



# Palatine Community Baseball/ Softball Coaches Guide



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## **Mission Statement and Goals**

The goal of Palatine Community Baseball/Softball is to introduce and teach our children the games of baseball and softball. In order to accomplish this goal, the organization is completely dependent on volunteers to step forward to teach each and every team. This manual is being created to help us all improve and relate the game to the age group we are fortunate enough to be coaching, be it T Ball or Travel Baseball or Softball.

Palatine Community Baseball/Softball has established the Coaches Corner to provide direction and the resources to efficiently and effectively teach the fundamentals of the game. It is the ultimate goal of this resource that with proper utilization and implementation, the player's abilities will consistently improve and ultimately result in everyone having more fun.

This guide is and always should be a work in progress. To make our program better, please provide feedback to the coaching coordinator so this document will constantly improve. Sharing experiences, drills and new ideas is the most important way that we as coaches and administrators can become better. As long as we as coaches continue to learn and improve, each player in Palatine Community Baseball/Softball has the opportunity to be the very best player he or she can be.

The Player Manual is outlined into three phases:

1. Outline of the Core Skills/Abilities at each division that each participant should be able to perform by the end of the season. An explanation is provided along with key points to help managers and coaches understand the expectation. The concept is to ensure that we as coaches are consistent in our teaching of fundamentals and basic skills that will help the player improve and perform at the next level of play.
2. Terminology. We want to put some standards in place to ensure that terminology stays the same from level to level. This way, the players can learn and speak using consistent terms for skills, drills, fundamentals, and game situations.
3. Sample practice plans and drills are provided at each age level to assist in implementing the drills within team practice format. These drills should be building blocks off of which each coach can develop or utilize additional drills to help his players improve.

Players and parents have the right to expect a coach to do everything in his or her power to help all players learn skills and develop as players. If a player is "not getting it", a coach must not give up on the teaching of that player. It is the obligation of the coach(s) to find an effective way of teaching that player the necessary skills to succeed. Use the resources. Books, videos and conversations with other coaches are all valuable tools to help improve this situation. We must not underestimate what a player at any level is capable of learning or doing. Constantly put appropriate challenges in front of players, and then coach them and encourage them to exceed your expectation. If a player does not understand a skill or drill or is underperforming, we must find a different way to coach the skill, drill, or expectation to that player.

Palatine Community Baseball/Softball would like to acknowledge South Elgin Little League who developed this manual and Chris Bechtold who made it ours.

## **So I'm a Manager – Now What?**

There are several things that will help you perform the task of manager. Some of these are obvious, and some not so obvious. Run down this list and you will be well on your way to maintaining your sanity throughout the season. Note that everyone listed in this section must complete a background check before they can begin working or have contact with the kids on your team.

### **Assistant Coaches**

Most levels allow you to name two assistant coaches before you draft. Pick assistants with whom you can discuss ideas and suggestions. Also, pick assistants who will be able to run practices if you are unable to make one. At most levels, the assistant coaches you choose must be the coaches on the field or in the dugout during games, so choose assistants that you can absolutely rely upon.

Discuss what your goals are for the season and how you want to go about achieving them. Discuss the draft in detail – including compiling all the information, what type of players you want to consider drafting and philosophy of positioning players.

### **Team Parent**

An organized team parent is worth their weight in gold. You should find a volunteer early and ask them to handle the following:

- Communication of league events and activities
- Handle postgame snacks at the younger levels
- Be a focal point for PCB/S information

Quickly finding someone to fill the role of team parent, assigning tasks to them and letting them handle the “other stuff” outside of coaching will really help you keep your sanity during the season.

### **Scorekeeper/Pitch Counter**

Finding someone who will be at every game to handle the official scorekeeping duties will allow you to pay more attention to the game. Scorekeepers can also help you ensure that everyone on your team meets minimum playing time guidelines. Also, having the same volunteer keep score every game will help keep continuity on scorekeeping decisions, such as errors. Pitch counts are also vital for the health of the players. Specify someone to track pitch counts to ensure that these young arms aren't getting over worked.

### **Parent Help at Practices**

Last but not least, ask any parents who will be at practice to fill out a background check and have them help you at practice. Keeping fourteen players working and active for an entire practice will take more than three people supervising drills and practice. Just having a few parents help with seemingly small tasks like help your catcher with his gear, stand in during demonstrations, shag missed ground balls or hit some fly balls will free you and your assistant coaches up to instruct and coach. This will help make your practice much more productive and fun.

### **Parent Talk**

The more information you can make available up front, especially regarding league rules, coaching philosophy, and team rules, the easier it will be to enforce them with a minimum of questions during the season. We strongly suggest you hold an initial meeting to cover the following bullet points. Create a parent letter you can distribute that has this information in writing. :

- Team roster
- League rules

. Rules unique to your level of play (if you play in a non-competitive level, make sure you explain that to the parents and ask them not to keep score)

- Schedules
- Rainouts and rescheduling
- Practice
- Coaching philosophy
  - What criteria do you use when you set your batting order
  - Playing time
  - Methods of teaching
- Team Rules
  - Discipline & Penalties
    - First Offense
    - Second Offense
    - Third Offense

### **Sportsmanship**

As an adult teaching youth athletics, you have an obligation to teach good sportsmanship. Players should be taught by example. Some of these examples are:

- Vocally and generously praise good play on both teams, not just the team you are managing. Also, encourage your players to do the same. You don't insult your team or do your team an injustice by telling an opposing player that he or she has made a good play.
- Enjoy the time you are spending with the players. You should expect an age appropriate level of discipline, but allow the players to enjoy the experience of practicing and playing baseball.
- If you must discipline a player, discuss the situation with an assistant coach first. If you choose to talk to the player, do so with an assistant coach present and without his teammates around. After practice, specifically discuss the situation with the parent, including what the expectation was, what was discussed, and what disciplinary action, if any, was taken. Follow this conversation up with an e-mail.
- **Do not argue calls at non-competitive levels. If no score is kept, there are no bad calls.**
- **If you must question a call at a competitive level, do it quickly and do it with respect for the umpire and players on both teams. Never raise your voice, use expletives, or become overly animated. You are a role model for players on both teams and everyone in the stands. If you act poorly, your players and parents will act the same way.**
- If you don't know the rule and can't show the umpire the exact rule in the rule book, don't question the call.
- You are responsible for the behavior of your team and your fans. Make sure that everybody understands your expectations.

## Practice Planning

Planning every practice is the key to a successful practice that will maximize the benefits to your players. The sample planning sheet below breaks down the practice into five minute “stations”. Working in stations allows more players to work on skills in order to get more done in the shortest amount of time. This may seem like overkill, especially at the younger levels, but it is even more important that time spent with each drill be kept short. Remember that if players stand around, they are losing interest and focus. It is more valuable to have a shorter practice time utilizing stations than having all the players stand around “shagging” while one player receives batting practice.

Nothing will lessen a player's enthusiasm for baseball faster than making them stand around waiting for their turn, giving them a goal or drill that is too hard for them to succeed or having them play catch for 20 minutes. Make practice as fun as possible. There are ideas on how to do this in the Drills Manual. Most importantly, remember that **five-ten minutes of focused work** at a skill or drill is better than twenty minutes of lackadaisical work at the same skill.

Planning practices in this way helps in several ways:

- You won't have to slow down practice while figuring out what drill to do next.
- Keeping track of all your practices lets you make sure that you've covered the important skills for player development.
- Having a schedule allows your assistant coaches to help run practices, allowing you to focus on skills.
- Planning each practice will make the players used to a set routine, making practice both more enjoyable and more productive.

On the next page is a sample practice plan. While this sample is geared for a travel baseball team, it can easily be adapted to any age group or skill level.

## Sample Practice Planning Sheet

### AAA White Sox Practice Schedule

**Date:** 4 \_\_\_\_\_

**Practice Goal:** Fielding

**Daily Work:** Calisthenics, Running, Throwing, Long Toss, Multiple Ball Catch, Side to Side

**Station Work:** Outfield Pass Patterns, Cut Offs, Ground Balls, Pop Ups

**Pitchers to throw today:** Valdez, Kenney, Bernau, Marchen

Time	Drill Name	Notes
5:20	Calisthenics	Arm Stretches, Hurdler's Stretches, Trunk Stretches
5:25	Running	Three laps around field.
5:30	Throwing	Active Warm up Throwing. Players should be about 40' apart. They should move their feet to catch ball within framework of their body. Two hands at every opportunity.
5:35	Long Toss	Have them throw 5 times from 50', 60', 70', and 80' and then 5 times each from 70', 60', 50'. Finish with 10 throws from 40'.
5:40	Two Ball Catch	Players pair off with two balls, each flips one to the other. They should catch the ball and flip the ball back to the other player. Goal is to go one minute without dropping the ball. If this proves too easy, add a third or even fourth ball.
5:45	Side to Sides	Same pairs as previous drill. One player (thrower) throws a one bouncer to the left. The other player (fielder) moves his feet to get the ball and flips it back to the thrower. The thrower then throws the same type of ball to the right. Fielder moves his feet to get ball and flips it back to the thrower. One minute reps, two reps for each player.
5:50	Team meeting	Give players water. Coaches go over practice plan for day & break players into smaller groups.
5:55	Station Work	10 Minutes at each station – See Station Work above for drills.
6:00		
6:05	Rotate Stations	10 Minutes at each station. Run to the next station
6:10		
6:15	Rotate Stations	10 minutes at each station. Run to the next station
6:20		
6:25	Rotate Stations	10 minutes at each station. Run to the next station
6:30		
6:35	Water	
6:40	Simulated Innings & Pitching	15 minutes duration. Team takes positions for simulated innings. Pull pitchers aside for 45 pitches.
6:45		
6:50		
6:55	Web Gems	Coach lines up whole team. First player runs towards coach. Coach flips ball just out of the reach of the player. Player must dive or do whatever it takes to catch the ball or knock it down and get it back to the coach.
7:00	Team Meeting	Team meeting to review what was learned today & what needs work

## The Basic Fundamentals

There are a lot of fundamentals listed in this section. **Obviously, players will learn at different rates and a coach cannot expect a player to be able to pick up on all of these fundamentals, especially at the younger ages. The goal here is to teach through repetition and using the games approach to drills. Try to correct the most severe issues first.** Also, many of the players will have several of these fundamentals already in place. Your goal is to identify what they can do better, and work with them one skill at a time to help them improve.

Rotate players through all positions in the infield and outfield. Game experience is a valuable tool. It will help your player to learn in a game situation and will help you to evaluate your teaching methods. Also, rotate your batting order from game to game. Lastly, do not keep score. The reason score is not kept at this level is so the player can concentrate on the basics of baseball without the added pressure of winning or losing a game. If a player tells you they know what the score is, or asks you what the score is, simply tell them that we don't keep score at this level.

### **Rules & Concepts**

At Tee Ball and Rookies, kids are usually getting their first exposure to structured play. Therefore, they need to learn the basic rules and concepts of the game.

- Strike
- Ball
- Safe
- Out – Teach them the ways the defense can record an out. Also, teach them to call the number of outs after every batter when on defense.
- Defense (in the field)
- Offense (batting)
- Fair territory
- Foul territory and what constitutes a foul ball
- First Base, Second Base, Third Base, Home Plate
- Where does the batter stand? (not on home plate)
- Field Positions and the difference between infield and outfield
- Force plays and tag plays - They will likely not understand this for a while, but you'll be surprised at what they'll pick up as the season progresses.
- Introduce backing up bases defensively
- Equipment
  - Gloves - You may have to talk to some parents about that child who's using his dad's old softball glove, or the child who is using the vinyl souvenir autograph glove their older brother got at a game six years ago. The glove should be appropriate for the child's size. Several companies make "easy catch" models geared towards this level of play. Also, you may need to talk to parents about how to break in a glove for their player.
  - Helmets – Helmets should always be worn whenever a player handles a bat. Get them in this habit now.
  - Cleats and protective cups – The earlier that players get accustomed to wearing protective cups, the better. Cleats are highly recommended on wet grass, which you will likely play on at least a few times in those early morning weekend games.

## Fundamentals

### Throwing / Pitching a Baseball

- Teach the proper grip on the baseball, with either two or three fingers.
- The grip should be comfortable. They should not grip the ball so tight you see strain in their fingers.
- Have them learn to point their glove or glove hand elbow to the target as they step to throw.
- Step towards the target with their glove hand foot.
- The throwing arm should be brought back behind them (Power T), elbow bent and kept ABOVE 90 degrees, ball pointing away from their head (if they were throwing off a mound to home plate, their throwing hand would point away from home plate, like they are showing the ball to the center fielder).
- Push their body towards the target (a good mental image at this level is to have the player fall with gravity to the target)
- Follow through on all throws. The ball should come off their middle finger so it has backspin. It should not rotate like a football spiral. After release, the wrist should bend naturally, and their throwing hand thumb should naturally come to the opposite hip.
  
- Note that these fundamentals also apply to pitching, with the pitching motion incorporated in the throw.

### Catching a Thrown Baseball

- Players should stand in an athletic stance (knees bent, weight forward looking at the player with the ball). Teach players to keep their feet moving. Don't allow players to stand like statues when they are catching a thrown ball.
- Try to teach kids to look at the logo on the cap of the player who is throwing. If players are using the correct throwing fundamentals, this will help them focus on the release point of the throw, ensuring they see the ball as long as possible.
- Two hands to catch – Above waist, thumb to thumb, below waist, little fingers together. It's very important to break youngsters of using their throwing hand to squeeze the back of the glove. This may help them close the glove, but it also virtually eliminates the pocket of the glove because it's squeezed together. The proper way to catch a ball with two hands is to teach them to use their throwing hand to cover the opening of the glove after the ball has entered the glove.
- When the ball is thrown, they should move their feet to "circle the ball" or keep the ball within the framework of their body. This is easy to teach if you instruct the player to keep their feet moving as the thrower is throwing the ball.
  
- Lastly, watch the ball into the glove.

### Catching a Ground Ball

Catching a grounder involves the same basic glove fundamentals as catching a thrown ball below your waist with the following exceptions.

- Fielders should keep their hands in front of them as they field a ground ball. They should not let the ball get between their feet.
- They should be taught to move their feet and get in front of every ground ball.
- They should field the ball "from the ground up". This means that the glove should be down touching the dirt, and they should move the glove up if they need to catch a bouncing ball. They should not keep the glove high and try to move it down or trap the ball. Kids will usually keep their glove high because of a fear of getting hit by the ball, so be patient with them as you try to teach this skill or try to break them of the habit of keeping the glove high to field a ground ball.

- They should use two hands whenever they are in front of the ball. If they are fielding a low bouncing or rolling ground ball, teach them to use their throwing hand on top of the glove, like an alligator's mouth, catching the ball in the glove and holding it with their throwing hand.

### **Catching a Fly Ball**

You will likely have very few players ready to catch a fly ball at this level. If you are going to practice this, start them out catching tennis balls. They will not get hurt or discouraged if they miss the catch and the ball hits them.

- Teach them to use two hands on all fly balls.
- They should always keep their feet moving and run underneath the ball.
- Both hands should go up over their head, but not blocking their view of the ball.
- Two hands to catch – Above waist, thumb to thumb, below waist, little fingers together. It's very important to break youngsters of using their throwing hand to squeeze the back of the glove. This may help them close the glove, but it also virtually eliminates the pocket of the glove because it's squeezed together. The proper way to catch a ball with two hands is to teach them to use their throwing hand to cover the opening of the glove after the ball has entered the glove.

### **Batting**

There is no one way to teach hitting. The main thing you will need to do is teach some simple fundamentals while making sure that players are not going to extremes with stance, hand position bat position and elbow position. Also, when you are pitching to the tee ball or Rookie player, do not throw underhand, and try to not to throw bloop pitches or "lollipops" to the player. This will not help them learn to hit a thrown ball. At this young age, it is important to recognize the fact that players will be afraid to get hit by the ball. Keep this in mind as you work with them on fundamentals. The goal is to teach them the skills and fundamentals that are present in any good stance or swing. Additionally, it is important to note that the Player's academy advocates the fundamentals of the "Rotational Swing" utilizing the lower body to the great extent.

#### Stance

- When taking their stance in the batters box, they should stand comfortably athletic (bent knees, bent waist, head facing pitcher).
- Feet should be spread apart about the same distance as their shoulders.
- Their body position should not be drastically open or closed. Slightly open or closed is acceptable but a neutral stance is suggested.
- Elbow position really does not matter, as long as the elbow is not pinned to their side or sticking up in the air higher than parallel to the ground. They should be comfortable – not tense or stiff.
- The bat should be gripped in the fingers, not in the palm of the hands. If the batter is a right handed batter, their right hand should be at the top of the grip. The opposite goes for a left handed batter.
- Hands should be generally by the ear. The main key here is that the barrel of the bat is not pointing down towards the ground. It is advocated that the bat should bounce off the rear shoulder.
- Head should be turned towards the pitcher. Player should be taught to look at the logo of the pitcher's cap. This will help them greatly in picking up the ball out of the pitcher's hand. If you are managing a tee ball level, you should teach kids the proper head movement by having them take their stance, turn their head to look at the pitcher, then move their head to the ball and swing. This will greatly help keep the tee ball player from developing an uppercut. It will also teach them to hit the "top half" of the ball.

NOTE – If you are managing at the tee ball level, you should set the tee up no higher than the batter's waist.

- There should be some slight movement as they wait for the pitcher to throw. Teach them to sway slightly back and forth. It's easier to swing a bat when the body is already moving and as they advance, a slight negative move into an explosive positive move will become vital.

### Swing

- Players should turn their head to track the ball to the bat. (In tee ball, instruct the player to look at the pitcher, then move their head to look at the ball and swing).
- The player should take a short front foot stride, no more than a few inches, without a huge lift of the front foot.
- Make sure the batter is stepping in the general direction of the pitcher. Avoid severely stepping away from the ball (in the bucket) or severely towards home plate (diving at the ball).

Teach the player to drive their hands or the knob of the bat towards the ball. The bat will go where the hands go. The player should avoid dropping his hands and raising them back up (a hitch) as they swing.

- The hitter's head should be down, looking at the ball (head on the ball).
- The lower body leads the swing. Whether the first move is from the inside knee or the inside hip, the move is the same.
- **Do not teach the player to “squash the bug” with his/her back foot.** Squashing the bug encourages leaning back as you swing, which leads to hitting “off the back foot” and upper-cutting. High school, college and pro coaches teach the batter to point the laces of his back foot shoe towards the pitcher. This helps the player swing aggressively at the ball and move their body weight to the front foot.
- Teach the hitter to swing through the ball, not at the ball. Their belly button (belt buckle) and both knees should be pointing at the pitcher after they finish their swing. The hands should finish at least shoulder high.
- Instruct the player to finish his swing, then run to first base.
- A balanced swing is VITAL. After the swing, the batter should be able to hold their swing finish for at least five seconds.
- Teach the difference between a ball and a strike and the strike zone dimension.
- Players should learn to stride even if they are not going to swing at the pitch.
- Players should learn to hit the ball out in front of the plate.

### Bunting

- From Day 1, the players MUST be taught proper Bunting techniques. Bunting teaches eye-hand coordination, and confidence to make contact with the ball.
- There are two techniques to properly bunt:
  1. Technique #1:

The hitter starts in the batter's box in a hitting stance. As the pitcher/coach begins his windup, the batter rotates his feet by simple twisting his hips so that his belt buckle is pointing directly at the pitcher. The batter placed his top hand just below the barrel of the bat at a position that he could hold the bat perfectly balanced in his pinch fingers. It is VITAL that the batter's top hand holding the bat is pinched between his thumb and index fingers and NOT exposing his entire hand to the on-coming pitch. The bat is held out in front of the batter so that the batter can watch the ball hit the bat. The batters arms should be bent at the elbow and the bat should be held very softly so that once contact is made, the ball deadens off the bat.
  2. Technique #2  

The only alteration to the above is that as the pitcher begins his motion, the batter transfers his feet so that his entire body to facing the pitcher. Feet are shoulder width apart with the bat remaining in front of the batter.

## Base Running

- Teach the proper direction and sequence for running the bases. (Hit the bump and take a left!)
- Emphasize running through first base, not running to first base or stopping on first base. (see the base running drills for suggestions on this skill for the younger ball player).
- Teach them that if they miss a base, they need to go back and touch it before they can go to the next base.
- Start teaching players that when they are on base and a ball is hit in the air, they should not leave the base until the ball has either hit the ground or been touched by a fielder when less than two outs. This will be very difficult for them to understand at first. However, the sooner they begin hearing this, the faster they will begin to understand it. You will be surprised how quickly some of the players will understand this concept once they see it in a game.
- Kids should learn how to slide at this level. They all want to do it (what kid doesn't want to get dirty?) so teach it. Only feet first sliding should be taught. The slide should start about three steps before the base, but this will vary from player to player. The player puts out one foot (usually the left), and tucks the right foot and lower leg underneath their rear end. Hands should be in the air, and hands up in the air. With practice, the player will develop an understanding of when he or she should start their slide so they reach the base, but do not jam their foot or leg into the base.