

2016 Byfield-Newbury Little League T-Ball Guide for Coaches

Introduction: Byfield-Newbury thanks you for volunteering to coach in our league. We are an all-volunteer organization so we deeply appreciate the efforts of each person involved. T-Ball is our introductory level of play and, therefore, your efforts in providing a fun learning experience are very important both to the player's enjoyment of this season and to the continued success of our league.

General: Per our website, "T-Ball is our introductory level of play. Coaches work with players to develop basic throwing, catching, and hitting skills. The goal is to have fun so the children enjoy the introduction to baseball with their family and friends. Tee Ball meets once or twice per week for a combined 1/2 hour practice and 1/2 hour game."

Coaching T-Ball is fun and rewarding, but does present some challenges. Most of the players (many of whom are in kindergarten or pre-school) have little experience with organized sports in general or baseball in particular. Therefore, coaching should focus on the most basic skills (throwing over-hand, catching with a glove, batter's stance) and rules of the game (i.e. running to first after a hit, throwing to first after retrieving a hit ball in the field). You will find that perhaps the most important "skill" at this level is simply to pay attention and to "line-up" for batting, etc. It will help if you enlist 2-3 other parents from your team in order to assist with these efforts.

Logistics: All games are played at the Upper Green in Newbury (Far Outfield away from the minor league home plate). On many nights, there will be minor league games played on the main field so please be mindful of that and make sure your players and parents refrain from interfering with those games. There is plenty of room in the Far Outfield for both T-Ball and minor games on the same nights. Our league has had this set-up since its inception. This also affords the opportunity for the T-Ball players to watch the older players in minor league games after their T-Ball games finish and we invite you to do so. T-Ball "games" are played from 5:30-6:30 on the nights listed on the schedule, with the first half hour of each session being a practice with your own team and the second half hour being a controlled scrimmage between the teams listed on the schedule.

Rainouts/Cancellations/Postponements: If there is inclement weather of any kind (rain, cold etc.) that the coaches feel would interfere with the players' enjoyment of a game on any particular night, we suggest you cancel the game by 3 p.m. on the day of the game. To do so, the coaches who are playing one another should simply be in touch by email or phone and make the decision to cancel or postpone. This year, games are scheduled to be played on Mondays, Wednesdays and some Thursdays at the Upper Green. However, the Upper Green is available for the T-Ball teams on any night of the week. No other teams use the Far Outfield at the Upper Green. Therefore, if you need to make up a game that was canceled due to rain, simply contact the opposing coach and pick a day (even weekends are available) and play the game at your convenience.

Practices: Teams are permitted to have practices independent of the game nights listed on the schedule, but are not required to do so. This is your call as a coach. In the past, most teams have had an initial practice or two prior to the first official game to introduce yourself and to hand out uniforms, etc. If possible, this is recommended so that the players have their uniforms prior to Opening Day ceremonies. In general, most teams do not have independent practices once the season starts because, again in general, two “games” per week is enough for players and parents at this age. We leave this to your discretion with the input from your parents. If you want to have a “practice” after the season gets underway we suggest you do so on any night (or any time on weekends) at the Upper Green when there are no other T-Ball games being played. You do not need to contact the league to do so as the Far Outfield will always be available for such a practice (no other levels of play use this space).

Tips for Coaching:

- (1) Prepare an outline of drills you intend to do prior to the game/practice (the 30 minutes of “practice” time on each game day will go by quickly)
- (2) Coaches (and hopefully your assistants) should arrive 10 minutes early to set up a spot to practice and set up your drills. There are four teams playing each night so the teams need to spread out in the Far Outfield. There is plenty of room for all four teams as long as the coaches communicate with each other at the start.
- (3) Have a “dugout”. Cheap cones, Frisbees or whatever you have laying around that can serve the purpose of creating four corners in a rectangle can work. Teach the players that they stay in the dugout sitting down, and their personal EQUIPMENT stays in the dugout until it is their turn to play in the field or hit. This is an invaluable tool to help prevent lost gloves/hats, players sitting in their parents’ laps every half inning, needing to retrieve your next hitter from feeding ducks in the pond, etc. Also, when you need to speak with them all at once, call “Dugout” and enforce that the expectation is to hustle to the dugout and be sitting, looking up at you, awaiting information or instruction.
- (4) Coach very basic fundamentals and try to keep it fun for the kids.
 - (a) Throwing: A basic goal for the season is to have all players be able to throw overhand by the end of the season. Many of the players will still want to throw underhand as they have done so from an early age. You may want to start the first few practices with each player throwing to the coach so you can evaluate where the player’s stand with regard to this skill. At this age, there are some players who will be far advanced from others and, therefore, pairing the strong throwers/catchers together in drills is important so that less skilled players are not overmatched.
 - (b) Catching: As with throwing, many children learn to catch “underhanded” at an early age and will continue to do so even with a glove on their hand. A goal for the season is to get the players to turn the glove “overhand” whenever a ball is thrown to them above their waistline. This is important for development of the player in general but also is a safety issue. Players who attempt to catch a ball “underhanded” that is thrown above their waist will often have the ball deflect off the heel of the glove and upwards toward their face. If they turn the glove upward (catch “overhanded”) these deflections toward the face are

eliminated. One suggestion, particularly early in the season, is to have all players throw to each other with tennis balls (or other similarly soft balls). Players who get hurt trying to catch a harder ball will often shy away from the catching drills for the remainder of the season.

- (c) Hitting: Safety first! Only one player should hold a bat at a time. There should be no practice swings, ever, outside of the coaches' direct instruction. A batter must always have a helmet on when holding a bat. Hitting properly will be foreign to most players at this age and will be a challenge to coach. Proper hitting technique will require the children to work with their parents at home and most players at this age do not do so. You can, however, work on the basics at your practices and in your games to improve this skill by year end. There are a number of good youtube videos on the topic that are easy to access and we suggest you do so prior to the start of the season. The very basics of coaching how to hit at this level are as follows: (1) right handed batters should have their left hand on the bottom of their grip of the bat and their right hand on top (and vice versa for lefties) (2) the hands should be touching, not spread apart (3) feet should be approximately shoulder width apart with knees bent in an athletic position with weight back on right for a right handed batter and left for a left handed batter (4) when in the batter's box getting ready to hit from the Tee, the bat should be raised to a position by the ear (we often tell batters to act like they are holding/listening to a cell phone) (5) if the bottom of the bat were a flashlight, the light should be shining directly into the opposite batter's box from where the batter is standing (6) the swing should be directly down toward the ball on the Tee and follow straight through the ball (batters should not try to "get under" the ball to hit the ball in the air).
- (d) Fielding: Goals for the season should include learning to field a ground ball, learning to play your own area in the infield (i.e. not try to get balls that are hit to another player), and learning that after fielding a ground ball you should throw to first base. Teach the players the basics of having their glove on the ground when fielding a grounder and how to rotate to throw to first base. If you have time, you may want to teach the players how to catch a pop up as well, but we will be happy if all players leave T-Ball knowing how to field a grounder and why they are throwing to first base.
- (e) Running: When in doubt, **Run the Bases!** This helps teach the rules of the game and, perhaps more importantly, helps to regain attention or provide an energy reset. You may want to let your team know that anytime you call "Bases" they are to line up next to home plate and march around the bases, calling out the names of each base as they step on it. As the season progresses, they can speed up and ultimately run the bases, but it is best to have them stay in line and discourage passing, since that becomes a tumbling mob sprint. This works well if a coach leads the march as piper and demonstrates the pace and expectation.
- (f) Rules: in addition to the basic rules of baseball and the modified exceptions for Tee-ball, it can be helpful to establish your own coach/team rules at the beginning of the year. Just a few about fun, safety and attention, reiterated throughout the year, can guide just enough repetitive structure for productive management of the group.

Games: On game days, once you have had ½ hour to practice, you should get with your opposing coach to set up the “game” for that evening. Mark out a small infield with the portable bases. Games will last 1-3 innings depending on time. Each team gets an at-bat during each inning. Outs are not recorded (although you should encourage throws to first base after a player fields a ball and should congratulate a successful throw to first base). TIP: have one of your best players at first base so there is a chance he or she catches a ball thrown to them. A team’s at bat ends when each player takes one turn at bat. Players should advance one base at a time after each hit so they can learn the base paths. TIP: When your team is in the field, at least one coach (and up to three coaches) should be in the field with the players. Attempt to put the players in basic baseball positions (i.e First, Second, Third, Shortstop, Pitcher) while in the field so they learn that there are specific positions. There is no catcher. Work on positioning and preventing a “scrum” of players all diving on a hit ball at the same time. TIP: When your team is at bat, have one coach assist the player batting and have at least one other coach or parent assist in lining up the other children for their turn at bat. We have had success with having the players who are waiting to bat sit “criss-cross” in a line waiting for their turn in a specified “dugout” area. This helps keep the players in line and keeps them safely from the swinging bat of the player who is at the plate.

Conclusion: T-Ball is a great experience for the players, coaches and parents and sets the stage for future success in the game. We appreciate your time and efforts. Please let us know if you have further comments or questions and/or if you have any issues throughout the season. Thank you.