

Lake Orion Baseball League Coaches' Clinic

Keys for successful practices: Fun, Dynamic, Routine & Repetition. Get the kids in a repeatable routine so they know where to be and what to do, especially when they arrive. It's good for them and good for you to start smoothly and on time every time. Start by picking "captain(s) for a day" to lead the exercises. Give everyone their chance to lead throughout the season. Here are some ideas...oh, and don't forget a Sharpie!

1. Warm Ups –

- a. Running (Run to "fence" and back – be consistent from practice to practice)
- b. Speed & Agility: 4-leaf clover drill (need 8 cones or "markers"); "Brazilian": lunges to 1st; karaoke to 2nd; backwards to 3rd; butt kicks or high knees to home (mix it up)

Gather in a circle, captain(s) in the middle

- c. Jumping jacks: Do 30+. Captains start count (odds), then team counts (evens)
- d. Light Stretching – not too much too fast – muscles should be warm before stretching
 - i. Arm circles (big & small); pull across; wrist stretch; alt toe touches; chipping wood; etc.
- e. Throwing – Strength & Accuracy (Emphasize proper form and rotation of ball EVERY throw)
 - i. Show proper grip (4-seam) and wrist action to impart spin on ball
 - ii. Seated; One knee; Square; Perp; 1-step (20ft); Crow 30+ft); Shuffle/transfer (dancing with the ball); team relay - (catch at transfer point) throw to chest
- f. Throwing - Long Toss
 - i. Have them start 30' from each other; as they catch the ball 10 times each, one player takes several steps back gradually, but steadily increase throwing distance – at least comparable to outfield throw to 2nd (cut-off) or 100 ft.+ (use your judgment and work up to max. length as season progresses)
- f. Hand Work (Without glove): fast roll to scoop "alligator hands" and trx to belly; center pickups
- g. Glove Work: Pick-ups (center, glove side, backhand)

2. Base Running

- a. Have kids run all of the bases. Pay attention to technique. Running on balls of feet & pumping arms. Look for cornering and route to bases. Adjust as necessary.
- b. Teach kids how to overrun first base
 - i. Infield single: tail off slightly to right (OB); look to right for overthrow
 - ii. Through infield: round first, listening for coach's direction
- c. Teach kids running bases and listening to coaches (teach "your" language/signs & be consistent)
 - i. Have a coach at 1st and 3rd base
 - ii. The coach at home plate will tell the first child to run (start from a fake swing)
 - iii. Look to 3rd base coach on way to 2nd for slide, stand up or double+
 - iv. Each child should make several runs...single, double, triple & dinger (wave them on)
- d. Teach a "chop down" step to slow down when standing up
- e. Run Downs - "STAR" = **S**print!; **T**ake ball out of glove and make visible and ready to throw (pump **once**, then tag or throw); **A**lways cut/turn to **right** after throwing and loop around to get back into the rotation; **R**eturn a runner to his starting point if you cannot make the tag.

3. Skill Centers

- a. Breaking the kids up into smaller groups and keeping them active will help keep their attention. Create different "centers" that a coach or parent can lead:

3a Hitting Center (Often better done off-field)

- a. Show bat grip: "door knockin' knuckles" aligned, loosely in fingers – hands inside the ball when swinging – don't cast the bat at the ball
- b. Show a good "load" before the swing: hands back and high; load on back leg, tap toe, heel touches and **explode!**
- c. Soft toss: Each child gets 10-15 swings to establish timing (this requires a net); toss ball from angle into strike/hit zone. Work the corners so batter has to adjust to various locations.

- d. Tee work - Manager works with each child to establish stance and select bat appropriate for each child; batter works on power angle
 - i. High Tee – fast and short to ball
 - ii. Lower Tee – try to create backspin on ball
 - iii. Step to tee – transfer weight
 - vi. Stride/Stop/Swing (Mimics waiting for off-speed ball) – pop hips and stay behind ball
 - v. Move tee to mimic inside and outside pitches; note where ball is hit & adjust as necessary
 - e. Machine Pitch - Show foot stance and proper angle (down) to the ball; load balls as in game situation; pay attention to weak hits and adjust batter (or bat) accordingly
- ***Key is BALANCE! Batter relaxed and stay back...let the ball travel to you!

3b Fielding/Positions Center (Done on field)

- b. Have child stand in correct infield position
 - i. 1st 2nd, SS, Pitcher, 3rd
 - ii. Hit ball to infielder and have them throw to first base
 - iii. Hit balls and call the base as if attempting to get lead runner
 - iv. Hit a few short ones to challenge catcher and pitcher (PFP*)
 - 1. PFP – We’ve all witnessed pitcher zing one into the bleachers; practice this often so they get the feel for the throw – “like you’ve been there 1000 times before!”
 - 2. Work on play to 1st, covering 1st, play to 2nd, play to 3rd (step around ball to 3rd)
- c. Fielding grounders (teaching “alligator” hands – Basic Defense)
 - i. Have kids stand in line (behind each other) at 2nd and SS
 - ii. Coach/parent hits grounder to 1st child
 - iii. Work on fielding (not hop timing) and a strong throw to catcher or asst. coach at 1st
 - iv. Ball is never really in glove pocket; one continuous motion to beltline and get possession (4 seams) – always moving toward the ball and the target
 - v. Play ball to outside of target throw when possible
- d. Outfield - Pop Flies - Needs to be introduced gradually: use a tennis ball to get them comfortable and then the regulation ball when you feel they’re ready
 - i. Use a racquetball racket or Fungo bat
 - ii. Use a batted ball after you’re comfortable with skills/players
 - iii. Catch a fly ball on “throwing side” – over right shoulder for RH – moving forward at catch and toss
 - iv. Teach other players to back up the fielder making the play – both infield and outfield
- e. Outfield – Grounders - Outfielders may “curtsie” quickly when fielding a slow rolling grounder – 3 points of touch (shin, glove, thigh) – nothing gets by this when done properly
 - i. Teach the kids the “Crow Hop”; especially from 3rd and outfield once they’ve gathered the ball – emphasize “know where you’re throwing BEFORE it’s hit” - get rid of it quickly!
 - ii. Crow Hop Drill (after warmed up properly)– Gather in outfield; toss pop fly to 1st player, when kids throw the ball, they take an extra “hop” and see how far they can throw the ball from outfield positions to 2nd base (do this from all outfield positions); gauge arm strength – this is the most effective drill you can do for arm strengthening
 - iii. Work on “route to ball,” emphasizing slight arc path to a ball in the gap; straight to a hard grounder at them...fielder needs to quickly pick best angle to ball for the throw

3c Throwing/Catching Center

- f. Remember to teach kids to point their glove hand at what they are throwing to and follow through - this is a dynamic exercise...not from “frozen” stance
 - i. Use the “scarecrow” model as example: perpendicular to target, ball arm extended back (palm down), glove arm forward (palm down); glove should be aimed at chest of person receiving the throw - the motion will be that of a punching bag tipped on side
- g. Always aim for the chest when throwing
- h. A one hop is better than a high arcing throw – the more time the ball is in the air the more time the runner has to advance

3d Catchers Skill Areas:

It's never too early to start a good foundation!

Receiving – Good comfortable stance with no one on base; secondary stance (butt raised, thighs parallel to ground) when runners on; hold a strike...get rid of a ball! Throwing hand should be protected by hanging next to leg or behind glove in fist (catcher's preference). Thumb of glove typically set at "2 o'clock" with pinky slightly forward...relaxed is the key. Look for catchers trying to "frame" everything...better to beat the ball to the spot (it's final location at the plate). Avoid exaggerated framing. Sway into position catching ball in front of chest if possible (vs. moving glove only).

Blocking – drop to knees "gaining ground" sliding forward, glove and free hand block 5-hole, back arched (will create small pocket of space between chest and the protector) and head looking down at ball; move laterally as necessary to stop ball, always with goal to keep ball in front of plate – at Clinic level a good catcher really keeps a game moving at a good pace! Ball gets by? Turn to left to approach ball from right (unless ball passes far right of catcher). Pick up ball b/w legs to create torque on throw

Fielding short hits - teach catcher to be aggressive on short hits in front of pitcher; catcher needs to be "vocal" on the field..."Mine! Mine!" Teach "inside" or "outside" throw to 1st based on where ball is fielded, to avoid striking runner in back – deliberate, controlled throw to 1st...there's usually plenty of time.

Fielding pop fouls – Pull off mask, step back and identify ball flight...toss mask AFTER ball is sighted; catch two hands above head when possible...squeeze it with both hands!

Tagging/Blocking the plate – receive ball in front of plate; left foot in front left corner of plate (leaving only lower half exposed) – free hand covers ball in glove and glove is placed on ground at top of plate where foot/hand must enter from offensive player sliding

Teach catcher to cover 1st base when no one on base – moment ball is hit in play he should follow the runner and set up OB for overthrow backup – this is great drill to see who hustles and really gets it

Just for fun: "Sports Center" – toss the ball just out of reach and let them "superman" dive for it. See who makes Top 10 plays.

Full team drills: 1. Follow the ball relay – players evenly distributed at bases. One player at a time (front of line) is in position to catch. Start with player throwing from Home to 3rd base (Thrower then runs to line of same base thrown to "following the ball.") Each subsequent throw, the player moves to the base thrown to. Home to 3rd; 3rd to 2nd; 2nd to 1st; 1st to Home. This continues as long as necessary. Every miss start over. Try to get around cleanly 3x.

2. Line Relay – 4 players per line; start with lead throwing to next person, hitting them on the "throwing side" and return the ball back to the lead thrower. Make is a race and look for good form and accuracy. Think triple play.

Review:

Base running

Hitting

Infield play

Outfield play

PFP

Catching

Pitching Machine Set up/ Generator

Questions