

Virginia Baseball Club
**YOUTH BASEBALL COACH'S
PLAYBOOK**



MAX TOUCH YOUTH BASEBALL FOR AGES 5-9 YEARS OLD

“A Guide for an Enjoyable Game that Keeps Players in Baseball”

Second Edition

By Mike Murray



“Quality Instruction Since 1992”

Year Round Baseball Training Programs and Summer Camps

Two Indoor Training Centers

VBC Merrifield

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VBC Youth Baseball Coach's Playbook

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For information about VBC Coach Clinics and purchasing additional copies, contact
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VBC Youth Baseball Coach's Playbook

Introduction: Let's Put the Ball in Play and Keep Kids in Baseball

The name of the game at every youth level is FUN and FRIENDS, and especially during the early years of playing. Every effort should be made by league directors and the coach to develop a positive sports culture and to keep the game moving by getting the players as many at bats, touches, and running opportunities as they can. When the ball is in play the players will have more fun. If they are having fun, they will learn, improve, and stay in baseball.

Our experience of more than 20 years in elementary education, baseball training programs, summer baseball camps, coaching youth baseball, and working with youth league directors has provided us with the opportunity to find the right balance of skill development and fun. Taking the best practices from elementary education, sports psychology, and experienced youth baseball coaches we have designed a program that is both valuable and enjoyable.

This playbook describes in detail the goals and structure for each level of early baseball, practical coaching skills, teaching strategies, safety practices, behavior characteristics of young players, and appropriate goals of achievement for each age level. These goals are consistent with the mental, physical, and social stages of middle childhood development. It provides the coach with methods of positive coaching and how to avoid “turnoffs” – common coaching mistakes that drive players away from the game.



The content of this playbook provides a comprehensive plan for player development, providing all of those involved in youth baseball with the tools and methods to create a valuable and enjoyable baseball experience for our young players.

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GETTING STARTED

Coaching young players is challenging and requires a unique set of skills. Even coaches who were experienced players will want some new tools to handle the task of organizing and instructing young players. Any coach who has coached at this level will testify that the game is much more enjoyable for everyone, especially the coach, when the players are engaged, learning, and having fun with their friends.

Before the season starts you can pick up some very helpful tips for making the season a success.

ATTEND A YOUTH BASEBALL COACHING CLINIC



The Virginia Baseball Club (VBC) provides hands-on coach training clinics each fall and spring. League directors and coaches can contact the VBC at questions@goVBC.com or call (703) 698-5599 for more information.

Training topics include:

- Positive Coaching Techniques, communication with parents, and avoiding “turnoffs.”
- Setting Goals for the Season
- What equipment is needed?
- Safety Guidelines and Medical Forms
- Practice Organization
- Game Management: Techniques and requirements to keep the games moving
- Coach Pitch Training
- “Hands On” skills teaching

VIEW VBC ONLINE VIDEOS – The VBC has produced several online videos for teaching baseball skills to youth players. Visit our website at www.goVBC.com

www.teeballusa.org

- **more drills, games, and tips for coaching T-ball**

www.positivecoach.org

- **Well articulated ideas for becoming an effective coach**
- **Online workshops for coaches and parents**

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GOOD COACHING SKILLS FOR IMPROVING PLAYERS' SKILLS

In line with developing a positive sports culture while keeping the game fun and moving, here are some essential skills for the coach.

SET YOUR GOALS FOR THE SEASON and Clearly Define Your Team

Culture – Set simple and clear expectations for the way you would like to run your team. Actively communicate these expectations to the parents and players at the beginning of the season. Consistently model the behavior you want from your parents and players throughout the season. People will tend to live up to cultural expectations when they are clearly defined. Your goals may include:

- Have fun and make friends
- Learn to encourage teammates
- Try your best and no excuses

MODEL THE BEHAVIOR YOU WANT from Players and Parents- Both players and parents will look to you for guidance on “the way things are done here.” The coach who snips at umpires and kicks the cooler in the disgust will generate the same type of behavior from the players and parents. Consider your behavior, including your body language, and think about the impact it has on those around you. Perhaps more than anything else you do, this will have a lasting impression on the players.

Capture Their Attention and Keep with Routines – Get your players attention with a whistle or unique word or phrase, “Hey Ho! Let’s Go!” Always have them on one knee, not sitting, while you talk with them on the field. Your back should be toward a wall or open field to limit distractions. Your talk should be very brief and cover on one or two topics.

Create Opportunities for Repetitions - Like you and me, young players learn best by doing. Many baseball skills, particularly hitting and pitching, are often over-coached and under-practiced. One of the goals of every coach is to provide players with as many opportunities to get “hands on” experience and get plenty repetitions practicing the same basic skills (hitting, throwing, and catching). Yes, the coach should give some age-appropriate guidance on technique, but most of all, the players will need plenty of repetitions.

Lots of Patience for Skill Development- The development of baseball skills will take longer for many. Some are simply late bloomers. There are several factors that affect the pace of development, including physical skills, attention and listening skills, and sincere interest in the game. Try to avoid the temptation “to fix” every flaw. An experienced coach knows that skills will eventually improve as the child gets physically stronger and has more opportunities to practice and play. Communicate this to your player’s parents.

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Divide and Conquer – Create small groups and avoid standing around. The coach will get the players more repetitions and provide more guidance in small groups. Set up stations for groups of 3 or 4 players to practice hitting, throwing, and catching. Have one or two coaches at each station. Depending on the age of the players, spend 10-25 minutes at each station, giving players plenty of repetitions. One key for doing this successfully is having enough tees, balls, bats, etc.

Create Games Instead of Drills – players will increase their effort and concentration if the coach creates a “mini-competition” within the group. For example, instead of just hitting off a tee, the coach creates a point competition to see who can hit the ball between the cones or hit a target at the end of a batting cage.

AVOID THESE “TURNOFFS”

- Slow moving games:
 - a) players in field do not know where to go or walk to their positions at the start of inning
 - b) on-deck batter not ready to hit
 - c) coach gives “extra” pitches to batters
 - d) players not involved in game while their team is at bat
 - e) coach often stops game for long periods to instruct players
- Slow moving, unorganized practices
 - a) long lines and lots of standing around
 - b) one player hits and the rest of the team watches from the field
 - c) meaningless drills – the drills do not apply to real game skills
- Over-coaching
 - a) the coach is too technical
 - b) the coach is constantly correcting players during games in front of his peers
 - c) the coach lectures or talks beyond player's ability to stay focused
 - d) the coach gives too much information at one time
 - e) parents are coaching their sons or daughters from the stands or from behind the backstop

UNDERSTANDING THE YOUTH PLAYER and TEACHING PHYSICAL, MENTAL, AND SOCIAL SKILLS

Physical, Cognitive, and Behavior Characteristics of Middle Childhood

Players come from all backgrounds within our community. The following are general descriptions of children you will be coaching. Some of the children you encounter will fit neatly into these descriptions; many will not. You will have some children that may have different needs than other children. It is important that you realize that all children have more in common than they have differences. All children like structure and routines. All children on your team need to be treated with the same respect and caring. You may find that you need to make modifications for individual children due to language, culture, physical, social, or cognitive reasons. Be flexible and have fun!

Preschoolers and Kindergartners

- For some players, this may be their first experience on a team, so be sensitive to this and help children engage in an activity and feel comfortable. Set aside time during practice and after games for team building.
- Children this age like to conform, are easy going and cooperative.
- They like music and simple games (duck, duck goose).
- They like to follow rules, but may test your patience now and then.
- Body and brain is developing rapidly. Lots of repetition is required to “automate” new skills.
- Attention span is short for activities, even shorter for listening activities.
- Preschoolers enjoy being around others although their play may consist of playing alone.
- Children at this age love to help out and are eager to carry out responsibilities.
- They also feel a sense of pride and/or accomplishment.
- Children are beginning to develop friendships.

First and Second Graders

- This is the beginning of a period of transition from “little kid” to “child.”
- They are eager to please adults.
- Like all children, they need a lot of praise – truthful and specific.
- They require a lot of guidance during the season.
- Be very clear when giving directions. Do not assume they know what you are talking about. Make sure routines, rules, and expectations are clear and easily understood. Keep all talks very brief.
- Around this stage their body growth is beginning to slow down, relative to the earlier stages. They begin to have more control over their body movements.
- First and Second grade children are still quite self-centered.



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- They may tattle on their peers or have difficulty sharing.
- Competition often is keen, with everyone wanting to be first in line or to be chosen for special jobs.
- They love to participate in group activities, but they have not developed a great deal of group loyalty. They will join groups with great enthusiasm, only to leave when they cannot have their own way.
- With this age group it is important to stress taking turns, sharing, and listening.

Third and Fourth Graders

- Third and fourth grade children are caught between being “little children” and “older children.” They may resent being treated like a “little kid,” but they still need to be reminded of responsibilities and praised for good behavior.
- They have lots of enthusiasm, and they are usually ready to tackle anything.
- Family is still very important, and they want parental attention and approval.
- Sportsmanship begins to develop at this age, and they can learn about winning and losing gracefully as they begin to have more behavioral regulation.
- The children may start group games on their own that often end in squabbles requiring adult intervention.
- Having friends is very important, conformity to their chosen group becomes a key issue, and peer pressure can be quite strong.
- They also are beginning to develop a strong point of view, and they may have some good suggestions about how to make the program a success.
- They often are willing to take on responsibilities for fixing things or helping with younger children.

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STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT AND GOALS FOR ACHIEVEMENT

Following is a guideline for the mental, physical, and social development of the youth league baseball player. It contains goals specific to each level. The coach should incorporate these skills in designing his or her practice and game plans. Strive to teach players all of these aspects (within a level) by the end of the season. Of course, each player varies in their cognitive, physical, and social development. Some players may exceed these stages while others may need more time to comprehend the skills.

The skill sets listed below are described in much greater detail in the **VBC Complete Baseball Coach's Handbook**. You will also find **Developing Skills videos** and picture slide shows at www.goVBC.com

TEE-BALL (age 5)

EQUIPMENT

- Bucket tees (at least 2)
- Lots of Safety balls (be sure to get "Level 1" safety balls - the very soft ones. Some are harder than others)
- Plenty of tennis balls, wiffle balls, sponge balls
- Throw down bases



SAFETY (Review with players before each practice and games – ask players what the safety rules are).



- 1) Never pick up a bat unless instructed to by the coach.
- 2) Use cones to create a designated area for on-deck where players can swing bat. or elect to not have an on-deck batter at all.
- 3) Have a parent play first base and another parent to monitor home plate area.
- 4) Have a parent monitor the dugout, keeping the batting order.
- 5) Never throw a ball to a person unless the person has a glove and is looking at you.
- 6) The on-deck batter should stay in the on-deck area when his team is at bat until the play is over.
- 7) Do not "pile-on" or grab for a ball that a teammate is fielding. (like telling dogs not to chase cats - we were most successful with this when telling the kids of this age to stay on their feet at all times when fielding the ball)
- 8) Never throw the bat after hitting, always place it on the ground (use a towel).

MENTAL ASPECTS:

- 1) Ability to sit on bench during team at-bat, pay attention to game, cheer for teammates, and know when it is their turn to hit.
- 2) Ability to pay attention in the field and consistently see ball off bat.

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- 3) Know to throw the ball to 1st base when it comes to them (or designated pitcher/parent).
- 4) Know each base by name.
- 5) Know each position by name.
- 6) Know the names of teammates and coaches.
- 7) Know the following baseball terms: foul line, fair ball, foul ball, dugout, single, double, triple, home run, on-deck.

SOCIAL ASPECTS:

- 1) Cheer for teammates when they are at bat. *Choose team captains each game to lead cheers from dugout.*
- 2) Acknowledge good plays by teammates and players on opposing team.
- 3) Shake hands with opponents after game.
- 4) Do not tease or taunt players on opposing team.
- 5) Acknowledge that they, not others, are in complete control of their actions, so do not over-react to teasing or taunting if it does occur. This should be taught at every level, that you are not a puppet for other people. Also, learn to use resilient phrases like: "That's OK, get 'em next time," "Shake it off, make the next play."
- 6) Thank coaches after practice and games.

PHYSICAL ASPECTS:

1) **Hitting**

- a) Consistent stance: in relationship to home plate, wide (yet comfortable) stance. Bat at 45-degree angle.
- b) Level swing-path through the ball.
- c) Ability to make consistent contact.
- d) Hold on to bat with both hands throughout swing, finish balanced with hands high.
- e) Ability to keep balance throughout swing.
- f) Lay down the bat after hitting (does not throw the bat)
- g) NOTE: Coaches, make sure Tee is placed in front of the plate. Most tees are designed with the stem in the middle of the plate, which is the incorrect contact point of contact. Players will have much more success if the tee is placed three inches in front of their front foot before they stride to swing.



2) **Base Running**

- a) Know the names of the bases.
- b) Run to first base after hitting the ball.
- c) When on base, run to the next base when the batter hits the ball.
- d) Know that they must step on the base before going to the next base.

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- e) Know to run full speed and all the way to base. This is one that has to be worked on – seems about 5% of kids run full speed,
 - f) Learn to not pass runners in front of them.
- 3) **Fielding**
- a) Ability to catch a ball thrown by a coach from 20'-30'. (Note: players will begin to catch all balls with fingers pointed down, palm up. They will develop catching balls above the chest with finger up at around age 7 or 8, depending on how much practice they have with this).
 - b) Ability to field easy ground balls – start by teaching players to move feet so that ground ball rolls between feet, then put glove to the ground.
- 4) **Throwing**
- a) Learn to rotate glove side shoulder to target before the throw. Start by standing sideways, instead of facing target.
 - b) Step toward target.
 - c) Consistently make accurate throws from 20'-30'.

COACH PITCH (Ages 6-8)

Prior to the season review the stages of development for T-Ball (including safety). You may want to dedicate the first few practices to review. We recommend that coaches/leagues begin to teach pitching and catching to players at this age during practice. Hold special weekly practices (or pre- or post-practices) for players who would like to learn how to pitch or catch.

EQUIPMENT

- One bucket tee
- Safety balls (be sure to get “Level 1” safety balls - the soft ones. Some are harder than others).
- Plenty of tennis balls, wiffle balls, sponge balls
- Throw down bases



SAFETY (Review with players before each practice and games – ask players what the safety rules are).

- 1) Never pick up a bat unless instructed to by the coach.
- 2) Use cones to create a designated area for on-deck where players can swing bat.
- 3) Have a parent play first base and another parent to monitor home plate area.
- 4) Have a parent monitor the dugout, keeping the batting order.
- 5) Never throw a ball to a person unless the person has a glove and is looking at you.
- 6) The on-deck batter should stay in the on-deck area when his team is at bat until the play is over.
- 7) Never throw the bat after hitting, always place it on the ground.

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MENTAL ASPECTS:

- 1) Knows the names of positions and role of each position.
- 2) Knows the meaning of the following terms: strike, ball, strike zone, out, force play, tag out.
- 3) How outs are made: strike out, force out, catch ball in air, and tag out.
- 4) Knows that throwing the ball is faster than running with it.
- 5) Anticipates where to throw the ball if it comes to them.
- 6) What is a run and how they are scored.
- 7) How to get on base: *Hit, Error, Fielder's choice*

SOCIAL ASPECTS:

- 1) Learn and practice methods of coping with own mistakes and teammates' mistakes. Learn to "pick each other up" after a mistake.
- 2) Demonstrate respect for teammates, umpires, and opponents. (Absolutely no teasing).
- 3) Learn to be persistent in effort.
- 4) Thank the umpire and coach after each game/practice.
- 5) Acknowledge that they, not others, are in complete control of their actions, so do not over-react to teasing or taunting if it does occur. This should be taught at every level, that you are not a puppet for other people.

PHYSICAL ASPECTS:

1) **Base Running**

- a) Know to run through first base, touching the foul-side of first base.
- b) Know when they are forced to run and when they are not forced to run.
- c) React properly to a ball hit in the air.
- d) Learn to not run into outs.
- e) Learn how to round bases.
- f) Learn how to slide into a base feet first.

2) **Hitting – Be careful to not over-coach!**

SEE VBC ONLINE HITTING VIDEO – "Recognizing and correcting hitting flaws."

- a) Proper stance: wide feet (yet comfortable), knees bent, elbows below hands, line up door-knocking knuckles, relaxed with some movement, bat at 45-degree angle. – most kids will do these naturally.
- b) Practice seeing the ball to the bat (or "see it, than hit it hard")
- c) Begin to identify strikes and balls (does not swing at bad pitches).
- d) Level swing-path through the ball
- e) Balanced during and after swing
- f) Drops the bat after hitting (does not throw the bat)
- g) Make consistent contact.

3) **Fielding**

- a) Learn ready position.
- b) Ability to play catch with a teammate at 25'-30' (ten throws without the ball touching the ground).
- c) Ability to field easy ground balls and then throw the ball to first base or for force play.

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- d) Consistently use proper glove position to catch ball at upper body (fingers up) or below waist (fingers down) –develops around 7 ½ yrs. old.
 - e) Turn glove to backhand on balls to throwing arm side.
 - f) Move feet to catch or field balls hit or thrown to right and left.
 - g) Learns how to take a throw at a base for a force out. Second/Short know when to cover 2nd and when to be cutoff man on a hit to outfield. Outfielders know to throw to a base.
- 4) **Throwing**
- a) Ability to consistently hit target from 30'-35'
 - b) Rotate shoulders when throwing – turning throwing hand away from head before throwing.
- 5) **Pitching**
- a) Develops a consistent pitching motion
 - 1) learns comfortable grip for fastball
 - 2) has consistent balance point
 - 3) has consistent separation and stride
 - 4) has consistent release point
 - 5) has consistent follow through
- 
- 6) **Catching**
- a) Knows how to safely put on equipment.
 - b) Use proper stance.
 - c) Catch most pitches in strike zone.

FIRST-YEAR KID PITCH (Ages 8-9)

EQUIPMENT

- Bucket tees (at least 2)
- Level #2 safety balls (a little harder than level #1 safety balls)
- Tennis balls, wiffle balls
- Throw down bases

SAFETY (Review with players before each practice and games – ask players what the safety rules are).

Never pick up a bat unless instructed to by the coach.

- a) Use cones to create a designated area for on-deck where players can swing bat.
- b) Have a parent monitor the dugout, keeping the batting order.
- c) Never throw a ball to a person unless the person has a glove and is looking at you.
- d) The on-deck batter should stay in the on-deck area when his team is at bat until the play is over.

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MENTAL ASPECTS:

- 1) Ability to always know how many outs, the count on the batter, and the score of the game.
- 2) Know what to do with the ball if it is hit to you.
- 3) Know fly ball communication priorities.
- 4) Know how and why to back up a base.
- 5) Know what a double-play is.
- 6) Know the meaning of: RBI, ERA, OBP, sacrifice bunt, sacrifice fly, squeeze bunt, bullpen.
- 7) Know team signals.
- 8) Knows to take an aggressive approach at the plate.

SOCIAL ASPECTS:

- 1) Continue to learn and practice methods of dealing with mistakes.
- 2) Demonstrate respect for teammates, umpires, and opponents.
- 3) Understand the benefits of teamwork and picking up teammates.
- 4) Acknowledge that they, not others, are in complete control of their actions, so do not over-react to teasing or taunting if it does occur.

PHYSICAL ASPECTS:

1) Base Running

- a) Ability to round bases, especially first.
- b) Consistently look to advance to next base (aggressive).
- c) Consistently steps on proper area of base.
- d) Ability to tag-up on fly balls.
- e) Slides when appropriate.

2) Hitting

- a) Slight inward rotation of front shoulder before swinging.
- b) Short, soft, straight stride before swinging.
- c) Hands are back and at top of strike zone before swinging (elbows below the hands) and bat angle is about 45 degrees (not straight up and down or flat).
- d) Sees ball to the bat.
- e) Takes an aggressive approach to each pitch.
- f) Consistently takes aggressive swing through the ball.
- g) Develops a good sense of his strike zone.
- h) Learns to turn away from pitches that may hit him.



Coach throws tennis balls, teaching player to turn away from pitch

NOTE: An aggressive hitting attitude is very important at this stage. Go up to the plate thinking that "this pitch" is my pitch.

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3) **Fielding**

- a) Ability to play catch with a teammate from 50' (10 throws without the ball hitting the ground).
- b) Ability to field easy ground balls to the right and left and throw accurately to the proper base.
- c) Ability to field a grounder on the side
- d) Ability to catch fly ball on the run with one hand.



- e) Catch ball with two hands for a quicker transfer to throwing hand.
- f) Catch a ball while running.
- g) Make a tag on a runner.
- h) 1st baseman: know the correct foot (opposite from

glove hand) to have on the base while receiving throws from infielders.

4) **Throwing**

- a) Start to move feet for momentum before throwing.
- b) Make accurate throws to target from 60'
- c) Often uses proper grip.
- d) Keeps throwing-hand fingers behind ball through release.

5) **Pitching**

- a) Can execute 5-step progression of pitching.
- b) Can hold balance position for 15 seconds.
- c) Ability to throw consistent strikes
- d) Knows four seam fastball.

6) **Catching**

- a) Knows how to safely put on equipment.
- b) Use proper stance.
- c) Catch all pitches in strike zone.
- d) Ability to block most balls in dirt directly in front.
- e) Moves feet to make accurate throws to second and third base.



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“PLAYING LIKE A CHAMPION” Strategies for Making Set Backs Temporary

Sports provide the child with a unique opportunity to experience success and failure, feel the emotions associated with it, and learn to respond properly. Baseball is a difficult game, and there will be lots of mistakes in the course of the game. Young players are just learning how to deal with disappointment and setbacks. The coach can play an important role in guiding players toward making set backs temporary, fostering a valuable life-long skill.

The coach must first recognize the distinction between controlling emotions and behavior. Children should be allowed to *experience* emotions and learn to *control* their behavior. A child that tries to control emotions will have lots of problems with behavior.

The coach should convey to the players that emotions are like the weather, they come and go. Experience the emotion and let it go, no big deal. One method to help players overcome a mistake is a “mistake ritual,” like figuratively burying an error in the dirt with your cleats or clapping the hands, to make set backs temporary.

In regards to behavior, the coach should establish some “ground rules” that the following will not be tolerated: 1) rudeness 2) disrupting the game 3) actions that endanger others.

The next step is to clearly communicate this to your players. Of course, the coach needs to keep his talks very, very brief (less than two minutes). Choose your moments carefully to convey your message.

Briefly before each game or at the start of each practice game

Say something like the following to the players, “We want to play like champions.

Champions play hard and support their teammates. They are not rude to others (do not argue with umpires or put down other players); they do not slow down the game by pouting; they do not throw equipment. Rudeness, disrupting the game, or throwing the equipment will not be tolerated here.”



“It is OK to make mistakes and feel upset. We all make mistakes and feel upset sometimes. Champions can feel mad or upset, and then move on. Don’t allow your feelings to keep you from playing your best. Make your set backs (feeling mad or upset) temporary and move on. If you make a mistake, clap your hands once then move on to the next play. Let’s try our best to play like champions today.”

As the season progresses you can simply ask the players, “What does ‘Playing Like a Champion’ mean to

you?”

During a break in the Game

When you get a break in the game (when the players come off the field) or practice, quickly remind players about “playing like a champion.” Perhaps you can quickly point out some good examples of how players have dealt with set backs during the game so far.

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Playing Like a Champion – *continued*

After the game

Ask players what “Playing Like a Champion” means to them. By having players talk about it they will begin to internalize what it means to be a champion.

We have found that scrimmage games during practice are a good opportunity to reinforce the skill of dealing with emotions and developing acceptable behavior responses. Implement some logical consequences for poor behavior. An example of using logical consequences is to make sure the players understand these consequences for poor behavior before a scrimmage game. Explain to them before games that certain behavior such as ARGUING CALLS, CRITICIZING TEAMMATES, and THROWING EQUIPMENT is unacceptable and there are consequences for such behavior. The consequence can be “team loses a run.”

There is no need for warnings or second chances. Children at this age know that this is unacceptable behavior.

What exactly is Mental Toughness?

“Be tough out there!” “We need to be tougher!”
“Kids today are just not as tough as they used to be.”

How many times have you heard these phrases or said one of them yourself? What message is the player hearing? “Grind your teeth!” “Try HARDER!” “Get tense!” I think what we mean to say is “OK, we made a mistake. It’s over. Now let’s forget about it, and make the next play.”

This is not to say that our players should not be mentally tough. The intention is to clarify what we are trying to communicate.

Every successful athlete and business person has figured this out: Resiliency, the ability to bounce back from adversity, is a characteristic of success. Sports, especially baseball, present us with the opportunity to teach our children the skill of dealing with adversity. A skilled coach looks to take advantage of these opportunities and sees them as “teachable moments.”

“Playing Like a Champion” does not deny players the experience of failure, but rather embraces it. When players are allowed to face adversity head on they will be better prepared to deal with it. The coach can cultivate a “mentally tough” team by implementing the strategies outlined above.

The coach or parent that always tries to “soften the blow” by providing excuses to the player after an error or strike out is not doing the child any favors.

Use phrases like, “Alright, it’s over. Let’s make the next play.”

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Practice Organization

Following are some detailed sample practice plans that can apply to each level of youth baseball. Of course, field space, time of practice, number of players and assistant coaches will affect the implementation. Also, the age and skill level of each team will influence the practice plan. These plans are meant to be a guide to the coach in developing his or her specific plan.

Earlier in this playbook you will find the Goals for Achievement for each age level. The coach should strive to include aspects of the safety, mental, social, and physical goals at each practice and game. Following these sample practice plans are specific drills to incorporate into your practices.

General Practice Outline:

- *2-5 min – Intro and Goals for Today (includes safety reminders and a “Social Goal”).
- *2-5 min – Getting Loose (warm up exercises)
- *20-50 min – Skill Development Stations (8-12 minutes each station)
- *20-40 min – Games or Game-Like scrimmage
- *2-5 min – Recap and symbolic rewards
- *length of time depends of age and skill level of players

Teaching Tips

- 1) **SAFETY:** Only use safety balls with this group. Be vigilant. Players this age are not used to being around bats and balls. Encourage the drinking of fluids. Take as many breaks as you need.
- 2) **STRIVE TO GET EACH PLAYER AS MANY TOUCHES OF THE BALL AND AS MANY SWINGS AS YOU SAFELY CAN – Bring lots of balls.**
- 3) Keep them focused with short activities.
- 4) Learn the first names of all of your parents. Get assistant coaches so that you can divide players into small groups.
- 5) Be **POSITIVE** and sincere at all times – Go out of your way to recognize the good things players do. Make corrections, but avoid the temptation to “fix” everything.
- 6) Use fun terms that they can relate to: “shark chase around bases,” “throw the ball through the ring of fire,” “Destroy the Death Star,” etc.
- 7) Do lots of “**TEAMWORK**” reinforcement: Constantly talk about how we support our teammates.

MOST IMPORTANT: Make sure the players are active and having fun with their friends!!!



VBC Youth Baseball Coach's Playbook

Sample Practice Plan

(This sample plan can be modified for any youth level)

9am-9:05am – Getting to know each other and Social Skill Reinforcement

- 1) As players arrive collect their bats and allow them to run bases, throw balls at target or with a coach.
- 2) Gather players in a circle and have a brief talk. **MAKE SURE THE PLAYERS LEARN THE COACHES NAMES AND THE NAMES OF THEIR TEAMMATES.** It is important that you know each players name. Get to know each player. Go around the circle and ask questions like, "Tim, what's your favorite team?" "Who is your favorite player?" "Have you played on a baseball team before?" "Have you been to a baseball game before?" This session will relax the players and help establish good relationships.
- 3) Discuss safety issues, e.g., not picking up baseball equipment without approval, swinging bats, anything else which may be off limits, etc.
- 4) Today's Social Skill – "Acknowledge good plays and good hustle by teammates." Give examples to players of what you are listening for. Tell players that you will give out baseball cards at the end of practice if you hear a lot of support for teammates.

9:05am-9:10am – Questions about baseball and getting loose

- 5) Warm ups– Do this with the team, and make this fun!
 - a) Have players put gloves on the ground and have them jump "like a kangaroo" around the gloves. Then have the players jump from side-to-side over the glove; then have them jump from front-to-back over the glove.
 - b) Have players make arm circles (big then small) – like a helicopter taking off.
 - c) Have players shake out their arms, then their legs, then hips, etc. "like Jello!"
- 6) Begin the instruction by asking the players to point to first base, second base, etc. Have your assistants put out cones where the position players play. Ask them where the first baseman should play. Does he stand on the base? Where do the second baseman and shortstop stand? How about the third baseman? Pitcher? Catcher? Outfielders? Then have them run out to the different positions. This will get them acquainted with the different positions they will play.

9:10am-9:20am – Teaching Base Running. Begin base running drills by allowing each player to circle the bases on his own ensuring that he touches each base. Tell the players to yell out the base as the touch it: "First base! Second base! Third Base! Home Plate!" Encourage them to run the bases as fast as they can. After two rounds of individual running have a "base race." Let each player start at home and "release" the next players in line in intervals requesting he "catch the player" in front of them. Continue to ensure that they touch all the bases.

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Skills Development Stations

Run three stations (about 3 or 4 players per station) simultaneously. The coach can rotate the groups to each station each 8 to 20 minutes or you may choose to teach and practice one of these skills per practice. **See more skill development games at end of book.**

9:20am-9:40am – Teaching hitting. Keep this group small (no more than 3 or 4 players per coach). Set up station near the backstop or a fence to teach “set up and stance.” Set up three tees, set them up about 20 feet from the backstop or fence and about 10 feet apart. Put a player at each tee. Have them start with their bats on the ground at their feet. Describe the proper set up and stance then have players do it per your instructions. Use the game “Simon Says” to make this fun. Have them check their stance under your direction. For example, you say “toes pointed forward?” And they respond, “Check!” Go through a simple check list then say “Hit!”



They all hit at the same time toward the fence or out toward the open field.

9:20am-9:40am – Teaching Throwing. Take your three or four players into the outfield (it is ideal to have a fence or wall close by) to practice throwing. Make sure players know which hand the glove goes on and that they know which hand to throw with. Show players how to grip a baseball – three or four finger grip with thumb opposing is appropriate. The coach will teach the players the proper throwing form (“STEP-EAGLE” i.e., point to target, step to target, elbow up). Follow this sequence with the coach calling out: 1) “Hands together at chest,” 2) “Step-eagle,” 3) “Throw to target!” Have each player throw the ball to the target (a coach or a target on a fence or wall) at the same time. The coach will reinforce the good things players are doing and make corrective suggestions. You can create teams to see which team can throw the most balls into the target. You can call the target “The Ring of Fire” (from the movie Nemo) or have them knock a ball off a tee, “Destroy the Death Star.”



9:20am-9:40am – Teaching Catching and Fielding

Grounders. In this group teach “ready position” and how to catch the ball: Knees bent, fingers up and out in front of their bodies. Teach them how to make a circle from their heads to their knees to catch high and low balls. Put the kids in a circle with the coach in the middle (for younger players). Toss or roll the balls to the players and have them throw the ball back to the coach. **See more skill development games at end of book.**

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9:40am-9:45am –Break: During the break you might want to talk with players about simple baseball rules and famous baseball players. Before going back to the field to start your practice game you may have the group sing “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” or “Star Spangle Banner” with younger players.

9:45am-10:05am – **Game Time (Try to include a game-like scrimmage at each practice).**

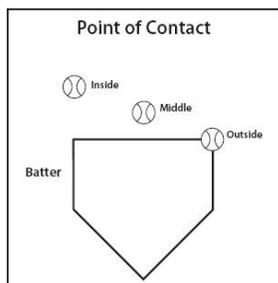
Discuss the batters box, on deck circle, and bench/dugout. TEACH THEM (DEMONSTRATE) HOW TO PUT THE BAT DOWN AFTER HITTING (DO NOT THROW THE BAT – Put a towel next to home plate and have players place or drop their bats on the towel after they hit). REVIEW SAFETY RULES – ALL OFFENSIVE PLAYERS IN THE DUGOUT. Set up cones where the fielders should stand. Set up cones for on-deck circle.



Don't over-coach the hitting during games, but **DRAW FEET IN THE BATTERS BOX WHERE YOU WANT THEM TO STAND. DO NOT GET TOO TECHNICAL.** Recognize if a player is right handed or left-handed.



For 5 year olds: Set up the tee for the 5 on 5 GAME with at least two coaches. This will give you five players in the field. Have everyone on the offensive team bat once each inning. As the players advance during the season move the tee to the different contact positions (see diagram) so that the ball is hit to different areas of the field.



For 6–8 year olds: Two coaches per 12 players (6 on 6). Have them hit and run the bases with defenders attempting to make plays. **Coach Pitch.** Your players will want to play this type of game for hours.

For 8-9 year olds: Two coaches per 12 players. Play regulation game with **Coach Pitch** from standing position. Catcher is optional. For fun, you may want to play a T-ball game with this age group, moving the tee to the different contact positions. It is a good drill for hitters and will create a lot of fielding opportunities for the fielders. Maybe start each at bat with a runner at first base to create force plays.

See more hitting games at end of this book.

10:05am-10:10pm – **Recap and give out baseball cards (or other symbolic reward).**

Use the last 5 minutes or so to recap what they have learned today. Ask each player to tell you one new thing they learned today. Praise them for their hustle, hard work, attention, and hand out baseball cards for supporting their teammates. Make sure they have all of their items.

VBC Youth Baseball Coach's Playbook

AGE-APPROPRIATE, GAME-LIKE DRILLS FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Drills can be an effective way of breaking down a baseball skill into a smaller, more easily understood and acquired skill. There are hundreds of drills for baseball skill development. Some are effective teaching tools. Many are “gimmicks” that do not transfer into a skill that the players will actually need in the game. It is very important for the coach to select drills that will transfer to actual game skills. Following are some age-appropriate, game-like drills.

Throwing, Catching and Fielding Skill Acquisition

Generally, the younger players do not “play catch,” but instead “play fetch.” Most of their time is spent chasing the ball in a traditional game of catch with a teammate. Of course, they are not getting better at catching or throwing. Here are some ideas for increasing the throw and catch opportunities and improving these skills. Always find a smooth surface to teach fielding.

Wall Ball – The old game of throwing a ball at a target against a wall and catching it on a bounce or two is a great way to get plenty of repetitions throwing and catching. Players will begin to make the physical adjustments and improve their skills with the repetitions.



Try to find a school, library or recreation center with a black top surface next to a wall. You can have players do a point game – one point for hitting the target and one point for catching the ball cleanly off the wall. As players develop they can begin to challenge other players to a competition, throwing the ball off the wall while the other player tries to catch it on a bounce or two. Introduce backhand and forehand plays as players develop.

Velcro Paddles to Teach Catching – These paddles are a great introduction to helping new players learn how to track the ball to the hand. Purchase three sets and make this one of your stations at practice. Gradually move to using gloves.



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Throw and Catch Point Game - Between 7 and 8 years old most players will be able to throw to a target and catch the ball with some relative consistency. Players can begin to play catch with another player at this level. Increase the concentration level of your players by having a mini competition. Pair them up and put them at a distance where they can routinely reach the other player with a throw.

- 1) Single A and Double A– each pair receives a point for each successful throw and catch. Pairs are trying to improve upon their previous scores.
- 2) Triple A – players compete against each other within their pair group. Award two points for a throw to the chest and one point for a throw to the head.

Increase Arm Strength Game – Players' arm strength increases as they throw more often and stretch out the distance they throw. For this game divide your players into three groups: one group in CF, the other at 3B, and the other at 1B. Separate them so that it will take one hop for most players to reach the next group. The CF group throws to 3B, 3B throws to 1B, and 1B throws to CF. You can use two balls at the same time to keep this moving. After each player gets five throws from one position, the groups rotate. About 15 to 20 long toss throws a day is about all kids at this age can handle.

Five Hundred – the coach throws fly balls to players (for beginners you may want to use tennis balls). Have players take turns. Give them 50, 75, or 100 points per catch. Emphasize moving the feet to catch fly balls.

Run and Catch – around the age of 8 players will learn to catch on the move. Divide players into several lines with a coach for each line. Have the players run pass patterns with the coach as the QB.

Around the Horn – Put a player at each base and home plate. Use one ball and have players see how many times they can throw it around the horn without the ball touching the ground. You may have several teams of four players competing against each other.

Hitting Skill Acquisition

Always teach hitting in small groups. Never have one player hitting while the rest of the team is standing around. Avoid the temptation to “fix it” and over-coach hitting. Hitting is probably the most over-coached, under-practiced skill there is. Give them some guidance and plenty of repetitions.

Choosing a Bat and Glove

Of course, bat and glove sizes vary. Select a bat that is approximately the length from the ground to the player's waist. The player should be able to make consistent contact with the bat or choose to a lighter one. Choose a glove that is not too stiff. The player should be able to squeeze the glove closed with the thumb and ring finger.

Check-Check, Swing – Hitting begins with a sound foundation in the batting stance. After showing them what a proper stance looks like you can have them get in their

VBC Youth Baseball Coach's Playbook

stance. Go through a check list with them, like a pilot and copilot. After you ask, “toes pointed forward?” The players respond, “Check!” Always start with the feet and work you way up.

- a) Toes pointed forward? - “Check!”
- b) Knees bent? - “Check!”
- c) Door-knocking knuckles lined up? - “Check!”
- d) Elbows below hands? - “Check!”
- e) Hands near back shoulder? - “Check!”
- f) Relaxed with some movement? – “Check!”
- g) Swing!
- h) Balanced? – “Check!”

Use bigger balls – Introduce coach pitch hitting with bigger balls like softballs or nerf balls. The success rate of contact will increase, and players' confidence will rise.

Improve Bat Control by Increasing Hand and Forearm Strength – have players swing with a weighted bat (use a weighted metal donut). They can do this while they are on-deck or during tee drills.

Move Back and Avoid Looping Pitching – Move back to a distance where the batter has a chance to see the ball and time it. Always throw on a straight line (from hand to strike zone). This line is easier to hit then a ball that is looping through the strike zone in a downward angle.

Target Hitting – For many young hitters it is easier to make physical adjustments by trying to hit the ball in a certain direction. For example, one way to get your players to keep their hands inside the ball and swing through the ball is to tell them to hit the ball toward a target up the middle, at the end of a batting cage (or through cones in the middle of the field). You can have them hit off a tee or you can throw to them. Give them points for hitting the target. You will see players begin to make the physical adjustment of keeping their hands inside the baseball in order to hit the ball up the middle.

See It, then Hit It HARD– To promote better timing and tracking of the ball, emphasize to players to see the ball **FIRST**, then hit it hard. One way to promote the skill of tracking the baseball is to have the player take one pitch (not swing at it). They should take their normal stride and watch the ball all the way through the strike zone. Then they hit the next three. Keep repeating this pattern of taking one and hitting three. Players will improve on pitch selection and hard contact.



Hitting Practice – Players learn to hit by hitting. As much as possible, throw from the pitcher's distance to the batter. However, move up as close as you need to in order to throw consistent strikes. Having someone who can throw strikes is a must. Pay a HS player to come to your practices if you need to. The pitcher should throw on a straight line (from hand to strike zone), from one knee to hitters 7 or younger.

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Use Front-Throwing or is always Getting a batter is more game from a short cage.



Toss instead of Side Toss – tossing from the angle of the pitcher preferred versus a flip from the side. to see a ball coming from that angle like. You may want to do this drill distance while working in a batting

Teaching Pitching to Beginners

Developing pitchers is one of the most challenging jobs of the youth baseball coach. Following are some basic recommendations for developing pitchers. SEE OUR NEW VIDEO ON TEACHING PITCHING TO BEGINNERS AT www.goVBC.com

We want the batter to hit the ball – perhaps more important than the physical aspects of pitching is the mental aspect of getting young players in the mind-set that we want the batter to put the ball in play. Most young players believe that they are supposed to strike out every batter.

Start at short distances – teach proper mechanics at shorter distances and gradually move back to mound distance.

Basic steps of pitching are:

- 1) Feet – From windup start with the feet together or slightly separated and pointed at 45 degree angle toward dugout. This angle will allow for an easier drop step and pivot of the back foot. The drop step should be short and to the side or in front of the rubber. Make sure the pivot foot (the one in contact with the rubber) is just in front of the rubber and parallel to the rubber. A major flaw with young pitchers is that their pivot foot is not turned completely parallel.
- 2) Balance Point – with hands together the front knee should raise to waist level with the back leg slightly bent. Nose should be over back toe. Players should be able to hold this position in practice for 10 seconds.
- 3) Direction – players should stride toward the target. The landing foot should be in line with the back foot to home plate. Glove should pull toward pitcher's chest when he throws.
- 4) Extension – the pitcher should bend at the waist after release and the arm should fall to the outside (glove side) of the front knee.

Pitch to a batter (not just a catcher) – practice pitching with a batter (it can be an adult) in the batter's box.

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Hold Pre-practice, post-practice, and special practices for pitchers and catchers – It is often difficult to get pitchers the work they need in a regular practice. Hold special practices that allow your players to develop their pitching skills.

Scrimmage/Practice Game

Try to implement fast-paced scrimmages at each practice. You can get a lot accomplished in a 30 minute scrimmage. Here is a sample of how to do it. Try different variations of this to meet your specific team needs.

Batting Practice/Game – To increase the number of swings and repetitions your players get in a game-like setting, divide your team into three or four groups of four players each. Hold a competition batting practice and award points during this session for each team. Each group will rotate each 10 or 15 minutes. A coach who can throw a lot of strikes is a must. Make sure you have a full bucket of balls to make this run efficiently.

Team A – Hitting (points for hard ground balls and line drives) – hitting team does not run the bases while they are hitting. – *continued on next page* -

Team B – Fielding (points for cleanly fielded ball – extra points for “great plays”). Since you do not have a full team in the field, balls that are not hit at players can be shagged by a parent or two who can collect the balls in a bucket.

Team C – Base running – a group runs the bases during each rotation. The base runners react to each batted ball just like a game; freezing on line drives, tagging up on pop flies, etc.

MORE RESOURCES FOR THE COACH

www.goVBC.com

- see online video and picture slide shows for teaching baseball skills
- online youth baseball coach certification
- information on upcoming coach and player clinics
- purchase VBC Complete Baseball Coach's Handbook

“Complete Baseball Coach's Handbook,” by Mike Murray and Brien Roche.

"Making Little League Baseball More Fun for Kids," Featuring 30 Games and Drills, by Randy Voorhees, Contemporary Books.

"Coaching Youth Baseball," American Sport Education Program, Human Kinetics Publishers, Inc.

"Play Baseball the Ripken Way," by Cal Ripken, Jr. and Bill Ripken with Larry Burke, Random House.

"The Baffled Parent's Guide to Coaching Youth Baseball," by Bill Thurston, Ragged Mountain Press/McGraw-Hill.

PREPARE for SPORTSMANSHIP –*a lasting impression!*

Surprising to some is the powerful pull “winning” and “success” has on our emotions during a youth sporting event. All of us nod our heads in agreement that youth sports are an opportunity for us to teach and model good sportsmanship for the players. Unfortunately, we all know horror stories of parents acting badly in front of players at youth sporting events, and we should recognize the potential that we all have to be overcome by the emotion to “win.”

To avoid falling victim to the pressures of “winning,” mentally prepare before each game. Consider the following:

- How will I react when a close call is not in my team's favor, especially late “with the game on-the-line?”
- How will I react when my players demonstrate poor sportsmanship?
- Have I clearly communicated to my parents sportsmanship expectations?

The behavior that we model in front of our players will have the most profound influence on them and how they learn to handle adversity, especially when things don't go their way.

COACH UMPIRES - At the younger levels the coaches are the umpires. Follow these rules:

- 1) Introduce yourself to the opposing coaches and determine who will be making the calls on the field.
- 2) If you are making a close call and you are not sure, always make it in favor of the opposing team.

HIGH-SCHOOL-AGE UMPIRES – Umpiring is more difficult than most of us can imagine. Split second calls with anxious adults watching can be very nerve-racking. As we know, many calls will not go our way. We need to remind ourselves that these young umpires are doing their best. Follow these rules:

- 1) Introduce yourself to the umpire(s). **THANK THEM FOR UMPIRING** (early and often).
- 2) Never argue a call. Just let it go. It's no big deal if a call is missed.
- 3) Between innings you may ask to talk with the umpire along with the other coach. Never try to manipulate the umpire.

GAME MANAGEMENT

A fast-paced, action-packed game is exciting for everyone. The coach plays a big role in making sure the game is moving at a reasonable pace. Following are guidelines to ensure that the games move quickly.

All coaches should come to the games prepared. Make sure you have the proper equipment and that you have set your line up for the game, understanding that some players may not make it to the game.



Pregame

- Send a reminder email to parents. Ask them to let you know if their player will not be attending the game.
- Check your equipment
 - a) two buckets with plenty of balls in one of them
 - b) 12 mini cones
- Meet with the opposing coach to go over the rules (particularly the maximum number of pitches to each batter and how many batters will bat each half inning).
- Assign parent helpers (varies depending on age level) to
 - 1) Dugout and On-deck circle
 - 2) Home Plate area
 - 3) 3rd base coach
 - 4) 1st base coach
 - 5) Field coach
 - 6) Coach-pitcher
 - 7) Catcher coach – to help catcher get on gear quickly.
- Set your batting order and post it so players can see it (see sample below)
- Designate areas for dugout and on-deck circle
- Collect all bats from players and put them in dugout or along backstop
- Meet with your players to review safety rules, sportsmanship, and focus point(s) for the game.
- You may want to select different team captains for each game to lead cheers for teammates at bat.

Game Time

- Make sure players are on the bench and in the game – cheering for teammates. You may select one or two team captains each game to lead the cheers.
- Keep track of the line up and make sure you rotate the order so everyone gets about the same number of at bats.
- Go out of your way to point out the good things players do.

VBC Youth Baseball Coach's Playbook

- Do not over-coach during games – your job is to be supportive, not critical at this time. RECOGNIZE WHICH MOMENTS ARE TEACHABLE MOMENTS AND WHICH ARE NOT.
- Make sure players hustle in and out between innings. Perhaps say, “Who will be the first one in the dugout?” or time them saying, “We have five seconds to get in the dugout, Five, four, three, ...”
- Hold very short team conferences and only when your players come off the field. Have the lead off batter get prepared to bat immediately (he should not be part of the team conference between half innings).
- Make sure players know their defensive positions before the end of the half inning or simply have them get their gloves and run out to the field coach for position assignments.
- Rotate positions each inning from infield to outfield for younger levels. Have the “field coach” put the players in specific positions, i.e., SS, 1B, LF. This process is much quicker than giving players position assignments from in front of the dugout, especially at the T-Ball and Rookie/Single A levels.
- The half-inning transition should take less than one minute from the last out to the first pitch.

Post Game Routine

- Congratulate players for their effort, win or lose.
- Congratulate opposing players and shake hands.
- Briefly meet with team to review game – especially the good things accomplished. You may ask players what they think we need to work on at next practice.
- Always try to have them leave the field with the desire to come back.

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Braves (Visitor 1B) vs. Red Sox (Home 3B)

Away/Home	Away/Home	Away/Home	Away/Home	Away/Home	
□ □	□ □	□ □	□ □	□ □	← Score
/	/	/	/	/	← Outs
Inning	Inning	Inning	Inning	Inning	Player Lineup
1	2	3	4	5	(Parents' names)
3B	OF	1B	P	3B	J.J. (John & Samantha)
OF	2B	2B	OF	SS	Davis (Doug & Diane)
SS	OF	OF	3B	OF	Peter (Laurie & Pete)
P	OF	SS	OF	OF	Sean * (Christine & Daniel)
OF	SS	OF	2B	X	Mason * (Mark & Kristen)
X	1B	OF	1B	OF	Devin (Matt & Michaela)
OF	X	OF	SS	OF	Zach (Sharon & Adam)
OF	X	3B	OF	3B	Tim (Sheila & Hamish)
2B	OF	OF	X	2B	Matt (Chris & Vera) -
OF	3B	3B	SS	OF	James (Luke & Nina)
1B	P	X	OF	1B	Ketz (Yazmin & Mike)
OF	X	P	OF	P	George (Tina & Jon)

*** = captains**

Max Touch Baseball **Age-Appropriate Modifications for an Enjoyable Game**

Younger players need a game that moves at a faster pace and is more action-packed. In this playbook we maintain the integrity of the game while providing modifications to match the youth player's social and physical ability.

Some of the traditional aspects of the adult game of baseball have been changed or removed to meet the needs of the early youth level. For example, we recommend removing the "catcher" from the 6-7 year-old level. Most players cannot consistently catch the ball at this age and end up retrieving every other pitch. Keeping this position at this level dramatically slows down the game. We must keep in mind that the objective is to provide a fun, faster-moving and more enjoyable experience that keeps kids in baseball.

A well-defined structure for each age level, which successively builds upon the previous level, is the first step to achieving a comprehensive development plan. Note that there are age overlaps at each level, allowing for a player to move up or stay in a level to match his or her skill level. Following are suggested guidelines intended to create a valuable and enjoyable experience, appropriate for each age level. Many of these guidelines already exist in the youth leagues in one variation or another.



VBC Youth Baseball Coach's Playbook

Suggestions for T-Ball League (Age 5)

The goal of this level is to provide players with a fun introduction to the game of baseball and to create an enjoyable social experience. Every effort should be made by league directors and the coaches to keep the game moving quickly: getting the ball in play often, giving players an opportunity to run the bases, and for fielders to touch the ball.



- Teams of no more than 10 players (only 8 will play in the field and no more than 10 will bat each half inning). Keep a continual batting order so that each player bats about the same amount of times during each game.
- Rotate fielding positions each inning; infield to outfield.
- *Use of tee only (no coach pitch at this level)
- 45 minute games once a week (10 games)
- Two practices per week (one should be a 5 on 5 intra-squad scrimmage game)
- Parent plays first base to take throws on the base (parent does not field balls hit off the bat)
- Use “Level 1” safety balls
- The goal at each game is to play each inning in 15 minutes or less (approximately 7 minute half innings) and 3 innings per 45 minutes.

**There will be a desire by some coaches and parents in T-ball to start coach pitch at this level. Although there may be some players that can consistently hit coach pitch at this age, most cannot. This practice of coach pitching during games at this stage greatly slows down the game. Keep in mind that there are about 17 other players in the game. If you have a child that can hit coach pitch, practice at home and/or move up to the next level.*

“A MUST” for the T-Ball Coach

Cultivate Your Parents

You will never succeed coaching kids this age by yourself, no matter how good you are. If you do not get a large group of parents helping you, you will be unable to accomplish much with this age. Most parents will want to help and are just waiting for you to ask them. Learn your parent's names right away. Tell them what you need help with and clearly communicate what you need them to do. They will appreciate it.

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Suggestions for Coach-Pitch League 1 (Ages 6-7)

The goal of this level is to provide players with a fun baseball experience and to create an enjoyable social experience. Players are introduced to coach pitch (no pitch machines) and will develop hitting, base running, fielding, and throwing skills, as well as a better understanding of the concepts and strategies of the game. Like T-Ball, emphasis is placed on keeping the game moving and providing as many “touch opportunities” as possible.

Note: There is often a large disparity in skill level between players 6 and 7 year-olds, particularly in catching and throwing the ball consistently. The coach should keep this in mind when placing players in certain positions, particularly at first base.



- Team rosters of no more than 12 (only 8 play in the field – each position minus the catcher)
- Play 3 outs or 5 runs max per half inning or bat no more than 9 players per half inning.
- Use “Level 1” Safety Balls
- Two games per week (scheduled on the same days each week, e.g., Saturday and Monday).
- One practice per week.
- Coach pitches to batters from one knee, throwing on a direct line - from hand to strike zone. Move up closer to throw consistent strikes. A coach does not have to pitch from the

mound. (*See footnote below on informal study on Coach Pitch vs. Machine Pitch)

- Each batter gets a maximum of five swings (excluding foul balls on last swing)
- NO PLAYER CATCHER. Parent will catch (standing by backstop with empty bucket to collect balls). No plays at home plate.
- Parent first baseman (recommended) to avoid collisions and allow players to throw to first full speed. A player may play first base if he or she has demonstrated that they can consistently catch a thrown ball from another player.
- The goal at each game is to play each inning in 15 minutes or less (approximately 7 minute half innings) and five innings in 75 minutes.

Keep the Game Moving and Allow Players to Deal with Setbacks

Many of the delays in the game (which drive players away from the game) are born out of the well-intentioned, but misguided, desire to help a player. Always keep in mind that there are roughly 20 other players in the game. The coach that gives the hitter 8 or 9 swings in one at-bat greatly slows down the game and unintentionally prevents that hitter from having the opportunity to have the valuable learning experience of dealing with disappointment.

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Suggestions for Coach-Pitch League 2 (Ages 7-8)

The goal of this level is provide players with a fun baseball experience and to create an enjoyable social experience. Players refine their hitting with coach pitch (no machines) and will develop more proficiency in hitting, base running, fielding, and throwing skills, as well as a better understanding of the concepts and strategies of the game. Like T-Ball and Coach Pitch 1, emphasis is placed on keeping the game moving and providing as many “touch opportunities” as possible. Team rosters of no more than 12 (only 9 play in the field)

- 3 outs or 5 runs max per half-inning.
- Scorebook is kept, but no league standings
- Coach umpires
- Use “Level 1” Safety Ball
- Two games per week (scheduled on the same days each week, e.g., Saturday and Monday).
- One practice per week.



- Coach pitch to batters from one knee or standing position, throwing on a direct line - from hand to strike zone. (*See footnote below on informal study on Coach Pitch vs. Machine Pitch)
- Each batter gets a maximum of three swings (excluding foul balls on last swing). No called strikes.
- Player catcher. If ball gets by catcher, the pitcher-coach will grab another ball out of

the bucket next to him. The catcher does not chase passed balls. A parent should be at the backstop with an empty bucket, behind the catcher, collecting balls that get by the catcher.

- No stealing and base runners may not advance on passed balls.
- Player first baseman.
- Base runners may not advance to the next base once the ball is in the pitcher's hand in the middle of the diamond.
- Pitching practices and clinics are offered weekly throughout the season by the league. Each coach is encouraged to schedule additional pre- or post-practices for players who would like to develop their pitching or catching skills.
- The goal at each game is to play each inning in 15 minutes or less (approximately 7 minute half innings) and six innings in 90 minutes.

Consider COACH PITCH instead of MACHINE PITCH

In an informal study conducted in the spring of 2010 in Arlington, Virginia we found that Coach Pitch was much more efficient and practical than Machine Pitch. Coaches in the Single A league were given the option to use either Coach Pitch or Machine Pitch. For teams that used Coach Pitch the ball was put in play on average 8 out of 9 times within the first three pitches. Coach-Pitch teams averaged 7 minutes per half inning to bat nine players. For teams that used Machine Pitch only 4 out of 9 players put the ball in play in the first three pitches. On average 3 out of 9 batters did not hit the machine pitch at all. The average time for a half-inning was 14 minutes to bat 9 players.

When both teams used Coach Pitch, 5.5 innings were played on average in 75 minutes. When one team used Machine Pitch the average amount of innings dropped to 2.5 innings per 75 minutes.

Without a doubt, the Coach-Pitch option is more efficient and practical. More strikes are thrown. The players hit the ball more often, run the bases more, field the ball more, and the throw the ball more. Players in the field are “in the game.”



It is logical to use Coach Pitch for developmental purposes. Players will get more repetitions in the field and develop a better sense of the game. Players will become better hitters for a variety of reasons:

1) They will see better pitches to hit.

2) They have a better chance to develop the proper hitting mechanics – naturally triggering the hands and shifting weight back with the motion of the pitcher. *With the machine the coach sees that his hitters are usually late to the ball – because it is too difficult to time the machine - and he instinctively tells his players to start with their hands and weight already back while the machine is loaded – a very unnatural hitting style (analogous to hitting a golf ball from the load position). This “preload” adjustment gives the hitter relatively more success off the machine, but has a negative long-term impact on the hitter.*

3) It naturally prepares players for the next level of Kid Pitch.

There is an argument that there are not enough coaches who can throw consistent strikes from 35-40 feet. If this is the case, there are several ways to compensate: 1) the coach can learn to throw from one knee or get an assistant to learn (the league will hold training sessions at the beginning of the year) 2) the league can pay a HS player \$20 to come to the games and pitch (the savings from not having to purchase pitching machines will cover the costs easily).

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Suggestions for First-Year Kid-Pitch League (Ages 8-9)

The goal of this level is to provide players with a fun baseball experience. Players are introduced to kid-pitch at an appropriate age level. Players will develop proficiency in pitching, catching, hitting, base running, fielding, and throwing skills, as well as a better understanding of the concepts and strategies of the game. More emphasis is placed on skill development. Like T-Ball and Coach Pitch, emphasis is placed on keeping the game moving and providing as many “touch opportunities” as possible.

- Team rosters of no more than 13 (only 9 play in the field and no more than 9 bat per half-inning).
- 3 outs or 5 runs max per inning.
- Use “Level 2” Safety Balls.
- Two games per week (scheduled on the same days each week, e.g., Saturday and Monday).
- One practice per week.
- Kid-pitch to batters. Move pitcher's mound up to 41 feet. If the pitcher throws four balls to a batter, the hitting-team coach (prepared with glove and ball in hand) will run onto the field and pitch to his batter. The coach throws from a standing position. The batter gets a maximum of three swings (excluding a foul ball on the last pitch). There are no walks.
- Scorebook is kept. Standings optional.
- Paid umpires. Balls and strikes are called.
- Player catcher. If ball gets by catcher, the umpire will throw the pitcher another ball. The catcher does not chase passed balls.
- No stealing and base runners may not advance on passed balls.
- Base runners may not advance to the next base once the ball is in the pitcher's hand in the middle of the diamond.
- Player first baseman.
- The goal at each game is to play each inning in 15 minutes or less (approximately 7 minute half innings) and six innings in 90 minutes.
- Pitching practices and clinics are offered weekly throughout the season by the league.
- Post season may include Town Tournament / Sunday Pick-up Summer Games



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Coach Mike Murray



Coach Murray has directed the Virginia Baseball Club since 1992. He has worked with hundreds of youth players in winter and summer baseball training programs, and has presented at dozens of coach clinics. He has been coaching varsity level baseball since 1988. Since 2003 he has been the varsity hitting coach at Yorktown High School (five district titles). Mike spent four years as the associate head varsity baseball coach at O'Connell High School (WCAC Champs and #3 ranking in Washington Post in 2001), after spending the previous seven years as the head varsity baseball coach at Wakefield High School. Among the teams Mike has managed include the Arlington American Legion Post 139, Alexandria American Legion Post 129 (co-founder). Mike teaches Sociology and Psychology at Yorktown HS. He was named in "Who's Who Among American Teachers" in 2006. He worked as a certified trainer for the Positive Coaching Alliance and traveled around the country presenting PCA workshops. In February 2006, Coach Murray was recognized by the International Sport Institute as one of nine coaches nationwide for his work in promoting a positive sports culture in his community. Mike lives in Arlington, VA with his wife, Yazmin, and two boys, Ketz and Javier. He is currently helping as an assistant coach with his sons' youth baseball teams.

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Contributors

Coach Terry Dwyer

An elementary physical education teacher since 1994, Coach Dwyer was named Teacher of the Year for Arlington Traditional School in 2006. Coach Dwyer was a middle infielder while attending SUNY Cortland from 1989-1993. While at Cortland, the Red Dragons were SUNYAC Champions from 1991-1993. He went on to serve as the Head Varsity Coach at Newfield Central School in Newfield, NY where he was named coach of the year in 1994. After moving to Virginia, Coach Dwyer was a Varsity Assistant Coach at Yorktown High School in 1995 and then moved on to become the Head JV Coach at Washington-Lee High school from 1996-2000. Since 2000, he has served as a Varsity Assistant Coach at Washington Lee High School. While a member of the W-L coaching staff, the Generals have won 4 district titles. Coach Dwyer has been associated with VBC since 1996. He has coached players in summer camps, private lessons and has presented at a few coaches clinics. Coach Dwyer is a resident of Fairfax City with his wife and three boys.

Coach Mark "Pudge" Gjormond

Coach Gjormond is the Head Varsity Baseball Coach at Madison High School in Vienna, Virginia. He has won numerous awards during his tenure at Madison, including Coach of the Year in the Northern Region, VA Commonwealth, Liberty District, and also by the American Baseball Coaches Association. He led team to the Virginia State Championship in 2002 and his team was ranked #3 in the country. He is currently the president of the American Baseball Coaches Association (2010). Coach Gjormond has been working

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with youth baseball players in winter and summer baseball programs through the MVP Baseball School since 1998.

Coach Joe McDonald – Joe McDonald has been the head varsity baseball coach at George C. Marshall High School in Falls Church, VA since 2008. Joe has coached high school baseball for 14 years and was previously an assistant coach at Freedom High School in South Riding. Also, Joe was the head baseball coach at McLean High School from 2000-2005 where he was named the Liberty District Coach of the Year in 2004. He has presented at numerous youth baseball coaching clinics. Coach McDonald is the head coach of the NVTBL Stars National, a regional based travel baseball team that has received national recognition. Joe is a special education teacher at Marshall High School. He helps coach his son's baseball teams and runs clinics for the local youth league. He resides in Aldie, VA with his wife Maria and his 3 sons; Aidan, Jack, and Joey.

Peter Cary – Peter is a former youth baseball coach and Fairfax Little League (Fairfax, VA) Commissioner and Player Agent, and author of the Fairfax Little League T-Ball Coach Training Guide. He is the author of "Fixing Kids Sports" and numerous other articles on youth sports published in U.S. News & World Report.

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Pictures of players and coaches include: Coach Mike Cassidy, George Sheldon, John Herbst, Brian Lubnow, Ketz Murray, Javier Murray, Zach Pearlman.

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Notes: