

Season Plan for 6 to 7-Year-Olds

These slightly older players can now progress to “revisiting” the tactical components of hitting and running as they also learn more of fielding and covering bases. The overview here provides a weekly guide that shows the tactical and skill components, along with the other types of activities described previously. These all will be detailed in the practice plans. Boys and girls should still play together at this age level.

Overview of the Season Plan

The Season Plan on the next page provides a weekly guide and addresses tactical and skill components, and other activities fully detailed in the Practice Plans document. The Season Plan has five components:

- **Purpose:** The purpose of the practice is your main focus.
- **Tactics and Skills:** Tactics are knowing what to do during the game (and when to do it), and they require an understanding of the problems faced by each team during the game and how those problems can be solved. Ways to maintain possession of the ball would be tactics. Skills are the physical skills traditionally taught, such as passing or shooting the ball or controlling the ball during play.
- **Rules and Traditions:** You will teach the rules of the sport to young children gradually, as part of playing games and learning skills. Traditions are those unwritten rules that players follow to be courteous and safe, such as raising your hand when you foul someone or playing cooperatively with the others on your team.
- **Fitness Concepts:** Even young children can understand some simple concepts about health and fitness, such as the idea that exercise strengthens your heart, so some of these are suggested as the focus for brief discussions during practice.
- **Character Development Concepts:** The four core values—caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility—can all be related to many situations arising while playing basketball. For example, playing cooperatively with teammates shows that you care about them. Again, we’ll suggest some specific ideas for briefly discussing character development values.

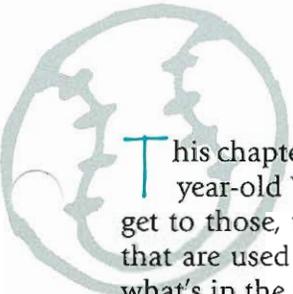
YMCA Rookies Baseball and Softball Season Plan

6- and 7-Year-Olds

Week	Purpose	Tactics and skills	Rules and traditions	Fitness concepts	Character-development concepts
1	Defending space in the infield with no outs, no runners on base, and a grounder to the infield.	Fielding grounders; throwing accurately to first.	Infield positions.	General fitness Playing baseball leads to fitness.	Four core values The four core values are introduced.
2	Getting on base with no outs, no runners on base, and a grounder to the infield.	Batting; hitting and running to first; fielding grounders; and throwing accurately to first.	Running outside base path; balls, strikes, and outs; overrunning first.	Flexibility Your muscles need to stretch.	Responsibility Learn the team motto: Be ready to play, work to improve skills, and have fun.
3	Defending space in the infield with no outs, no runners on base, and a hit to the infield.	Fielding line drives; fielding fly balls; fielding grounders.	Fly balls as related to the batter, runner, and fielder; number of foul balls and outs.	Cardiorespiratory fitness The heart is a special muscle that pumps blood.	Responsibility It's important to be a good sport.
4	Cutting the lead runner and advancing from first to second base with no outs and a runner on first.	Covering second base on a force play; throwing accurately to second; running from first to second.	Force play; tag play; when to leave first base.	Cardiorespiratory fitness Your heartbeat increases with exercise.	Honesty Tell the coach when you break a rule.
5	Cutting the lead runner and advancing from first to second base with no outs and a runner on first.	Covering second base on a force play; throwing accurately to second; running from first to second.	Runner interference with the player fielding the ball.	Cardiorespiratory fitness Your heart gets stronger when you exercise and play.	Responsibility Mistakes are OK. Don't make excuses for your play.

Week	Purpose	Tactics and skills	Rules and traditions	Fitness concepts	Character-development concepts
6	Cutting the lead runner and advancing from second to third base with no outs and runners on first and second.	Throwing accurately to third base; running from second base to third; covering third base on a force play.	When to leave second base.	Flexibility Muscles help you move	Caring Take turns with teammates
7	Cutting the lead runner and advancing from third to home with no outs and runners on first, second, and third.	Throwing accurately to home; running from third to home; covering home plate on a force play.	Scoring; when to leave base.	Muscle strength and endurance Physical activity gives you strong arms and legs.	Responsibility Keep control of yourself during practice and games.
8	Defending space in the outfield with no outs, a runner on first, and a ball hit to the outfield.	Throwing accurately to third base or shortstop from the outfield; fielding fly balls, line drives, and grounders; backing-up in the outfield.	Fly ball; tagging on fly ball. day, even days you	General fitness Keep active every day. It's important to have no practice.	Responsibility to team It's important to value teamwork.
9	Defending space; various situations.	Making appropriate plays during a game with nine players on the field.		General fitness Healthy habits give you more energy.	Caring Forgive mistakes; they are part of the game.
10	Giving players a chance to experience a longer game.	Reviewing skills and tactics.	Game play procedure with review of rules as applicable.	General fitness Eat good foods rather than junk foods.	Respect for game Realize it takes years to master some skills.

Practice Plans for 6- and 7-Year-Olds

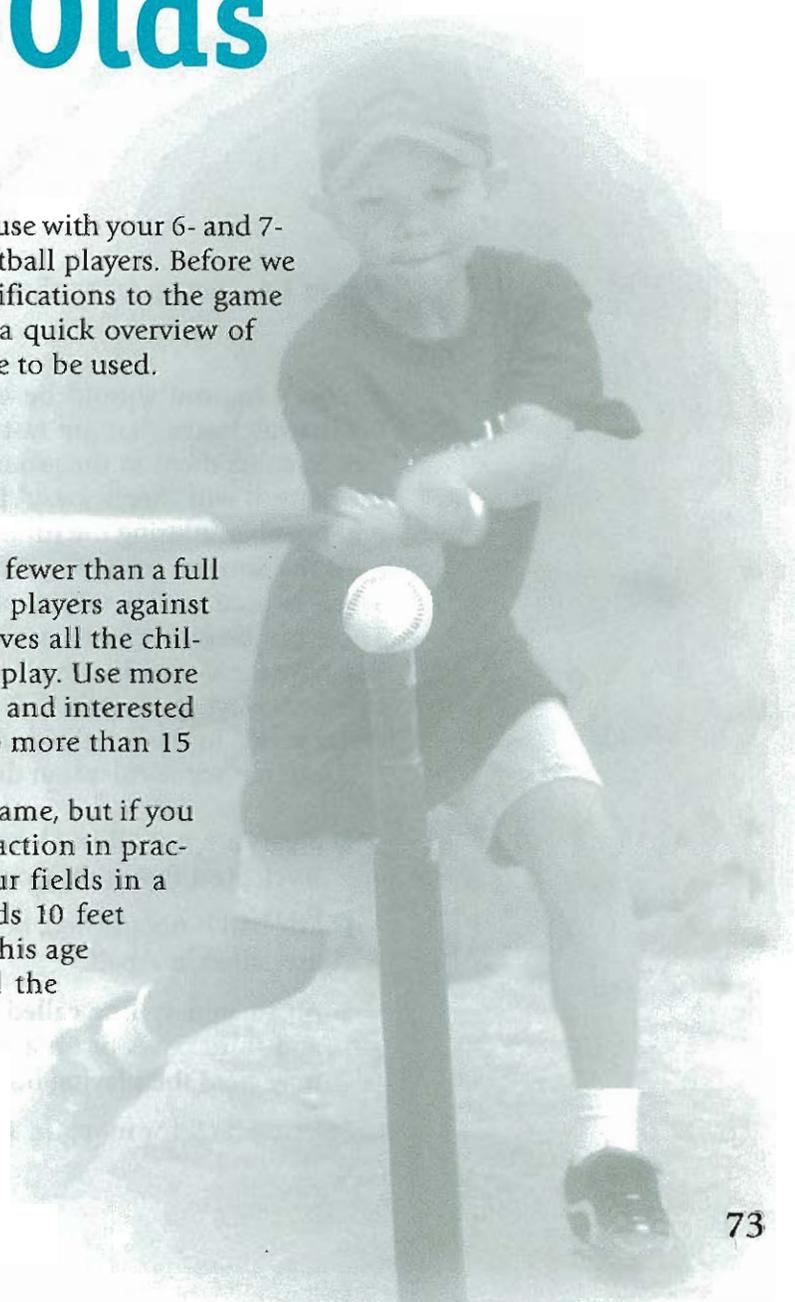


This chapter contains 10 practice plans to use with your 6- and 7-year-old YMCA Rookies baseball or softball players. Before we get to those, though, we'll explain the modifications to the game that are used in Rookies play and give you a quick overview of what's in the practice plans and how they are to be used.

Game Modifications

At this age Rookies mainly play games with fewer than a full nine-player team on the field, usually six players against six (6 v 6). This speeds up the game and gives all the children more opportunities to be involved in play. Use more players, however, if you feel they are skilled and interested enough to do so on a larger team. Have no more than 15 players on a team.

Baseball or softball is inherently a slow game, but if you use the whole field, you can speed up the action in practices. Here's how: set up two, three, or four fields in a cloverleaf (see figure 7.1). Set up the fields 10 feet apart to avoid injuries on overthrows. For this age level, bases should be 50 feet apart, and the



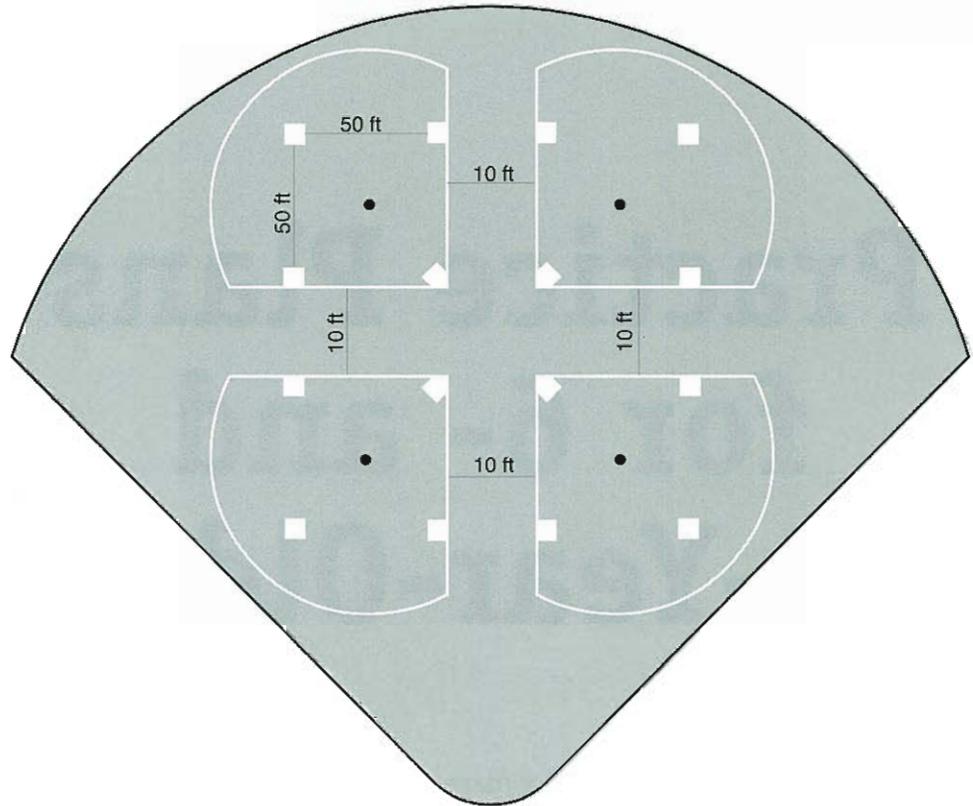


Figure 7.1 Set up for smaller fields.

pitcher's mound should be 40 feet from home plate. Bases should be breakaway bases that are not permanently attached to the spike or tube that anchors them to the ground. With such bases, when a player runs into the plate, it will "break away" from its anchor, rather than staying stationary and possibly injuring the runner.

At the Rookies level, players play T-ball rather than baseball. A regulation T-ball is used with a variety of widths, lengths, and weights of T-ball bats. These can be either foam-covered plastic or Wiffle bats, the equipment that you have the 4- and 5-year-olds use; they also can be aluminum or wooden T-ball bats. Having a variety of types of bats allows players to select the bat that "feels good" to them individually.

T-ball has some rules that differ from baseball:

- ⊙ Steals are not allowed, so no sliding to bases is taught at the Rookies level. Headfirst sliding, which is dangerous, is prohibited.
- ⊙ The ball is not pitched, but is hit off a tee. Therefore, no balls and strikes are called in T-ball.
- ⊙ An imaginary line called the *playing line* is drawn either between first and third bases or on a curve 40 feet out from home plate. No fielder may cross the playing line until the ball is hit.

See chapter 9 for more on T-ball rules.

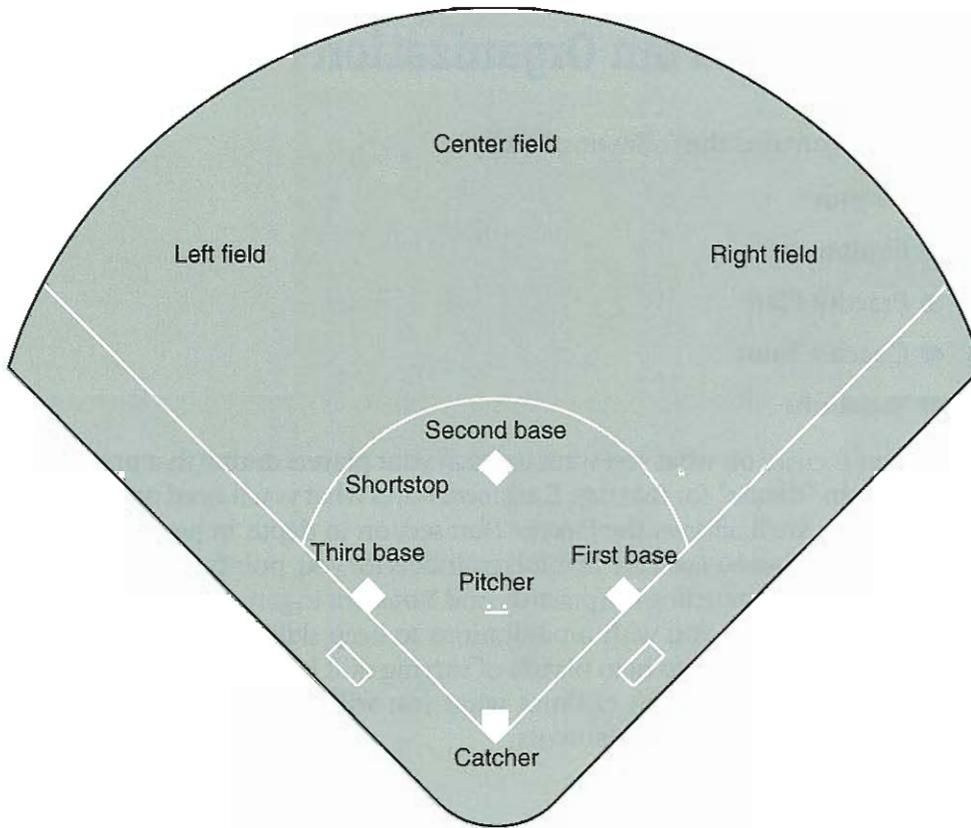


Figure 7.2 Baseball positions.

Players should learn to play all the infield and outfield positions at this level (see figure 7.2). In most games, play is 6 v 6, with the fielding team filling all infield positions (first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher). Toward the end of the season, games are played with nine players on the field, including all the infield and outfield positions.

If you should choose to play with smaller teams, have players play the following positions:

- ☉ For 4 v 4, place players at first, second, third, and shortstop.
- ☉ For 5 v 5, place players at first, second, third, shortstop, and pitcher.

The player in the pitcher's position will not pitch, but will field. He or she must stay in place until the ball is hit. The player in the catcher's position must stand far enough behind home plate to not interfere with the batter.

Players will be aided by having a first-base and third-base coach to guide them during play, so try to recruit at least one other adult to assist you during practices. If you have more than one game going at a time, having additional adults who can serve as base coaches allows you to observe games without also coaching at a base. Encourage parents to help you—the more assistants you have, the more attention each young child can get (though you should be sure not to assign parents to work with their own children).

Practice Plan Organization

Each plan contains the following sections:

- ⦿ Purpose
- ⦿ Equipment
- ⦿ Practice Plan
- ⦿ Coach's Point
- ⦿ Variations

Purpose focuses on what you want to teach your players during that practice; it is your main "theme" for that day. *Equipment* notes what you'll need on hand for that practice. We'll address the *Practice Plan* section in depth in just a moment. Items listed in *Coach's Point* are helpful reminders for you, points of emphasis for most effectively conducting the practice. And *Variations* to games noted at the end of each plan provide you with modifications to keep skill practices and games fun and interesting and to help players of varying skill levels.

The *Practice Plan* section outlines what you will do during each practice session. It consists of these elements:

- ⦿ Warm-Up
- ⦿ Fitness Circle
- ⦿ Game 1
- ⦿ Skill Practices and Games
- ⦿ Team Circle and Wrap-Up

You'll begin each session with 5 to 10 minutes of warm-up activities. This segment will be followed by 5 minutes of the Fitness Circle, during which you briefly talk with players about an idea that relates to health or fitness. Then, in Game 1, you'll be working on the first two steps of the four-step process for teaching baseball or softball: that is, playing a modified game and helping players discover what they need to do. The game will be designed to focus the children's attention on a particular aspect of the game. Start the game, but when it's clear that the players are having trouble achieving the goal of the game, stop the game and ask questions and get answers similar to those shown in the plans. The questions and answers will help the players see what skills they need to "solve" tactical problems in the game.

The third part of the four-step process is teaching the skills identified in Game 1 through skill practices. In each skill practice you'll use the IDEA approach, which means you do the following actions:

- I** Introduce the skill.
- D** Demonstrate the skill.
- E** Explain the skill.
- A** Attend to players practicing the skill.

Chapter 8 contains descriptions of all the skills, so a page reference will be given to guide you to the appropriate description there. The introduction, demonstration, and explanation should be very brief to fit young children's short attention spans. As the players practice, you attend to individual children, guiding them with Coach's Cues or further demonstration.

After the skill practices, you finish the four-step process by having the children play another game. This lets them use the skills they just learned and to see how those skills fit into the context of a game.

The Practice Plan section concludes with a Team Circle, which focuses on character development. You take about 5 minutes to talk *with* your players about some aspect of the game that relates to one of the four core values—caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility. Following this, you wrap up the practice with a reminder of the next practice day and time and a preview of what will be taught in the next practice.

A note about Fitness and Team Circles—these times are meant to be true discussions, not lectures where you do all the talking and the kids do all the listening. Ask the questions provided and wait for your players to respond. Don't feed them the answers that we provide; these answers are only meant to help you guide the discussion. The children's wording doesn't have to exactly match what is given here. Your role in team circles is as much to ask questions and get players to respond as it is to dole out information.

The plans in this chapter, combined with the information in the rest of this book, should give you everything you need to lead practices. Just remember to be patient and caring as you work on skills. Different children will progress at different rates, and it's more important that they learn the sport in a positive way than it is that they learn quickly.

Key to Diagrams

	= Cone
	= Rolling the ball
	= Throwing the ball
	= Running
	= Hitting the ball
R	= Runner
	= Coach
B	= Batter
X	= Player
1B	= First-base player
2B	= Second-base player
3B	= Third-base player
SS	= Shortstop
P	= Pitcher
C	= Catcher
LF	= Left fielder
CF	= Center fielder
RF	= Right fielder

Practice 1

PURPOSE

To defend space by infield position, focusing on the situation in which there are no outs, no runners on base, and a grounder to the infield. The objectives are for players to learn the infield positions (first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher) and to field grounders and make an accurate throw to first base.

Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- Three or four batting tees
- Five balls at each tee



 Players on first base will need some help with covering the base on the throw. Be sure to put one of your more proficient players on first base initially, but give all players a chance to play first base eventually.

Warm-Up (10 minutes)

Begin each practice with five to ten minutes of warm-up activities to get players loosened up and ready to go.

1. Players play catch with you or an assistant coach..
2. Players jog once around the bases.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Following the warm-up, gather the players and briefly discuss the fitness concept for that practice.

Key Idea: General fitness

“In baseball [softball], running makes our hearts beat faster and our leg muscles stronger. Spread out into your own space. Everyone run in place and I will toss the ball to some of you. If you get the ball, toss it back to me and keep running!” Continue for about 30 seconds. “Playing baseball [softball] improves our physical conditioning or fitness. We get better at running, batting, and throwing the ball, and we can keep going longer before we get too tired. How can I keep from getting too tired when I’m running?” Pacing. “How about throwing?” Practice at home. “It is also important to take a rest when you need one and to drink water during practice and at home. We’ll talk more about the different areas of fitness in our Fitness Circles throughout the season.”

Game 1 (10 minutes)

Following the Fitness Circle, get the kids playing a game. Follow most games with a time of questions and answers—with YOU asking the questions and your PLAYERS providing the answers (about what the goal of the game was and what skills and tactics they needed to perform to succeed in the game). For many games, we provide diagrams or figures showing how the game is played. We also often provide “coach’s points” for you to pass along to your players during the games.

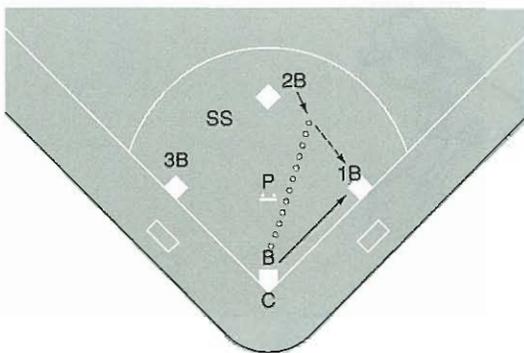
Goal

Players will field a grounder and throw to first base ahead of the runner. Players will hit and run to first base ahead of the throw. Players will review the infield positions: first, second, and third bases; shortstop; pitcher; and catcher.

Practice 1

Description

6 v 6 (can be fewer players)—for each field, set up an infield. Review infield positions. A player from the batting team hits off a tee and runs to first base. If the batter-runner gets to first base safely, he or she scores a point for the team. If safe, the player can continue to run and score again by crossing home plate. The fielding team attempts to field and then throw the ball to first base, getting it there ahead of the runner (a play will only be attempted at first base). The side is retired after three points or three outs, whichever comes first. Each team keeps track of the points scored and compares it to the points scored in Game 2.



Coach: "What was the goal of the game, if you were an infielder?"

Players: "The goal was to catch the ball and throw it to first base."

Coach: "How many times did your team get three straight outs, without letting a runner on?"

Players: "None."

Coach: "How do you think we could get better?"

Players: "We could practice."

You'll follow Game 1 with a Skill Practice, during which you'll introduce, demonstrate, and explain a skill or tactic, and then attend to your players as they practice it. The question-and-answer session, in which your players tell YOU what skills and tactics they needed to be successful in the game, leads directly to the Skill Practice. We often provide coaching points with the Skill Practices; pass these points along to your players. We also provide "coach's cues"—phrases to help your players focus on the task at hand—during many Skill Practices and Games.

Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to field a grounder with a glove (see pages 125-126).
2. Practice fielding a ball properly.

Description

Pairs—partners stand about 10 feet apart from each other and roll the ball back and forth between them. When the partners get 10 in a row without a miss, both players take one giant step back and repeat the drill.



Practice 1

(cont'd)



COACH'S cues



For Fielding Grounders

"Get in the ready position."

"Move your feet to the ball."

"Put your glove on the ground."

"Catch and cover." (Cover the ball with the ungloved hand.)

Skill Practice 2 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to throw a ball accurately (see pages 121-122).
2. Practice fielding a ball properly and throwing accurately.

Description

Pairs—partners stand about 15 feet apart. One partner rolls the ball to the other partner, and the other partner fields the ball and throws the ball back. After one partner rolls the ball five times, players should switch so that the other partner rolls the ball. If both of the partners complete four of five good catches and accurate throws (within one step of the person's catching the ball), both should take one giant step back and repeat the drill.

COACH'S cues



For Throwing

"Bring the ball WAY back."

"Step with the opposite foot."

"Follow through to the target."

Use the Coach's Cues for fielding grounders to help with this practice, too.

Game 2 (10 minutes)

- Follow the same directions as with Game 1. Compare the scores of Game 2 with the score of the first game.

Practice 1

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Conclude practice by gathering your players and discussing a character development concept. These aren't lectures; you want your players' active participation in these discussions. Following the discussions, wrap up the practice with a few comments.

Key Idea: Four core values

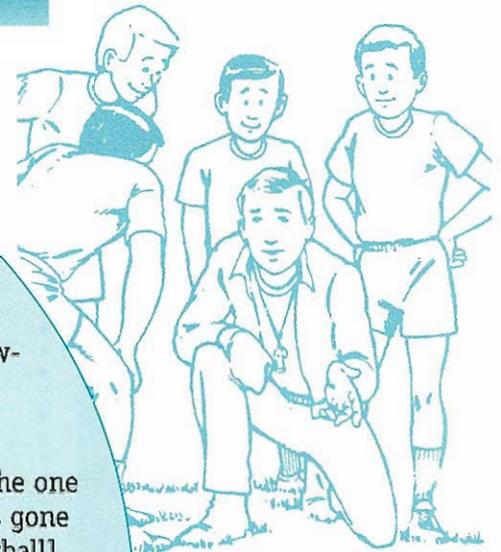
Gather children into a circle with one ball. "Everyone hand the ball to the one next to you until it makes it around the whole circle." After the ball has gone around the circle one time, have it tossed to you. "We play baseball [softball] to be more healthy and fit, but it also teaches us to become good teammates and good people. This season we will talk about four qualities of a good person and teammate: *caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility*. Our team needs to have all of these qualities in our practices and games. Remember—we can't be a team without each of you doing your part. Let's throw the ball to each other and say one of the core values before you throw. This will help you remember to use all four of the qualities so we can work together."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the children of the next practice's day and time, and give them a sneak preview of that practice—hitting and running to first base as well as fielding grounders and throwing to first base.

Variations

- If you have a number of players without previous experience, put them on a separate field and provide them with some one-on-one or one-on-two attention.
- Games may be played 4 v 4 or 5 v 5, depending on the number of players per team.



-  Try this activity with advanced players. Have four players form a square, with a person at each corner. The first player rolls the ball to the player to his or her left. That player catches the grounder and throws the ball to the next player, who then rolls the ball to the next player, and so on. After the ball goes around the square five times, the players change roles so that the players who rolled the ball throw.
-  If you have a player who is having difficulty, send him or her off with an assistant coach for some one-on-one attention for about 5 to 10 minutes.
-  Frequently question the players about the proper infield positions. For example, you might say, "Cordero, go show us where the first-base player stands." "Lisa, what position are you playing?" "Raymond, tell me what position Theresa is playing."

Practice 2

PURPOSE

To get on base, focusing on the situation in which there are no outs, no runners on base, and a grounder to the infield. The objectives are for players to be able to bat properly from a tee, to hit and run to first base, and to field grounders and make an accurate throw to first base. They also will review infield positions (first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher).

Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- Four batting tees
- Five balls at each tee
- A rubber band

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

1. Players play catch with you or an assistant coach.
2. Players jog around the bases once.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Flexibility

Bring a large rubber band to show to children. "This rubber band is like our muscles. Can you tell me why?" Listen to their responses—stretches when pulled, goes back to original shape, and so on. Demonstrate band movement. "Your muscles work the same way. When you reach and stretch, your muscles stretch like the rubber band. When your body comes back, your muscles go back to their original shape. Everyone reach down to the floor with your arms slowly and then bring your arms back up." Have children repeat three times. "Your muscles need to stretch because we use them in baseball [softball]. It makes them more flexible. When muscles are flexible, it keeps them from getting hurt and makes the muscles feel good."

Game 1 (10 minutes)

Goal

Players will field grounders and throw to first base, ahead of the runner. Players will hit and run to first base, ahead of the throw (see the figure on page 46). Players will review the infield positions: first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher.

Description

6 v 6 (can be fewer players)—set up an infield (or two or three of them). A player from the batting team hits off a tee and runs to first base. If the batter-runner gets to first base safely, he or she scores a point for the team. And, if safe, the player gets to continue to run and score again by crossing home plate. The fielding team attempts to

Practice 2

field the ball and throw the ball to first base ahead of the runner. The side is retired after three points or three outs, whichever comes first. Each team keeps track of the points scored and compares it with the points scored in Game 2 later. Review rules related to foul balls, outs, and base running (for example, running outside the base line or over-running first).

Coach: "What was the goal of the game when you were batting?"

Players: "The goal was to hit and then run to first base ahead of the throw."

Coach: "How many teams got players on base every time?"

Players: "None."

Coach: "How do you think we could get better?"

Players: "We could practice."

Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to hit a ball off a tee with a bat (see "Hitting," pages 128-130).
2. Practice hitting a ball off a tee with a bat.

Description

Pairs—use four batting tees positioned within five feet of a fence with two players at each tee and at least one assistant coach (see the figure on page 44). Each player should hit five times in a row, then switch. The other partner places the ball on the tee and stands *way* back. (The assistant coach should put a glove on the ground 10 to 15 feet behind the tee and have the partners stand behind the glove.) Discuss rules for balls and strikes (see pages 137-138). Remind players to stay in the batter's box while batting.

COACH'S cues



For Hitting

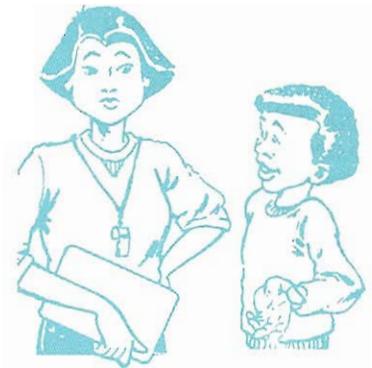
"Get in the ready position."

"Watch the ball on the batting tee."

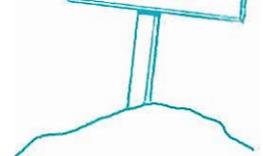
"Step and swing fast."

Skill Practice 2 (5 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to hit and run quickly to first base (see pages 130-131). Focus on the first step after the swing. Tell players to run outside the baseline and why. Also, tell them to run (or overrun) all the way *through* first base, without leaping.
2. Practice hitting and running quickly to first base.



COACH'S point



 Question the players frequently about the proper way to perform skills or where to throw the ball in a specific situation. For example, you might say, "Michael, show me the proper ready position when preparing to field a ball" or "Bobby, if the ball comes to you, where are you going to throw it?"



 To break players of throwing the bat, put a carpet square behind the batter's box (see figure on page 49) and tell the players to drop the bat on the carpet square on their follow-through, then run to first base.

Description

Individual—players do a mock swing and run to first base, three or four times each. Review rules related to running outside the base line and overrunning first base (see page 138).

COACH'S cues



"Get in the ready position."
 "Watch the ball on the batting tee."
 "Step and swing fast."
 "Step and drive to first base."

Skill Practice 3 (10 minutes)

Description

6 v 6—each member of the batting team hits and runs to first base, twice (see the figure on page 46). The fielding team fields the ball and throws to first base. Teams rotate after each player on the batting team hits and runs twice.

COACH'S cues



For Hitting and Running to First Base

"Step and drive."
 "Run hard outside the line."
 "Watch the coach."
 "Run all the way through the base."
 "Round first if the coach says to." or "Advance to second if the coach says to."

Practice 2

Game 2 (10 minutes)

Same as Game 1. Compare this game's score with the score of the first game.

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Responsibility

Gather children into a group. "When you come to practice, you should do three things: (1) Be ready to play. (2) Learn and improve your skills and work with others. (3) Have fun. I'm going to give you a way to remember these three things. It's called a 'team motto.' Our team motto is *Play hard, play fair, and have fun!* Let's say it together loud. That's great. Be sure to remember our team motto and put it into practice."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the children of the next practice's day and time, and give them a sneak preview of that practice—fielding fly balls and line drives.



Variations

If several players are having difficulty with a skill, design a special drill with multiple trials. This drill should last no longer than five to seven minutes; then move on to another game or drill or return to the game or drill they were previously playing.



 Demonstrate or have players demonstrate skills. Young children tend to be visual learners. When you demonstrate, pinpoint what you want the players to look at. For example, as players are watching a throwing demonstration tell them, "Watch Breana's hand go *way back* as she steps forward to throw." Repeat the demonstrations two or three times.

Practice 3

PURPOSE

To defend space by infield position, focusing on a situation in which there are no outs, no runners on base, and a grounder, fly ball, or line drive to the infield. The objective is for players to be able to field grounders, fly balls, and line drives. They also will review hitting and running to first base and the infield positions (first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher).

Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- Three to four batting tees
- Five balls at each tee

Warm-Up (10 minutes)

1. Players play catch with a partner.
2. Players jog around the bases twice.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Cardiorespiratory fitness

Children gather into a group. "Everyone hold one hand up and make a fist. Squeeze your fist tightly, then let go. Keep tightening and letting go." Children continue for 10 counts. "Your heart is a special muscle that tightens and relaxes, just like your fist is doing. Your heart is about the size of your fist. Every time it tightens, or beats, it pumps blood all over your body. When you play baseball [softball], your heart beats faster and you breathe faster. Run in place with high knees. Feel your lungs and feel your heart beating by placing your hands over your chest. Count how many times your heart beats." Time for 15 seconds. Ask players the number they counted. "Running helps you improve your cardiorespiratory fitness—the heart and lungs work together to get blood to your whole body."

Game 1 (10 minutes)

Goal

- Players will field grounders and throw to first base ahead of the runner.
- Players will hit and run to first base ahead of the throw.

Description

- 6 v 6 (can be fewer players)—for each field, set up an infield. Review the infield positions. A player from the batting team hits the ball from the batting tee and runs to first base (see the figure on page 46). If the batter-runner gets to first base safely, he or she scores a point for the team. And if safe, the player can continue to run and score again by crossing home plate. The fielding team attempts to field and throw the ball to first base ahead of the runner. The side is retired after three

Practice 3

points or three outs, whichever comes first. Each team keeps track of the points scored and compares them to the points scored in the second game.

Coach: "What happened when the ball was caught before it hit the ground (fly ball or line drive)?"

Players: "The batter was out."

Coach: "Who can show me how your glove should be when you are catching a ball above your waist?"

Players: [They should show you the fingers of their gloves pointing up.]



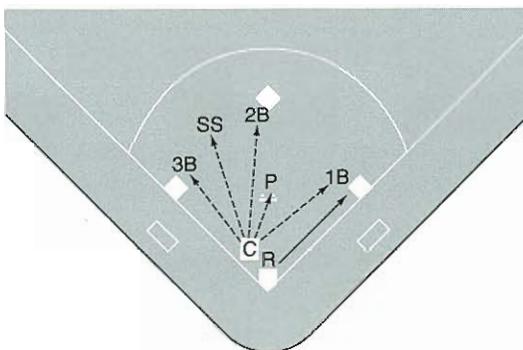
Skill Practice 1 (15 minutes, 5 minutes per task)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to field grounders, line drives, and fly balls under control and throw accurately to first base (see pages 125-127).
2. Practice fielding grounders, line drives, and fly balls under control and throwing accurately to first base.

Description

Try the following activities:

1. Groups of three or four—if possible, have an assistant coach for each group. You or an assistant coach throws fly balls or line drives to the players, who are in positions in the infield. The players field the ball, then throw the ball in to the player standing next to you or the assistant coach (see the figure on page 51). Encourage players to "call" for the ball (say they are going for it). Adjacent players should back up the player who is fielding the ball. Discuss rules related to fly balls from the batter's, runner's, and fielder's perspective (see page 138).
2. Groups of three or four—if possible, have an assistant coach for each group. Repeat the first activity, but alternate throwing grounders, fly balls, and line drives. Tell the players that if they charge and call for the ball, they should miss the ball on purpose this time; then the backup player will field the ball and throw it in to the player standing next to you or the assistant coach. (This activity will help players learn to determine the proper angle for backup.)
3. Groups of five—with five infielders (first, second, third, shortstop, and pitcher), you or an assistant coach throws fly balls and line drives to each infielder. As the ball is released, a member of the batting team runs to first



👉 Rotate players from position to position, so that all of them get a chance to play at each position.

base. If the ball is caught, the runner is out. If the ball is not caught, the runner is safe and may stay on first and then advance to the next base on the next throw. Discuss rules related to fly balls (see page 138).

COACH'S cues



For Fielding Grounders

"Get in the ready position."

"Move your feet to the ball."

"Put your glove on the ground."

"Catch and cover." (Cover the ball with the ungloved hand.)

For Fielding Fly Balls

"Move your feet to the ball."

"Watch it come in."

"Catch the ball in front of your forehead. Use two hands, extend your arms."

"Move smoothly from catch to throw."

"Keep your feet moving through the ball and toward the target."

"Throw the ball quickly into the base."

For Fielding Line Drives

"Ball above the waist; fingers point up."

"Ball below the waist; fingers point down."

For Throwing

"Bring the ball WAY back."

"Step with the opposite foot."

"Follow through to the target."

Skill Practice 2 (5 minutes)

Description

Set up three or four batting stations. With you or an assistant coach, players work on striking the ball off a tee, hitting it against a fence.

Practice 3

COACH'S cues



"Get in the ready position."
"Watch the ball on the batting tee."
"Step and swing fast."

Game 2 (10 minutes)

Same as Game 1. Compare the score with the score of the first game.

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Responsibility

Gather children into a group between two bases about 10 feet apart. Stand in the middle of the circle with a ball. "I am going to show you two different ways to handle the same situation. Think about which is the best way to handle this." Choose a player to receive a throw from you. Make a bad throw and then stomp angrily away from the group. Retrieve the ball and make another bad throw. This time, run to get the ball and make a throw that goes directly to the player. "If you think the first response is the way to handle making a bad throw, stand next to this base. If you think the second way is better, stand next to this one." Ask players to explain their choices. "It's important to be a good sport in baseball [softball]." Highlight how and why. "That's being responsible to your teammates."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the children of the next practice's day and time, and give them a sneak preview of that practice—throwing to second base to cut the lead runner and using a proper start position to run from first to second base.

Variations

Work with advanced players to have them catch the fly ball as they are running toward the intended target and to catch and throw quickly (get a quick release).



COACH'S
point

Remember, not all players will be familiar with baseball or softball terms such as *fly ball*, *line drive*, or *foul ball*. Teach them what those terms mean (see page 116-117).

Practice 4

PURPOSE

To cut the lead runner and to advance from first to second base, focusing on the situation in which there are no outs and a runner is on first. The objectives are for the players to be able to throw to second base to cut the lead runner, to properly cover second base on a force play, and to use a proper start position to run from first to second base.

Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- Four batting tees
- Five balls at each tee

Warm-Up (10 minutes)

1. Players play catch with a partner.
2. Players jog twice around the bases.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Cardiorespiratory fitness

Gather children into a group. "Everyone put your hand up in front of you and make a fist. What did we pretend our fist was at the last practice?" Wait for someone to say the heart. "What does our heart do?" Wait for responses (pumps blood). "Everybody open and close your fist. Put your hands over your chest and feel what is happening. Now, let's run to a base and back. Will our heart beat faster or slower?" Listen to responses (should be faster). "Put your hands over your chest. Are your heart and lungs beating or moving faster or slower now? When we run during baseball [softball], the heart beats faster, just like the fist opening and closing, and lungs breathe faster. They slow down when we slow down. Making your heart beat faster helps to improve your cardiorespiratory fitness."

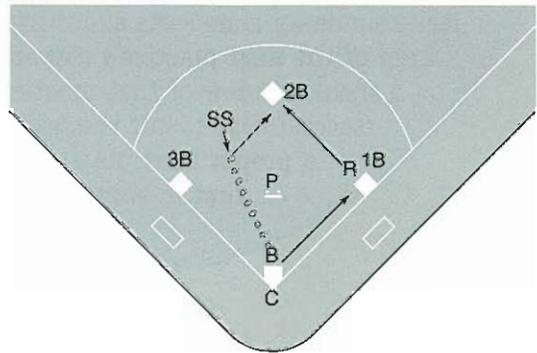
Game 1 (10 minutes)

Goal

Players will run from first to second base before the throw gets to second. Players will field and throw the ball to second base before the runner gets there.

Description

6 v 6—the batting team starts with a runner on first base. A batter hits and runs to first base. If the first-base runner is safe at second, the batting team scores a point. The runners can continue to run bases and can score a run if they cross home plate. The fielders



Practice 4

attempt to field and throw the ball to second base before the runner gets there. The side is retired after three points or three outs, whichever comes first. Each team keeps track of the points scored and compares them with the points scored in Game 2 later.

Review the rules related to when the player can leave first base and advance to second (see page 138). Also teach players how to stop at second base. You'll need to remind them frequently that they can overrun first base, but *not* second base.

Coach: "What was the goal of that game if you were playing the infield?"

Players: "It was to catch the ball and throw to second base ahead of the runner."

Coach: "Who should cover second base if the ball is hit to the left side of the infield?"

Players: "The second-base player should cover it."

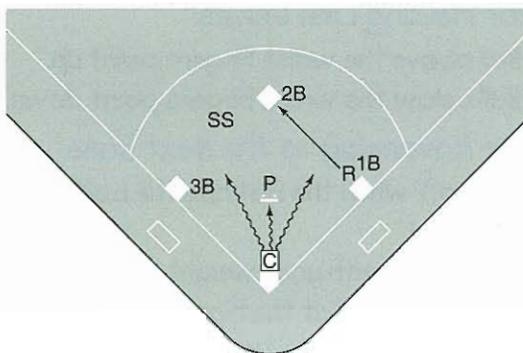
Coach: "Who should cover second base if the ball is hit to the right side of the infield?"

Players: "The shortstop should cover it."



Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to cover second base on a force play and use proper starting and stopping technique when advancing from first to second base (see pages 130-131). Show and explain to players that to cover a base on a force play they should keep the foot opposite their glove hand on the edge of the base that is closest to the play (closest to where the ball is coming from).
2. Practice covering second base on a force play and using proper starting and stopping technique when advancing from first to second base.



Description

5 v 5—have the batting team run from first to second base. The fielding team should have players at first, second, third, shortstop, and pitcher. Roll or throw four balls to the left side, then four balls to the right side, then two to the pitcher. Signal the runners to run each time. After you have thrown 10 balls, the teams should switch. Continue through three rotations so that all players get to play shortstop or second base (rotate in this order: first, second, pitcher, shortstop, third).

Review the rules related to a force play (see page 138). Differentiate between a force play and a tag play. Also discuss who covers second base when the ball is hit to the right side of the field versus when the ball is hit to the left side of the field.

COACH'S cues



For Throwing

- “Bring the ball WAY back.”
- “Step with the opposite foot.”
- “Follow through to the target.”

For Fielding Grounders

- “Get in the ready position.”
- “Move your feet to the ball.”
- “Put your glove on the ground.”
- “Catch and cover.” (Cover the ball with the ungloved hand.)

For Fielding Fly Balls

- “Move your feet to the ball.”
- “Watch it come in.”
- “Catch the ball in front of your forehead. Use two hands; extend your arms.”
- “Move smoothly from catch to throw.”
- “Keep your feet moving through the ball and toward the target.”
- “Throw the ball quickly into the base.”

For Fielding Line Drives

- “Ball above the waist; fingers point up.”
- “Ball below the waist; fingers point down.”

For Advancing to the Next Base

- “Take off when the bat hits the ball.”
- “Run hard.”
- “Keep back with your weight on your heels.”
- “Gather.” (Bend at the hips, knees, and ankles.)

For Stopping on a Base

- “Lean back.”
- “Keep your weight on your heels.”
- “Flex your legs and ankles to absorb the force.”
- “Hold the base.” (Keep your foot on the base at all times.)

For Covering a Base on a Force Play

- “Get yourself between the ball and the base.”
- “Put your foot opposite your glove hand on the outside edge of the base.”
- “Provide a good target.” (The player places his or her glove at about shoulder level, with the glove open and facing the player throwing the ball.)
- “Watch it come into the glove.”

Skill Practice 2 (10 minutes)

Description

- Set up three or four batting stations. With your or an assistant coach's help, players work on striking the ball off a tee, hitting it against a fence.

Practice 4

Game 2 (10 minutes)

Same as Game 1. Compare this game's score with the score of the first game.

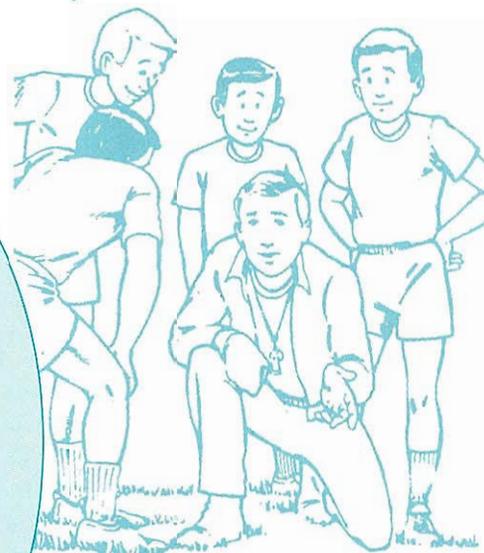
Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Honesty

Gather children into a group near two bases about 10 feet apart. "What is against the rules in baseball?" Listen to their responses. "Should you admit to breaking a rule if no one sees you? Those who think yes, stand at this base. Those who think no, stand at this one." Wait for children to choose. "When you know you've broken a rule, you should tell the coach. You should never take unfair advantage of other players. Can you think of other ways honesty is practiced on the field?" Listen to responses and discuss. "All of those show honesty."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the children of the next practice's day and time, and give them a sneak preview of that practice—more practice on throwing to second base to cut the lead runner and using a proper start position to run from first to second base.



☞ It might help to rotate batting practice field by field. For example, if one field has batting tees set up, players from each field can go to that area for 10 minutes while the players on the other two fields are busy with other practice tasks.

☞ Be sure that all players are moving on every play. If they are not fielding the ball, they should be covering a base or backing up.

☞ Encourage players to talk to each other and communicate. For example, they can call the ball ("Mine!") or can remind each other of where the next play is ("Play's at first").

Practice 5

PURPOSE

To cut the lead runner and to advance from first to second base, focusing on a situation in which there are no outs and a runner is on first. The objectives are for the players to be able to throw to second base to cut the lead runner (requiring coverage of second on a force play) and to use proper start position to run from first to second base.

Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- Three or four batting tees
- Five balls at each tee

Warm-Up (10 minutes)

1. Players play catch with a partner. They throw grounders, line drives, and fly balls to each other.
2. Players jog around the bases twice.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Cardiorespiratory fitness

Gather children into a group. "Everyone find your own space. Put your fist up in front of you. We pretend our fist is our . . ." Wait for someone to say the heart. "The heart does what things?" Wait for responses—pumps blood and beats faster when we run or move faster. "When I say 'Go!' we all should run in our own space and make our fists open and close faster at the same time. When I say 'Stop,' stop as fast as you can." Begin. "When you run, your heart beats faster. Every time your heart beats faster, it gets stronger because it's a muscle. Muscles get stronger when you use them. Playing and running in baseball [softball] is a good way to keep your heart healthy and strong and improve your cardiorespiratory fitness."

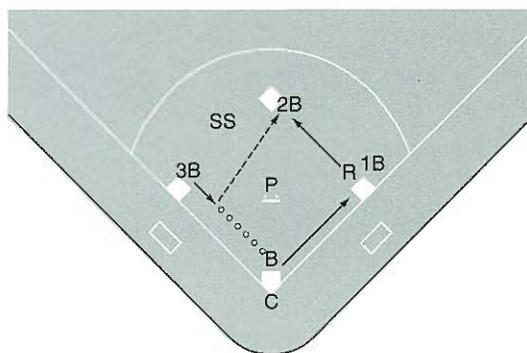
Game 1 (10 minutes)

Goal

Players will run from first to second before the throw gets to second base. Players will field and throw the ball to second base before the runner gets there.

Description

6 v 6—the batting team starts with a runner on first base. A batter hits and runs to first base. If the first-base runner is safe at second, the batting team scores a point. The runner can continue running bases and can score a run if he or she crosses home plate. The



Practice 5

fielders attempt to field and throw the ball to second base before the runner gets there. The side is retired after three points or three outs, whichever comes first. Each team keeps track of the points scored and compares the number to the points scored in the second game. Review the rules about runner interference with the player fielding the ball (see page 138).

Coach: "What was the goal of that game if you were playing the infield?"

Players: "It was to catch the ball and throw to second base ahead of the runner."

Coach: "Who should cover second base if the ball is hit to the left side of the infield?"

Players: "The second base player should cover it."

Coach: "Who should cover second base if the ball is hit to the right side of the infield?"

Players: "The shortstop should cover it."

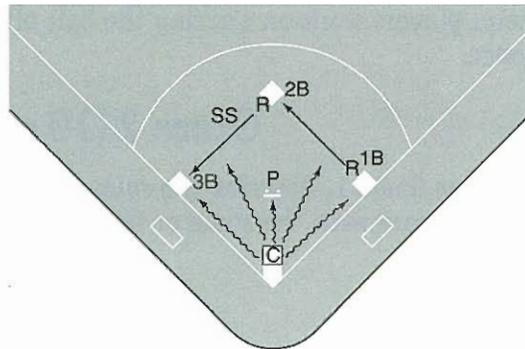


Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

Description

5 v 5—have the batting team run from first to second base. The fielding team should have players at first, second, third, shortstop, and pitcher. Roll or throw four balls to the left side, then four balls to the right side, then two to the pitcher. Signal the runners to run each time. After you

have thrown 10 balls, the teams should switch. Continue through three rotations so that all players get to play shortstop or second base (rotate in this order: first, second, third, pitcher, shortstop). Review what the runners should do if there is an overthrow at first base.



COACH'S cues



For Advancing to the Next Base

"Take off when the bat hits the ball."

"Run hard."

"Lean back with your weight on your heels."

"Gather." (Bend at the hips, knees, and ankles.)

For Stopping on a Base

- "Lean back."
- "Keep your weight on your heels."
- "Flex your legs and ankles to absorb the force."
- "Hold the base." (Keep your foot on the base at all times.)

For Covering a Base on a Force Play

- "Get yourself between the ball and the base."
- "Put your foot opposite your glove hand on the outside edge of the base."
- "Provide a good target." (The player places his or her glove at about shoulder-level, with the glove open and facing the player throwing the ball.)
- "Watch it come into the glove."

Skill Practice 2 (10 minutes)

Description

- Set up three or four batting stations. With your or an assistant coach's help, players work on striking the ball off a tee, hitting it against a fence.

Game 2 (10 minutes)

- Same as Game 1. Describe the rules as the game is played. Compare this game's score with the score of the first game.

Practice 5

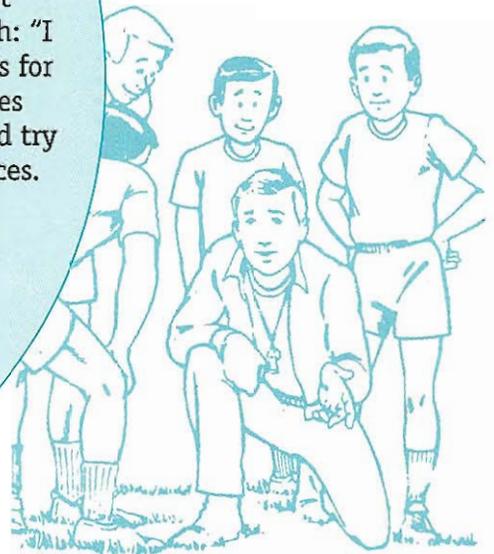
Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Responsibility

Gather children into a group near two bases about 10 feet apart. Choose two players to help role play. Set up a triangle of you and the two players. Let the children know you're role playing with them. All three of you take turns tossing the ball. When it's your turn, miss the toss and role play yourself as a player: "I couldn't get that throw! It was your fault—you made a bad throw!" Now as coach: "I want you to think about players who make excuses and blame others for their mistakes. Stand at this base if you think it's OK to make excuses when you make mistakes. Stand at this base if you think you should try to learn and work harder to improve." Ask players about their choices. "Not making excuses is taking responsibility for yourself."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the children of the next practice's day and time, and give them a sneak preview of that practice—throwing to third base to cut the lead runner and using the proper start position to run from second to third base.



COACH'S
point

- ☞ Be sure that all players are moving on every play. If they are not fielding the ball, they should be covering a base or backing up.
- ☞ Encourage players to talk to each other and communicate. For example, they can call the ball ("Mine!") or can remind each other of where the next play is ("Play's at first").

Practice 6

PURPOSE

To cut the lead runner and to get from second to third base, focusing on a situation in which there are no outs and runners are on first and second bases. The objectives are for players to be able to throw to third base to cut the lead runner, to cover third base on a force play, and to use proper start position to run from second to third base.

Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- Three or four batting tees
- Five balls at each tee
- A rubber band

Warm-Up (10 minutes)

1. Players play catch with a partner. They throw grounders, line drives, and fly balls.
2. Players jog around the bases twice.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Flexibility

Gather children into a group. Show them a rubber band and demonstrate how it stretches. "Let's pretend this rubber band is . . ." Wait for response—a muscle. "See how it moves back and forth, stretching and moving. Let's move our bodies just like the rubber band. Reach and stretch up and down. It's important to stretch slowly without bouncing or jerking."

Have them continue for one minute. "Our muscles help us move and stretch. We need to stretch muscles to keep them flexible and able to move easily. When muscles can move easily, they don't get injured."

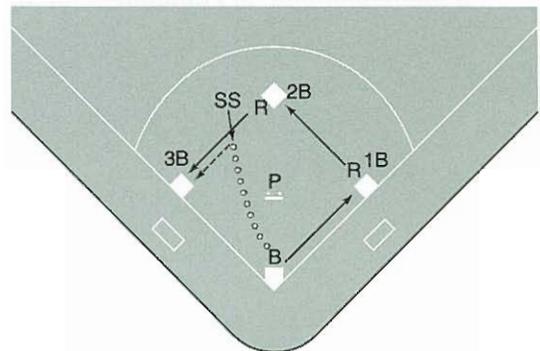
Game 1 (10 minutes)

Goal

Players run from second to third base before the throw gets to third. Players field and throw the ball to third base before the runner gets there.

Description

6 v 6—the batting team starts with runners on first and second bases. A batter hits and runs to first base. If the second-base runner is safe at third, the batting team scores a point. The runner may continue running bases and can score a run if he or she crosses home plate. The fielders attempt to field and throw the ball to third base before the runner gets



Practice 6

there. The side is retired after three points or three outs, whichever comes first. Each team keeps track of the points scored and compares the score to the points scored in Game 2 later.

Review the rules related to when a player may leave second base and advance to third (see page 138). Also teach players how to stop at third base. You'll need to remind them frequently that they can overrun first base, but not second or third base.

Coach: "What was the goal of that game if you were playing the infield?"

Players: "It was to catch the ball and throw to third base ahead of the runner."

Coach: "Who should cover third base in this situation?"

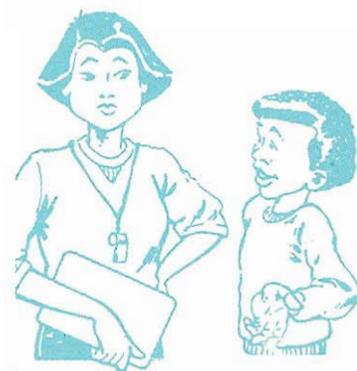
Players: "The third-base player should cover it."

Coach: "What if a ball were hit to the third-base player? Should the player field the ball or cover third base?"

Players: "The player should field the ball."

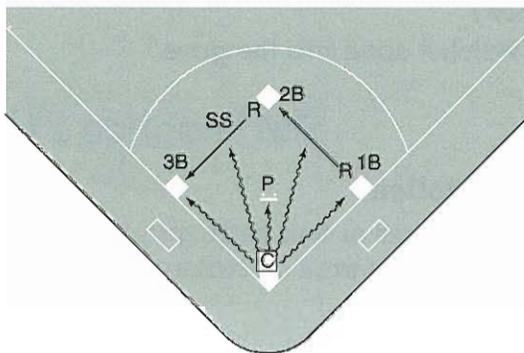
Coach: "Then who should cover third when the third-base player is fielding the ball?"

Players: "The shortstop should cover it."



Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to cover third base on a force play (including how the shortstop should cover third base when the third-base player fields the ball) and how to start and stop properly when advancing from second to third base.
2. Practice covering third base on a force play and starting and stopping properly when advancing from second to third base.



Description

5 v 5—the batting team provides runners at first and second base. The fielding team has players at first, second, third, shortstop, and pitcher. Roll or throw two balls to each of the five infielders, signaling the runners to run each time. After you have thrown 10 balls, the teams should switch. Continue through three rotations so that all players get to play third base or shortstop (rotate in this order: first, second, third, pitcher, shortstop).



Be sure all players get to play third base and shortstop so they all can learn both how to cover a base on a force play and who should cover third base in each situation.

Tell fielders to throw the ball to the base, rather than to the person moving to cover third base.

COACH'S cues



For Advancing to the Next Base

"Take off when the bat hits the ball."

"Run hard."

"Lean back with your weight on your heels."

"Gather." (Bend at the hips, knees, and ankles.)

For Stopping on a Base

"Lean back."

"Keep your weight on your heels."

"Flex your legs and ankles to absorb the force."

"Hold the base." (Keep your foot on the base at all times.)

For Covering a Base on a Force Play

"Get yourself between the ball and the base."

"Put your foot opposite your glove hand on the outside edge of the base."

"Provide a good target." (The player places his or her glove at about shoulder-level, with the glove open and facing the player throwing the ball.)

"Watch it come into the glove."

Skill Practice 2 (10 minutes)

Description

Set up three or four batting stations. With your or an assistant coach's help, players work on striking the ball off a tee, hitting it against a fence.

Game 2 (10 minutes)

Same as Game 1. Compare this game's score with the first game's.

Practice 6

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Caring

Gather children into a circle. Stand in the middle of the circle with a ball. Choose two children to throw the ball with you.

"We're going to work on our throwing skills." Throw repeatedly to them and not the others. "Tell me how you felt to have only two players get the throws?" Listen to their responses. "Sharing the ball and not distracting your teammates shows you care about them. What other things can you do to show you care about your teammates?" Their responses should include encouragement, positive comments for good play, forgiving players that make mistakes, and so on. "Good. Those are all ways you can show you care."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the children of the next practice's day and time, and give them a sneak preview of that practice—throwing to home plate to cut the lead runner and using the proper start position to run from third base to home.

Variations

During the skill practice, mix in some line drives or fly balls. Then review information from Practice 3.



COACH'S
point

- Remember to teach off-the-ball skills, such as base coverage and backing up the player fielding the ball.
- Rotate players from position to position so that all of them get a chance to play at each position.

Practice 7

PURPOSE

To cut the lead runner and to get from third base to home plate, focusing on a situation in which there are no outs and runners are on first, second, and third bases. The objectives are for players to be able to throw to home plate to cut the lead runner, to cover home plate on a force play, and to use the proper start position to run from third base to home.

Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- Three or four batting tees
- Five balls at each tee

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

1. Players play catch with a partner. After throwing for a few minutes, they throw fly balls back and forth.
2. Players jog around the bases twice.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Muscle strength and endurance

Gather children into a group. "OK, everyone get down on the ground and do the crab walk." Continue for 30 seconds to one minute. "Are your arms and legs getting tired? You used many of your arm and leg muscles to do the crab walk. What parts of the body do you use the most for baseball [softball]? That's right—your arms and legs. The more you practice baseball [softball], the stronger your muscles will get. Then you can keep going much longer before you get too tired. What things can we do to get our muscles stronger for baseball [softball]?" Let them answer running and throwing. "Right. Now pretend you have a ball in front of you. Pretend to throw the ball in your spot." Have children pretend to throw for five counts. "Practicing throwing helps make your arms stronger."

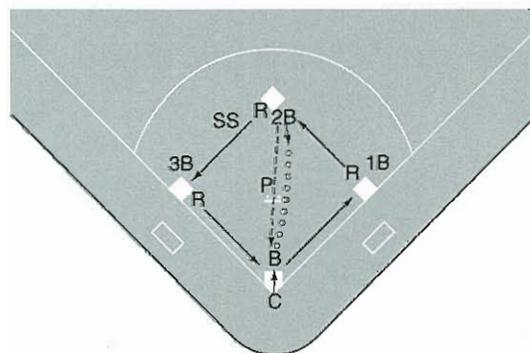
Game 1 (10 minutes)

Goal

Players will run from third to home plate before the throw gets to home. Players will field and throw the ball to home plate before the runner gets there.

Description

6 v 6 (can add more players if needed)—the batting team starts with runners on first, second, and third bases. A batter hits



Practice 7

and runs to first base. If the third-base runner is safe at home, the batting team scores a point. The fielders attempt to field and throw the ball to home plate before the runner gets there. The side is retired after three points or three outs, whichever comes first. Each team keeps track of the points scored and compares it with the points scored in Game 2 later. Review the rules related to scoring and about when the player can leave a base (see page 138).

Coach: "What was the goal of that game if you were playing the infield?"

Players: "It was to catch the ball and throw to home plate ahead of the runner."

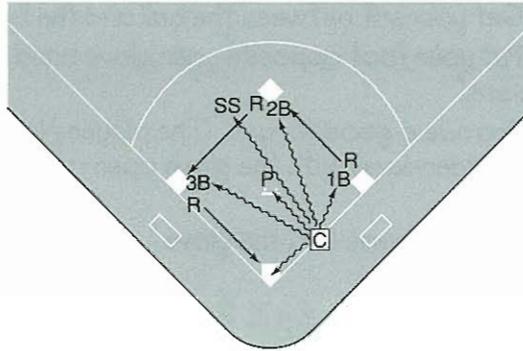
Coach: "Who should cover home plate in this situation?"

Players: "The catcher should cover it."



Skill Practice 1 (20 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to cover home plate on a force play and how to start and stop properly when advancing from third base to home plate. Show how the pitcher should cover home when the catcher fields or chases an overthrown ball. Remind players that the runner may overrun home base.
2. Practice covering home plate on a force play and starting and stopping properly when advancing from third base to home plate.



Description

6 v 6—the batting team provides runners at first, second, and third bases. The fielding team has players at first, second, and third bases, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher. Roll or throw two balls to each of the six infielders, signaling the runners to run each time. After you have thrown 12 balls, the teams should switch. Continue through three rotations so that all players get to play catcher or pitcher (rotate in this order: first, second, pitcher, shortstop, third, catcher).



Be sure each player gets to play catcher and pitcher; so all of them come to understand how to cover a base on a force play as well as who should cover home plate in each situation.

COACH'S cues



For Advancing to the Next Base

"Take off when the bat hits the ball."

"Run hard."

"Lean back with your weight on your heels."

"Gather." (Bend at the hips, knees, and ankles.)

For Stopping on a Base

"Lean back."

"Keep your weight on your heels."

"Flex your legs and ankles to absorb the force."

"Hold the base." (Keep your foot on the base at all times.)

For Covering a Base on a Force Play

"Get yourself between the ball and the base."

"Put your foot opposite your glove hand and on the outside edge of the base."

"Provide a good target." (The player places his or her glove at about shoulder-level, with the glove open and facing the player throwing the ball.)

"Watch it come into the glove."

Skill Practice 2 (5 minutes)

Description

Set up three or four batting stations. With your or an assistant coach's help, players work on striking the ball off a tee, hitting it against a fence.

Game 2 (10 minutes)

Same as Game 1. Compare the score of this game with the score of the first game.

Practice 7

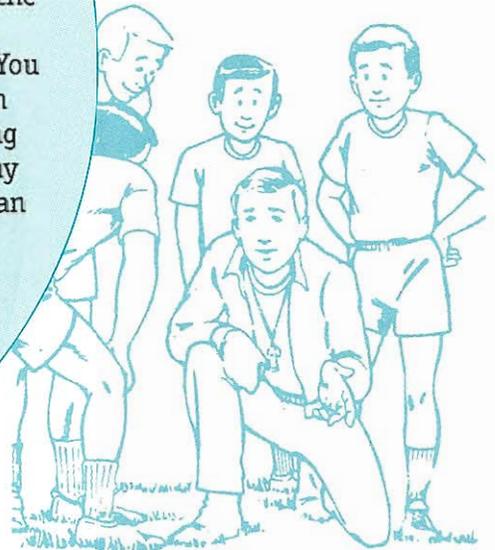
Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Responsibility

Gather children into a circle. "I want everyone to run in a circle, following the person in front of you, without bumping into each other. Keep a space about as long as a bicycle between you, and don't go ahead of the person in front of you." Encourage children to run slowly enough to do all the directions. Continue the activity for one minute. "Everyone stop. Did you bump into each other? Did any of you get upset with the person in front of you? You kept your body under control by not going ahead of the person in front of you. You kept your emotions under control by not getting upset with the person ahead of you—he or she couldn't move any faster since you were all running in a circle as a group. We all can stay safe and learn when we all are responsible for ourselves."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the children of the next practice's day and time, and give them a sneak preview of that practice—holding the lead runner.



Variations

If you are playing with nine players in the field, include the outfielders and review where they should throw when they get the ball (see pages 119-120). Be sure to rotate players from batting to fielding so all players get a chance to field as well as bat.



 Continue to review and reinforce off-the-ball skills and communication skills.

Practice 8

PURPOSE

To defend space by outfield position, focusing on a situation in which there are no outs, a runner is on first, and a ball is hit to the outfield. The objectives are for players to be able to field balls in the outfield (grounders, line drives, and fly balls), to back up the adjacent outfield, and to make an accurate throw to third base or the shortstop.

Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- Three or four batting tees
- Five balls at each tee

Warm-Up (10 minutes)

1. Players play catch with a partner. After every 10 good throws in a row, the players each back up two steps.
2. Players jog around the bases twice.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: General fitness

Gather children into a circle. "What do our bodies need to do every day to keep going?" Wait for their responses. Discuss sleep and rest, eating, and doing regular activities. "There's one more thing that's really important—being active and exercising. Let's pretend it's a day that you do not have baseball [softball] practice. Your body needs to move every day. With no baseball [softball] today, what should we do to move our bodies?" Wait for their responses. If a child suggests an activity such as biking or swimming, have everyone act out that activity. Act out three activities. "It's important to be active when you don't have baseball [softball] practice. Your body needs to move every day."

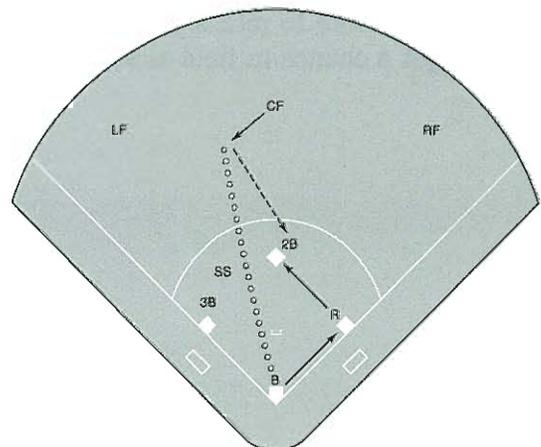
Game 1 (10 minutes)

Goal

Players will throw ahead of the runner to keep him or her from advancing to third base. Players will advance to third base safely.

Description

6 v 6—the fielding team has three outfielders, a shortstop, a second-base player, and a third-base player. The batting team must always have a runner



Practice 8

at first. A batter hits a ball to the outfield (instruct infielders *not* to catch or interfere with batted balls) and runs to first. The batting team scores a point if the first-base runner reaches third base safely. The fielders attempt to field and throw the ball to the shortstop (if the ball is hit to left or center field) or third base (if the ball is hit to right field) to keep the runner from advancing to third. The side is retired after three points or three outs, whichever comes first. Review the rules on tagging up on a fly ball (see page 138).

Coach: "What did the left fielders have to do to keep the runner from advancing to third?"

Players: "They had to catch the ball and throw it to the shortstop."

Coach: "Who covered second base when the ball was hit to right field?"

Players: "The shortstop covered it."

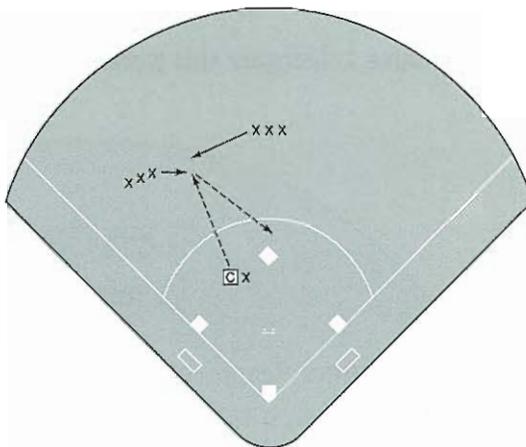
Coach: "Who did the fielder throw to when the ball was hit to right field?"

Players: "The third-base player."



Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to field a ball in the outfield and make an accurate throw to the shortstop. Emphasize a quick throw to keep the runners from advancing. Demonstrate how to back up the player fielding the ball.
2. Practice fielding the ball in the outfield and throwing accurately.



Description

Group of 7—place three players in left field, three players in center field, and a player at shortstop. Stand at about the shortstop position and throw grounders, line drives, and fly balls between the outfielders. One outfielder should call the ball, and the other should back up the play. The outfielder catching the ball should throw the ball in to the shortstop, then both outfielders should move to the back of the opposite lines. You can consider using a base runner at first base who takes off when you release the ball. Review rules related to fly balls and tagging up (see page 138).

Then repeat this activity, but this time tell them that the player calling the ball should attempt to catch it but then *intentionally* miss the ball, allowing the backup player to field the ball instead. After fielding the missed ball, the backup player should throw the ball to the shortstop. You can also repeat this activity on the right side of the outfield, with the shortstop covering second base.



☞ Rotate players from position to position, so that all of them get a chance to play at each position.

☞ Continue to review and reinforce off-the-ball and communication skills.

☞ Use teachable moments. If you see a situation from which players can learn, stop, replay it if necessary, and use it to provide additional instruction.

COACH'S cues



- "Get in the ready position."
- "Move your feet to the ball."
- "Watch it come in."
- "Catch and cover the ball."
- "Throw immediately (or quickly) to the shortstop."
- "Follow through to the target."

Skill Practice 2 (10 minutes)

Description

Set up three or four batting stations. With your or an assistant coach's help, players work on striking the ball off a tee, hitting it against a fence.

Game 2 (10 minutes)

Same as Game 1. Compare this game's score with the score of the first game.

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Responsibility

Gather children into a circle. Stand in the center of the circle with a ball. Ask children to call to you and raise their hand if they are ready for a grounder. Toss the ball to yourself, but do not throw it to anyone. Continue for about one minute. "Did I share the ball with anyone?" Wait for their responses. "Do you think that is good teamwork? What is good teamwork?" Listen to their responses. Repeat the activity, but this time throw a grounder to players who call and raise their hands. "Teamwork is when all players are working together."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the children of the next practice's day and time, and give them a sneak preview of that practice—playing a game well.



Practice 9

Warm-Up (10 minutes)

1. Players play catch with a partner. After every 10 good throws in a row, the players each back up two steps.
2. Players jog around the bases twice.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: General fitness

Gather children into a circle. "Everyone is going to run in place. Let's start. Pretend that your body is going to run out of energy because you ate too many chips and drank a soda before practice. Start running slower and slower, and now stop! Now let's pretend that you ate a peanut butter sandwich and drank a glass of milk and a glass of water before practice. Let's run in place." Continue for 30 seconds. "See how you're able to run much longer and keep your energy? Eating healthy foods and drinking plenty of water are healthy habits for every day. You should drink water several times a day and drink even more when you're exercising. Also make sure to get enough sleep, exercise, brush your teeth, and say no to alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Keep your body healthy!"

Game 1 (10 minutes)

Goal

Players will recognize the situation and make the right play.

Description

Nine players on the field, others batting—play a game with regulation rules. Discuss any rules not previously covered that arise during the course of the game. Rotate the players from batting to fielding.

Coach: "Where should the ball be thrown in this situation?"

Players: *[Whatever arises during the game]*

PURPOSE

To defend space, focusing on various situations. The objective is for players to be able to make the appropriate play during a game with nine players on the field.

Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- One batting tee



Practice 9

(cont'd)



☞ Review rules as they play.

☞ Question players frequently to check for their understanding.

☞ Praise and encourage players often.

☞ Rotate players frequently so they get experience at many different positions.



Skill Practice (20 minutes)

Identify where players (or the team) are having trouble, then select or design a drill or practice game that will help them improve that aspect of the game. Review rules as situations arise.

For example, if players are having difficulty fielding fly balls, use a drill that provides them with maximum opportunities to field fly balls. As a drill you could throw fly balls to three or four players, throwing short, long, and in between them. Players earn 3 points for catching a fly ball, 2 points for catching a line drive, and 1 point for catching a grounder. The goal is for one of the players to reach 12 points. When one player gets to 12, the game starts again. (If they don't call the ball, they don't get credit for the catch. This will encourage them to call the ball.)

Game 2 (10 minutes)

Go back to playing a regulation game.

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Caring

Gather children into a group near home plate. Ask a child in the group to toss you an underhand pitch. Swing at the pitch and miss. Retrieve the ball and toss it away from everyone. "That swing wasn't very good, was it? How about that throw? . . . Those were mistakes. What should you say to your teammates when they make mistakes?" Listen to their responses. "What could you say to make your teammate feel better? What could you say to make her feel worse?" Listen to their responses. Have players change the unsupportive, negative comments to positive ones. "It's very important to forgive mistakes and be understanding of others, just as you would want them to be of you. Making mistakes is part of learning. Saying something that makes your teammates feel better shows you care about them."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the children of the next practice's day and time, and give them a sneak preview of that practice—playing the game during *all* the practice time.

Variations

Modify the last game to match the goals of the skill practice.

Practice 10

Warm-Up (10 minutes)

1. Players run around the bases twice.
2. With you or an assistant coach as partner, players practice catching fly balls.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: General fitness

Gather children into a group near two bases about 10 feet apart. Tell them that each base represents a different food group. "This base is healthy foods, such as fruits, vegetables, meats, milk, and breads. This other base is special treat foods, like chips, soda, candy, and sweet snacks. What foods can you eat to keep your body healthy, with enough energy for baseball [softball]?" As they respond, have them stand near the base they choose. "It is important to eat more healthy foods, they give you more energy for baseball [softball] and help you grow. Special treat foods should be eaten in small amounts. Can you tell me other examples of healthy foods and special treat foods?"

Game (40 minutes)

Goal

Players play the game without interruption.

Description

Nine players on the field, others batting—play a game with regulation rules. Discuss any rules not previously covered that arise during the course of the game. Rotate players from batting to fielding.

 **PURPOSE**

To give players a chance to experience a longer game, reviewing skills and tactics.

Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- One batting tee



 Review the rules as they play. To demonstrate a rule (or proper procedure), repeat a play (like an instant replay).



Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Respect

Gather children into a group. "What have you learned about baseball [softball] this season?" Listen to their responses. "What does respect have to do with playing baseball [softball] or any sports? It takes many years to master the game of baseball [softball], so it deserves your respect. Every year there are new skills to learn and improve on; every year you play, you'll get better. That's why you need to come back next year! What examples of players showing respect have you seen this season?" Listen to their responses and discuss.

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about what everyone learned over the course of the season. Encourage players to come back next year!



☞ Question players frequently to check for their understanding.

☞ Praise and encourage players often.