



Berlin Youth Baseball - Practice Start & End

Goal of this document: Provide coaches with ideas on how to consistently start and end a practice.

Explanation: It is important to be consistent with your team and establish repeatable expectations, goals, and takeaways from every practice. One way to accomplish this is by always starting and ending practice in a similar manner. Remember, you want to have lots of time for

actual skills practice, so the huddles mentioned below should be a max of 5 minutes.

1.) Warmups:

Players will arrive to practice at different times so having pre-planned “warm-up” activities such as simple tosses or stretches will be necessary until everyone arrives and true practice starts. As players arrive, there will be a lot of energy and distractions, as friends who haven’t seen each other all day want to talk, goof off, etc. Allow them to do this during warm-ups, but eventually it’ll be time to get focused.

2.) Opening Team Huddle

Goal: Once everyone has arrived, you should have a formal way of letting your players know that practice is starting and they need to get focused onto “baseball-mode”.

The Location: A huddle is a great way to get true practice underway. Remember that the bench is not typically a “fun-place”, so it’s best to have the huddle out on the field, perhaps around the pitcher’s mound. A huddle should have all players in a circle surrounding the coach. The players can be on one knee, and the coach should also be down on a knee or low to the ground to get to the players eye level.

Say Hello: In a brief fun demeanor, say things like “Ready to hit some homeruns?” “You excited for baseball?” “Today is going to be fun!”

Then tell them Practice is starting: Say something like “Time to put on your game face”, “time to get focused”, and set the expectation that from now until the end of practice there is no talk of video games or anything else, only baseball.

Remind them of the Last Practice or Game: Then start circling into a more serious conversation. Start by reminding them of the last practice or game. Make sure to mention positives (such as how our defense looked sharp, or we scored 5 runs in that one inning). But every time also make sure to bring constructive feedback, things they can focus on today in practice (such as we dropped several fly balls, or we weren’t keeping our head down when swinging).

Start Talking about Today: Transition into what we’re going to be doing today. What are a few of the main things the players should focus on improving and getting better at (e.g. perhaps today we’re looking to improve on defense, specifically hustling after the ball even if we miss it).

Give them a Key Takeaway: One way to get a point across to the players is to repeat a key word or phrase throughout practice. For example, today's "word of the day" is "hustle", or "accuracy", or "persistence", etc. Then use that word during practice

End in a Cheer: Every huddle should end with a cheer for team morale and bonding. Ask them to put their hands in the middle and do a countdown and chant such as "1-2-3 Berlin". Be Creative. Make it loud. If it wasn't loud, do it again. Louder! Louder!!

3.) The actual Practice

Have pre-planned activities that align with the talking points you made in your huddle.

4.) Closing Fun Activity

Especially if you performed an intense, hard practice, and the players seem tired and lacking energy and positivity, it's important to end practice on a high note. Sneak in a 5-minute relay race or some other fun activity. It's important to ensure your players are not walking away from baseball practice tired, dejected, and worn down ... but instead happy, energetic, and excited!

5.) Closing Team Huddle

Goal: Always leave a practice with a positive message that keeps the boys engaged and eager to return the next time.

The Location: After a long tiring practice, with everybody including the parents eager to get going, it's still important to close out practice with a huddle. If the parents see this, they will also know exactly when practice is over and it can avoid any confusion. Again the huddle should be out on the field, not on the bench, as once the players "leave the field" then practice is over.

Positive Comments: Always try to cover a few positives you saw at practice. Make sure to make attempts to call out players who maybe don't always have successes for the good things they did today. Spot and mention things like "Hey that was a nice catch", or "remember that hit you had?" or "That one throw you did from 3rd was amazing".

Remind them of the Key Takeaway: In your opening huddle you spoke of a key word or phrase, such as "hustle" or "accuracy" or "persistence". Test the players, do they remember what that word was? Talk about what we did today to accomplish that goal.

Talk about next practice or game: What is coming up? What do they have to look forward to? When should they be there? What should they bring? What can they do from now until then if they have spare time to practice?

End in a Cheer: Again end every huddle with a cheer for team morale and bonding. Ask them to put their hands in the middle and do a countdown and chant such as “1-2-3 Berlin”. Be Creative. Make it loud. If it wasn’t loud, do it again. Louder! Louder!!

***Reminder:** This consistency doesn’t just apply to practice. Implement opening and closing huddles, goals, and cheers in games too! Try to end those games with huddles out on the field, and avoid the bench. Regardless of whether they won or lost the game, try to end on a high note with a fun cheer and positive comments about the good things that happened, the great plays that were made, and how we’re going improve and get better the next game.*