

Season Plan for 8 to 9-Year-Olds

The focus is on the fundamentals: fielding, throwing to the proper base or cutoff person, hitting, running the bases well, and communicating well with teammates. At this level we advocate coaches pitch, rather than players. The outline on pages 71-72 provides an overview of each component of practice from Week 1 through Week 12.

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.

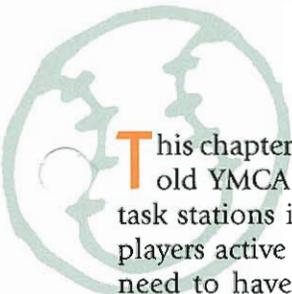
8- to 9-Year-Olds

Week	Purpose	Tactics and skills	Rules and traditions	Fitness concepts	Character development concepts
1A	To defend in the infield on ground balls.	Fielding grounders; throwing to first base.	Infield positions; balls and strikes; foul balls; outs.	General fitness Physical activity makes you fit, contributing to cardiorespiratory fitness, muscular strength and endurance, and flexibility.	Four core values We'll stress four core values: caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility.
1B	To defend in the infield on ground balls.	Fielding grounders; throwing to first base; covering first base; hitting; running to first base.	Running to first base; offensive and defensive interference.	Safety It's important to notify your coach whenever you hurt yourself, even if you think it's a minor injury.	Honesty You need to play by the rules and be honest if you break one.
2A	To defend in the infield on ground balls.	Fielding grounders; throwing to first base; covering first base; hitting; running to first base.	Batting.	General fitness It's important both to warm up and cool down.	Responsibility Working and playing as a team works better than playing as a bunch of individuals.
2B	To defend at second base by making force plays.	Fielding grounders; making force plays at second base; running to second base.	Force play.	Flexibility Stretch until you feel a pull but no pain; hold for 10 seconds.	Respect Respect opponents by shaking or slapping hands at the end of a game.
3	To defend at third base by making tag plays.	Making tag plays at third base; hitting; baserunning.	Tag play; offensive and defensive interference.	Healthy habits Drink enough water during practice.	Responsibility Cheer for your teammates when you're on the bench.
4	To defend in the outfield and on throws from the outfield to the infield.	Fielding in the outfield; backing up a play in the outfield; covering/advancing to second base; increasing bat speed.	Outfield positions; tagging up.	Safety Stay in your own space.	Caring Compliment players—even opponents—on good plays.
5	To defend in the outfield, including backing players up.	Fielding in the outfield; backing up a play in the outfield; covering/advancing to second base.		Cardiorespiratory fitness Aerobic endurance is important for health.	Caring Share the ball—don't be a ball hog!

8- to 9-Year-Olds (continued)

Week	Purpose	Tactics and skills	Rules and traditions	Fitness concepts	Character development concepts
6	To defend at third base on force plays.	Covering/advancing to second and third base.	Review offensive and defensive interference.	Cardiorespiratory fitness As your heart beats faster, it pumps blood and delivers oxygen to muscles faster.	Respect Celebrate victories in ways that don't embarrass opponents.
7	To defend at second base by holding runners on second on ground balls.	Holding runner at second; looking runner back.	Baserunning rules; overthrows.	Muscular strength and endurance Muscles adapt to harder work by getting stronger.	Respect Respect umpires and thank them at the end of games.
8	To defend in the outfield, preventing runners from advancing on fly-outs.	Catching fly balls; getting ball back quickly to infield; communicating with teammates; tagging up at second.		Training and conditioning Improve your physical conditioning by practicing/playing longer.	Responsibility Teamwork means helping each other.
9	To defend in the infield on various force plays.	Making force plays; covering bases; running bases.	Review force-out.	Muscular endurance The longer you play before your muscles tire, the more muscular endurance you have.	Caring Everyone gets a chance to learn and play.
10	To defend in the infield on various tag plays.	Making tag plays; covering bases; running bases.		Healthy habits Check off your healthy habits as you do them.	Caring Forgive teammates for mistakes.
11	To defend in the infield and outfield by backing up players.	Backing up plays.	Maximum run rule.	Training and conditioning Your body loses conditioning if you stop exercising. Use it or lose it!	Responsibility Learn from your mistakes and take responsibility for trying to improve.
12	To defend in the infield and outfield in various situations.	Executing skills and understanding tactics.		Healthy habits Good eating habits are important for physical activity and for life. Eat healthy and avoid junk foods.	Respect Be caring, honest, respectful, and responsible.

Practice Plans for 8- to 9-Year Olds

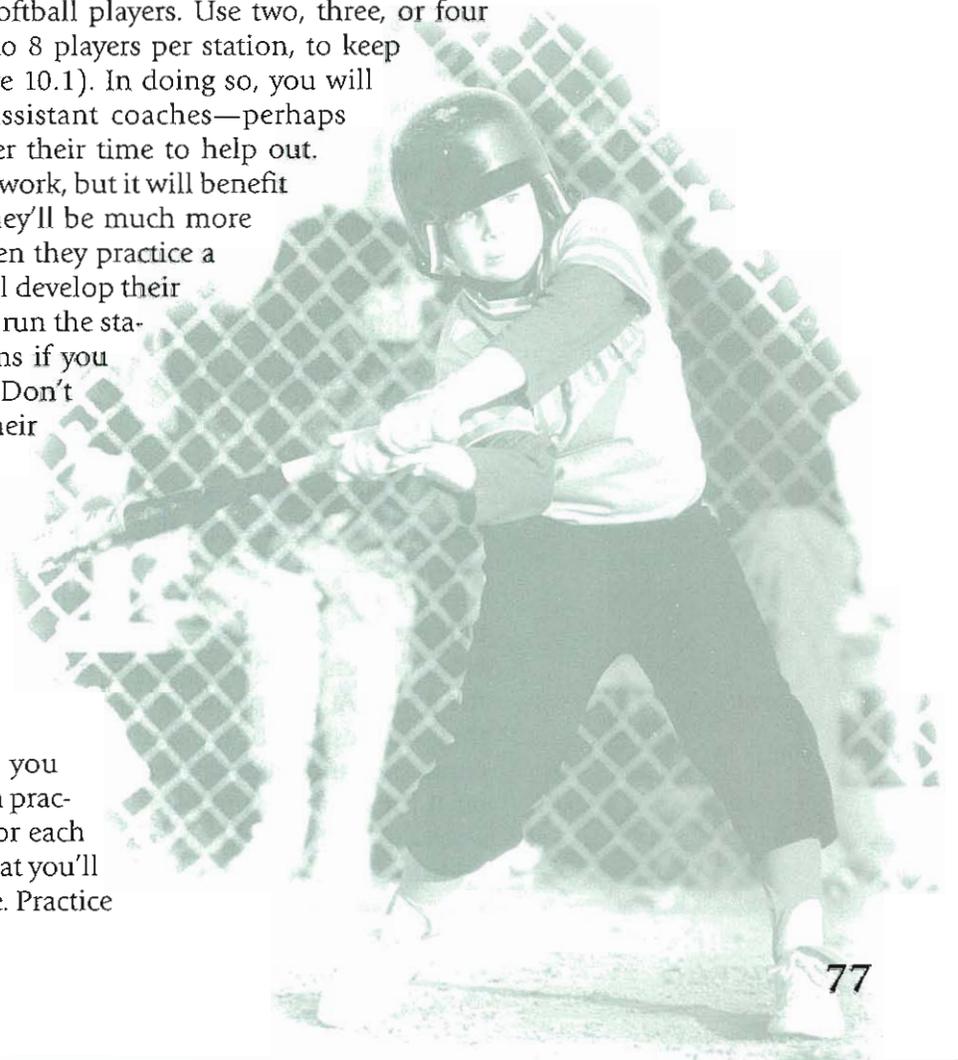


This chapter contains the 14 Practice Plans you'll use with your 8- to 9-year-old YMCA Winners baseball or softball players. Use two, three, or four task stations in a cloverleaf, with 4 to 8 players per station, to keep players active and learning (see figure 10.1). In doing so, you will need to have formal or informal assistant coaches—perhaps parents of players who will volunteer their time to help out. Organizing this help will take a bit of work, but it will benefit the players tremendously, because they'll be much more active during practices. The more often they practice a tactic or skill, the more likely they will develop their abilities. In fact, you won't be able to run the stations as outlined in the Practice Plans if you don't have additional adult support. Don't assign parents to task stations where their own children are playing, however.

Each plan contains the following sections:

- ⊙ Purpose
- ⊙ Equipment
- ⊙ Practice Plan

Purpose sections focus on what you want to teach your players during each practice; they outline your main theme for each practice. Equipment sections note what you'll need to have on hand for that practice. Practice



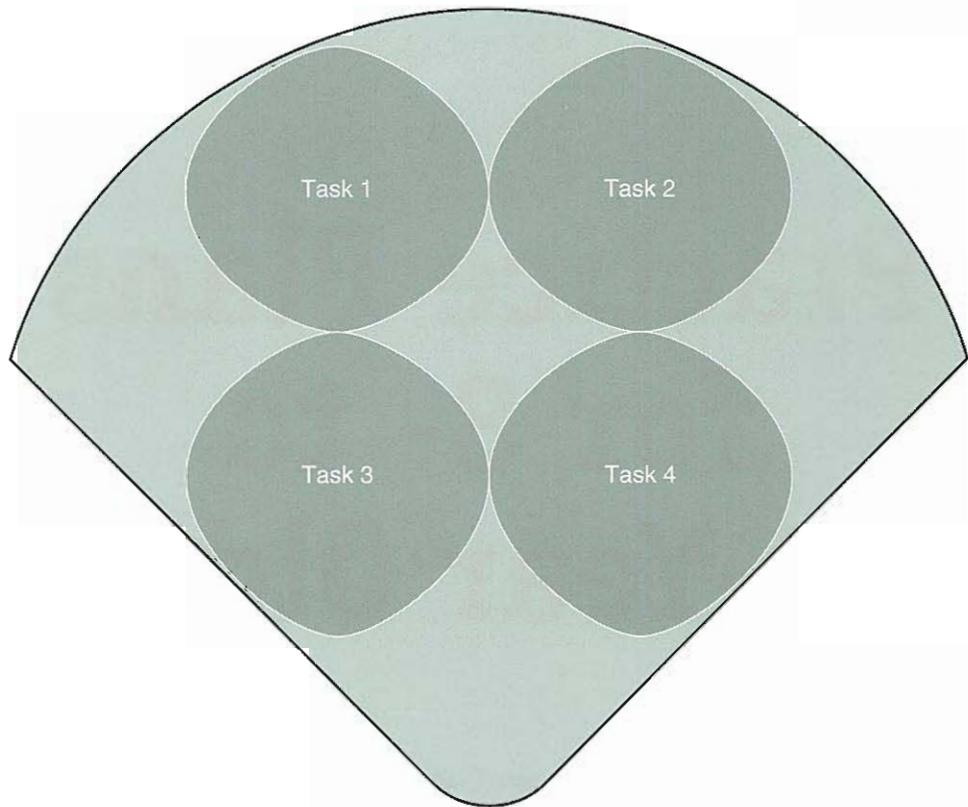


Figure 10.1 Set up task stations in a cloverleaf pattern to maximize space on the field.

Plan sections outline what you will do during each practice session. Each consists of these elements:

- ⊙ Warm-Up
- ⊙ Fitness Circle
- ⊙ Games
- ⊙ Skill Practices
- ⊙ Team Circle and Wrap-Up
- ⊙ Variations

You'll begin each session with about five minutes of warm-up activities. This will be followed by five minutes of a Fitness Circle, during which you'll lead players through an activity and discussion about an item that relates to their fitness. Then you'll have your players play a modified baseball or softball game. You'll look for your cue to interrupt that game—your cue being when players are having problems with carrying out the basic goal or aim of the game. At this point you'll "freeze" the action, keeping the players where they are, and ask brief questions about the tactical problems the players encountered and what skills they need to solve those problems. (Review chapter 8 for more on interrupting a game and holding a question-and-answer session.) We provide discussion questions in each Practice Plan section. In addition, we provide coach's points, when appropriate, with Game and Skill Practice sections to help you conduct each practice most effectively.

Then you'll teach the skill the players need to acquire to successfully execute the tactic. Chapter 13 contains descriptions of all the skills, so a page reference will be given to guide you to the appropriate description. During this Skill Practice session, you'll use the IDEA approach:

- ⊙ Introduce the skill.
- ⊙ Demonstrate the skill.
- ⊙ Explain the skill.
- ⊙ Attend to players' practicing the skill.

Your introduction, demonstration, and explanation of a skill should take no more than 2 to 3 minutes; then you'll attend to players and provide teaching cues or further demonstration as necessary as they practice the skill according to the Practice Plan.

After the Skill Practices, you will usually have the athletes play another game or two to let them use the skills they have just learned and to understand them in the context of a game. During Game and Skill Practices, emphasize the importance of every player on the field moving and being involved in every play, whether they will be directly touching the ball or backing up their teammates. No player on the field should be standing around.

The Practice Plan section continues with a Team Circle that focuses on character development. After players cool down and stretch, you will talk to your players about some aspect of baseball or softball that relates to one of the four core values—caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility. Following this, you'll wrap up the practice with a few summary comments and remind them of the next practice or game day.

The Practice Plan concludes with a Variations section to help you modify the Game and Skill Practice sections. These suggestions will help you keep practices fun and provide for players with varying skill levels.

A note about Fitness and Team Circles: These times are meant to be true discussions—not lectures where you're doing all the talking and your players are doing all the listening. Ask the questions provided, then wait for your players to respond. Don't immediately feed them the answers we provide. These answers are meant simply to help you guide the discussion. Your role in Team Circles is as much to ask questions and get players to respond as it is to dole out information.

Following are Practice Plans for the 2 weeks of your preseason and then for the 10 weeks of your competitive season.

Key to Diagrams

P	=	Pitcher
C	=	Catcher
1B	=	First baseman
2B	=	Second baseman
3B	=	Third baseman
SS	=	Shortstop
LF	=	Left-fielder
CF	=	Center-fielder
RF	=	Right-fielder
SF	=	Short-fielder
R	=	Runner
—	=	Path of ball hit
→	=	Movement of player
---→	=	Path of ball thrown
X	=	Player
~→	=	Path of ball rolled on ground
B	=	Batter
☐	=	Coach
☐AC	=	Assistant coach
☐T	=	Batting tee
△	=	Cone
()	=	Optional player

Week 1—Practice 1

PURPOSE

To defend in the infield when no runners are on base and a ground ball is hit. The focus is on fielding ground balls and throwing accurately to first base.

Equipment

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

COACH'S point

 Frequently ask players about the proper infield positions to make sure they know the positions.

 Have enough stations that players aren't standing around waiting for a turn.

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

- Begin each practice with about five minutes of warm-up activities to get players loosened up and ready to go.
- Jog once around the bases, starting from home plate. Play catch with a partner. Partners begin about 25 feet apart and move back two steps after 10 accurate throws and 10 controlled catches in a row.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Following the warm-up, gather the players and lead them through a series of stretches for the major muscle groups (see chapter 15 for stretches). After you lead them in stretches, briefly discuss the fitness concept for that practice.

Key Idea: General fitness

Gather team into a group. "I want everybody to run in place at a slow pace. Now a bit faster. Now everyone stop." Choose a player to demonstrate a throw to first base. "That was a good throw. Now I need all of you to throw the ball to each other and practice throwing with accuracy and catching." Have players throw to each other two times each. Next, have them perform a leg stretch. "Those four activities we did are a part of baseball, but they also are ways to improve your fitness. Each activity helps to improve a different area of fitness. Running improves your *cardiorespiratory fitness*, throwing helps your *muscular strength* and your *muscular endurance*, and stretching helps your *flexibility*. Throughout the season we'll be learning more about fitness in our Fitness Circles."

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 players needed to perform to succeed in the game). For many games, we provide diagrams or figures showing how the game is begun. We also often provide coach's points for you to pass along to your players during the games.

Week 1—Practice 1

“Zero-Zero” (zero outs and zero runners on base)

Goals

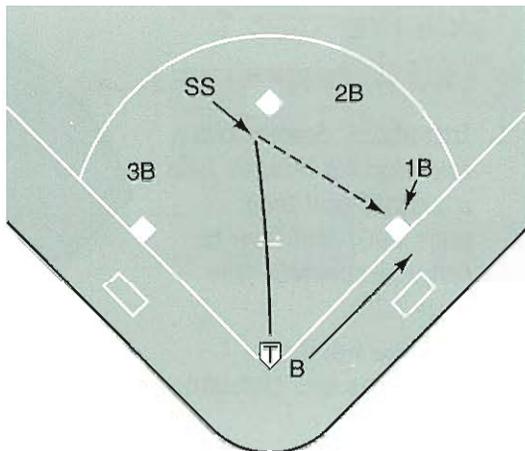
Infielders will field grounders and throw the runner out at first base. The runner tries to make it safely to first.

Description

Set up an infield (or two).

Play 4 v 4 (or teams can

have more players). The batting team hits off a tee and runs to first base. Runners who get to first base safely score a point for their team. Runners can advance to the next base (or bases) for practice but cannot score again. The fielding team attempts to field the ball and throw the batter/runner out at first base. The side is retired after three players reach first base safely or three outs, whichever comes first. Teams keep track of points scored; they'll compare the totals to the score of Game 2. Review rules about *foul balls*, *outs*, *strikes*, and *balls* (see pages 296–298). Review infield positions: pitcher, catcher, first base, second base, third base, and shortstop (see page 303).



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

Players: 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: Practice fielding and throwing.



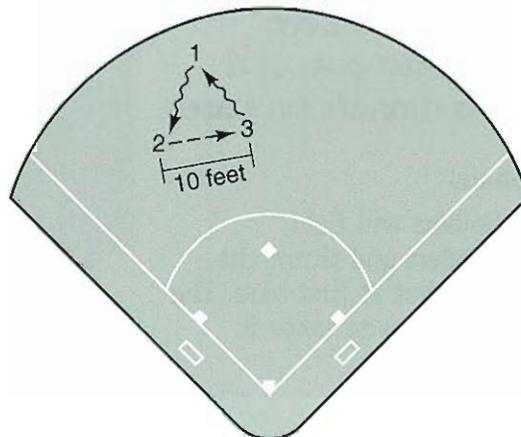
Skill Practice (40 minutes)

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 that tactic. The question-and-answer session, in which your players tell *you* what skills and tactics they needed to be successful in the game (instead of you telling them), 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 “coaching cues”—phrases to help your players focus on the task at hand—during many Skill Practice and Game sections.

Week 1—Practice 1 (cont'd)

Skill Practice 1 (20 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to *field a ground ball* (see page 290) and how to *throw accurately* (see page 275).
2. Practice fielding grounders and throwing.



Description

Players in threes stand about 10 feet apart. One player rolls the ball to another player, who fields and throws the ball to the third player. That player rolls the ball to the first player, who fields and throws to the second player, and so on. When a trio gets 10 in a row without a miss, all three players should take one giant step back and repeat the drill.

COACH'S CUES



Fielding

- “Ready position!”
- “Feet to the ball!”
- “Glove on the ground.”
- “Watch it in.”
- “Catch and cover” (with nonglove hand).

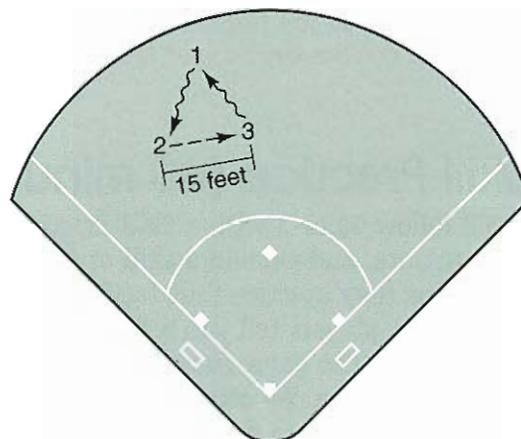
Throwing

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

Skill Practice 2 (20 minutes)

Description

Players practice fielding and throwing. Players in threes stand about 15 feet apart. One player rolls the ball to another player, who fields the ball and throws the ball to a third player. That player rolls the ball to the first player, who fields and throws to the second player, and so on. If trios complete 4 of 5 good catches and make accurate throws (within one step of the person catching the ball), they should take one giant step back and repeat the drill.



Week 1—Practice 1

Game 2 (10 minutes)

Repeat Game 1. Compare the score with the score of the first game.

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Conclude practice by gathering your players and leading them through the same stretches you led them through in the Fitness Circle. After stretching, discuss a character development concept. Remember, this isn't lecture time; you want your players' active participation in these discussions and activities. Following the discussion, wrap up the practice with a few comments (see below).

Key Idea: Four core values

Gather team into a circle. "Everyone stand on the first base line and link arms. Now try to move quickly toward second base, starting off on your left foot." The players move toward second. "If you were just walking by yourself it would have been much easier. But when we think of working together as a team, it takes more effort. We need to put just as much effort into being good teammates, with everyone doing their part. We'll talk about four qualities or values that help us be better players—*caring*, *honesty*, *respect*, and *responsibility*. These qualities are just as important as catching, throwing, and hitting. Give me an example of each of the four values." Listen to their responses and discuss.

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice and remind players of the next practice.



Week 1—Practice 1 (cont'd)

Variations

Games may be played 4 v 4, 5 v 5, or 6 v 6, depending on the number of players you have to work with.

For intermediate to advanced players

Place two players at shortstop and two players at third base, one behind the other. (They will take turns fielding the ball.) Also include a first base player. Extra players can serve as runners. Place one cone about halfway between home plate and third base and another cone on the pitcher's mound. Hit ground balls, alternating between third base and shortstop. Fielders should charge the ball, attempt to field the ball before it reaches the imaginary line between the cones, and make the play at first base. Another coach or parent should be at first base to assist the first base player with proper footwork and give feedback to runners (running outside the basepath, running hard to first, watching the coach, running over the base without leaping). After three trials at each position, players rotate.

For advanced players

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 on the left. Play continues in this fashion, with one player rolling a ground ball, and the next player fielding it and throwing it in the air. After five times around the square, the players change roles.

Week 1—Practice 2

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Jog once around the bases, starting from home plate. Play catch with a partner. Partners begin about 25 feet apart and move back two steps after 10 accurate throws and 10 controlled catches in a row.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Safety

Gather team into a group. Choose one player to act out being injured (limping) and have a second player get a coach to report the injury. "What did you see happening?" Listen to their responses. "When you get injured, it will probably look like what was acted out. If it hurts, you should stop and let me know right away. Don't pretend it doesn't hurt. Most of the time injuries are not bad, but sometimes they can be serious. If you get hurt even a little, I need to come over and check your injury. If you see a player who looks hurt or in pain or if you saw her get injured, let me know. Telling me if you're hurt helps me keep you safe during games and practices."

Game 1 (10 minutes)

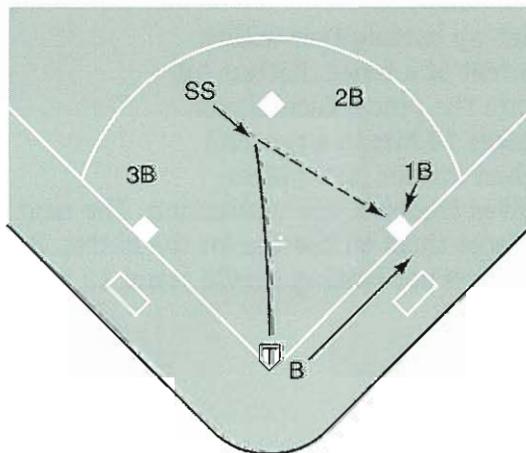
"Zero-Zero"
(zero outs and zero runners on base)

Goals

The offense tries to score.
The defense tries to get the runner out.

Description

Set up an infield (or two). Play a 4 v 4 game (you can have more players on a team). The batting team hits off a tee or a coach and runs to first base. Batters/runners who get to first base safely score a point for their team. They can continue to run for practice but cannot score



PURPOSE

To defend in the infield when there are no runners on and a grounder is hit. The focus is on fielding grounders, throwing accurately to first base, and covering first base properly.

Equipment

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



 Challenge players mentally. Frequently ask questions: "What else could you have done on that play?" "Why did you throw the ball there?" "What did you do that made that play work?"

 Develop hand signals for when to run-it-out at first, round the base, or run to second base, and teach them to the players. Use these signals during practice.

Week 1—Practice 2 (cont'd)

- again. The fielding team attempts to field the ball and throw the ball to
- first base, ahead of the runner, or to second base if the runner chooses
- to advance. The side is retired after three points or three outs, which-
- ever comes first. Teams keep track of the points scored; they'll compare
- the totals to the score of Game 2. Review rules related to running bases,
- especially running to first, and the rules related to base coverage (i.e.,
- *offensive interference and defensive interference*; see pages 273 and 289,
- respectively).



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

Players: **Get the runner out.**

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

Players: **None.**

Coach: What was the goal of the game if you were on the offensive team?

Players: **Score as often as possible.**

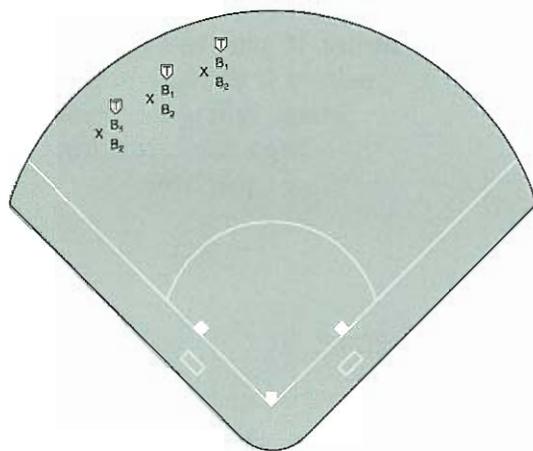
Skill Practice (40 minutes)

Skill Practice 1 (20 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to *hit* (see page 268).
2. Practice hitting.

Description

Set up batting tees within 5 feet of a fence. Batters hit into the fence. Each player takes 10 hits in a row and then rotates. One player gives feedback and instruction. The next hitter retrieves balls and places them on the tee for the batter. Remind players about safety: Players not batting should stand 10 to 15 feet away from the batter.



**COACH'S
point**

☞ Skill Practices 1 and 2 can run sequentially or concurrently, depending upon the number of coaches, assistant coaches, and parents available.

Week 1—Practice 2

COACH'S cues



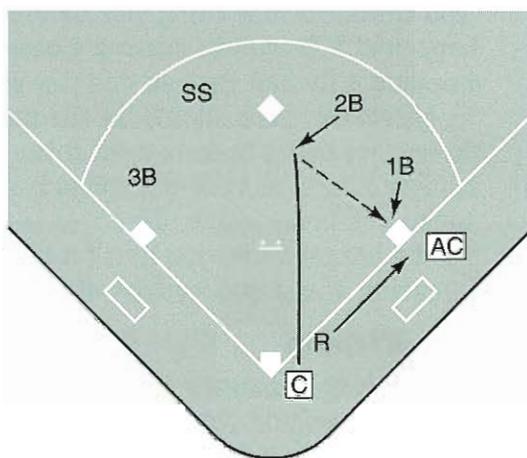
- “Ready position!”
- “Watch the ball on the batting tee!”
- “Step and swing fast!”
- “Contact in the power zone!”

Skill Practice 2 (20 minutes)

Description

Practice fielding grounders and throwing to first base. Place players at first, second, third, and short-stop. Add a pitcher and/or a catcher if you'd like. Extra players serve as runners.

Hit ground balls, alternating among the four infield positions. Fielders should charge and field the ball, then make an accurate throw to first base. Another coach or parent should be at first base to coach the first base player on proper footwork used to cover first and to give feedback to runners (running outside the basepath, running hard to first, watching the coach, running over the base without leaping). After three trials at each position, players rotate.



Game 2 (10 minutes)

Repeat Game 1. Compare the score with the score of the first game.

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Honesty

Gather team into a group. "Think about the rules in baseball. I am going to tell you a rule. Raise your hand if you think it's something you should let the umpire know happened." Examples: missing a base when baserunning, dropping a fly ball that no one saw you drop, running out of the basepaths. "You should let the umpire know about all of those rules being broken, even if the umpire does not see it. Raising a hand or telling umpires is an honest thing to do when you break a rule, even if it is an accident. It's important to be honest when you break a rule in practice and in games. It is a quality that makes you a better player."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice and remind players of the next practice.



Variations

- Provide baserunning drills if necessary. Include when and how to start as well as how to stop (lean back, weight on heel, flex legs and ankles to absorb force) and hold the base.
- Review fielding grounders and throwing for players having trouble: First, demonstrate (or have two of the players demonstrate) how to properly field a ball and how to throw accurately. Then, have partners stand about 10 feet apart and roll the ball back and forth. When the partners get 10 in a row without a miss, both should take one giant step back and repeat the drill. Frequently repeat the cues for fielding and throwing. Continue for 8 to 12 minutes.

Week 2—Practice 1

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Jog once around the bases, starting from home plate. Play catch with a partner. Partners begin about 25 feet apart and move back two steps after 10 accurate throws and 10 controlled catches in a row.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: General fitness

Gather team into a group. “Everyone think of a hill. Get a picture of a hill in your mind. Close your eyes and see it in your mind. You see it? Now pretend we’re all bicycling up that hill. We start at the bottom and slowly climb. We have to work harder and harder as we make it to the top. Then we gradually start pedaling back down the hill, which is not as hard as going up. That hill is the way your body will move every practice. We start slow with a *warm-up*. As you ride up the hill, this is how we move in the middle of practice. Toward the end of our practice, we gradually start to come back down the hill, slowing our bodies down. This is called the *cool-down*. A warm-up and cool-down are important parts of healthy fitness.”

Game 1 (10 minutes)

“Zero-Zero”

(zero outs and zero runners on base)

Goals

The offense tries to score. The defense tries to get the runner out.

Description

Set up an infield (or two; see page 85 for a diagram). Play a 4 v 4 game (you can have more players on a team). The batting team hits off a tee or a coach and runs to first base. Runners who get to first base safely score a point for their team. They can continue to run for practice, but cannot score again. The fielding team attempts to field the ball and throw the ball to first base, ahead of the runner, or to second base if the runner chooses to advance. The side is retired after three points or three outs, whichever comes first. Teams keep track of the points scored; they’ll compare the totals to the score of Game 2. Review *batting* rules (see page 296).

PURPOSE

To defend the whole infield when there are no runners on and a ground ball is hit. The focus is on fielding grounders from all positions, making accurate throws to first base, and covering first base properly.

Equipment

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



 Frequently ask questions: “What else could you have done on that play?” “Why did you throw the ball there?” “What did you do that made that play work?”

 Develop hand signals for when to run-it-out at first, round the base, or run to second base, and teach them to the players. Use these signals during practice.

Week 2—Practice 1 (cont'd)



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

Players: Get the runner out.

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

Players: None.

Coach: What was the goal of the game if you were on the offensive team?

Players: Score as often as possible.

Skill Practice (40 minutes)

Skill Practice 1 (20 minutes)

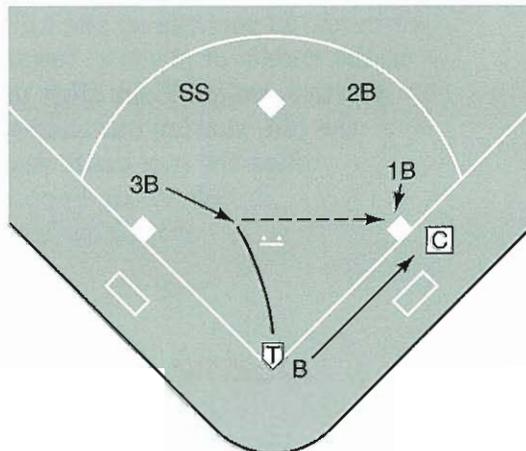
Description

Practice hitting. Set up batting tees within 5 feet of a fence (see page 86 for a diagram). Batters hit into the fence. Each player takes 10 hits in a row and then rotates. One player gives feedback and instruction. The next hitter retrieves balls and places them on the tee for the batter. Remind players about safety: Players not batting should stand 10 to 15 feet away from the batter.

Skill Practice 2 (20 minutes)

Description

Practice fielding ground balls and throwing to first base. Place players at first, second, third, and shortstop. Add a pitcher and/or a catcher if you'd like. Players hit off a tee or coach and run to first base. After three trials, the batter/runner switches with an infielder. Fielders charge and field the ball, then make an accurate throw to first base. Place a coach or parent at first base to coach the first base player on proper footwork and to give feedback to runners (running outside the basepath, running hard to first, watching the coach, running over the base without leaping). After three trials at each position, players rotate.



COACH'S point

☞ Skill Practices 1 and 2 can run sequentially or concurrently, depending upon the number of coaches, assistant coaches, or parents available.

COACH'S cues



For the batter

“Ready position!”
“Watch the ball on the batting tee!”
“Step and swing fast!”
“Contact in the power zone!”
“Step and drive to first base!”

Week 2—Practice 1

Game 2 (10 minutes)

Repeat Game 1. Compare the score with the score of the first game.

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Responsibility

Gather team into groups of two partners. "Everyone stand and balance on one foot." Wait while everyone gets his or her balance. "Now one of you offer your shoulder for your teammate to lean on. If you're leaning on your partner's shoulder, now try to balance on one foot again. . . . Change places. If you were leaning before, now let your partner lean on your shoulder and stand on one foot." Wait until everyone has balanced with the help of a partner. "Now come back here. Wasn't it easier to balance when you were leaning on your partner? It works that way in sports, too. When you help each other during practices and games, we work better as a team. Each of you can contribute. Your teammates count on you to contribute to the team. That is being responsible to your team."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice and remind players of the next practice.



Variations

- Provide baserunning drills if necessary. Include when and how to start as well as how to stop (lean back, weight on heel, flex legs and ankles to absorb force) and hold the base.
- Review fielding grounders and throwing for players having trouble: First, demonstrate (or have two of the players demonstrate) how to properly field a ball and how to throw accurately. Then, have partners stand about 10 feet apart and roll the ball back and forth. When the partners get 10 in a row without a miss, both should take one giant step back and repeat the drill. Frequently repeat the cues for fielding and throwing. Continue for 8 to 12 minutes.

Week 2—Practice 2

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Jog once around the bases, starting from home plate. Play catch with a partner. Partners begin about 25 feet apart and move back two steps after 10 accurate throws and 10 controlled catches in a row.

PURPOSE

To defend second base by making a force play at the base when there is a runner on first base and a ground ball is hit to the infield. The focus is on proper technique in making the force play and smart baserunning.

Equipment

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

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Flexibility

Gather team into a circle and tell them to sit down with their legs stretched in front of them. “Think of stretching a rubber band as far as you can. What happens if you stretch the band too far?” Listen to their responses. “That’s right. It breaks. Muscles work in sort of the same way. Stretching your muscles too far can tear and injure them. But it’s important to stretch your muscles for them to be flexible. Everyone reach forward and try to touch your toes, but stretch only until you feel a slight pulling in your leg muscle—make sure it doesn’t hurt.” Tell them to hold the stretch for 10 counts without bouncing. “Stretching your muscles is important to keep them flexible, but you shouldn’t feel pain. The main muscles to stretch are the front of your thighs (quadriceps), the back of your thighs (hamstrings), the back of your lower legs (calves), your shoulders (deltoids), and your arms (biceps, triceps).” Demonstrate stretching each muscle group.

Game 1 (10 minutes)

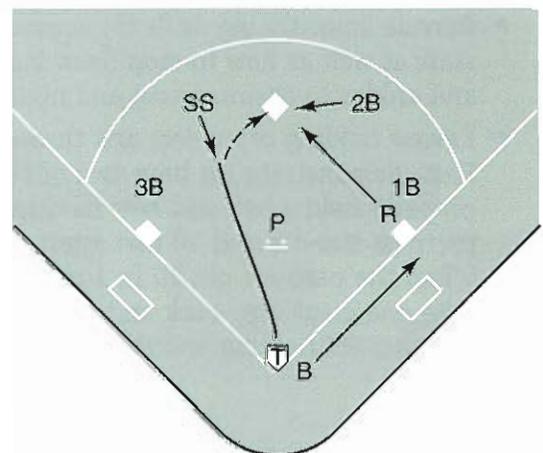
“Movin’ on Up”

Goals

- The offense tries to advance the runner to second base.
- The defense tries to get the runner out at second base.

Description

- Set up an infield (or two).
- Play a 5 v 5 game (you can



Week 2—Practice 2

use more players per team). The batting teams start with a runner at first base. Batters hit off a tee or coach and run to first base. If the runner gets to second base safely, the offense scores a point. The runner can continue to run and score again by crossing home plate. The fielding team attempts to get the runner out at second base. The side is retired after three points or three outs, whichever comes first. Review rules related to the *force play* (see page 256).

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

Players: Get the runner out at second base.

Coach: Who covered the base if the ball was hit to the right side? Left side?

Players: Shortstop (right side); second base player (left side).

Coach: If a play for the runner was made at second base, did the player covering the base need to tag the base or the runner?

Players: The base, because it was a force play.

Coach: When running from first to second base, how do you know when to take off?

Players: When the batter contacts the ball.

Coach: How do you stop quickly?

Players: Lean back, gather (bend hips, knees, and ankles to absorb force), and hold onto the base with your foot.

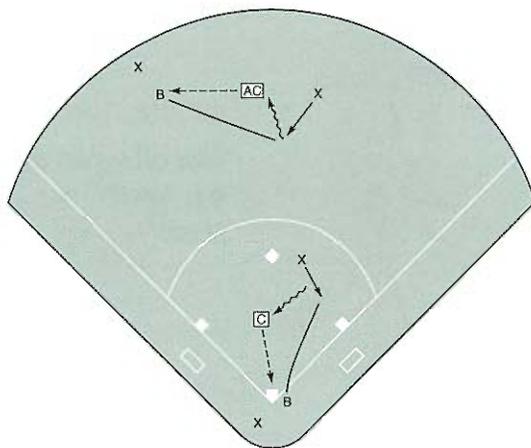


Skill Practice (40 minutes)

Skill Practice 1 (20 minutes)

Description

Practice hitting. Set up hitting stations with 4 or 5 players at each station. Use a coach for each station. Each player takes 10 hits in a row, then rotates. One player gives feedback and instruction. Another player retrieves balls and rolls them back to the coach. Remind players about safety: Players not batting should stand 10 to 15 feet away from the batter.

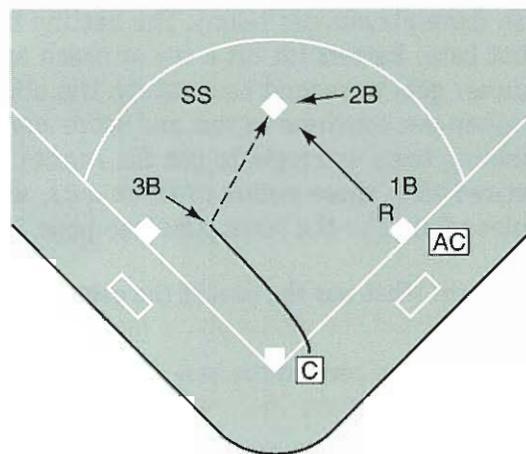


 Encourage players to hustle throughout practice. *No walking!* If practice is active and quick-paced, players will get more opportunities to respond and therefore more opportunities to improve.

Week 2—Practice 2 (cont'd)

Skill Practice 2 (20 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to execute a *force play* at second base (see page 256).
2. Practice executing force plays at second base.



Description

Place players at first, second, third, and shortstop. You can also include a pitcher and/or catcher. Extra players serve as runners. Place a runner at first base. The runner takes off when your bat contacts the ball and continues to second base. Hit ground balls, alternating among the four infield positions. Fielders charge and field the ball, then make an accurate throw to second base. Place another coach or parent at first base to assist with instruction and feedback to the players. After three trials at each position, players rotate.

Game 2 (10 minutes)

Repeat Game 1, applying what has just been learned.

COACH'S cues



For the runner on first base

"Take off when the batter hits the ball."
"Run hard!"
"Slide!"



Run Skill Practices 1 and 2 at the same time. After 20 minutes, players switch stations, going on to practice the next skill.

Make sure players start in their proper positions so that the practice is gamelike.

Week 2—Practice 2

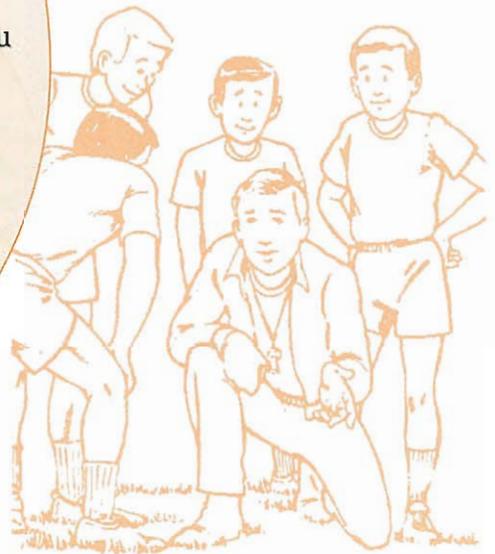
Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Respect

Gather team into two lines standing opposite each other about five feet apart. "I want each line to walk toward each other and give each person in the other line a high-five. Imagine that the other line is your opponent for a game. Show me how you would act toward an opponent and what you would say if it was the end of the game and we lost the game. Start." Assist players if necessary. Listen to responses some players provide to each other. "At the end of each game it is important to show respect for your opponent. We do this by slapping hands and saying something like 'good game,' even if we lose the game."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice and remind players of the next practice.



Variations

- Set up a situation, similar to Skill Practice 2, where players have to "flip" the ball to the player covering second base.
- Advanced players can work on turning a double play, perhaps on a separate field within the cloverleaf.

Week 3

PURPOSE

To defend third base by making a tag play at the base when there is a runner on second base and a ground ball is hit to the infield. The focus is on proper technique in making the tag play and smart baserunning.

Equipment

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

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Jog two times around the bases, starting from home plate. Play catch with a partner. Partners begin about 25 feet apart and move back two steps after 10 accurate throws and 10 controlled catches in a row.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Healthy habits

Gather team into a group. "Everyone run in place for 15 seconds. Ready? Go! . . . Now stop! Whenever we run during our practice, our body starts to get warm. When our bodies get really warm, what do you think happens to cool them off?" Wait for their responses. "Our bodies start to sweat. Sweat is the water that comes out of all the pores in your skin. Then the sweat evaporates into the air. Since your body sweats to cool off, what do you think we need to put back into our bodies?" Wait for someone to say "water." "That's right. Drinking enough water every day is an important healthy habit. You'll need to drink more water if you're running and playing a lot. I want to challenge all of you to drink one glass of water a day for every year of your age. How many is that? . . . Eight? Nine? I know you can drink that many glasses a day!"

Game 1 (10 minutes)

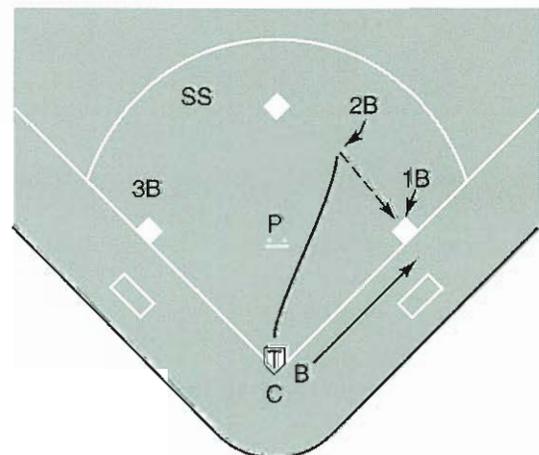
"Running Bases"

Goals

The offense tries to hit and advance to as many bases as possible. The defense tries to get the runners out.

Description

- Set up an infield (or two).
- Play a 6 v 6 game (you can use fewer players). The batting team hits off a tee or coach and runs to first base. Runners who get to first base



Week 3

safely score a point for their team. They score another point for each base they reach on any subsequent plays. The fielding team attempts to field the ball and throw the runner out. The side is retired after six points or three outs, whichever comes first. Each team should keep track of the points scored and compare the score to the score of Game 2.

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

Players: Get the runner out.

Coach: If you made a play for the runner at first base, did the first base player need to tag the base or the runner to get him or her out?

Players: The base.

Coach: If a play for the batter/runner was made at second base, did the player covering the base need to tag the base or tag the runner?

Players: The runner.

Coach: What's the difference between a force play and a tag play?

Players: Force play, you touch the base; tag play, you touch the runner.

Coach: How is running all the way to second base different from running just to first base?

Players: You have to cut outside the basepath before getting to first, round the bag, then run to second rather than running straight across first base.



Skill Practice (40 minutes)

Skill Practice 1 (20 minutes)

Description

Players practice hitting. Set up batting tees within 5 feet of a fence (see page 86 for a diagram). Batters hit into the fence. Each player takes 10 hits in a row and then rotates. One player gives feedback and instruction. The next hitter retrieves balls and places them on the tee for the batter. Remind players about safety: Players not batting should stand 10 to 15 feet away from the batter.

Skill Practice 2 (20 minutes)

Description

Players practice fielding. Place players at first, second, third, and shortstop (see page 87 for a diagram). Add a pitcher and/or a catcher if you'd like. Extra players serve as runners. Hit ground balls, alternating among the four infield positions. Fielders should charge and field the ball, then make an accurate throw to first base. Another coach or parent should be at first base to coach the first base player on proper footwork used to cover first and to give feedback to runners (running outside the basepath, running hard to first, watching the coach, running over the base without leaping). After three trials at each position, players rotate.



 Develop and use a consistent set of hand signals for baserunners. Quiz players on these hand signals frequently.

COACH'S point

☞ Teach players a sweep tag. This keeps them out of the runner's path and emphasizes the need to tag the runner low, so the runner cannot sneak a foot onto the base.

☞ Look for coachable moments. Emphasize key aspects of a situation as you describe what happened or what ought to have happened. Keep it positive and to the point.

Skill Practice 3

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to execute a *tag play* (see page 259).
2. Practice tag plays at third base.

Description

Place players at first, second, third, and shortstop (see page 94 for a diagram). Extra players serve as runners. Runners take off from second base on your signal and continue to third base. Hit ground balls, alternating among the four infield positions. Fielders charge and field the ball, then make an accurate throw to third base, where the fielder attempts to tag the runner. Place another coach or parent at third base to assist in instructing and giving feedback to the players. After three trials at each position, players rotate. Differentiate between a tag play and a force play. Review the rules related to a *tag play* (see page 259), including rules related to *offensive interference and defensive interference* (see pages 297 and 296, respectively).

COACH'S cues



- "Select your position!" (depending on angle of incoming ball)
- "Ready position!"
- "Straddle the base!"
- "Watch the ball into the glove!"
- "Catch firmly!"
- "Sweep low!"

Game 2 (10 minutes)

Repeat Game 1. Compare the score with the score of the first game.

Week 3

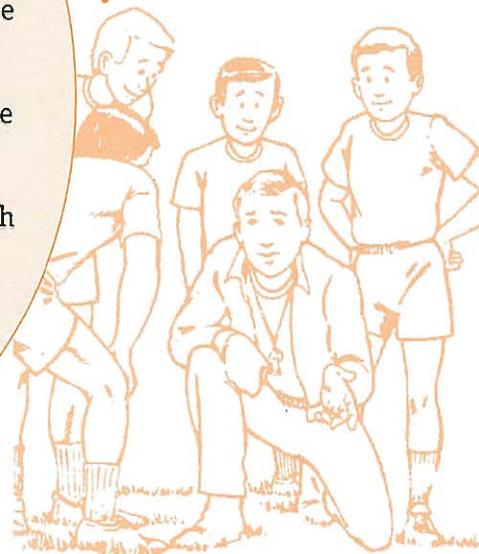
Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Responsibility

Gather team into two groups; one group will spread out to pitch and bat. The other group will be to one side, as if on the bench during a game; they should be silent for the first 30 seconds of the activity. Then have them cheer and encourage on-field players; continue this activity for 30 more seconds. "When players are on the bench during a game, they should be encouraging their teammates, no matter what's happening in the game. This is being responsible to your team. It helps players keep trying hard even if they are losing or have made some mistakes. How did it feel when you were playing and the bench players didn't encourage you? How about when they did encourage you?" Listen to both responses and have players compare feelings.

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice and give reminders for the first game.



Variations

- Set up a situation, similar to Skill Practice 3, where players have to flip the ball to the player covering second base.
- Provide some baserunning drills if necessary. Include when and how to start as well as how to stop (lean back, weight on heel, flex legs and ankles to absorb force) and hold the base.

Week 4

PURPOSE

To defend in the outfield and defend in the infield on throws in from the outfield. The focus is on proper fielding techniques for balls hit into the outfield, backing up plays in the outfield, and covering second base on throws in from the outfield.

Equipment

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

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Jog two times around the bases, starting from home plate. Play catch with a partner. While throwing, alternate among line drives, grounders, and fly balls.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Safety

Gather team into a group. "Pretend you're a 'player in a bubble.' Walk around and work at not bumping into your teammates to make sure their bubbles don't break." Keep players in a confined area. Time them for one minute. "Now we'll do the same thing while jogging." Time for 30 seconds. "It's important not to run into other players and it's also important to play as safely as you can. Thinking about the other players' bubbles will help you stay in your own space during practices and games."

Game 1 (10 minutes)

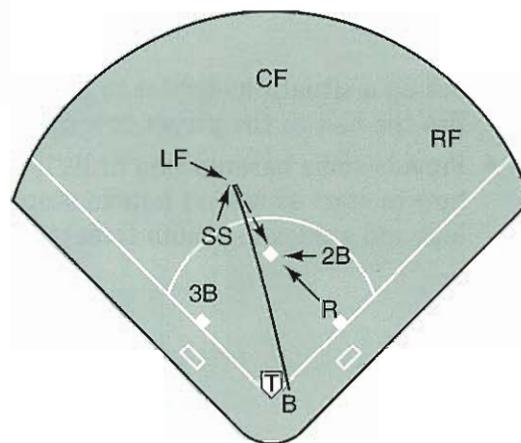
"Movin' on Up"

Goals

The offense tries to advance the runner to third base. The defense tries to keep the runner from advancing to third base.

Description

Set up an outfield, a third base player, a shortstop, and a second base player. The batting team always begins with a runner on first base. Play 6 v 6 or 7 v 7, depending on the number of outfielders used. Batters hit off a tee or coach and attempt to hit the ball to the outfield. Infielders should let balls go through to the outfield. If the runner gets to second base safely, the



Week 4

offensive team scores a point and does not continue running. The defense also scores a point if the runner advances only to second base (for holding the runner to one base on a single). If the runner makes it to third base, the offense scores two points. If the runner is thrown out at third base, the defense scores two points. The side is retired after six points for either side. Review rules related to number of outfielders and positions (see page 303).

Coach: What was the goal of the game if you were an outfielder?

Players: Hold the runner at second base or get the runner out at third base.

Coach: Who covered second base if the ball was hit to the right side? To the left side?

Players: Shortstop (right side); second base player (left side).

Coach: If the runner attempted to go to third, who was the cutoff for the throw?

Players: Shortstop (for left fielder and center fielder); second base player (for right fielder).

Coach: If you want to hit a long ball, should you swing the bat hard or fast? What's the difference?

Players: Fast. To swing fast you need to keep your arms loose, instead of tensing them up.

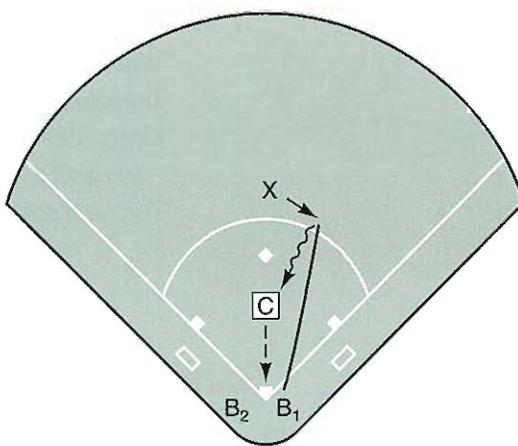


Skill Practice (40 minutes)

Skill Practice 1 (20 minutes)

Description

Players practice hitting. Each player attempts to hit 10 balls as far as possible into the outfield. One player gives feedback and instruction. Another player retrieves balls and rolls them back to the coach. Players not batting should stand 10 to 15 feet away from the batter. Players on deck should take 10 to 20 practice swings, working on bat speed.



👉 Devices used to increase bat speed, such as a Wiffle bat that “pops” when you swing fast, might be useful. The faster you swing, the louder it pops.

COACH'S point

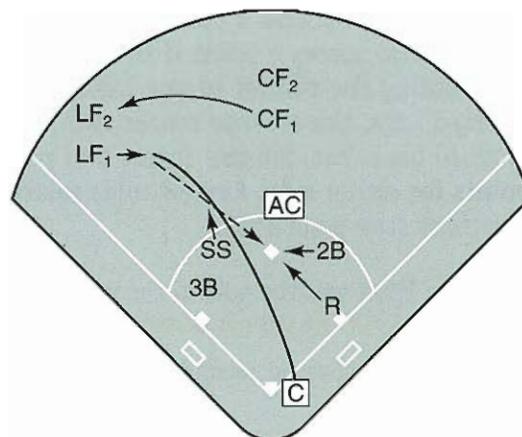


Put an additional coach or parent in the outfield and another at second base.

If there are players who need special help fielding fly balls, have a coach or parent take them off to the side and work with them for 5 to 10 minutes.

Skill Practice 2 (20 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to catch fly balls (see page 293).
2. Practice catching fly balls in the context of Skill Practice 2.



Description

Place two players in left, two players in center or left center, and players at second, shortstop, and third. Extra players serve as baserunners, taking off from first base on your signal. Throw or hit balls between the outfield positions, alternating among fly balls, line drives, and grounders. One player calls and catches the ball and another player backs him or her up and tells the fielder where to throw the ball. After 10 throws or hits, players rotate. Review rules related to tagging up on a fly ball (see *tag up* information on page 275).

COACH'S cues



- “Feet to the ball!”
- “Watch it in!”
- “Transition smoothly from catch to throw.”
- “Keep feet moving through the ball and toward the target.”
- “Throw the ball quickly!”

Game 2 (10 minutes)

Repeat Game 1. Compare the score with the score of the first game.

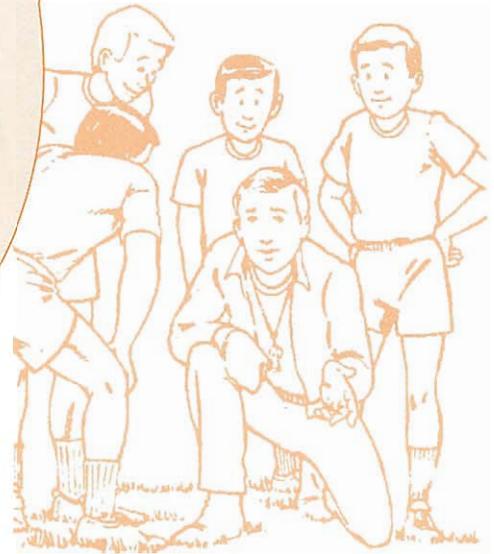
Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Caring

Gather team into groups of two and give each group one ball. Players should throw ground balls to each other. "Each of you should say two good things about your partner's skills. Then come back to me in a group. Begin." Wait for them to regroup. "What were some of the comments your teammates told you?" Listen to their responses. "What kind of value or quality is it when you go out of your way to say something good about a teammate's playing?" Listen to responses and encourage discussion as needed. "Caring is one of our core values. You show you care about your teammates when you encourage them."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about the practice and give reminders for the next game.



Variations

- Repeat Skill Practice 2 on the right side of the field and have the shortstop cover second base.
- Repeat Skill Practice 2, but have fielders intentionally miss the ball so that players backing them up can practice positioning and fielding a missed ball.

Week 5

PURPOSE

To defend in the outfield, including outfielders backing each other up, and to cover second base on balls hit into the outfield.

Equipment

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

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Jog two times around the bases, starting from home plate. Play catch with a partner. While throwing, alternate among line drives, grounders, and fly balls.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Cardiorespiratory fitness

Gather team into a circle. "Remember the hill we imagine we bicycled up a few practices ago? We start slow going up, then go faster toward the top and come slowly back down. Let's start up that hill by running in place slowly, getting a little faster, faster, and now really fast. Now start to slow down. A little slower. Slower. And stop." Run with players to model. "That was a short version of moving during our practice. We run faster to make our heart and lungs stronger; this is called *cardiorespiratory fitness*. We start slowly and then gradually slow down at the end of the practice to help our hearts pump blood and carry oxygen from our lungs to our muscles."

Game 1 (10 minutes)

"Movin' on Up"

Goals

The offense tries to advance the runner to third base. The defense tries to keep the runner from advancing to third base.

Description

Set up an outfield, a third base player, a shortstop, and a second base player (see page 100 for a diagram). The batting team always begins with a runner on first base. Play 6 v 6 or 7 v 7, depending on the number of outfielders used. Batters hit off a tee or coach and attempt to hit the ball to the outfield. Infielders should let balls go through to the outfield. If the runner gets to second base safely, the offensive team scores a point and does not continue running. The defense also scores a point if the runner advances only to second base (for holding the runner to one base on a single). If the runner makes it to third

Week 5

base, the offense scores two points. If the runner is thrown out at third base, the defense scores two points. The side is retired after six points for either side.

Coach: What was the goal of the game if you were an outfielder?

Players: Hold the runner at second base or get the runner out at third base.

Coach: Who covered second base if the ball was hit to the right side? To the left side?

Players: Shortstop (right side); second base player (left side).

Coach: If the runner attempted to go to third, who was the cutoff for the throw?

Players: Shortstop (for left fielder and center fielder); second base player (for right fielder).

Coach: If you want to hit a long ball, should you swing the bat hard or fast? What's the difference?

Players: Fast. To swing fast you need to keep your arms loose, instead of tensing them up.



Skill Practice (40 minutes)

Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

Description

Players practice hitting. Each player attempts to hit 10 balls as far as possible into the outfield. One player gives feedback and instruction. Another player retrieves balls and rolls them back to the coach (see page 101 for a diagram). Players not batting should stand 10 to 15 feet away from the batter. Players on deck should take 10 to 20 practice swings, working on bat speed.

Skill Practice 2 (15 minutes)

Description

Players practice throwing to the proper base. Place two players in left, two players in center or left center, and players at second base, third base, and shortstop (see page 102 for a diagram). Extra players serve as baserunners, taking off from first base on your signal. Throw or hit balls between the outfield positions, alternating among fly balls, line drives, and grounders. One player calls and catches the ball and another player backs him or her up and tells the fielder where to throw the ball. After 10 throws or hits, players rotate.

Skill Practice 3 (15 minutes)

Repeat Skill Practice 2, except the player that calls the ball intentionally misses the ball and allows the player backing him or her up to field the ball.



☞ Tell outfielders to get the ball in *quick!*

☞ Put an additional coach or parent in the outfield and another at second base.

COACH'S cues



- "Feet to the ball!"
- "Watch it in!"
- "Transition smoothly from catch to throw."
- "Keep feet moving through the ball and toward the target."
- "Throw the ball quickly!"

Game 2 (10 minutes)

Repeat Game 1. Compare the score with the score of the first game.

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Caring

Gather team into a group and choose two to demonstrate with you. You will throw the ball to one of them three times in a row and not throw to the other one. "Why didn't Jerald catch any of the balls I threw? I didn't throw to him, did I? Sharing so that all players get a chance shows you care about your teammates." Have players get into groups of three and play catch the "caring" way. Bring players back together. "Raise your hand if you think that caring is an important quality or value on this team. It is important!"

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice and give reminders for the next game.



Variations

Repeat Skill Practice 2 on the right side of the field and have the shortstop cover second base.

Week 6

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Jog two times around the bases, starting from home plate. Play catch with a partner. While throwing, alternate among line drives, grounders, and fly balls.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Cardiorespiratory fitness

Gather team into a circle and give one player a ball to hold. "What does the heart pump to the whole body?" Listen to responses until someone says "blood." "What does the blood carry to the muscles?" Listen until someone says "oxygen." "We're going to pretend that the ball is oxygen and that you're big blood vessels or tubes that carry the blood. Toss the ball to the person next to you." Each player should touch the ball until the ball completes the circle. "The oxygen in your blood starts at your heart and travels to your lungs, legs, arms, and brain." Try assigning a part of the body to each player. "Playing baseball helps your heart and lungs get better at getting oxygen to your muscles—this is called *cardiorespiratory fitness*."

Game 1 (10 minutes)

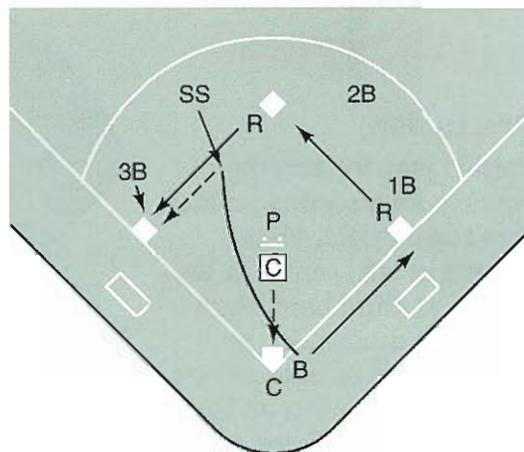
"3 for 3"

Goals

The offense tries to advance the runner to third base. The defense tries to get the runner out at third base.

Description

Set up an infield (or two). Play a 6 v 6 game. The batting team has runners at first and second. Batters must hit ground balls. If a runner gets to third base safely, the offense scores three points, and that



PURPOSE

To defend at third base on balls hit to the infield and outfield with runners on first and second base. The focus is on covering third base on force plays and proper baserunning between second and third.

Equipment

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

- runner does not continue running. The fielding team attempts to get the runner out at third base. The side is retired after nine points or three outs, whichever comes first. Review *offensive interference* and *defensive interference* rules (see pages 297 and 296, respectively).



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

Players: **Get the runner out at third base.**

Coach: Who covers third base? How?

Players: **The third base player, by standing just off the base between the ball and base and placing the foot opposite the glove hand on the outside edge of the base.**

Coach: How is running from second to third different from running from first to second?

Players: **It's not unless you have to round the base to run home; then it's just like rounding first to run to second.**

Skill Practice (40 minutes)

Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

Description

Players practice hitting. Each player attempts to hit 10 balls as far as possible into the outfield. One player gives feedback and instruction. Another player retrieves balls and rolls them back to the coach (see page 101 for a diagram). Players not batting should stand 10 to 15 feet away from the batter. Players on deck should take 10 to 20 practice swings, working on bat speed. Players on deck can also take some turns hitting off the tee, into a fence.

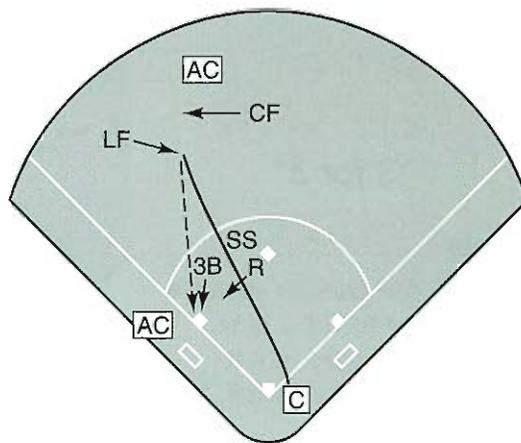


☞ Skill Practices 1 and 2 can be run concurrently with players switching tasks after 15 to 20 minutes.

Skill Practice 2 (15 minutes)

Description

Players practice keeping runners from scoring on hits into the outfield. Place players in left, center or left center, at third base, short-stop, and catcher. Extra players serve as baserunners, taking off from second base on your signal. Throw or hit balls between the outfield positions, alternating among fly balls, line drives, and grounders. One player calls and catches the ball, and the other player backs him or her up and tells the fielder where to throw the ball. After 10 throws or hits, players rotate.



☞ Put an additional coach or parent in the outfield and another at third base.

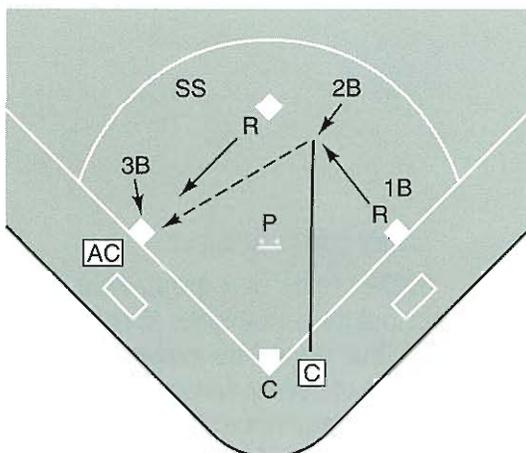
Week 6

Skill Practice 3 (15 minutes)

Description

Players practice forcing runners out at third base on balls hit to the infield. Place players at all infield positions. Extra players serve as baserunners, taking off from first and second base on your signal. Hit grounders, alternating hits to the infield positions.

Infielders field the ball and throw to third base. Players rotate after three trials at each position. Position a coach at third base to help with proper technique required to cover third on a force-out situation.



COACH'S cues



- “Select your position!” (depending on angle of incoming ball)
- “Ready position!”
- “Watch the ball into the glove!”
- “Catch firmly!”

Game 2 (10 minutes)

Repeat Game 1. Compare the score with the score of the first game.

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Respect

Gather team in a group near two cones 10 feet apart. Act out two examples of celebrating for good play or a win. One should be exaggerated and obviously inappropriate, the other modeling the kind of celebrating you'd like to see from your team. "If you think the first example I showed you is the way to celebrate a good play, stand by this cone. If you think the second is the best way to celebrate, stand by this one." After all players have voted, ask why they voted the way they did. "The second example is the kind of celebrating that shows respect for your opponents."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice and give reminders for the next game.



Variations

- Repeat Skill Practice 2 on the right side of the field.
- Allow runners to continue running to home if they can. This will create a tag play at home or, if the runner is coming back to the base, a tag play at third.

Week 7

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Jog three times around the bases, starting from home plate. Play catch with a partner. While throwing, alternate among line drives, grounders, and fly balls.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Muscular strength and endurance

Gather team into a group in their own space.

"We're going to move in different directions in our own space. I will point to a direction and the whole group should jog slowly in that direction. When I put my hand up, everyone stop." Point to directions of forward, one side, the other side, and backward.

"When you jog in different directions, you use different muscles. It's important to improve your muscular strength and endurance in all your muscles in your body. We can do that by running, throwing and hitting the ball, and running the bases."

Game 1 (10 minutes)

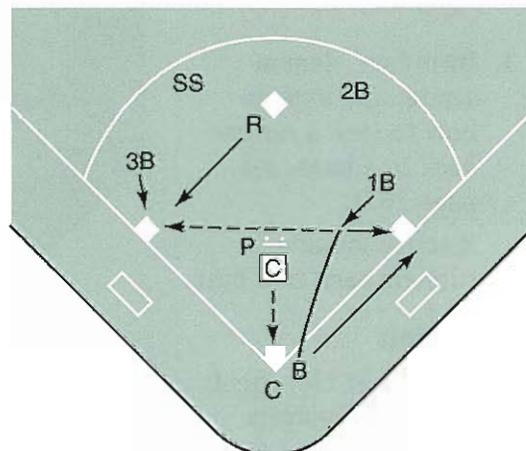
"Stayin' Alive"

Goals

The offense tries to advance the runner to third base. The defense tries to hold the runner at second base and get the runner out at first.

Description

Set up an infield (or two). Play 6 v 6. The batting team always starts with a runner on second. Batters must hit ground balls. If the runner gets to third base safely, the offensive team scores three points, and that runner does not continue running. The side is retired after nine points or three outs, whichever comes first. Remind the first base player to back up second base in a rundown of a runner between second and third. Review rules related to running bases and overthrows in chapter 13.



PURPOSE

To defend at second base by holding a runner on second when a ground ball is hit to the infield. The focus will be on looking the runner back to second base before throwing to first base.

Equipment

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



 Have a coach's corner, where players can go for extra help. Parents can be responsible for providing help. You can "recommend" it to the player or the player can go on his or her own. Players go to the coach's corner for 5 to 15 minutes to practice a particular skill. *Caution:* Make this a place for every player, not just low-skilled players.



 If possible, set up two fields to provide many chances for players to practice this situation.

Coach: What did you have to do to hold the runner at second and get an out at first?

Players: Field, look the runner back, then throw to first.

Coach: If the fielder cannot get the runner at first, what should he or she do?

Players: Hold the runner at second base.

Coach: What did runners have to do to delay the throw?

Players: Fake like you were running to third, but be ready to get back to second if the throw goes to second and to run to third if the throw goes to first.

Coach: What did you do to get to third?

Players: Took off on the throw.

Skill Practice (35 minutes)

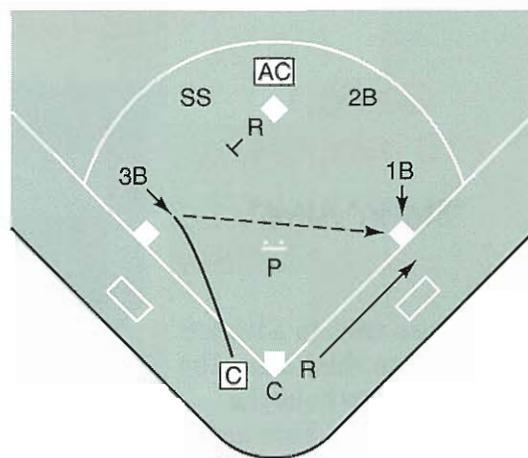
Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

Description

Players practice hitting. Each player takes 10 swings and then rotates. One player gives feedback and instruction. Another player retrieves balls and rolls them back to the coach (see page 101 for a diagram). Players not batting should stand 10 to 15 feet away from the batter. Advanced batters can practice hitting to specific areas of the field.

Skill Practice 2 (25 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to *look a runner back* to a base (see page 267).
2. Practice looking runners back to a base.



Description

Place players at all infield positions. Extra players serve as baserunners, taking off from behind home plate and second base on your signal. Hit grounders, alternating among the infield positions. Infielders field the ball, look the runner back to second base, and make the appropriate play. Players rotate after three trials at each position. Position a coach at second base to help with proper positioning of the shortstop and second base player as he or she anticipates a possible tag play situation.

Week 7

COACH'S cues



To hold runner

"Ready position!"
"Show a target!"

To look the runner back

"Field the ball!"
"Look back during the throwing motion!"
"Throw to first."

If the runner breaks for third base

"Fake throw!"
"Pivot and throw to third!"

For baserunning

"Fake!"
"Stay low!"
"Go on the throw!"

Game 2 (15 minutes)

Repeat Game 1. Compare the score with the score of the first game.

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Respect

Gather team into a group and choose one player to help demonstrate. He or she will pretend to be an umpire; you will be a player. Run the basepaths and run wide, out of the path. Direct the player to stop play and call you out. "What did I do when you called me out for being outside the basepath?" Listen to their responses. Discuss stopping when the umpire calls for time and not arguing about the call. "You need to respect the umpires and their decisions at all times. It also shows respect to the umpire when you thank them at the end of the game."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice and give reminders for the next game.



Week 8

PURPOSE

Defend the outfield on fly balls when runners are on second base with fewer than two outs. The focus will be on proper technique in fielding fly balls and getting the ball in quickly to the infield to keep the runner from advancing.

Equipment

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

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Jog three times around the bases, starting from home plate. Play catch with a partner. While throwing, practice catching and throwing the ball back to the partner as quickly as possible, working on quick releases.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Training and conditioning

Gather team into a circle. "Everyone run in place for 10 seconds. . . . Now stop. Now run in place for 20 seconds. . . . Stop. Next we'll run for 30 seconds. . . . Stop. When you run, you're improving your body's physical conditioning in your heart, lungs, and muscles. Every time you run the bases, your body improves its physical conditioning. When your body has better conditioning you can keep up with opponents and play longer without getting too tired."

Game 1 (10 minutes)

"Tag"

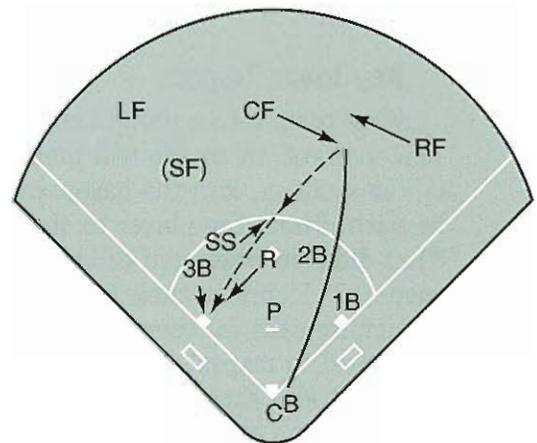
Goals

The offense tries to advance the runner to third base. The defense tries to hold the runner at second base.

Description

Play an intrasquad game by dividing players into three teams of five. One team bats while the other two teams are in the field. Rotate teams at bat and in field. The side is retired after nine points or three outs, whichever comes first.

The batting team always begins with a runner on second. If the runner gets to third base safely, the offense scores three points, and



Week 8

that runner does not continue running. The batter should throw a fly ball into the outfield. A ball caught on the fly counts as an out, as does throwing the runner out at third base.

Coach: What did you have to do to hold the runner at second?
Players: Catch the ball and throw it immediately to third base.

Coach: As a runner, what should you do on a fly ball?
Players: Tag up.

Coach: When can you leave the base?
Players: As soon as the fielder touches the ball.



Skill Practice (35 minutes)

Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

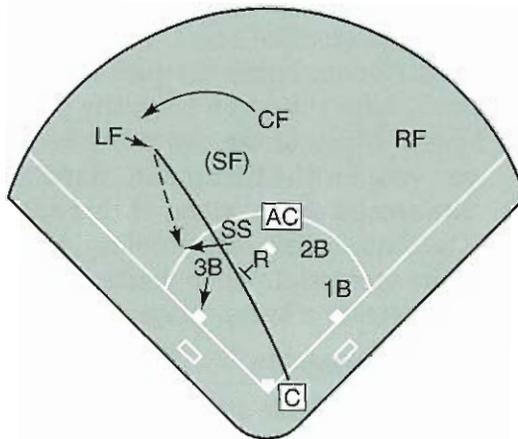
Description

Players practice hitting. Each player takes 10 swings and then rotates. One player gives feedback and instruction. Another player retrieves balls and rolls them back to the coach (see page 101 for a diagram). Players not batting should stand 10 to 15 feet away from the batter.

Skill Practice 2 (25 minutes)

Description

Players practice holding the runner at second base. Place players at all outfield positions, second, third, and shortstop. Extra players serve as baserunners, taking off from second base as soon as an outfielder touches the ball. Throw or hit fly balls to the outfield. Players rotate after three trials. Position a coach at second base to help with proper baserunning technique as well as proper positioning of the shortstop and second base player as they anticipate a possible tag play or cutoff.



 Some players will be ready to learn how to time an approach to a fly ball so they can use their momentum to get the ball in faster. Encourage all outfielders to catch and throw quickly into the infield.

COACH'S cues



Tagging up

"Watch me!"
"Go on the signal!"

Game 2 (15 minutes)

Repeat Game 1. Compare the score with the score of the first game.

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Responsibility

Gather team between two cones about 10 feet apart. "What are some different ways you can get a baserunner home to score?" Listen to their responses. Provide the example of players working together to get the runner from first base to second (a sacrifice bunt). Give the example of one player trying to score on an inside-the-park home run when he or she obviously should have stayed on base; the player is easily thrown out at home. "Which of the two is the best example of teamwork? If you vote for the first group, stand at this cone; if you vote for the second group, stand at this one. If everyone makes good teamwork their responsibility, we can all work together to be successful. When you're responsible to your team, you become a better player."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice and remind players of the next game.



Variations

You can extend Skill Practice 2 to work on cutoff plays. Require that all throws go to second, then to third, using a cutoff as appropriate.

Week 9

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Jog three times around the bases, starting from home plate. Play catch with a partner. After a few minutes of throwing, throw fly balls just beyond the partner so he or she gets to practice the appropriate footwork for moving back on a fly ball.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Muscular endurance

Gather team into a group. "Stand with your arms straight out from your sides. Give enough space so you don't bump your neighbor. Circle your arms like this." Demonstrate. "Keep going until you get very tired, then stop." Wait until the last player stops. "Do your arms feel tired? That is called muscle fatigue. Muscles can keep moving and tightening only for so long before tiring out. The longer you can play before your muscles tire out, the more *muscular endurance* you have."

Game 1 (10 minutes)

"Intrasquad"

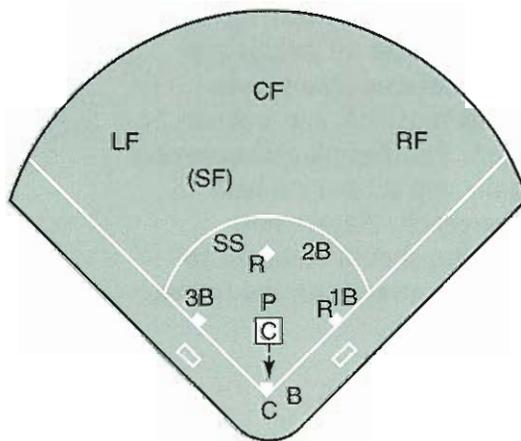
Goals

The offense tries to score. The defense tries to prevent runs.

Description

Play an intrasquad game (for description of setup, see Game 1 in Week 8, page 114).

The offense is always in a force play situation. In other words, if a runner reaches second, a runner must be on first (or be placed on first). If a runner is on third, runners must also be on first and second. The batter gets only two pitches. The side is retired after three runs or three outs, whichever comes first. Review the *force play* rules related to *force-outs* (see page 256).



PURPOSE

To defend bases on force plays. The focus is on demonstrating tactical understanding on all force play situations and properly executing force plays.

Equipment

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

COACH'S cues



For force play

- “Position between the ball and base.”
- “Place foot opposite glove hand on outside edge of base.”
- “Watch the ball into the glove.”



Coach: Did your team always know the right play to make?

Players: (various answers)

Coach: Was your team always able to execute the right play? Where did you have problems?

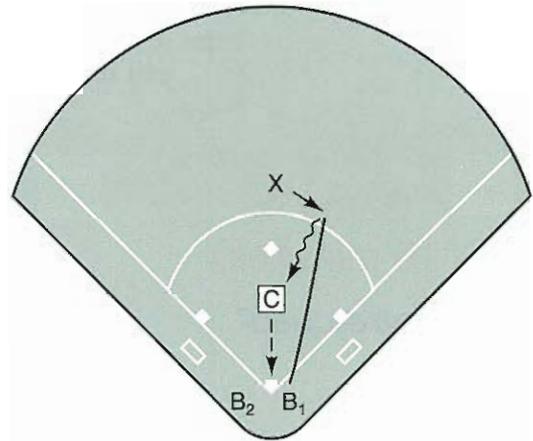
Players: (With a coach/parent, let each team determine where they had the most problems or where they could use more work to execute more efficiently.)

Skill Practice (30 minutes)

Skill Practice 1 (15 minutes)

Description

Players practice hitting. Each player takes 10 swings and then rotates. One player gives feedback and instruction. Another player retrieves balls and rolls them back to the coach. Players not batting should stand 10 to 15 feet away from the batter.



Skill Practice 2 (15 minutes)

Description

Select a drill from a previous practice that addresses a need of the team.

Game 2 (20 minutes)

Design a game that is consistent with the drill or practice.

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Caring

Gather team into a group and choose three players to demonstrate. These three will play catch, taking turns at catching. Set up another group to do the same activity. Rotate players into the two groups until they all get a turn. Bring team back together to discuss. "What was happening every time a new person came into the throwing group?" Listen to their responses. Discuss many players getting playing time. "When we share playing time, it shows that you care about your teammates. Players who care about each other want the whole team to get a chance to play. That way everyone can contribute to the team."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice and give reminders for the next game.



Variations

- Scrimmage another team for 2 innings, practice for 30 to 40 minutes, then return to the scrimmage game for another 2 or 3 innings. Have a run limit so the games move quickly.
- Split your team in half and play two small-sided games with another team.

Week 10

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Jog three times around the bases, starting from home plate. Play catch with a partner. While throwing, alternate among line drives, grounders, and fly balls.

PURPOSE

To defend bases on tag plays. The focus is on demonstrating tactical understanding on all tag play situations and executing tags.

Equipment

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

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Healthy habits

Gather team into a group. "What are healthy habits?" Listen to their responses. "Why do you need to practice healthy habits?" Listen to their responses and encourage discussion of how healthy bodies and minds are important to sports. "Practice healthy habits every day to take care of your bodies—the same way we practice to improve our skills and get to be better players. Keep the list of healthy habits in your mind." Have a list of examples written on a piece of paper clipped to a clipboard, including brushing your teeth; no smoking, alcohol, or drugs; eating healthy foods; and getting plenty of sleep. "Check each item off when you have done that habit during the day." Have a pen to actually check an item off the list. "Every day start your list over again. Doing all the habits daily keeps you healthy."

Game 1 (10 minutes)

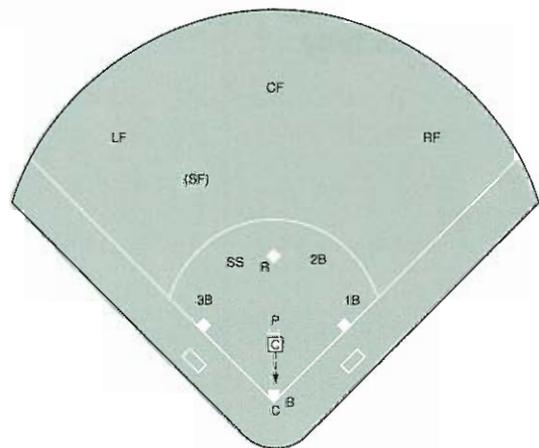
"Intrasquad"

Goals

The offense tries to score. The defense tries to prevent runs.

Description

Play an intrasquad game (for description of setup, see page 114). The offense starts each at bat with a runner on second. If that runner advances to third, no runner can be on second. The batter gets only two pitches. The side is retired after three runs or three outs, whichever comes first.



Week 10

Coach: Did your team always know the right play to make?

Players: (various answers)

Coach: Was your team always able to execute the right play? Where did you have problems?

Players: (With a coach/parent, let each team determine where they had the most problems or where they could use more work to execute more efficiently.)

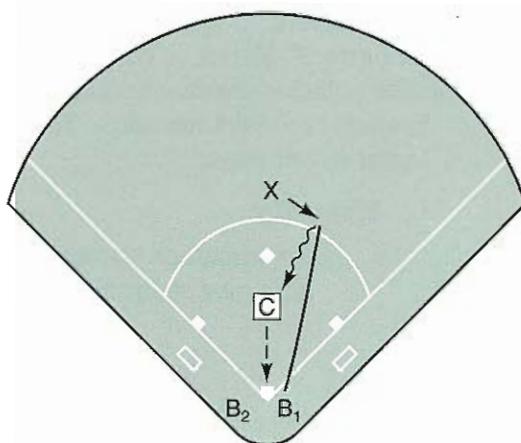


Skill Practice (30 minutes)

Skill Practice 1 (15 minutes)

Description

Players practice hitting. Each player takes 10 swings and then rotates. One player gives feedback and instruction. Another player retrieves balls and rolls them back to the coach. Players not batting should stand 10 to 15 feet away from the batter.



Skill Practice 2 (15 minutes)

Description

Select a drill from a previous practice that addresses a need of the team.

Game 2 (20 minutes)

Design a game that is consistent with the drill or practice.

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Caring

Gather team into a group near two cones 10 feet apart. "Let's imagine we're playing in a game and one of your teammates throws you the ball. The throw is over your head. Pretend you say, 'What a terrible throw! Get out of here until you learn how to throw!' How would you change your comment to sound more positive and make the person feel better?" Listen to their responses. "It is important to make positive comments and not get upset when your teammates make mistakes. This shows you care about your teammates."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice and give reminders for the next game.



Variations

- Scrimmage another team for 2 innings, practice for 30 to 40 minutes, then return to the scrimmage game for another 2 or 3 innings. Have a run limit so the games move quickly.
- Split your team in half and play two small-sided games with another team.

Week 11

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Jog three times around the bases, starting from home plate. Play catch with a partner. While throwing, alternate among line drives, grounders, and fly balls.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Training and conditioning

Split team into 2 or 3 groups. Give each group a ball. Instruct them to make two lines, then play catch with the player opposite them. Continue for one minute, then bring everyone together. "Let's say that activity finished our practice. Now you're finished with practice for the week. What could you do tomorrow to stay active and practice skills that are similar to or the same type of thing we do in practice?" Listen to their responses. Discuss running, hitting, and other skills. "Your body loses its conditioning when you stop using it! It's important to stay active outside of practices. This helps keep you fit."

Game 1 (20 minutes)

"Intrasquad"

Goals

Perform the proper backups in various defensive situations.

Description

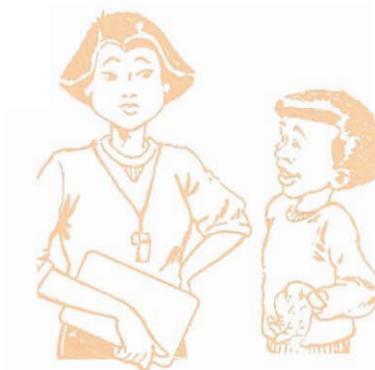
Play an intrasquad, regulation game, except impose a maximum run rule (for description of setup, see page 114). Review the *10-run rule* (see tables 14.1 and 14.2 on pages 300 and 301, respectively). Focus on players getting in proper backup position.

PURPOSE

To defend in the infield and outfield by backing up players in variable situations.

Equipment

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



 Work on communication. Players should talk constantly to each other about where to make a play, how many outs there are, or if there is enough room to make a catch.

 Repeat plays that demonstrate proper backup positions, reinforcing the correct techniques.

Coach: Why are proper backups so important?

Players: If there is an error or overthrow, backups keep the runner(s) from advancing.

Coach: In which situations did your team have difficulty with executing proper backups?

Players: (With a coach/parent, let each team determine where they had the most problems or where they could use more work to execute more efficiently.)

Skill Practice (25 minutes)

Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

Description

Players practice hitting. Each player takes 10 swings and then rotates. One player gives feedback and instruction. Another player retrieves balls and rolls them back to the coach (see page 121 for a diagram). Players not batting should stand 10 to 15 feet away from the batter.

Skill Practice 2 (15 minutes)

Description

Set up situations where the backup is weak and practice. Instead of waiting for batters to hit into a situation that calls for a backup, yell out the situation, then throw or hit a ball to the infield or the outfield. Players move into the appropriate coverage. Rotate players frequently and repeat so that all players know where to move to back up.



"Move quickly into position!"
"Adjust with the play!"

Game 2 (15 minutes)

Play an intrasquad game or scrimmage with another team.

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Responsibility

Gather team into a group. Choose one player to demonstrate with you. Let the player know you'll be throwing the ball and that he or she should pretend to be in position to make a play at first. Throw the ball wide. Identify that the bad throw was your mistake. "Raise your hand if you think it's a part of learning when you make a bad throw." Give them time to raise their hands. "Now raise your hand if you think a bad throw means you are not a good player." Give them time to raise their hands. "Everyone makes mistakes, and when you make one it does not mean you're not a good player. Taking responsibility for your play, even when you can improve, is an important quality for good players."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice and give reminders for the next game.

Variations

- Scrimmage another team for 2 innings, practice for 30 to 40 minutes, then return to the scrimmage game for another 2 or 3 innings. Have a run limit so the games move quickly.
- Split your team in half and play two small-sided games with another team.



Week 12

PURPOSE

To defend in the infield and outfield, demonstrating efficient skill execution and tactical understanding in 90 percent of all situations.

Equipment

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

Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Jog three times around the bases, starting from home plate. Play catch with a partner. While throwing, alternate among line drives, grounders, and fly balls.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Healthy habits

Gather team into a group. "What kinds of food do you think are the best to eat?" Listen to their responses. Encourage discussion to talk about the difference between healthy foods and unhealthy foods. Healthy choices include fruits, vegetables, grains or cereals, lean meats, plant proteins, and nut butters. Discourage soda, high-sugar foods, fatty meats, chips, and fried foods. "Your body needs all types of food to be healthy. Let's think of three healthy snacks you could eat that would give you energy to practice." Listen to responses and encourage everyone to contribute. Vote on whether the foods they name are the best choice. "Eating healthy snacks that give you extra energy to play is a healthy habit you should be practicing every day."

Game 1 (15 minutes)

"Intrasquad"

Goals

Make the right play!

Description

Play an intrasquad regulation game, except impose a 10-run rule (for description of setup, see page 114).

Week 12

Coach: Were there any breakdowns in your team's defensive play? Offensive play?

Players: (With a coach/parent, let each team determine where they had the most problems or where they could use more work to execute more efficiently.)



Skill Practice (25 minutes)

Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

Description

Players practice hitting. Each player takes 10 swings and then rotates. One player gives feedback and instruction. Another player retrieves balls and rolls them back to the coach (see page 121 for a diagram). Players not batting should stand 10 to 15 feet away from the batter.

Skill Practice 2 (15 minutes)

Description

Select a drill from a previous practice or design a new one that addresses a need of the team. Encourage players to provide input and design their own drills.

COACH'S cue



"Where is the play?"

Game 2 (20 minutes)

Goals

Players will execute properly.

Description

Play an intrasquad game or scrimmage with another team.

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Respect

Gather team into groups of two. "Each of you tell your partner two or three ways you saw other players show respect this season. I'll give you two minutes." After two minutes, group all players together again. "Tell us what some of the examples were." Listen to examples and discuss. "It's important to notice respect being practiced and to talk about what we saw. All season we have been working on improving and being good teammates. Improving both of those areas tells me you have respect for yourselves and your teammates."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice and remind players about the final game.



Variations

Have each team elect a captain or two to design drills and run practice.