

9/10 Coaching Philosophy

At the 9/10 age level, it's important to keep your teaching methods simple. Kids at this age will quickly get overwhelmed if we try and teach more than 2-3 key points for each fundamental. Throughout the year, stick to the 2-3 key points listed for each fundamental. These 2-3 key points for each fundamental are the foundation, and kids need to have a strong foundation before learning new skills. We want the kids to be able to do the 2-3 key points for each fundamental consistently and as a habit (without thinking) before moving to the 11/12 Cal Ripken league.

Note on Skill Levels: There will be some advanced kids that you can teach additional skills. This is encouraged as long as they can do the base fundamentals consistently every time.

Hitting

Hands: Hands should start about ear height. Have the kids place the bat on their shoulder, and raise their hands up a couple inches for proper placement of hands to start the swing.

Note on the back elbow: Don't make the kids have a high back elbow. Let kids do what is most comfortable for them. If you think about the swing, the elbow comes down anyway, so a high back elbow is really just a wasted motion. However, if a high back elbow is comfortable and working, it is fine to do, just don't force kids to have a high back elbow before starting their swing.

Stance: At this age, it is probably best to teach kids a square stance (not open or closed). Make sure both toes are pointed in the same direction, and feet about shoulder width apart. Kids should be relaxed (a little bend in the knee).

Front Foot: "Step on Glass" – Use this saying to reinforce that the front foot starts and ends in the same location, and not too hard as it comes back down. Make sure front foot starts and ends in the same exact location. A lot of kids will step out with their front foot, so be sure to watch for that and correct as soon as possible. Tailor your drills to reinforce this fundamental. You may need to have some kids not move their front foot at all for much of the season.

Back Foot: "Squish the Bug" - The swing needs to start with the bottom half of the body. As such, start 'squishing the bug' before the hands/bat start in motion. A lot of kids will be slapping the ball, or in other words their hands will be out in front of their body when they make contact with the ball. We want kids to start 'driving the ball' by the end of the season, and this will only happen if we constantly reinforce the back foot starting to 'squish the bug' before the hands start.

Throwing

Throwing drills are very important...for youth through college! Most college teams do these throwing drills every day!

Concentrate on:

- Hand on top of ball
- Down, around, and up
- High elbow
- Follow Through

1. Start out on one knee at close distance and cup elbow of throwing arm in glove. Use only upper arm and wrist to throw ball to partner – 10 feet apart or so.
2. One knee toss – to isolate upper body and check throwing mechanics of arm. Throwing knee down on ground. Bring arm back and up – stop to check that ball is back, fingers on top, and elbow above shoulder then throw and follow through.
3. Stand with feet spread facing partner and use same mechanics and follow through – feet shouldn't move (to isolate upper body).
4. Begin throwing – we make sure that everyone does a right-left-throw (L-R-T for lefties) when they play catch. This forces them to work on their footwork and it makes the transition into fielding a lot easier and more natural.
5. Be sure that they are practicing taking the ball out of their glove and finding the cross-seam grip. Again, makes the transition easier later.
6. Be sure both partners are catching the ball with two hands and moving to the ball rather than reaching for it. Step into the ball when catching it. Catch the ball in front of the body.
7. Be sure that they are aiming for a small target (chest or head). It's a good idea to have the partners hold up their glove and try to hit it – keeps them focused.
8. Throw long-toss – as they get spread out, have them use a throw-hop (crow hop) to get some momentum behind the throw. That is, instead of just a R-L-throw, they hop off their left foot into the right-left-throw. This is the best time to practice it and it makes a world of difference if it comes naturally to them later.

Fly Balls

Catch ball at highest Point with two hands. While throwing the ball have the kids crow hop and make a good throw.

Ground Balls

Get Ready Before the Pitch: Make sure kids are in the athletic position, with glove in front and palm up. Kids should be taking a small step forward as ball is pitched.

Feet Apart/Butt Down – When fielding the ball, feet should width apart and butt down. We want the chest square to the ball and kids not bending over. Tell kids that if the ball takes a bad hop and hits the top of their head (beanie on the hat) they can get very hurt. If ball hits them in face at least they will live.

Field the Ball in Front of Body: fielding a ground ball in front of body and not underneath the body.

Good Drill: Place a ball on the ground, have kids take off their gloves and field through the ball. Kids should not touch the ball but go through the motion of fielding the ball. Next, roll the ball to the kids (still no gloves). Finally, roll the ball to the kids with glove on. Make sure to field the ball straight on, and side to side (kids need to get into position to field a ball not right at them...get in front of the ball).

Baserunning

Home to 1st after hitting a ground ball: Any drill should incorporate the 3 main steps of going home to 1st. 1) Get out of the box, take 3 steps running hard with head down, on the 3rd step look for the ball (Have the kids yell "one" when looking for the ball). 2) When looking for the ball, the runner determines that the ground ball didn't get through and must beat out the throw from the infielder. The runner should now look at 1st base the rest of the way, then hit the front edge of first base while continuing past the base at full speed (Have the kid yell "two" while hitting the front edge of first base). 3) The runner gets a few steps past first base, and then 'breaks down' and stops, looking over his right shoulder to see if the ball got by the first basemen (Have the kid yell "three" while looking over right shoulder). Make sure runner comes back to first base on the foul side of the fair/foul line.

Home to 1st on a single: This is a situation where the hitter hits a ground ball that the runner determines gets past the infield while looking during step 1 above, or a line drive that is a sure single. Either way, we want the runner to make a question mark like route to first base so that they can push off on the inside edge of 1st base. The quickest route to any point is a straight line, and we want to go in a straight line from base to base. On a single, we want kids to break off first base hard to make it look like they are going to second base, then quickly stop and get back to 1st base.

Also make sure at some point in the season to work on base to base (always hit the inside part of the base). Work on picking up the 3rd base coach after rounding 2nd base. Note: for a runner approaching and rounding 2nd base determining if they should advance to 3rd, we want kids making the decision on their own if the ball is in front of them (i.e. the ball is hit to left or center field. We only want the kid picking up the 3rd base coach before rounding 2nd if the ball is behind them where they cannot see the ball (i.e. right field).

Tagging up from 3rd. We don't want the coach yelling go. There is too much that could go wrong (i.e. someone from the crowd yells go and the runner leaves early). We want the kid on 3rd to have his body open to the field after he gets back to 3rd base, watch the ball get caught, and then take off on his own.

Secondary lead: A secondary lead is the movement you make toward the next base once the pitcher has committed to pitch the ball home. Our objective is to create some momentum and cut down the distance to the next base in case of a batted ball or a pitch that gets away from the catcher. Work on this drill, and incorporate passed balls. We want kids advancing to the next base as soon as the pitcher throws the ball in the dirt.

Pitching

Concentrate on the Balance Point and Follow Through. Pitching will be the most difficult skill to coach at this age level. There will be a wide range of development. Kids will have the most success pitching out of the stretch the entire time since this is the simplest way to teach the 2 basic pitching fundamentals (balance point and follow through). If we can get most kids to consistently get balanced before pitching the ball by the end of the year consider that a success.

Make sure kids have a relatively high leg kick to get to their balance point.

Advanced kids should pitch out of the wind up.

Make sure that kids have their foot in front of the rubber (a lot of kids will want to put their foot on top of the rubber).

At bats

Kids will want to watch a bunch of pitches, and it will be a struggle getting kids to swing the bat. Reinforce we want them swinging the bat. It will also be a struggle getting kids to recognize strikes and balls. In practice, while doing batting practice, make sure that kids are swinging at strikes and not swinging at balls.

Game Situations

Reinforce that we want the kids thinking about where to throw the ball before the ball is pitched.

Most kids will not know the force out. You will need to incorporate game situations into your practice plans.

Cutoffs and Relays

Keep it simple. Ball hit to the left side of the field, SS is the cutoff. Ball hit to the right side of the field, 2B is the cutoff.

Cutoff man should have both hands in the air, as the ball comes the player adjusts his body to catch the ball on their glove side so that they are in throwing position as they catch the ball (follow the glove when they throw) and can get rid of the ball quickly. Make sure outfielder is throwing the ball to be catchable. A good drill is to divide the kids into 2 groups, and spread the kids out (25 feet apart). Each kid in the middle will be a cutoff man and work on hands in the air, catch ball on glove side and follow glove while throwing, and then make a good throw to next kid.

Practice Plans

Have kids play catch with similar skill levels. Find a way to make practice fun. We want kids always moving and doing something. Baseball is a tough sport to keep kids engaged and active for an entire practice, but it is possible with some effort.

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