



San Ramon Valley Little League

Practice Guide

Players experience limited opportunities to improve their abilities as players and athletes if their only exposure to baseball is during gametime. In fact, it is the recommendation of USA Baseball that practice time should make up at least 75% of a team's time during a regular season. With that much emphasis on practice, it is important to make sure your athletes are being challenged and having fun so they stay engaged in the training, and leave wanting to come back for more.

The development of your athletes should come before anything else. Here are some considerations to ensure the development of your athletes is the first priority:

- You arrive at practice prepared with an organized practice plan.
- You ensure your athletes are having fun and enjoying the game.
- Athlete development and fun are priorities over winning.
- Communication is open and respectful between players and coaches.
- You praise your athletes to build their confidence, not tear it down

Be Prepared, Have a Plan

Being organized, minimizing downtime, and maximizing your time is key to ensuring your players are getting the most instruction and repetitions, and most importantly, are staying too busy to be bored!

Here are recommendations to being and staying organized:

- Start with a list of Season goals. Assign time to each practice to work on accomplishing these goals over time.
- Create a written plan before each practice, inclusive of drills and time frames. Have it with you.
- Find volunteer help, and delegate responsibilities among your coaches. The more you can do at the same time, the less standing around and waiting there is.
- Arrive at practices on-time (early) and with all the gear you need.

- Practice the situations that happen most often in games.
- Establish a routine. When athletes know what to expect, as well as what is expected of them, they will be able to develop more comfortably. Your routine should be adjusted if you can tell that practices are becoming mundane and/or athletes are no longer having fun.

Use Progressions

Students learn best when using a process called “scaffolding”. Just like building a structure, it starts with a good foundation, and then building a strong framework to add the decorative exterior. In regards to athletic practice and skill development, start with the basics. Ensure all of your players understand the fundamental aspects of a skill and work up from there. Break up your drills into steps, and go slow. Help them understand that they will have a chance to run at full speed, but they have the responsibility to demonstrate mastery before you will give them a chance to “show their stuff”.

For example, if today’s goal is to learn bunt coverages, then begin with stations to focus on the specific individual fundamentals that each position player and pitcher will need to learn (e.g. how to position your feet and body to pick up a slow-moving ball; and footwork around each of the bases to receive throws, etc.) and then spend time with the entire team learning and executing the various plays.

A good approach to teaching skills is the following:

1. Introduce the Skill
 - Name it, explain why it’s important
2. Demonstrate the Skill
 - Use correct form, slowly, from different angles
3. Attend to your Players
 - Younger players may need to be guided through the skill
 - Provide positive feedback, in addition to correction
 - Don’t be afraid to have a Player freeze, and physically move their arms or legs through the motion of the skill.

Use Competition and Gameplay

One of the basic philosophies of teaching baseball is to make it fun. On the surface that means that we should let the kids play games, which is important from both an enjoyment and a developmental standpoint.

The actual game of Baseball involves periods of boredom, punctuated by controlled chaos. Introducing gameplay into your practices is a great way to replicate the excitement, energy, tension, interference, and distractions that are normal elements of baseball games. Create excitement and competition amongst your players, but then remind them to focus on their skills, technique and form, so that they can perform later under pressure.

Practice Structure

All practices are not the same. Location, attendance and where you are in the season all affect the way your practices are run. However, following a consistent format will help create routine and allow players to self-assign tasks or initiate with a minimum of direction.

1. Early Activity

- It is unlikely that all of your players will show up on time, every time. Instead of having a disorganized start to your practice, plan for a buffer that allows you to control the actual start of structured practice.
- Fill this time with a fun, but beneficial activity. Some examples include 2-ball, pepper, or live BP. Give late players a reason to show up early next time!

2. Warmup

- While your players are likely to be young and resilient, we must still pay attention to building good physical habits. Incorporate a stretching or warm-up routine that gets their bodies moving and their minds engaged. By the end of a season you might appreciate the extra few inches of stretch from your first-baseman as he's reaching for the game winning out.

3. Baserunning

- Schedule a drill or game early in the practice that encourages players running the bases. This serves to burn off extra energy that you don't want later, and ensures you make time for this important skill. Make sure to incorporate Coach signs and situational running into the drill.

4. Catchplay - Throwing Routine

- Please notice that this segment wasn't labeled "warmup". Youth baseball teams should do everything they can to stay away from the concept of "throwing to warm up". Throwing and catching effectively is **fundamental** to the success of a team. Your team should take this time to be focused and structured - develop a specific routine.
- Players chasing after overthrows is one of the biggest wastes of time in your practice. Direct your volunteer coaches to patrol behind each line of players, stopping balls, passing extra balls back to the players and monitoring their progress.

5. Skills

- Time for working on fundamental components of infield/defensive motions (See "Use Progressions" above). Try and create multiple stations to maintain group numbers of 3-4.
- Trouble generating ideas? Identify a play that you want your team to execute during your next game, and break down the steps. Start with fielding the ball, making the throw, receiving the ball and executing the out. Identify how you want your players to execute each step.

6. Closing

- Finish on a high. Options include a closing game (especially as a reward for good focus or effort) or a conditioning drill (team exercises or physical challenges).
- Make sure to close with a message to your players about what they did today. What did we cover? What did they find interesting? What will they use in their next game?

Managing Misbehavior

Mischievous behavior is a natural part of youth. “Bad” behaviors such as clowning, grandstanding or even defiance, is to be expected when coaching youth sports. The trick to managing these behaviors is to have multiple approaches for different situations, and to understand and know your players’ motivations.

Practice Structure

If a Coach can keep practice activities constant and engaging, then many times, misbehavior can be avoided. When kids have tasks to perform and see those tasks as a challenge, they are less likely to want to find other things to do for entertainment. Stay organized, and know what you want your kids to **do**.
Baseball is boring IF you turn it into downtime.

Enthusiasm

If you **act** like a skill or activity is fun or important, then your Players will begin to believe it too. Having an excited look on your face while you describe a drill, or acting concerned about your Players’ ability to perform a skill goes a long way to create tension. Kids love the idea of a physical challenge. Even if it’s imaginary, give them reason to rise to that challenge.

Ignoring vs Praise

Sometimes a Player’s misbehavior is a learned behavior, and works to gain attention (even if it’s negative). It is hard to ignore misbehavior in a group setting, but paying too much attention to it is distracting and wastes valuable practice time. Learn to praise and give attention to good behaviors, and see how quickly your Players adapt themselves to how you want. If they see you as a source of affirmation and support, they will modify their behaviors to gain your attention.

Discipline

Sometimes discipline is necessary to protect Player safety or when Players are creating negative situations with their words or actions. In these situations, please follow the following guidelines:

- Corporal punishment (physical touch, slapping, forceful grabbing) is **never** acceptable.

- Only use discipline as a last resort. Constant discipline creates resentment and causes Players to lose interest.
- Discipline in a corrective way to help them improve. Never discipline to retaliate and make yourself feel better.
- Impose discipline in an impersonal and conservative tone. Shouting or scolding indicates that your attitude is one of revenge.
- Be consistent amongst Players. Never appear to target particular individuals.