

Dear Coach or Manager:

The following represents a rough description of a Pre-Game Practice Routine that could be used with teams from the 10-12 yr old divisions and up. The routine is a fun and focused way to have your players practice what you teach before every game. Al Price has used parts or all of the routine for the past 4 years with the teams he has managed at the Major and Junior Levels. The description of the routine is a rough draft at the moment. We will polish this document up in the future with graphics, pictures and use a more professional looking format...for now this should be of some help to you. Of course you will recognize that many of the drills and skills are included in the training manuals, videos and CD-ROM that Al and I have written and published for Little League. You don't have to do it all...if you only want to set aside 45 minutes pre-game just choose the parts that you like that fit your team the best.

Pre- Game Routine - 60 minute pre-game plan

Ask the players to try to get to the field on game day 45 minutes before scheduled game time. As a coach get to the field 60 minutes before and offer to give early birds a chance to participate in whiffle hitting.

Pre-Game Routine/Practice may include all or some of the following or drills depending on how much time you have and how well organized you are and how much the players hustle from drill to drill. The details for each part of the Pre-Game routine are listed below.

15 minutes	Early Bird Whiffle Hitting
6-8 minutes	Warm-up Exercises
4-6 minutes	Base running Warm-up
5-8 minutes	Playing Catch...Short-Medium-Long
3 minutes	Hat Drill – Force Play for points
3 minutes	Hat Drill – Tag Play for points
3 minutes	Partners Soft Toss Fly Balls
3-5 minutes	Partners Ground Balls
15 minutes	Team Infield/Outfield Warm-up
...at same time	Pitcher & Catcher Warm-up
5 minutes	Review Coaches Signs and Pre-Game Meeting

Total Time for the complete routine is between 60 minutes to 70 minutes...and as you can see it is fun for the players because there is hitting, throwing and catching competitions, lots of game simulations and the pre-game is full of action. From a Coaches point of view it is like running an extra 1 hour practice...from the players point of view even if they only get into 3 innings during the ball game they have had lots of fun and action during Pre-Game. As a coach you will need to teach each of the activities of the Pre-Game routine during practices then put the complete plan together on Game Days. If you plan it out well...the players will take tremendous pride in it because they are organized to show their best skills to parents and friends and their opponents each game day. If you stay with the same routine all year you will see tremendous improvement and the players will notice that they are improving as well as the year goes on.

Early Bird – Whiffle Hitting

(from 60 minutes to 45 minutes before game time)

Everyone loves to hit. It is a very difficult skill to master so players need to practice every chance they can get. As a coach you cannot afford to spend more than 20-30 minutes of any practice on hitting because players need practice time to develop skills in all areas. Early Bird hitting provides a motivation for players to be on time even early and also provides extra hitting practice on every game day.

Drill Description:

Get to the ballpark early as a coach. Set up a whiffle hitting station in the outfield. Players that arrive early take some warm-up swings and then participate in whiffle ball hitting rounds. Players number off and hit in the order they arrive. Coach's position 5-6 steps away with pile of whiffle balls...kneels down or sits on a bucket and tosses whiffle balls to the hitter overhand styled dart throwing action. Other players spread out and gather up any balls that are hit and put them in a bucket 10 steps behind the coach.

Note:

This is not a mandatory part of the pre-game, so in many cases not every player will get a chance to hit because they did not get to the field early. At 45 minutes before game time you start the official pregame routine with the Warm-up Exercises.

Exercise Routine

(8 minutes exercise warm-up)

(the full exercise routine from the time the team jogs from the dugout to the outfield until they finish the 12-14 exercise you have taught them takes no more than 8 minutes)

Share the game starting lineup with the players

Great time to walk around and talk to the individuals on your team about the starting lineup. Have your complete line-up done before you go to the park and then make any adjustments necessary 30 minutes before game time. It is probably a good idea to tell your players and their parents that in order to start in the game they need to be at the diamond ready to go no later than 30 minutes before game time.

Basering warm-up (this part of the pre-game should not take more than 4-6 minutes)

It is great practice to finish off your exercise warm-up with a series of running routines. Simulate real game situations so that the players continue to practice what they have learned from you in practice.

- **From a Base – steal**

Players place their gloves down on the outfield base line about 2 steps apart. Each player uses their own glove as 1st base and sets up in their proper starting base running stance.

Coach calls out ready – go and the players sprint from the base past the coach the length of a baseline. The players then jog back to their gloves and repeat on the coach's call 2 more times.

- **From a Base – Relaxed...Ready... Shuffle Off...Go!**

Players take their starting position and on the coaches calls Relaxed...Ready...shuffle off...go!
At Relaxed... each player is facing home plate hands resting on knees left foot on the ground with side of the foot up against their glove. (The pitcher is not on the mound but has not started wind-up motion)

At ready... each player takes hands off their knees, shifts weight to balls of feet, sticks butt out, legs bent. (The Pitcher has started the wind-up)

Shuffle Off...each player takes a crossover step and staying low shuffle off 2-3 steps and gets into a ready position ready to react to the play. (The shuffle off action starts when the ball crosses the plate...the player is 2-3 steps off the base in a ready position as the catcher makes the play)

...Go!! Every player crosses over and takes 2-3 sprinting strides toward the next base (go means that in the game the catcher has fumbled or missed the ball)

- **From a Base – Relaxed...Ready...Shuffle Off...Back!**

Relaxed...Ready...Shuffle Off...these actions are the same as above.

...Back Every player crosses over and sprints back to the base. (Back means that in the game the catcher has caught the ball clean and is in a position to make a throw to the base to pick off the runner)

- **Hat Drill – Force Play** (3 minute drill... same distance as 1st to 3rd throw)

The hat drill – force play is used to practice a long strong throw to a player positioned at a hat (base) and for the person catching the ball practicing the proper footwork for a force play. Using the hat as a base causes both players to focus just like in a game situation. The player receiving the ball places the side of their power foot up against the brim of their hat just like they would at a base setting up for a force play. A point system turns it into a competition. The 2 players playing catch are a team. 2 points for a good throw and catch that does not pull the player's foot off the hat. 1 point if the player is pulled off the hat but is able to make the catch and quickly return to the hat. 0 points for a missed throw. (remind the thrower to take their time during this drill so that they use good footwork and work on their accuracy...this is not a speed drill)

- **Hat Drill – Tag Play** (3 minute drill... same distance as 1st to 3rd throw)

The hat drill – tag play is used to practice the long strong throw to a player positioned at a hat (base) and to have the player receiving the ball to practice the proper technique to tag a runner sliding into a base. Using the hat as a base causes both players to focus just like in a game situation. The player receiving the ball takes a wide low stance with his chest over the hat, glove leg forward, and hands out front in a little fingers together palms up position. The goal of the play is to catch the ball and then quickly get the glove down in front of the hat simulating a tag play. A point system turns it into a competition. 0 points if the player misses the ball. 1 point if the player has to leave his position to make the catch before he returns to finish the tag play. 2 points if the player catches the ball anywhere in line with the triangle formed by his legs when the player is in the proper wide low stance. 3 points if the throw and catch is right on or perfectly in line with the hat.

Partners Soft Toss – Fly Balls (2-3 minute drill... length of a baseline)

The goal of this drill is to get all of the players warmed up for fly balls and for each player to get used to the type of sky and clouds on game day.

Partners stand the length of baseline apart and 4-5 steps away from the other groups next to them. 1 player tosses the ball up like a fly ball to his partner. The partner practices moving under the ball and catching it in an outfielders position with 2 hands, with the glove in front of the glove side shoulder and with glove leg forward... legs bent and butt out in a strong ready position for the throw. Have the players take their time and try to toss the ball close to their partner or at the most a couple of steps away from your partner. We are not causing the players to make tough catches...in fact we are just trying to build confidence and get all players ready for the game.

Partners Ground Balls Each Way (2-3 minute drill... 3 steps more than a baseline apart)

The goal of this drill is to give all of the players a chance to practice receiving ground balls and build up their confidence prior to the game. Your players partner up and stand the length of a baseline plus a couple of steps apart and roll ground balls to each other. The first person rolls 5 ground balls the other fields each ground ball with the proper footwork and throws to their partner. The ground ball should bounce at least 3 times before reaching the partner and are not thrown hard. After the player fields the ground ball and throws it to his partner he must turn around and jog back to his starting position and assume a ready position before his partner rolls the next ball. Remember we are not trying to test our partners with tough plays and 1 or 2 hitters...we are practicing the footwork and gaining confidence for the game.

Pitcher – Catcher Warm-up Routine

At about 25-30 minutes before game time the starting pitcher and catcher move to the bull pen area and go through their warm-up routine. This usually happens right after the complete team warm-up routine and during the infield/outfield routine for the two teams. It is a good idea to have a coach near the 2 warming up to help them keep focused and following the basic routine you have set up for your pitchers

- **Rounding a Base...Ready...Go...Round It...Go!**

Players need to practice rounding a base on a potential extra base hit. A simple little pre-game drill can provide them all with the practice they need.

Each player stands next to their glove and walks 3 steps back down the base line and takes 2 steps off the line and then stands facing his glove and gets ready to run toward the glove and round the base.

Ready...each player gets into a lower stance ready to run

Go...each player runs toward their glove/base at an angle to round it

Round it...each player steps on the inside of their glove with either foot and takes 3-4 running strides in a straight line toward the next base...then stops in a ready position looking toward the outfield ready to react to the play...

Go...each player crosses over and takes 2-3 sprinting strides toward the next base (go means that the outfielder fumbled or misplayed the ball)

- **Rounding a Base...Ready...Go...Round It...Back**

Ready...Go...Round It...these actions are the same as above

...**Back** Every player crosses over and sprints back to the base. (Back means that in the game the outfielder has caught the ball clean and is in a position to pick off the runner)

Playing Catch (this complete routine, short-medium-long throws lasts about 5-8minutes)

- **Technique throwing and catching** (start 1/2 the length of a baseline)

Short distance soft toss is used to practice the complete catch, grip, starter step, arm down, arm back, step and throwing and catching technique. Players do not throw for power and should seldom miss their target. You could start with whiffle balls at this distance and play catch barehanded or use regulation balls with gloves on

- **2-step throw – short power step** (back up to 2/3 of the length of a base line)

When playing catch at this distance each player is to use a **short starter step** to set up complete throwing motion.

- **2-step throw – medium power step** (back up to full length of a baseline)

When playing catch the length of the baseline ask each player to use a **medium length starter step** to set up complete throwing motion. Good players will start to hop into the starter step and quicken up their footwork to start the throw.

- **2-step throw – long power step** (back up to 1st to 3rd distance)

Every player needs to practice long strong throws at a distance similar to the typical throws made in a ball game. The throw across the diamond from 1st to 3rd or from home plate to 2nd represents the length of a long throw every player may face in a ball game. It is also the same distance of a long throw from Shortstop or 3rd Base to 1st base and.... a throw that the outfielder will have to make to 2nd base or to the cutoff man on a throw to the plate and...obviously it is the same length of the throw a catcher makes to 2nd on a steal play.

Good players will take a very strong and much longer starter step to make a long strong throw.

This is also a good time for the players to practice skidding the ball to their partner on one long bounce. Players need to practice catching the long bounce from a low throw.

Infield Play/Practice

(may take 10-15 minutes if you opt to take infield practice)

If you decide to take infield practice take a bucket of balls to the plate so that if a player misses a ball and it goes to the outfield that you can immediately pick up another and give them another chance. Don't waste time during infield practice chasing missed balls. Pick up all the missed balls after the warm-up.

Remember you do not have to hit ground balls for infield practice...you can throw them so that you get more chances in and also so that you can control them. There are many different ways to do infield practice. Make sure that each player gets several chances to field and throw to 1st base...a few chances throwing the ball to 2nd and 3rd base and a few chances to field the ball and throw to the plate. Provide the catcher with chances to throw balls to each base and a chance to field a couple of bunts and a couple of chances to catch pop-up foul balls.

Outfield Play/Practice

(may take 10-15 minutes at same time as infield Practice)

While your team is taking Infield practice have a coach hit a few fly balls so that they get used to catching fly balls at regular outfield distance and off of a bat. Have the players line up at the fence on behind each other...and have 1 player move up to a position about 10 steps in front of the fence at a time to take a turn on the ball hit. The player makes the play and throws it in low and skids (1-hops it) into the coach.

Coaches Signs for the Day

While the other team is taking infield/outfield practice go over the signs and remind the players of the key for the day.

