



Baseball PEI Introductory Coaches Manual

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INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 2018, Baseball PEI tasked our three summer clinicians – Matthew Barlow, Tessa Hood and Dawson McCormack – with the job of creating a coaching manual for introductory coaches. All three clinicians had a great deal of experience as players and a great knowledge of baseball. Their directions were fairly wide-open; they had to construct something for introductory coaches that would be easy and effective for their consumption. They scoured every imaginable baseball resource they could find - from NCCP manuals to old baseball texts to the latest research from leading baseball minds like Kainoa Correa and Kyle Boddy – and consulted with former coaches and Board members from Baseball PEI. The result was this document. This is something of which they and Baseball PEI are very proud.

There are millions of documents and resources for baseball coaches; many of which are much more in-depth than this manual. However, in feedback from many of the coaches who graciously volunteer to coach various baseball teams on Prince Edward Island each summer, few documents are clear and straight-to-the-point. Many of these coaches are often folks who volunteer after working forty hours each week and aren't interested in doing in-depth research on coaching. They want something clear, easy-to-read and accessible that will help them be better coaches, and in turn, improve the experience for their players. That was the motivation for creating this document.

As with many things in life, there are lots of differing opinions on various topics in baseball. There may be suggestions/styles/beliefs in this document you may not agree with in person. That being said, the clinicians who created this used the latest baseball best practice and theory.

I hope it is useful to you. If you have any suggestions, feel free to pass them along. We will be updating this document as time goes on. I congratulate Matt, Tessa and Dawson for their hard work and great job on this project. It follows the mantra we follow at Baseball PEI – when we help coaches improve, it improves everything in baseball here on Prince Edward Island.

Randy Byrne
Executive Director, Baseball PEI

PREPARATION

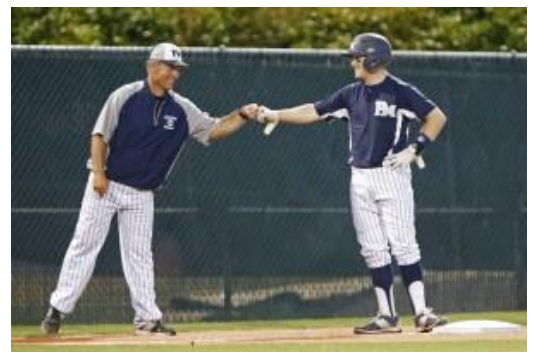
Game

- Develop a pre-game routine for your team (the players should be able to do most of this on their own after the first few times).
- Expect players to arrive at a specific amount of time before the game starts.
 - If a player is late, they won't start - no exceptions!
- The entire warmup should be done as a team.
 - Run, stretch (dynamic and static), throwing program, whiffle balls, et cetera.
 - Infield/outfield.
- In-game routine.
 - Prepared beforehand and have the defensive alignment posted in the dugout for all innings of the game. This will help with game flow.
 - Have a lineup card/batting order posted in the dugout.
 - Let the players play different positions as this will aid their development.
 - No defensive positioning specialization until around approximately high-school age.
 - The goal is development - not winning. If you focus on development, the winning will come as a by-product!



COMMUNICATION

- When instructing, only introduce three - four key points; any more than this and the players will not retain information and will not be able to focus on individual areas of improvement.
- The best coaches include all three learning types – auditory, visual and kinesthetic – while explaining a concept, fundamental, or drill.
 - Auditory – Learns through listening.
 - 30% of the population learns this way.
 - Visual – Learns by observing.
 - 65% of the population learns this way.
 - Kinesthetic – Learns by physically doing it (hands-on).
 - 5% of the population learns this way



- Develop a relationship with your players.
 - Players who enjoy their coach will work for their coach and will come prepared to work hard and improve.
- Use a lot of positive reinforcement – it is scientifically proven to be the most effective way to teach a new skill.
 - Focus on the good – it will keep the players motivated.
- Teach your players to overcome obstacles.
 - Grit and determination” – will help them succeed out in the real world.
- Communicate the expectations of the team to your players and to the parents prior to the start of the year. It is vitally important to develop a relationship with the parents as they will be dealing with you on a regular basis during the course of the season.
 - Be an approachable coach and provide contact information (email, phone number, et cetera.)



FUNDAMENTALS

Fundamentals are fundamental. What this means is that the basic fundamentals of baseball (fielding, hitting, throwing, running, pitching) must all be mastered before extending into each different aspect of the game. For example, you are not going to teach turning double plays to players that have not mastered the basic fundamentals of fielding a ground ball hit right at them.

Fielding

- Before the pitchers throws the first pitch to a new hitter, we must know as fielders where the ball is going if it is hit to them. Know the situation.
 - Example: you are playing shortstop, runner on first base, one out. A routine ground ball is hit to your left – where is the play? Second base to try for a double play.
 - This will allow us to be relaxed and comfortable in our defensive position and will alleviate the need to panic or rush a throw if we haven’t surveyed the situation beforehand.
- Preparing for a ground ball (pre-pitch routine).
 - Must be prepared to move in any direction – develop a pre-pitch routine.
 - “Prep-Steps” – as the pitcher starts his delivery, take a few (two or three) steps to get your feet moving to anticipate a ball hit in play.
 - In an athletic position after the steps, on balls of feet, a ball enters the hitting zone – ready to explode in any direction.
- Proper fielding position (stationary).

- Athletic position (knees bent, strong base).
- Feet slightly wider than shoulder width.
- Glove foot slightly (heel-toe) in front of throwing a foot.
- Outstretched arm off centre of a hat; no bend in the elbow.
- Flat wrist (finger-tips pointing towards dirt).
 - This creates more area for the ball to make contact with the glove.
- Your back is flat.
- Throwing hand on top on the glove – this allows for a quick transfer.



- Proper Fielding Position (approach to the ball when the ball hit directly at fielder).
 - Create an angle to 1st Base (or whatever base to which you're throwing).
 - “Banana” – work around the baseball.
 - Stutter steps – as the ball gets closer, steps become smaller/quicker.
 - “Right foot, left foot, glove” – easy queues to remember to get into proper fielding position (opposite for lefthanded player).
 - Left foot hits the ground just before the ball arrives – acts as a timing mechanism. If timed right, it will allow momentum to carry forward.
 - If left foot hits too early - flat-footed, no momentum/angle.
 - If left foot hits too late - ball goes thru legs or is fielded in between the feet and forward momentum is lost.
 - Momentum is extremely important – it could make the difference between safe and out. Stay low throughout the fielding and throwing motion.
 - Glove goes directly out front and **to the ground (get it dirty)**.
 - 100x quicker/easier to come up on a ball than go down.
 - Only have to “guess” one direction if the glove is in the dirt (up).
 - Stay low/athletic position the entire time.
 - Once the ball is fielded, throwing hand goes into the glove and brings the ball up into proper throwing position to be prepared to be thrown to the appropriate base.
 - Follow your throw/keep feet moving once you throw the ball.
 - Will help players stay low and use their legs while throwing

Hitting

- Selecting the right bat.
 - Swing a bat you can handle and feels comfortable.
 - Length – around hip height, nothing higher.
 - Weight – stay within recommended guidelines and whatever feels comfortable (-10, -5, -3, et cetera)
- Lower Half (before load, coil, et cetera).
 - Athletic position (knees bent, strong base).
 - Feet slightly wider than shoulder width.
 - “Straight-up” – feet are parallel (not open, not closed).
 - Toes are pointing in opposite batter’s box.
 - Weight is evenly distributed:
 - 50% on the front leg.
 - 50% on the back leg.
 - Be comfortable and relaxed! Don’t tense up.
- Upper half/hands (before load, coil, etc.).
 - Grip.
 - ‘Knocking knuckles’ (see figure).
 - Loose grip/wrists.
 - A tight grip will take away bat speed/rhythm/rotation.
 - Start with the bat on the shoulder at 45° angle – don’t wrap around the head.
 - Lift hands to ear height - keep at the same height during load.
- The load (weight transfer).
 - Remember – 50% on the front leg, 50% on the back leg to start.
 - Must come back before going forward - generates power/energy.
 - Example: kicking a soccer ball - more power is created if you generate momentum/energy before kicking the ball rather than standing still then kicking.
 - Why is the load important?
 - Acts as a timing mechanism and a continuation of rhythm/power.
 - Movements are under control/fluid, not quick/jerky.
- Timing
 - When the pitchers start his/her load (leg-kick), start transferring weight to the back leg (60/40).
 - Hands stay at the same height, moving straight back towards catcher/umpire/backstop.
 - Don’t drop/clutch your hands, creates a lot of problems.
 - Shoulders stay square* to the plate.
 - **Slight shoulder turn is necessary to load**



- If shoulders turn too much as you load, you can't see the ball.
- Very difficult to hit a moving object if you can only see it with one eye.

○ Stride

- Stride is used for timing purposes – NOT FOR POWER.
 - Leg kick/stride/tap – all three are viable.
- Personal preference for timing.
- As you load your hands/transfer weight to back leg, stride towards the pitcher (toes are still facing the other batter's box) while keeping weight on the back leg.
- Front foot must be planted, and front knee must be locked before starting to swing.
- Land on the ball of the foot, still explosive.
 - Landing on the heel of your foot will result in loss of balance/power.
- Gives back hip something to rotate around and acts as a brake for the energy created in the legs/hips.



○ Swing

- “Hips lead the hands” – back hip initiates the swing.
- Hands are along for the ride.
- Keep hands inside the baseball – knob of the bat to the ball.
 - If knob of the bat was a flashlight, you want to shine the light on the ball as long as possible.
 - Closer the hands are to the body - the stronger you are.
- Top hand snaps barrel of the bat to the ball at the point of contact – maintains bat speed.
- At the point of contact:
 - Stiff front leg.
 - Toes on the back foot are pointing to the ground.
 - Hands are above the barrel.
- After swing is complete:
 - Back hip replaces the front hip.
 - Back shoulder replaces the front shoulder.
 - Finish in a balanced, athletic position.
 - Should be able to rewind into original stance quickly if balanced correctly.



Baserunning

- Running to 1st Base on a ground ball:
 - Drop the bat after finished swinging.
 - Left-handed hitter will crossover with your left foot.
 - Right-handed hitter will push off with the left foot, the first step with right foot.
 - Quick, short steps to gain speed.
 - On balls of feet, not heels or toes. Being on the balls of our feet will help maintain balance and result in more fluid strides.
 - Once the top speed is reached, take a peek at the ball.
 - If the ball is fielded, pick up the front side of the base and run through the base (don't slow down) making contact with the front side of the base to avoid injury.
 - If the ball is missed/goes into the outfield: create an angle to 'cut' the base. Once $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way down the line, start to gradually take steps on the outside of the baseline. We want to make contact with the corner of the base closest to the pitcher's mound in order to create the best angle to the next base.
 - Once we can't advance any further, put on the brakes. Weight shifts to the front leg while watching the ball at all times and we return to the base promptly.
- Reacting to a Batted Ball:
 - **At 1st Base** – be aggressive, look to take the extra base.
 - With 2 outs, we must go on contact.
 - With 0 or 1 out, we must know the situation.
 - On a ground ball, we have to advance to second base.
 - Same as running to 1st base, take a peek where the ball is.
 - Line drive we must freeze until we are sure the ball is down/okay to advance.
 - If the ball is caught, return to the base quickly.
 - If the ball is not caught, advance accordingly and listen/watch your third base coach.
 - Fly ball to right field, go halfway to second base.
 - Fly ball to centre field or left field, go $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way to second base.
 - **At second Base** - be aggressive, look to score on a base hit.
 - 2 outs, running on contact, but don't run into an easy out.
 - 0 or 1 out and only a runner at second base, must know the situation.
 - On a ground ball hit directly at us OR to our left (past the pitcher), advance to third base and pick up your 3rd Base coach.



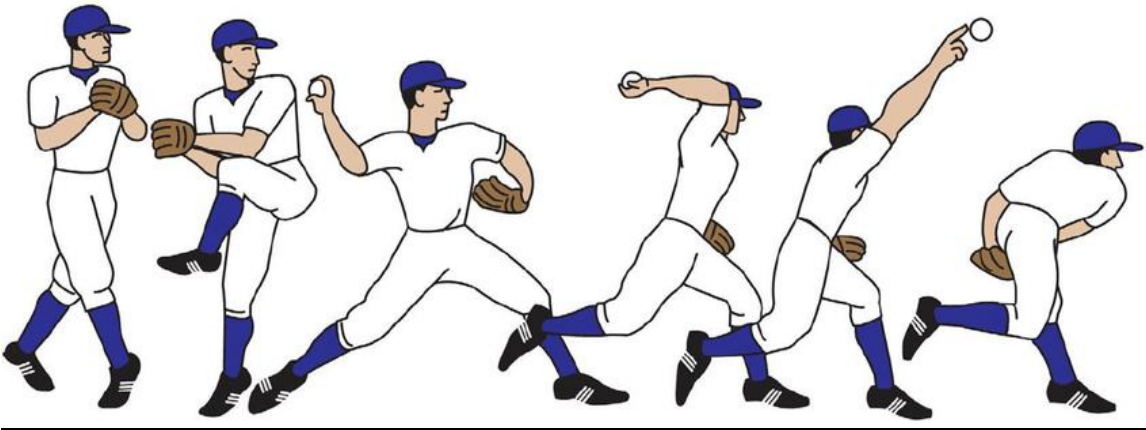
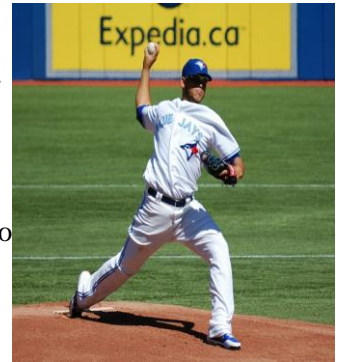
- On a ground ball hit to our right, watch the ball flight to first base and make a decision on whether to advance or stay put.
 - On a fly ball to right field, tag-up if deep, run aggressively to third base.
 - On a fly ball to centre field or left field, the ball must be deep to tag-up; if not deep, go halfway to 3rd base and face the ball.
- **At 3rd Base** – be aggressive, but smart!
 - With two outs, running on contact, but don't run into an easy out.
 - With 0 or 1 out, must know the game situation/score.
 - Ground balls - you must take a look at the infield and talk with your coach.
 - Infield playing deep (not close/early in the game) – can advance home on a ground ball.
 - Infield playing shallow (close/late in the game) – don't advance, watch the ball.
 - Fly balls – anything in the air/to the outfield, immediately return to the base (tag-up).
 - If ball drops can easily score.
 - If the ball is caught, still a chance to tag-up and score.
- Things to remember:
 - To be a successful baserunner, the runner must pay attention at all times.
 - Hitting each base with their foot on the inside corner of the base that will minimize wide turns.
 - When a runner is attempting to beat the throw of an infielder to first base, the runner must run through first base.
 - On a hit to the outfield, the baserunner will want to round first base rather than run through it. Turning the base will allow the runner to advance on an outfielder's error, a ball that ends up in a gap, or a ball that gets over the outfielder's head.
 - If the outfielder makes a play and the runner believes he cannot advance another base, the brakes should be put on and retreat to the previous base while watching what happens with the ball.
 - There's no getting around the base paths without hustle. A full effort both mentally and physically is key to becoming not only a good baserunner but a great athlete.

Throwing/Pitching

- ALWAYS a four-seam grip (except when pitching and not wanting to throw a four-seam fastball).
- Why? The ball travels straight and is easier to catch.
- Arm Positioning
 - Elbow near or above shoulder height.
 - The arm should almost make a 90-degree angle or an "L" shape.
 - Follow through over the top, bringing throwing a hand down to the opposite hip.
 - Keep glove hand tucked into chest near front shoulder – this ensures that both shoulders stay closed and don't fly open.



- Arm Motion.
 - Ball and hand start in the glove.
 - Release both from glove; starting low.
 - Bring hand and ball back and up towards back shoulder at a 90-degree angle or “L” shape.
 - Start momentum going forward.
 - Release the ball out in front of your body.
 - Throwing arm follows through across the body and finishes near the front hip.
 - The circular motion will support your throw by providing more ordinary drive than merely taking your arm straight back and forth. The rounded motion should initiate when you're isolating the ball from your glove.
- Legs/Feet Positioning.
 - Throwing is much like hitting when it comes to your legs and weight transfer.
 - At the start, weight should be 50/50 on each leg/foot.
 - Load: weight transfers to 60% on the back leg and 40% on the front leg.
 - Drive: Weight is drove forward switching the forces to 40% on the back leg to 60% on the front leg. Drive the front hip toward the target.
 - Front leg becomes stiff, while back foot pivots toward the target.



Character (https://www.iidmglobal.com/expert_talk/expert-talk-categories/leadership/coach_mentor/id42522.html)

- Many coaches possess numerous qualities that make them great, and players are willing and wanting to play for them:
 - 1) Organization and Commitment.
 - The best coaches come prepared to practices/games ready to go to work. They develop a plan and execute the plan, trusting the process.
 - 2) Consistent.
 - The coaching methods used are consistent and easily understandable.
 - 3) Feedback.

- Great coaches provide useful feedback for players to use to improve. The coach asks a question pertaining to the particular skill trying to be taught, and analysis is given by the player – in a way, players are then coaching themselves without realizing it.
- 4) Knowledgeable.
- The best coaches have a combination of experience from all aspects of the sport. Whether it be as a player, coach, official, administrator, volunteer, or a fan. They are able to apply their knowledge in the most efficient and clear manner to the players.
- 5) Patient.
- Coaching young players is a marathon, not a sprint. Coaches must be patient over the course of a season with their players. The main goal of coaching is to develop players into better athletes and more importantly, better people. This process will not happen overnight.
- 6) Flexible.
- Coaches are process-oriented until it is evident that something will not work. They are able to adapt to the situation and develop the best plan.
- Unfortunately, not everything on the baseball field can be controlled. You must preach to your players that they can only worry about things under their control. In order to be a successful team, you must simply beat the other team in the following six areas:
- 1) Work Ethic
 - 2) Practice Habits
 - 3) Attitude
 - 4) Mental Toughness
 - 5) Desire
 - 6) The ability to focus
- If your team can master these six elements, they will develop into not only better athletes, but more importantly, better people. It does not take any skill or talent to work hard and have a positive attitude; everyone can do it. Those who are willing to put forth the extra effort will see how this is important not only on the field but also off the field in the “real world.”



Practice

- Develop a practice plan before the practice begins!
 - Being prepared for practice is the most efficient way to ensure that it runs smoothly and there is minimal “down-time” for the players participating.
- In being prepared, this shows the team and the parents that you want to be there and are seeking to improve the individual skills of each player on the team.
- Train muscle memory by maximizing the number of reps each player will receive in each drill; stress efficiency – minimize sitting around.

- The players are there to get better each day – “practice like you play.”
- A distracted player is a player that does not improve, which is the main goal of coaching.
- Stick to a timeline during practice, will help your players stay on track/know what to expect.
- Ask for the feedback! You won’t know if your practices are effective if you don’t ask for feedback from the players, other coaches, and potentially parents.

Practice Planning

- There are many key elements in order to run a smooth and efficient practice where all players leave the field as better players and better people:
 - **Goal/Purpose.**
 - Every good practice starts with a practice plan prepared before arriving at the field.
 - Overview with the team what you will be trying to accomplish by the end of the practice and why - Players need to understand **why** they are doing a specific drill/exercise.
 - **Warm-up (20-30 mins):** develop a routine at the start of the season. All of these can be done as a group, select a different leader each practice.
 - Light Run/Jog to start - 1/2 lap(s) around bases/field or pole-to-pole.
 - Dynamic Stretching - high-knees, butt-kicks, lunges, frankensteins, et cetera.
 - Static stretching - start with legs, finish with arms.
 - Throwing Program - gradually increasing distance.
 - **Skills and Drills (1 hour):** focus on a specific skill(s).
 - Throwing (can be done during “throwing program/warm-up”).
 - Fielding – footwork, routes to balls, defensive fundamentals.
 - Hitting – tee work, soft toss, batting practice (BP) thrown by coach, live BP (thrown by players, work on game-like situations).
 - Baserunning – rounding bases, reading the play, stealing.
 - Pitching – windup, stretch, pickoffs, pitchers fielding practice (PFP).
 - Team Concepts – bunt defence, cutoffs/relays, signs.
 - **Fun Activity (15-20 mins, some will take longer):** preferably baseball-related.
 - Pepper – line players up along the fence. The coach will start with the ball 10-15 feet away from the fence and will hit soft grounders to all players, in no particular order. The players must keep the ball in front of them in order to avoid being eliminated - a bobble is okay. Once a player fields the ball, they must throw the ball **under-hand** back to the coach to hit a soft grounder once again. Last player standing wins.
 - Knock-out – Evenly spread out players at third base, shortstop, and second base. A coach will play first base. Another coach will hit ground balls to the players at third base, shortstop, and second



base. The players must field the ball cleanly and make a good, accurate throw to the coach at first base. Failure to field the ball cleanly or a bad throw will result in elimination. Last one standing wins.

- To make this more game-like, the eliminated players can become runners to put additional pressure on the fielders.
- Three- or four-team game (game situation drill) - Divide your players into three or four teams (four groups of three players is ideal). One team will hit, and the other 3 teams will be in the field. Each player will try and hit pitches delivered by the coach with a maximum of 3 strikes. Once the ball is hit in play, the fielders must simply make an out, then the next player in the group will hit. If a hitter reaches base, they may stay on base while the next batter is hitting. Once the fielders get three outs, the next group will go into hit. The team with the most hits after everyone hits will be named the victors.
- **Cooldown (10 mins)**
 - Sprints/running.
 - Group stretch (one leader) – can hold a practice debrief at the same time, go over what was learned that day and reinforce important points so that they will be remembered for next time. Also, mention your next scheduled field time and see if anyone knows if they will be absent/missing.



Development (LTAD)

Rather than having given positions, the superlative way to train a young ball team is with a team full of players that have experience around the Though allocated positions and distinct roles become vital to succeeding at the advanced ages of baseball, the staff of youth teams should give the opportunity to all athletes to mature and experiment all positions to develop into more experienced and knowledgeable baseball players.

entire diamond.

When kids are introduced to pitching, their arms need to be eased into this adjustment. You cannot have the same kids pitching every game, or their arms will eventually become sore and injured. You want to develop your team every time you hit the field, whether it is a practice or a game. Give every kid an opportunity to pitch an inning and see how it goes. This will allow your team to adapt to this adjustment and it will give you hindsight of who will ultimately become your pitchers as the season rolls along.

Coaches should be patient when it comes to teaching the skills of the game so the youth can overcome their maximum desire to be a ballplayer. Young kids are not going to know all the right techniques and fundamentals right away. Patience is needed and the process should be taught slowly and precisely.

A coach's main goal for the team should be to have fun. Players should enjoy their time while on the ball field and should feel welcome to countless opportunities. Instruction should be given with a positive tone and should avoid saying the word

“no.” Constant praise even over the smallest of things will encourage the players to become better and keep striving to succeed at these simple instructions.

On PEI, the regular season for all teams participating in Baseball PEI governed leagues are used for development - teams are seeded based on their proximity to the host association for Provincial Championships and Eliminations. This means that over the course of a twelve-game regular season schedule, zero (0) of these games mean anything in regards to seeding for provincial championships/eliminations. This is great as a coach - there is no pressure to win a certain amount of games in order to qualify for a Provincial Championship and this will allow each player the equal chance to develop and further themselves as a baseball player and an athlete.

