



## HINTS FOR NEW COACHES

*This document is targeted primarily to new coaches, although experienced coaches might find a tip or two helpful as well.*

### Elements of a Good Practice

A good practice should:

- **Be fun!** - If the kids are having fun, they'll work harder and learn more. Plus, they'll look forward to practice. You should have fun too.
- **Be Diverse** - Don't spend all the time on one thing (skills, scrimmage, conditioning, etc.). Break practice drills into stations.
- **But not Too Diverse** - The kids can only absorb so much.
- **Teach Skills** - the players can use at next game.

### Basic Practice Structure

Every manager needs to find what works for him/her. But, here is a basic template to start from. This is mostly applicable to AA and up but some tips can be adapted for tee ball and coach pitch as well.

- **Before Practice.** Plan your practice. Think about where players need improvement and find drills to work on those skills. Figure out what you want to tell them. The coaching team should exchange email about practice ahead of time so all adults come to practice knowing what will happen.
- **10 Minutes Before Practice.** Manager and coaches arrive. It's good to be there and set up before the kids arrive. Make sure the field is safe for play.
- **5 Minutes Before Practice.** Some kids will arrive early. Don't leave them sitting there. As they arrive, have them play catch in pairs. No hard throws yet.
- **First 10 Minutes of Practice.** Once everyone has arrived, have him or her warm up (see "Warm Up and Stretching" below)
- **Next 50-60 Minutes.** Work on drills for about 15 minutes each skill. Younger players will probably not be able to stay interested for that long. Three skills plus breaks will be about 50-60 minutes.
- **Scrimmage (option).** This is not an essential element. In many ways, it's undesirable because too many kids are standing around. Can use "**game situation**" drills as an alternative.
- **Plan B:** No matter what you do, sometimes it just won't work out (the drill might not work, the field might be too wet, and the players you wanted to focus on



might not show up). Always have an alternate plan; at least a few additional drills you could run in lieu of the ones you originally planned.

### **Where can I find drills and other information?**

There are many online sites and books. The Alpine LL website will provide information as we continue to build it out. There are already some great resources posted there and we will continue to add to it.

### **What makes a good drill?**

- **Everyone is doing something.** The worst drills have one kid doing something, while others watch (i.e. batting practice). If you have skills that are focused on an individual, set up a drill for the rest of the team and pull one kid out at a time for that individual skill.
- **Teaches something.** Sounds silly, but some drills don't sink in. Pick something that they can use at the next game.
- **Conditioning.** Not all drills should involve conditioning because the kids will drop from exhaustion, but some drills should include conditioning. Ideally, the kids don't know they're conditioning - no running just for running sake. Teaching base running here (or a fun base-running relay game) and you get both.
- **Age and skill level appropriate.** Don't teach turning a double-play to coach pitch because you'll lose most kids. Professional ball players do drills that Little League players might consider below them (i.e. practice batting off a tee). Don't dismiss a drill because it seems like a "little kid" drill. One famous SF Giants player with a knack for hitting balls into the Bay used to hit off a tee for 30 minutes prior to most games.
- **Younger Players.** Focus almost entirely on skills. The most important "strategy" concept at this point is to start thinking about what they are supposed to do. Backing up a base is a good skill to work on - it also helps keep outfielders awake. This is where you as a coach can make an immediate impact - teach them the basics! Throw and catch properly!
- **Middle.** Introduce more difficult skill concepts. For example, for an outfielder, the first step should be backwards. Positioning for the cutoff, low throws, etc.
- **Older Players.** Keep working on the skills. And more conditioning. Work on game situations. Push concepts like "every player moving on every play," proper footwork, etc.
- **Progressive.** The same drill can be used, but gets harder as they get better. Some drills get faster or farther, others introduce more complex skills. For



example, a drill that throws to the correct base might change to double-play. A drill running to a base, might add sliding.

- **Mix.** Mix some old and new drills.
- **Fun.** It is a good idea to break up a practice or end a practice with a little fun drill. It can still be a teaching opportunity - but give the kids something to look forward to (they are still kids). Throwing a ball into a garbage can from the outfield can teach good throwing technique & accuracy - while making it fun for the kids. A pack of trading cards (or gum or candy) for the kids who make it in the can! Or a relay race around the bases - split the team in half, one group goes to the right and one goes to the left. It's fun AND conditioning.

### **Warm Up and Stretching**

Warming up muscles a bit before stretching is a good idea. A short jog (two laps around the bases for little kids), and maybe a little throwing should cover it. Make it a team job - not a race. Warming up and stretching should take 5-10 minutes depending on age. Teach warm-ups as a major league skill. It's important both to prevent injury and to maximize performance. This is not goof off time. While playing catch - emphasize proper throwing and catching techniques. Too many coaches just let their kids go off into the outfield and warm up while they prep the field, etc. They are missing the most important fundamental we can teach these kids - proper catching and throwing techniques. This is where it ALL starts.

### **Teaching Skills**

If you don't know the details of the skills yourself (e.g. how to hold a baseball), then ask or check out the many excellent websites and other resources. You can also enlist the help of others with skills (older siblings are great!) and don't be afraid to ask another coach. Our goal here is to teach the kids after all!

Also, attend the Fundamentals Training offered by Alpine LL pre-season.

### **Scrimmage Sample**

There are many different ways to incorporate a scrimmage in a practice setting - don't stop doing the drills that improve the fundamentals - but the kids tend to enjoy this "game situation" setting and it can provide valuable teaching.

Fielders: Put players in the field (9-10 depending on level). Define a rotation (i.e. pitcher => catcher => first => second => short => left => center => right) that makes sense. You can adjust the scrimmage to the number of players at the practice (i.e. 4 on 4).

Batters: All the other players are batters.

The coach pitches, but "pitcher" fields balls to that position.



Batter hits. If they get on base, they become a base runner. If they score or get out, they become a fielder. Everyone rotates and the batter fills the empty spot. Everyone must run to his or her new position. If you want them to run more, have the rotation to positions that are far apart.

The advantage of this approach is every time someone is out, players have to move. You can come up with variations such as: the batter bats until he gets out; only rotate after 3 outs, then rotate x3. Another variation is to start with a 2-strike count to encourage kids to swing the bat and keep things moving. You get the idea...

**Where can I get more information?**

If you have other questions, we are here to help! You can contact a Division Commissioner for age appropriate information. You can contact our [Coaching Coordinator](#) for more information on resources. And please check out all the coaching resources on our website and at Little League International.