



## **Suggested Plan of Action for Rally Cap**

While I was skeptical of the program as an Association President, with more research and familiarity with the Rally Cap Program, I believe it is the right way forward in terms of growing the game for young children and developing their skills. It faces challenges on PEI, in terms of numbers - and more seriously - attitudes. That being said, it should be the goal of Baseball PEI to promote the correct implementation of Rally Cap

### **Why do we need Rally Cap?**

In the past, organized Mosquito baseball started at age 9, and children 8U generally played Rookie/Pony, while children 5U played t-ball. While some children found Rookie and T-ball exciting - generally those who excelled in it - a number of children were put off by the game. It involved too much standing around, very little repetition of core skills and didn't prepare many for the jump to Mosquito. Today, we live in a more sedentary society, alarmingly more so for youth. Whereas youth fifteen years ago were outside playing baseball or some sort of physical activity on a daily basis at home/in their neighbourhood with siblings/friends, today more and more children in their daily spare time are watching television, playing video games or are on the computer, with very little physical activity taking place. The only time many young ballplayers pick up a baseball is at organized baseball. As a result, skills and ability in baseball, according to many, are significant lower for children in this age range of 6-11. While we must promote physical activity and literacy at home (and acknowledging that in order to become a great baseball player you must play and practice every day), we must be pragmatic and realize for many players, this isn't the case. Therefore, their time at a ballfield must be as concise and developmentally useful as possible. If they are at the ballfield for 75-90 minutes, 65-80 minutes cannot be spent standing around doing nothing. The entire time and space must be effectively used to grow and develop players. Classic Rookie or T-ball models cannot do that. Rally Cap can do that.

### **What is Rally Cap?**

According to Baseball Canada it is for 4-6 year olds, but for Baseball PEI, it will be for pre-Junior Mosquito players – at least for 6-8 year old, but we would encourage Associations to use the White and Grey Cap model of Rally Cap for 5U players. Players of that age group are divided into teams of six players, and three teams meet at a field at one time. The first 10 minutes are devoted to warming up, and then there are three 20-25 minute blocks. In the infield, two teams will play an inning of a game, where both teams and each player gets to bat (depending on skill level by tee, underhand pitch, or overhand pitch/pitching machine). Runs are scored the conventional way, but if coaches elect, runs or points can be added for good defensive plays. Players can still be out or safe, just like any other baseball game. During this time, the third team is in the outfield working on a specific skill. After 20-25 minutes/an inning played in the game, the teams rotate. One of the teams playing the game go to the outfield, while the team in the outfield goes to the infield to play against the third team. Under this model, each team plays two innings and gets a chance to work on a specific skill in the outfield (another time that week there could be practices without games, where players would work on four-five specific skills for 15-20 minutes each - throwing, receiving, hitting, base running, etc.).



With all of that being said, Baseball PEI realizes many associations don't have exact numbers to completely follow the Baseball Canada method. Adaptability would be encouraged; for example, four teams of six could be at the field at one time, and each team would play two innings while working on two specific skills in the outfield, or each team could have between 5-8 players on them. The main goal is that as little time as possible is spent standing around and the most time possible would be spent playing and/or working on a skill. Baseball PEI has thorough manuals for coaches with practice drills, plans and strategies, and to teach certain skills.

Associations would be encouraged to provide at least two, if not three, testing days - one at the start of the year, one in the middle and one at the end. If an association wished, players at the lower end of the skill scale (white and grey caps, for example) could form one or two teams, or be fairly interspersed amongst teams. This testing could be done by a representative of Baseball PEI, or a Rally Cap-trained person from their Association (more on that further). For more details and information, visit <http://baseball.ca/rally-cap-initiation-program> or check out a Baseball Canada Rally Cap Manual.

### **Misconceptions around Rally Cap on PEI**

- It is simply a new name for the old Rookie level offered by most association for 6-8 year olds
  - o It is much different than Rookie, and is a specific, structured program
- It is too complicated
  - o Most Rookie teams would have at least three coaches and stations at practices anyway. It isn't nearly as complicated as many think, plus there are easy resources to go along with it. Even if you don't know much about baseball, a good coach can easily run a proper-Rally Cap session.
- Unless you have 18 or 36 children, you can't run it properly
  - o Rally Cap can be adapted, so that as long as you have 12 children or more, you could run a Rally Cap session. If for some reason there was occasionally fewer, as long as you follow the principle of skill development and little standing around, you can run a variant
- It's not worth the effort
  - o Very much the contrary – it better prepares players for the big jump to Mosquito baseball, and it involves much less standing around, which appeals to young children

### **Positives of Rally Cap**

- Specific structure and time frames allows sessions to run for 75 minutes (or longer, if you wish) and there is little time wasted
- Much more effective use of time in regards to skill development
- Much less standing around
- Manuals provide coaches with pre-made practice plans and tips on how to teach certain skills – once things are organized, there is little thought or extra planning needed on the coaches' part
- If done properly, players skill growth will be visible shortly, and they will be much more ready for Mosquito

### **Negatives of Rally Cap**



- It takes a little more planning at the start of the season: a skill-testing session, who will be on what mini-teams
- Less “official games”

### **Recommendations from Executive Director**

- Each Association have Rally Cap and its benefits explained to them at meetings
- Each Baseball PEI Association send 1-2 people in March or April to a Rally Cap Prep session, in which they could get Rally Cap certification (if Desi gets proper accreditation from Baseball Canada) and have the proper Rally Cap method demonstrated to them in a gym or outdoors. These people could set up proper Rally Cap program in their Association, and could do the testing
- In Quebec, it is mandatory for Associations to offer Rally Cap. Within the next 2-3 years, properly-run Rally Cap programs should become mandatory for all Baseball PEI Associations. Some Associations may protest, but it is necessary for growth of skill and sport
- This issue be discussed more in-depth by Baseball PEI Executive

### **Closing**

For many, the skill level of many Mosquito-level players has dropped over the past number of years, and for many of these players, proper teaching and coaching as alluded them. Plus, there is a drop-off in numbers from pre-Junior Mosquito to Junior Mosquito. Based on reasons presented above, it is time for the proper implementation of Rally Cap to take place in all Associations. We must keep in mind that many of our Associations they won't have the numbers to follow the Rally Cap Manual exactly. That being said, adaptability must be allowed as long as the basic principles are followed. Baseball PEI must offer as much support to Associations as possible in order to see the proper implementation of Rally Cap happen, and check in from time-to-time to make sure it remains running properly (more discussion may be needed as to how to do this effectively). At the end of the day, if this is done right, it will benefit players significantly in terms of skills development and keep more players interested and involved.