



COACHING

9 to 12 year olds

KING OF THE DIAMOND

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The "KING OF THE DIAMOND" competition is designed for players 8-14 years old but could be easily modified to help players of any age. You can have all the players on your team compete at the same time or better yet, split your team into 2 groups of 6-7 players. 1 group competes in "KING OF THE DIAMOND" and the other 1/2 of your team competes in the outfield "Fly Ball Shuttle Competition" at the same time. After 10-15 minutes have the 2 groups switch stations. Remember, when you are working with players at this age, they all need to develop both of these key defensive skills.



SETTING UP FOR "KING OF THE DIAMOND"

Have one coach, move to home plate with a bucket of balls and get ready to throw (or hit) ground balls.

The 2nd coach is positioned at first base, with an empty ball bag behind him, ready to receive throws from each of the fielders. (We suggest you have the coach at first just catch the balls and drop them in the bucket behind 1st base ... then when the coach at home plate is out of balls ... just run the balls in from 1st and switch buckets. This approach saves a lot of time and keeps the drill moving.)

The players line up, one behind the other, at the regular 2nd base fielding position.

The player at the front of the line moves onto the infield dirt and gets ready to take his turn fielding a ground ball. (It is a good idea to draw a "V" in the dirt where you want the infielder to stand when it is his turn to make a play.)

OK, NOW YOU ARE READY FOR ROUND #1

Roll a "routine" ground ball to each player lined up at 2nd base fielding position.

If the player fields the ball clean and makes an accurate throw to the 1st baseman - he gets to move to the line at the shortstop position.

If a player fumbles the ground ball or makes a bad throw to first - he does not advance to SS but instead moves to the back of the line at 2nd base position.

Coaches, ROUND #1 ends when you have given each player a chance to field 1 ground ball.

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LETS GO FOR ROUND #2

At the start of ROUND 2 you will probably have players still lined up at 2nd base and some over in the at the shortstop line.

Start ROUND 2 by rolling a routine ground ball to each of the players still in the 2nd base fielding line.

Again, if the players make a good play they move up to SS and if they make an error they stay at 2nd base.

Now, turn to the players lined up at SS. Complete ROUND 2 by rolling a little more challenging ground ball to each player in the SS line.

If a player in the SS line makes a nice play and an accurate throw to first base he gets to move over and line up at the 3rd base fielding position.

If a player in the SS line fumbles the ground ball or makes a bad throw to 1st base he needs to move back down to the line at the 2nd base fielding position.

Round #2 ends when each player in the group has had the chance to field his 2nd ground ball of the competition.



ROUND #3, NOW IT STARTS TO GET INTERESTING.

At this point in the competition you will probably have some players lined up at 2nd base, shortstop and 3rd base fielding positions.

Start ROUND 3 by rolling a routine ground ball to each of the players in the 2nd base line. Again, if they make a good play they move up to SS, if they make an error they stay at 2nd base.

Then roll a medium paced ... a little more challenging ground ball ... to each player in the SS line.



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Remember if a player in the SS line makes a nice play and an accurate throw to first base he gets to move up to 3rd base line and if he makes a fielding or throwing error he moves back to 2nd.

Finally, turn and face the players in the "KING OF THE DIAMOND" line at 3rd base and throw a more challenging ground ball to each of them. (Coaches, we want this play to be tougher so roll or hit a faster ground ball and make them work to their backhand or forehand side.)

Now, if a player at 3rd base position makes a good fielding play and an accurate throw across the diamond to 1st base he gets to stay in the "KING OF THE DIAMOND" line.

And as you would guess, if a player in the 3rd baseline makes an error fielding or throwing he moves down to the shortstop line.

Round #3 ends when each player has had the chance to field his 3rd ground ball, so if you have 6 players in the group the round would include 6 ground balls, 1 to each player.

CONTINUE WITH SEVERAL MORE ROUNDS so each player gets lots of the chances to move up. The "KING OF THE DIAMOND" champion is the player that makes the most successful plays at 3rd base.

The best part is that everyone is challenged at their own skill level. Your weaker players will often make the play at 2nd base and get to move up and try plays at the SS position. Your stronger players are pushed to get better when they are at SS and 3rd base trying to make more difficult plays. In our local league we used this drill as the fielding ground ball station at pre-season and all-star tryouts and it worked great. I like to throw the ground balls because there is more control but hitting ground balls can work as well.

Any time you want to add a little more focus and energy to the competition, just offer to buy the "KING OF THE DIAMOND CHAMPIONS" an ice cream cone or other little treat. Once you show "KING OF THE DIAMOND" to your players they are going to ask for it all season long - perfect!