

2016 Byfield-Newbury Baseball Softball League **“SINGLE A” 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. Single A is one step above 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, “Typically for 1st graders SINGLE A is a coach-pitched level of play for beginning players in first or second grade. Basic skills such as throwing, catching and batting stance are taught. Games are played only against teams with similar skill level and scores are not recorded. An emphasis on having fun and learning the game is promoted at this level. Teams meet twice a week at Triton High School fields for 1/2 hour practice and 1/2 hour game to one hour game.” Each season we try and schedule games with a town close by to introduce a little "Intertown Play." The travel is kept to a minimum. For example, you may be scheduled away one game every other week to Rowley or Salisbury. The will also travel to Triton High School to play in games with Byfield-Newbury.

Coaching at this level is fun and rewarding, but presents some challenges. Most of the players (generally first graders) have little experience with baseball (having, at most, played in TBall previously). Therefore, coaching should focus on basic skills (throwing over-hand, catching with a glove, batter's stance) and the continued development of rules of the game. Paying attention for a full hour of practice or game is still a challenge at this level. It will help if you enlist 2-3 other parents from your team in order to assist with your efforts.

Logistics/Games:

All games are played at one of the two Triton softball fields behind Triton High School. “Games” are played from 5:30-6:30ish (you may go longer if the players and parents so desire). During the first half hour of each game night, you should practice with your own team. Get with the other coach and determine who will take infield practice first. The other team can then warm up in the outfield until the first team is finished in the infield. Then the teams can switch from infield to outfield. Once you have finished this warmup practice, the two teams should go to their respective dugouts and get assignments from the coaches for positions/batting orders and the “game” can begin. A “game” consists of a controlled scrimmage between the teams. Coaches can (and should) take the field with their players to provide constant instruction on stance, where to throw a ball, etc. An inning consists of each player on each team getting one turn at bat. Coaches pitch to the players (pitching can be from the mound, from a knee, or even underhanded as necessary for the skill level of a particular player). Early in the season, outs are not recorded and an inning continues until each player gets an at-bat. If warranted by the skill level and maturity of players, coaches later in the season can increase the competitiveness of play by counting outs recorded and ending an inning after three outs. This is at the discretion of the coaches as the season progresses. Additionally, whether to allow a player to advance more than one base after a hit to the outfield is also up to the coaches as the season progresses. Extra bases should not be taken due to errors by infielders (i.e passed balls at first base). The coaches should agree how to handle these situations before the game on a particular night begins.

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. The Triton fields are available for Single A on most night of the week. No other teams use the Triton fields after 5:30 p.m. (the high school teams use them until that time). Therefore, if you need to make up a game that was canceled due to rain, simply contact the opposing coach and pick a day 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 at Single A have a few practices once the season starts. To schedule a practice, you should contact the league to see when fields are available in town. There is a baseball and softball field at NES and a field at Upper Green that may be available for usage. The lower green is always available and does not need to be reserved.

Tips for Coaching:

- Enlist as many parents as possible to help coach (or even just help organize and keep order in the dugout during games)
- Prepare an outline of drills you intend to do prior to each game/practice
- Coaches (and hopefully your assistants) should arrive 10 minutes early to set up the practice or game.
- Coach basic fundamentals and try to keep it fun for the kids.
- 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 throw without a follow-through or will still want to throw underhand as they have done so from an early age.
- 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. Enforce the skill of "overhand" catching whenever a ball is thrown to a player 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.

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. No practice swings in the on-deck circle! A batter must always have a helmet on when holding a bat. Hitting properly – particularly from a pitcher – will be initially difficult for 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. Encourage the players to do so. You can 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).

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. Teach the players how to catch a pop up.

Rules: in addition to the basic rules of baseball and the modified exceptions for Single A, 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.

Conclusion: Single A - coach pitch 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.