



9U (Rookie) Division

\*\* Recommended Program \*\*

# **\*\* 9U (Rookie) Division - Recommended Program \*\***

## **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, etc.).

## **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, coordinating skill development activities (practice plan), 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 Rookie program and are really appreciated by the coaches. **This is not considered to be a drop off program and encourages parents / guardians to be involved on the field to assist the coaches. No baseball experience is required.** 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, etc. 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 is also an opportunity for parents/guardians to learn along with their child.

## **Teams & Players/Team, T-shirts & Hats**

Teams will consist of 8-10 players per team. Each team name will be based on their t-shirt color. Participants will each receive a t-shirt that they will wear to each practice/game. These will be provided to each player on the first night. Players are asked to wear a hat to all practices/games.

## **Participant & Team Equipment**

Participants need to have their own helmet, glove, protective cup and water bottle (**please write their name on these**). Each team's equipment bag (supplied by SMBA) will have balls (10 Incrediballs, 10 tennis balls & 20 orange gas balls), bats, cones, hula-hoops, a batting T, a set of bases, a set of catcher's gear and a first aid kit. If players have their own bat, they are welcome to bring it, but please have their name marked on it.

## **Poor Weather/Cancelling a Practice/Game**

Coaches from each team will be responsible for contacting each other and deciding if a practice/game is going to be cancelled due to poor weather or diamond playability. If they do decide to cancel, they will contact (phone, email, etc.) their team. With starting at 4:00pm it is preferred that coaches try to decide by 3:00pm but this is not always possible. **\*\*\* Thunder/Lightening = Cancel \*\*\***.

## **Practice / Games Format**

Listed below is the format that the coaches are expected to follow for the season. It allows for a balance of skill development and the opportunity to use those skills in a game setting.

4:00pm – 4:15pm    Players Arrive/Equipment set-up (bases, etc.).

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4:15pm – 4:20pm	Welcome participants and parent helpers, introductions, safety/rule reminders, etc.
4:20pm – 4:25pm	Warm-up activities (versions of tag, valley and volcanoes, sharks vs. minnows, stretching, etc.).
4:25pm – 5:00pm	Defensive (throwing, fielding, catching, how to get outs, etc.) & offensive (base running, hitting, etc.) skill development.
5:00pm – 5:45pm	Game (set bases 15 - 16 walking steps apart, use cones on the field for position indicators, hula-hoops for the on-deck batter and catcher positions, have a batting T near home plate, 5 Easton Soft Stitch Incrediballs).

### **Blue Jays In 30 Analogy**

This program implements modifications to the “traditional” game format to ensure players are more engaged and having fun. Baseball traditionalists may not agree with the modifications, but the number one reason children stop playing a sport is because it is not fun and/or they are bored. There tends to be a lot of standing around both offensively and defensively in baseball, so for young players it is necessary to modify the game while still teaching them the fundamentals to ensure they are ready to move up to the Mosquito 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 can 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 will realistically only watch about 20 minutes of action from a 3-hour game.....that’s 160 minutes (89%) of waiting/downtime. Using this same ratio for a 45-minute Rookie ball game **without any modifications**, which means there is only about 5 - 6 minutes of total player engagement as most action lasts 5 – 10 seconds within the game (eg. a player hits a ground ball and runs to first base = approx. 5 seconds).

### **Game Modifications/Rules**

#### **1. Home/Visitor & Scorekeeping:**

Home and visitor can be decided by a glove flip/coin toss. Score will not be kept; this is introduced in Mosquito.

#### **2. Defensive Positions:**

Players will be placed in the following defensive positions LF, CF, RF, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, SS, 3<sup>rd</sup> & catcher and pitcher (5 steps behind the coach that is throwing to the hitters) for a total of 9 positions. If a team has 10 players, they can play with a 4<sup>th</sup> outfielder (rover).

Short, flimsy soccer cones are placed at each position for the first week to assist the players with where each position typically plays/positions themselves. It helps to avoid someone rotating to play second base and just standing on the base. It also gives the young players a visual of where to rotate to. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 3<sup>rd</sup> week the coaches can continue with the cones for half the game or not use them at all.

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### **3. Rotate Positions:**

Participants will rotate one defensive position after every 2 batters, except for the catcher. This position will not rotate every 2 batters, the participant will be the catcher for the complete half of their defensive 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. Once the play stops, celebrate/acknowledge the great hit by the batter and reload the bases with the batter that just hit going to 1<sup>st</sup> base and the two other base runners in front of them returning to 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. This will also result in all three of them getting additional base running experience, physical activity and keeps more players engaged.

### **6. Outs:**

“Outs” will be called (eg. thrown ball beats the runner to first base, runner is tagged when not on a base, etc.). The participant that is “out” will just return to their bench and this baserunner position will remain empty.

### **7. Advancing on Overthrows/Ball Returned to the Infield/Stealing & Leadoffs**

For balls that are hit/overthrown to the outfield or overthrown into foul territory (eg. shortstop overthrows 1<sup>st</sup> base), all baserunners may run/advance **UNTIL the ball reaches the infield (controlled or uncontrolled by an infielder)**. At the end of the play all baserunners will return to the necessary base to load the bases. Participants are not allowed to steal bases or lead-off.

### **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:**

To keep the game moving along, each batter will receive a maximum of 5 pitches (May)/4 pitches (June) from their coach. Coaches pitch from being on one knee, throwing darts, as an adult standing and throwing results in 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. 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 pitches (June), a ball will be placed on a batting T for them to hit.

### **11. Game Balls:**

A soft stitch indoor ball will be utilized as the game ball (see picture below). As the coaches pitch to their batters from such close distance, using these balls provides a safety factor when coaches get hit with a

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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 hula-hoop can be used to represent the on-deck circle and the catcher's area.

### **14. 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 (making sure catchers do not get too close to hitters, hitter's stand properly, etc.).