

# Keys to Good Practice

- There must be new learning (must balance game prep with teaching new concepts)
- Keep as many players active as much as possible
- Keep your eye on the mood of your players – Is something taking too long? Losing focus?
- MUST MAKE IT FUN (maybe not every single minute but are they smiling, are they intent?)
- Balance competition between individuals/small groups and the whole team (vs. coaches?)

## Must Get Coaches on the Same Page

- Discuss how you want things to operate
- What is the game plan? Why?
- What fundamentals are non-negotiable?
- Need a common voice – players should hear consistency across all coaches
- Can provide alternatives but always in a “here’s another way to look at it” – not that it’s “wrong”

## Assumptions

- 90 minutes with only one team on the field
- 3-4 coaches
- Baseballs (there’s no such thing as too many – V runs with 150-200 balls at each practice)
- Tee AND a hit net (if you’re team does not have a portable hit net – push to get one)

## General Practice Outline (can players get there 10-15 minutes early? Get stretching done early?)

1. **Stretching**
2. **Throwing**
3. **New Learning**
4. **Station Work for reps**
5. **Team activity or competition**

**5 minutes** – body warm up and stretching

- Consider dynamic warmups with legs
- Static warmups with arms

**10-15 minutes** – proper throwing drills (outlined in other handout)

- Maybe at first practice you show them the first drill and then let them “throw”
- Second practice do drill one and then teach drill two – then “throw”
- By 4<sup>th</sup> practice they are doing all 4 throwing drills for the allotted 15 minutes

**15 minutes** – new learning (more or less time depending on...)

- Baserunning (pick topics within)
- Communication (calling out pop flies, coach's key phrases, defensive positioning, 3B coach, etc.)
- Team Signs
- Cuts and Relays
- Bunt Defense
- Bunt Offense
- Learning to hit up the middle (or to the opposite field)
- Run-downs (so critical – especially when you have multiple runners on)

**36 minutes** – station work (12 minutes each; more or less depending on...)

- Hitting (tee, live, soft toss, etc.)
  - Consider setting a purpose (can't just always be free swings)
  - What are you working on? (hit up the middle, other way, 2-0, 0-2, etc.)
- Infield (full, partial, positional, with or without throws?)
  - Consider setting a purpose (what are we focusing on to get better?)
  - Focus on footwork? Glove work? (forehand, backhand, charging?)
  - Start with rolling balls up close to maximize correct reps, then move to grounders
- Outfield (thrown or batted – have enough space?)
  - Consider setting a purpose
  - Get under the ball, catch it moving forward, drop steps, changing directions
  - Hitting the cut-off (aim for their head; are we teaching our IF how to receive?)
- Pull pitchers from station work as needed
  - Maybe not everyone “today”
  - Just pull them regardless of what station they are at
  - OR you could make this a 4<sup>th</sup> station but it cuts into time for other things

**20 minutes** – live action, game time, competition time, etc.

- Split team into three groups (one hitting, one in IF, one in OF – rotate after 3 outs or 6 AB's)
- Hitting competition of hitting the ball up the middle, other way, etc.
  - Split into groups, develop a point system
- Could turn the new learning of the day into a competition
  - Baserunning race?
  - Sign challenge
  - Run-down challenge – how long can the runner stay alive? Fewest throws to get the our wins?
- Split team scrimmage
  - 6 v 6
  - Coach is the catcher, player is the P? Or coach pitches to keep it moving...
  - Another coach in the OF?

## **Some Final Thoughts**

- Balance new learning with game prep (what is the purpose of youth sports?)
- Is your goal to help these kids improve so they can make a future team? Or win now?
- View your practice as a collection of timed activities (move time slots around as needed)
  - Maybe start a practice with a competition to teach them to come ready
  - Can always move things around to fit your need
- Remember that they are young and still learning – different kids respond to different styles
- Always bring them together at the end and review what they worked on (maybe this is off the field so the next team can get on)