

Coach/Machine Pitch Coaching Guide



Baseball Positive 2023

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FOUNDATIONS

Bat Safety

Carry the bat by the barrel ([p.5](#))

Coaching Kids

- REPS, REPS, REPS brief instruction; get them moving coach/review details later
- Lack of Body Strength reason for many technical mistakes
...parents ask for tips to get better: Sleep & Vegetables —> get stronger
- The 60' game is different from the 90' game
- It's not what WE know; it's what THEY understand

[Parent Helpers](#) (blog)

Traffic cops (Coaches can focus on Coaching)

- Get kids **organized** for each drill
- Get kids **in and out** of drill reps
- Help with **transitions** between activities
- Collect **overthrows** (during [Playing Catch Practice](#)) and give players another ball, so they keep working
- Help with **individual player issues** (ex: get them a band-aid)

The Base

- Base is for the Runner; Ball is for the Defense
- Positioning to receive a throw
 - A. Ready Position
 - B. *Next to* the base
 - 1) Side of the base the ball is coming from - deep concept for younger players; prioritize other points
 - 2) Body squared to the ball, facing the ball (Ready Position)
 - 3) *Not touching* the base
- Ball First, Base Second ([p.9](#))
...Third Baseman moved off the base to catch the off-line throw. The runner was safe this time; it happens a lot.
Catching (stopping) the **ball is priority #1**.

Drill: [Receiving a Throw at a Base](#)

...Important! ...do this in your 3rd or 4th practice ...maybe sooner. A component of many other drills.

Bat Safety - Carry the Bat by the Barrel

The only time a batter holds a bat by the handle is at home plate in a game/scrimmage, or after getting their feet in position to swing during a drill, under the supervision of a coach.

Each year thousands of kids are seriously injured when a teammate is swinging a bat randomly on the field, unaware of other kids walking near by.

It is challenging to train kids to not hold the bat by the handle when they are walking around. For many, the handle is the only part of the bat where they have placed their hands.

Step 1 in training our kids, is to alert them that the pros, when walking around, carry the bat by the barrel. Show them how to Look Cool Like The Pros. Second, and finally, look at a bat as a loaded gun when a kid is holding it by the handle. It can cause just as much damage. Respond and correct them with the same urgency as if it were a gun. That can save a child, on the receiving end of a misplaced swing, from having their life permanently changed, or worse.



RECEIVING THROWS & THROWING

Receiving Throws

(‘Open Gloves’)

1. Ready Position ([picture p.8](#))
 2. Move Feet to Catch ([picture p.9](#))
 3. Reach Forward to Catch ([picture p.9](#))
- Receiving a Throw at a Base **DRILL** - [‘Cover the Base With Your Eyes’](#) VIDEO of the **DRILL** ([watch](#): 0:46 - 2:05)
(In the video, the ball is delivered overhand. Coach should deliver the ball to player using an Underhand Toss.)

Underhand Toss - ([pictures p.10](#))

- Arm action; level toss
 - Feet Throw the ball; arm *guides* the ball
 - Follow your head
- ♦ [Video #1](#) - teaching to kids (video length: 0:57)
 - ♦ [Video #2](#) - Pro player during practice (Watch 1:38 - 2:05)
 - ♦ [Video #3](#) - Pro player during a game (Watch 0:00 - 0:10)

[DRILL Diagram](#) (Only need to run this drill for a couple days to get the kids a ton of reps, and a feel for the action.
Many other drills involve the Underhand Toss. They’ll get plenty of reps in those drills.)

Throwing - ‘No Ball’ Drills

Power Position ([picture p.11 top](#))

1— Pull ([picture p.11 - bottom](#))

Both arms are involved in making a throw. Glove elbow pulls back, which moves the throwing-arm elbow forward. The pulling action stops a bit before the glove elbow reaches the side of the torso. The result of the action puts the throwing hand approximately 12” in front the head - Release Point.

2— Wrist Snap (Wave)

Move wrist straight down and up, while the throwing-hand is positioned at Release Point.

3— Drive, Pull, Snap

Add the use of the back leg, driving the body forward, to the above two actions

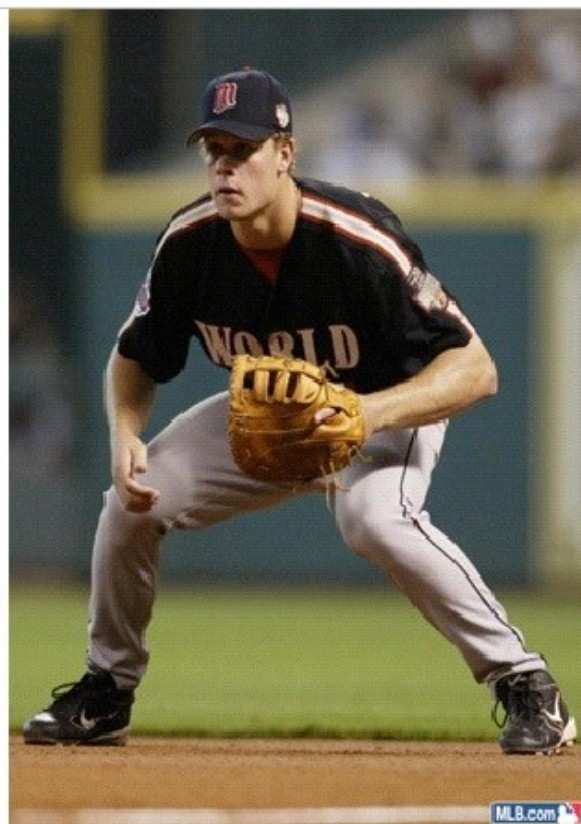
4— Shuffle

5— Shuffle, Shuffle, Pull-Snap ...follow your head

***Once the players grasp the concept of moving their feet to throw, we begin using the teaching phrase:

“**Feet & Wrist**” as a reminder, constantly, anytime they are involved in activities involving an Overhand Throw.

READY POSITION



Move Feet to Catch | Ball First, Base Second

We want to instruct our players in the concept of **'Move Your Feet to Catch'**. Kids tend to stand in place and reach to the side in the hope they will catch the ball. Baseball/Softball players **'Catch the Ball with Their Feet'**. When a player is receiving a throw at a base, we teach them to prioritize: **'Ball First, Base Second'**. In this picture, David Wright of the Mets, was at the base preparing for the throw. When he saw the throw was offline, he Moved His Feet to the point where the ball was going to arrive. He left the base to be sure he able to **'Reach Forward to Catch'**.



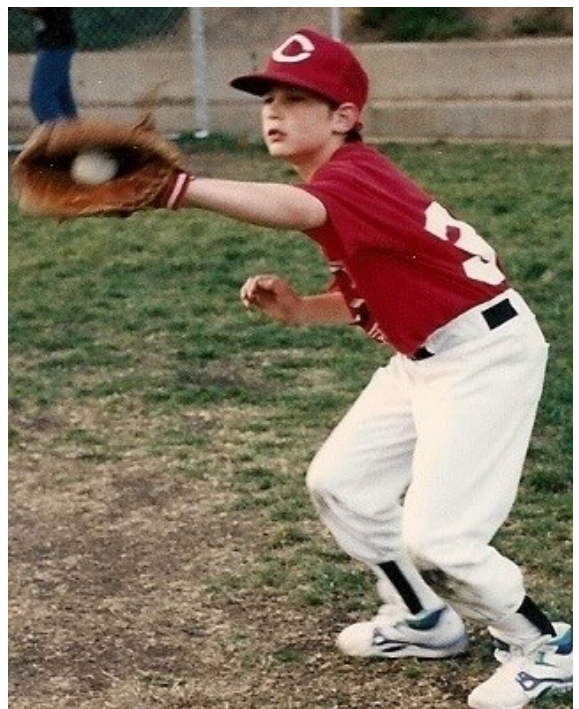
Reach Forward to Catch

Most young ballplayers could do a better job of extending their arms to catch thrown balls.

The tendency is to hold their glove too close to their body (the reason is their lack of shoulder strength, making it difficult to support the weight of their arms)

When the ball is off line (which it often is), they reach out to the side to catch, rather than moving to the ball and getting in a position where they can Reach Forward to Catch.

When reaching forward, a player gets their glove and the ball in their line of sight. This significantly increases the percentage of balls caught.



UNDERHAND TOSS

In each picture we can clearly see that these players are running towards their target, "Move Your Feet to Throw", powering their throws with their legs. The use of the arm is primarily to 'guide the ball'. The arm action in the pic of the kids is not ideal, though the player is obviously running. The act of really extending the arm takes more strength than we, as adults, might realize. With repetitions the kids' technique in the release aspect of the action will improve quite a bit.



Throwing Action - Position Player

Pull Glove Elbow



FIELDING

Fielding

Ground Balls

- Fast-Slow-Fast
- Feet Wide to Catch ([pictures p.15-16](#))
- Don't get in front of the ball??

Don't Get In Front of the Ball. —> 'Get in front of the ball ...to catch the ball' ([pictures p.17](#))

The feet make the hands work. Most of our instruction focuses on what the feet are doing. Strength is an issue. Feet Wide to Catch may be challenging for a couple of the kids.

Keep teaching and emphasizing footwork

Over two months of practice they will get better; they will 'kind of' get it, The experience of hearing the instruction over and over will stick in their minds. Our instruction will make a significant difference as the kids grow and get stronger in the coming years. While we may not see all the fruits of our labor today, we are making a positive impact on the players' long term development.

Fly Balls

- Not really applicable
- Run drills occasionally —> for Fun

Key Fly Ball Teaching Points

- Run full speed while going for a fly ball
- Extend the glove-arm away from the body to catch the ball

Toss Drills are not a cure-all for helping kids judge fly balls. We have to be honest with ourselves regarding how much time we have and making the best use of that time. Toss drills are the most efficient approach.

- [Drop Step](#)
- [Toss Drills](#)
- [Perpendicular Toss](#)

Recovering The Ball - 'Pick up Both Sides of the Ball' (*infielders, outfielders and catcher*)

(*Hugely valuable to teach, and train, at this level of play*)

- Center the ball between the feet
- Glove side of the body facing target
- Throwing hand 'picks up' one side of the ball
- Glove hand 'picks up' the other side of the ball

Drill

Set up:

- Run this after doing 'No Ball' Drills and before playing catch.
 - Kids partnered up, standing 30' apart, facing their partner
 - Each player with a ball. Set the ball 3 giant steps in front.
1. Address the ball with the glove side of body facing partner
 2. Ball centered between feet
 3. Pick up both sides of the ball
 4. Make one aggressive shuffle towards partner. Finish with 12 players in a power position.
- Do this 2x. Then set the ball 3 giant steps behind. Execute 2x.
 - It won't be pretty the first day ...or the second day. Get the reps and move on. Soon they will 'get it' and the drill will look good. And it will pay off big time as the season progresses.



Former MLB catcher, Miguel Montero demonstrating the action: 'Pick up Both Sides of the Ball'.

Ground Balls - 'Feet Wide to Catch'



Strong, grown-up body:
teen, college, pro

Kid body:
smaller muscles;
less body strength



Feet Wide to Catch



Get in Front of the Ball ...to Catch the Ball

See in the pictures below, the Right foot of the players has just been planted, and the Left foot is in the process of completing the action of stepping 'in front of the ball to catch the ball'.

A commonly misused cliché in youth baseball/softball coaching is, "**Get in Front of the Ball**". This leads kids to believe *that* is the most important factor in fielding. The key factor for consistent success in catching ground balls is keeping *the feet moving throughout the action*. The tendency, when following the instruction, "Get in Front of the Ball", is a player getting in front of the ball *too soon*. The result is their feet stop moving. Their rhythm is disrupted.

Train kids to stay a bit to the side of the ball while preparing to field the ball. Then use a rhythmic, Right-Left action to 'get in front of the ball to catch the ball'. The rhythm of their footwork in fielding the ball flows into the rhythm of their throwing footwork: Shuffle Shuffle, Pull-Snap.

When players get older and stronger, we cut their throwing footwork down to one shuffle. Then the 'field and throw' rhythm becomes, Right-Left catch, Right-Left throw.



DRILLS

DRILLS - Concepts

- Repetition is paramount. Instruction has its place, but not as important as Reps.
- Compact your drill space (roll grounds from a spot between home plate and the player positions)
- Roll and Toss the ball*
- It's not going to workthe first time ...or the second ...but they soon start to 'get It'

Most are:

- Catch → Throw → Catch
- Putting different Foundational pieces together
- Same stuff; different spot on field

Fielding Drills (50/50)

- Two parts that are Equally important: 1) Field/Catch 2) Throw

Running Drills Effectively

- Make the objective clear ...i.e. 'Feet Wide to Catch', 'Ball or Base', etc.
- Compact drill space
- Throw, roll or toss balls (no bat)

*Delivering Balls in Drills (see videos on next page)

Ground Balls

- [Roll Balls](#) (watch: 1:08-1:20) medium-slow (Footwork and Rhythm are focus)
- Don't roll straight to player

Fly Balls

- Not designed for judging the ball
- These are 'Run & Catch' drills
- [UH Toss by Coach](#) (watch: 3:30-3:50)
- Low arc

Drills List

- **'No Ball' Drills** [to help their muscles learn the throwing action - [p. 7](#)]
 - [20' Ground Balls](#) | [40' Ground Balls](#)
 - [Receiving a Throw at a Base](#)
 - [5-4 Play](#) | [4-3 Play](#) ...example of an efficient set up to get a lot of reps on common plays for this level
 - **Defensive Movement Responsibilities** ([p.25](#))
 - [Ball or Base Drills](#)
 - [Three Players, One Base Drill](#)
 - [Ranging Laterally for Ground Balls](#)
 - [Throwing Across](#) ...work this in a bit, but a lower priority; not a lot of outs recorded by 3b or SS throwing to 1b
 - [Catch, Tag and Throw](#)
- [Incorporate this mid-season when the players are a bit better at catching a thrown ball. Mini Diamond (25' square) version using Underhand Toss. 5 players; two at the base the drill starts at. If not enough players available, an adult can fill in. Possibly progress to throwing overhand using the full diamond. In both cases set a few extra balls near the base. When a throw gets past a player, they pick up a new ball and keep the drill moving.]
- [Perpendicular Toss](#)
 - [Toss Drills](#)

[These drills are primarily 'for fun'. Many kids this age are not adept at catching a fly ball, but they love trying!]

Don't deliver the ball straight to a fielder

Our primary objective is to make our kids conscious of the important role their feet play in fielding a ground ball. Delivering ground balls straight to a player conflicts with achieving this objective. We want balls delivered to our kids, 8-12 feet to the side, at a relatively slow pace, so they are able to make an angle to the ball in their approach. Players developing timing, rhythm and sense for angles. There are few circumstances that call for delivering a ball directly to a player in a drill.

Conclusion

- Kids: bodies and learning style is different from teens
- Actions v Results mindset
- Limit amount of instruction per work out
- Work on one aspect at a time
- Teaching ahead: common mistake
- Don't try to get it perfect in one day

Delivering the Ball in Drills

In the process skill development of baseball/softball players, **one of the most important concepts** for a youth coach to understand:

Consistently delivering balls in drills, to the right/same spot and at the right pace (med-slow), is an absolute must

Consistently batting a ball where and how a coach intends, rarely happens. This inconsistency keeps us from developing a good rhythm and flow in drill work. Developing skills and muscle memory requires **massive and consistent repetition** throughout each drill session. ...this is why **professional coaches** run many drills by rolling, tossing and throwing balls instead of using a bat.

Below are several videos illustrating this concept.

[Orioles DP Feeds](#) - watch: 3:42 - 4:37

[Trey Mancini 1b Drills](#) - watch: 1:35 - 2:10

[Yankees - DP Turn](#) - using a machine (same concept: Accurate delivery, Quick pace, Massive Reps) - Watch: 0:15-0:35

[Cardinals OF - low liners](#) - Watch: 0:00 – 0:20

[Rangers](#) - Watch: 1:00-1:07 (can't see coach; based on pace of ball and accuracy, can tell its being rolled)

2:58-3:11 - tossing fly balls

3:45-4:00 - batting off a knee from pitchers mound (same concept: Compact Space, Accuracy and Reps)

[Twins - Sano footwork for OF](#) - Watch: 3:50-4:15; 4:55-5:10

[Fielding Clinic](#)

Watch:

2:25 – 2:40

3:50 – 4:10

4:55 – 5:05

5:25 – 5:40

7:10 – 7:25

[Cal Ripken Jr. - Move Feet, Follow Your Head](#): Watch 3:47- 5:21

(this doesn't involve the ball being delivered to the fielder; does address Moving Feet)

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Base Running - Through First Base, Four Groups

FULL FIELD

Objectives:

1. Base Runners look only at the touch point (front) of the base until they SEE their foot touch the base
2. Base Runners look to their Right after touching the base (looking for a possible overthrow)

RULE: Base Runner IS NOT allowed to look at the ball while running to first base

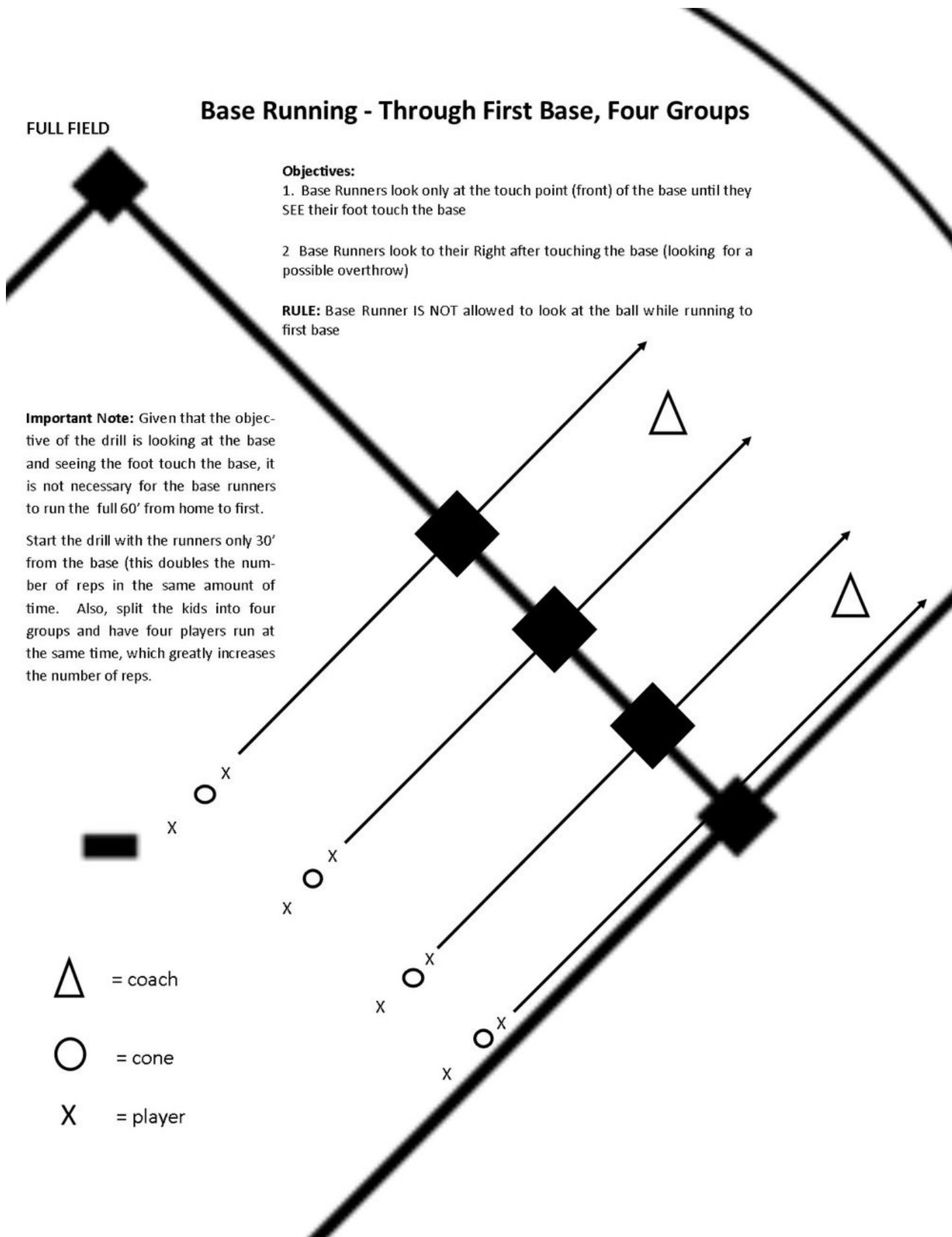
Important Note: Given that the objective of the drill is looking at the base and seeing the foot touch the base, it is not necessary for the base runners to run the full 60' from home to first.

Start the drill with the runners only 30' from the base (this doubles the number of reps in the same amount of time. Also, split the kids into four groups and have four players run at the same time, which greatly increases the number of reps.

△ = coach

○ = cone

X = player



TEAM DEFENSE

Foundations of Team Defense

Team Objectives

1. Stop the ball
2. Stop the runners (record an out?)
3. Get the Ball to the Middle of the Infield

Three Individual Responsibilities

1. Ball
2. Base
3. Back-up

There Are Two Options for Making a Throw

1. Overhand Throw
2. Underhand Toss
.....many kids are unaware of, or do not think about, *the Underhand Toss option*.

Moving the Ball on Defense

1. Throw the ball
2. Run with the ball

The Ball is Constantly Moving on Defense

As soon as a player has control of the ball they must *immediately move* the ball. They have **two** options.

Be emphatic about this in scrimmage. For awhile the kids will be confused and flustered. If we insist on the rule that the ball never stops moving until it is back to the pitching rubber, in the pitcher's hands, the kids will adapt.

1. **THROW** the ball (to a cut-relay player or to a base runner(s))
2. **RUN** with the ball toward the *middle of the infield*

COORDINATED TEAM DEFENSE - ***"Baseball is a Game of Movement"***

Many of these drills can be incorporated into the Skill Building Warm-up portion of practice. 'Pitcher Responsibilities, Ball Hit to Infield fits into the Team Drills segment. This could be run with a group of four or group of six, while the other players are running a different drill(s) at a different spot of the field.

Foundations

Three Team Objectives

Three Individual Responsibilities – BBB

Ball, Base, Back-up

Coordinated Team Defense - The System (Part 1)

Mini Diamond - Super Tool

The Catcher's Position

"I am going to GO GET the Ball"

Infield Base Coverage (INF --- group of FOUR)

DRILL ...core of the system

Backing-up Bases (OF & P --- group of FOUR)

DRILL ...core of the system

Managing the Ball

Moving the Ball on Defense

The Ball is Constantly Moving

Two Types of Throws

Rule —> Runners Not Trying to Advance

Get the Ball to the Middle of the Diamond

Coordinated Team Defense - The System (Part 2)

Middle Infielders Movement On Ball Hit To The Outfield

DRILL

SS, 2b, P - Always Move Toward The Ball

Ball, Base, Back-up Drills - Training Defensive Responsibilities for the Pitcher ('Runner')

Pitcher Responsibilities - Ball Hit to the Infield

DRILL Series

Three Players, One Base Drill - BBB

DRILLS

PRACTICE STRUCTURE

PRACTICE STRUCTURE

Greater Practice Efficiency

- Written Plan
- [Parent Helpers](#)
- No chasing missed throws
- [MINI Diamond](#)

Resist Cancelling Practice

- [Rain/Wet Day Practice](#)
- ID a covered area in your neighborhood

First 2 Practices

- 'Training Camp' (Clinic Format): Get a lot of 'Teaching the Game' content in during this time
- Don't cancel practices b/c of weather; **embrace poor weather days** as *Opportunities to Teach the Game*
- Don't expect it to work right the 1st time (or the 2nd ...)

Standard Practice Plan (90 minutes)

-0:15 – 0:00	Whiffle Ball BP
0:00 – 0:05	Pre-practice talk: Overview
0:05 – 0:15	Skill Building Warm-up (SBW) ...this may go a bit longer
0:15 – 0:20	'No Ball' Drills (Batting & Throwing) Recovering the Ball Drill
0:20 – 0:30	Playing Catch Practice (PCP) ...this is closer to 5-7 minutes (no pitching segment for tis level)
0:30 – 0:45	Team Play (Defense, Base Running) / Batting Practice - group 1
0:45 – 0:50	BREAK
0:50 – 1:05	Team Play (Defense, Base Running) / Batting Practice - group 2
1:05 – 1:30	Scrimmage

* Set up batting practice in the outfield using wiffle balls, so that multiple kids can swing at the same time. Ideally, 1-2 additional kids are getting swings off a Tee. This requires an extra adult to monitor, primarily for safety reasons. This adult would also be in charge of the player(s) focusing on a single aspect of the swing, for a series of 5-6 swings ([see pages, 30, 39, 43](#)). Then give the player(s) a new focus point.

Use the infield/diamond for defensive work. It is important to note that many drills can be run without an infield diamond. A team can hold a very productive practice on any flat open patch of ground. Most any object can serve as bases for running drills. The only activity that might be difficult would be rolling ground balls in thick grass. An artificial surface, most any dirt surface, and even a concrete school yard work perfectly fine. Point beingwe do not need a 'field assignment' in order to hold an outstanding practice.

On occasion, it makes sense to have the batting group in the infield. Kids to see pitches from the same perspective they will in a game. Same for defensive players. It also provides fence space for kids hitting off Tees to bat into a fence, which limits the time needed to retrieve balls, resulting in them getting more swings.

50/50 Practice

—> 50% of the time: skill building; 50% of the time: scrimmage

Warm up: Base Running and Skill Building Exercises

5 min

Three Group Rotation

- | | | |
|--------------------------|---|--------|
| 1. Playing Catch: | 'No Ball' Drills Underhand Toss Playing Catch | 25 min |
| 2. Fielding: | Drills | |
| 3. Batting: | 'No Bat' Drills hitting off Tees live wiffle ball batting | |

<break>

5 min

Scrimmage

25 min

Scrimmage

- Three players on Offense
- Nine players on Defense
- Coach delivers ball: Standard Pitch | Front Toss | Soft Toss | Tee (yes! ...using a tee guarantees a strike)

Offense

- **Two** players on base
- **One** Batter (coach/parent)
- **Other Player(s)** doing skill building drills; off to the side (coach/parent)
- If an out is made on a runner, allow them to remain as a baserunner (**build** baserunning **skills**)

Defense

- Positioning
 - > Infielders: **5 Giant Steps** from the base
 - > Left/Right Fielders: half way between the corner base and second base; appropriate depth in the outfield
 - > Center Fielder: 40' behind second base

BATTING

Overview of The Swing

- Turn Back - Batting is like jumping. In order to swing the bat forward as fast and powerfully as possible, the batter first needs to Turn Back. ([Picture p.31](#))
- LEG TURN initiates and powers the swing ([Picture p.32](#))
- Rubber Bands - Muscles work like rubber bands. When the body moves, the muscles stretch out and snap back. The Leg Turn stretches the muscles through the torso. Those stretched muscles snap the bat to contact. The faster the turn, the more the rubber bands stretch, and the more accurately they snap. We want to instruct our kids with turn as fast as they can and swing as fast as they can ([Pictures p.42](#)) **The FASTER the legs turn, the MORE accurate the swing** ...when the 'Head Stays in Place'.
- Sideways Karate Chop - The action of the top-hand arm, moving the bat to contact point ([Picture p.33](#))
- Head in Place (Face the Ball at Contact: [Picture p.34](#)) - The body follows movement of the head. Head movement throws off the swing. Keeping the head in place is fundamental for an accurate swing.
- Feet in Place ([Picture p.35 & 42](#)) - Bookends, along with the head, a controlled and accurate swing. Fundamental to maximizing leg strength in the swing.
- Stride? - Few elite batters (college and pro) take a stride. Below is a detailed explanation and video.

Is The Stride Needed in the Swing?

Most successful batters Do Not stride. We will not tell any batter to stride. If a batter chooses to stride we leave them alone unless we see the stride causing them problems.

Striding is an individual thing, mostly in relation to an individual's instinctive timing mechanism. It is OK to stride if it feels natural to a batter, HOWEVER...

I encourage young batters to work **without using a stride**. Striding is additional movement for a batter to learn to execute with body control and balance. More movements in the swing; more chances for mistakes. A solution for eliminating or reducing a problematic stride is to widen the stance.

The videos below; WATCH: None of the batters stride. A few pick up their front foot and set it back down; an action called a 'Step' or 'Toe Tap' (timing mechanisms like a stride, but with less movement). Many (older and stronger) players today use this type of an action in place of a stride. These actions require quite a bit of leg strength, which players gain in their teen years. Younger kids are fine by simply 'Turning Back'.

[Canada v Italy](#) **1 min 57 sec** Aug 3, 2013

[Orioles v Blue Jays](#) **1 min 9 sec** Sept 26, 2022

[M's v Blue Jays](#) **4 mins** Sept 2022

(watch: 0:25 | 1:01 | 1:30 | 1:51 | 2:20 | 2:37 | 3:03)

Santana in the first clip, and the Jays batter in the last clip, Do lift their front foot. However, they set their foot back down, pretty much right where the foot started. Note that they do so slowly and with control of their bodies. These are grown men with tremendous body strength. Very few kids could execute this action.

Batting - Turn Back (Load)



Legs Start the Swing - Stretch Rubber Bands

...Turn Fast!



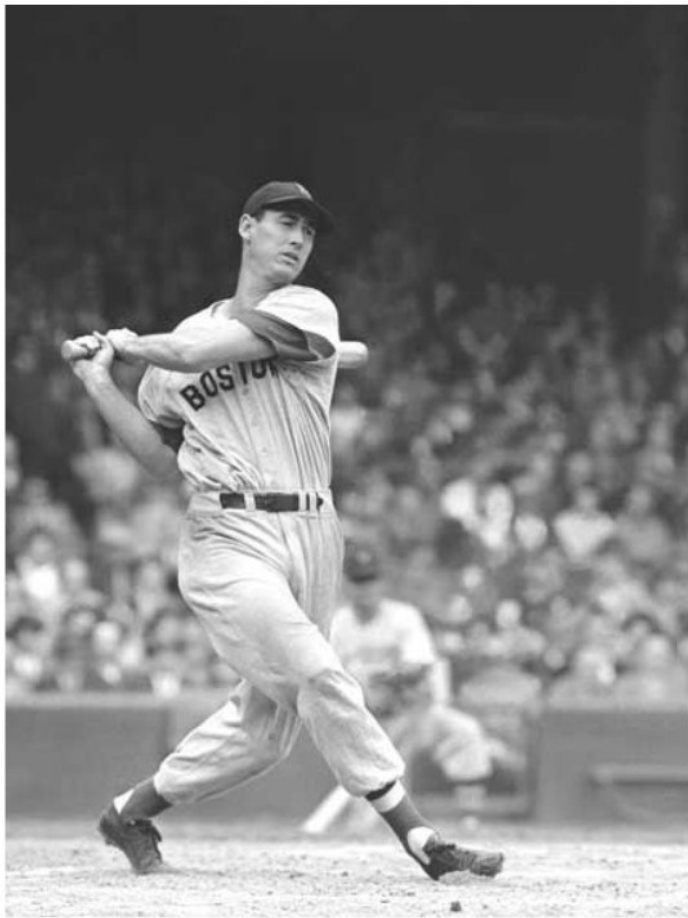
Sideways Karate Chop



Head in Place - Face the Ball at Contact



Feet In Place - Balance



'No Bat' Drills

1 - Twist

Feet outside shoulder width; turn feet and lower half, back and forth while keeping upper body (shoulders and head) still. Continue for 5 seconds; rest, repeat.

2 - Switch Heels ([videos](#) - p.37)

Batting Stance with hands on hips - Player 'Turns Back' by turning their front knee slightly back towards the catcher (the front shoulder may also turn back a bit). The batter's head position must remain, so to still be able to look at the pitcher and contact point while turning back. When turning back the front heel comes off the ground. The player then 'Turns Fast', driving their front heel, quickly, down and back. At the same time their back heel turns up.

3 - Sideways Karate Chop

Top hand, w/palm open, in the position where the bat is held in the stance. Head looking down toward 'Contact Point'. Switch Heels to power lower half turn; snap the top hand to 'Contact Point'. 'Funny Bone' leads the action of the top hand arm. Finish with elbow bent, fairly closed to the body and palm facing up.



Switch Heels

Head in Place

Sideways Karate Chop

Head & Torso Centered Between Feet



Switch Heels

Head in Place / Face the Ball

Sideways Karate Chop

Let the Ball Get to Your Feet

Switch Heels

The first videos show pro players executing the Switch Heels action. The third video shows a US Soldier using the same action. We are teaching/learning Body Mechanics, not 'secret' baseball/softball stuff.

Videos: Pujols, Zunino, About Face

A fundamental action in the swing is to 'Switch Heels'. All batters, when initiating their swing, drive their front heel back and down. While this takes place, their back heel turns up.

The result of these combined actions is energy from the legs pressing against the hip girdle, forcing rotation of the Lower Half of the body (legs). Many of us have heard the phrase 'turn the hips' in relation to the batting swing. The turning the hips begins with this action of the heels.

There are a few batters where it may be difficult to see this action in the front foot/heel. Some have a more- subtle movement. In those swings the rotation and driving back against the front hip takes place in ankle and knee joints (which have some laxity and capability to rotate).

Regarding the small percentage of batters who stride, there are two ways they execute the 'heel drop' in the front foot. Some rotate the heel back just before landing the stride; others finish their stride on their big toe, then drive the front heel back and down from there.

The first two videos below illustrate the 'Switch Heels' action used by Albert Pujols and Mike Zunino. The third video shows a soldier doing an 'About Face'. The soldier employs the same technique as the batters to turn his legs and body. The purpose of including the third video is point out that this action is not something unique to swinging a baseball or softball bat; this action is basic body mechanics.

[Albert Pujols](#) - Front Heel / Switching Heels - **Three examples: 0:00, 0:38, 1:35**

- Up to load ("Turn Back") Back and Down ("Turn Fast")
- Front heel (foot) initiates lower half turn

Note that Mr. Pujols has little or no stride; and minimal upper body movement until after the conclusion of the turn of his legs.

[Mike Zunino](#) - 2 HRs - **Three examples: 0:00-0:13, 0:14-0:20, 0:30-0:35**

Watch front heel; same as Pujols (and every batter to some degree ...and our soldier)

'About Face'

Example of a soldier using the same technique as Pujols and Zunino to turn his legs. This video is included to point out that what we are teaching isn't some 'secret' action exclusive to the baseball/softball swing. We want the coaches and players to gain an awareness of how the human body moves to initiate the action of the swing and most efficiently generates power in the swing. The soldier, Albert and Mike are each using the same technique to turn their lower body as effectively as possible ...they "Switch Heels".

...only need to watch the **first 10 seconds** of the video.

Swing Review

- Turn Back
 - Legs Start the swing
 - Turn Fast
 - Sideways Karate Chop
 - Contact Point
 - Feet in Place - Balance
- Stretch Rubber bands
Snap Rubber Bands
Face the Ball | Head in Place
Centered and Tall

Helping Kids During 'No Bat' Drills

We help our players develop proper movements during the No-bat drills by assisting them through touch. This help is only needed in the first few days of their learning. Beyond these first few days, the points below can be applied from time to time to as 'reminders'. Three ways to assist our batters in their learning:

HELP: Hands on shoulders: **Touch** the shoulders to create Awareness of movement; don't grab or hold shoulders

Drills: **Twist**

HELP: Hand on top of head: If their head moves, the kids Feel a change in the relationship of their head to your hand

Drills: **Switch Heels**

Sideways Karate Chop (p.33)

HELP: Fist at 'Contact Point' (p.41) (Placed even with the front foot; middle of home plate area - approx. 2' from their stance)

Drill: Switch Heels: Be sure kids start with their **FRONT FOOT 'FLAT'** on the ground in their stance. The front heel comes up when they 'Turn Back'

The back foot remains perpendicular to home plate when the batter 'Turns Back'

Progressions of Batting Instruction

'No Bat' Drills

These are incorporated into each practice. We encourage kids to do the drills at home each day. They take 1-2 mins.

Tee Work

The batting tee is an integral part of batter training at all levels of play, including Olympic level softball and Major League Baseball. We want to make tee work part of every practice. Have kids take swings in sets of 5-8, focusing on one of the points of emphasis (Turn Fast, Sideways Karate Chop, Face the Ball, etc.)

Soft Toss (watch 0:35-1:45)

Great for delivering a high percentage of hittable 'pitches'. Also, provides a timing element by swinging at a moving ball.

Live batting using wiffle balls

Allows us to pitch, off a knee, from close distance (18'-20'). The shorter the distance, the higher percentage of good pitches to hit.

Bating practice, on the field, with a regulation ball

The last piece. And usually the least efficient in a team practice environment. Not needed during each practice at this level (assuming the kids are hitting wiffle balls and getting Tee Work).

Tee Work

Developing the batting swing is done by focusing on one aspect of the swing at a time for a series of swings. Players train actions through consistent repetition - creating Muscle Memory. Below is a list of focus points for any given set of swings (8-10 swings for each focus point is about right).

In the first couple of weeks of swing development, the challenge as a coach, and for the player, is these focus points don't instantly produce a perfect swing. Over time, through the training of each part, the actions begin to meld together into a sound good swing.

IMPORTANT: When a player is working on a given aspect of the swing, they need to understand that Success is determined by how they execute that particular aspect; *Not the result of the swing*. As coaches, we need to understand this as well. Our feedback is based on how the player executes that particular aspect. Our challenge is to resist correcting flaws we see in the swing beyond the current focus point ...and there will be many. Our understanding that building a swing is a process that takes a number of weeks in a step-by-step manner is critical for us in pacing our instruction along with pacing our, and the players, expectations for a single workout.

The focus points below are, more or less, in order of how we want to introduce them. A good swing workout will cover 3 focus points. As a player progresses through their learning, we progress through the list. While introducing new drills and concepts, go back and pick a more fundamental point, near the top of the list, to include in a given workout. All points need to be reviewed periodically to maintain good habits/Muscle Memory.

Focus Points for Tee Work

1. Legs - 'Turn back, Turn fast' Gain familiarity with the leg action in the swing
2. Switch Heels Establish mastery in the use of the Heel Switch action to activate the Leg/Lower Half Turn
3. Head in Place/Face the Ball This is more of a focus during drills (Switch Heels - Drill #2)
4. Sideways Karate Chop Be sure a player is accomplished and consistent in the leg-turn action before adding this aspect to their training. Even with the Leg Turn established, initially, some kids will forget their legs when the Karate Chop is the focus. Alternating Switch Heels and the Sideways Karate Chop, as focus points, can help them learn to always initiate the Karate Chop with their legs.
5. Feet in Place At the conclusion of the swing
6. No 'Careful' Swings We want each swing executed with 100% effort. Assuming a batter keeps their Head in Place, a swing at full speed is more accurate. Additionally, the muscles learn quicker if each movement is repeated at the same speed. Full speed (100% effort) is the only way sure way to have each swing executed at the same speed.
7. Check Balance The culmination of 'Feet in Place' focus and 'Centered and Tall' focus. As a batter progresses in their understanding of the swing and awareness of their body actions we move to the phrase 'Check Balance', which encompasses both those focus points. Later, this phrase can become simply 'Balance'. If you were to spend time around a college or professional setting, you would hear the term 'Balance' uttered quite often by coaches as a reminder to their batters. .

Why Use a Batting Tee?

A batting tee is not just for Tee-Ball. This is a tool a baseball and softball player uses their entire playing career, through to the highest levels. Most swing work should be off a tee (or soft toss; **watch 0:35-1:45** in this [video](#)). This is the case at all levels.

Relationship of feet to the ball when hitting off a Tee (see diagram [p.40](#))

1. Front Foot even w/ball
2. One bat length from ball to legs/hips

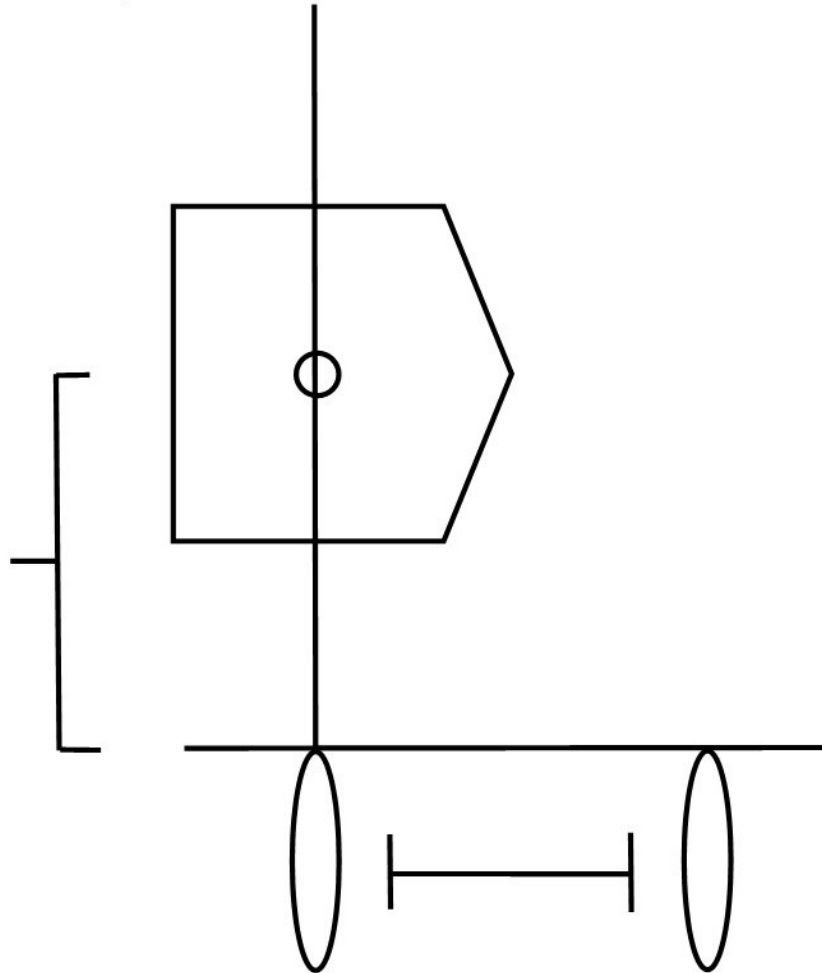
Former American League MVP, [Josh Hamilton Practicing Off a Tee](#)

...only need to watch this for 30 seconds. It is important kids understand that a batting tee is not just for Tee-Batters.

Stance at a Tee

Have a perpendicular line running across both batter's boxes and intersecting the Tee Stem and ball. The batter's front foot must be lined up with the ball. THIS POSITION IS CRITICAL and must be correct prior to EACH swing. The back foot, as noted below, is spread out so that the feet are slightly Wider Than The Batter's Shoulders. A good way to create a visual for the kids is telling them 'Your Feet Must Be Wider Than Your Knees'. It is easy for them to see the difference between their feet wider than their knees versus their feet directly under their knees (the spot where kids tend to want to position their feet. The problem is it is hard to generate power and be balanced when the feet are not wider than the knees/shoulders).

Batter stands one bat length from the ball. Measure from the ball to the batter's hip. NOTE: kids often measure distance with their arms extended - this is incorrect and we MUST prevent this mistake.



We want a straight line from the back toe to the front toe to the 'pitcher'

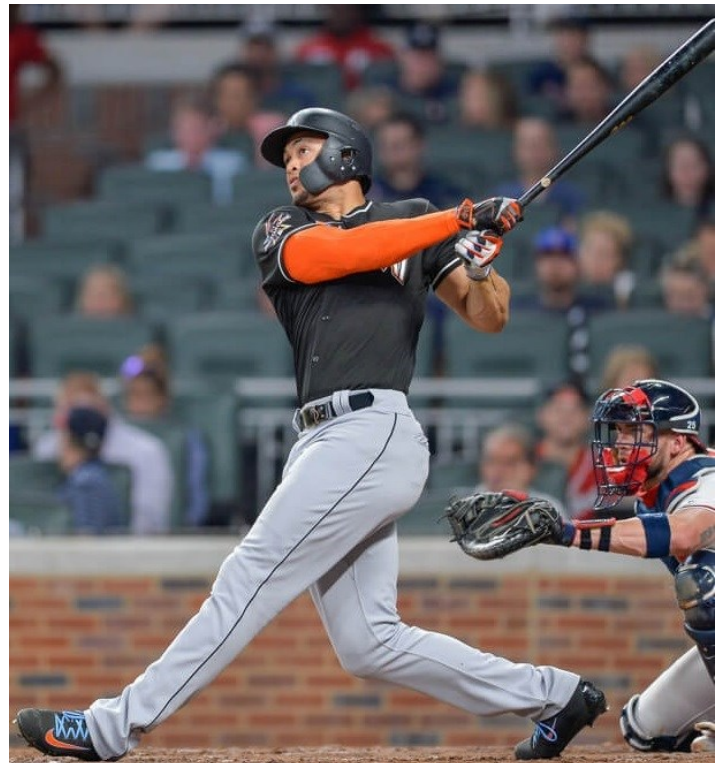
The figure drawn above represents the child's shoulders.

The ovals are their feet. The feet need to be wider than the shoulders.

Contact Point ...Let the ball get to your feet



No Careful Swings - Full Speed (100% effort)



Teaching Phrases

Clear communication (and understanding by the players) is the bedrock of effective coaching. The following Teaching Phrases have a *specific* meaning for a given part of the swing and other aspects of the swing process. Consistency in terminology, that the kids understand to mean a specific action, speeds learning and development.

The most knowledgeable coach can have limited effectiveness if the players don't understand the instruction. A novice coach with minimal knowledge, can be effective when the kids understand the words they are hearing.

"It's not what **we** know, it's what **they** understand"

Note: Good instruction is not limited to correcting flaws. We want to *acknowledge when we see something done right*. The best way to acknowledge good actions is to point out what the player did right and tell them to "**Feel** it/that". Recognizing the *feel* of an action performed correctly plays a big roll in learning and retaining physical skills.

Teaching Phrases & Terms

- Turn Back Preparation for the Leg Turn (commonly referred to as 'Load'). This is a relatively slow action.
- Turn Fast Reference to the Legs. Turning the lower half of the body initiates, and powers, the swing.
- Head in Place Head remains centered between the feet, starting in the stance, throughout the swing.
- Face the Ball Same concept as 'keep your eye on the ball'. This phrase is preferred because it ties in with the concept of 'Head in Place'.
- Switch Heels Activates all the leg muscles for the Leg-Turn action.
- Rubber Bands The muscles through the torso 'stretch' during the Leg Turn (p.32). Then 'snap' the bat to the ball using the Sideways Karate Chop action; 'snap the rubber bands'.
- Feet in Place At the end of a swing, the batter wants their feet to remain in place with their torso and head centered between their feet. Initially, we want a batter to gain *awareness* of their feet at the conclusion of their swing; not necessarily be perfect at keeping their feet in place after each swing. Ultimately, a batter wants to complete each swing with their feet in place, in control of their body and be BALANCED.

Important Points

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| The Swing | Legs initiate the swing and generate energy |
| Three Keys | 1) Turn (LEGS) Fast 2) HEAD in Place 3) FEET in Place |
| Feet Wide in Stance | Feet wider than the hips. Hugely important for balance and coordinating the Leg Turn with the Sideways Karate Chop action. A wide stance requires more effort and energy; it's just easier for kids to stand with their feet beneath their hips, close together. We have to constantly remind young kids to widen their stance. |
| Contact Point | When the ball is even with the front foot (a bit earlier on inside pitches; a bit later on outside pitches)
Many of the actions (and teaching) of the swing are done in reference to Contact Point. |

Timing

1. See Ball, Turn Back (Turn Back [pictures p.31](#))
2. Let the ball get to your feet (Contact Point [pictures p.41](#))

1 - Training Players When to Turn Back

Without the Turn Back (load) action, the chances of executing an effective swing is almost zero. *It is critical that we train and discipline our batters to use the Turn Back action for every swing.* This is a relatively slow and controlled movement. As the pitcher brings their hand to the Release Point in their delivery, the batter Turns Back when they See the Ball.

Failure to Turn Back significantly limits a batter in utilizing their leg strength to execute the most important part of the swing - a Fast Leg Turn. This is a new concept, and a new physical action for most young players; one that many struggle to incorporate into the process of their swing.

While it may not seem like much from an adult perspective, the action of turning back takes a good amount of leg strength. It takes some effort, prodding and patience on the part of a coach to get young players to Turn Back prior to every pitch.

Older players have room to improve this aspect of the swing process. Incorporating this drill into their swing work takes little time. Improving the rhythm and timing in their swing could be the missing piece to the puzzle for a good hitter to become a great hitter.

...Swinging a bat without first Turning Back is like trying to jump up without first bending the knees.

Drill - [“See Ball, Turn Back”](#) (watch 1:05 - 2:15)

1. Get players in their batting stance facing the coach
2. Go through a wind up and pitching motion stopping at release point
3. Players Turn Back when they See the Ball approaching release point
4. After they turn back the drill repetition is complete
5. Repeat 8-10x each day before batting practice and before each game.

This routine creates a Pavlov's Dog effect where each time 'the pitcher shows them the ball' they 'Turn Back'. This daily routine ensures the batters use their legs when they swing the bat. The drill also trains batters to pick up the ball in the pitcher's hand. Many kids do not lock onto the ball at release and follow its flight to contact. This drill is a first step for a player in developing the skill of tracking the ball.

Note: The duration of the pitcher 'showing the ball' is an arc of approximately two feet, NOT a specific point in time. This is important to understand. Every player's internal timing mechanism is different.

Machine Pitch

Instruct players to Turn Back when they see the ball released from the machine arm.

Remind kids to turn back in a controlled manner. Watch for them Turning Back in a fast, jerky movement (this is common either because they misunderstand that Turn Back is a slower action, or because they panic out of concern the ball will go past them before they can swing. The low velocity of the machine pitch allows ample time for them to Turn Back and be ready to swing in time to contact the ball.

Note: While the timing of the Turn Back action is slightly different from Coach Pitch, we can use the same drill. Take your players through the [See Ball, Turn Back Drill](#) (watch 1:05 - 2:15) every day. Creating the habit of Turning Back is the important element. It doesn't take long for most to develop timing with the machine.

2 - Let the Ball Get to Your Feet

A common flaw in the approach of young hitters is swinging before the ball gets to the point where they are strongest when making contact. Pitches in the middle area of the plate are contacted when the ball is even with the front foot, give or take a few inches. (A bit sooner for pitches located on the inner part of the plate; a bit later for pitches on the outer part of the plate).

Young baseball/softball hitters need to be educated on where they want to contact the ball in relationship with their stance/feet ([pictures p.41](#)). Given this understanding, when we see a batter swinging early, the teaching phrase, **“Let the ball get to your feet”**, has valuable meaning. The batter is reminded to wait longer before they swing.

The concern in the back of all hitter’s minds is a fastball getting past them or jamming them. Communicate that you understand this when working with a young player. Remind them that this is practice; it is OK if not every swing produces a rocket line drive. Then support them as they go through the process of learning to let pitches get to that best, and strongest, point for making contact.

How to Coach Pitch to Kids

([Video](#) watch: 2:35 - 3:50. Also [Video](#) watch: 0:40 - 1:20)

First, we don’t pitch from full distance (pro batting practice is pitched from short distance). Second, pitch off a knee using a ‘dart’ throwing action, not a ‘full arm circle’. Third, massive repetitions in practicing the skill*.

*This is the **easy and fun** part - we throw batting practice to our own kid(s) at home!

It is the responsibility of the coach/batting practice pitcher to provide good pitches to swing at during live work. Live work includes **soft toss** and **short front toss**. Batters need good pitches to swing at in order to improve their skills. We coaches must recognize that ‘Batting Practice’ is actually **‘Swing Practice’**.

Important: throw firm, level pitches. Slow arcing pitches are harder to hit. Kids can hit balls pitched with a little bit of velocity when they use their **Legs** and the incorporate the necessary habit of **Turning Back** when they ‘See the Ball’.

If we are going to miss with a pitch, we want to miss low rather than high. The natural path of the hands in the swing is down into the strike zone. Swinging at a low pitch follows the natural swing path. Swinging at pitches that are too high is contrary to the fundamentals of a good swing.

Start pitches off level at armpit height (top of the strike zone) and allow gravity to pull the pitch down into the middle of the strike zone. This way, no pitch arrives to a batter above the strike zone.

Note: It is understood that **not every coach/parent has the time** to practice, or ability to throw, a high percentage of strikes for live batting. **Solution:** use the **‘Soft Toss’ technique** ([video](#) watch 0:35-1:45) instead of pitching straight on. The most important part of batting practice is, ‘batters getting a high percentage of good pitches to swing at’.

During Coach Pitch Games, it is strongly encouraged to have coaches pitch the same way as described above for throwing batting practice. If the league has rules regarding pitching distance and how pitches are delivered, talk with the Board about changing or relaxing the rules. Point out that when a lot of poor pitches are thrown, the kids in the field, the batters waiting their turn are doing nothing. They are all standing around watching a grown-up throw a ball ...poorly.

When constructing Coach Pitch game rules, consider the experience of the of the **NINE** kids in the field ...and everyone else at the park; not just that of the **ONE batter**. The ball needs to be hit in order for the rest of the kids to **PLAY**. :)