

Indoor Practices Still Need Safety

When outdoor conditions aren't ideal and going inside is an option, it is still important to keep players safe. Most coaches will be in charge of an indoor practice sometime during the season.

Indoor Batting Cages

If your league has access to batting cages and pitching machines, indoor practice can be time well spent.

When using a batting cage, make sure the coach stands behind the L-Screen. Line drives, one-hoppers, and ricochets from support tubing can all result in a "come-backer" to the pitcher that can cause serious injury. Make sure everyone in the batting cage has a helmet on at all times. Also, make sure the cage only has one batter in it at a time, with no "on-deck" batter waiting close by.

If your league uses a pitching machine, make sure a qualified adult is operating it. Don't allow a minor to run the machine just because there are a limited number of coaches. Make sure all observers are well away from the sides of the cage, to avoid being hit by pitched or hit balls. Put in a secondary fence to keep people from standing too close to the batting cage.

Using Open Spaces

Without a batting cage, instead of full swings, have your pitcher throw to a single player practicing bunting mechanics.

The other players should stand a safe distance away. This can be a good time to focus on an otherwise overlooked part of the game. If you are practicing in a school gym, don't use a hard ball; "pickle" balls or even "wiffle" balls can substitute and reduce the chance of property damage or injury.

If you're borrowing the space from a person or other organization, be sure to get clearance for the use of regular baseballs and softballs. Older players are typically mature enough to handle themselves using these smaller spaces. Indoor practices are a great time to work on other key mechanics you might rush through during an outdoor practice, like pitching and catching. Group hand-eye coordination drills, such as "hot potato," are a great example of indoor skills that can be developed that don't require a large area.

Other Tips

If the owners of the space would prefer coaches not use regular baseballs or softballs, a much smaller investment could be made in

alternative, indoor balls. These balls are designed to weigh and feel like a regular baseball or softball, but are much more elastic. This translates into less potential damage done to walls, ceilings and most importantly, people.

Whatever you do at practice, there are just a few more things to consider:

- Players shouldn't throw or drop equipment to the floor on purpose.
- Players still need appropriate hydration breaks. Four ounces of water every fifteen minutes is recommended, allowing for breaks between drills or at least every half hour.
- The local league president must approve all practice sites.

The weather doesn't have to stop a team's progress. Coaches can make creative use of what they have, and explore indoor drill ideas online (or make up their own) to make sure that a rainy day is still a productive one. Go to www.littleleaguecoach.org

to access the free coaches reference center on the Little League website for more information.

