

WEST HARTFORD LITTLE LEAGUE
GUIDING PRINCIPLES
BASEBALL – INSTRUCTIONAL DIVISION

The Basics

- The Instructional League of WHLL is for players aged 6 and 7.
- The target roster size per team is 8-10 players. The more volunteer coaches we get the smaller our rosters can be!
- Rosters are built by accommodating friend requests whenever possible and keeping kids from the same elementary schools together whenever possible.
- Registration typically ends in mid-March.
- Rosters are announced by the first week of April.
- Practices start the 2nd or 3rd week of April, pending field conditions.
- In a typical week each team has one practice of 45-60 minutes and plays one game of 60-75 minutes.
- Games are generally held on Sundays from mid-April to early June. There may be one or two midweek games to accommodate holidays or rain outs.
- Games will primarily be at King Philip Middle School. There will be one or two scheduled games at the Little League complex.
- Practices are scheduled by each coach, usually on a weeknight starting between 5pm and 6pm, or on a Saturday.
- Equipment - Each coach will be provided with the following:
 - Balls for practices/games
 - A key to the Joe-Boxes
 - Joe-boxes contain helmets, balls, bats, bases and other equipment which can be used for practices and games.

The Games

- The goal of games in the instructional league are to have fun, feel safe, and start to learn the real rules of baseball.
- Games are played with league approved baseballs, which are softer and safer than normal baseballs.
- Scores are not kept. There are no team records.
- We suggest coaches use a 2 bucket system for pitching / catching

- 1 coach has a bucket full of balls to pitch with.
 - 2nd coach or parent stands 5-10 feet behind batter filling up a bucket with pitched balls.
 - Switch buckets as needed, keep the game moving fast.
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- Coaches typically pitch overhand while kneeling on one knee from 10-30 feet away depending on the ability of the player. If a player is having difficulty or unable to hit an overhand pitch, the coach may choose to “pitch” with an underhand soft toss. Coaches may also assist a player with hitting/making contact if he/she is having difficulty putting the ball in play. Keep pace of play in mind.
 - Coaches are allowed in the field to work with fielders and base runners about learning all the basics of the game. Coaches are encouraged to work with players from both teams.
 - Teams may choose to keep a portion of the team in the outfield during defensive half innings to do practice drills, play baseball-related games, or anything else fun & engaging. The purpose is to prevent kids from being idle/bored in the outfield. Engagement is key at this age and level.
 - Each team should do what they can to ensure that all players get an equal number of at bats each game and throughout the season. Options include:
 - Having a set lineup all season long and leading off the next game based on whoever made the final out the game prior.
 - Switching lineup each game to ensure each kid bats in as many batting order spots as possible.
 - Batting orders should not be built from best to worst.

The Practices

- Coaches may and are encouraged to use other types of balls during practice (tennis balls, wiffle balls, nerf balls, etc.). Coaches should consider pairing players up with similar skill levels. For instance, do not use real baseballs for catch if one player is able to throw/catch with consistency and the other player cannot catch. Keep safety and fun in mind.
- Coaches should advance players to the most real baseball that they can safely and confidently use, but should pay special attention to not have kids playing with balls that they are afraid of or that are likely to hurt them.
- There are many ways to organize a practice, but every effort should be made to maximize engagement and activity. Avoid “batting practice” where one kid is hitting and 9 other kids are just standing around in the field waiting for a rare ball to get hit their way.

- Small groups often work best at this age. Drills/stations should not last more than 10-15 minutes max, and shorter times are also encouraged.
- Any coaches who want ideas/advice on running practices are encouraged to reach out to the Instructional Division Directors - Jeff Billing (jeff.billing@gmail.com) and Chris Klepps (chris.klepps@gmail.com)
- Kids at this age respond to fun games/competitions. Some basic practice suggestions are:
 - Baserunning drills (5 minutes)
 - Teach kids to run to first base after ball is put in play and to run through the base.
 - Have kids run from first to second, one at a time.
 - Have kids run from second to home, one at a time.
 - Have kids run around all the bases. Set a realistic time (45 seconds, etc.) for the entire team to complete.
 - Small group stations (3-4 kids per group, 5 minutes per group and then rotate):
 - Set up a net near second base. Place kids near pitcher's mound. Set timer to one minute and see how many tennis balls the kids can throw into the net. Repeat and see if they can beat previous score.
 - Wiffleball pop ups. Use limited flight wiffleballs and hit pop ups to each kid with a tennis racket. Gloves are optional. 1 point for touching the ball with hand or glove, 3 points for completing the catch.
 - Ground ball competition (5-10 minutes). Set up a net at second base and a coach at first base. Place one group at short stop and the other at second base. Coach kneels near pitchers mound and alternates throwing ground balls to each group (tennis balls work well). Short stop group throws into the net, second base throws to the coach. Count which group completes more throws.
 - Nerf ball (10-15 minutes). Have fun with the kids at the end of practice by playing a "scrimmage" with nerf balls and nerf bat.
 - As stated above, standard batting practice is discouraged. Keep the kids moving and engaged.

Parent Communication

- Keeping parents informed and engaged throughout the season often results in a more positive experience for all involved.
- Suggest sending out an e-mail to parents after each game (by Monday evening at the latest). The e-mail can and should be short, with a brief mention of the previous game, followed by a

reminder about next practice and game schedule. Always include time and location information for next practice and gametime, even if it doesn't change week to week.

- These e-mails provide an easy avenue for parents to communicate with the coach.

WEST HARTFORD LITTLE LEAGUE

LOCAL RULES

BASEBALL – INSTRUCTIONAL DIVISION

1st Revision March 10, 2006; 2nd Revision December, 2006; 3rd Revision April, 2008; 4th Revision January, 2009; 5th Revision April, 2010; 6th Revision February, 2011; 7th Revision April 2016, Reviewed January 2023, 8th revision March 2025

All coaches must discuss these Rules with the players and parents prior to the start of the regular season.

SPIRIT OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL DIVISION

- Goal is to have fun, develop a love for baseball, learn the rules of the game, develop skills and make friends
- Skill levels can vary widely. Most kids cannot catch a thrown ball.
- Coaches are encouraged to modify the experience in any way that adheres to these principles without deviating from the rules below.

PROGRESSION OF GAMES

- Games 1&2 - Each player bats each inning and is allowed to run the bases even if an out is made.
- Games 3&4 - Each player bats each inning but when outs are recorded the player returns to the dugout.
- Games 5 to end - Develop to three out baseball. Teams are guaranteed for 3 players to bat, but half-inning ends at the earlier of 3 outs being made or offense batting through the lineup.

GROUND RULES

1. Please make sure to check the West Hartford Little League General Rules which appear on the West Hartford Little League Website www.westhartfordlittleleague.com.
2. The Rules contained in the Official little Rulebook supersede these local Rules if they are more restrictive.
3. Coaches should pitch overhand for all kids who are able to hit overhand pitching. Coaches may pitch from a knee if preferable. However, coaches are encouraged to meet each player at their skill level. Coaches may pitch underhand if a player cannot or is struggling to hit overhand pitching, or with a soft toss flip from the side. In situations where a player is having difficulty making contact after a number of pitches, coaches are encouraged to do what is necessary to help build confidence and keep the game moving (for instance, standing with a batter and helping him/her make contact). The use of a batting tee is discouraged.
4. No stealing or leading off base. No

5. There will be no advancing on overthrows to any base.
6. Umpires are not needed in this division. Offensive coach will determine if an out is made. When in doubt, it is an out.
7. All players are in the batting order the entire game, even if they are not playing in the field. Coaches should ensure each player gets an equal number of at bats throughout the season. Coaches may implement a constant and consecutive batting order at the beginning of the season, and starting the next game's lineup wherever the final out was made at the previous game. Coaches may also alternate the lineup on a game-by-game basis to ensure each player hits in various spots in the lineup throughout the season. The same players should not be at the top/bottom of the lineup each game.
8. Do not bat more than once through the order per inning.
9. There are no walks or strikeouts.
10. Coaches may choose to play all of their players on defense, or may choose to split up the team so that half of the players are playing in the infield positions, and half are doing separate developmental work in the outfield with another coach. Small outfield groups allow the kids to keep moving and minimize inaction.
11. Coaches may be first and third base coaches. However, at least one coach must be in the dugout at all times while their team is at bat. If a team has only two coaches at a game, a parent is permitted to coach a base or be in charge of the dugout.
13. Batting helmets must be worn when batting and running the bases.
14. Practice swings are not permitted until batter is at the plate. No on-deck swings. All bats must be kept inside the backstop when not in use.
15. All Players must be given the opportunity to play every position for at least one inning at some point during the season. If a coach feels that it would be dangerous for a particular player to play a particular position, he or she must discuss it with the player's parents. Sitting kids on the bench is strongly discouraged, but no player may sit on the bench for 2 consecutive innings.
16. Maximum game length is 75 minutes. Most games last 2-4 innings. Coaches should meet at the end of the second inning, and each inning after that, and decide whether the game should continue or is concluded. An inning may not start more than 15 minutes prior to the next scheduled game.
18. The length of the base paths will be 50 feet.
19. No bunting.
20. No extra innings.
21. No head first slides, except when returning to a base.
22. When a ball is hit into the outfield, runners can't advance after the ball re-enters the infield diamond.
23. There will be no regular season standings and no playoffs.

24. Score is not kept at this level. There will be no mercy rule.

25. All field boxes must be locked after all practices and games.

26. Coaches should prominently display the sponsorship banner during practices and games, if possible.

27. The infield fly rule will not be in effect.

Please remember to keep this all in perspective and have fun!!!

Edited March 2025