

# Rogers Area Youth Baseball

## Coaching Guidelines

The Rogers Area Youth Baseball Association board of directors welcomes you to Youth Baseball! Your willingness to “step up” and help coach the youth of our community is much appreciated.

A short word about our philosophy towards coaching youth and then we'll get into some specifics about coaching fundamentals and how to run a practice. The following words were taken from a “coaching tip” page from a baseball clinic signup form. They summarize our feelings toward coaching very well. Please take a moment to read them and take them to heart.

*Professional athletes ARE role models, and they should be expected to behave as such. And so should you.*

*For a moment, think about why we like to have young people involved in sports. Cast aside the thoughts of grandeur, the dreams of superstardom, and examine the simple lessons of sports.*

*Baseball and other team sports take groups of very different individuals with varied interests and abilities and teach them to work together toward a common goal. Sports teach those same individuals how to learn, and how to deal with the highs and lows of difficult games, like baseball. Life itself has many highs and lows we have to deal with on a daily basis.*

*Athletics help young people recognize individual differences and allow them all the chance to discover their strengths and weaknesses, and to put those strengths to use in a productive fashion. Sports teach lessons about making meaningful contributions, but not just to a game.*

*So sports are truly useful in helping prepare young people to make positive contributions to society. Thus, the pro athlete who does not act as a good citizen thumbs his nose at society by illustrating negative characteristics, turning his back on the lessons he should have learned in youth sports.*

*You CAN help change this type of attitude. You CAN teach these valuable lessons. Teach your players to emulate those athletes who DO behave as positive role models, and be an example of one every day.*

## Fundamentals of Coaching

The following fundamentals are expected to be followed by all coaches in our association,. They are meant as guidelines to help begin building consistent coaching techniques throughout all grade levels.

1. **Communication** – make sure that your players and parents understand the “rules of the game”:
  - As soon as your roster is created, call each parent to let them know who you are and let them know that more information will be coming. The parents and players are all anxious to hear which team they are on and who their coach is.
  - Create a roster with each player’s name, phone number and parent’s names
  - Create a game schedule listing each scheduled game, along with the time and location and driving directions if needed. Don’t forget a column for “bringing treats to the game”. Even the older players still love a treat after the game.
  - Write up a letter outlining the upcoming season explaining your expectations of each player and parent and send it to the parents before your first practice. This way, they’ll already know something about you when you meet them for the first time.
  - Conduct a team meeting at your first practice to welcome all of the players and parents.
    - ✓ Introduce the coaches who you already have established and ask for more volunteers from the parent group. You can never have enough help.
    - ✓ Explain your priorities, expectations and commitments for the coming season. Ask each parent to be committed also and to help out when asked.
    - ✓ Set up any ground rules that you have regarding practice times, game schedules, playing time, discipline, etc. at this meeting so there are no miscommunications during the year. “Mutual respect” between coaches, players, parents and opponents is a key ingredient to a successful season.
2. **Consistency** – do your best to be consistent in everything you do
  - Start and end practices on time and expect parents to have their kids their on-time (practices & games!)
  - Carry out practices in a consistent fashion so that players come to understand what is expected of them early in the season. The better “routine” you can get into, the more you can accomplish in practices throughout the year.
  - Stress safety at all times during practices and games. This is especially important at the Association level which will be using “hard balls” and “pitching machines” for the first time.
3. **Attitude**
  - Good words go a long way: Keep it positive and give lots of reinforcement to your players. Focus on their strengths. Do whatever you can to keep your players motivated.
  - Keep your energy level high in order to match the energy level of the kids. Your players will feed off of your energy.
  - Keep your eyes open and get to know your team; get to know their names right away and then watch how they interact with one another. You’ll see their personalities come out very quickly and thus you’ll be better prepared to deal with any “situations” that should occur.

4. **Fundamentals** – stress fundamentals in everything you do at a practice session or games. The Rogers Area Youth Baseball Board is very committed to helping coaches teach the fundamentals of the game at EVERY age level.
- **Basic catching and throwing:** emphasize proper catching and throwing fundamentals early and often. At least one quarter of every practice should be spent on catching and throwing drills. Let the parents know that this is where they can really help out at home by playing catch with their kids. It really does help!
  - **Fielding** – proper fielding stance for infielders and outfielders. Try to find drills that emphasize these points and give the kids a lot of repetition. If you need help, ask other coaches for tips.
  - **Pitching** - If you are comfortable teaching pitching, then work with each pitcher on your team to create consistent form and follow-through. If you aren't real comfortable in this area, find a parent who is and they'd be glad to help out.
  - **Hitting** – if it were up to the kids, they would just hit balls all day at practice. Find enough different sorts of hitting drills to keep it fresh (soft toss, hit off the tee, coach pitch, etc.). Again, emphasize proper fundamentals for each and every player each and every time!
  - **Rules of the game:** spend a little time every practice going over game situations to make the kids more comfortable with all of the aspects of baseball. Start slow with the younger kids and don't worry about being repetitive. They will catch on eventually!

## Other Keys to Coaching and Baseball Success

- Read a book or two about the game, there is always something to be learned. Many materials exist on the Internet also. Examples:
    - <http://www.batspeed.com>
    - <http://www.webball.com>
    - <http://www.ycoach.com>
  - Express concerns but listen to feedback, use constructive criticism
  - Never put a player down or embarrass them negatively
  - Take notes and point out the positives
  - Stress a team attitude not an individual one (teams win championships, individuals do not)
- 
- ✓ Preparation
  - ✓ Energy Level
  - ✓ Relaxed Attention and Focus
  - ✓ Mind and Body Control
  - ✓ Roles (Player Defined)
  - ✓ Proper Expectations
  - ✓ Self Knowledge
  - ✓ Attitude and Aggressiveness
  - ✓ Determination + Desire = Total Performance
  - ✓ Self Confidence + Self Image = Success

To all coaches, whether it be your first season or your twentieth, always remember why the game is played and who the game is for. Without the excitement of a child with a dirt filled uniform, the game and the history is obsolete! Good luck on your upcoming season!!

# Fundamentals to Teach at Baseball Practice

## 1. Conditioning

- Proper stretching before activity
  - ✓ Arms and back
  - ✓ Legs and hips
- Distance running for endurance
- Sprints for strength
  - ✓ Leg strength and endurance helps the throwing arm recover quicker and keeps the players in shape to reduce fatigue during competition

## 2. Throwing & Catching

- Beginning
  - ✓ Elbow in Glove ( 10 - 20 ft apart )
    - Emphasize forearm and wrist action
- L Position ( 30 - 40 ft apart )
  - ✓ Throwing arm extended perpendicular to body
  - ✓ Glove arm same except bend at the elbow 90 degrees
  - ✓ Throw ball keeping the elbow shoulder height, use glove arm to pull into body for proper mechanics
  - ✓ Follow through so the arm comes across the body and legs become parallel to each other
- Playing Catch ( Gradually move back )
  - ✓ Step towards target
  - ✓ Line up shoulders to target and then throw
- Long Toss ( Extended Distance )
  - ✓ Throw on a straight line ( no rainbows )
- Secondary for position players during fielding drills
  - ✓ Throwing at target from each respective position
- Secondary for pitchers
  - ✓ Balance on rear leg
  - ✓ Throwing off a mound or regulated distance
  - ✓ Throw through the catcher's glove at different locations
- Learning to catch for younger players
  - ✓ Proper glove positioning
  - ✓ Use window-wash drill – force them to move the glove around

## 3. Defense

- All players ( Ready Position )
  - ✓ Fielders with hands on knees as pitcher comes set
  - ✓ Fielders move slightly towards batter with knees slightly flexed, feet shoulder width apart with weight on the balls of their feet, and hand and glove open as pitcher makes delivery
  - ✓ As pitch reaches the plate drop hands to put more weight on balls of feet so not to fall back
  - ✓ Bounce on toes and react to the ball while in motion not from a stationary position
- Fielding a Ground Ball
  - ✓ Properly approach the ball aggressively and in control ( don't let the ball play you )
    - ❖ Approach using a cross over step, backhand, or rounding the ball
  - ✓ Feet should be wide and parallel, shoulders rounded knees and hips bent not the back, weight on toes, bent elbows and wrists
  - ✓ Glove down on the ground and open until the ball is on final bounce
  - ✓ Glove out in front of body
  - ✓ Eyes focused on the ball

- ✓ On impact cushion the ball with glove by bringing ball into the body
- ✓ Position bare hand next to glove to assist in securing the fielded ball
- ✓ Remove the ball from glove, break hands, step towards target, arm extended, throw
- Catching a Fly Ball
  - ✓ Don't always come IN on the ball as your first instinct. Go back on the ball and then you will always have time to run up to make the catch. Work on this a lot with younger players.
  - ✓ Use feet to become properly positioned under the ball
  - ✓ Catch every ball with two hands to ensure making the catch and to have the throwing hand there for a quick exchange
  - ✓ Catch the ball a little above eye level with arms extended away from the body
  - ✓ Relax your hands with fingers pointed upwards
  - ✓ Call for the ball three times to avoid collisions
- Cut-offs
  - ✓ Position Infielders to receive the ball from an outfielder
    - ❖ Cut-off position for each base (LF to 2B=shortstop, RF to 3B= 2B, CF to Home= 1B, etc.)
  - ✓ Back up positioning
    - ❖ Pitchers back up 3B and catcher, outfielders each other, and catcher to 1B
  - ✓ Bunt defenses, Pickoffs, Double Plays, etc.
    - ❖ Do simulations of what you want to run
- Catchers
  - ✓ Receiving stance
    - ❖ Keep feet close together, weight equally distributed on balls of feet
    - ❖ Comfortably positioned, keep rear end low and knees pointed in the direction of the shortstop and second baseman
    - ❖ Give signs to be seen only by the pitcher
    - ❖ Open glove for the pitchers target, do not extend your arm, receive the ball as it comes to you
    - ❖ Keep throwing hand behind your back
    - ❖ Frame the pitch as it is received with little movement

## 4. Hitting

- Bat Selection - Find a bat the players can control throughout his/her swing
- Grip on the Bat - Keep hands relaxed and align middle knuckles to middle knuckles
- Position in the Batters Box - Be able to hit inside and outside pitches adjusting as needed
- Feet - A little past shoulder width, weight on ball of feet
- Knees and Waist - Slightly bent to help relax the body
- Shoulders- Kept level
- Head and Eyes - Head Straight up and rotated towards the pitcher to see with both eyes
- Arms, Elbows, and Hands
  - ✓ Hold bat somewhere between the vertical and horizontal plane ( 45 degrees )
  - ✓ Keep from wrapping the bat around the head to prevent a long swing
  - ✓ Hands out from back arm pit comfortably 4-8 inches
  - ✓ Hands held at top of strike zone to ensure direction of hands is downward towards the ball
  - ✓ Elbows held comfortably away from the body with back elbow slightly higher than the front
- Inward Rotation
  - ✓ Prior to release of the ball, hitter should dip his front knee slightly and let his body rotate back
  - ✓ (Loading gun effect) Provides proper motion for a smooth and fluid swing
  - ✓ Done before striding
- Stride
  - ✓ Made directly toward the pitcher just after he releases the ball
  - ✓ Should be soft and short
- Hips
  - ✓ Initiate the swing by rotating forward
  - ✓ Bat speed is directly proportional to the speed that the hips are rotated forward
  - ✓ Should be open to a degree that the belly button faces the area in which the ball will be hit
- Front Shoulder- Must remain down and in slightly, it is your guide to the ball

- Head and Eyes during the Swing
  - ✓ Hitters chin should be near the front shoulder prior to the swing and the rear shoulder after
  - ✓ Keep head steady and train eyes to pick up the ball ASAP
- Weight Distribution
  - ✓ Keep body weight on balls of the feet
  - ✓ 60% of weight on the rear leg which will be transferred during the swing
- Rear Foot - Must pivot when hips begin to rotate and bend at the knee
- Bat Arc
  - ✓ Barrel of the bat must take a direct path to the ball (chopping motion)
  - ✓ Arms extended fully on contact with the ball (not before)
  - ✓ Wrists should roll over producing a sweeping motion
  - ✓ Bat follow through to back keeping both hand on the bat at all times

## 5. Bunting

- Only and always bunt strikes unless a squeeze play is called
- Pivot on front heel and back toe
  - ✓ Hips and shoulders square to the pitcher
- Level bat
  - ✓ Knees slightly bent with weight distributed on front leg
  - ✓ Slide top hand up bat to the trademark area, held with the fingers (do not grasp the bat)
  - ✓ Extend arms to top of strike zone and be sure you can cover the plate ( avoid jabbing)
  - ✓ Bend at the knees to move up and down keeping your eyes at the ball level

## 6. Baserunning

- Get out of the box
  - ✓ Get to the foul line quick as possible
  - ✓ Do not take first steps on the infield grass, run on a line
- Running through first
  - ✓ Keep head and eyes focused on the front of base
  - ✓ Touch the front side of the base, not the top or backside
  - ✓ Run through the base leaning slightly forward, avoid lunging or pulling up to the base
  - ✓ Hit the base, look for the ball and listen for the coach
- Turn at first
  - ✓ Run the bases aggressively
  - ✓ As soon as you are out of the box, grab grass and gradually cut an angle on turn
  - ✓ Do not use a "question mark" turn, hit the base with either foot without breaking stride
  - ✓ Inside shoulder should be lowered and the first step after hitting the base should be directly toward the next
  - ✓ Runner going to 2<sup>nd</sup> needs to pick up the 3<sup>rd</sup> base coach as they are approaching 2<sup>nd</sup> base
- Sliding
  - ✓ Put hands into a fist as you are sliding into any base. Protect the fingers!
  - ✓ Leave the head-first slides for the major league players.

# PITCHING

## Introduction

- Proper way to throw – many ways – fundamentally sound
- Teach in a sound manner – understand important points
- Learning is easier than re-training – 5 minutes every day
- Best pitchers are the players with the best arm action and are good athletes
  - Pitchers are the main middle of the field Defense and are always the focus of the game

## THROWING PROGRESSION- breaking throwing down to its simplest parts

### I. Elbow in Glove

- A. Transferring on to ball through the ball - wrist action
- B. Grip
  1. With seams (fingers together or close)
  2. Four seam (Backward C to a right hander)
  3. Hold out on fingers as far as comfortable
  4. Movement

### II. Goalpost or L Position (Down on one knee) 30-40 feet apart

- A. Elbows High
  1. hide ball
  2. 65 pounds strong - 37-40 pounds weak  
47 pounds pressure - 85 mile an hour fastball
  3. form it up

### III. Break Hands

- A. Palm Away - Thumbs under
  1. Glove starts at bellybutton
  2. Get to goalpost- throw
  3. Turn hand over curve ball
  4. Change up grip
    - a. o.k.
    - b. pitchfork
    - c. palm

### IV. Already Taken Stride (Standup & move back to 50 feet)

- A. Finish over front leg-toe -elbow-knee
  1. Deceleration-80-20
  2. Stride length approaches height-bent leg to bent leg
  3. Toe slightly closed

### V. Play Catch

- A. Step Perpendicular to target
  1. Line up front side
  2. Gradually move back - stretch it out
  3. Target practice

## **CONTROL DRILLS**

- VI. Stand Up Drill** (Partner 50-55 feet away with home plate) 4-taken stride - 4 complete balance
- A. In and Out Strikes (4 taken stride, 4 compact balance position)
    - 1. 6-8 both sides of plate - over emphasize out or in
    - 2. Change-ups keep ball down- in and out
  - B. Curve ball for strikes
    - 1. Low strikes - down in zone
  - C. Curve ball for strike-out
    - 1. Breaking out of zone
    - 2. Back door curveball
- VII. Set Position** (60 feet 6 inches away from partner 3/4 speed)
- A. Throwing to spots inside and out (slide step, quick to home)
    - 1. Mixing pitches
    - 2. Good low strikes - proper technique
    - 3. Slide step & Quick to home
- VIII. Wind up - Control Contest**
- A. Each pitcher throwing to a designated spot
    - 1. Contest - who can hit the spot
    - 2. Pitchers will throw in order - catchers will catch and hold the pitch
    - 3. Puts a little pressure on each pitch

## **Developing Pitching Performance**

**Control-** The ability to throw the baseball into the strike zone or just out of the strike zone at differing speeds and rotations.

**You are a pitcher when you can throw a change-up for a strike in the game – *consistently*.**

Pitchers need to throw in a sound manner – everyone doesn't throw the same – There are some basic mechanics listed below. Pitchers that throw in a sound manner will have greater success and be less likely to be injured or have a sore arm.

### **Wind Up Mechanics**

1. Step back – pivot foot under hat – balanced
2. Lift leg – Do not swing – into compact balance position
3. As the leg lifts – hands break over the knee
4. Ball comes out of the glove palm away
5. Arms get to goal post position – elbows high
6. Drop foot – Drive to home plate – slightly closed
7. Land and finish – landing leg is bent – do not throw across your body – point little toe at plate
8. Release through the ball – arm decelerates smoothly

### **Check Points**

1. Balance through out – step back compact balance position – landing – good fielding position
2. Ball comes out of glove palm away – elbows get high to goal post
3. Aim with lead arm – look down lead arm – lead arm takes you to the target
4. Land smoothly on the ball of the foot, not the heel
5. See the target on the release – see the catcher catch it

## **Concentration and Focus – Consistency \*\*SUCCESS IS A LEARNED BEHAVIOR\*\***

1. Taking the basic fundamentals into a competitive environment – making it your own
  - a. Daily Control contest – put pressure on yourself to throw a strike- put yourself in situations
  - b. Learning to relax and concentrate – cut loose – pick up the catchers mitt and throw through it
  - c. Simulation game throwing to a catcher with stand-in game like
  - d. Throwing to strings or a strike zone on the wall

## **Stamina – Resiliency – Ability to avoid injury**

1. A study in the Journal of Applied Science showed that a pitchers heart rate will keep going up through the fifth inning of a seven inning game. A pitcher must have cardiovascular conditioning to be consistent during the course of a game. The study also showed that pitching is an explosive exercise.
2. We want to work on power as well as conditioning:
  - a. Squats
  - b. Box jumps
  - c. Stairs
  - d. Medicine ball exercises
  - e. Sprints
3. Work on your arm strength – play long catch as much as you can take
4. Shoulder program specifically for throwing as well as a program for the major muscle groups should be strictly followed
5. Swimming to increase strength through a range of motion for muscles, tendons and ligaments

## THE PLAN

### Challenge Each Hitter

- Greatest hitter in the world is going to get himself out at times
- Work ahead of the hitter – 1<sup>st</sup> pitch or 2 of first 3
- Confidence to throw your fastball in your spot
- We do not want to show the hitter a lot of pitches—efficient
- Sell your pitchers on defense and throwing strikes

### Working Ahead

- Keeps fielders in the game—they can find a rhythm
- Forces the hitter to hit your pitch—out pitch
- Expands the strike zone—what the hitter will swing at

### Disrupt the Hitter's Timing

- Hitting is timing—no rule against throwing slow
- Throwing the ball by people—making them adjust to the change of speed and location
- Watch the hitter's hands—stance and stride—it will tell you what to throw and where
- “This guy's got nothing”—except he got you out

### Focus of the Game

- Gain control, don't lose control
- Sound defensively
- Competitor—Winner

## PICK-OFFS

- ✓ Your best, quickest move to 1<sup>st</sup> base. When hands come together in your set, you go over.
- ✓ Next best move. After you have come to a set position then go over.
- ✓ Not your best. Setting up the runner. Just let him know you can come over there.
- ✓ Balk move. If an umpire was to watch close – he may see your front knee break before you make your move over to 1<sup>st</sup> base.
- ✓ Best move to 2<sup>nd</sup> base—deceptive—Pick your leg up to a balanced position where you can throw to home or 2<sup>nd</sup>, then step through and throw to 2<sup>nd</sup> base.
- ✓ Whirl and throw to 2<sup>nd</sup> base turning your back to the base timing play with infielder.
- ✓ Timing play with third baseman. Lift leg and go to third while third baseman breaks there. Similar to a left hander going to 1<sup>st</sup> base.

## **Sample Practice Stations by Age Group**

The following are examples of practice stations that you could use during your practices. They are broken down by age group. These are only a small example of the many types of practice session breakdowns you could use. There are many books and web-sites that you can use to find more examples.

### **Minors**

- Hitting
  - \*Grip and Stance
  - \*Fundamental Swing
  - \*Tees
  - \*Soft Toss with regular whiffle balls
- Throwing
  - \*Progression
- Catching
  - \*Window Wash/Glove Positioning –using two hands
  - \*Use of tennis ball to reduce fear
  - \*Ground balls without gloves
  - \*Flip ball to them in the air
- Base running
  - \*Touching the base properly
- Teach the concepts of baseball

### **Association > same as above, plus**

- Hitting
  - \*Soft toss and Tees
  - \*Shadow Swings
  - \*Pitching whiffle balls
  - \*Live Batting Practice
- Fielding
  - \*Fundamental of fielding
  - \*Throwing Ground balls
  - \*Toss Fly balls
  - \*Take pre-game
- Base running
  - \*Drills
- Pitchers
  - \*Form

### **10's > same as above, plus**

- Fly balls
  - \*Drop step
- Contest for fielding
- Hitting
  - \*Use small whiffle balls
  - \*Situational infield and outfield with runners
- Ground balls
  - \*No Gloves
  - \*Quick Hands > Fielding hop drill
- Pitchers and Catchers

**11-12's** > same as above, plus

- Hitting
  - \*Bunting
  - \*Hitting sticks with whiffle balls
- Infield
  - \*Circle drill
  - \*Underhand tosses
  - \*Cut-off drill > line
  - \*Double plays > getting the lead runner
  - \*Applying a tag
  - \*Run downs
- Outfield
  - \*Hitting fly balls
  - \*Use crow hop
  - \*Getting under the ball
- Base running
  - \*Stealing and leading off
  - \*Sliding
- Play Pepper

**13-14's** > same as above, plus

- Hitting
  - \*Hit and run drills
- Infield
  - \*Middle infield
    - Quick hands
    - Pivots
    - Approach bag
    - How to deliver the ball
  - \*Situations with base runners
  - \*Backing up bases
  - \*Bunt coverage
  - \*Pick offs
- All fielders
  - \*Bucket at home plate > competition
- Pitchers
  - \*Spot the ball
  - \*Pick offs
- Catchers
  - \*Blocking and Framing
  - \*Catching Pop-ups
- Signals and Plays
- Teach the concepts of the game before and during practice

**15's +** > same as above, plus

- Hitting
  - \*Tees > Hitting the ball the other way
- Fielding
  - \*Over the shoulder catches, Throwing on the run, Back-hand ground balls
- Base running - sliding drills