

A Good T-Ball Practice Schedule

by Karl M. Cunningham

You will never be satisfied or know for sure whether you are teaching them too much or not enough. Chances are both. At T-Ball you have some kids who love the game and are talented mixed in with recreationalists who are there for entertainment and who knows what else.

I recommend that you make some games that reinforce basics. Start with running the bases in order - have the kids yell the base when they hit it and just go all the way around. You will tire them out and teach them the bases. If you can get some parents to play with them they will have more fun (plus the family thing and the exercise thing). Next you might teach them when to run situational, that is, on grounders when forced, on pop-ups after tagging up. So you get a partner to toss the ball to you either in the air or on the ground after you tell them how many outs there are and they run accordingly. Start out with simple situations then move on to decision making.

The base running can keep you busy for several practices alone but you should break it up with:

Pick-ups and Catch. Again, get parents to work on the pick-ups with the kids, otherwise it will not do any good. Just so you know - pick-up is a simple drill of slow rollers back and forth that gets the kids shuffling their feet side to side and picking the ball with two hands in front of them. Don't let them field it to the side. The "roller" is not supposed to try to fool the player, just easy rolls to help the kid go back and forth. This can be a game by seeing which kid can field 20 rolls fastest. Oh, the fielder just underhand tosses back to the roller who is only 6-8 feet away.

Catch can also be turned into a good game. Since their ability to catch and throw accurately is very limited, the game may have to be more of a judgment on form. When we do catch, we have one line of kids line up on the outfield foul line and the other line making perpendicular throws to this line. The games can be consecutive throws without touching the ground (this doesn't last long) or you can put one line against the other by checking their form.

- did they point their elbow and shoulder at the target
- did they reach back properly
- did they grip the ball properly
- did they follow through
- did the receiver keep his elbows in and catch with a vertical glove
- did he move to the ball

They are only allowed to throw on command and even though it is difficult to watch them all you can get parents to help and you can usually encourage them that it is very close and they are all improving. The point is, when they are competing they will listen and try to do things properly.

For batting, I recommend you hit into a net with these kids. You can have somebody working with them on this while the other kids are doing the other drills. Put a string across the net that is just slightly above the point where the ball sits on the T. The goal of the kids is to hit all their balls UNDER the string yet not on the ground (low, sinking line drive). If you have a second T you can place it behind the actual hitting T so the kids have to come down onto the ball properly. Anywise, one parent can keep quite busy with the kids batting and giving them some individual attention.