



FARM DIVISION GOALS AND PRACTICES

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Please review Juniors Goals and Practices for information regarding fundamentals. Drills recommended below assume that basic fundamentals have been attained.

GENERAL

- Have a well-defined plan of your goals and objectives to accomplish during practice. Practices must be organized to minimize standing around or “down time”.
- Baseball is not boring, but poorly run practices can cause boredom and get kids thinking the baseball is boring.
- Break your team into groups to maximize time and limit waiting.
- Example:
 - A group of four for grounders
 - A group of four for fly balls
 - The remainder for pitching and catching
- During hitting, place a player at each infield position to make plays even when the hitter isn't running.
- Use contests instead of drills.
- Teach during water breaks.
- Give praise along with constructive advice, but don't give false praise.
- Recognize hustle.
- Be alert and watch out for potential accidents.
 - Make sure kids are not swinging bats near others.
 - Runners must always wear helmets.

TEACH SPORTSMANSHIP AND RESPECT FOR THE GAME

- 1) Build a “team”. Don't ever let teammates talk negatively about one another.
- 2) Respect your opponent.
- 3) Never blame an umpire. Teach “no arguing with umpires”. Players watch the coaches' actions very closely. Practice what you preach.
- 4) Encourage players to practice at home.

BASIC SKILLS

THROWING: A good throw is one in which the entire body is used. It starts from the feet. The hand should be the last part of the body involved.

- 1) Point toe and foot in the direction you are throwing.
- 2) Front foot should point at the target.
- 3) When arm moves forward make sure shoulder is high.
- 4) Transfer weight forward as ball is thrown.
- 5) Complete motion by extending the elbow and following through in the direction of the target.
- 6) Proper grip of the ball: Two fingers across the seams

FIELDING GROUND BALLS: Establish good body position (“ready” position)

- 1) **Position is crucial.** Knees slightly bent, on their toes, upper body bent slightly forward, hands out front, good balance, feet parallel.
- 2) Fielders should be alert and ready to move quickly in either direction.
- 3) Position glove like a ramp, body and glove low to the ground, left foot slightly ahead of right (reverse for left handed players), look ball into glove, secure ball quickly with bare hand.
- 4) Quick release with stride toward base they are throwing to.
- 5) Charge the slow rollers. Make sure they do not wait for the ball to come to them.
- 6) While it is great to have players experience all positions, make sure only your players who can “always” catch play first base for safety reasons.

DRILL: Have players throw grounders to a partner with bare hands to make sure palms are up and they cover ball with other hand.

- 7) Practice fielding ground balls at every practice. As a coach you want even your least talented player to learn how to pick up a grounder and throw it to first base.

FIELDING FLY BALLS: This skill may be the hardest to learn.

- 1) Work on getting the ball to the cut off immediately. Never hold the ball or fake a throw – Just get the ball in.
- 2) When the ball is hit, an outfielders first step should always be BACK. It is always easier to run IN on a ball than run OUT to catch it.
- 3) Run to ball and then catch. Do not run with glove extended.
- 4) Glove is tilted at an angle just slightly closer to throwing arm and just above the head to catch ball.
- 5) Always get ball quickly into the infield.
- 6) Teach running a 45 degree angle to cut off balls hit deep.
- 7) Work on keeping balls on the ground from getting past. Pick up and quickly throw to the cut off.

DRILL: Start the year throwing fly balls. As the players become more accomplished, use a bat to hit fly balls and begin increasing the distance.

Repetition, Repetition, Repetition.

BASERUNNING

- 1) Emphasize running through first base (unless coach is waiving you to second).
- 2) Always keep eyes up to see where you are running.
- 3) Run in a straight line.
- 4) Don’t watch the ball when you hit it.
- 5) Don’t stand in the batters box and watch after the ball is hit.
- 6) Extra bases: Strike the inside corner of the base, as you approach first base move slightly out of baseline to loop-this allows a straight line to second.

DRILL: Use base coaches to get the players used to watching a coach.

DRILL: Alternate waiving them to second or pushing them to overrun first.

SLIDING

- 1) Teach players to ALWAYS slide into home.
- 2) Work on proper “feet first” slides into second, third, and home.

HITTING

- 1) Proper bat weight and size are essential (don't let the kids swing with a bat that is too heavy). It is better to error on the side of too light.
- 2) Teach a short stride (or slide) forward with front foot toward the pitcher (watch for stepping out).
- 3) Teach a downward swing. Get the "loop" out of the swing. Get the barrel of the bat quickly to the hitting zone.
- 4) A compact swing is more important in the long run than a long swing to "rip" a slow pitch.
- 5) Players should hit every practice.

DRILL: Start with slow pitching from 30 feet. Finish with 40-45 mph from the mound (46 feet).

DRILL: A tee can be used for some instruction to help a swing.

DRILL: Pitch whiffle balls in the outfield to a small group.

PITCHING

- 1) Start early on developing pitchers. Try to have 5-6 capable pitchers on your team. Control is more important than speed.
- 2) Balance: Teach a smooth pitching motion. You may need to break old habits.
- 3) Teach players to pitch out of the wind-up. Some players may want to work out of the stretch. Pitching out of the stretch is a shortcut and may not be best in the long run.
- 4) Keep motions short.
- 5) Head and chin: Keep up and "on" the target.
- 6) Teach a good stride toward the plate. Not fading towards first or third.

CATCHING

- 1) Try to have 4 catchers on your team.
- 2) Keep the target (glove) up and still to help the pitcher.
- 3) Must block and stay in front of low pitches.
- 4) Work on not turning their heads. Teach them to trust the catcher's equipment.
- 5) Move the body on bad pitches. Don't just take a "stab" with the glove.
- 6) Get the ball back to the pitcher quickly.
- 7) Take off the mask when the ball is hit and be in the game.
- 8) Make sure the catcher is not positioned too far back. The biggest problem with new catchers is that they way to be way behind the batter.

BACKING UP: ANTICIPATE THE OVERTHROW!

- 1) Outfielders always have some place to move as a potential back up.
- 2) Keep the "theme" of no standing around. Outfielders move as soon as the ball is hit. Example: Grounder hit to third or shortstop: right fielder moves to back up first base, left fielder backs up third or shortstop, center fielder moves to back up a throw to second base.
- 3) Work on the cut-off position. Make sure the second baseman and shortstop know their role.
- 4) Pitchers need to back up too.

- 5) When a double (or more) is hit, the first baseman must serve as the field general and back up the right side of the infield.
- 6) Teach/encourage hustle and awareness of the game.

DRILLS/CONTESTS: Contests are more fun for the kids than drills.

- 1) Split into teams and practice grounders. Put one team at shortstop and one playing second base. Have throws come home.
 - a. 1-point to field the ball cleanly.
 - b. 1-point for a good throw home.
- 2) Split into teams and practice fly balls. Put one team in left field and one in right field. Have throws go to cut-off.
 - a. 1-point for catching or keeping a ground ball in front.
 - b. 1-point for a quick, accurate throw to cut-off.
- 3) Scrimmage: Play a one-inning game.
 - a. Pay attention to backing up and “ready position” for each pitch.
 - b. Recognize “hustle” plays.

PREVENTING INJURIES

Players this age do not understand potential ramifications of dangerous actions. As coach, you must “error on the side of caution”

- Helmets must be worn at ALL times when hitting, on deck, and on base.
- Do not let a player pitch to a hitter from a short distance.
- When players are warming up, make sure they are spaced apart. Assume a really rotten throw—where could a horrible throw go? Be certain the players are playing catch in a line that absolutely avoids being struck by another group either too close or perpendicular to them.
- When learning to catch fly balls – If the player is a beginner, use “soft” baseballs to teach.
- Don’t let the players ever climb the fence or dugout.
- Most injuries occur when one player picks up a bat and just starts swinging. Players this age don’t check who may be behind them, in front of them or moving toward them. Be paranoid about this. Have firm rules regarding swinging a bat—where, when and how.
- All players should wear a cup -- Enough said.
- Play only the more talented players at first base. You may think you are being nice playing a player with limited skills at first. You are not being nice—you are inviting injury.