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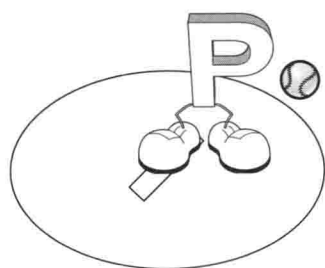
COACHING YOUTH BASEBALL

*Only the essential drills, practice plans,
plays, and coaching tips!*

DAN KELLER

Survival Guide for Coaching Youth Baseball

Dan Keller



Human Kinetics

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Survival Guide for Coaching Youth Baseball



Drill Finder

Drill title	Skill level			Skills									
	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced	Batting	Bunting	Throwing	Receiving	Fielding ground balls	Athleticism	Fielding fly balls	Pitching	Catching	Page no.
Slow Rollers and Fundamentals	X						X	X					32
Dueling Fungoes		X						X					35
Box Drills	X					X	X	X					38
Ground Ball–Quick Catch	X						X	X	X				40
Double-Play Feeds			X			X		X					41
Thumbs Up, Pinkies Down	X						X						52
Four-Corners Receiving	X						X						54
Quarterback Tosses		X							X	X			57
Kick Back Jack		X					X						59
Tennis Racket Fly Balls			X							X			60
Broken Throwing	X					X							70
One-Knee Partner Catch	X					X							72
Sprint, Stop, Throw		X				X			X				74
Reaction Throwing		X				X			X				76
Five-Step Throwing Routine			X			X							78
Group Freeze Drills	X										X		94
Bullpen Buddies	X			X							X	X	96
Chair Drills		X									X		97
Homework—Individual Freeze Drills		X									X		100
Pitchers Fielding Practice (PFPs)			X					X			X		102
Three-Step Hitting	X			X									120
Tee Work With Stance and Grip	X			X									122
Getting Hit		X		X					X				125
Darts or Short Toss		X		X	X								127
Soft Toss With Details			X	X									129

Preface

The youth baseball coach is a mythical creature similar to a cross between Joe Torre and Kermit the Frog, Tommy Lasorda and Big Bird, or Sparky Anderson and Spongebob Squarepants! Equal parts team manager, sport psychologist, and sideshow entertainer, the job of a youth baseball coach can be both challenging and stressful. But, although there will be unavoidable struggles and unnecessary drama along the way, this fulfilling role can easily be the most rewarding coaching position of a parent's "career."

So . . . you find yourself standing and staring, clipboard in one hand, bucket of balls in the other. Your shirt's tucked in, sunglasses are on, and a shiny whistle hangs from your neck. But even though you look like Joe Torre, you're worried that you might manage more like Spongebob—especially considering that you can't stop these 12 rug rats from chasing the butterflies and that the majority of your first practice is spent teaching the group to make left-hand turns at every base.

Be not afraid! The *Survival Guide for Coaching Youth Baseball* is here. The daunting task of guiding a group of far-from-professional athletes through a season full of practices, games, and pizza parties just got a heck of a lot easier. This book is aimed at first-time coaches or parents who have chosen (or have been chosen) to lead a team of 5- to 10-year-old athletes. It provides an efficient and effective plan for teaching the game of baseball while developing solid fundamental skills and keeping kids entertained, engaged, and involved. With the help of this book, the first-time coach will be able to do the following:

- Establish team rules and guidelines for playing time, positions, and game competition.
- Evaluate players to determine realistic goals for development and training.
- Organize practices that maximize both fun and skill development.
- Create game plans that maximize enjoyment for athletes, coaches, and parents.
- Provide age-appropriate tips, and implement effective drills.
- Build a solid athletic fundamental base in the areas of hitting, pitching, and fielding.


- Educate kids on the benefit of teamwork, fair play, trying their hardest, and losing with dignity.
- Show young athletes why and how they can build character, strength, and integrity through competition and teamwork.

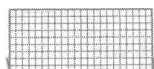
Making the commitment to coach youth baseball may or may not have been a well-thought-out decision. However, ensuring that the season is a successful one (defined by positive competition, athletic development, and maximum fun) most definitely can be. Coaching is an awesome opportunity to take a group of young athletes on the ride of their lives. The tips and strategies outlined in this book will help you plan a season full of terrific practices and fun games, so that everyone on board can have the best experience possible. Soon, you'll be known as the coach whom parents want their kids to play for. Those parents will know that your players get better and compete while having fun and learning to play the game the right way.



This book speaks to you in plain English. It's an easy read with clear-cut drill descriptions crafted to fit your age group. The following chapters highlight coaching and management techniques specific to running a youth team as well as provide guidance on teaching the fundamentals of baseball. And after you set down this book, you'll be armed with the knowledge to plan a practice in which players waste no time picking grass or digging holes.

This book is not about winning at all costs. Rather, winning becomes the by-product of putting a team in a position to maximize success and minimize the chance for injury. This is done with a balance of management skills and baseball knowledge—and a little bit of each goes a long way! Provided that you can keep the team learning and growing with smiles on their faces, winning will take care of itself, and the focus can remain on the development of your kids. This book embodies that philosophy and will be with you every step of the way. Read it once and then read it again. The *Survival Guide for Coaching Youth Baseball* is your guide to leading a group of individuals to a summer's worth of fun!

Key to Diagrams

-  Any player
-  Batter
-  Pitcher
-  Catcher
-  Shortstop
-  First-base player
-  Second-base player
-  Third-base player
-  Left fielder
-  Center fielder
-  Right fielder
-  Coach (or assistant coach or parent)
-  Baseball
-  Cone
-  Empty bucket
-  Bucket of balls



-  Path of runner or fielder
-  Path of hit or throw

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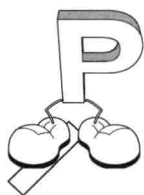
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Help! Where Do I Start?

You've received your call-up . . . your cup of coffee . . . your opportunity to make it big as a baseball manager! But this is not the major leagues, with chartered jets, five-star hotels, and a roster full of the world's best players. Instead, your call-up came from the volunteer league board member letting you know that you've been "selected" to manage a local youth baseball team. Your cup of coffee came at the manager's meeting, where you listened to the rules and responsibilities of coaching, wondering why you ever got yourself into such a role. But with that behind you and the challenges of a season ahead of you, your opportunity to make it big is entirely real!

Never before have you had such an exciting opportunity to lead 12 young athletes through the time of their lives—they will be growing and learning, competing and complaining, succeeding and failing. Friendships will be forged, personalities shaped, and situations experienced that simply cannot be simulated away from the fields of competition. Coaching can be an exhilarating roller-coaster ride of character development and physical and mental improvement, with the chance to teach the fundamentals of a great game along the way.

A youth baseball coach can become entirely overwhelmed by the task of managing a team. After all, the coach must deal with the pressures of

practices, games, and parents. And if you're a first-time coach, you may be facing a lot of pressure regarding topics that you know little about. Relax! If you can plan a single effective practice—which this book will assist you in doing—you can coach a team. It may seem intimidating now, but in four months you'll look back and laugh at how much fun you had. The show—maybe not “The Show”—but at least *a show* is about to begin!

Getting Started—Learning the Basics

Before the first practice, you need to have a basic understanding of baseball rules, field size and dimensions, and the minimum equipment necessary. Use the following information to prepare for early-season practices and to help plan the all-important preseason team meeting.

Know the Field

Baseball is “America's game,” and the baseball field may be one of the most recognizable shapes on earth. From above, the field of play resembles an ice cream cone; home plate represents the bottom of the cone, and the outfield fence serves as the top of a well-rounded ice cream scoop. The baseball field has four bases, two batter's boxes, a pitcher's mound, and either 9 or 10 distinct positions:

1. Pitcher
2. Catcher
3. First base
4. Second base
5. Third base
6. Shortstop
7. Left field
8. Center field
9. Right field
10. Fourth outfielder (youngest levels)

Although most games will be played on a baseball field resembling figure 1.1, many practices will be held at city parks, neighborhood greenbelts, or school kickball areas. The field dimensions can vary wildly. Sometimes the field may include a pitching mound, backstop, and groomed infield. And other times, the field might be made up of a small patch of grass ridden with gopher holes and a line of bushes marking foul territory. Early in the season, you should find out where your squad

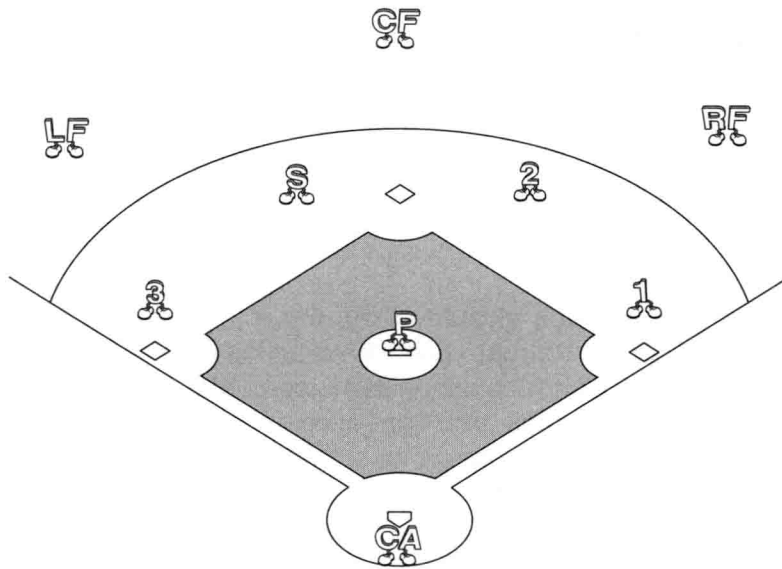


Figure 1.1 Fielder's positions.

will be practicing and exactly what the field dimensions and conditions are. Your practice plan will be directly related to the space, facilities, and equipment available.

Some leagues provide field space and specific times for your team to practice. In other leagues, the fields are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. Sometimes coaches or parents will even volunteer to cut out of work early simply to get to the park and reserve a field (similar to the kid who left the lunch table early to ensure that he got the first game of tetherball). These communities have an unwritten rule rewarding the first person to be at a field in the afternoon. More strict leagues (often those that use fields on city parks) keep all teams OFF of the fields until game play begins. This is the toughest scenario, because the teams are sent scrambling to find field space on their own. In all cases, the search to find field space is a real issue but one that can be overcome with proper practice planning and space management. Find your practice area, map out the available and safe grounds, and get to work maximizing your time spent there.

Once your practice area is established, become familiar with the facilities. Are there restrooms available? Is there a safe area for athlete drop-off and pickup? Will you be able to use extra batting cages, bullpen areas, or even open grass for skill training or multiple stations? And just how much time will you have available on the field of play? This information will prove critical in mapping out and planning for a fun and busy practice with lots of movement and varying activities.

Coaching Equipment

Like that “golfer gadget guy,” a baseball coach can quickly become inundated with the latest gimmicks and equipment designed to aid baseball performance. And although each of these fine pieces of technology likely has a time and place, most are not critical to the success of an eight-year-old. Here is a reasonable list of things to have with you when running a youth team:

- **Items that a coach should carry.** To run an effective workout, a coach should carry a clipboard (with the practice plan), a whistle, and a watch . . . and the coach should look darn good doing it. Sunglasses with reflective lenses, eye black, and tight elastic shorts are *not* necessary. However, a cell phone for emergency purposes is required and should be kept in a pocket or readily available nearby.

- **Gear bag.** Coaches of teams with players under seven years of age should use tennis balls or safety baseballs (soft stitch) to help avoid injuries as young kids learn to throw and catch. Small plastic disc cones, a batting tee, and a first aid kit can all be carried in a large gear bag. Most off-the-shelf first aid kits will work well, but be sure that the kit includes an instant cold pack, elastic bandages, Band-Aids, and CPR flashcards. Other recommended equipment includes Wiffle balls, a catch net (pop-up net for catching balls batted off a tee or from a soft toss), and an extra glove, bat, and helmet to accommodate those individuals in the rotating role of *forgetful kid* and *excuse-filled parent*.

- **Baseballs.** Simply put, the more baseballs you have, the easier your practice will be to run. The first-time coach will need to collect as many baseballs as possible. Whether they are safety or regular baseballs, the number of balls dictates the ability to break the team into smaller groups and run multiple drills at once. This allows assistant coaches to keep kids entertained, engaged, and having fun. Most coaches use buckets to gather and carry baseballs, and every coach should have a minimum of one full bucket that can be divided into at least two workout areas.

- **Coach's binder.** This administrative binder can be kept in your car or in the team gear bag. It should include emergency procedures as well as contact information and medical conditions (including allergies or health issues) for each player. The binder should also include any specific pickup or drop-off guidelines, birth certificates, league paperwork, and schedules (for practices, games, and snacks).

Player Equipment

Whether seeking equipment for your own kid or for the other 11 kids you are about to adopt, you can rest assured that a player only needs a minimal amount of gear in order to participate in a full practice. Most kids nowadays bring their own supplies to each event, including a helmet, bat, glove, and protective cup (never too early to protect one's manhood). Players usually carry these supplies in a baseball bag.

- **Player equipment bag.** Although any backpack or bag will do, baseball-specific athletic bags are available for purchase at sporting goods stores and can help to avoid lost equipment. These bags have a long pocket available to hold a bat, and they also have enough space to cram a helmet, cleats, and glove inside. Batting gloves are a nice option to include, and a baseball with family initials can make this bag ready for a big-league workout. Pack a bottle of water, and be sure to label everything with a last name and phone number. Kids may struggle to hit or pitch, but they usually excel at leaving their equipment behind! Teams will often be issued helmets, so be sure to ask about this before purchasing a helmet.

- **Player uniform.** At practice, athletes should wear baseball pants, a protective cup, and a hat. Some coaches like their athletes to wear a team T-shirt or other specifics, but this will vary. Athletes should bring a jacket and both cleats and athletic shoes. Here's a great tip to keep cars and homes clean: Instruct your athletes to arrive and leave in regular athletic shoes. They should keep their cleats inside the bag until they reach the ball field. At that time, the athletes take the cleats out of the bag, put them on, and put the athletic shoes in the bag. After practice, they reverse this procedure and put the normal athletic shoes on. Athletes should be sure to knock any dirt off of the cleats before jamming them into the bag. Your car will thank me later!

Know the Rules

The age of your players and the organization you participate with will determine many rules for competition. These include the distance between the bases, the distance from the pitching mound to home plate, and applicable rules or limitations related to playing time, positions played, and number of pitches thrown. At the youngest ages (4-6 years),

tees will be used in place of any pitching. The next level up, typically 5 to 7 years of age, will involve coach pitching—something that is far more pressure packed than you might have imagined! The rules vary from league to league, but the adventure of kid-pitch baseball typically begins at age 7. Both basepath and pitching mound distances increase as the age of the athletes increases (table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Base Distance and Mound Distance for Various Ages

Age	Little League (bases / mound)	PONY League (bases / mound)	Travel Ball (bases / mound)
5	60 ft / NA	50 ft / NA	55 ft / NA
6	60 ft / NA	50 ft / NA	55 ft / NA
7	60 ft / 46 ft	55 ft / 38 ft	60 ft / NA
8	60 ft / 46 ft	55 ft / 38 ft	60 ft / 40 ft
9	60 ft / 46 ft	60 ft / 44 ft	65 ft / 44 ft
10	60 ft / 46 ft	60 ft / 44 ft	65 ft / 46 ft
11	60 ft / 46 ft	70 ft / 48 ft	70 ft / 50 ft
12	60 ft / 46 ft	70 ft / 48 ft	70 ft / 50 ft
13	90 ft / 60.5 ft	80 ft / 54 ft	80 ft / 54 ft
14	90 ft / 60.5 ft	80 ft / 54 ft	90 ft / 60.5 ft
15	90 ft / 60.5 ft	90 ft / 60.5 ft	90 ft / 60.5 ft
16	90 ft / 60.5 ft	90 ft / 60.5 ft	90 ft / 60.5 ft
17	90 ft / 60.5 ft	90 ft / 60.5 ft	90 ft / 60.5 ft
18	90 ft / 60.5 ft	90 ft / 60.5 ft	90 ft / 60.5 ft

Several major parent organizations are involved in youth baseball. Each organization plays under specific guidelines for field dimensions, playing time, and pitch counts. The organization associated with your league will issue specific bylaws and a rules handbook that you can study to determine what rules are applicable to the age group of your team.

Your local league will also follow rules on aspects such as game length, uniforms, and equipment allowed (e.g., bat regulations). Rules for game competition will include the strict or liberal interpretation of the strike zone, whether or not the teams will officially keep score (players are pretty skilled at determining who is winning regardless), and whether umpires will warn managers and athletes before enforcing other noncritical rules

(balks, turning in after running through first base, and so on). You'll also need to delegate responsibility, or schedule your own time, to prep the field before play and after practice or games (cleanup crew).

Team Meetings and Communication

Your first task as a new manager is to hold a team meeting. This meeting is for both the players and their families, and it should be held off of the diamond at a team member's house (better start cleaning). The initial team meeting provides a chance to meet teammates and parents alike. At this meeting, you can break the ice and clearly communicate team goals as well as your own coaching philosophies.

The key to a smooth season as manager is honest and consistent communication. By agreeing to take this youth baseball team, you have signed on as a manager of people—youth and adult—and communication skills are an absolute necessity. This meeting is your first opportunity to establish the guidelines for the season ahead, to let parents know what will be expected of them, and to secure as much help as possible.

Team Meeting Highlights

Open the meeting by introducing yourself and each athlete and family. These are the players whom *you* scouted during tryouts and *you* selected during the draft. Get excited about your squad and pass that energy along to the families for the upcoming season. Share your own contact information and discuss important issues clearly and quickly—no one likes a yawner. Here are some issues that should be discussed:

- **Emergency information.** Protect yourself and your players. Collect vital information from parents by having them fill out a medical card (most leagues provide standardized and organization-mandated cards). Ideally, you should be CPR trained, carry a cell phone at all times, and have emergency supplies and procedures on hand. Make sure the forms include an area where parents can provide their own contact information and can share any sensitive information or other requests.

- **Schedules.** Parents appreciate early notice so that they can plan around your practices. Before the initial team meeting, you should finalize the practice schedule leading up to the first week of games. You can always switch days or times if necessary, but doing this early will help with practice attendance and allow for consistent development. Clearly communicate your expectations regarding punctuality and attendance—it is appropriate to expect everyone else's commitment to match your own.