

## TBALL GOALS & SKILLS EMPHASIS

**GOAL:** Safe, Fun and Learning (confidence building).

**TONE:** Non-competitive, upbeat, enthusiastic, fast-paced practices.

- Make everything a game if you can.

**SKILLS EMPHASIS:** Focus on teaching basic individual skills and avoid attempting to teach complex team play skills.

- **SKILLS TO BE TAUGHT:**

- **Basic rules**

- Concepts: Outs, runs, innings, foul vs. fair ball, batting order, force out, outfield vs. infield
- Which direction to run the bases
- Run through first base on ground balls

- **Throwing:**

- Stepping to target with glove side foot
- Overhand throw ( to start, do not worry about arm positions/angles – as long as they are throwing in some overhand fashion)
- Proper release point – many players at this age release too late and/or release in some direction other than towards where they are aiming
- Point back foot inside ankle bone at target
- Lead with glove to target
- Follow through with back foot

- **Catching:**

- Alligator for ground balls
- Proper glove alignment depending on whether ball is above/below waist & left or right of body
- Yelling “I got it” on fly balls (even if they don’t “got it” – this is as much a safety skill as anything else)

- **Fielding:**

- Throw to first on grounders

## TBALL GOALS & SKILLS EMPHASIS (Cont)

- **Hitting**
  - **BAT SAFETY**
    - no player is to pick up a bat during practices or games unless instructed to do so by a coach and must always have a helmet on
    - Making sure the coast is clear:
    - Proper grip:
      - Second knuckles on each hand aligned
      - Front hand on bottom, back hand on top
      - Elbows pointing down and held loosely
      - Short forward step with front foot
      - Level or slight upward swing
      - Head steady watching ball all the way through swing
      - Not throwing bat after hitting
  - **Base running**
    - Running immediately after hitting ball
    - Ready position when on base

### **SKILLS TO AVOID TEACHING** (Or in some case less emphasis)

- Sliding (avoid)
- Bunting (avoid)
- Catching fly balls (except, as skills advance and you are confident that the child is capable of some success with this skill. In this case, a waffle ball or rolled up sock ball should be used)
- Trigger (or “loading up”, or “hitching”, or “coil”) when hitting (Avoid)
- Holding bat in the fingers (hands are too small to succeed at this at this stage) (less emphasis)
- Hitting thrown ball – keep it on the tee even for advanced skill players – we want to teach basic mechanics at the t-ball level (avoid)
- Bat location in relation to body (e.g., do not worry if child is holding bat in center of body, over back foot, etc. – as long as it is held in a position giving success in hitting the ball off the tee) (less emphasis)
- Particular grip when throwing (less emphasis)
- Any team play complexity (cutoffs, signs, etc.) (avoid)
- Any position complexity (avoid)

**REMEMBER THAT TBALL IS A KIDS GAME & GAMES ARE SUPPOSED TO BE FUN!!!! THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN ALL SPORTS IS TO HAVE FUN.**

## COACHING TEE BALL SKILLS - A CHECKLIST

Here are concise and convenient reference of key points to be covered in the instruction of basic skills: hitting, fielding, throwing and running, This outline was developed as a reminder for experienced coaches and as a guide for coaches new to the sport.

**Hitting:** The starting point for any hitter is finding the right bat size. Have the player grip the bat at the end of the handle and lift it, with arm fully extended, straight out from their body. They should be able to hold it level with ground for 5-10 seconds without wobbling or shaking. If they cannot do this, then find a lighter bat. The number one reason children in lower level baseball get frustrated at bat is due to having too heavy a bat.

A good training aid can be useful to help a beginner learn the proper stance in the batter's box. Try a flat piece of rubber or similar approximately 19" long and 5" wide, like the pitching rubber that is included with many "practice bases". Place the aid in relation to the tee where you want the toes of the batter, feet shoulder width apart. This will allow the player to assume the proper position quickly and with minimal assistance.

Improve hitting power for a young player by helping them get the feel of using their hips during their swing. Use this drill as they are warming up during hitting practice. Have the batter place a bat behind their waist, horizontal to the ground. While holding an end of the bat in each hand, assume a normal batting stance. Lift the lead leg as they would in a normal swinging stride and let them turn their hips using the bat. Try this several times before batting.

For the safety of your players, set a rule during the first practice that **no player is to pick up a bat during practices or games unless instructed to do so by a coach.** Young players get excited and start swinging bats without paying attention to others around them. All players who pick up a bat must **always** be wearing a helmet. Also, remind your players to never go near another player that is holding a bat.

**Batting** -- the stance, swing and follow-through

Adjust the tee with ball set even to the hitter's waist.

1. Face tee with feet spread shoulder-width apart.
2. Bend knees, body in slight crouch.
3. Weight on balls of feet.
4. Grip bat; hands together above knob.
5. Hold bat firmly; don't squeeze.
6. Bring bat up and away from the body.
7. Keep shoulders level; bat and head steady.
8. Eyes on the ball.
9. Short step with the front foot at start of swing.
10. Swing level and bring the bat through the center of the ball.
11. Watch bat hit ball; keep head down.
12. Weight shifts to front foot; back foot stays on the ground.
13. Extend arms and follow through; swing around.
14. Drop the bat; do not throw it

***\*\*Don't try to give your players all of these tips at the same time – use the following key points and then pick out above cues to use on an individual basis during each practice.***

**Key points: eyes on the ball, no cross-handed hold, position of feet stride [weight shift], rotation, the swing.**

## **COACHING TEE BALL SKILLS - A CHECKLIST (Cont)**

**Fielding:** With groups of three or four, teach beginners how to field by showing them the proper hand and body position for fielding grounders. With their gloves off, have them hold their hands in front of them and place their pinkies side-by-side, in a cupped position. Next, demonstrate for them how to bend their knees and get their hands near the ground while keeping their pinkies together. Remind the players to keep their backs as straight as possible. With their gloves still off, hand-roll grounders to them from eight to ten yards away. Roll it as slow as necessary for them to be successful. By trying this drill at first without gloves, it will allow you and the players to make sure that their pinkies are together and with palms up. Let them have several turns and then try it.

To help young players develop quick hands and learn to hustle for a past ball, use a fun drill that encourages speed. Have three or four players line up side-by-side with enough space between them that they can't touch each other with their arms out. From about ten yards away have a coach hand-roll balls to each one, in order, as many times as they can in one minute. Count how many balls they can field and throw back during that minute. Do it again and try to increase the number each time you do it. Have them run for passed balls and make it fun with their gloves.

### **Fielding Ground Balls**

Eyes on the ball.

Watch the ball go into the glove.

Cover the ball with the other hand

Stand legs apart, shoulder-width or wider.

Bend knees. Get low. Lean forward.

Run to the ball.

Keep body in front of ball.

Glove low to the ground.

Scoop or catch the ball and cover it.

### **Fielding Fly Balls**

Run to where the ball is going.

Call for the ball: "I've got it."

Stop and wait for the ball.

Hands together, fingers up, shoulder high or over the head.

Watch ball into the glove and cover.

### **Fielding Thrown Balls**

Bend knees slightly.

Watch the ball.

On a ball thrown to player above the waist:

Hands together facing out; thumbs up.

Catch and cover.

On a ball thrown below the waist:

Hands together facing down; little

fingers touching.

Catch and cover.

## COACHING TEE BALL SKILLS - A CHECKLIST (Cont)

**Throwing:** Ask your players to point the “bill” of their cap & their glove hand toward their target before and during the throw. That will help them focus on their target. Use the same hand position as before. Foot position is critical for consistency in throwing. Make sure your players are stepping and pointing their lead foot at the target. The lead foot is always the one on their glove side. Call it their “pointer” foot to help them remember its purpose. When giving instruction on the throwing motion, assist them with the moves and demonstrate for them. Then let them mimic the motion on their own to get the feel of it.

Throwing

Grip and motion

Thumb under the ball.

Two or three fingers on top.

Don't worry about the seams.

Eyes on the target.

Legs apart; foot on throwing arm side behind the body.

Arm back and up, front shoulder turned toward target.

Step toward target with foot opposite the throwing arm.

Right-hander with left foot; left-hander with right foot.

Push off on back foot as throw begins; end with weight on forward foot.

Release the ball in front of body and follow through.

All levels should learn and practice basic catch. At T-ball and A there will be little success (it will be more like “chase” than “catch”) but the concept is still important to attempt for at least a few minutes at every practice. For one thing it is the fundamentally most basic element of baseball: playing catch is what defense is all about. For another thing it is the best opportunity in which to instruct in the basics of throwing and catching skills.

**Running:** Remember that beginning players don't know to run to first base after the ball is hit. Try something very simple that teaches base running skills. For example, line up all the players on the first base side of home plate. During their first practice just let them take one turn running to first base and all the way around the bases and back home without stopping. Make sure the players in line at home plate are not blocking the runner's path. With each practice, add something else.

Add base coaches at first and third and stop the runners randomly at different bases. That will get them used to watching for instruction from their coaches and the need to be on a base when they stop. Later, let them hold a bat before they start and be sure they drop it at the plate when they run. This seems very basic but for beginning players, it really does help.

One good way to get runners in the habit of running through first base is to have a base coach give the runner a signal when they should run through the base. Have the first base coach stand about four feet past the base and give the runner a high five when they pass by. Have another signal for rounding the base to advance to second base.

Instruct actions at 1B Coach at 1B signals to run past base or to turn and go on to 2B. Instruct that forced runner on base must advance. non-forced runner can hold position on base. player on base watch what next batter does; where the ball goes.

## **COACHING TEE BALL SKILLS - A CHECKLIST (Cont)**

### **Base running**

Run on the balls of the feet. Pump arms back and forth.

*After the ball is hit*

Run behind the tee, unless left-handed.

Look at first base, not where the ball has gone.

Run outside the foul line.

Run straight through first base; don't jump on it or slow down.

Watch and listen to coach for instructions.

When on base Keep one foot touching the base until the next batter hits the ball. Lean forward; when ball is hit, push off base.

Know where the ball is.

When passing a base, try to touch it on the side without stopping.

### **Basic Positions**

#### **First base**

Show where 1st baseperson is to stand when no runner is on base and when one is on the base. Practice fielding plays; ball thrown to 1B by infielders.

#### **Second base**

Position player in place, anticipating action. Practice fielding plays; such as tagging a runner out.

#### **Shortstops**

Show positions: one between 1B and 2B; the other between 2B and 3B. Practice action; such as, fielding balls and throwing to 1B or 2B for an out.

#### **Third base**

Show position, anticipating action. Throwing to 2B or 1B

#### **Pitcher**

[Stands in pitcher's area but acts as an infielder.] Practice action; such as, fielding ball and throwing to 1B.

#### **Catcher**

[Stands behind and away from home plate until ball is hit] Demonstrate: after ball is hit, adult removes tee and bat; catcher moves up to cover plate. Practice actions: catcher tagging base runner out, catcher throwing to 1B.

#### **General infield activity**

Staying behind Playing Line until the ball is hit. Field balls and throwing to a base or to home plate. Tagging runners on the base path. Relaying a ball from an outfielder to a base; to the catcher at home plate

#### **Outfielders [there may be five or more]**

Position players. Practice catching fly balls in a crowd with waffle balls or rolled up sock balls. Hands up in front of face & "I've got it" Practice catching ground balls and throwing to infield. Have one outfielder receive relay from another and throwing to an infielder.

### **Batter**

Give basic hitting instructions. Practice hitting ball, then dropping bat properly and running to first.

### **Bench**

Team sits in batting order (hint: its easiest if you set the order by jersey number – the kids can put themselves in order this way), encouraging the batter. Coach talks to team: Listen for instructions. Play fair; follow the rules. Have fun.

### **Coach talking to team, after the game**

Summarize team's activity. Specifics, not generalities. Recognize progress. Note any humorous thing that happened. No public criticism; as necessary, take player aside. What's next practice at home, next team practice and game schedule; tell parents Other comments, as appropriate. High Five other players and Coaches and go home

WHEN COACING ANY YOUTH SPORT AND ESPECIALLY TBALL RECRUIT AS MANY ASSISTANTS AS POSSIBLE. Any parent or older youth can be a great resource. As the head coach, you can instruct them on what you want to accomplish and then let them go and have fun. This way you can rotate smaller groups, accomplish much more and keep it fun!!!.

Head Coach

Throwing Coach

Catching

Assistant Coach

Assistant Coach

Batting Coach

Bench Coach

Cheering Coach – What ever you want to call 'em. You get the idea. The more help the more fun it becomes and the more you can teach.

## TBALL DRILLS

The following is a list of TBALL drills assembled from various coaches. Some of the drills may be similar or have different names. The point is to be creative and keep it fun while teaching basic skills to our young players through progression and repetition. By varying the drills and working in smaller groups, we can maximize the fun by making the same repetitive skill a fresh new game.

**Bounce to the Bucket:** Large basket or cooler put on a base. Outfielders try to throw and bounce the ball into the open container. Can be done as a game with 10 points for getting the ball in, 5 for hitting the bucket and 1 point for the nearest bounce, no matter where the ball ends up. This drill/game teaches throwing from the outfield to a base.

**Catch.** Two or more players play catch. Keep score of the number of successful catches.

**Catching Contest.** Players are in pairs and throw the ball back and forth between each other. Last pair that has not dropped a ball wins.

**Catching Flies.** Hit or throw fly balls to fielders by using a soft baseball, rubber ball or tennis ball. Repetition and practice are the key to success.

**Catch the Coach.** Coach runs from home plate to first base. After a few steps, coach shouts "tag me" to a player holding a ball, who runs after the coach and tries to tag him out. Coach to decide where/when/if the runner is successful.

**Catch the Players.** Coach starts four or more players about 10 seconds apart from home plate to circle the bases. Coach starts last, trying to tag the players [alternate: snatch off their caps.

**Crab Drill.** Player is in basic fielding set position stance, crouched forward with glove open and down. Player takes three or four steps as coach rolls the ball.

**Crow Hop.** Classic throwing drill. Player takes a short step and a hop in the direction of the intended throw

**Distraction.** Coach rolls the ball to a fielder, but another player runs in front of the fielder and tries to break the fielder's concentration on catching the ball.

**Dive.** Coach throws or hits ball to one side or the other of a fielder, who has to dive to make the catch. Then, throw to 1st base.

**Just Block It.** Coach hits ball directly to a fielder. Emphasis is on stopping the ball from getting through to the outfield. OK to just block the ball; [better, of course, to catch it.] Can be a game with a point scored from every block, two for a catch and zero if the ball is not stopped.

**One and Two.** Two players play catch. Thrower scores 2 points if ball is caught at or above the shoulders. 1 point if caught between waist and shoulders. No points if caught below the waist or not caught. First player to score 10 points wins.



**Run Down.** Two fielders or coaches and a runner, who tries to run from one base to another without getting tagged out. Participants rotate positions.

**Scoop or Pick-up.** Two players [or two rows of players] line up about 10 feet apart. From kneeling position, one player rolls the ball to the other. Repeat 10 to 15 times.

**Track Meet.** Two players at home plate. At the "start", one runs to 3rd base, the other to 1st base. They continue running [in opposite directions] around the bases. First one to return to home plate wins.

Note: to avoid collisions, instruct the runner that begins via 1st base to touch 2nd base from the outside corner; the other runner, coming from 3rd base, touches the inside corner of 2nd base

**Target throwing:** Set up pieces of cardboard, tie towels in the backstop. Have players throw at the targets from varying distances, making a competition if you want between two sets of teams.

**Bucket toss:** Set up buckets in the outfield and have players try to throw balls into the buckets. You can lay the bucket down on its side to make it even more fun.

**Bucket first base toss:** A great drill for teaching the difficult concept of "throw the guy out at first". Set up a couple buckets at first base – one on top of the other – and have players from shortstop (or closer) try to knock the top bucket over with their throws (basically, kids this age love throwing AT things – so any target throwing drill you can think of will be fun for them).

**Hockey:** Separate into two teams against the backstop. Alternate players from each team trying to stop from hitting the backstop ground balls you roll. Make it a competition. Emphasis "alligator" and other good fielding techniques. Work on getting in front of the ball.

**Run through First:** Have a coach at first and one at second base. Have another coach hit a ball to second and have the coach attempt to throw the player out at first who broke from home when the ball was hit (but take long enough so the player is safe). The point of this drill is to encourage the player to run hard (he's trying to beat the throw) and not stop at first – to run through the bag. Fun for the player as it's a game but also teaches these two concepts which are very hard to grasp at this age.

**Run for Home:** At the end of practice, line the players up behind the backstop and one by one have them run out a homerun (reinforces the concept of touching bases and which way to go around the bases). End every practice this way.

**Squish the Bug:** To teach the pivot of the back foot, show them how they would squish a bug and then have them practice it when they swing.

**T-hitting:** You can have two t-hitting stations – one hitting into a fence (hint: use waffle balls), the other hitting onto the field.

**Relay Race:** Form Two Lines: Have the players throw to a coach and then run and stand behind the coach. Teaches the players to step into their throws:

**Knock It Down:** Set up a stack of buckets or plastic bottles on top of a bucket or fence and have the players try to throw from a line and knock down the bottle. Kids love to throw at things. Emphasis on proper throws.

**Climb the Ladder:** Have players in pairs of twos play catch a few feet apart. Once they have each caught the ball once the move to the next rung on the ladder several more feet apart. Players continue climbing the ladder until they reach the top. Can be made a competition. Emphasis on accurate throwing skills and catching.

**HATS OFF:** Coach hits or throws ground balls to players one at a time. If they keep the ball in front of them nothing happens. If the ball goes by they turn their hat backwards. 2<sup>nd</sup> time their hat goes off behind them. 3<sup>rd</sup> time they pick their hat up and back up another player. Game continues until there is only one player left. Emphasis on keeping the ball in front and fielding skills.

**Cold Potato Relay:** Players form two lines and throw the ball to the next player who pivots and throws to the third. First player runs to end of line and this continues until players reach the finish line. This drill can be done with cones or bases at equal distance apart. Bad throws or missed balls should be retrieved and then restarted at the next cone. Emphasis on good throwing skills, good pivot and then throwing to the next base.