

Highland Groveland Recreation Association
(HGRA)

Baseball Coaching Manual



Table of Contents

	Page
Forward:	1
Chapter 1: What is HGRA and how does it operate?	2
Chapter 2: Team Administration	7
Chapter 3: Running a Practice	10
Chapter 4: Game Day	14
Chapter 5: Teaching Baseball Skills	17
Chapter 6: Fifteen Years of Success: An Experienced Person's Primer on HGRA Baseball Coaching	21

Forward

Thank you for agreeing to coach an HGRA baseball team this summer. Coaching in HGRA is a great way to teach kids how to play and enjoy the wonderful game of baseball. You will also help them develop teamwork, cooperation, friendship and community, all qualities that will serve them well in the future. While doing all of this, I bet you will find that you have as much fun as the kids do - or maybe more!

Coaching can be an intimidating task. It may sound easy ("I've played ball so I can certainly teach it to a bunch of kids") but the task involves far more than just teaching some kids to catch and hit. You have to keep the kids interested and focused, evaluate a number of developing skills in each one of the dozen or so players on the roster, maintain good behavior and teach the game to the kids, all the while insuring the right amount of enthusiasm, positive support and fun. Sometimes, it is hard to know where to begin.

This manual will help. You will find sections on HGRA's philosophy and structure, how to teach all of the necessary baseball skills, how to plan a practice and how to handle game day. We don't have all the answers - far from it. However, this manual should help you get started in your role as HGRA baseball coach. From there, you can get help from books, web sites, friends, other HGRA coaches or your own experiences and instincts - there is a tremendous amount of help out there if you take a few moments to look for it.

Have fun, make sure the kids have fun and thanks again for taking on the role of HGRA baseball coach - one of the most rewarding tasks in making our community a great place to live.

Dennis Merley
HGRA Baseball Commissioner
May, 2002*

Many thanks to Jim Hynes, Mike Kowski, Geoff Kolb, Sue Kies, Wil Totten, John Patrikus and John Barrett for their hard work in writing this manual.

Chapter 1

What is HGRA and how does it operate?

“The HGRA Way”

The Highland Groveland Recreation Association (HGRA) is a private, non-profit organization that provides summer athletic programs for boys and girls in the west end of St. Paul. HGRA (or its predecessors) has been around for almost 50 years. We started out with football and hockey programs, and have gradually phased into offering baseball and soccer. In the summer of 2001, we had more than 2,100 players in the two programs.

HGRA baseball is a coed, recreational program designed for beginners, “veterans” and all skill levels in between. Unlike many competitive-minded programs, our child-centered approach emphasizes sportsmanship and fun over winning and statistics. In short, our games are competitive but our coaches and players are not.

HGRA baseball players learn the game the right way, without coaches and parents pushing too hard, and without the fear of failure sapping their enjoyment of the game. We want them to develop their skills in a setting that makes them want to play baseball year after year. At the same time, they should learn sportsmanship and team play, make some new friends and have an enjoyable summer. Our approach also centers upon the family experience, where the entire family can get involved as coaches, helpers, treat providers, etc., and can also enjoy balmy summer evenings with friends and neighbors watching the kids have fun.

In keeping with that philosophy, “the HGRA way” to coach is to create a positive, supportive environment that lets everyone participate and succeed to the best of their individual abilities. We think every kid in the program should be given equal and fair attention. The ones with more skills should have a chance to develop their games, while the kids with less skills deserve the opportunity to enjoy the thrill of their first catch or their first hit. In this way, the success of the coach can be measured in terms that are more important than just who won the most games - it will be measured by improvements made by each player on the team, the smiles on their faces when they show off their new skills in a game and the enthusiastic “thank you’s” at the end of the season from both player and family.

The HGRA way is not for everybody, and there are other baseball programs in town that will serve the needs of kids who want to play to win or lose, or for their parents who want their kids to have a more intensive baseball experience. Neither style is better or worse, but HGRA wants to be the place where kids can learn and play baseball without having to feel pressure to perform or scorn for failing to “make the play.”

HGRA Baseball Structure

HGRA Baseball is divided into 4 leagues:

T-ball (ages 5-6): Here, the little folks learn the basics (how to swing, where to run, etc.). They do not keep score, and everyone bats and fields. The kids (and their parents) have a great time!

Rookies (ages 7-8): A step up from T-ball, introducing a few more elements of the game. Again, no score is kept, and everyone bats and fields. However, the kids now swing at pitches from their coach and are called “out” if a play is made in the field. This introduces the teamwork that baseball requires, and rewards good fielding, too.

Minor League (ages 8-9): This is a transition to real baseball. It is still “coach pitch” but a player only gets 8 pitches to hit and a team only gets 3 outs per inning. The first seven games are developmental and no score is kept. The other three are competitive to test the kids’ developing skills.

Major League (ages 10-12): This is real baseball using Little League rules but without Little League pressures. Kids pitch, umpires call balls and strikes, and everyone plays good baseball with an eye toward winning the season-ending tournament and crowning a great season! HGRA’s Major League is a quality baseball experience that lets kids play and learn the game in an exciting and positive setting.

As a rule, kids are not allowed to “play up” (move up to a level of play beyond their age group) unless they are within a few weeks of the age group, or if they have played at least 2 years at their present level. The only exception is in the Major League, where older and more skilled 9-year-olds may be invited to play in order to fill out rosters or provide more appropriate competition for the child. The reason for generally not moving kids up is because so much of the focus of our program is on social interaction, sportsmanship and other intangible but valuable qualities. We feel that a child will have the most fun and get the most out of the experience it they are with others of the same age.

For this reason kids are never moved down unless doing so accommodates a disability of some type. Again, we would rather have kids of the same age together rather than base league placement on skill level since our emphasis is not on competitiveness but rather, fun and learning. From a practical standpoint, we also simply do not have the time or facilities to evaluate the skill level of approximately 600 children to determine whether the league for which their parents have registered is truly compatible with their skill level.

HGRA Process

Although we try to make it as easy as possible for our coaches, the real work is done by you, the coach. Your patience, enthusiasm, and leadership will determine whether the kids on your team have a quality baseball experience this summer.

To help you get started, we set the teams for you, order and provide uniforms and equipment, reserve a practice time and field and, in the Major League, provide two umpires. We also provide a coaching clinic, player clinic (in the upper leagues), a coaching forum on our web site (www.hgra.org) and this manual.

You are expected to conduct one practice per week. Some Major League coaches offer a second, optional practice if they wish (and can find suitable space). Some T-ball coaches find that interest in practice tends to wane as the season wears on and they cancel practices. We would prefer that this not happen - even if only 4 kids show up, those kids will benefit from the extra attention that week.

The Regular Season

The actual games begin on the Monday following Mother’s Day - some time in the middle of May. The rotation is always the same:

Monday:	T-Ball
Tuesday:	Minor League
Wednesday:	Rookie League
Thursday:	Major League

This rotation is set to coordinate with HGRA soccer so that the two sports do not compete for players of the same age on the same day.

We play 10 games in 11 weeks, with all leagues except T-ball taking the week of July 4 off. T-ball does not take that week off because they also miss playing on Memorial Day. Therefore, if the 4th is celebrated on a Monday, we play the games on Wednesday. Otherwise, we schedule the games knowing that some families will be unavailable, but hoping that enough are in town to field a team - there usually are.

The season ends in the last week of July as each team plays its last game that week, except in the Major League, where a tournament is held on the weekend to determine the season champion. You will be notified a week ahead of time or so about how equipment is to be returned. Usually, we arrange for a van to come to the fields where two or more games are being played so that the coaches can drop their equipment off after the game. At fields where only a single game is being played, we usually have an HGRA representative come to the field to retrieve the equipment, but you might be asked to help out by bringing your gear to the HGRA storage area. Don’t worry, though - you will get plenty of notice of where to go or what to do.

That's the HGRA Baseball season in a nutshell. Of course, there will be other events, such as our Major League All Star game, a team trip to the Twins or Saints game, perhaps a team party or bar-b-q, etc. Frankly, the season can be as much fun as you make it - we know you'll do your best. That's why we think that HGRA has the best group of coaches in any sport and in any league in the area.

Chapter 2

Team Administration

No one volunteers to be a baseball coach to set rules and be an administrator. The fun for everyone, players and coaches alike, comes on the field. From the coach's standpoint, the demonstration and instruction of baseball skills, followed by an opportunity during games to observe the development of the players brings an enjoyment over and above that experienced by other parents and fans. However, the coaching experience is diminished if players are not present and ready to play during scheduled practices or games, or if the players or their parents act inappropriately. This section of the Manual sets forth not only the expectations of you, as coaches, but also those expectations that you should have of the players and parents.

A. Number of practices

- Practices should be held weekly.
- Plan on having at least two, and preferably three, practices prior to your first game, especially for the older kids.

B. Time of arrival on game nights

- Suggest no less than 15 minutes before game time. This gives you time to set the lineup and field positions while the kids stretch, play catch or field grounders.
- Ready to play means just that - no anticipated breaks during the game for the child to eat something or go to the bathroom - that should be done at home.

C. Proper attire

- Encourage the kids to wear the full uniforms, including hats, for games.
- Tennis shoes or other athletic shoes must be worn. Sandals, clogs, or other shoes that either provide no traction or can come off while running are inappropriate.
- Jewelry should be eliminated - it can be dangerous.
- Shorts or long pants are both acceptable (long pants only for kids who slide).
- Games in May can be cold - favor sweatshirts and sweaters over parkas and coats.

D. Incentives for getting to the game on time

- Some coaches reward punctuality with a better position in the field or a preferred spot in the batting order.
- You can keep track of who has been on time for games, and at the end of the year, provide a special award or treat to the player who was on time most often.
- Some coaches feel that arrival is not something that kids can control. They try just talking to parents who may not realize the importance of prompt arrival.
- Any incentive should be made known to the players and parents.

E. Incentives for coming to practice

- You will be given a time (usually based on your stated preference) and reserved location that you can use each week to conduct practice.
- If your assigned time does not work for you or your players, you may practice at another time but remember - field space is very difficult to find in our area due to the large number of leagues and teams competing for those fields.
- Practice is for skill development and increasing overall knowledge of the game.
- Players and parents must understand the importance of practice. The same types of incentives described above can be used to encourage attendance at practices.

F. Parents must advise coaches if a player will be absent

- When the roster and schedule are passed out to parents, ask that they keep you informed if a player is going to be absent from a practice or game.
- Parents generally know when a player will miss a practice or game, so many coaches gather families together after a game and ask about next week.
- Where advance notice of the player's absence from a practice or game is not possible, ask parents to call you as soon as they know.

G. Practicing skills during the week

- Encourage and expect the players to work on skills during the week.
- Siblings, friends, baseball-loving parents, or other interested folks can help.
- Good methods include whiffleball, playing catch, homerun derby, etc.
- These exercises are more fun if they are made into games. Can the child catch ten throws in a row? How many throws out of 10 hit the box drawn on the wall?
- If the player can't find anyone to play with, throwing a ball against a wall or the front steps develops throwing and fielding skills.

H. Social events/end of season

- Post-game treats are a staple of HGRA. Ask a parent to circulate a sign-up sheet where parents indicate particular week when they will bring treats for the team.
- Juice boxes, cookies, popsicles are the usual treats.
- If parents and players have enjoyed each other's company, a picnic or barbecue can be a nice event. A parent-kid baseball game can be a fun part of the event.
- Think about handing out some type of ribbon or award to all of the players, along with any special awards (e.g. "best hustler", "best practice attendance").
- If vacation schedules or other plans prevent a post-season event, try a "fan appreciation night" during the season with a picnic, pictures, awards, etc.

- Discuss these ideas with parents at the beginning of the season, and if there is some interest, ask for a volunteer to plan this.

I. Parental involvement and behavior

- Encourage parents to help you wherever this is needed. Many parents like to be involved, and are just waiting for someone to ask.
- At practices, parents can: throw grounders or pop-ups, staff a “station”, catch batting practice, warm up pitchers, etc.
- At games, parents can: coach first or third base, help put on catcher’s equipment, monitor the batting order, maintain behavior on the bench, warm up pitchers.
- Make sure parents don’t become a problem. Expectations of the players and parents should be discussed at the initial opportunity, before problems arise.
- Address this up front. Tell parents that HGRA has not had problems in this area and expects none, but situations in other leagues make this an important topic.
- Ask parents to be positive. Cheer for their kids, their teammates and the other team when a good play is made. No criticizing players, coaches or umpires.
- If a parent has a problem with you, an opposing coach, or anything else, they should address it to you and you alone. Coaches are in charge of what happens on game nights. If the parent wants more, direct them to the League Coordinator or the HGRA Baseball Commissioner.

Chapter 3

Running a Practice

When a player is truly participating, the game is more enjoyable for both the player and his or her teammates. Participating does not mean “being on the field” - it means taking an active role in all aspects of the game.

Practice may be broken into two parts, offensive skills (hitting, baserunning etc.) and defensive skills (fielding, throwing etc.). Try try to spend 50% of each practice on offense and 50% on defense. Players will always want to spend more time “hitting” than “fielding” but without a good balance these same players will get frustrated and lose interest in playing if they have to stay out on a field and watch batter after batter from the opposing team get on base.

Listed below are a number of drills that I have tried to use over the years. The first in each category address basic skills and are more applicable to T-Ball, while the later are more advanced require a better understanding of the game and should therefore be directed toward Rookie level and above players.

A. Offense:

1. Hitting:

- See the ball

“Watch the words” Place a ball on the tee that has ether wording or a mark that is easily identified (place a mark on the ball if needed). Swing the bat and watch for the bat to hit the words or mark on the ball. Don’t worry about how hard you hit it or where the ball goes, simply practice seeing the bat actually hit the ball.

“Side toss” In the coach pitch leagues, start out by having the players hit balls tossed from alongside them. This allows the hitter to start becoming used to focusing on a moving ball. Tossing the ball from alongside lets the batter see the ball quickly then react to it. It also grooves the swing. Any sort of ball works - tennis balls are good because they are bright and easy to see.

- Level swing

“Cleaning the table” Tell the batter to imagine the ball is not sitting on the tee but rather is sitting atop a table. Practice swinging the bat so that it slides along the top of the table and brushes the ball off. Don’t swing from below or you’ll break the legs and don’t chop down or you’ll cut the table in half.

- Placement and movement of a batter’s feet

For T-Ball, draw a three-sided box near home plate to show the player where to stand. The open side of the box points toward the batter, they place a foot on the two opposite sides while the third side shows them how close to the plate they need to stand.

For older kids, only the two sidelines are needed. Then.,make a mark on the ground about 1 foot in front of their front foot. This is the mark they are to step on as they stride at the beginning of a pitch.

Try using wiffle balls of practice golf balls off the tee. They don’t travel very far and allow you to continue to use the infield for other drills while a player is batting.

2. Baserunning:

- Remember that kids just getting started in the game have no frame of reference as to what they should be doing. Running from home to 3rd base seems as logical as running from home to 1st, especially if they are a right handed batter. Try these drills to get them going in the right direction.
- “Running with the herd” Put the entire team on home plate and walk as a group to 1st telling them the name of the base. Have everyone touch it explaining how important this is. Have everyone make a guess as to where they go next. After the kids answer, tell them we are going on to 2nd base, proceed around the basepath this way until you are back at home plate.

After they have done this with you leading the way have them do it as a group and as individuals. Or try telling them to run from home to either 2nd or 3rd reminding them they need to go in order.

- For older kids, a good base running drill is “running through 1st”. Younger players have a tendency to slow up after they hit the ball thinking that once they hit it they get a free pass to 1st.

In this drill split the team in half. One group lines up at home the other half lines up single file behind the pitcher’s mound. Have another coach or parent play first base. Now roll the ball from home toward the first player on the mound while at the same time having one of the runners take off from home. Keep score as to how many runners were safe. Switch the runners with the fielders and run the drill again. The competition makes the drill more interesting.

B. Defense:

1. Catching:

- Pair up the players and have them face each other touching the tips of their gloves together. The object of the drill is to see how far apart they can get and still be able to catch the ball consistently.
- Have the first player toss the ball to his or her partner who catches it and tosses it back. Once both players have caught the ball three times without dropping it they can each take one step backward away from each other. If either player drops the ball the counting starts over again. This drill begins to teach a player it is as much their responsibility to place the ball in a position to be caught as it is for the other person to catch it. They also see that they need to control how hard a throw is made, close together toss underhand and slow further apart toss overhand and harder.

2. Throwing:

- T-Ball: I follow one simple rule in teaching these kids where to throw. If the ball is hit anywhere on the infield you always throw to 1st. If it is hit anywhere in the outfield they should always throw to 2nd. It doesn’t matter if the runner is already long since past that base they still need to throw to these spots. They are still learning the basic elements of the game. Teaching them about “going for the lead runner” or “throwing it home” should wait until the kids are playing at a more advanced level.
- Rookies: Follow the same rule as in T-Ball for the first few practices and games but as the season progresses begin to teach the players about “force plays”.
- An easy method for explaining the “force” is to think of it this way. Have the infielders look at a base, if there is a runner on that base AND on every base behind that then there is a force on every base in front of each runner. If they can see an empty base behind the runner then the only force is at 1st for the batter. As your players are fielding ground balls make up different situations and ask where they COULD force out a runner.

- Another drill for Rookie level players is to practice throwing from any infield position to any other infield position. The coach rolls the ball from the home plate area toward an infielder and calls out which base to go to.

C. How Do You Keep Kids Interested?

- Be prepared and plan ahead. Know what you are going to do for the whole practice.
- Short drills that keep as many players occupied as possible. Multiple “stations” to teach hitting, fielding, throwing on a rotation, or have some kids hit, some field and some run while running hitting practice.
- Competition is also a way to stimulate interest. Split the team in half for certain drills and have one half compete against the other. If they are cheering their teammates they don’t have as much time to think up other things to do. You may even want to award points during drills to emphasize the importance of paying attention. Correctly doing a drill is worth 1 point while trying but not necessarily succeeding is worth _ point.
- Try to encourage participation, use positive reinforcement, don’t punish a player for not taking part (i.e. don’t make them sit out a turn for not paying attention). This leads to more of the same behavior. In their mind they are not being “allowed to play” so I should look for something else to do. Keep a balance of activities to keep kids involved.
- You can reward players for paying attention, let them have the first chance to bat. The first batters tend to get more swings since it is early in the practice. As time runs short in practice the number of swings each player gets tends to drop.

D. May to June progression:

- As the season moves along, modify what is done in practice. Early in the season everybody needs to get back up to speed after having the winter off. Beginners also need a beginners pace.
- By week 3 or 4, transition practice from learning skills to perfecting how they play the game. More repetitions are needed now. Exceptions are made, of course, for significant issues that arose during the last game.

E. The role of parents:

- Coaches and parents need to be on the same page. A parent should not be teaching a kid to do something contrary to what the coach has said.
- Parents who have a different way of doing things should be invited to talk to the coach, who should then consider asking the parent to teach this skill - we can always be open to new ways of doing things, especially if it gets us some help.
- Coaches are not babysitters. **Try** not to allow parents to simply drop off a child while they run a few errands. There are too many situations which may arise that demand a parent be present (weather, injury, conflicts with other players). If parents want to pair up and share responsibility for multiple children that is fine.

F. Having FUN!

- There are a number of ways to make practice fun for the players. Good natured competition between teammates focuses the players on learning and demonstrating their abilities. Everyone wants to look good in front of others.

- “Beat the Coach” This could be as simple as hitting the ball past the coach or throwing more accurately etc. Dare the player to make you look bad. Every player wants to be able to “show up” their coach.
- Ask the team how they would make practice more fun. Kids will be quick to tell you.

G Behavior

- Separate kids who are being disruptive, assign them to different skills areas to keep them focused. Burn off some of this negative energy by having them do a larger portion of the base running at each practice.
- Lean on the parents for help. Parents need to be present at practice to back up a coach and if necessary discipline their child. Tell the player to go over and have a “discussion” with their parent.
- Utilize positive reinforcement rather than excessively punishing the child.
- If the behavior becomes a hazard to the player and the team, contact the league coordinator or Baseball Commissioner.

Chapter 4

Game day

A. You arrive at the field

- Be at the appointed field at least fifteen minutes prior to scheduled game time (i.e. by 6:15 pm) and ensure the team equipment arrives with you.
- Ask players to arrive at the same time. There is always a good reason, e.g. angle of the sun, standing water or more room on one side.

B. Players Arrive

- Keep track of players as they arrive.
- Have kids warm up with each other by playing catch, fielding grounders. Parents can help.

C. Batting Order

- Generally have one coach handle the batting order and another the defensive fielding positions. Both jobs require a fair bit of concentration and forethought and it's not uncommon for an individual coach to have greater skill or preference for one or the other.
- Batting orders fall roughly into two categories - Random and Designed.
- Random - batting orders can be assembled in a number of ways, the most common being the order in which players arrive for the game. Another way is to put all players who attended the previous practice in the top of the order with the rest to follow.
- Designed - batting orders can also be constructed a number of ways, but a sound approach is to optimize for total team run production. There are various good methods, but a simple one is to put the three players with highest On Base Averages (OBA) in the 1-2-3 slots, followed by your "big sticks" (players with potential to deliver a long, bases clearing shot to the outfield) in the 4-5-6 slots and the remaining players to follow, roughly in order of descending OBA. A batting order constructed in this manner becomes remarkably stable after just a few games and players can become familiar with who they follow (cutting down on the inevitable "Who's up next" and "When do I bat" barrage).

D. Fielding rotation

- Just as with the batting order, there are several approaches to assigning defensive positions. HGRA policy is to afford each player approximately equal playing time in the field. Think through whether you want to adopt an egalitarian or optimized fielding rotation.
- Particularly in HGRA Minor Leagues, one rather even approach is to establish a specific inning by inning position rotation, with the player in each fielding spot moving to a pre-determined spot the following inning. It is even possible to begin the following week's game right where the preceding game left off.

- Some Minor League and most Major League coaches elect instead to adopt a more strategic approach. For HGRA Major Leagues with players pitching, it's a good first step to consider and assign your pitchers and catchers. Remember to plan for the eventuality of six (6) innings even if the game is ultimately shorter. Next is first base.
- It's more than a good idea to adopt the policy that only sure-handed players are rotated through first base. This is the single best defensive strategy aside from utilizing pitchers in HGRA Major Leagues who throw the ball over the plate (regardless of pitch speed), and it insures safety. Next, assign the remaining three infield positions. All are important, but the middle infielders (second base and shortstop) are the most critical. You may want to adopt the practice (recommended) of assigning only middle infielders who have demonstrated the ability at team practices to stop ground balls and make reasonable throws to first base, or perhaps rotate a solid shortstop with a less solid second baseman or vice versa.

E. Competition

- In the Majors, Play to win, while consistently and constantly exhibiting good sportsmanship and adherence to the rules.
- HGRA's written policy prohibits on-the-field amendments to the published rules. Coaches have the responsibility to implement and adhere to this policy. Don't put opposing coaches on the spot by suggesting even minor departures (e.g., "Little Joey really can't throw the ball 46 feet - let's let him pitch closer to the plate," or "Let's just put all our players in the outfield so no one sits on the bench.")

F. Team Demeanor - some good thoughts

- The players all stick together. When the team is batting, all players sit on the bench (not with parents or friends or exploring the surroundings), focus on the game and cheer their fellow players.
- Only players and coaches in the bench area - no siblings, friends or visitors.
- Posting the batting order in the bench area helps immensely.
- Good sportsmanship is not optional. Players are never allowed to make a disparaging remark to or about the opposing players or umpires. Emphasize right from the beginning that your team will be a class act and good sportsmanship will be the norm. Deal with irregularities firmly and immediately - expect the opposing team to do the same. If the opposing team is causing a problem, talk to the coach. If the problem persists, contact the league coordinator or HGRA Baseball Commissioner after the game.
- No throwing the bat. This is an official HGRA rule and it's important.

G. Spectator Demeanor

- Most HGRA spectators are remarkably well behaved and don't feel any particular need to interject themselves into game play. There are exceptions, but fortunately few. A good preemptive step is to collect both players and parents together at an early practice and review sportsmanship standards.
- It doesn't hurt to reiterate these expectations in a written handout (which can also include info on practice times / places, etc.) right at the beginning of the season. Remind both players and parents they're to make no challenging or disparaging comments about the opposing team or any

umpire's call, any time. Only the head coach can approach an umpire to discuss a call or interpretation of the rules. Enforce this practice politely but firmly.

- If a parent becomes irrationally exuberant, a short walk from the bench and a discreet word usually suffice. More intense cases may merit a more public and firm request launched at higher volume from the bench area. (Fortunately these are very uncommon).

H. Injuries

- Fortunately, injuries are very uncommon and serious injuries are exceedingly rare. Except in the event of an obvious, serious injury where an urgent and immediate response is appropriate, it's advisable for the head coach to hustle out to the field for a private conversation with the player to determine the real extent and nature of the injury.
- The coach can generally determine the appropriate course of action, which often involves simply giving the player a minute to recover or temporarily replacing the player and allowing him or her to rest on the bench for a time. The coach may also determine that it is advisable to summon the player's parent or responsible adult to assess the situation. This should be done any time it appears that the child needs more than just a minute or two of rest to recover.
- In this case, the parent should make the determination whether further attention is needed and whether it's appropriate for the player to remain in the game.

Chapter 5

Teaching Baseball Skills

A. Batting

1. “Ready Position”

- Feet slightly wider than shoulder width apart
- On the balls of his/her feet, not be flat-footed.
- Knees slightly bent with the butt down and head up above the shoulders; the player’s back should not be rounded.
- Feet should be parallel with the toes pointing toward the plate.

2. Holding the bat

- Do not grip too tightly
- Put the end of the bat on the ground in front, then position the hands as described above.
- Raise hands and pivot the end of the bat straight up so the end of the bat is above and angled slightly behind the batter’s back shoulder. It is important that the batter does not have the end of the bat wrapped behind the batter’s head. This causes the batter to have a long swing, which makes it more difficult for the batter to catch up to the pitch.

3. Swinging the bat

- Establishing a strong swing is important, even if contact is not always made.
- The player should put slightly more weight on the back foot, then as the pitch is thrown the batter should slightly raise his/her front foot and step toward the pitcher as the swing begins.
- Contrary to many uninformed parents and coaches, the batter does not stride as the swing occurs - the stride is first, as this creates the opportunity for the hips to rotate properly as the swing commences.
- Be sure the batter’s leading foot is not stepping away from home plate. This not only takes power away from the swing, it also makes it more difficult for the batter to reach pitches on the outside corner of the plate.
- The batter should follow through with the swing so the player’s chest turns from facing the plate at the beginning of the swing to facing the pitcher at the end of the swing. The batter’s back foot should do the same where the toes move from pointing toward the plate to pointing toward pitcher. This pivoting action is often referred to as “squishing the bug”.

B. Throwing

- The player should turn 90 degrees so the non-throwing hand is the leading hand.
- The throwing hand should be extended back away from the body with the palm facing down.
- The player then slightly lifts the leading foot and steps toward the catching player. The leading foot should be pointed directly toward the catching player.
- As the player throws the ball, his/her back foot should follow through so it is even or a little ahead of the leading foot.

C. Running

1. Running to 1st base

- Reinforce the concept of over-running first base down the first base line so the player uses maximum speed running toward the base.
- The runner should NOT look at the fielders to determine whether to stop at first or to move toward second base. The runner needs to watch the First Base Coach and stop at first or go to second base according to the First Base Coach's instruction.
- If the player is told to advance past first base on his/her hit, the player must use a combination of knowing where the ball is and watching the third base coach to determine if he/she should stop at second base or advance to third base.
- The batter should work on taking a big, powerful step toward first base after hitting the ball and not looking at where the ball is hit.

2. Leading Off – there is no leading off from any base in HGRA

3. Stealing bases

- Bases can be stolen only when the pitches cross home plate.
- A maximum of two stolen bases is allowed per inning (this rule has varied over the years).

4. Sliding – HGRA does not teach sliding techniques and strongly discourages players from sliding in order to avoid injuries.

5. Running the bases while another player is batting.

- The player must understand the “situation”. The situation is knowing how many outs have been recorded and whether there is a force play.
- The base runner must watch the batted ball to be sure he/she is not running on a fly ball. The base runner is encouraged to move cautiously toward the next base and watch to see if the fly ball is caught.
- Base running needs to be done at full speed, with the exception of waiting to know if a fly ball will be caught.

D. Fielding

1. Ready Position

- Feet slightly wider than shoulder width apart
- Player should be on the balls of his/her feet, do not be flat-footed
- Knees need to be bent with their butt down and head up above the shoulders; the player's back should not be rounded with the player's head below the shoulder looking at his/her feet

2. Infield Glove position

- The player should position his/her glove hand in the “table position”. The table position is where the player has his/her glove in front of his/her chest with the palm up as if it were resting on a table directly in front. The player is in a position to move his/her glove hand above the table or below the table depending on where the ball is hit.

- The “above the table” position is where the player has his/her glove hand up and the palm s facing away from the body or facing up toward the sky. The player uses the “above the table” position when the ball is hit chest high or higher. The non-glove hand should be positioned near the open glove to help secure the ball as soon as it enters the glove. It also can help protect the fielder’s face from a misplayed ball.
- The “below the table” position is used to field ground balls. The player’s glove hand is palm up and the glove fingers are touching the ground giving a ramp-like approach for the ball to enter the glove. It is critical that the back of the hand is facing down toward the ground and not facing up toward the player’s face. The non-glove hand should be positioned above the open glove to help secure the ball as it enters the glove.
- Some coaches use the “trash can & lid” analogy and others use the “alligator jaws” analogy. In the “trash can & lid” scenario, the glove is the trash can and the non-glove hand is the lid. As the ball enters the trash can, shut the can with the lid (non-glove hand) to prevent the ball from escaping. Similarly, the “alligator jaws” use the bottom jaw as the glove hand and the top jaw is the non-glove hand. As the ball enters the alligator’s mouth, the two jaws come together to secure the ball.
- In fielding drills, it is important to have the infielder chase balls to his/her glove side and to his/her non-glove side. Balls hit to the non-glove side require the fielder to reach across the body and backhand the ball.

3. Outfield Glove Position

- Both the glove hand and non-glove hand should be in the “above the table” position. The arms should be partially extended from the chest but below the shoulders.
- The player will need to react and change the glove position as needed, similar to the infield glove positions.
- Always catch fly balls with the glove positioned above the shoulders and the palm facing up and/or away from the player’s face. The outfielder should never catch a fly ball with his/her glove below the shoulder unless the fielder is running in toward the infield and can only reach the ball by extending his/her arm straight out with the palm facing up (back of the hand facing the ground).
- In fielding drills, it is important to have the outfielder chase balls to his/her glove side across the body and backhand the ball.

E. Situations

- Get players thinking about how many outs have been recorded whether you are batting or fielding.
- If the ball is hit to the infield, we encourage the players to attempt to get the lead base runner out. However, if the ball is hit the right side of the infield, we encourage the players to get the out at first or second base instead of throwing the ball across the infield to third base or home. Ultimately, we want players to make safe plays to get outs instead of making risky plays and allowing more runs to score than would if the safe out were taken.
- If the ball is hit to the right side of the infield, the second baseman fields the ball and the shortstop covers second base. If the ball is hit to the left side of the infield, the shortstop fields the ball and the second baseman covers second base.
- Outfielders need to understand two basic fielding concepts
 - (1) Throw the ball to the base ahead of the leading base runner to prevent them from advancing further,

(2) Use the second base and shortstop cutoffs

- Players playing second base and short stop need to learn to move to shallow outfield as a cut-off for the outfield. If the ball is hit to the right side of the outfield, the second base player is the cut-off and the short stop covers second base. If the ball is hit to the left side of the outfield, the shortstop is the cut-off and the second baseman covers second base.

F. Pitching

- First and foremost, it is more important that a pitcher throws strikes than it is to throw hard.
- Pitchers can deliver from either a windup or the stretch position, but we recommend pitching from a stretch because it is less complicated.
- Pitching from the stretch position:
 - (1) The pitcher does not face the batter squarely. Instead, the pitcher turns 90 degrees so the non-throwing hand is the leading hand. The pitcher's feet are parallel with the pitching rubber instead of facing the batter.
 - (2) The pitcher stands in front of the pitching rubber with his back foot touching the front edge of the rubber.
 - (3) The pitcher holds the ball in the glove close to his/her chest and grips the ball while the ball is still in the glove.
 - (4) The pitcher lifts the leading leg so the foot is by the knee of the back leg. Then the pitcher pushes off the back foot (by the pitching rubber) and steps toward the batter with the leading foot. The toes of the leading foot should point directly toward home plate.
- It is important that the pitcher learns to follow through with the pitching motion. The pitching hand should end up around the knee of the opposite leg and the pitcher's back foot should end up even with or ahead of the leading foot. Example: A right handed pitcher should end up with his right hand by his/her left knee and his/her right foot should end up even or slight ahead of the left foot.

Catcher

- The catcher needs to hold the catching mitt up as a target for the pitcher.
- The catcher should be on his/her toes and not on his/her knees when in the catching position.
- The catcher needs to hustle after pitches that get by him/her.
- We generally do not recommend catchers throwing to second or third base to catch a base runner attempting to steal a base. However, if the catcher has a strong, accurate arm and the baseman is a good fielder, they may try throwing out a base runner at second or third base.

H. Positions

- The coach should identify three to five players that can pitch. It is more important that the pitcher is able to throw strikes than to pitch fast.
- The coach should also identify the players that are able to make accurate throws from third base and short stop to first base. These are the most difficult throws and require greater throwing ability. The coach should try to avoid putting a player in a position where they are not able to make a play.
- As much as possible, players should have the opportunity to play every infield and outfield position.

Chapter 6

Fifteen Years of Success

An Experienced Person's Primer on HGRA Baseball Coaching

(John Barrett qualifies as a legend in HGRA coaching circles. Having grown up playing HGRA ball, he dedicated 15 straight summers to coaching HGRA baseball teams at all levels. Now that the last of his kids has moved through the program, John has retired from coaching and we'll miss his warmth, energy and originality. Thankfully, he left us these thoughts so that all of us can strive to be a little more like him out on the ball field.)

There are *many* successful ways to coach a little league team. These are hints that worked well for me the past thirteen years, and I offer them only to help you get started. I gratefully acknowledge the HGRA coaches I had as a kid (including my dad) for the things they taught me about baseball, coaching, and life. Have a great season.

John Barrett

Some Common Sense Rules of Thumb:

- Parents/Guardians love to help, they just need to be asked.
- Busy kids learn. Bored kids do not.
- The best way to learn responsibility is to have it.
- You cannot do it all yourself.
- Lighten up, it is a game
- Emphasize basics, the rest comes later.

Getting Organized:

After getting your roster, call the kids at once. They cannot wait to hear from you.

- Decide when and where your first practice will be.
- When calling, ask for the kid on your team *first*. Introduce yourself.
- Have them get a pen or pencil and take down your name and telephone number.
- Give them the time and place of first practice.
- Give them the team name. They want to know this too.
- Have them repeat all to you. This gives them immediate ownership of some responsibility. This will be important later.
- Then ask to speak with mom or dad. Greet them by introducing yourself and telling them what you have told their son or daughter.

- Invite them to meet you ten minutes *before* the start of first practice. This tells them immediately that you are not a day care provider. It also establishes an expectation of being on time.
- Explain that all practices will last one hour. They will start and end on time. The parents will love that they can count on this.
- Get yourself a five-gallon pail to hold your baseballs. McDonalds and BK use these for pickles (hint).
- Round up atleast 10-20 used baseballs.
- Get a clipboard to hold your rosters and stuff.
- Make copies in advance of your basic expectations. Hand to parents day one. (See the Coach's Two Cents)
- Get your garden rake and put it in the back of your car. You will need it during the season when you least expect it.

Enlisting Help:

- Some parents may offer help during your first telephone call. Grab them.
- At the first practice, while meeting with the parents, ask for some help. Some may step right up. Grab em. Invite others to pitch in and help whenever they are able to do so. Many will gladly help on game nights too.
- Encourage parents/guardians to attend and observe practices. This may be the best time to see their child get the most action.
- Invite parents to speak up and introduce themselves to each other. This will make your whole season more fun and they are just as nervous as their kids are.
- Someone will ask about "treats". Immediately ask *that person* to be in charge of them. They obviously have an interest and *you* will not have the time.

Getting Started/ the First Practice:

I recommend the following for a first practice:

Arrive early.

- Unload the equipment and place it *exactly* where you will want it kept for practices and games. You will see why later.
- Set out the bases.
- As kids and parents arrive, *go to them* and shake hands with the child *first*. Welcome them and immediately have them grab a ball out of the bucket. Assign the first kid the number one. He or she will be the first to bat today.(Motivator #1)
- The next kid to arrive will be #2 and will be #1's throwing partner. Continue this with all kids on arrival. Explain that this is the way the batting order will *always* be determined. If you lose track of the numbers, ask the kids. They *will not* forget.
- Determine sun direction. Have the kid with the ball line up on either the first or third base line (whichever will not put the sun in their eyes).

- Have the throwing partner line up five or six feet from kid number one and begin playing catch. Having them close together gets things going successfully for all. Have the kids not on the line back up one step with each successful catch. (Motivator #2)
- Keep an eye out for good throwers and catchers.
- Enlist your parent help. Have them start by observing the throws and catches.
- Once all kids have arrived, whistle them in and assemble in a circle. Start with one and have them give their *first* name loud and clear. Everyone wants to “fit in”. This helps do that.
- Continue around the circle 2-3 times. Pick one kid to try naming the others, and have any missed speak up and help them out.
- Next, starting at home plate, explain each position as the group “tours” the field. There may be someone new who does not know shortstop from center field. Besides, it is a good review.
- Review the big four rules. (See Coach’s Two Cents) Quiz the kids to review often.
- Have each run out to a position. The first six take infield. Others go out to outfield
- .
- Ask another parent/coach to hit or throw balls to the outfielders from beyond second base. Spread them out and rotate. Have one kid catch.
- Grab a bat and *two* baseballs. Explain to your catcher that he or she gets the throw from first and holds the ball until you ask for it.
- Have all show you the proper position for fielding a ground ball.(mitt in the dirt directly in front of them)
- Hit ground balls to each infielder starting at third and rotate left to right. Have them each throw to first base.
- *Insist* that the first baseman get to and stand on first *before* each throw. Have them hold up their mitt as a throwing target.
- End each rotation by tossing a blooper in front of the plate for the catcher to field and throw to first. There is no bunting in HGRA, but many balls will end up there after full swings.
- After catcher tosses to first, holler “rotate” and have them all move to their left. The catcher goes to the pitcher, and since the first baseman has the ball, they are your new catcher.
- Continue this until all have had a chance at each infield position.
- Switch outfielders and infielders and repeat.
- 90 % of the plays these kids will need to make during a season are catching infield hits and throwing to first. Parents will marvel at your coaching success when they see their son or daughter know what to do when the ball comes to them that first time.
- **Check your watch.**
- Call in the first two players (#1and2), and have them put on helmets.
- Everyone else grabs a position. First come, first serve, (Motivator #3)
- You will not have much time left. Give each kid three hits or about ten pitches and have them run to first on their third hit while the others try to get them out. The kids *love* this. (Motivator #4)

- As first kid finishes, they scoot out to take the open position of #3 hitter who is called in to put on a helmet. Have another coach work with each on-deck batter on their swing before getting up.
- Continue this until all have batted. Adjust number of hits to fill or save time. As season progresses the kids will quickly learn that hustling through all stages of practice gives them more time to hit. (Motivator #5)
- With five minutes left to go in practice, whistle them all in and have them *set* their gloves against the backstop. Have them form one line behind home plate facing first base. It is time for “The Base Race”. You act as starter, and place your hand on the top of their head. Lift your hand as a signal to “go” and have them run the bases as fast as possible. Tell them that anyone getting caught and tagged by a following runner will need to run again. This gets them in the habit of running out hits. This is usually a highlight of practice. (Motivator #6)
- Have them put away all equipment. Two hold open the bag; every one else grabs something and puts it away. This reinforces teamwork and ownership in what they are doing. It also helps you out. Have them “take a knee” around you when all is put away.
- Explain to all that this same routine will be followed at each practice. You will be amazed! By the third practice or so, you barely have to say a word. They like the predictable routine and settle in to it nicely.
- Review the big four rules one last time.
- Announce to all the next time you will see them and you are done.

Game Plans and Hints:

- Arrive early. Set up bases. Set out equipment.
- Require and expect them to show up *one half hour* before games. This allows them to be warmed up and organized. You will have happier parents as well, since they do not like to see the disorganization/chaos that can occur before a game either.
- Follow above routine to establish batting order for games. It is fair.
- Write down your batting order as kids arrive. Consider giving early arrivals first choice of starting position too. (See Roster template)
- Immediately tell and then expect the kids to pair-off and begin warm-up tosses.
- When most have arrived. Grab a bat and hit them infield (as per practice)
- Be aware that other team should get equal access to field.
- Enlist your first two parent coaches to coach base running. You keep the clipboard and arrange the kids in order standing up in a straight line behind arriver #1. Once all in proper alignment, have them look at the kid directly in front of them. This is whom they will follow all night.
- HGRA requires that no child play more than two full innings at any one position. I recommend that you re-assign positions three times a game, or after every two innings. With early games, you may not get to your third positions before running out of time. This gives you fewer decisions to make and really keeps the game moving. Everyone will get the chance to play each position eventually.(see Roster Template)
- At the end of the game, line all up to shake hands. Return immediately to bench where all will immediately put away all equipment as per practice routine. Have a brief recap and invite other coaches to do the same.
- Hold off on treats until above two items are done or you will not get the second chance.(Motivator #7)

- Thank your coaches.

What to say when asked: “What’s the score?”

Finally, while HGRA is all about fun and learning, the most often asked question every year (no matter which level) has been: “What’s the score?” Until they reach the Majors where the score *does* count, I recommend you simply say “We are doing pretty good” or “We need to score some runs”. This largely answers their question in a way that will get them off your back about it, and does not stress the competitiveness HGRA is seeking to avoid. Good luck and HAVE FUN!

The Coach's Two Cents:

(This is handed out to parents at the first practice)

Here is a list of things to review with your son or daughter:

- A. We will practice each (day of week) at (time of day) at (field name)_____field. You may plan ahead. This will not change.
- B. Practices will last one hour. We start on time and end on time.
- C. As an encouragement to be on time or a bit early, players will bat in the order that they arrive to both practices and games.
- D. Game day arrival is 6pm. Games begin at 6:30. We need a half-hour to warm up, get organized, position players, and get up for the game a bit. Games are on_____. _____
- E. Players will generally rotate positions 3 times per game. All will have a chance to play each position during the season.
- F. Parents are encouraged to help. This makes it more fun!
- G. Players unable to make a practice or game will please do the courtesy of notifying the coach in advance. The kids do this. They are old enough.
- H. We'll stress four simple rules at practices and games:
 - a. Listen.
 - b. Hustle.
 - c. Be a Good Sport.
 - d. Have Fun.

The last rule is the most important.

We look forward to a great season! Parents, please introduce yourself to others. It is more fun when we all get to know each other. It would be helpful for someone to type up a roster of kid's and parents names and jersey numbers. If treats are desired, someone will need to coordinate that too. Concerns or questions? Call.

Coach's name: _____ Phone: _____ E-mail _____

Asst. Coach: _____ Phone: _____ E-mail _____

