



Northampton Baseball & Softball

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Northampton Baseball & Softball

2017 Coaching Manual

***Youth athletics built on integrity, perseverance,
community, character & teamwork,
with a passion to back it up***

Quick thoughts for coaches

**A coach will impact more young people in a year than the
average person does in a lifetime**

**"Boys need to play better to feel better about themselves.
Girls need to feel better about themselves in order to play better."
- Jessica Mendoza**

RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE LEAGUE:

1. Submit a completed Volunteer Application, including a signed copy of the CORI National Background Check form. These **must** be completed and on file for anyone directly involved with NBSL athletes.
2. Reflect the values of Northampton Baseball & Softball in all dealings with parents, athletes, umpires and league officials. *Remember, you are coaching every player in our league.*
3. Make an honest effort to understand and comply with the rules of Little League. A rulebook will be provided for each league level.
4. Respect all NBSL equipment. Pick up and return equipment in compliance with the dates/times set by the equipment manager. Make every effort to clean equipment at the end of the season.
5. Refrain from the use of tobacco and alcoholic beverages at NBSL practices, games, and league events.
6. Attend required coaches meetings and clinics.
7. Share knowledge and expertise with fellow coaches in a spirit of sportsmanship.
8. Develop and maintain a program that is fair, equal and respects all members.
9. Adhere to the Volunteer Code of Conduct

RESPONSIBILITIES TO YOUR TEAM:

1. Teach all players the fundamental skills, rules and strategies of baseball or softball consistent with their developmental level.
2. Model team building behaviors including punctuality, sportsmanship and respect for equipment and teammates.
3. Create a volunteer group to support your league, your team and your coaching staff.
4. Disperse league information, equipment and uniforms to all athletes and/or parents as appropriate.
5. Constructively develop relationships with fellow coaches and coordinators and create opportunities for their individual skills to be utilized.
6. Measure your team's success by the level of effort, enthusiasm and improvement first. Scores come later.
7. Plan and execute worthwhile practices, using the Keys and Practice Dynamics on the following page.

PRACTICE KEYS & DYNAMICS

Always have a plan. Don't take valuable time on the field to plan your next move. Inform assistants (and volunteer helpers) what their duties will be during practice. Be prepared to begin practice with the arrival of the first player. Begin practice *on time* and keep it controlled but fast moving.

Use the same sequence for your loosening up drills at each practice. Keep your best players from always pairing off during warm-ups and drills. Provide as many repetitions of the basic skills as possible during practice. Correct fundamental fielding and coverage errors in a specific step by step manner as they occur. Finish practice *on time* and with one of your players' favorite drills. Remember the key elements of practice:

- ❖ *Action: Keep your players active.*
- ❖ *Repetition: Provide many repetitions of the basic skills.*
- ❖ *Competition: Inspire players to compete with themselves and against others.*
- ❖ *Organization: Plan every practice session.*

RESPONSIBILITIES TO YOUR INDIVIDUAL ATHLETES

1. Prepare all athletes to compete on a physical level by stretching; and on a mental level by sharing goals and strategies.
2. Protect your athletes by insisting on safety, good health practices and respect for all players.
3. Teach. Teach. Teach.
4. Grant playing time on a fair and equitable basis.
5. Let the players play the game. It belongs to them.

RESPONSIBILITIES TO YOUR PARENTS

1. Carry your roster forms with medical information. These forms must be with the team at all practices, games, and athletic events.

2. Contact all parents to clarify expectations regarding behavior and operations.

See "Ideas for Letters" on next page

3. Hold a parent meeting at the beginning of the regular season. Your agenda should include.

- *Get to know each other - your parents' names, and neighborhoods (helpful for carpooling)*
- *Recruit volunteers for the team duties (scorebook, scoreboard etc...)*
- *Discuss: Division Rules; Sportsmanship (language, care of team equipment); Practices (starting on time and being picked up on time); your coaching philosophy.*

In order to have a good parent attendance, make a reminder call the day before and stress the importance of attending this meeting.

Have an alternate site (rather than the field) or time in case it is raining.

4. Communicate your expectations openly and fairly –

See "Ideas for Letters" on next page

IDEAS FOR LETTER TO PARENTS

(from the coach/manager)

I expect my players to

Be on time for all practices and games. Properly wear a neat and clean uniform. Always do your best whether in the field or on the bench. Be cooperative at all times and share team duties. Respect others, and yourselves as well. Be positive with teammates at all times. Stay patient with your own mistakes and those of others. Understand both winning and losing are important to your growth as a player in any sport.

And in turn, I will:

Be on time for all practices and games. Be as fair as possible in giving equal playing time to all players. Do my best to teach the fundamentals of the game. Positively treat each individual with respect. Set reasonable expectations for each child and for the season. Teach the players the value of winning and of losing. Be open to ideas, suggestions or help. Handle any disagreement or adversity in a respectful, quiet and individual manner.

What I would like from parents and family?

Come out and enjoy the game. Cheer to make all players feel important. Do not yell negative comments to any player (including your own), coach, umpire or league official.

Allow me to coach and run the team. Try not to question my leadership. Players will make mistakes and so will I.

If you wish to question my strategies or leadership, please do not do so in front of the players or fans.

My phone number is available and I will be happy to talk with you privately about your concern. Also remember that a helping hand is always welcome at practices.

Children playing little league baseball or softball will have widely divergent skills. We hear all our lives that we learn from our mistakes. Let's allow them to make their mistakes, but always be there with positive support to lift their spirits.

KEY ASPECTS OF MINORS & MAJORS DIVISION

Note: Skills are listed in descending order of **perceived** relevance and importance!

Teamwork: Critical to any team or group endeavor, teamwork is essential. No one individual is above the others.

Stretching and Warming Up: Players of **all** ages need to stretch and warm up to avoid unnecessary short-term **and** long-term injuries.

Pitching

Proper mechanics are a must! Teach them now before they become bad habits.

Limiting your pitcher and pitches during any outing avoids injury and most importantly cutting any career short (pro or amateur) – see LL pitch count rules for full outlines of limitations

Fielding (catching) & Throwing: See the Ball, Catch the Ball, Throw the Ball

At this level, these are the **most** important skills to be taught. One goes with the other: having “good hands” does no good unless the individual can make the throw and conversely, having a great arm and the ability to make accurate throws does no good unless the ball is caught.

Fielding (catching):

Use two hands to catch all throws and field all balls! When receiving thrown or fly balls, the throwing hand is beside the thumb on the glove hand to assist in making the catch and allowing for quick retrieval of ball to make the throw. Know the “ready position.” Player must know to be in this position before the ball is pitched. Feet shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent, the butt down, body low with glove-side leg slightly forward. Hands out front, glove down to the ground, throwing hand is in “gator” position providing back-up and protection from bad hops, suck the ball up with both hands into belly, take starter step to begin the throw.

Staying in **front** of the ball is one of the most difficult concepts to teach a young ballplayer. A missed ball that stays in front is a ball on which a play can still be made! **Charge** the ball on slow rollers.

Run with hands down at the side, pumping them as if running, bringing the glove up only when ready to receive or field the ball.

Proper position of glove when receiving the ball, either thrown or batted, is important. “Around-the- World” positioning of glove is easy to teach. Extend the glove-hand to the side, with pocket forward, move arm in circular motion.

Knowing which base to throw to and cut-offs are essential.

Fly balls: the first step is **always** back. Call for the ball, loud enough for others to hear.

Throwing

Proper mechanics are a must! Without proper mechanics, many problems and injuries can occur.

Grip the ball with two or three fingers on top across the seams, thumb on bottom with the ball held out on fingertips, not back in the hand. Starter step with power leg perpendicular to target (right leg for right-hander, etc.), arm comes down, hips and glove-side shoulder turn toward target, arm extends backward, stride to target with toe pointing ahead, throwing arm comes forward, elbow shoulder high, snap wrist upon release and follow-through.

Base Running:

Good base running skills are needed for success on the field.

Balls hit to the infield: head down, run through 1st base. Balls hit to the outfield on the ground: round the corner and be ready to go, look at your coach! Caution on balls hit to short right field.

Balls hit in the air: run hard, ready to round 1st base.

Base stealing: run hard with head down. Set-up in “track” position i.e., one foot on leading edge of bag, shoulders turned toward the next base - not towards home except when on 3rd base.

DON'T WATCH THE BALL!

Sliding properly is important to avoid injuries to **all** players whether on offense or defense.

Hitting: The Fences Aren't Everything!

Proper mechanics are a must and bad habits are very hard to break. Grip, feet position, hand position, position in the box, and most importantly, head position are all required to hit the ball with any kind of success.

Grip: middle joints lined up with bat held in fingers, not back in the palm of the hand. Choking up on the bat **is not** a wimpy thing to do. This increases control and bat speed, which are important.

Stance: feet about shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent, front foot about even with leading edge of plate, hands back **and** away from body, elbows up, and most importantly - **KEEP THE HEAD DOWN AND WATCH THE BALL ONTO THE BAT!**

Small stride with front foot toward the pitcher keeping the foot closed. Hips turn at beginning of swing bringing shoulders with them as swing progresses. A level swing is important for success. **KEEP THE HEAD DOWN AND WATCH THE BALL ONTO THE BAT!!!!**

Back foot stays planted, no stepping out of the box, "squash the bug."

Follow through on swing; don't hold up if the intent is to hit the ball.

Bunting is an art. Not all players will be able to master this fundamental (not many pro players can bunt well) but they should know how to do it for when it is needed and should be taught at an early stage if a player is going to be successful.

Hand position, squaring around, and going up or down with the pitch (not pointing the bat up or down) should all be taught at this level. Laying it down the baseline can be taught to those who do get the hang of it.

There are lots of books and websites out there with useful information. Also, feel free to talk to your coordinator or call the Coaching Coordinator if you'd like more coaching tips.

KEY ASPECTS OF INTERMEDIATE – 70’ diamond

The overall goal at the Intermediate level is to develop players’ skills so that the young athletes become ready to play at the next level.

To do this, coaches must help players with their hitting, bunting, base running, throwing, fielding, catching, and pitching. Coaches must also instill in players a routine of stretching and exercise to condition and strengthen their bodies.

Most importantly, this will help prevent injury as well as make players physically fit to play their best.

Stretching and Exercise: Young athletes must do basic stretching and warm-up exercise before each practice or game. Coaches can teach skill-specific exercises, too, i.e., ones for pitching, batting, catching, and fielding. See attached “Suggested Stretches” for examples.

Hitting: Several factors are involved in learning to hit; understanding the strike zone and using proper mechanics; correct grip on the bat, correct stance at the plate, hip rotation, keeping hands in the correct position to make a level swing, and making solid contact with the ball.

Bunting: Coaches should teach the proper mechanics of bat position and footwork, as well as pitch selection.

Base Running: This skill includes running through first base; making the turn at a base; knowing when to run, when to tag, when to go halfway, and when to steal; proper sliding; and using the base coaches. It’s important to teach the only proper dive allowed, which is back to the bag.

Throwing: As with the other skills, proper mechanics must be taught. The grip, starter step, arm extension, foot movement, and follow through should be taught. This is an especially important skill in transitioning to a higher level. Coaches can refer to manuals or other books to ensure that sound mechanics are being taught.

Fielding: Players should be in the “ready” position before every pitch. (Note: balls come off bats at incredible speeds. Coaches simply cannot have players not paying attention to the pitch.) Physical position to field a ground ball is *seat down, head up, hands out in front and low*. Teach hand reaction drills and ground ball fielding. For fly balls, teach positioning to make the play, forehand catch and backhand catch.

Teach infielders the importance of focusing on every pitch and knowing where the base runners are. They must understand their fielding responsibilities and how they change with runners on base. Infielders must always know the number of outs, the plays for particular situations, how to cover a base and back up another infielder, and their cut-off responsibilities.

Teach outfielders to focus on every pitch, too. They should know the outs and the cut-off with runners on base. Teach them to back up every play.

Catching: Teach sound fundamentals. Catchers should be the correct distance from the plate and the batter. They need to know how to go from a relaxed position to a ready position to receive the pitch. Encourage the catcher to take charge of the team and make sure everyone is ready and in position.

Stress *practice, practice, practice.*

Pitching: Teach sound fundamentals, including proper windup, weight shift, pivot, lift and load, arm extension, glide, and follow through. Pitchers need to get into the ready position after pitching so they can be ready to field the ball.

The “Thinking Game.” Pitchers need to be made aware of the importance of their focus, changing speeds, location, and fielding responsibilities.

Pitchers must maintain a positive attitude for the best performance.

KEY ASPECTS OF SENIORS – 90' diamond

Overall goal at this level is to develop the players' skills so that the kids have an opportunity to play high school ball.

Skill development is best achieved by repetition in drills, NOT in game situations.

Technique is the player's best friend, increasing his confidence, safety, and performance.

Hitting: *Stress proper mechanics* such as quiet, still head, balanced stance, eyes on ball always; closed stride foot and straight stride leg, short stride just prior to initiation of swing, slow load followed by fast hands, hip rotation precedes hands, level swing from high hands position, making contact rather than hitting for power, concept of swinging "shoulder to shoulder". *Teach ball placement* to advance/score runners, hitting behind the runner, hit-and-run, and other situational hitting. Also teach patience at plate, picking up ball rotation out of pitcher's hand and pitcher's hand position so a curve ball or change-up can be hit. Drill by hitting off tee, using Swingaway, Hit-N-Stick or soft toss to correct mechanics of swing. We believe that batting practice with "live" pitchers is preferable to batting cage time for hitting instruction.

Bunting: *Stress proper mechanics and footwork* for sacrifice bunting to 1st and 3rd base side between baseline and pitcher. At this level, bunts need to be stronger, i.e., past pitcher to avoid being thrown out by pitcher or catcher. *Teach drag bunt* to either side for base hit.

Base running: Becomes a huge part of a successful game at this level, much more so than on 70' diamond. *Teach concept of aggressive base running*, taking the extra base, forcing the defense to make a play. Teach aggressive leading off at all bases; watching pitcher for cues; proper head-first return slide from lead, head looking away from ball direction; proper path to take in running all bases, watching and listening to base coaches. *Teach getting good jump on pitcher* on steal attempts, starting low with hands free, with first step a cross-over and sprint low to lead base. *Teach inside and outside hook slide, and bent leg slide*, along with head-first slide in return to base from lead.

Throwing: In our experience, this skill is the major factor determining successful transition from 60' or 70' to 90' diamond. *Proper mechanics of throwing MUST* be taught at this level for the kid to have a chance at success. *Stress ALWAYS warming up and stretching arm, wrists, shoulders, and torso*, with short toss and long toss, ALWAYS using proper technique in practice. Proper technique for powerful throws needed at this level involve gripping ball across seams, taking small starter step forward with push off foot perpendicular to line of throw, full extension of arm back, striding straight towards target, looking at target, rear hip and shoulder turn forward toward target and lead shoulder is pulled down, 3/4 to straight overhand throw, wrist snap with follow-through of arm toward opposite hip or knee, power or push off leg follows through forward to complete follow through and throw.

Fielding

General infield skills: Teach “*ready position*” before all pitches, for fielding ground balls teach controlled forward approach or “charge” of grounders and *getting IN FRONT of all balls possible*; feet shoulder width apart, knees bent, butt down and body low with glove side leg forward; hands extended out in front, back of glove ON GROUND; watch ball into palm of glove with hands in “gator” position, suck ball, glove and both hands into belly, take starter step with power foot and initiate throwing steps. On pop-ups, *teach cross over backwards step towards ball direction*, turning shoulder and keeping eye on ball, and calling all pop-ups. Teach general field coverage and back-up responsibilities for all infield positions. *Teach proper run-down or “pickle” technique and responsibilities*, footwork and responsibilities on pivot plays at 2nd base for 2B and SS, coverage on steals, “daylight” play at 2nd base with 2B and SS “bumping” runner back to 2nd base, tagging technique (let runner come to you with glove in front of bag--don’t reach). The only infielder to ever “hold” a runner on base is staying stationary on the base is the 1st baseman.

General outfield skills: For ground balls, stress charging ball and fielding with power knee down to block ball on bad hops. On approach to ground balls on plays at home or when quickness is key, teach charging

NOTES FOR COACHES:

Baseball & softball are extremely difficult sports to teach, hardest of our major sports.

Patience in teaching, player development and eventual application needs to be expected.

The coach with the greatest knowledge of the game DOES NOT translate into being a great coach

Great coaches reinforce three key elements to teamwork

ENERGY

EFFORT

ATTITUDE (a good one)

You are the coach for every player in our league, not just those on your team.

How to become a coach players will never forget and in a good way:

Adults must first understand a great coach is not someone who wins championships, attains first place, holds a good win/loss record, a great coach understands that a players abilities will only take them so far.

Great coaches inspire and set players up for success and with each success, players gain confidence within themselves and with confidence, that player will realize their true potential.

Greatest measuring stick for great coaches is simple: returning players.

Players who return to the sport season after season have had great coaches who taught with patience, offered inspiration and encouraged teamwork, combining it all with having fun

REMEMBER, A coach will impact more young people in a year than the average person does in a lifetime

Additional recommended resources:

- The Power of Double-Goal Coaching by Jim Thompson
- How to Coach Little League by Jake Patterson
- Baseball Positive Coaching Manual by Mark Linden
- Elevating your Game by Jim Thompson
- Little League International website, training and free videos
- YouTube is good resource for planning practices

Baseball Basics

Handout for Parents & Players with instructional video links

Grip



The best way to grip the ball is across the seams as pictured to the right. The fingers are placed over the top of the seams to provide a good grip on the ball. In the first picture you'll notice that you can see 2 seams running horizontally. The back of the ball not visible will also have 2 seams running horizontally. By gripping the ball in this fashion, those 4 seams will help to keep the ball in the air longer and keep the ball traveling straighter.

Wrist



Many young players don't use their wrist much when throwing the ball. When the ball is brought back in the throwing motion, the wrist should be cocked back. This way the wrist can be used as part of the throwing motion.

Watch young players throw and you will see most will throw with a stiff wrist. It is very difficult to throw the ball accurately with a stiff throwing wrist. This is a skill that young players should work on from the start.

You can practice this skill by holding your throwing arm just above the wrist with your glove hand (see image). Bend your throwing arm at the elbow with your forearm vertical. Keeping your arm in this position, practice throwing the ball with just your wrist and fingers. It may feel strange at first, but keep working on this skill. The wrist and fingers play a major role in the accuracy and strength of your throw.

Arm Motion

You can think of the motion your arm makes when throwing the ball as a circular motion. If you're throwing a short distance, the circular motion will be smaller than when you are throwing farther, but it's still a circular motion. The circular motion will aid your throw by providing more natural momentum than simply bringing your arm straight back and then forward. The circular motion should begin when you're pulling the ball from your glove.

If you are playing outfield you will almost always be making a longer throw, so when you remove the ball from your glove, your arm and hand should drop down and by your back knee. This will provide you with the longest circular motion possible.

If you are making a shorter throw in the infield for example, you may take the ball out of your glove and move it back and down slightly. This will give you a circular motion appropriate for the distance.



Instructional videos – parents please supervise kids: (each are only about 3-5 minutes long)

Throwing: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9XCX3_MNyg

Catching the seams of a baseball: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dFUes1pd98>

Hitting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xj5PvJJUjT8>

For pitchers: You can start from the stretch position – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJ7YIR6bY1M>

These basics are a good to start. If you are really adventurous, these are easy drills you can do with your kids that do not require a baseball field! They don't need to throw the ball, they can just hand it back to you. It works on their footwork. You can also use tennis balls if you feel more comfortable.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=euNsDrc9NCw>

Please practice with your player – the key to getting better is to practice, Practicing at home goes a very long way