

Lakeland Minor Ball League
9U & U9 (Baseball and Softball) Division Package

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Season Focus:

- Participant safety
- Best effort by coaches, parents/guardians and players
- Engaged participants resulting in a desire to return next season
- Continual physical skill development as athletes not just baseball players
- Life skills development (patience, respect, cooperation, communication, leadership, ect)

Volunteer Coach Role

Thank you to the individuals that have volunteered to be a coach this season. Each team has a Head Coach and an Assistant Coach that will be responsible for aspects such as the equipment bag, participant safety, coordination skill development activities (practice plans), cancellations due to weather, teaching basic rules and ensuring the participants are engaged

Parent Helper Role

Parent helpers are essential to the success of the 9U program and are really appreciated by the coaches. The Lakeland league and associations do not consider this to be a drop off program and encourages parents/guardians to be involved on the field to assist the coaches. **No baseball experience is needed.** This assistance may include setting up the bases, organizing/picking-up equipment, ensuring a participant gets to a portable toilet and back, helping a participant find their glove/bat/helmet/water bottle, assisting players in rotating positions, directing base runners, ect. It is not the expectation that parent helpers are responsible for coordinating any of the skill development activities; they are there to just assist the coaches with these activities. It's also an opportunity for parents/guardians to learn along with their child.

of players per team

Try to keep teams with 8-9 players per team.

Participant & Team Equipment

Participants need to have a glove, helmet, protective cup and water bottles. Team equipment bags should consist of bats, balls, a batting tee, hoola hoops, cones (round flexible ones), a set of catchers gear, and a first aid kit

Poor Weather/cancelling a game

Coaches from each team will be responsible for contacting each other and deciding if a game is going to be cancelled due to poor weather or diamond playability. If they do decide to cancel, they will contact their own teams. Please try to make a decision with enough time that team travelling can contact their team before they are on the road. Thunder/lightning =cancel.

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9U & U9 (Baseball and Softball) Division Package

Blue Jays in 30 Analogy

Baseball traditionalists may not agree with the modifications, but the number one reason children stop playing a sport is because it's not fun and / or they're bored. There tends to be a lot of standing around both offensively and defensively in baseball, so for young players it's necessary to modify the game while still teaching them the fundamental to ensure they are ready to move up to the 11U division

There is a show called **Blue Jays in 30** that shows you the highlights/action only from a Blue Jays game earlier that day. To emphasize the amount of downtime in the game of baseball, consider the fact that most Blue Jays games last 3 hours (180 minutes) yet they're able to summarize the actual action from a 3 hour game to just 30 minutes. Now take out the commercial breaks during the 30 minute episode and you'll probably only watch about 20 minutes of action from a 3 hour game.....that's 160 minutes of waiting/downtime. Using this same ration for a 45 minute 9U ball game **without any modifications** means there is only about 5-6 minutes of total player engagement as most actions lasts 5-10 seconds within the game (eg. Player hits a ground ball and runs to first base = approx... 5 seconds)

Game Modifications/Rules

1. Score keeping:

Score will not be kept; this is introduced in Mosquito all you have to do is keep track of who bats next

2. Defensive Positions:

Players will be placed in the following defensive positions LF, CF, RF, 1ST, 2ND, SS, 3RD, Catcher and pitcher (5 steps behind the coach that is throwing to the hitters) for a total of 9 positions. If a team prefers, they can play with a 4th outfielder instead of having the pitcher position in the rotation.

3. Rotate Positions:

Participants will rotate one defensive position after every inning

4. Bases Loaded:

The team that is batting will start with the bases loaded (one runner on each base). Same concept as if the first 3 batters of the game got walked and it instantly engages 3 extra players beyond just the hitter and on-deck hitter.

5. Extra base Hits:

If a player hits the ball far enough and can get a double, triple, or homerun they are encouraged/allowed to, with the base runners in front of them also advancing.

Game Modifications/Rules (Con't)

6. Outs:

"Outs" will be called (eg. Thrown ball beats the runner to first base, runner is tagged while not on a base, ect.) The participant that is "out" will just return to their bench and this baserunner position will remain empty.

Lakeland Minor Ball League

9U & U9 (Baseball and Softball) Division Package

7. Stealing / Advancing on Overthrows/leadoffs:

Participants are not allowed to steal bases or lead-off. They can advance one base on overthrow.

8. Everyone Bats:

The offensive team will bat every participant, there is not 3 "outs". Once each participant has hit, the teams will switch.

9. Helmets:

Helmets are mandatory for all hitters, on-deck batters and base runners.

10. Maximum # of Pitches per Batter:

In order to keep the game moving along, each batter will receive a maximum of 5 pitches(May) / 4 pitches (June) from their coach, either **underhand** or **overhand** at the coach's discretion based on the participant's ability. If they have not made contact after 5 swings (may)/ 4 swings (June), a ball will be placed on a batting T for them to hit.

11. Game Balls:

The Easton Soft Stitch Incredi-ball will be utilized as the game ball. As the coaches pitch to their batters from such close proximity, using these balls provides a safety factor when coaches get hit with a line drive/ hard ground ball. This also encourages players to get in front of the ball and not just hold their glove out to the side of their body when attempting to field or catch a ball.

12. Base Distance:

Thrown down bases will be set up 15-16 regular walking steps (approx. 45-50 feet) apart.

13. On-deck & Catcher Circles:

To ensure the on-deck batters and catchers remain a safe proximity to the batter; a hoola hoop can be used to represent the on-deck circle and the catcher's area.

Program Odds and Ends:

Pitching:

- Coaches pitch from being on one knee, essentially throwing darts (baseball), throw underhand (softball) as an adult standing and throwing results in a way too high of an arm angle that the ball comes from to home plate. They place a regular plastic baseball bucket in front of themselves and use a glove as added protection. They are encouraged to move closer/further away depending on the hitter's ability and if they are throwing overhand or underhand to the hitter.
- Baseball: Coaches are encouraged to throw underhand to all of the batters for the first week, however, after the first week they can throw overhand or underhand based on the player's ability. The goal is to eventually get everyone hitting overhand pitching for the 9U division

Lakeland Minor Ball League

9U & U9 (Baseball and Softball) Division Package

Catchers:

- **The Catcher for the next inning should be the first batter so they have time to get the gear on.** Catchers do not throw each ball back to the coach/pitcher. If they miss it, they leave it and get ready for the next pitch. If they catch it they just roll it behind their back or flip it up to the coach at the home plate area that is helping out (making sure catchers don't get too close hitters, hitter's stand properly, ect)

Position Cones:

- Short, very flimsy soccer cones are placed at each position for the first couple of week to assist the players with where each position typically plays / position themselves. It helps to avoid someone rotating to play second base and just standing on the base. It also gives the young plays a visual of where to rotate to. In the 2rd week the cones are removed halfway through the game, players are encouraged to help each other with where they need to rotate to after every 2 batters. In the 3rd week the coaches can continue with the cones for half the game or not use them at all.

Maximum swings:

- This is just a reminder.....players get 5 swings in May and 4 in June. If they swing 5/4 times and do not make contact, there will be a batting T approx. 6 feet from home plate that is then placed at home plate and the struggling hitter hits off the batting T.

Roster size:

- Roster size preference is 8 players/ team but the maximum should be 9. The concept behind this is that **as quantity goes up, quality goes down.** This also assists inexperienced coaches with not getting overwhelmed.