable distance)
    - Thumb under the ball
    - Fingertips contact seams to create rotation
  - Two-seam fastball
    - Object is to create proper movement
    - Hold it with the seams
    - Fingers comfortable width apart where the seams are closest together
      - On top or inside of seams is up to pitcher – grip that generates strikes and movement is best
    - Create movement by keeping hand behind the ball and letting it come out naturally – don't come around the ball!

### Correct Grips

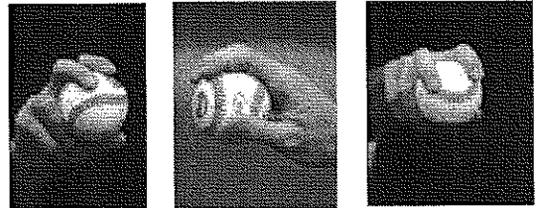
*Four-seam grip*



*Two-seam grip*



### Incorrect Grips

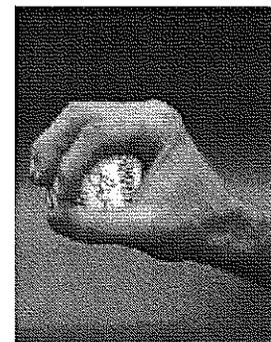
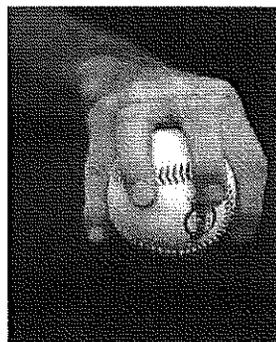


- Mechanics – Five links of the chain
  - Hard to analyze by watching entire throwing motion
  - Troubleshoot by breaking down into parts – introduce terminology to kids so they can make adjustments
  - Five parts to the motion – if one link breaks, it affects the chain
    - Feet (link 1) – start at middle of rubber
      - Heels on rubber
      - Tempo
      - Keep head above pivot foot – short step back (at a 45 degree angle)
      - Pivot all the way – foot parallel to rubber
    - Balance Position (link 2)
      - Controlled leg lift
      - Leg a little closed, butt pointing a bit toward the catcher
      - Hands together and pause with glove slightly above belt
    - Power Position (link 3)
      - Get the ball out and up
        - Hand above the ball
        - Strong front side
      - Weight stays back – allows generation of torque for rotation
    - Rotation (link 4)
      - Hand stays behind the ball as arm comes forward
      - Elbow forms an “L” and stays slightly above shoulder level – even for a  $\frac{3}{4}$  delivery
      - Both feet on ground
        - Lead foot pointed toward home
      - Front side must be used correctly – whenever we throw
        - Front shoulder on the target
        - Generate torque
    - Follow Through (link 5)
      - Back foot on ground when ball is released, then follow through takes place
      - Is a result of momentum
        - Not all pitchers will follow through the same – some will be in fielding position, others won’t
        - Strikes are the key
  - Observe pitcher’s results then break down mechanics to troubleshoot
  - Can’t offer assistance without first watching what the player is doing

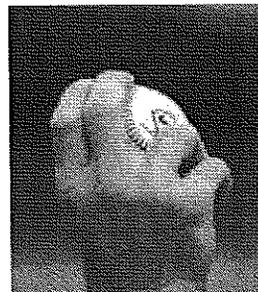
- Five links broken down for younger pitchers
  - Baby step back
  - Turn the foot (pivot)
  - Lift the leg
  - Point the front shoulder
  - Release and follow through
  
- Drills to assist with mechanics
  - One-knee drill – arm action and power position
    - Throwing-side knee to the ground
    - Opposite knee up
    - Take ball back out of glove
    - Keep hand behind ball
    - Four-seam grip
    - Short distance
    - Do every day to correct problems
  
  - Tee drill – for players who let elbow drop below shoulder; enhances the knee drill
    - Tee on throwing side, close enough so that elbow hits tee if it drops
    - One-knee position assumed
    - Creates muscle memory if done daily
  
  - Balance drill – for players who don't gather into a good balance position
    - Start windup and pause at balance position
    - Pause for three seconds before delivery
    - Throw from shortened distance
  
  - Toe-tap drill (1-2-3 drill) – for players who have trouble staying back and “walk into” their deliveries
    - From stretch raise knee to balance position, touch toe on ground and return to balance position twice before delivering pitch the third time the toe touches the ground
    - Throw from shortened distance

- Power position drill – troubleshooting and warm-up before a game
  - Wide base with feet
  - Four-seam grip
  - Hand placed on ball at chest level
  - Weight shift back
  - Power position assumed
    - Break hands
    - Ball out and up
    - Front shoulder at target
    - Release
    - Follow through
    - Both feet stay on ground at all times
    - Rotate on back side, creating hip turn
    - “Pose for a picture”
    - Short-armers can start in finish position then go back and through
    - Can be done on or off mound
    - Not a velocity drill
    - Think about timing, balance and coordination
  
- Offspeed pitches
  - Master two fastballs and mechanics first
  
  - Establish fastball first – everything comes off fastball
  
  - Most important thing with offspeed pitches is to make sure ball is comfortable in pitcher’s hand
    - Everyone’s hand is different
    - Arm slots differ
  
- Change-up – teach young players first as an offspeed pitch
  - Take something off fastball – throw off hitter’s timing
  
  - 8-10 mph slower than fastball
  
  - Not a strikeout pitch; let the batter hit it – develop confidence in throwing a slower pitch over the plate

*Change-up Grips*



- Many grips
  - Three fingers for younger players with small hands
    - Across four or two seams
    - Not stuck in back of palm – space between hand and ball
      - Just play catch
- More advanced, introduce four fingers
  - Two fingers on the middle of the ball with pinky and pointer as bookends
  - When it feels good, put thumb on ball (big fingers will automatically create circle change)
    - Don't force the circle, it will come
- Ball must feel comfortable in hand – move grip around until it is
- Mechanics of changeup
  - Separate and keep hand above ball
  - Stay behind ball through rotation
  - As arm comes forward, get back on top of ball and slightly inside, not turning over
    - Don't lead with wrist
    - Hand naturally finishes inside
    - Let grip take care of rotation – don't force it
  - Visualize dropping the ball in a bucket after release
- Grip can be adjusted to take off velocity – better to throw it hard than to baby it up there
- Try to build arm strength in young players
  - Learn to throw hard by throwing hard
  - Throw the fastball
  - Introduce offspeed pitches, but don't let players rely on them too much



*Breaking Ball  
Grip*

- Breaking Ball Grips
  - Find a long seam
    - Place middle finger on inside of long seam so there is something to pull down on
      - Ball visible on both sides of fingers
      - Thumb is variable
      - Move fingers around and tweak it until comfortable

- Windup – same as fastball at beginning
- Hand on top of ball, shifting behind ball in rotation before getting over the ball out in front of the body
- Hand comes over ball and through it as arm gets out in front of body
  - Get out front and be aggressive
  - Don't baby it
- Good extension, but not as far as fastball after release.
  - Coach can hold glove out in front at normal point of extension and have pitcher consciously pull back in after rotation
- Visualization – start with expectations small
  - Use term “breaking ball,” not curve or slider
  - Make it break within the strike zone
    - Create rotation and throw strikes
    - Start practicing in power position from abbreviated distance – separate and throw
      - Move back as comfort level increases
- Don't let pitchers throw the ball up to make it break down
  - Get over the ball and make it break a little bit first
- Don't let young pitchers fall in love with breaking balls
  - Common sense dictates that more fastballs strengthen arm enough to throw a good breaking ball and to increase velocity
  - Good curveball developed by throwing a lot of fastballs at a young age
- Introduce concept of breaking ball, but manage the big picture
  - Set rules and limits
  - Don't throw for the sake of winning
  - Keep player's development in mind
  - Minimize use of pitch in games
  - Let kids grow with the concept

## Pitching Questions and Answers/Notes

## Hitting Fundamentals with Cal Ripken, Jr.

- Introduction
  - Most difficult part of the game
  - Most fun and satisfying
- Choosing the bat
  - Personal preference – many different styles
  - Not one that is too heavy
    - Makes swing long and slow
    - Ideal swing is short and compact
    - Will not allow maximum use of wrists
- The grip
  - Placed in fingers
  - Line up the knuckles
  - Loose at start, tightens automatically
    - Unlocks wrists
    - Allows hitter to snap or throw the bat head
    - Bat can stay on a level plane through strike zone

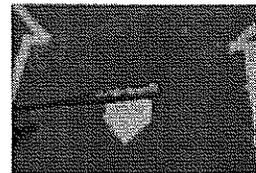
*Correct Grip*



*Incorrect Grips*

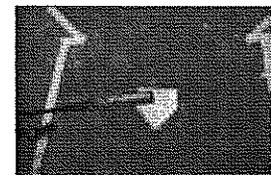


- The stance – just a starting position
  - Choose one that is comfortable
    - Be in position to see the ball
    - Good balance
    - Plate coverage



*Good Plate Coverage*

*Insufficient Plate Coverage*



- Weight shift
  - Body and swing must work together
  - Go from a cocked, loaded position to a swing position
    - Cobra coils and gathers energy before striking
    - Hitter gathers energy back and then takes it forward
    - “Go back to go forward”
      - Start in balanced position before transferring weight to back side and then forward to front side as you stride into the swing
      - Tee is a great way to practice weight shift
        - Stationary ball, don’t have to rush
        - Allows rhythm development
- The stride
  - Varies for each individual
    - Shorter vs. longer
    - Toward home plate vs. away from home plate
  - No right or wrong – whatever works for each person, but two things fundamentally are important
    - Stride should be toward the pitcher
      - Puts batter in position to strike the ball
      - Body position is good for inside or outside pitches
    - Short, soft stride is preferable
      - Short stride keeps head on same plane for tracking
      - Allows batter to wait longer – less likely to get fooled
- The swing
  - Preparation – hands in ready position, approximately at top of back shoulder
  - Ideal swing is level
    - “Stay on top of the ball” or “swing down on the ball” really means to swing level – stay on the same plane as long as possible; “Get there quick and stay there long.”
      - Expressions sometimes used to correct a hitch (dropping hands below shoulders as swing starts)
  - Short, quick swing utilizing forearms and wrists is advised
  - Don’t get too technical or analytical about the swing
    - Player’s swing develops the more he plays

- Point of contact
  - Generally out in front of home plate
    - Allows for good extension and bat speed
    - Hitting too far back cuts swing in half, allowing less time and space to generate full bat speed
    - Too far in front means swing is in slowing down phase when contact is made
  - Optimum points of contact vary slightly for each hitter
    - Key is for hitter to find his best point of contact
  - General guidelines on contact
    - Inside pitch hit a little more out in front than a pitch down the middle
    - Outside pitch hit a little farther back than a pitch down the middle
    - We like to let the natural swing dictate how a hitter hits certain pitches as long as the proper approach is followed (shoulder stays in, stride toward pitcher, etc.)
- Follow through – swinging through the baseball
  - Without follow through, bat is actually slowing down at the point of contact
  - Want maximum bat speed at the point of contact
    - Swing through the baseball after contact
  - One hand or two doesn't matter as long as batter swings through the ball
- Hitting Drills
  - Soft Toss – work on the components of the swing itself
    - “Loose hands, quick bat”
      - Ideal swing is short and quick to the baseball
      - Grip loosely in fingers and concentrate on using wrists and hands to swing
      - Don't worry about body position, hips or anything else
      - Tosser is vital to success of drill
      - Not a race – allow ample time between tosses
      - Swing hard

- Tee drill – Can be used many ways, we stress weight shift and concept of “Go back to go forward”
  - Develop rhythm in swing through weight shift
  - Ball is stationary, no reason to rush
  - Place ball on tee, get in comfortable stance
  - Gather energy with weight shift
  - Swing hard
  - Variations of tee drill
    - High tee drill — ball at top of strike zone to prevent players from upper cutting
    - Big ball tee drill — large rubber ball placed on tee to promote swinging through the ball and finishing the swing
  
- Stickball drill – quick hands, balance
  - Smaller, plastic balls
  - Same set-up as soft toss
  - Wider stance
  - No stride
  - Quick hands
  - Five swings and rest
  - Hitter dictates pace
  
- One-arm drill – create a direct path by lead arm to the baseball
  - Slightly more advanced
  - Still can use with younger players (7/8-year-olds)
  - Use normal game bat
  - Bottom hand grips in normal position
  - Tosser out in front, behind a screen
    - Swing normally with two hands five times
    - Take top hand off and swing with bottom hand only five times
      - Batter can choke up a bit or tuck the lead arm into the body for stability
    - Take five more swings with two hands
      - Swing should be shorter and more compact during this set
  
- Soft toss/short toss from out in front – “use the big part of the field”
  - Toss to the outside of the plate
  - Patience
  - Proper approach – let the ball get there
  - It’s okay to pull some of these pitches if the ball is hit hard and the correct approach is followed (keep the front shoulder in)
  - Variation — short toss from behind
    - Balls tossed across the plate from behind the hitter to promote extension and follow through

- Lob toss – patience; keep the weight back and “let the ball get deep”
  - High arcing tosses
  - Wait as long as possible
  - Drive the ball up the middle or to the right side if possible
  - Let the ball travel and then explode
  
- Free hitting – swing and have fun
  - Batting cage
  - Live pitching
  - All components of other drills fall into place
    - Put pieces together
      - Loose hands
      - Quick bat
      - Weight shift
      - One-arm drill
  - No coaching – don’t get technical
    - Do that during other drill work
    - Don’t confuse player when ball is being thrown at him
    - Rhythm and timing should begin to develop automatically after doing other drills
    - Address flaws at other times during drill work
  
- ***Implementing the Ripken-Kinect Training Bat*** — can be used to increase difficulty of any hitting drill
  - Only bat of its kind that can be used with for live batting practice with regulation baseballs
  - Reduced barrel promotes better contact/eye-hand coordination
  - Same length/weight combinations as game bats promotes improved swing timing and accuracy
  - Use with smaller training baseballs or Ripken Quickballs to make drills even more challenging
  
- Drills should cater to the individual
  - Avoid being too technical and confusing
  - Provide a solid fundamental base
  - Allow individual’s specific swing and talent to take over

## Hitting Questions and Answers/Notes

## **Defensive Fundamentals with Bill Ripken**

- Infield defense broken down into two parts
  - Catching
  - Throwing – can't throw if it isn't caught
    - Double play – five simple parts (a catch, a throw, a catch, a throw and a catch)
- Ready position – athletic position used in almost every sport
  - Feet and shoulders square to home
  - Knees slightly bent
  - Balance – weight distributed evenly on balls of feet
  - Can creep or move side to side, but must be in ready position as ball enters hitting zone
- Fielding a groundball
  - Wide base (at least shoulder width apart)
  - Butt down (forces head up and hands out)
  - Hands out in front
- Throwing (four-seam grip)
  - Create momentum toward target
  - Point front shoulder toward target
  - Follow the throw
- Basic groundball – hit directly at infielder
  - Ready position provides easy transition
  - Get rear end down and hands out

- Backhands

- Used when fielder can't get in front of ball
- Catch out in front – never catch the ball behind
- Basic principles apply
  - Base gets a little wider
  - Rear end automatically lower to ground
  - Allows for glove to reach out in front of body
- Two types of backhands
  - Right foot as lead foot
    - Right foot directly into the path of the ball – creates wide base
    - Collapse trail leg – gets rear end down and pushes glove out in front of body
    - Field in front and bring directly to the center of body
  - Left foot as lead foot – ball hit farther away
    - More reach – lunging position
    - Cross over
    - Ball is played outside the lead foot, not even with it
    - Catch out in front of body
- All backhands are one-handed plays
- Troubleshooting the backhand
  - Taking glove away from ball too quickly – bring to center of body
  - Balls bouncing off wrists and forearms – catching ball behind body
  - Inside of glove facing sky

- Philosophy of fielding drills

- Build confidence
  - Let them feel what it's like to do it right – muscle memory
  - Flat, smooth surface for practice
  - Roll balls before hitting
    - Basic, backhand, forehand, etc.

- Sample Groundball Drills
  - Basic groundball – roll close and far (feet behind a line, glove in front of line)
  - Groundballs on knees – force hands out
  - Backhand with knee down
  - Backhand upright — left foot and right foot
  - Two lines, backhands and forehands
  
- Throwing after the catch
  - Bring hands to center of body
  - Shuffle feet toward target (don't cross or hop) – keeps shoulders parallel to ground
  - Front shoulder pointed directly toward target
  - Release ball
  - Use momentum to follow throw (Derek Jeter)
  
- Throwing drills
  - Playing catch – two points head, one point chest
  - Line drill – throw and follow using line as guide
  - Simulated 5-4 forceout with three cones
    - Fielder starts with ball in glove, four-seam grip
    - Start at first cone, shuffle to first cone and throw, follow past third cone
    - Ball to right of fielder – momentum back toward target
  - Actual 5-4 forceout – rolled (still using three-cone setup)
    - Ball at fielder
    - Ball to right of fielder – momentum back toward target
  
- Balls hit to either side
  - Crossover step – most efficient way to move laterally on baseball field
  - Focus on getting in front of the ball
    - Ball to right – pivot on right foot and left foot crosses over the right (opposite for ball to left)
      - Okay to take a second, read play and make sure footwork is correct
      - Will become second nature with practice – Cal crossed over on every hit ball in batting practice to get used to the step

- Good lateral movement/footwork allows fielders to get to balls they normally wouldn't
  - Once there, fundamentals for catching a groundball take over
- Throwing off the backhand
  - Stop momentum from going away from target
  - Push off to create momentum back to the target (using either foot)
- Forehand plays – can't get in front of the ball
  - Good athletic position
  - Crossover step
  - Left foot closest to baseball (glove-side foot)
  - Catch in front of body
    - Wide base, butt down, hands in front
  - One-handed play – force glove out front to see glove and ball at same time
  - Throwing off the forehand
    - Stop momentum from going away to target
    - Get body turned toward first base
    - Point shoulder
    - Generate momentum toward target
    - Follow the throw
- The underhand flip – important part of defense, often taken for granted
  - Used by virtually every player in the infield at some point
  - Can be used to start 2/3 of all double plays at higher levels
    - At younger levels can eliminate errors around second base
      - Bad overhand feeds
      - Middle infielder gets to bag late
  - Developing proper technique
    - Generate momentum toward target
      - Shuffle feet
      - Crossover step
    - Flip the ball
      - Clear glove (separate hands)
      - Stay crouched, don't stand up straight
      - Don't swing arm (no bowling)
      - Leave hand at target's face

- Follow the ball to the target
- Differences between second and short
  - Shortstop more natural – almost open to second base
  - Second baseman – should flip from in front, where the ball is caught
    - Don't bring behind the body
    - May be awkward at first
- Underhand flip and follow drill – roll ball, shake coaches' hand
- Crossover drill – 4-6-3/6-4-3
- Box drill
  - Shortstop flip
  - Second base flip
  - Counter
- Double Plays
  - Double play depth – middle infielders, runner on first and less than two outs
  - Come up and over toward second base
    - Must be able to get to the base and be a stationary target if ball is hit hard to another infielder
      - Want to play catch, not be a moving target
      - Eliminate throwing to players who are moving
    - Will depend on the infielder; double play depths vary
  - Second basemen – executing the double play
    - Setup at the base – left foot to the bag
      - Straight line from position to the bag – don't round the base
      - Get there quickly, as early as possible, and be a stationary target
      - Shoulders square to fielder
      - See the throw first, don't anticipate a good throw
      - Take left foot to the bag and right foot to the ball
      - Catch, plant left foot and throw

- Three basic ways to turn a double play – throw dictates which method is used
  - Go across the bag to the ball
  - Take right foot to the outfield side; use the bag as your friend
  - Step back
  
- Getting there early, setting up and taking the right foot to the ball allows second baseman to handle any throw
  
- Shortstops – executing the double play
  - Get to the bag quickly – two approaches
    - Most basic
      - Get to bag early
      - Right foot to the bag
      - Shoulders square to fielder who is throwing the ball, not to first base
      - Read the throw
        - Perfect throw = left foot to the ball, which takes center of body to the ball
    - More advanced
      - Feed to mound side of base
      - Feed to outfield side of base
      - Receiving throw from first baseman
  
  - Making the throw – must concentrate on getting feet and front shoulder pointing back toward first base
    - Catch the ball square to second baseman
    - Swing feet around to get in line to throw to first base
      - Point lead shoulder toward target

- Executing the pivot
  - Always try to use two hands for quick transfer and throw
  - Catch the ball out in front – see it enter the glove
  - Even for third outs of inning, get in habit of getting there early, being a stationary target and catching the ball out in front with two hands
  
- First Base Play
  - Nobody on base, just another infielder – ready to field a groundball
    - Same fundamentals – wide base, butt down, hands out in front
  
  - Ball hit to another fielder and responsibility changes
    - Get to the bag quickly
    - Be a stationary target for off infielders
      - Younger players play more shallow to get there in time
      - Square shoulders to fielder making the throw
      - Stand tall; don't crouch
      - Heel of throwing-side foot on center or inside part of the base
      - See the ball before committing to the stretch
        - Judge flight of ball and take glove hand foot and glove toward the baseball
        - Don't stretch too soon
  
  - First baseman handles more balls than anybody but catcher
    - Team is better if first baseman handles throws well

## **Defense Questions and Answers/Notes**

## **Planning and Running a Practice**

- Interactive, small groups
  - Stations
  - If no assistants, get parents to help (preseason meeting)
  - Keep the kids moving around
- Running/jogging
  - Older kids can go for a short jog first (or big league baserunning)
  - Younger kids do baserunning first and last
    - “Big League” baserunning
      - Home to first
      - First to third – get up with pitch and go
      - Run out a double
      - Score on a hit – get up with pitch and go
      - Run out a triple
      - Run out a home run
    - Teaching component and get rid of extra energy
- Stretching – can be done around pitcher’s mound
  - Serves physiological purpose for older kids
  - For younger kids = habit forming
  - Allows coach to go over practice plan for the day
- Batting practice – eliminate standing around
  - Small groups, 15-16 minute stations with drills
  - More efficient use of time, space = more swings
- Dealing with limited field space
  - Fielding/throwing station = fungoes during BP
  - T-work/soft-toss = use backstop or batting cage
    - Coach/parent tosses if possible
- Batting practice – remaining players shag
  - Hit four minutes each (16 minute stations)
- Stations provide 45 minutes of good, solid drill work = efficient
  - Situation drill can follow incorporating entire team
  - Infield can follow

- Planning important – give this some thought ahead of time
  - Instills confidence in kids
  - Keeps kids under control
- One-man coaching staff
  - Preseason meeting just with parents
  - Ask for assistance (not full-time, just occasionally) from all parents
  - Discuss philosophies of playing time
    - Goals
    - What you are trying to accomplish
    - Emphasis on positive experience
    - Supervision/safety
- Perfect practice makes perfect
  - Practicing the wrong way doesn't help
  - You practice the way you play
  - Be armed with a plan and fundamentals
  - Stations = more reps, efficiency
    - Don't compromise quality
    - Do it the right way every time
    - Develop good habits so game reaction is natural
    - Be disciplined, but still have fun
      - Integrate fun = drills, games, contests
  - Maintain the players' interest
  - Keep it interactive
  - Be creative
- How much is too much?
  - Common sense is always key
    - Younger players (4-6)
      - Small attention window
      - Accentuate fun in short periods of time
      - 1-hour at most (baserunning is fun)
      - If THEY want to stay, it's on THEIR terms
      - Shorter stations for younger kids
      - Build a love of the game

- 7-9 age group
  - Same basic concepts
  - Let their attention dictate the time (1-1/2 hours at most)
  
- 10-12 age group
  - More traditional practice
  - Longer attention, more serious
  - Team skills – time consuming
    - Still teach in smaller groups
    - Don't try to accomplish everything at once
    - Build each time out

### **Sample Practice Plan – Ages 13 and up**

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| 20 minutes | Stretch, run, throw   |
| 20 minutes | Groundballs and flyballs – use buckets and systems to minimize throws and maximize repetitions <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Not taking infield</li><li>○ Two infield fungo stations</li><li>○ One outfield fungo station</li></ul>   |
| 20 minutes | Team fundamental <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Bunt defenses</li><li>○ First and third defenses</li><li>○ Cutoffs and relays</li><li>○ Pickoffs and rundowns</li></ul>  |
| 20 minutes | Baserunning or another team fundamental   |
| 60 minutes | Team batting practice – four stations, 15 minutes each (or four stations, 10 minutes each if you want to do another team fundamental) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Stations can be rotated daily – always include free hitting</li><li>○ Pitchers can throw on the side</li><li>○ On third day of three-day series of practices this can be an intrasquad game</li></ul> |

Once in-season, coaches should prioritize which issues need to be addressed during team fundamental sessions. Please note that the infield fungo station does not mean taking a full infield. Batting practice provides opportunities for pitchers to throw on the side and do their running.

## **Sample Practice Plan – Ages 12 and Under**

- 10 minutes      Baserunning
- “Big League” baserunning
- 20 minutes      Stretch and throw
- Stretch around mound
  - Go over practice plan in detail
- 45 minutes      Stations – small groups, 15 minutes per station and rotate
- Live Batting practice
  
  - Tee work/soft toss – use fences/backstops if necessary
  
  - Fielding/throwing station – while live batting practice is going on
  
  - Flyball/throwing station – while live batting practice is going on
- 10 minutes      Baserunning

As always, common sense must prevail. For ages 5-8, a practice should only last an hour. Times should be shortened accordingly. Players should only stay longer if they ask to, and you should let them do what they want. Players ages 8-10 may be able to stay the full time and 11- and 12-year-olds might be able to last for even longer. Use this framework as a guideline and customize practices to fit your needs.

### **Sample Practice Plan – Ages 13 and up**

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| 20 minutes | Stretch, run, throw   |
| 20 minutes | Groundballs and flyballs – use buckets and systems to minimize throws and maximize repetitions <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Not taking infield</li><li>○ Two infield fungo stations</li><li>○ One outfield fungo station</li></ul>   |
| 20 minutes | Team fundamental <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Bunt defenses</li><li>○ First and third defenses</li><li>○ Cutoffs and relays</li><li>○ Pickoffs and rundowns</li></ul>  |
| 20 minutes | Baserunning or another team fundamental   |
| 60 minutes | Team batting practice – four stations, 15 minutes each (or four stations, 10 minutes each if you want to do another team fundamental) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Stations can be rotated daily – always include free hitting</li><li>○ Pitchers can throw on the side</li><li>○ On third day of three-day series of practices this can be an intrasquad game</li></ul> |

Once in-season, coaches should prioritize which issues need to be addressed during team fundamental sessions. Please note that the infield fungo station does not mean taking a full infield. Batting practice provides opportunities for pitchers to throw on the side and do their running.

## **Sample Practice Plan – Ages 12 and Under**

- 10 minutes      Baserunning
- “Big League” baserunning
- 20 minutes      Stretch and throw
- Stretch around mound
  - Go over practice plan in detail
- 45 minutes      Stations – small groups, 15 minutes per station and rotate
- Live Batting practice
  - Tee work/soft toss – use fences/backstops if necessary
  - Fielding/throwing station – while live batting practice is going on
  - Flyball/throwing station – while live batting practice is going on
- 10 minutes      Baserunning

As always, common sense must prevail. For ages 5-8, a practice should only last an hour. Times should be shortened accordingly. Players should only stay longer if they ask to, and you should let them do what they want. Players ages 8-10 may be able to stay the full time and 11- and 12-year-olds might be able to last for even longer. Use this framework as a guideline and customize practices to fit your needs.

## Bonus Section — Catching

- Introduction – The job description
  - o The appeal of the position
  - o The truth about the position
  - o Characteristics of a good catcher
    - Durable
    - Leader
    - Personality
    - Unselfish
  
- The Gear
  - o Athletic Supporter
  - o Helmet
  - o Mask
  - o Chest Protector
  - o Shin Guards
  
- Fundamentals of a quality catcher
  - o The set-up – Stance with no one on base, less than two strikes
    - Be relaxed and comfortable
    - Soft hands
    - Allow the umpire to see the zone
    - Protect your throwing hand
  
  - o Runner on any base; hitter has two strikes
    - More advanced stance – need to be able to receive, block, and throw from this stance
    - Keep your rear end up
    - Right toe in line with the left arch
    - Stay on the balls of your feet
    - Go through the pitch to throw
    - Go down and through a pitch to block
  
  - o Receiving the ball
    - Catching an egg
    - Keep glove hand relaxed
    - Funnel to the center of your body
    - Let the ball close the glove
      - Receiving Drills
      - Simulating catching a pitch when you play catch
      - Rapid fire drill
    - o Develop soft hands
  
  - o Giving signs
    - Not doing it right can cause problems for the whole team
    - Glove positioning
    - Spread your legs apart – not too far though
    - Grab your cup – get deep to give the sign

- Target
  - Wide open glove
  - When to show the target
  
- o Catching pop-ups
  - Keep eyes open when the hitter swings
  - Take the mask off as soon as possible
  - Throw the mask in the opposite direction of the path of the ball
  - Don't cross your feet
  - Ball will have backspin and drift toward the mound
  - Catch the ball away from your body and above your eyes
    - Bottom line = catch the ball however you can
    - Catcher's territory for pop-ups
      - o Be aggressive until called off
  
- o Blocking pitches
  - Practice the correct (perfect way) over and over but the bottom line in a game is still to get the job done
  - Anticipate the ball in the dirt – beat the pitch to the spot
  - Throwing hand behind the glove
  - Weight distribution automatically comes forward
    - Enables us to go through the target
    - Quicker Transfer
    - Enables us to gain ground on wild pitches
      - o Good stance + anticipation + weight distribution = better chance to go down and through the pitch
      - o Balls to either side – 45-degree angle
        - Ball ends up near the plate
        - Do not catch the ball
        - Mask goes to the spot where the pitch bounces
        - Throwing hand behind the glove
        - Glove covers hole between your legs
  
- o Fielding Bunts
  - Pick it up the first time
  - Stay over the ball
  - Balance
  - Front shoulder toward the target
  - Clear the runner (bunts down first base line)
  - Throw through the target
  
- o Throwing
  - Two hands out front
  - Glove stops the ball
  - Keep hand on top of the ball
  - Front shoulder points to target
  - Left foot steps toward target
  - Throw through, not to

**Catching Questions and Answers or General Questions and Answers/Notes**