

Little League Instructional Games/Tips

This pamphlet was put together to help Coaches run the “practice” portion of their allotted field time for the Instructional Leagues (T-ball, Girls International, Boys American & National), as well as tips for game time . Much of what is written here is taken from the experiences of coaches who have participated in these leagues over the past few years. Some of these instructional games were taken from the books, “Making Little League Baseball More Fun For Kids-A Little League Baseball Guide” by Randy Voorhess and also “The Little League Guide to Tee Ball” by Ned McIntosh and Rich Cropper. These are excellent books, and would help any coach at any level.

The Instructional Leagues games are divided into 2 parts. The first part is dedicated to instruction and should last between 15 & 30 minutes. The second portion is a game and should last around 45 minutes – or the balance of your allotted field time. At this level, it is very important that the youngsters have fun, while learning the game. Coaches should always give positive feedback as well as instruction on how they can improve.

BEFORE THEY EVEN HIT THE FIELD

- Parents must get the players to the game when you ask & should be there for pick up when you are done. When a child is late it is almost always the parents doing.
- No jewelry can be worn
- Proper dress. Full uniform for games (including cleats). T shirt, long pants for practices.
- EVERYTHING should be labeled with child’s name (hats, mitts, bats etc...) This will eliminate confusion & save lots of time.
- At first few practices, feel free to write the players’ names on masking tape and attach to shirts. This will help get the names memorized.
- Use as many coaches as possible. Solicit help from parents – even those who didn’t volunteer at registration. As long as you have a plan for them, anyone can follow it.
- When dividing duties among coaches, place kids in groups of 4, or less if possible. This will keep them busy.
- Especially in the Instructional leagues, see if moms are willing to help out. In our experience, the moms can get the kids in line before most coaches have lost order.
- SHARE THE FIELD WITH THE OPPOSING TEAM BEFORE A GAME. If your team arrives first & the other team trickles in, make room for them or join together for a practice.

GAME TIME & DUGOUT TIPS

- Only a supervised batter should have a bat in his/her hands.
- Use only the type of balls given in your equipment bag. Most are not ready for a hardball yet.
- Post a chart showing each players position each inning they are to be in the field. Some coaches move players around every inning & some keep the same players at the same position – fielding & batting – for the entire game & then change them all around in the next game allowing the player to better learn that position. **DO NOT KEEP THE SAME PLAYERS AT THE SAME POSITION EVERY GAME OR EVEN THE MAJORITY OF GAMES.**

- Get the players on & off the field quickly – lots of play time is wasted not doing this well.
- When teams are coming to bat, have them lined up wearing their helmets - ready to hit in order. After players come off the field from making an out or scoring a run, they should get their gloves & hats & be ready to get in the field when the time comes.
- Coaches should be on the field with their team defensively to encourage & instruct them on what is going on. Ask them questions between batters – which bases are occupied? Where do you throw the ball if it comes to you?
- Remind them that if the ball is not hit into their vicinity they are not to chase it, but should move to a base for defense.
- Have a coach backing-up the catcher (if you are dressing one – they must wear equipment).
- It's a good idea to get kids accustom to wearing a cup in their early years.
- BATTERS & BASE RUNNERS MUST ALWAYS WEAR A HELMET.**

STARTING THE PRACTICE

STRETCHING/MUSCLE WARM UPS-before starting a game and/or practice

- Jumping Jacks
- Toe Touch
- “Helicopter”-(twisting) Children face coach, arms in a “T” (out to the side, children twist from side to side without moving feet).
- Jog around bases-Line children up behind home plate. Children (and coaches) jog around bases; each child calls out base as they touch each one (it helps them identify which base is which).
- Elbow pulls
- Arm circles
- Any other *simple* stretching exercise you can think of.

THROWING BASICS

- Glove hand and shoulder face coach/target, both arms raised from sides (palms face down) forming a “T”. Point with the glove hand, step, throw and follow through. “Follow through” has been achieved when throwing hand fingers end touching opposite leg pocket (left leg for a right hander – opposite for lefties).
- It's OK for them to use 3 or even 4 fingers to grip the ball when throwing.
- Pretend they are picking a ball up from a table emphasizing “palm down” at start of throwing motion.
- Step towards the target with the foot opposite of throwing arm. A right-hander will step toward the target with the left foot, and the opposite is true of a left-handed player.
- When players are older encourage them to take 2 steps at start of throwing motion – “throwing hand” foot steps toward target , “pushing off”, opposite leg steps & lands with toes pointing at target.

FIELDING BASICS- Teach players to keep their eyes on the ball, and to “look” the ball into the glove.

*Introduce players to use glove as “big” hand of clock (it shows them position of glove for grounders, pop ups and line drives).

- Feet slightly more than shoulder width apart – on the toes, squat slightly – rear end down, both hands hanging at knees. As the ground ball approaches, hands drop, palms face out, glove hand on bottom, bare hand on top “Alligator” position. Bare hand helps “gather” ball into glove.
- Go get the ball-moving in on a slow roller and moving to one side or the other.
- Grounders- keep the body low in order to keep the glove low enough that the ball cannot go under the glove.
- Pop-ups- teach kids to call for it, “I’ve got it, I’ve got it!” Players running in for the ball have priority for catching it. The other player can serve as a backup.
- Balls below belly button- both hands, palms facing out, down at thigh level with “pinkies” touching. As ball approaches, glove hand catches with bare hand “gathering” ball.
- Balls above belly button -both hands up, palms facing out, at chest level, “thumbs” touching. Same as above to receive ball.

BATTING BASICS-

Batting Tee slightly in front of home plate , not directly on top. Tee level should be set at each players belly button height.

*Identify where they stand in relation to home plate.

- Ball on tee at belly button level.
- Feet shoulder length apart, body facing home plate.
- Head turned toward pitchers mound, hands together on bat holding hands at shoulder height. Hold bat in fingers as much as possible. Hands even with rear armpit.
- Swing level/down and through ball, while keeping eyes on ball. Remember, a level swing will result in a line drive, which is what every hitter strives to achieve. Belly button should be facing pitcher after a swing.
- Keep head DOWN! - Shoulders and head tend to follow the head. If a batter raises his head as the bat is brought around, the result is an upward swing instead of a level swing.
- The beginner needs to be taught to drop the bat to the side of the favored hand, which will be the top hand that grips the bat on the follow-through. He should not just let go of it during the follow-through, or drop it in front of himself, as he may trip over it.

BATTING “T”

- Facing a fence, set up a tee and have players hit “into” the fence for practice before a game. Person placing balls on tee should emphasize the repetitive motion needed for a successful swing. Head down, level swing, follow thru the ball, turn hips - ending with belly button facing pitcher and rear foot pivoting with heel up, facing catcher. Many of the little ones will say hitting on a tee is for babies. Remind them that Major Leaguers (name their favorite player) continue to hit from a tee far more than they take actual batting practice.

SOME DRILLS:

The last thing you want is one coach standing around rolling a ball to a line of 7 – 12 kids! The first kid in line *might* be ready, the rest are sure to grow restless and you will lose them. The same holds true for batting practice at this level – one kid at bat & the other 8 or 9 waiting around for the better to hit it to them ...eventually.

Remember - small groups & keep them moving. Emphasize the fundamentals outlined above during all drills. Try to have a couple of groups, each working on different drills with different coaches.

BASE RUNNING

-Line players up behind home plate.

-1 coach at home plate with children, 1 coach at 1st base and 1 coach behind or at pitchers mound (to field). Having other parents/coaches at 2nd and 3rd base would also be helpful).

-Coach at home plate rolls balls out to fielding coach. Object is for players to “beat” throw to 1st base. Repeat this for each player standing at home plate as the others progress around bases.

-Before going on to the next player, ask children which base they are on and which base they will be going to next and its name/number.

*Be sure runners going to 1st run “through” the base and those running to 2nd and 3rd know to stop at those bases. Also, run through home plate. In most other games that children have played, *base* is synonymous with *safe*, and being off base is risking being out.

The batter runs over first base and home plate, without slowing down, being sure to touch the base on the foul-side edge.

**Once the players get the hang of this, introduce the fact that they can be “forced” out at 2nd and 3rd base.

SPLIT TEAM IN HALF

½ team stays lined up behind home plate.

½ team placed in positions in infield.

Same idea as the above drill but now has fielders make plays and throws to 1st base (have a coach at 1st for catches or one of your *better* players). It’s good idea to have others help in field with players to point out proper fielding techniques.

Continue to ask questions as well as ask fielders to verify where to throw the ball.

As season progresses, introduce concept of force plays at appropriate bases.

*Emphasize that if ball is not hit in the area of certain fielders, *they should not chase it!*

*After a few tries, switch players around and move runners into fielding and vice versa.

SIMPLE GROUNDERS

Each coach takes a group of 3 or 4 players & simply rolls them grounders & has them throw right back, aiming for coaches chest. Emphasize fundamental motions of fielding & throwing. Once you are comfortable that they can do this move on to GENTLY hitting the ball with a bat.

THROW TO FIRST

One group at 2nd base position, one group at first base position. Roll ball to “second basemen” have “first baseman” cover the base – it’s probably good to start with a coach playing first, then move a player in that spot with a coach backing it up – get ready coach, YOU WILL SEE ACTION.

UP THE MIDDLE “FORCE PLAY”

Line up half the players at 2nd base position & half at short stop.

Coach stays half way between pitchers mound & 2nd base and asks players to assume ready position but doesn't tell them which position – 2nd or short , he will be rolling the grounder to. This will have both players ready. Whichever player has the ball rolled to them must get it & toss it to 2nd base, where the player from the other position must get to “cover” the base.

* These 2 drills can be done on the same infield at the same time (2 coaches are needed), especially with American leaguers & below. Just have the “up the middle” 2nd base group move a little closer to 2nd base & have the “throw to first” 2nd base group move a little closer to 1st base.

5 AND 10 Throwing

During this drill, give 10 points for a ball thrown to the coaches chest level; 5 points for the head & 0 points anywhere else. The thrower who reaches 50 points first is the winner.

CATCH MARATHON- throwing (and catching)

Have all your players pair off. Each pair should stand approximately 5 feet away (older players start 20 feet apart). At your call the players simply step and throw the ball back and forth to each other. A pair is eliminated once the ball touches the ground. After you have a winner you can move the pairs further away from each other and continue more games. It is very important to correct improper throwing techniques. Proper throwing technique is to have the player move his hand with the ball in it back and up until his elbow is approximately shoulder-height. There should be a right angle at the elbow. At the same time, he steps toward his target, while rotating his shoulders and hips until they are in a direct line with his target. He pushes his weight back on the ball-side foot. As his arm accelerates into the throw, he pivots on the ball of his back foot and shifts his weight from his back foot to his front. When he releases the ball, he should feel it rotate off his fingertips. At the same time, he pulls his lead arm into his chest, near his heart, as he shifts his weight forward. Remind players to finish the throw by following through.

USE THE BATTING T

As mentioned above, set up a tee facing a fence or net. Have players come one or two at a time – while other coaches are performing fielding drills with other team members.

DRILLS FOR OLDER TEAMS

BASEBALL IN THE BARREL- throwing

Position all outfielders in a single line in right field. Place a plastic barrel (large garbage can) on its side in front of third base and one in front of home plate, with the openings facing the right field. Hit fly balls and ground balls to each player and have him attempt to throw the balls into the barrels, first throwing to third, then to home. In each case, the player should pick out a target area where the ball will land before bounding to the target. Allow each player to make five throws to each barrel. Points are awarded according to the accuracy of the throws.

Any ball landing within three feet=1 point.

Any ball that strikes the barrel=2 points.

Any ball that goes into the barrel=3 points.

A variation of this game is to place a player in the shortstop and second base positions. Have an outfielder relay the ball to an infielder, and then the infielder throws the ball toward the barrel. Move the players into different positions to keep the game interesting.

IN-LINE RELAY THROWING RACE-throwing (and catching)

Divide the team into 2 squads of equal numbers. Position the squads in two parallel lines approximately 30 feet apart, with each player 10-20 feet from the teammate in front of and behind him. The player in the front of the line has a baseball. On your signal, he turns and relays the ball to the next player behind him. This continues to

the last player in line, which in turns throws the ball back up the line till the ball reaches the player that started off the relay. The team who gets the ball back to the first player first wins. Encourage players to throw to the other player's chest/glove areas. Rules are: there are no skipping players, if a player misses the ball, he must go get it. Variations for the older players are that every player **MUST** catch the ball. A variation for the younger players is rolling ground balls. Players behind a player that misses a ball can be encouraged to "back-up" missed ball by stopping them. You can mix up the line up as well.

DRIVE DRILL-fielding-line drives

The coach tosses liners (or hits them if he is skilled enough) to the left or right of the positioned infielder. The player doesn't know whether the ball is coming to the left or right, so he has to be ready to drive in either direction. Since the fielder usually ends up flat on the ground after the catch or attempted catch-start the drill in grass to cushion the fielder's fall. Gradually move it to the dirt infield for realism as the player gets the knack of it. Keep score and give 5 points for a catch and 3 for a block.

STAR GROUNDERS-fielding-ground balls

Divide your players into groups of five. Position each group such that each player represents one point on a star. Each group gets a ball. The game starts when the player with a ball rolls a grounder to the player two positions to his left. That player then rolls a grounder to the player two positions to his left, and so on. After each player has fielded six or eight balls, change the direction of the game by rolling grounders to the right instead. Make the game more interesting by instruction the players to vary the type of

grounders: some fast, some slow, some directly at their teammate, some slightly to his left or right.

MACHINE GUN-fielding-ground balls

Players take turns at the shortstop position. The coach hits or throws groundballs to the player, which in turn throws the ball to the assistant manager or a player at first base. As soon as the player has released the ball, you hit or throw another grounder to him. This game requires total concentration, because the ground balls are coming fast and furious. Variations of this game are to change the player's position, as well as the base that he throws to.

POP-FLY PRIORITIES-fielding

Send all of your players to the field in all positions (except catcher and pitcher (or pitcher helper)). The coach stands near the pitcher's mound and using a tennis racket and tennis ball, the coach will serve pop-fly tennis balls into shallow outfield, covering the area from foul line to foul line. Before you start, you must instruct your players that they need to communicate, and thus avoid any collisions. The outfielders have first priority to call the ball simply because it is easier to run forward than backward. The player must yell, "I got it. I got it". Once the outfielder makes the call the other players that were pursuing the ball must peel away while yelling, "Take it. Take it". Make sure each player understands that they should aggressively pursue the ball until the outfielder yells, "I got it". If two players call for the ball simultaneously, the outfielder always has priority. If two infielders call for the ball at the same time, the second baseman has priority over the first baseman and if the shortstop and second baseman both call it, the shortstop has priority. Make a game of this by keeping score, left field vs. right field. The center plays for both teams. The team with the fewest pop flies that hit the ground wins.

HIT THE L-SCREEN-hitting

Place an L-screen 15 feet in front of home plate and on a direct line between the plate and the pitching rubber. Set up a batting tee on home plate. Direct each batter to hit the ball directly into the L-screen. Make this drill a contest by declaring that the winner will be the batter who hits five balls into the screen-both line drives and ground balls count-in the fewest number of attempts. For older kids, next, you can move the L-screen back to a distance of 30 feet and pitch balls to the batter. You are teaching the lost art of bat control by forcing each batter to manipulate his hands and try to hit the ball to a precise location. GOOD BALANCE IS PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT INGREDIENT OF GOOD HITTING FORM.

BUNT INTO THE BUCKET-hitting (bunting)

Good bat position is very important for successful bunting. The hitter must get the bat to a position at the top of the strike zone. This way anything above bat-level is a ball, and it's easier to move the bat down to the ball than it is to move the bat up. Also, the batter needs to see the ball hit the ground before he starts running. If he leaves the batter's box prematurely and is struck by a fair ball, he's out.

Place two five gallon buckets in fair territory approximately 12 feet away from the nearest point of home plate-one about three feet away from the first baseline and one about three feet away from the third baseline-with the openings facing home plate. Giving each player nine sacrifice bunt attempts, divided into three rounds of three bunts each, plays the game. Each player will receive a score based on his proficiency-three points for any ball that rolls into a bucket and two points for any ball bunted fair that

misses a bucket but does not go past is opening; he loses one point for a foul ball, a ball bunted higher than four feet into the air, a bunt and miss, or a called strike. Any ball bunted fair between a bucket and the foul line is a “do over”. A player may call his shot (declare before the pitch into which bucket he will bunt the ball) to receive a bonus of three points. The player with the most points at the end of three rounds wins.

NAME THAT COLOR-hitting

“Keep your eye on the ball” how many times have you said it? This game will help the hitters with the ability to focus on the ball. First take four balls and paint one quarter of each of its surface a different color. Paint one blue, one red, one green and one yellow. You (the coach) pitch batting practice with the colored balls, and the hitters must identify as quickly as possible the color on the ball, then swing and hit it. You can make this into a game by giving points for quick, accurate color identification and bonus points for hitting the ball hard. You can also make this game more interesting by asking an assistant coach to use a stopwatch to record how quickly the player correctly identifies the color on each ball.

PICKEL-base running

Divide your team to groups are 3 or 4 players per group. Put two bases (or gloves) approximately 20 feet apart. Have a coach on each base. Have one group of players practice running back and forth while the coaches are throwing the ball back and forth trying to get the players out. If a player gets out he has to sit on the side. Once all players are out in a group it is the next groups turn. For older players, you can have players that are not in a group base running throw instead of coaches. This is an excellent throwing exercise for them.

DON'T BREAK THE EGG-base running (sliding)

Wet down a 10-foot area in the outfield grass, and place cones to indicate where the wet grass begins and ends. Put a flat base or baseball glove on the ground to give players their sliding destination. Divide the players into two teams. Line the players up so they have to run approximately 30-40 feet before reaching the wet grass. Hand the first runner two eggs. He must hold the eggs in the hands from the time he starts running straight through the slide. The object is to execute the slide while keeping both eggs intact. If the runner allows his hands to contact the ground during the slide the eggs will break. If he throws his hands up in the air as he's supposed to, the eggs will survive the exercise. On your call, the runner sprints toward the wet grass and slides feet first. The team that goes the longest without breaking *both* eggs wins. The object of this drill is to teach the kids the proper way to slide. Scrapped palms, jammed thumbs, and sprained wrists occur frequently because they fail to throw their hands upward when they should.

RELAY RACE-base running

Divide the team in half to form Teams A and B. Place team A at home plate and team B on second base. Before the race begins, demonstrate the correct path to run around the bases. Set up cones (gloves, or hats work just as well) to mark points that runners should stay within while making turns. The first runner in each team is given a ball. On your signal, both runners start to run. They circle the bases just as they would in a game. As soon as each player completes one lap around the bases he must **HAND OFF** the baseball to the next runner. The race continues until all the runners have circled the bases. Each player should finish where he started. The first team to finish the race wins.

SANDLOT GAME- for older player

You bring all the equipment and then get out of the way. You need to be present because of safety issues, but let the kids divide themselves into teams, choose positions, even come up with “house rules”. They will even have to umpire themselves.

EVERBODY TOUCH IT-hitting, base running, fielding and teamwork

Divide the team into two squads, one in the field and one at bat (or coach vs. the team). The defense may position its players in any formation. The game begins when the hitter puts the ball into play. The batter continues to run all the bases until every player in defense has touched the ball and it is relayed back to the pitcher. The batter may run around the bases twice or more! The offensive team’s score is the total number of bases accumulated by all its players. Once each player has batted and run the bases, the teams switch sides. The team with the highest number of bases wins the games.

KIDS VS. PARENTS

Have lots of fun and laughs!

Pelham _____ Vs. _____

INNING							
	Name	1	2	3	4	5	6
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							
11							
12							
13							

(For younger leagues it is easiest to have the batters go in numerical order, 1-11 for the first at bat, and then reverse it for the 2nd at bat (11-1) and so on for additional innings.)