

## **DDMBA PRACTICE PLANNING & DRILLS**

### **2022 season**

The DDMBA practice planning and drill information included in this section is taken from Baseball Canada training manuals and long term athlete development [LTAD] model plan as posted on their website [www.baseball.ca](http://www.baseball.ca) [specifically at [www.baseball.ca/files/ltad.pdf](http://www.baseball.ca/files/ltad.pdf) ]. This document supplements and does not replace the existing DDMBA Coaches Manual located at [www.ddmba.net](http://www.ddmba.net) at link “coaching info”.

**Purpose:** The goal of this section of the DDMBA Coaching Handbook is to ensure coaches have resources to access when planning and carrying out drills at a practice specific to their age group. Each age group has different developmental milestones. A DDMBA coach has “done his/her job” if the player [a] improves and [b] smiles at the end of season and says he/she wants to play baseball again the next season.

#### **Age specific player development targets DDMBA seeks are as follows:**

**Rally Cap:** Designed for players ages 5-9. Please access the BNS website at [www.baseballnovascotia.com](http://www.baseballnovascotia.com) or Baseball Canada website at [www.baseball.ca](http://www.baseball.ca) as this age group has a very specific developmental program with games and drills outlined in great detail. Players learn and progress sequentially and are issued six [6] different color baseball caps. Fundamentals learned for hitting, running, receiving, throwing.

**11U:** Focus is on fundamental skills development. Players learn hitting sequence, throwing and receiving basics, basic pitching, very basic position play.

**13U:** Focus remains on fundamental skills with introduction to developing specific skills and position play. Continue to learn hitting sequence, throwing and receiving basics, basic pitching, basic position play.

**15U:** Focus falls more on developing specific skills and on positional play. Introduction of mental training [pre-competition routine, mental preparation, goal setting and coping with success/failure]; discussion of tactical training [emphasis on teamwork, developing positional tasks], defensive rotations, offensive situations, positional awareness in games; add-on of technical instruction [advanced techniques, position specific emphasis, introduction of curveball at age 14].

**18U:** Focus is on consolidating specific skills and positional play with introduction to specific training. Refinement of core skills/position specific skills, add in advanced techniques/skills. Discuss decision-making, tactical awareness, analyzing the game.

#### **Next:**

The next few pages will outline how to plan a practice for the length of time issued [typically 90-120 minutes] and provide different drills for each area of the game that can be worked on at practice.

**Running the Practice:**

Practice time is precious, so you'll want to make the most of it.

Here are some tips for running efficient and successful practices:

- Get to practice early and insist that your players arrive on time.
- Share responsibilities with another coach (and other helpers if necessary). This will give players more individual attention and help keep them active and involved.
- Keep drills and other activities brief (i.e. 5-10 minutes each).
- Provide as many contacts with the ball as possible - throwing, receiving, fielding and hitting. In a game, players may only get four or five chances at bat or to field a ball. They must get many more contacts in practice to improve.
- Do the more demanding skills and drills early in the practice.
- Continually challenge players by increasing the difficulty of the drills once they have mastered easier ones.
- Treat all players equally and emphasize positive feedback. Try to talk to every player individually at every practice.

**Include the following elements in every two hour [120 minute] practice:**

**First 15 minutes:**

- Warm-up – Easy run or warm-up activity followed by dynamic movement/stretching will prepare players for the more demanding activities that follow.

**Next 90 minutes – apportion depending on the team needs and part of the season:**

- Base running - Use races and relays to improve running technique. Players should practise running from home to first, and from base to base. Strategies like tagging up and advancing can also be practised. Some elements of base running can also be included in batting practice.
- Throwing and Receiving - Spend some time each session on developing throwing form and accuracy as well as arm strength. This section can incorporate time for pitching.
- Defensive skills - Practise all defensive skills used in a game on a regular basis. These include moving to the ball, fielding ground balls, and catching pop-ups [infield/outfield work].
- Batting Practice - To run this part of practice efficiently, have players rotate through a series of stations. These could include hitting off a batting tee, soft toss, and "live" batting practice.

**Last 15 minutes:**

- Cool-Down - Conclude the practice with stretching and easy running to bring the player's heart rate and body temperature back toward normal resting levels. A summary of what has been accomplished at this practice and goals for the next practice/game can also be incorporated into the cool down.

**Drills:****1. Running the Bases:**

Base running is one of the most natural skills for the young player. Most of the players at this age enjoy running and are in reasonably good condition, but many of them have improper running technique. The coach's job will be to correct errors in running form, teach correct base running skills and develop positive attitudes about hustle and aggressiveness.

**Running Form:** Head forward. Arms pump "eye socket/hip pocket". Comfortable stride length.

**Drills:** Each player practices running home to first, then first to third, then second to home with each player spaced out to prevent passing. A relay is fun with players starting on all four bases. See who can run a full loop back to his base first. Winners of each session can play a final four.

**Teaching Sliding:** An excellent place to teach sliding is on wet grass. Have the players take off their shoes and slide to a loose base. If the grass is long, it need not be wet, but wet grass is easier to slide on than dry. In the beginning, have players assume the finished position 2 or 3 times before actually sliding so they are reasonably certain of what they are trying to do.

**Bent Leg Slide:** The most effective and popular slide in baseball. It provides the quickest approach to the base and also enables the runner to pop-up and advance.

The following are coaching points in learning the bent leg slide:

- Start to slide at least 9 to 10 feet from the bag. Do not slide late.
- Take off from either leg (whichever is most natural) and bend it under.
- Slide on the outside of the bent leg, contacting the ground with the calf, thigh and rear.
- Keep low to the ground. Do not leap or jump.
- Throw the head back as both legs bend, thus preventing the knees from hitting the ground first.
- Face the instep of the bottom foot in the direction of the slide, preventing the spikes from catching the ground.
- Always touch the base with the top leg.
- Keep the leg relaxed, the knee slightly bent, and the heel off the ground.

**Bent Leg - Pop-up and Advance:** Towards the end of the bent leg slide the player pushes the bent leg up before the slide is completed. The momentum generated from the slide along with the push up from the ground by the bent leg and the push up from the extended foot on the bag, spins the runner towards the next base.

## **2. Base Stealing:**

In contemplating a steal, each coach must consider the following questions:

- What is the ability of the runner?
- How good is the pitcher's move to first base?
- Can the hitter move the runner to the next base?
- Is the steal worth the risk?
- Does the situation warrant the attempted steal?

**Stealing Second** - Getting the jump on the pitcher: A good base runner gets the jump on the pitcher by studying their moves. If the pitcher commits themselves with a move towards the batter, they have to throw home or a balk is called by the umpire. As soon as the runner sees the pitcher start their move to the plate, they can be off and running.

**Cross-Over**: When the runner decides to go, they pivot on the right foot and cross-over with the left leg. In breaking for second base, runners should swing their left arm towards the next base as they begin their cross-over. The arm action pulls their body around and enables them to take a good first stride with their left foot. The runner's weight should be forward with their legs driving hard.

**Glance**: When the runner breaks towards second base on the steal, they must glance towards the plate after taking a few steps. This will help them decide whether to return to first (i.e. line drive or fly ball), slide into second, or round it and try for third (i.e. pass ball).

**Stealing Third**: Stealing third base is probably easier than stealing second and a right-handed batter will make the throw more difficult for the catcher. A runner can score in more ways from third than second, but if they are thrown out attempting to steal, a potential run is removed. For this reason most coaches are content to leave the runner on second.

### **3. Implementing fielding practices:**

A typical fielding practice routine consists of the following:

- **Outfield Routine:** Ground balls are hit to outfielders in areas that will require throws to second, third and home in a game situation.
- **Throws to Second:** hit balls to the left fielder near the foul line - hit balls to the centre fielder in left or right centre hit balls to the right fielder near the foul line
- **Throws to third:** hit balls to the left or right of the left fielder - hit balls straight at the centre and right fielder
- **Throws to Home:** hit balls in front of all outfielders (that they have to charge) - also hit fly balls to them. The cut-off men are always in position during these rounds. Following this, the outfielders go to centre field to practise catching fly balls hit to them by an assistant coach or pitcher.
- **Infield Routine:** This drill simulates the skills required of infielders during game conditions.
  - Assign players to the infield position (except pitcher).
  - Starting with the third baseman, the coach hits a ground ball which is fielded and thrown to first base and then to the catcher.
  - This sequence is repeated with the other positions.
  - The ball hit to the first baseman is thrown to third base and then the catcher.
  - The coach then repeats the entire sequence hitting to the infielder's left and right.
  - After the first baseman's turn, the catcher is rolled the ball near the third base line (first round), then towards the mound (second round), and then near the first base line (third round).
  - Each time the catcher must run up, field the ball and throw to first base.
  - Following this, the coach hits in rounds to execute double plays (i.e. 5-4-3, 6-4-3, etc.) using the same rotational format.
  - The coach then hits pop-ups, fair and foul. Objective is to have the proper player calling for and making the catch.
  - The infielder then throws to first base, except for the first baseman who throws to third.
  - Next, the coach hits balls to the infielder's left and right and directly at them with all throws to home for plays at the plate.
  - Coaches should have three or four balls on hand to ensure a fast flowing drill.

- The conclusion of this activity during a practice session should consist of a short meeting.
- This meeting includes comments on the practice and/or information about the next game or practice, as well as providing the opportunity for players to ask questions and give input.

#### **4. Infielder Drills:**

- **Simulation Drills:** (without a ball) Players line up facing the coach. The coach asks the group to assume the correct position upon command (i.e. resting, ready, and fielding).
- **Cross-over and Field Drill:** (without a ball) The players are in the ready position and the coach asks them to cross-over (i.e. right or left) and advance three or four steps before gliding into a proper fielding position. Repeat several times in the same direction and then change to the other direction.
- **Cross-over, Field and Throw Drill:** (without a ball) The same procedure is followed as above except a throwing action is added. After completing a fielding motion the player simulates the correct throwing technique, employing the crow-hop.
- **Group Ground Ball Drill:** (with ball) Team members are divided into three groups. Balls should be rolled directly at them, to their left and their right. With each repetition the player assumes the ready position, then breaks for the ball, fields, and throws it back to the coach. The player then moves to the end of the line of the group.
- **Group Pop-up Drill:** (with ball) The same procedure in the ground ball drill is used, except that balls are tossed in the air in various directions.
- **Partner Drill:** (with ball) Pair players off when they have progressed to a point where less observation of techniques is needed. One partner can roll ground balls or toss pop-ups, while evaluating his/her partner's fielding skills. This drill provides many repetitions in a short period.
- **Bare-Hand Drill:** The above drills that utilise a ball can be conducted in the same manner, but without the use of a glove. The drill accomplishes two things: it forces the players to use two hands and it encourages the hands to draw back slightly upon impact with the ball.
- **Ground ball groupings:** Drill is dependent on the number of players out for practice. It can be done in one or two groupings. Place a group of players at the SS position with one player assisting by catching balls at home. Hit balls to the group with the line of players standing at 3<sup>rd</sup> base while one player mans the SS position. Field the ball, throw home and rotate to the back of the line after the throw. After several ground balls hit right at the player work on backhands and then up the middle plays. After 5 groundballs rotate the player catching at home. This drill can be done at the second base location as well with the line of players waiting near 1<sup>st</sup> base until their turn. With 12 players two groups can go at the same time with separate catchers at home for each group. Coach hitting balls to SS group lines up on first base side of home. Coach hitting balls to 2b group lines up on 3b side of home.



## 5. Catching Drills:

- **Blinking:** Have the catcher wear a mask and kneel in front of you. Tennis balls or soft foam balls may be used for this drill. Take several balls and softly toss them into the mask. The catcher should concentrate on not blinking during this drill. This often eliminates blinking or flinching when a batter swings at a ball.
- **Blocking Low Pitches:** One catcher should throw at least 25 balls in the dirt to the other (wearing full catching gear), then change positions. Sponge balls can be used until adequate skill and confidence are developed. The coach should supervise this drill until the proper blocking techniques are developed.
- **Throwing:** Allow the catcher to throw to second base at least 10 to 20 times. Make sure the catcher is behind home plate during the drill. Have someone throw the balls to them so they can also practise receiving and the adjusting of the grip. Start in crouch, stand up and plant right foot, throw off left when it lands. Short arm action – ear start.
- **Pop-Ups:** This drill can be practised in pairs. The catcher (in full gear) positions themselves in the receiving stance while the other catcher (or coach) throws the ball in the air. The catcher should practise all the proper techniques required for catching foul balls when doing this drill. Start mask on, remove and throw to the side after spotting the ball when ball is in the air. Using a tennis racket to hit balls straight up creates good backspin.

## **6. Playing the Outfield:**

Part of each practice session should be spent developing outfield skills. The techniques required to perform these skills are similar to that of infielding.

- **Stance:** Most outfielders' resting position is a standing position with the feet spread approximately shoulder-width. The outfielder assumes this position between pitches. As the pitcher releases the ball, the body begins to lower into a crouch position. Body weight and balance is forward on the balls of the feet. In the final 'ready position' the toes are turned slightly out and the hands are off the knees. This allows the outfielder to react in any direction.
- **Fly Balls:** Outfielders should try and catch fly balls at eye level with two hands. The elbows are bent and the hands draw back slightly as the ball enters the glove. Having the throwing hand close to the glove allows the outfielder more time to find the correct grip (across seams). If possible, all fly balls should be caught facing the ball and over the throwing shoulder. This allows the outfielder to make a quicker and stronger throw.
- **Line Drives:** The outfielder should approach low line drives with the glove fingers pointed down. Again, the player should concentrate on the ball and use two hands whenever possible. When going to the left or right, the outfielder must use the cross-over step by pivoting on the foot nearest the direction of the ball and crossing over with the other foot.
- **Ground Balls:** All outfielders should charge ground balls. The mechanics of fielding the ball are identical to those for infielders. With runners on base, the outfielder charges the ball, but brings their body under control by slowing down and gliding into the correct fielding position. With no runners on base, an outfielder should be more conservative. Again, they charge the ball, but drop to one knee to receive the ball. With fly balls, the outfielder uses two hands and their eyes follow the ball into the glove.
- **Throwing:** Outfielders should always use the overhand delivery when throwing and grip the ball across the seams. Here are the steps required to develop a proper overhand throw:
  - 1) After catching ball, weight is shifted to the pivot leg (same side as throwing arm)
  - 2) Arm drops down - front shoulder and hips point at target
  - 3) Arm extends back for full extension
  - 4) Body moves forward against firm front leg. Elbow is up
  - 5) Ball is released in front of and above head with a downward snap of wrist
  - 6) Follow-through with arm swinging down and across body

## **7. Outfielder Drills:**

- **Footwork Drills:** Used to practise quick starts in all directions. The outfielder stands in their regular stance while the coach tosses balls to their left, right, and then over their head. This drill should be practised until the cross-over steps are mastered.
- **Ground Ball Drills:** Gives the outfielders practice in picking up ground balls using the different methods. Players should charge every ground ball. The coach may either throw or hit ground balls in this drill. Throwing drills may also be included with this drill (i.e. throw to the cut-off person after fielding the ground ball).
- **High Fly Balls:** Allow the outfielder time to get under the ball, come in on it, and practise proper receiving and throwing positions.
- **Left or Right Fly Balls:** Line up outfielders on one side of the field and hit balls to the other side. Repeat going the other way. Outfielders should be in the ready position every time.
- **Over the Head Fly Balls:** Outfielders line up fairly shallow and the coach hits the ball over their head alternating which shoulder of the player you hit the ball over. Make sure that proper foot work is maintained.
- **Line Drives:** Hit line drives to improve player judgement and practise the proper method of receiving low line drives (glove fingers pointed down).
- **Balls in the Sun:** Line up outfielders facing the sun. Hit fly balls to them and have them use their gloves to shade the sun. If sunglasses are available use them as well.
- **Throwing Drills:** Proper throwing techniques are incorporated into all of these drills. Upon catching the ball, players can be instructed to throw the ball to a designated area.

## **8. Hitting drills:**

The mechanics of hitting are very complex. DDMBA recommends coaches take advantage of the Baseball Nova Scotia coaching courses to obtain a solid foundation to teach hitting.

Here are some drills that can be used when incorporating the proper learned mechanics:

- **Hip Rotation:**
  - players stand with their stride foot forward and their pivot foot back
  - both arms are bent with hands resting in front of the hips
  - place a bat horizontally behind the lower back and slide through the opening between the torso and the bent arm (bat is resting in the crook of each arm)
  - players turn their hips left and then right, keeping the back straight and pivoting with their back foot
  - purpose of the drill is to maximize the push and pivot action of the batter's back foot and develops "quick" rotation of the hips
  
- **Stride Drill:**
  - players practise taking a short forward stride
  - do not swing the bat but keep the hands back
  
- **Swing Simulation:**
  - everybody takes practice swings pretending the ball has been thrown
  - every player must assume the proper 'ready' position before taking a swing
  
- **Tee Drill:**
  - allows players to perfect their swing
  - players practise hitting the ball off the tee with the coaches and other players observing any problems in their mechanics, if not hit 'cleanly' then the swing needs to be corrected
  - set tee up in front of a fence or screen with the players hitting the ball into the fence
  
- **Screen Drill:**
  - small groups of 3 or 4 players (one is a pitcher, one hitter and a shagger)
  - pitcher kneels in front of and to the side of a screen allowing the batter to hit the balls into the screen
  - pitcher tosses the ball slowly in front of the hitter from the side and the hitter hits the ball into the screen
  - each player takes a number of swings as hitter and then rotates to the other positions

- sponge, plastic or tennis balls may be used for this drill
  
- **Pepper Drill:**
  - team is divided into small groups
  - the batter 'chokes' up on the handle and hits short easy balls to the fielders in front of him
  - once the ball is fielded it is thrown back towards the hitter who again must hit it out of the air towards the fielders
  - develops bat control and allows fielding opportunities
  - players rotate after several pitches
  
- **Batting practice:**
  - This can involve working in a batting cage or on-field;
  - When working in a batting cage rotate players in and out paying attention to mechanics and provide constructive feedback in a positive manner.
  - When doing on-field batting practice a “snake” method can work for the order of hitters rotating the batter from a fielding position to on deck to batter by a specific order of rotation OR allow hitters to bat based on who arrived to the field first for practice or who is most supportive as a teammate or helpful to the coaches with gear.
  - Quality over quantity is the key for cage or on-field – 10-15 swing maximum with multiple rounds per player is better than 25 swings straight as fatigue causes mechanics to break down.

**10. Pitching Drills:**

The mechanics of pitching are very complex. DDMBA recommends coaches take advantage of the Baseball Nova Scotia coaching courses to obtain a solid foundation to teach pitching.

Here are some drills that can be used when incorporating the proper learned mechanics:

**Pre-Game Warm-up:**

- Warming up before a strenuous activity will loosen the muscles and increase flexibility, reducing the chances of injury.
- At least ten minutes of warm-up is recommended for young pitchers.
- They should begin by throwing easily for the first few minutes, then gradually throw with more velocity until game speed is reached.
- The pitcher should not be throwing hard until completely loose.
- From the start of warm-up, the follow-through should be exaggerated so that the back and legs are stretched as well.
- Pitchers should warm-up at pitching distance, and always throw at a target.
- A long sleeve sweatshirt should always cover the pitcher's elbow and a warmer wool-type sweatshirt is recommended for cooler days. To prevent tightening up during the game, the pitcher should wear a jacket between innings.

**Tip:**

- Begin loosening up by playing catch with no glove for the first three minutes. Players will be forced to throw easily to start. Here are several drills that will help players improve their pitching mechanics:

**Concentrate on the Target:**

- When playing catch, have the players pick a target on their partner and always throw at that target (i.e. the player's chest).
- Each time the ball is thrown accurately, one point may be awarded.

**Balance Position:**

- Have all pitchers assume and hold the balance position (hands together) for several seconds.
- Then, without losing balance, swing the arm down and hold the reach-back position for a few more seconds. Check that the hand points down.

**Follow-Through:**

- The pitchers line up on the mound each with a ball and in turn throw to the catcher.
- They should concentrate on their follow-through fielding position.
- The coach can then either hit or throw the ball on the ground back to the pitcher.

**Bullpen practice:**

- A pitcher needs to build up his arm strength/endurance;
- A bullpen can be thrown throughout the season but the number of pitches thrown will vary;
- A good rule of thumb is not to exceed the one day rest limit of a pitcher depending on their age level at each bullpen session if you wish that pitcher to pitch in a game in two days time;
- The bullpen should focus on developing command [the ability to put a pitch in an area you intend to throw it]. For example, for fastball command plan on throwing grouping of 15 pitches – 5 to one corner at knee height, the middle at knee height and the other corner at knee height;
- Then try to locate the fastball at the top of the zone for all three zones;
- As a pitcher gets older a curveball can be introduced at age 14;
- Changeups and other off speed pitches can be integrated as well.

**Long toss:**

- Long toss is a great way for a pitcher of any age to build up his arm strength every season;
- After a proper dynamic warmup to get the arm muscles loose partner up;
- Face your partner from 10 feet away shoulders square to them;
- Start by throwing the ball with proper mechanics of feet on ground, waist twist, elbow at shoulder level or above, glove elbow point, to partner, easy toss and follow through;
- Do that for 5 throws each person then step back ten feet and repeat;
- As you move out you may begin a small “crow hop” [throw side foot over glove side foot] to gather momentum for the throw while keeping the same arm slot mechanics as stated earlier;
- As the partner moves farther away the arc of the ball should be a rainbow type;
- If the arm slot mechanics cannot be maintained then you are too far away;
- At that point, start moving back to your partner with the throws being on a line not arc;
- Do this drill 3 x week and the distance you can safely throw will lengthen.

**Batting Practice:**

- It is important that pitchers participate in live batting practice. This drill can closely simulate a game situation. It involves the use of batters, a catcher and all members of the team. The pitcher can practise his delivery technique while providing opportunities for batters to practise hitting.