

SCBA

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Tee Ball

Fielding

Toilet, Alligator, Eggs, Dance

Two-Hands for Fly Balls (and Ground Balls)

Everyone moves on the sound of the bat!

COMMUNICATE

“Shading” a batter. (Adjust according to a right or left handed hitter.)

Hitting

Hold bat in fingers

Short stride (4-6 inches)

Swing Down on ball

Directional Hitting

Base running

Run through First (turn right, unless first base coach instructs otherwise)

Sliding (Bent Knee, sit with legs crossed and extend top leg, front heel off ground, raise hands, slide on bottom – holding dirt in hands will protect fingers)

Fielding

Ground Balls

1. Sit on the Toilet – “Toilet”
 - Good fielding stance, athletic posture
 - Keeps butt down, solid frame
2. Alligator Eats dirt – “Alligator”
 - Two hands, in front of body
 - Keeps glove down, react up
3. Collect Easter Eggs – “Eggs”
 - Soft hands, cradle towards body
 - Centers ball, prepares body for throw
4. Do the Dance – “Dance”
 - Feet always moving, able to react
 - Gets momentum moving towards target

Remember the triangle. Before you begin fielding, line your players up with some space in between them. Have them set up with their feet about shoulder width apart. Now, have them reach their glove out on the ground in front of themselves about the same distance as the width between their feet, as if they are fielding an imaginary grounder. Have them hold the position, and point out that the three things on the ground - each foot, plus the glove - form the points of a triangle. This is the ideal position for fielding a ground ball; feet too close together take away the ability to move laterally, a glove too close to the feet gives no room for error when scooping up a grounder.

Use both hands. This is possibly the most critical aspect of fielding grounders that you can teach, and is oddly enough, the one most often ignored by coaches. When set to field a grounder, the glove should be placed on the ground, and the other hand should be open, above the glove, with the heels of the hand fairly close together (the analogy used for younger players is that of an alligator's mouth).

When the ball enters the glove, the secondary hand should automatically close over the ball and gather it in; not only does this ensure that the ball won't pop out, but it places the fielder into a favorable position to make a throw. The further, and less obvious benefit, is that balls that skip off of the heel of the glove cannot pop up and hit the fielder in the face if this basic fundamental is employed; the top hand will simply deflect the ball back down into the dirt where it can then be recovered.

Start low, then come up high. Teach your kids that, when fielding a grounder, they should always begin with their glove all the way on the ground. If the ball takes a hop, they can bring their glove up to it; even if they misjudge, odds are excellent that their top hand and/or their body will block the ball and keep it from going past.

However, if the player tries to start with their glove high and then go down to the ball, they will invariably let grounders after grounders go between their legs.

Keep soft hands. Ground balls come in with so much velocity that they will frequently bounce out of even a perfectly placed glove. Bringing the second hand in will help this, but sometimes, the ball will still pop out in the time it takes to bring that hand down.

The best way to reduce this effect is by having soft hands. In other words, teach your players to not lock their elbows in, thus presenting a brick wall for the baseball to ricochet off of. Instead, they should "give" ever so slightly - this will reduce the energy of the baseball enough to prevent it from popping out. If you have a player who always seems to get into the right position for fielding, who uses two hands, who gets his glove down, and yet still seems to lose a lot of balls, odds are excellent that he has no idea what soft hands are.

Watch that footwork! The first instinct that many young fielders have when fielding a grounder not right at them is to turn to the side and run towards the ball. Unless the fielder is trying to make a stab at a ball deep in the hole (and even then they should give ground, taking a proper angle), this is the wrong way to do it.

If the player turns his head and runs, he loses track of the ball. Since the first rule of pretty much every phase of baseball is some variation of "keep your eye on the ball," we know that this cannot be correct! Furthermore, even if the fielder can pick up the ball in time, he then must turn his body and reset his feet in an effort to get back to a good "triangle" stance.

Coaches are often tempted to ignore fundamentals in the case of a talented fielder who can make plays, even when doing it the wrong way. The fact of the matter is that you are doing a disservice to your player if you take this path.

Instead of turning and running, players should "slide step" to the side, allowing them to keep the eye on the ball. Further, this allows for a simple stop in motion to place the fielder into proper triangle form. Practice this by lining your players up with several feet in between them, and have them simply "slide" to the left, then to the right. Repeat this for a minute or so, until you have them breathing nice and hard.

The idea is that they should be stepping wide to the side, then following the other foot over until their heels almost click together. In younger players, this will be somewhat of a hopping motion, but as they become more accustomed, it should become second nature and more of a glide.

Bribery with Candy is Awesome for Tee Ball

I found that when kids come from t-ball their catching skills are not exactly refined. Two things put together really helped the kids. First for catching getting the glove into the proper position to catch it you must think of a clock. 12 o'clock is the face (thumb up), 3 o'clock to the left hardest for left handed kids, 6 o'clock (thumb down) and the hardest for the right handed kids. Do this a couple of practices so that they get the idea then ADD CANDY.

You will be amazed what the kids can do to get a piece of candy, but only if they catch it! After they get a hang of it use a tennis racket and ball the results are amazing. Finally after all that you can start with catching a pop up with the glove just over the head by hitting candy in the air with a tennis racket. Put a t-shirt over it so the candy don't go through the holes. Hope these hints help make the little guys a little better!

BATTING DRILLS

In any practice, you will do well to use stations - these "work centers" allow small groups of players to get many more skill repetitions than they ever would standing in line waiting for their turn to bat. Ideally, you will run at least three stations at any given practice; if you can increase this number to four or five, so much the better. If you have a well-run practice, it shouldn't take much more than an hour for each batter to get at least two passes through each station. If you take much longer than this, you run the risk of losing your players' attention spans.

The rest of this article deals with recommended stations and how to run them. For the sake of variety, you may want to change which stations you use from practice to practice. In every station, always emphasize proper technique - have the batters dig in for every swing, have them load up properly, make them swing hard and follow through each time. The idea is to build muscle memory; if they don't practice swings the way they will use them in game situations, the benefited of the drills are decreased or completely lost.

The Tee Drill

An absolute essential - you should use tee drills at almost every practice. Major league baseball players hit off of a batting tee every single day, and your players will reap similar benefits. All you need to run a tee drill is a batting tee and either a net of some sort or a nice section of chain link fence.

Make sure that your hitters do not contact the tee. If the ball pops up, the batter is likely hitching or dipping his swing. Adjust the tee every few swings to work the entire range of pitches the batter might see - inside and outside, high and low. The tee gives you a great opportunity to focus on particular holes in your players' swings.