RUNNING AN EFFICIENT PRACTICE

The three most important keys in running a practice for young ball players is to keep their attention, have no one standing around and make it fun while making sure that they are getting the proper instructions on the fundamentals of the game. The kids are playing baseball to have fun and learn the game and they’re not playing to hear you talk for most of the practice. Keep this in mind when you make up your practice schedule. Usually, 90 minutes to 2 hours is enough time for practice, any longer and interest will fade quickly. Breaking the team into smaller groups will allow you to set up stations for the kids to rotate through so that everyone keeps moving and no one is standing around. Remember, that many repetitions, in a short amount of time, is the key to success with young kids. They have a short attention span so keep each drill short and productive.

- Be efficient! Come to each practice with a plan. Allot a set time for each activity or drill and try to stick with it as best you can. I will give some examples of practice plans at the end.

- Keep practice moving and keep everyone involved! Like I said before, kids will lose interest if they stand around too long.

- Expect the unexpected! Have a plan in case some kids are missing, coaches can’t make it, field is flooded and you need to move to the blacktop. If you plan ahead for any situation, you will be prepared to run a good practice. It is the same as game management when your best pitcher hurts his arm in the first inning. If you prepare ahead for that possibility, you will not be caught flat-footed.

- Initiate help from parents or others because the more help you get, the better. When having them run drills for you, make sure you go over exactly what you want accomplished at that particular station that day and how you want it shown to them. (Backhands, balls in the gap, cutoffs, etc). You all need to be on the same page.

- Set up an e-mail chain with all the team including the parents, in order to keep them in the loop. Let them all know your goals and expectations as early as possible in order to insure everyone has a positive experience.

- Set up your stations so that each one serves a particular purpose. Rotate all the players through each drill. Make them all well-rounded ball players. Stations and drills are an important part of your practice plan. The more stations you can set up, the less standing around for the kids.

- Make your drills fun by incorporating competitions. Award points for bunts down the line that hit the target, hit behind the runner to move them along to the next base, most consecutive grounders fielded cleanly. Kids love challenges and will rise to the occasion!
• Warm up as a team! Express to the kids the importance of stretching and warming up. The way they warm-up will be the way they play. Playing catch is a key element in the game and encourage them to take this seriously. Team warm-ups are not the time to fool around throwing knuckleballs!

• Incorporate live situations where you can work on the skills you taught them in the drills as a team and always try to incorporate scrimmages as often as possible. Nothing works better than live situations where you can stop and explain what was good or bad about the play.

In conclusion, remember a couple of keys elements when coaching youth baseball. Kids nowadays do not respond to the way we were taught growing up, intimidation and screaming at the kids just does not work. It just makes them lose interest in wanting to continue playing. Kids are smarter than we give them credit for so treat them with respect and you will be respected in return. Get to know your players because each of them will require something different. They are not created equal, so learn what works best for each one of them individually.

Remember, there are tons of baseball drills and variations on how to run them available to you. There are many ways to incorporate drills, situations and scrimmages into your practices. The key is to always keep practice moving, keep everyone involved, keep each drill short and informative (remember their attention span), and stay organized. Above all, keep the practices fun for the kids, remember that it is still just a game. You want the kids to look back on the season as a positive experience where they learned skills and became better teammates.
**PRACTICE PLANS**- These are just a few examples of practice plans. Mix and match to suit your needs, just make sure you stay organized.

**Example 1**
5 min- Stretching- as a team  
10-12 min- Play catch, warm up arms  
5-10 min- Base running- taking leads, 1st to 3rds, tagging up, etc  
30-40 min- Individual stations and drills  
20 min- Team defense- practice bunt coverages, rundowns, pickoffs, etc  
30-40 min- Situations or scrimmage

**Example 2**
5 min- Stretching- as a team  
10-12 min- Play catch, warm up arms  
30-40 min- Individual Drills and stations  
30 min- Situations- use se base runners to simulate game  
45 min- Scrimmage- alternate using coach or players throwing

**Example 3**
5 min- Stretching- as a team  
10-12 min- Play catch, warm up arms  
10 min- Hit whiffle balls  
40 min- Team Drills- Cutoffs, double cuts, backups, steals (catchers throw)  
45 min- Batting practice- coach throws, practice bunts, hitting opposite field, etc

**Example 4**
5 min- Stretching- as a team  
10-12 min- Play catch, warm up arms  
30 min- Inf/OF Defense- fungoes to IF and OF  
30 min- Situations- use se base runners to simulate game  
30 min- Tee Scrimmage- kids hit off of tee on home plate, game situations. Kids will love this drill!

**Arm stretches:**

- small arm circles forward, big arm circles forward  
- small arm circles backwards, big arm circles backwards  
- shoulder stretch across  
- triceps stretch  
- arm swings high to behind you (bicep stretch)  
- rotator cuff stretch on the ground (lay on your throwing arm side put arm at 90 degree angle and push hand down towards the ground).
Sample drills: just a few, there are plenty more to fit your needs.

- Rundown drill with base runners
- Pitcher fielding practice
- Double plays
- Short hops drill for infielders
- Soft toss
- Bunt defense
- Throwing to second (catcher and middle infielders)
- Blocking drill for catchers
- Bare handed ground balls
- Backhands
- Quarterback drill (over the shoulder catches for outfielders)
- 4 corners drill
- Around the bucket drill (for infielders to take the right path to the ball)
- Bare handed receiving practice (catchers)
- Pickoffs
- Double cuts drill
- Balls off the fence drill (outfielders)
- Taking leads
- Tag plays at each base
- Crow hop drill for OF
- Tag ups
- Sliding drills
- Bunt drills- difference between safety and suicide
- Stealing drill- Difference between straight, delayed or accelerated