



Player Development Workbook
For Madison Little League
Ages 8-10

By Mark LaFontaine

Ingraining basic fundamentals and making the game fun are the major objectives in working with 8-10 year-old players. Successfully rooting sound fundamental in young players will give them the confidence and trust to have success in the game and stick with it.

Work on the right things and keep it simple and you'll see young players develop right before your eyes. Below is a listing of the fundamental skills that should be developed for players in this age group along with drill work designed for the task. The last section of the workbook contains a sample practice plan. Feel free to call or email with any questions; mark.lafontaine@yale.edu or (203) 627-0006

I. Objectives and Drills for Fundamental Skills

Throwing

Key Objectives:

- Grip: players are gripping the ball properly across the seams with two fingers or three.
- Alignment: Players are consistently aligning their front shoulder with their target.
- Separation: Players are exchanging the ball in the middle of their chest and separating their glove and throwing hand with thumbs down.
- Shuffle: Players should be able to coordinate straight-line shuffle footwork with their throwing.

Drills:

- Ready/Set/Go Progression
- Poppers on One Knee
- Throwing on One Knee
- Shuffle and Throw

Catching

Key Objectives:

- Pocket Awareness: players should be able to control their glove and catch the ball consistently in the pocket.
- Glove Adjustments: players should be able to adjust for balls that are up, down, right or left.

Drills:

- Pocket Toss
- Around the World
- Quick Hands
- Wide Receiver or Divers with Throw

Fielding Ground Balls

Key Objectives:

- Proper Footwork: players properly execute "right, left, pickup the ball" footwork.
- Proper Fielding Position: players field the ball with "wide base, flat back, soft hands".
- Momentum Through the Ball: players are able to approach, field and throw in a fluid motion.

Drills:

- Funnel and Discard
- Dead Ball Approach

- Ball in Hand with Throwing Footwork
- Rolled Ground Balls

Hitting

Key Objectives:

- Grip: players consistently align knocking knuckles with easy pressure
- Stance: players are square to the plate, as wide as their bat, sit a little, angle a little with hands off back shoulder
- Balance: players are able to maintain balance in their stance, at impact and hold their finish.
- Impact: players can go from stance to contact points in slow motion with short path and hands tight.
- Bat Awareness and Control: players become comfortable handling and controlling the bat.

Drills:

- Ready, Set, Go Progression, including slow motion swings
- Stance to impact slow motion with tee
- Two Tee Drills
- Flips or Tee with Pre-Impact and Pause

II. Practice Plan

Agilities: 5 minutes high-knee skip, shuffle, chariochi, backwards run, secondary lead, steal

Group Throwing, Fielding and Hitting Progressions: 10 minutes; 2 lines of 5 or 6 players spaced safely and evenly. Coach leads progression work

- Throwing progressions: the progression is "ready, set, go". Players start in an athletic ready position with thumbs up ("drive the bus"); on "ready" they jump and turn their bodies so they are aligned with coach with their throwing hand in their glove in the middle of their chest; on "set" players separate their hands with thumbs down in "goal post" position; on "go" players shuffle and throw and imaginary ball at game speed toward coach. 10-12 controlled reps.
- Fielding Progressions: Dead Ball Step Up 5 reps, Dead Ball Approach 5 reps, Dead Ball Pick-Up 5 reps
- Hitting progressions: to build an awareness of the bat, its weight, and the barrel. Overhead lumberjacks (10), lumberjacks into the side of the tree (10), bat dips with right and left hands (10 each, hold bat half-way up), mirror drill (players follow coach's barrel, "same direction, same speed"); "Ready, set, go" progressions: pendulum swings, on "ready" players get into their stance which should be relaxed and athletic; pendulum swings-"ready" for 5 reps then add "set", on set players stride softly while pushing their hands back slightly creating rhythm and load, do 5 reps; add "go" for a full swing for 5 reps. Slow motion swings, do 5 slow motion swings so players learn to control their bodies and the bat, strive for balance and hands leading barrel into impact.

Station Work: Hitting/Throwing/Fielding 8 minutes each, 3 or 4 players per station

- Hitting: one coach needed, 1) ready, set, go off tee, 2) slow motion to impact tee, 3) flips with impact rehearsal; all tee and flip work into pop up net
- Throwing: two coaches ideal, 2 groups. 1) poppers on one knee, 3 reps then switch. glove under throwing elbow, proper grip on ball, pop to coach about 8 feet away with forearm and wrist pop. 2 sets of 3. 2) "Ready, break, throw" on one knee to coach about 15 feet away, 3 sets of 3. 3) Shuffle and Throw, 2 sets of 3 at 20 feet, then again from 40 feet, then 60 feet until time up. Players start with ball in hand, hand in glove in the middle of the chest, straight line shuffle and throw.

- Fielding: Pocket Toss or Around the World 6 ball, 2 sets; Quick Hands 6 ball, 2 sets; Funnel and Discard (wide base, flat back, soft hands) 6 ball, 2 sets; then do ball drop fielding position with short throw to coach (need 2 coaches for this drill); rolled ground balls with short throw/throw

Game Time: pick one fundamental skill drill for competition and do it for 5 minutes, then play a tee or soft toss infield scrimmage for the rest of practice. No coaching during "Game Time", just fun.

- Fundamental Skills Games 5 minutes: Pick a different drill for each practice. Hitting: Target Practice Hitting: off tee or soft toss, players get 3 swings to hit ball into pop up net placed in front of the pitchers mound. Throwing: Target Practice Throwing: players are in center field, given a ball and take turns throwing to a pop up net placed behind third base, 3 or 4 rounds count how many balls team gets in the net, coach can set a goal, say 10, so players have a goal to reach together. Fielding: Wide Receiver Drill: coach is on one knee, players run from foul line and coach tosses ball underhanded as they run to see who can make a "highlight catch", distance of the toss for this age group should be about 40 feet. Then go back in the other direction. Do four sets.
- Infield Sandlot Scrimmage: for remaining time. Tee or Soft Toss. 2 times through the order or 6 outs then switch. players play different positions in the field each time they go back out. No need to run bases at the end as players have run during the scrimmage.