



New Hartford Little League Baseball Handbook for Coaches and Player's



Baseball Handbook



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Throwing

The Throwing Grip

Grip the ball across the long seams of the baseball with your index finger and long finger. This is called the 4 seam fastball grip. The thumb should give support underneath the ball. You should try to throw the ball with this grip every time.

The Throwing Motion

- Grip the ball properly
- Line the shoulders up with a target (the first baseman, for example)
- Establish the back foot as your pivot foot (the foot you're going to push off on)
- Stride toward the target
- Throw with a 3/4 arm action
- Follow through toward the target

Fielding

The Set Position for Fielding

In the set position, your feet are a little more than shoulder width apart, your weight is leaning slightly forward and your hands are on your knees. You are looking at the situation on the field.

In the set position you should be thinking about:

- What's the score?
- What inning is it?
- How many outs are there?
- How many runners are on base?

You use this information to decide the answer to these questions:

- What am I going to do with the ball if it's hit to me?
- What if they hit me a ground ball? (Can I get a force play?)
- What if they hit me a line drive? (Can I double somebody off?)
- What if they hit me a fly ball? (What base do I throw to?)

The Ready Position for Fielding

There isn't much difference between the set position and the ready position, but it is important. As the pitch is getting ready to be made, you look only at the batter who is getting ready to swing. Take your hand off your knees and position them in front of you, so you are ready to catch the ball when it is hit to you.

How to Field Ground Balls in the Infield

- Feet spread - so you have good balance to go either left or right, up or back
- Seat down - so the ball doesn't go between your legs
- Hands in front - so you can see the ball as it enters your glove
- Use two hands every time!
- Bring the ball up to your belt buckle
- Throw the ball using the proper throwing motion

How to Field Ground Balls in the Outfield - Three Techniques

1. Drop to one knee - It's the safest way to catch, but it takes the longest. It keeps the

- ball in front of you. This is the method we will use with no one on base.
2. The infield technique - This is the way that you will use most often.
 3. The "do-or-die" - Only use this technique in game-saving situations like the last inning with the tying or winning run at second base. You scoop the ball up on the run and come up throwing.

How to Field Line Drives Above and Below the Waist

- Line Drives Above the Waist - Catch the ball with your hands and fingers pointed up.
- Line Drives Below the Waist - Catch the ball with your hands and fingers pointed down.

Always use two hands!

Catching Fly Balls in the Infield and Outfield

- Drop-step first, then cross-over step (if the ball is hit over your head).
- Get behind the ball.
- Catch the ball while you are coming in toward the infield, so your momentum is toward the infield not away from it.
- Catch the ball above your shoulder with a small bend in your elbows and knees to "cushion" the catch.
- Throw the ball to the cut-off man. Don't hold the ball in the outfield!

* The drop step and cross-over step will be demonstrated at practice.

HITTING

Hitting the baseball is one of the hardest things to do in all of sports. Taking a round bat and hitting a round ball squarely is a difficult thing to do. The best hitters in the world, like Barry Bonds of the S.F. Giants and Tony Gwynn of the San Diego Padres, only do it 3 out of 10 times they come to bat. That means that they don't get a hit 7 out of 10 times! Hopefully, our guys will hit more than 3 out of 10. But still, we will need lots of practice. You can really help your child become a better hitter by taking him up to the batting cage a couple of times a week for a dollar or two of extra batting practice. We simply don't have enough practice time for each child to get all the BP (that's baseball lingo for batting practice) he needs. Of course, you can pitch to your child in the back yard, but between the lost baseballs and the broken windows

General Philosophy on Hitting

1. Be Aggressive - In the batter's box the player should think, "If it's a strike, I'm going to hit it hard." We teach the "Yes, Yes, Yes, The next pitch is mine" philosophy. This means we're thinking yes, yes, yes we're going to swing. If we miss, the next pitch is mine to hit.
2. Hit hard ground balls and line drives - Ground balls and line drives give you the best chance for getting on base. A ground ball or line drive has to be caught by one player, thrown by that player, and caught by another player. So, there are at least three chances for a mistake by the defense. Once the boys learn to catch well, a fly ball can usually be easily caught by one of several players, so you will probably make an out.
3. Use all the field. By that I mean, if the pitch is outside, hit it to right field. Don't try to pull everything!
4. Maintain good balance before, during, and after the swing (throughout the swing). It's very difficult to hit the baseball hard consistently if you don't have good balance.
5. Know your strengths and weaknesses - play within yourself. If you're not a home run hitter, then don't be standing at home plate trying to hit home runs.
6. Stay positive! Always remember, each time you make an out, you're that much closer to getting your next hit!

Bat Selection

Grasp the bat handle in your stronger hand. Hold the bat straight out to the side. If the bat starts to waver or the bat head drops after only 10 or 15 seconds, the bat is too heavy or too long or both. If you can hold the bat steady for 25-35 seconds then the bat is the proper size. Most kids in this league should be using a bat that weighs 20 to 23 ounces.

Depth in the Batters Box and Distance from Home Plate

Put your belly button on the break of the plate (where it angles back). This gives you a starting point for how deep to stand in the batter's box. Now this is not absolute. It's a starting point. If we're facing a really hard thrower, then we may move back in the box to get a little longer look at the pitch. If we're facing a junk ball pitcher, we may move up in the box to hit the pitch before it breaks.

With a little bend in the knees, you should be able to easily reach 3/4 of the way across the plate with your bat. This gives you a starting point for how far away you should be standing from home plate. The thing I want to emphasize is that you don't go up there and automatically stand in the same hole that the kid in front of you stood in. Getting the correct depth in the batter's box and distance from home plate is very important in becoming a good hitter.

Stance and Balance

We want you to use a parallel stance with your feet about shoulder width apart, slightly pigeon-toed with most of the weight on the balls of the feet. This leads to good balance. You know you're well balanced if I cannot move you either backward or forward with a push to the chest or the back. Make sure your head is level and you're looking at the pitcher with both eyes.

Grip

You should use the "standard" grip where the 8 middle or "door knocking" knuckles line up on the handle of the bat. We want to avoid the "choke" grip in which the base knuckles (the ones closest to your wrist) line up. Don't choke the bat! It needs to "breathe." Hold the bat in the finger pads.

Box and Bat Angle

We want to make a "box" with your arms and your body. The four sides are:

1. across your chest is the top of the box
2. down your front arm is the front side of the box
3. across your front arm is the bottom of the box
4. up your back arm is the back of the box.

Keep the back elbow down comfortably at your side. Your back elbow should not be stuck way up in the air. The top hand should be about level with the back shoulder.

Hold the bat at a 45 degree angle (not a 90 degree angle). The bat should be about even with the back shoulder. Your hands should be close enough to your chest that you can almost touch your chest with your thumb.

Inward Turn / Load to Explode

When the pitcher shows you his "hip pocket," you show him yours. The inward turn is a movement of only about three inches backward with your front knee, hip and shoulder. You can think of the inward turn as coiling the spring of your swing. Another way of thinking of this is "Load to Explode."

Stride

The stride is a timing mechanism. It has nothing to do with generating power. You want to make sure your front foot is down before you hands are in the strike zone. Stride to the same place every time.

- Lead with your heel. This helps keep you from opening up too early. Take a short stride (6-8 inches or so) toward the pitcher or on a 45 degree angle toward home plate

- Land on your big toe
- Step on "thin ice" (This helps keep your weight and hands back)
- You must get your foot down before you swing. You want to hit against a firm front side.

Swing

- Focus the eyes on the pitcher's release point. This will allow you to pick up the ball as soon as possible.
- "Squish the bug" (Rotate up on the ball of the back foot)
- "Slap the hands down" (Swing on a slightly downward angle) You want to keep your hands above the ball and the barrel of the bat above the hands. You can think of this as wanting to keep your hands inside the ball or hitting the inside part of the baseball or pointing the knob of the bat at the ball.
- "Ike to Mike" (Keep your head down on the ball) Our front shoulder is named IKE. Our back shoulder is named MIKE. Put your chin on Ike. After you swing, your chin should be on Mike. For you boys who like to eat, you can think of cheeseburger on your back shoulder. After you swing, you should be able to take a bite out of the cheeseburger.
- Follow through. Don't think that you're hitting just one baseball. Imagine that you are hitting a second and third baseball just in front of the one you are actually hitting.

Situational Hitting

- Two Strike Hitting

Look for the pitchers "out" pitch. If he's thrown a big round house curve to the last five hitters with two strikes, you'd better be looking for that round house curve. Choke up on the bat a little to attain quickness and bat control. Cut down on your swing just a little. You're trying to get the ball in play. With two strikes, if it's close I want you swinging. Don't leave it up to the umpire to call strike three.

- Runner on Second and No Outs

We're trying to move the runner to third. This generally means trying to hit the ball to the right side of the infield (towards the second baseman or first baseman). Of course, this depends on your strengths and weaknesses as a hitter. For example, if you're our 3, 4, or 5 hitter, we want you up there driving in that run. We don't want you hitting a weak ground ball to second base just to advance the runner. On the other hand, if you're our 11 or 12 hitter, then we want you trying to advance the runner to third.

- Runner on third and less than two outs

We want to get that run home. Again, what we do as a team this will depend on your

strengths and weaknesses as a hitter. For some of you, this will mean trying to hit a fly ball that is deep enough to score the run on a sac fly. For some of you, this will mean laying down a squeeze bunt.

- Hitting Off a Hard Thrower/Fast Pitcher

If you're facing a really hard thrower, we are going to make a couple of changes in the way we hit to give ourselves every possible advantage. 1) move back in the batter's box to give yourself a little longer look at the ball. 2) Choke up on the bat an inch or two to or change to a slightly lighter bat so you can be a little quicker with your swing. 3) Take the "pull" field out of play. By that I mean, if you're a right handed batter don't try to pull the ball. Try to hit the ball back up the middle or towards right field. This will give you your best chance to get a hit off a really fast pitcher.

- Hitting the Curveball

The first thing you have to do to be able to hit the curve ball is to recognize that it is a curve ball. Look for a difference in the pitcher's delivery that tips off when he's going to throw his curve. Maybe he "cocks" his wrist, maybe he slows down his delivery, maybe he changes his release point. Learn to see the ball spinning and realize that it's a curve ball. **TEAM RULE:** We will not swing at a curve ball unless we already have one strike. Most curve balls in this league are NOT thrown for strikes. You usually do the pitcher a favor when you swing at his curve because it will usually be a ball if you take the pitch. The only exception to this rule is: 1) If you get a "hanger" on the inside part of the plate. A hanger is a curve ball that doesn't break, it just spins. It comes up to the plate looking as big as a beach ball! It's saying **HIT ME, HIT ME, HIT ME!!** If you get a hanger, it's OK to swing at it even if you don't have a strike.

Ten Common Hitting Mistakes and How to Correct Them

1. Stance and Stride

a. Stance Mistake: Closed or open stance

Correction: Parallel stance with your feet about shoulder width apart, slightly pigeon-toed with most of the weight on the balls of the feet.

b. Stride Mistake: Taking too long of a stride and/or striding away from the plate ("stepping in the bucket")

Correction: Short stride (6-8 inches or so) on a 45 degree angle toward home plate. Land on your big toe--think of stepping on "thin ice" (This helps keep your weight and hands back)

2. Grip Mistake: Choke grip (base knuckles lined up on both hands)

Correction: Standard grip with middle (or knocking) knuckles lined up

3. Improper Box Mistake: Stretched or high box (back elbow up)

Correction: Visualize a box across your chest, down your front arm, across your front arm, then up the back arm. Keep the back elbow down comfortably at your side. The top hand should be about level with the back shoulder.

4. Dead Stop Hitting Mistake: The first movement is forward. There is no movement backward before going forward.

Correction: Correct execution of an inward turn. When the pitcher shows you his "hip pocket," you show him yours. The inward turn is a movement of only about three inches backward with your front knee, hip and shoulder. Remember: Load to Explode.

5. Back foot lockout Mistake: Hitter doesn't move the back foot when he swings. He doesn't "squish the bug."

Correction: Squish the bug. Rotate up on the ball of the back foot with the swing.

6. Bat Angle Mistake: Holding the bat at a 90 degree angle or straight up and down.

Correction: Bat angle at 45 degrees

7. Front Shoulder Early Release or Quick Hip Problem: The front shoulder opens too early. This is usually caused by back foot lockout.

Correction: Inward turn, squish the bug and Ike to Mike.

8. Lack of Follow-through Problem: Lack of follow-through is caused by several things: 1) Choke grip; 2) Decelerating or stopping the swing immediately after contact with the ball; 3) Tension in the swing. Correction: 1) Standard grip 2) Hit through the ball 3) Relax Hit through the second and third baseballs.

9. Head Positioning and Tracking Mistake: Head not level, not looking at the pitcher with both eyes and not following the ball from the release point.

Correction: Level head. Look at the pitcher with both eyes. Follow the ball from the release point.

10. Fear of the Ball Mistake: Fear of the ball is a natural reaction, but it is probably over-exaggerated. Sure, everyone gets hit occasionally, but of the approximately 40 at bats you

will have this season, you will probably get hit only once or twice. The mistake is going up to the plate expecting to get hit.

Correction: Learn how to get out of the way of a ball coming at you. Turn away from the ball and drop the bat so you don't get called for a cheap foul-tip strike.

Hitting Drills That Can Be Done At Home Every Day

- Mirror Drill

The goal of this drill is shadow hitting. Using a full-length mirror, position the hitter either sideways facing the mirror or looking at the mirror as though it were the pitcher. The hitter then takes a look at his stance, stride, and inward turn and evaluates how he sets up and gets ready to hit. If there is room (and you are sure that you aren't going to break anything!) the hitter swings at an imaginary ball. In this drill, the hitter should make sure that his weight is evenly distributed and that his balance point is straight down the center of the body. He should not lean either forward or too far backward. At the same time, he can check many aspects of a proper swing, such as the box, the head, eye angle (both eyes looking at the pitcher), front shoulder, hip, inward turn, and stride. Although it takes no more than a minute or two per day, the mirror drill is important in stressing key points to work on in improving the stroke. This drill can be enhanced with the use of a video camera.

- Iso-bat Drill

The goal of this drill is to maximize the strength of the hitter's swing without the use of weight machines or barbells, so it is especially good for young hitters who are not yet old enough to lift weights. It is based on an isometric exercise which requires a partner. The same hitting fundamentals used in the systematic approach to hitting should be followed. The hitter is to roll up on the back foot ("squish the bug"), thrust the hips, keep the head down with his chin on the chest ("Ike to Mike"), extend the arms completely in a straight line from the front arm right on down through the bat, and slowly swing the bat. The aim here is to get the hitter to the point where he extends the arms with the bat out over the plate with his head down as though he were going to hit a ball up the middle. The partner should now place his hand in front of the bat and provide a light, steady resistance on the bat all the way around to the follow-through position as the player finishes his swing. This develops strength in the hitter's swing. The resistance should not be so heavy that it forces the hitter to change any portion of his stroke in order to be able to follow through. The young hitter should do 5-10 repetitions per day, while the older hitter who enjoys doing this drill and sees some merit in it would benefit from 10-20 repetitions per day. This drill can be easily done at home with a parent.

- Bat Behind the Back Drill

The goal of this drill is to improve the hitter's hip quickness, to develop the habit of squishing

the bug with every swing, and to quicken the swing, particularly on inside pitches. The bat-behind-the-back drill is particularly important for young players, who are just beginning to develop their fundamental skills. After warming up, the hitter gets into his regular stance and places the bat behind his back either right on the belt or on the belt line of his baseball pants. He then puts his hands on the back side of the bat so that he can pull hard while executing the drill. With the head of the bat pointed toward the pitcher, the hitter strides and pulls the bat around his back with his right hand (for a right-handed hitter; or with his left hand for a left-handed hitter). At the same time, he rolls up on the back foot and squishes the bug. Fifteen to twenty repetitions of this drill should be part of every hitter's daily routine. Although the drill takes only two to three minutes to complete, the benefits are immeasurable.

- 1-2-3-4 Drill

The goal of the 1-2-3-4 drill is to help develop a proper inward turn. It is especially helpful for dead-stop hitters. These are players who are not going back before going forward. They are not coiling like a jack-in-the-box, gathering strength, and then uncoiling. In general, the dead-stop hitter's problem begins with the first movement, which is straight forward. To correct this problem, it is important to break down the stance and inward turn into a four-step process. This way you can isolate and concentrate on the hitter's specific problems and simplify the steps needed to correct them. Position the hitter in his stance and have him begin moving back and forth. All he needs to do is lift his heels off the ground one at a time, shifting his weight from one side to the other in a bit of a rhythm. He's actually moving back and forth from the pitcher to the catcher. In other words, he: 1. Rocks toward the pitcher, then 2. Toward the catcher, then 3. Toward the pitcher, and then 4. Toward the catcher (to coil and explode into the swing). The motion is not an exaggerated one. In fact, it's very slight. This drill helps the hitter develop some rhythm and movement, making an inward turn easier. It is better to have some rhythm and movement than none at all. As the hitter rocks back and forth, call the 1-2-3-4 count. That is, as he rocks forward, call "1." As he rocks back, call "2." As he rocks forward again, it's "3," and as he rocks back, it's "4." In this manner, the hitter makes the inward turn. You want the hitter to move his hands back just a little bit, but not in a manner distinct from the rest of the body. On the "4" count, the hitter rocks the hands and swings, forcing him to make his inward turn. The front half of the body - that is, the front knee, the front hip, and the front shoulder -- should do the rocking of the hands for the hitter. Young hitters tend to have a problem with this drill when they get away from the rocking motion and lose their rhythm. The rhythm actually gives them an opportunity to time pitches. Timing becomes extremely important as the hitters get older and faces off-speed pitches with regularity.

BUNTING

Bunting is an excellent baseball strategy to move a runner along or to hit the ball toward a poor defensive player.

How to Bunt

- Move up in the batter's box slightly. This will get your bat in fair territory once you square around. This will improve your chances for a successful bunt.
- Take a small step out with your front foot and step up with your back foot so you are facing the pitcher. This is known as "squaring around". Don't step on home plate! You're out if you step on home.
- Grip the bat with the thumb on top of the bat and the index finger and long finger cradling the bat underneath.
- The bottom hand slides up the bat slightly (3 or 4 inches) to give better control. Don't wrap your top hand all the way around the bat. You will get your fingers broken this way!
- Hold the bat at the top of the strike zone at a 45 degree angle. Have the barrel of the bat pointed just inside first base.
- Get the bat OUT IN FRONT of you! Your arms should be extended with a little bend in the elbows. You don't want your arms completely extended - you tend to bunt the ball too hard. But you don't want your arms in by your sides either.
- Knees are bent.
- Hips and shoulders are level.
- Eyes see the ball through the bat and are on the ball.
- If the ball is low, bend at the knees to bunt it.
- If the ball is higher than the bat, pull the bat back and let it go by for a ball.
- You want to bunt the ball toward the first or third baseman. Do not bunt the ball back to the pitcher--it makes you an easy out.
- The proper way to bunt is to "tap" the ball or to "catch" the ball on the bat.
- Bunt the ball before you start to run. Get the bunt down on the ground, then start for first base.

Slash Plays

The slash play is when we square around to bunt, then pull the bat back and swing away. It's an exciting offensive play that puts a lot of pressure on the defense. If it's executed properly, the defense is moving all around. The first and third basemen are charging, the second baseman is going to cover first, the shortstop may be going to cover second or third depending on the game situation. This creates holes in the infield that we can hit through!

The philosophy of the slash is to first sell the sacrifice to the defense. Square around a little earlier than normal, but not so early that you give it away. The grip is the same as for the sacrifice bunt. As the pitcher gets ready to release the ball, you pull the bat back to your back shoulder, the top hand slides down to meet the bottom hand that was choked up 3-4 inches for the sacrifice. We are looking for hard ground ball contact through one of the holes in the

infield.

PITCHING

At this level of baseball and at every level up from here, the teams that have the most success are the teams with the best pitching. Yeah, you still have to hit the ball to score runs and you still have to catch the ball to get the other team out, but if you don't have good pitching, it's difficult to have success. So, one of the first things we're try to do is find out who can pitch and start working with them.

Proper Care of Young Arms

Make sure that you are adequately warmed up (10 - 15 minutes) before you throw hard. Make sure that you throw with the proper mechanics to decrease the chance of injury to your arm. Make sure you have on a sweat shirt on cold and/or rainy days to keep your arm warm.

Qualities of a Good Pitcher

- The ability to pitch with control. - I don't care how fast you throw, but you must throw strikes. Walks will almost always come back to haunt you! On our team, the players that pitch will be the players that can throw strikes consistently. Make the other team "earn" their way on base. Throw the ball over the plate and let your teammates help you on defense.
- The ability to pitch with confidence and poise - I want you to know that you're going to get them out. I don't want you standing out there hoping you'll get them out.
- The ability to throw hard - At this level, throwing hard is not nearly as important as throwing strikes! It's nice to have a 98 - 100 MPH fastball like Mark Wohlers, but you gotta throw it for strikes!

Our Pitching Philosophy

1. We want to make the batter swing the bat - The best hitters in the world only get a hit 3 out of 10 times at bat. That means they make an out 7 out of every 10 times they bat! So, as a pitcher, the odds are with you if you throw it over the plate and make the batter swing the bat. Now, throwing it over the plate doesn't mean belt high, straight as a string. We'll talk about changing speeds, different pitches, and all that other stuff but we want the batter to swing the bat. The one thing I want to stress to our pitchers is that they don't have to win the game all by themselves. We have eight other guys

out there playing defense whose job it is to help the pitcher.

2.
 - We want to throw first pitch strikes - It puts the batter on the defensive.
 - You lose games by walking people - if the lead off batter in an inning walks he will score over 50 % of the time!
 - You don't try to make the hitter miss until he has two strikes - once you get two strikes on him you can try to get him to expand his strike zone and chase a bad pitch.
3. Pitch to our strengths - If you're a fastball pitcher, when the count is 3-2, I want you throwing your best fastball. If you're a breaking ball pitcher, I want you throwing your best breaking ball when the game is on the line. If you get beat, I want you to get beat with your best pitch.
4. Work early in the count (we'd like to average 3 1/2 pitches a batter). I don't want a lot of 3-2 counts. The fewer pitches you throw to each batter, it stands to reason, the more batters you can pitch to in a game.
5. Work to advantage counts (first pitch strikes) - The batter is on the defensive when the count is 0-2 or 1-2. He will often expand his strike zone and swing at pitches that are not strikes. He will, in effect, get himself out for you!
6. If we lose the advantage (fall behind 2-0 or 3-1), we call that Challenge Time - throw the ball right down the middle and let your defense bail you out. We don't want to walk people!

Pitching Goals

As a pitcher you should work on at least one of these every time you throw a baseball.

Our "pitching goals":

1. Sound delivery/mechanics - you cannot throw strikes consistently if you do not have sound mechanics. You also risk arm injury if you throw with bad mechanics
2. Location - To be a successful pitcher you have to be able to locate the ball.
Inside/outside, up and down
3. Change speeds - You don't throw every pitch the same speed. You put a little more on, you take a little off. It keeps the batter off stride. There is an old adage about hitting that says: Hitting is all about timing. Pitching is all about disrupting the hitters timing. You disrupt a hitters timing by changing speeds
4. Field your position - You can win yourself a lot of ball games if you can field your position.

Three Components to Any Pitch

There are three components to any pitch. They are:

1. Location (most important) Your fastball may not be 100 MPH, but if it's on the corner

at the knee, it's hard for any batter to hit it.

2. Movement (second most important) It doesn't matter how hard you throw it, if your pitch is as straight as a string, good hitter will hit it. It's the late movement on pitches that makes hitters miss
3. Velocity (least important, but nice to have!) OK, I'll admit it's nice to be able to throw hard enough to throw the ball by hitters, but velocity is the least important of the three components to any pitch.

Key Points of Pitching Mechanics

by: Rick Hatcher, Former Pitching Coach, University of South Carolina

1. Foot Position on the Pitching Rubber
 - Right handed pitchers should be on the right side of the rubber.
 - Left handed pitchers should be on the left side of the rubber.
 - Heels of your feet should be on top of the rubber and about 6-8 inches apart.
 - Balls of your feet should be in front of the rubber.
2. Signal Receiving Position
 - The ball should be placed in a preset position in your glove
 - Knees should be slightly bent and in a comfortable position.
 - Feet should be about 6-8 inches apart.
 - Fingers on the ball should be pointed straight out from the belly button.
3. First Movement of the Windup
 - Take a short 6 inch rocker step back and slightly to the side of the rubber.
 - Weight should be on the ball of your rocker step foot. Do not let your heel touch the ground. This causes improper weight transfer.
 - Head should remain over the pivot foot.
 - Your hands should move up to your chin or slightly above your eyes.
4. Shoulder Turn - Pivot Foot Placement
 - Turn your front shoulder to your target as you place your pivot foot in front of the rubber.
 - The knee should be slightly bent over your pivot foot.
 - Your back leg should be bent slightly from start to finish.
5. Balance Point - THE MOST CRITICAL PART OF MECHANICS !
 - Lift your knee, not your foot, up and back to the mid-point of your body.
 - The leg should be bent high and parallel to the ground.
 - The lower part of the leg should be relaxed.
 - Your toe should be slightly lower than the heel of the foot.
 - Your elbows should be pointed down to the ground (45 degree angle).

6. Front Shoulder

- Shoulder should be pointed to your target.
- The chin should be over or slightly in front of the shoulder.

7. Hand Separation - Ball out of the Glove

- Hands should separate between the belt and chest.
- Movement of the ball out of the glove should be the first movement. Nothing goes forward until the hands separate.
- Take the ball back and up with your hand, not your elbow, to the top of the throwing circle.

8. Arm Extension

- Start arm action back with your throwing hand, concentrating on the thumb pointing down and the fingers pointing back towards second base.
- The elbow should work with the throwing hand.
- Throwing hand should be in a position above your back shoulder with the fingers pointing up to the sky in centerfield. You can think of your index and long fingers of your throwing hand like fangs of a snake. You want the fangs pointed away from you so you don't get bit!

9. Front Side Actions

- The front arm should be strong and firm throughout the delivery.
- The lead elbow is slightly bent and points toward home plate.
- The front arm determines the speed for the pitch.
- The glove should be in a semi-tucked position at the point of release.

10. Hips

- Your hips are your power
- The pivot will drive the back hip, the back hip will drive the front hip to the plate, and the hips will turn the landing foot.
- The pivot foot is the key to when you open your hips.

11. Landing Foot

- You should land with a slightly bent front knee.
- The foot should land flat on the ground, toe and heel should touch together.
- The stride should be approx. 5 shoe lengths from the front edge of the rubber.
- Keep your weight back as long as possible when you land on your stride foot.

12. Throwing Arm Extension

- You must have a relaxed grip and wrist; allow your throwing arm, hand, and wrist to go completely through the delivery.
- The hand must extend to the target, then the head follows the hand down, then the back side creates the follow through.

- Be "long" in front. Be a rifle, not a pistol.

The Pitcher's Grip

1. Fastball

- 4-Seam Grip - Grip the ball across all four seams. Excellent pitch to throw hard, up in the strike zone.
- 2-Seam Grip - Grip the ball along the two short seams of the ball. This produces a sinking pitch. Use this grip to keep the fastball down and get a little move movement on the pitch.

CATCHING

Our catcher is our "field general." The catcher is the only player who has everything in front of him. He has to have courage to take the foul-tips off his body and to stand his ground for the collisions at home plate. He has to be able to communicate with the other players, so he can tell them where to throw the ball. The catcher is the most important defensive position on the field. If you have a good catcher, you can have a good team defense. I want the players who we designate as our catchers to study the handbook daily until they know it like they know their names.

The Catcher's Equipment

The catcher's equipment is sometimes called the "tools of ignorance," but nothing could be further from the truth. The catcher must be one of the smartest players on the field, but since his job is also the one with the most danger, he gets some special protection.

- Shin guards
- Chest protector
- Helmet Mask and throat guard
- Protective cup (required)
- Catcher's Mitt

The Sign-Giving Position

- Wrap the glove hand around left knee to hide the sign from the third base coach.
- Point your knees at the pitcher to keep the first and third base coaches from looking in and stealing your signals.
- Keep your right hand held deep in your crotch, so no one can see the sign except your pitcher and middle infielders (second base and short stop).

- Don't have your fingers so low that they can be seen by the opposition. Make sure the hitter isn't looking back trying to steal the signal.

How to Get the Proper Distance From the Batter

You need to be far enough behind the batter so you don't get hit with the bat and called for catcher's interference. If the batter hits the catcher with the bat while swinging, it is called catcher's interference, and the batter is awarded first base. You need to be as close to the batter as you can get without getting hit with the bat. When the catcher is close to the batter it allows the umpire to get a good look at the pitch. A good catcher who is set up close to the batter can steal some of those borderline pitches for his pitcher (get them called strikes when they may have been balls) by framing them for strikes. A good rule of thumb on how to set up is: You should almost be able to reach up and touch the batters back elbow with your catchers mitt.

The Receiving Position Stance With No Runners On Base

After giving the sign, the catcher assumes the receiving position. With no one on base and if the batter isn't a threat to bunt, you can catch in whatever position you feel most comfortable in. We call this our primary stance. Feet are shoulder width apart. With no one on base, I want your "meat hand" (the one without the glove on it) to be held behind your back with your thumb folded inside the other fingers, so you don't catch a foul tip off of it. Catching arm should be outside of the knee. Catching arm should be out in front with the elbow slightly flexed (not fully extended and not in right next to your chest protector).

The Receiving Position Stance With Runners On Base

With runners on base or a bunting threat at home plate, we have to be in position to field the bunt or make a throw to get the runner trying to steal. We call this our secondary stance. Feet wider than shoulder width. Weight up on the balls of the feet. Right toes about even with left instep. Legs parallel to the ground. Butt up and stay low to give the umpire a good view of the pitch. The meat hand now comes up (with thumb still folded inside the other fingers) to a position just beside the right edge of the mitt. Make sure you catch the ball before you try to throw it. Remember the position you're playing is CATCHER.

Framing A Pitch

Framing the pitch is the art of catching the borderline pitch (a pitch that could be called a ball or a strike) so that it gets called a strike for your pitcher. Framing is a short, fluid move back into the middle of the body with the glove after you have caught the ball.

Blocking The Pitch in the Dirt

We do not expect our catcher to catch every low ball in the dirt, but we do expect him to block them so they don't get through to the backstop letting runners advance.

- Technique for blocking the low pitch right in front of you
 - - Fall to your knees.
 - Glove into the ground like a "pitch fork."
 - Meat hand behind glove.
 - Relax your chest.
 - You are not trying to catch the ball, you are trying to block it.
 - Your chest protector acts as your glove
 - Keep your body square to the ball.
 - Hunch your shoulder forward.
 - Keep your chin down, so the ball doesn't fly up and hit you in the throat.
 - Direct all balls back toward home plate Keep the ball in front of you! If it's in front of you, you can still make a play.
 - Technique for blocking the ball in the dirt inside or outside
 - Jab step with the near-side foot
 - Drive off the opposite leg Stay low Get "around" the ball
 - Direct the ball back towards home plate

How to Field Pop Fouls

The important thing to remember is the idea of "infield drift". What this means is that any foul ball will tend to drift back toward the infield.

Technique for fielding foul balls

- Find the foul ball.
- Turn your back to the infield.
- Throw your mask far enough away so that you don't trip over it. (Don't laugh, it's happened even to major leaguers!)
- RELAX ! You've got more time than you think.
- Raise your mitt above your chin.
- Catch the ball with two hands above your chin. Do not catch it "basket style" in front of your waist.
- Your elbows and knees act as shock absorbers to give a little when you make the catch.

How to Field Bunts

- How to Field Bunts down third base line

We have two options on bunts down the third base line.

- - Small jab step with left foot go out and round off the ball. Get your plant foot (right foot) behind the ball, scoop and throw.
 - Head directly toward the ball. Get your right foot over the ball. Spin toward first base and make the throw.
- How to Field Bunts back toward the mound (but a ball that the catcher can get to)
- - Head straight out toward the ball.
 - Round off the ball when you get to it.
 - Square up to first base.
 - Make the throw.
- How to Field Bunts down the first base line
- - Head straight toward ball.
 - Scoop the ball up.
 - Either step into the infield to get a better angle on the throw or step into foul territory to get a better angle on the throw.
 - You must make sure you don't hit the runner with the throw.

When to Scoop the Bunt into Glove vs. When to Bare hand the Ball

Team rule: If the bunt is rolling, I want you to scoop it up into your glove with your bare hand (glove hand and bare hand work together). If the bunt has stopped rolling, I want you to think of either a "cork screw" or a "pitch fork" as you "screw" it or "fork" it into the ground as you pick it up with your bare hand.

BASE RUNNING

Some baseball players are fast runners and some baseball players are slow, but you can be a good base runner even if you aren't very fast. Knowing when to run and knowing when not to run are more important than being really fast. Of course, it's best if you're really fast and a good base runner! In this section, we'll talk about what makes a good base runner and how to slide.

Three Rules of Good Base Running

1. Check the coach for a signal - perhaps a steal or maybe a bunt's on. You have to know the signal before you leave the base.
2. Before you EVER leave a base, find the baseball. Do not get caught in the old "hidden ball trick."
3. Check the defense.

Fundamentals of Running The Bases

Run "loose" with no tension. This does not mean not to run hard, it just means don't run tense. Shoulders are level. Hands and arms work in a "piston-like" manner-- the hands go no higher than the shoulders in front and no further back than the hips behind. Hips are level, like the shoulders. Knees come up to the level of the hips. The toes land before the heels. Run in a straight line.

Running to (through) First Base - (ground ball on the infield)

- Base running starts at the crack of the bat! Good hitting mechanics allow a player to get a better jump out of the batter's box.
- First step out of the batter's box - Right handed hitter will take his first step to first base with his right foot. A left handed hitter would cross-over with his rear foot (left) by opening up his stride foot (right) after contact with the ball.
- Quick Peek - On the third or fourth step, the batter may grab a quick peek to see if the ball is on the infield (and he's running through the bag), or got through the infield to the outfield (and he's making a turn at first base), or got between the outfielders (and he's thinking double) Do not watch the ball after your quick peek -- it only slows you down. Last season, I saw a lot of kids get thrown out at first base because they were watching the ball instead of running hard.
- Run in a straight line for first base. You must run in the restraining box that begins about 1/2 way up the first base line. If you are hit with a thrown ball and you are not in the restraining box, you can be called out.
- The runner must never leap for first base.
- The runner must attempt to touch the front of the base.
- The runner must touch first base every time.
- The runner must run full speed through first base.
- On ground balls on the infield think of first base as the finish line in a race. Good runners "run through" the finish line.
- After running full speed through first base, the runner then chops his steps down and looks to his right (toward foul territory) for the overthrow.

Rounding First Base - (ground ball through the infield)

- On your quick peek you see the ball is through the infield.

- About half way toward first base, begin your banana turn.
- Hit the inside corner of the bag with your inside foot (left) Make the ball stop you.
- Follow the ball all the way back to the bag
- We're thinking "two out of the box." Doubles are made between home and first not between first and second.

You're a Runner on First Base and A Fly Ball is Hit in the Outfield

On fly ball to right, go 1/3 of the way between 1st and 2nd. You will have to turn yourself so you can see if the right fielder catches the ball. On fly ball to center, go about 1/2 way between 1st and 2nd. On fly ball to left, you can go almost 2/3 of the way between 1st and 2nd. Your weight is on the balls of your feet. Your arms are hanging loosely in front of you. If the ball falls in, you're on your way to second base. If the ball is caught, you're scampering back to first base.

You're a Runner on Second Base and a Ball is Hit (no runner on first)

"Apply the Rule": On ground ball to right side (second base, first base), advance to third. On ground ball back to pitcher, hold and make sure he throws the ball to first (you can be a couple of steps off the bag, just don't be so far off that the pitcher can pick you off), then if you've gotten a good jump, go over to third. On ground ball to left side, make the third baseman or shortstop throw the ball to first before attempting to go to third. (You can be a couple of steps off the bag, just don't be so far off that they can pick you off.) Make a line drive go through. don't get doubled off ! On fly balls, if it's obviously going to be caught - go back to second to tag up. If the fly ball is kinda iffy (may be caught and may not be caught), you need to be far enough off the bag so that you can score if the ball falls in for a hit, but not so far off the bag that they can double you off if the ball is caught. Obviously, the coach doesn't have time to go over all of possible scenarios in a game. So, I'll just say: Apply the Rule.

You're a Runner on Third Base

- Scoring on a passed ball or wild pitch

As the ball goes by the batter, the runner at third will push off the bag with their back foot and take two or three hard strides toward home plate in foul territory (if you are hit with a batted ball in fair territory, you're out), finishing with their weight going forward. Then, if there is a passed ball or a wild pitch, the runner is in position to score. If the catcher catches the ball, the runner retreats back to third base, but he does so in fair territory (so if the catcher throws to third the ball has a good chance of hitting the runner in the back, caroming into left field and we score the run).

- Tagging up on fly balls

Make the line drive go through. Don't get doubled off! On any fly ball to the outfield that isn't obviously a base hit (and less than two out. With two outs, of course, you're off on contact), you go back to third base and tag up. Timing is very important. If you leave the base too soon, they can appeal the play and you can be called out. If you leave the base too late, they may throw you out at the plate. If it's going to be a close play, the runner must leave the base at the exact time the ball touches the glove of the outfielder. The runner must be able to observe the catch himself, rather than relying on the third base coach to tell him to tag up. The only way the runner can clearly see the ball while tagging up at a base is to have the foot on the base that will allow him full sight of the baseball as it is touched by the outfielder. Just as the ball touches the outfielders glove, the runner pushes off hard with his foot that is in full contact with the base, achieve maximum acceleration as quickly as possible, and slide at home plate. If you run into the catcher and don't slide, they will call you out. You must slide at home.

Sliding

Sliding is "controlled falling." It is not a jump or a leap. We will teach only the Figure-4 slide. Head-first sliding is illegal in our league. If you head-first slide, you will be automatically out. Whenever we steal a base, advance on a passed ball or on an overthrow, we assume the slide. I don't want anyone thrown out because they didn't slide.

Figure 4 slide

The player tucks one of his legs underneath him as he goes into his slide. This is called establishing the tuck leg. The top leg is slightly bent, so it can give a little when it hits the base. It's important for there to be some bend in the top leg, otherwise it can break when it jams into the base. The head is up looking for the base. The arms are off the ground.

The Cardboard Sliding Drill Sliding

It's fun and easy to learn with the cardboard sliding drill. The players will get a running start, come in and execute a Figure-4 slide on a big, slick piece of cardboard. Wear old socks the day we do the cardboard sliding drill, because we slide in our sock feet. I don't want your mom mad at me because we trashed a pair of your good socks learning to slide!

Defensive Game Situations

Everyone likes to hit the ball, run the bases, and score runs, but not everyone appreciates just how important defense is in baseball. Defense is just as important as offense. If we play good defense and the other team doesn't score, then we can't lose!

The Four Magic Rules Of Defensive Success

(You guys do these things, and we'll be famous by Friday!)

1. Catch the ball! You can't throw the ball before you catch it. Don't laugh! Even Major Leaguers make this mistake. Catch the ball by looking it into your glove. Don't be in such a hurry to throw it that you forget to catch it!
2. Always take the easy out! As the old baseball saying goes, you don't want to give the other team "four outs." That means it is better to take a "sure out" instead of trying to make a really difficult play. The difficult play could lead to an error and the other team scoring a bunch of runs.
3. Get the lead runner out when you can. Keeping their runners as far away from home plate as possible is always a good thing to do, but not if it means violating rule #2.
4. Outfielders: We throw two bases in front of the lead runner on ground balls to the outfield. We throw one base in front of the lead base runner on fly balls that are caught in the outfield. If you catch the ball (either grounder for fly ball), we will throw directly to the base. If the ball gets by you and rolls to the fence (either grounder for fly ball), we will throw directly to the cut-off man. Always throw toward the correct base and hit the cut-off man. If you don't, the other team usually takes extra bases and scores extra runs.

Call for Pop Flies

When the fly ball is at its apex (highest point) and you're going for it, I want you to scream as loud as you can - "I got it, I got it!" and wave your arms from side-to-side to show your team mates that you're going to catch it. This keeps you from running into a team mate and possibly injuring one another.

Run Downs

The idea in a run down is to get the runner out with as few throws as possible. Ideally, we will run the runner back toward the base he came from, make one throw and tag the runner out. Make sure that you don't stand in the baseline blocking the runner without the ball, the umpire can call the runner safe if you are blocking his path by standing in the baseline without the ball. Of course, if you have the ball, you can stand in the baseline and tag him

out.

Special Situations

- Bases Loaded

Hopefully, we'll play such good defense that no one will load the bases against us! But just in case it does happen a time or two this year, I'd like to spend a little time discussing it. After the other team loads the bases, we must minimize the damage, "stop the bleeding", if you will. We're trying to keep them out of the big inning where they score 5, 6, or 7 runs. If you only give up a run or two in a bases-loaded situation, that's not so bad. But if you give up a bunch of runs, you can find yourself too far behind to catch up!

- Bases Loaded and Two Outs

We have a force at any base, including home plate. Remember Magic Defensive Rule #2--always take the easy out. If the ball is hit to the third baseman, he can just step on the bag, because it's the easiest out (he doesn't even have to throw the ball). The same thing applies for the ball hit to any other infielder, get the easiest out possible.

- Bases Loaded and One Out

What to do with the ball in this situation isn't nearly so clear cut. We have a force at any base, but if we can turn a double play then we're out of the inning. What you will do depends on where and how hard the ball is hit. If it's hit right at you, the best play may be a force at home. If it's hit up the middle, the shortstops and second baseman's best play may be going for the double play. If it's hit to the first baseman then the best play may be for him to step on the bag, and then throw home to, hopefully, get the runner coming in from third. Remember, after the first baseman has already gotten the batter, the force play is no longer in effect and the catcher must tag the runner, not just step on home plate.

- Bases Loaded and Nobody Out

We have a force at any base (including home). If the ball is hit to you sharply, your best play is probably a force at the plate. All the catcher has to do is touch home plate. He doesn't have to tag the runner if the force is in effect.

- Last Inning and the Winning Run Is on Third

If this run scores, we lose. So, we have to bring the infield and outfield in so they can throw the runner out at the plate. If the force is not in effect, the catcher must tag the runner.

Miscellaneous Offensive Game Situations

Hit with batted ball

If you are a base runner and you are hit with a batted ball, you are out. If you can see the batted ball coming, try to jump back or over the ball so it doesn't touch you. If it touches you, you're out! If you are hit with a thrown ball you are not out.

Hidden ball trick

Do not fall for the old hidden ball trick! That's when you, as a base runner, don't realize the player on the other team has the ball, and he says something like, "Hey, how about step off the base so I can straighten it or clean it." You step off the base. He tags you out. The umpire calls you out. You'll feel really bad if this happens to you. I don't want this happening to us, but we just might try to pull it on another team this year!
