

Reference Practice Plan

K-2nd

Warm Up – Pre-Throwing

Warm ups can set the tone for your practice. Starting your players working as a team. Building on consistent routines they we perform as they continue in baseball and see at all level of play.

At this age, most of these players are very limber. Our focus is building good habits.

- **Wrist/Forearm stretch**
 - Extend right arm with fingers pointed up (stop sign)
 - With the left hand, grab the right fingers and pull back to stretch the forearm (10 sec count)
 - Perform on the left arm
 - Suggest you come up a count approach that the kids rally around and use for the season
 - W – H – I – T – E – S – O – X – Go – Soxs
 - C – U – B – S – C – U – B – S – Go – Cubs

- **Big shoulder stretch**
 - Extend right arm fingers pointed out
 - With left hand grabbing above the right elbow, pull towards your chest for a 10 count
 - Perform on the left arm

- **Square/Robot Waves**
 - Both arms at right angles/90s, fingers pointing straight forward
 - Wave up keeping arms at 90s for 10 times/count
 - Wave down keeping arms at 90s for 10 times/count

- **This Player**
 - Both arms at right angles/90s, fingers pointing straight up
 - Roll hands into hitch hiker thumbs
 - Pull in thumbs towards ears 10 times/count

- **Job/Leg Warm up**
 - Pick an object about 100-150 yards out (tree, swing set,..., the run the bases)
 - Have the team run as a team to the object and back
 - Emphasize team job, no racing

You can insert more, but this should get you a good start.

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Throwing

We are looking to build fundamentals that help players develop good habits and progress through different age levels. These drills are preformed through all levels of play, even at the upper levels of baseball play.

The “V” format is suggested for younger, less skilled players. The “V” format is 2 player throwing to and receiving from a coach. It will help with developing consistency and speed along the drill.

The gloveless work is intended to be done on a knee. It helps to isolate the hip of a player and develop strong mechanics. At this age a number of players throw and pull their throwing side hip forward.

Throwing from the knee can be challenging for this age as their cores aren’t developed and they can struggle with balance. Wide knee stances can help and you can do it standing, but watch for the hip movement

Ball grip is also important. Small hands need to use more fingers. 4 finger grips should be encouraged, some larger 2nd graders might use 3. It would be very rare to see two finger grips at these age levels. 4 and 3 finger grips promote control and accuracy. The 2 finger grip can promote improper tendon stretching. The finger teeth assessment, interlocking fingers, can help to assess the grip each player should utilize.

Gloveless encourages use of two hands. Suggest promoting the use of triangle target from the receiving player (thumbs point at each other, fingers up and in towards each other).

Gloveless work – Whiffle Balls

- **Ball Flip – The end in mind**
 - Support the throwing arm below the elbow with the opposite hand
 - With the throwing arm at a 90, flip the ball from the 90 positon.
 - Some players may need to move the forearm which is fine, but promote the eventual flip “only approach”
 - We are promoting the finish of a throw with the proper grip

- **Ball to the Wall – Proper starting position (no throwing yet)**
 - Throwing arm at 90, right hand up, ball grip has the ball facing “wall” behind the player
 - Glove arm is at 90, the arm parallel to the ground
 - The player practices getting into starting positon, looking back at their ball hand and their glove had to self asses their position (10 reps)

- **Elbow over glove side knee – follow through (non-throwing and throwing)**
 - From the proper starting position, play with slow motion throw
 - We want their throwing arm to end up on the other side of their knee, to emphasize follow through and the isolation of their throwing side hip (10 reps)
 - As skills progress, move to releasing the ball to the coach, still at a slow pace.

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Gloved work – regular ball

- **Short Toss – Warm up toss – moderate velocity, emphasize control and form**
 - Using a standing position and utilizing a V formation (as appropriate) start a soft toss game of catch
 - As the player's skill and confidence increases encourage them to take a small step back.
- **Mid toss**
 - Scissor step – helps with longer throws
 - Simulate throws to 1st
- **Long Toss – 7U/8U – Arm Strength**
 - For developing players, start with a extended target that is multiple throws away (playground, other back stop,..)
 - Once players are more comfortable, introduce long toss throw and catch, utilize V formation as appropriate
 - Simulate 3rd to 1st and SS to 1st throws

Pitching (2nd/8U only)

Pitching is the core skill that Rookie is trying to develop. We pitch at a distance of 42 feet. Not every player can make an accurate throw at that distance to start, but with some basic drills and emphasizing proper mechanics, most every player we get there by end of season.

Hillcrest West and Indian Trail have pitching targets. They are metal frames with canvas target in the field box. These use of these targets is strongly encouraged. It eliminates the use of catcher and offer reasonable object to hit at 42 feet.

Target Pitching – Use the wide zone – Target is place across home plate, not behind it

- coach at the rubber with a bag of balls, assembling pitching station with a portion of your players
- Players line up with single ball and in order, scissor step near the rubber and throw at the target
- Players then circle back to grab another ball rotating turns until they help the coach pick up the balls
- As skills advance, have player slide step from the rubber to make the throw without the scissor step.

Please note, that we encourage the slide step at early ages, wind ups are difficult, require great balance and don't promote accuracy.

- As skills improve, consider replacing the target with an adult catcher.

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Fielding

Fielding skills will vary wildly. There is a tendency to rush player development, but this is where patience helps to build confidence. Grounder should be hand rolled and not hit to players. Pop flies should be soft tossed and not hit and not chucked as high as possible. For players that are showing fear of catching, consider using whiffles without a glove. It will encourage to hands while building confidence.

Hand Drills

Fingers Up/Down - emphasizing catching balls above your waist with fingers up and below with fingers down

- Without gloves, have player line of side by side
- The coach use a ball to stimulate the player reaction
- Starting from ready position:
 - coach puts the ball above their head, player put fingers up
 - coach puts the ball below their waste player put fingers down
 - Try in a “Simon Says” mode

Gator Scoop – emphasized for fielding grounds - likely Ks and new players

- Ready position
- Roll ball to player
- Gloved hand on the ground
- Throwing hand scoops/covers the ball likely an alligator

Practice Drills to Consider

Fielding rollers/grounders

Small pop flies

1st base throws (scissor step)

Basic fielding:

- **Where are the forces outs – Ks**
- **All base throws and fielding (receiving foot position) – 1st**
- **Multi base throws and planning/deciding– 2nd**
- **Cutoff Drills for Outfield play**

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Hitting

- Knocking Knuckles
 - emphasizes power at contact

- Bat on the shoulder
 - fire from relaxed position
 - level swing vs the dip in the swing

- Stepping off the plate
 - Mid plate – emphasizing hitting at the front of the plate – hands out front
 - Righty: Right – Left – Right
 - Lefty: Left – Right – Left

- Tee Work
 - Tee Tap – Knuckle position
 - Coach place ball on the tee
 - Player holds bat near tee and taps ball off the tee
 - Promotes target contact position and bat out front
 - Slap swing
 - Coach place ball on the tee
 - Player holds bat near tee
 - Then brings back a few inches
 - Then slaps the ball off the tee
 - Full swing
 - Coach place ball on the tee
 - Player holds bat near tee
 - Then brings back shoulder rest on shoulder
 - Then fires through full swing

- Live pitching – similar drills can be used as needed to promote contact and swing mechanics
 - No Swing Tap
 - Quarter swing tap
 - Full swing

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Base Running

Base running is something that every kid seems to enjoy and is a great way to end a practice. Learning to run through 1st and when to make the turn to second is the biggest challenge. Have fun with them in these drills. There are a good amount of games that can played to emphasize learning while having fun,

- Running to and through first
 - Line up players by the back stop/safety fence
 - One by one, have the make a simulate batting stance and swing
 - Practice dropping and not throwing the bat
 - Have them run through 1st base and turn towards the right

- Add the turn to second
 - Teach then about rounding 1st
- Add a the chance running through 1st or going to second

- Rounding the bases
- Sliding feet first only
- Sliding to avoid contact