



# Valley Center Little League

**"Progression Through the Divisions"**



We need to make sure there are specific areas being covered at each level of play. We do not need to be teaching how to throw breaking balls in Rookies and we do not need the Majors kids just starting to learn how to run the bases properly. We need to be unified in how and what we are teaching our community during the different divisions of baseball. Below is a recommended plan to get our youth ready to have fun playing baseball in Valley Center Little League moving from T-Ball (4-6), Rookies (6-7), Minor B (7-9), Minor A (8-11), Majors (10-12), Intermediate (11-13), Juniors (13-14), into High School and beyond. This should be a progression of learning experiences as well. Keep the game engaging, useful, competitive, and most importantly, FUN!

**T-Ball (4-6) or Rookies (6-7)** *This will typically be their first year involved with baseball*

Main focus for the players first year of baseball should be an intro to the game itself and how to have fun playing baseball the right way. Start to respect the game and what it has to offer. You always have to assume they know nothing. Invite the parents to learn and help out if they would like to. The more help the better.

### **Learn to dress properly / be ready for practice and games**

- ◇ Cleats
- ◇ Baseball Socks
- ◇ Baseball Pants
- ◇ Belt
- ◇ Shirt Tucked In
- ◇ Hat
- ◇ Glove
- ◇ Bat

### **Learn to stretch and warm up for baseball activities**

- ◇ Stretch as a team
- ◇ Butt-kickers
- ◇ High Knees
- ◇ Carioca
- ◇ Shuffles
- ◇ Sprints (Running the Bases...Properly)
- ◇ Arm Stretches
  - o Arm Across
  - o Arm Behind Your Head



- o Arm Circles
  - Forward & Backward

**General Coaching Points / Notes:**

- Do not over teach your division.
- Encourage parents to play catch with their kids...will go a long way with development!
  
- **T-Ball (Ages 4-6)**
  - o Work on keeping things organized as best as you can with positions
  - o Try to get only one kid fielding the baseball
  - o Show them how to hold the bat, how to stand in the box, simple swing, and where to run after the hit it
  - o Basic throwing mechanics
    - Point your glove hand or the elbow to your target
    - Step to your target and point your toes towards the target
    - Throw overhand
  - o Basic fielding mechanics
    - Feet about shoulder width apart
    - Bend their knees
    - Butts down (like sitting in a chair)
    - On the balls of their feet and not on their heels
    - Hands out front just a little off the ground
    - LOOKING at the hitter waiting for the ball to be hit
  - o You will need lots of help, so make sure to ask other parents to help coach and be in the dugout to keep some type of organization.
  - o Try to have multiple skill stations with only 3-4 kids at each station.
    - Hitting, Fielding, Throwing, Catching, Coach Pitch, etc...
  - o HAVE FUN
  
- **Rookies (6-7)**
  - o Everything that was listed above in T-Ball PLUS...
  - o Start to develop the swing a little more to hit pitches being thrown at them either from the coach or off the machine. (Machine will be used for games)
  - o Understand their feet a little more in the swing pattern and use their legs and rotate
  - o Continue to know where the ball needs to go with baserunners on
    - Different situations
      - Ball into the OF, we need to learn to throw to 2B and not 1B
  - o Start to learn how to round the bases and when to run the bases
  - o Start working on a catcher.... the kids need to WANT to do this.
    - DO NOT make a kid catch. You will ruin that experience for them later on
  - o Start to work a lot more on fielding, catching, and throwing
    - They will need to be able to catch pretty good in order to move on to Minor A's for safety reasons
    - We do NOT want to put them in that situation



- Implement the grip of the baseball
        - Hands might not be big enough for a true grip yet, but start to hold the ball correctly with a 4-seam and a 2-seam grip
    - Make sure a kid can catch prior to sticking them at 1B
- **Minor B (7-10)**
  - Everything listed above in T-ball and Rookies, PLUS...
  - One of the most important levels of baseball – This is when they begin to decide if baseball is for them and if they really enjoy it.
    - Keep it engaging and fun for them
  - This is still a DEVELOPMENT level
  - Kids who are just starting or need extra developing but are too old/big/advanced for Rookies and not ready for Minor A's yet
  - Focus on getting their skills developed.
    - Mainly catching, throwing, and fielding
    - Hitting will begin to come around as well, but not the most important thing at this level
  - Kids will be starting to learn how to pitch
    - For safety reasons, pitch everyone at practice to see if they are able to do it in the game
    - It's okay if everyone does NOT get to pitch in the game
      - The kids start to take things pretty hard when they fail in a game and there is no reason for us, as coaches, to put them into that situation. Again, DO NOT ruin their experience with it
    - Have to start working in the bullpens on how to throw correct
  - Need to make sure you are running practices that keep ALL of the kids engaged and active.
    - Create stations, get help from parents
      - Keep groups of 3-4 kids together
        - Easier to manage and keep them engaged/active
  - Start to throw BP to them at practice and fielding live plays/situations
  - Baserunning needs to be worked on
    - Correct way to hit the base, run through the base, and round
  - Start working on sliding at bases
  - Begin working on how to pick up the coach to see if they should keep running to the next base, round and stop, stop on the base, or slide
  - Make sure you start to teach good behavior in the dugout
  - Teach them the rules of baseball a bit more as well
    - When they can run
    - What they can do
    - How the pitching rules are
    - Etc...
  - Start getting the rules of the game explained to them
- **Minor A's (8-11)**
  - Everything listed above in T-ball, Rookies, and Minor B's PLUS...



- o Coaches HAVE to be getting more advanced and skilled in all areas of the game from here on out
- o As a league, we are starting to play to win at this level. COMPETE.
- o Pitching
  - Stay away from breaking balls. NO NEED!!!
    - Fastball and Changeups are perfect
  - Get the mechanics of the WIND-UP dialed in
  - Get to a good balance point at leg lift
  - Load into your legs
  - Know when to separate the hands
    - Usually as your leg is coming down...all depends on foot-strike
  - Get the ball in hand up above in a good position at front foot-strike
  - Have a good balanced finish after extension
- o Hitting
  - Stance
    - Get their hands into where they need to be FOR THAT INDIVIDUAL
  - Swing path (per individual)
  - Extension to AND through contact
    - “Palm up Palm Down” at contact and through it
  - FINISH the swing
    - Do not over rotate and pull your front side out
  - Start to work on bunting and the mechanics of that as well
    - Difference between a SAC, push, and/or drag
- o Fielding
  - Pre-pitch timing step/routine
    - Should not be flat-footed
    - ANTICIPATE the ball and where to go when hit into play
  - Right-Left-Field, Right-Left-Throw
  - Follow your throw
  - Good arm slots depending on play
  - Hands out front vs. Funneling
  - Create and implement a Pick Routine for infielders
  - Create and implement a Line Routine for outfielders
  - Create and implement a Catch routing for everyone!
- o Baserunning
  - How to hit 1B
  - Run THROUGH 1B
  - How to break down and read after 1B
    - Overthrow and go
    - How to turn towards the foul side so you are not in play
  - How to round the bases with more intent
  - Pick up base coaches “coach, bag, coach” as an example
  - SLIDING Practice!!!
- o Catchers (Position)
  - This is a very important time to get the catchers LOVING their position



- Have to create and implement catching routines and practices
      - GIVE THEM REPS but DO NOT wear them out!
    - Work on throwing to bases as a catcher
      - Who's covering
      - Footwork
      - Arm action
    - COMMUNICATION is huge!
      - Give them a voice
      - Step out front, how many outs, where the ball is going, etc...
    - Hustle
      - Passed balls and wild pitches are going to happen with runners on
        - WORK ON THIS
  - Need to really know the rules of the game and understand them
- **Majors (10-12)**
  - Everything listed above in T-ball and Rookies, Minor B's, and Minor A's PLUS...
  - Keep implementing more and more knowledge to everything discussed
  - Practice plans will begin to develop differently
    - More focus and running at practice
    - Throwing routines
    - Stretch routines
    - Form running
    - Inf/Of sessions
    - Bullpens
    - Correct mechanics
    - Advanced talks on the mental side of the game
    - Game management
  - Pitching...Stay away from working on breaking balls that are not being thrown correctly. No true curveballs!
    - Absolutely no need to be pulling down and snapping at this age
    - You can teach a football change (it breaks if thrown right and is safe)
    - Cutters are easy to gain movement
    - Two-seam vs 4 seam
    - Change up is the best pitch. DEVELOP and master it.
  - Hitting
    - More intent and get further into mechanics
    - Start filming swings and going over mechanics with them
    - Begin to discuss and implement the mental side of the game/approach
  - Fielding
    - Start to figure out what positions these kids be should playing for the most part
    - Cuts and relays need to develop
      - Proper footwork as a cut off



- Where to go when the ball is hit in different spots on the field
    - Know where to line up as a cut-off guy in different situations
    - Good loud communication
  - o Catchers
    - Teach them how to call a game and allow THEM to call their own game!
  - o Arm Care
    - Implement a program with bands, stretching, throwing programs, etc.
- **Intermediate (11-13)**
  - o Everything listed above in T-ball and Rookies, Minor B's, Minor A's, and Majors PLUS...
  - o Continuing to go even further into baseball
    - Rules of the game
    - Etiquette of the game
  - o Baserunning begins to advance and start to work on leading off the base
    - How to lead off
  - o Pick-offs from the pitchers
    - How to pick
    - What a balk is
    - Pick to 2B
    - Knowing when you have to throw on a pick attempt and when you do not have to
  - o A lot more goes into the game as you are now playing by "real" rules!!!
  - o Practice plans have to be better
    - Better use of time
    - No standing around!
    - Keep kids engaged and coached
  - o Hitting has to begin to be taken to another level
    - Filming should be introduced for hitters
    - Coaches have to know how to break down a swing and diagnose what needs to happen in order to "fix" and adjust issues
    - Work from the ground up
      - If you mess with the hands first and then the load in the legs, the load might change what the hands are doing, and you are back to square one.
      - Understand the kinetic chain of the swing
  - o Film
    - Pitching mechanics



- Hitting mechanics
- Fielding mechanics
- Catching mechanics

- **Juniors (13-14)**

- o Everything listed above in T-ball and Rookies, Minor B's, Minor A's, Majors, and Intermediate PLUS...
- o This level is the last stop before heading into High School and trying out for those teams
- o We need to have them ready to go!
- o Develop and continue the efforts of advancing the coaching levels we can offer
- o Be involved. BE BETTER.

**Learn the Names, Numbers, and Abbreviations of the positions**



**Learn how to be “baseball ready” and where the ball needs to be thrown when hit into play**

- ◇ This is our goal....to get every kid looking like this before each swing or pitch!
  - o Butts down, eyes up (watching the hitter), on their feet, and glove ready



- ◇ When a ball is hit into play, we want to get them used to throwing it to 1B every time
  - o Ideally when the ball is put into play, we only have a kid or two going for a ball and then only one actually getting the ball to throw it, looking something like this





- In reality, it will look something like this!!!



- Just keep working on things and get them to the point where it's not a dog fight every time the ball is put into play
  - You can use cones to mark out section of the field for each position to "stay in" as a boundary



## Learn to hold the bat properly and what size bat you should be using

Tony Gwynn (Between Knocking Knuckles and Hammer)  
(Hammer)



David Ortiz



Albert Pujos (Knocking Knuckles)  
(Hammer)



Hank Aaron



*As you can see in these pictures of Hall of Famers, they all have slightly different versions of the grip. Do not get stuck teaching one way to hold the bat “knocking Knuckles” grip or more of the Hammer Grip “Hammering Hank (Aaron)”*

- ◇ Be somewhere from “Knocking Knuckles” to “Hammer” and anywhere in between
  - This will start to determine how their swings will need to be adjusted as they get older
- ◇ Let the kids start to feel what is comfortable to them



- Here is a link to show that the “GET YOUR ELBOW UP!!!” is not for everyone. Again, just let the players develop what is COMFORTABLE to THEM INDIVIDUALLY



<https://www.hittingdaily.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/AltuveJose2016Side.gif>

- ◇ As the player gets older, they will develop more of the type of swing path and “launching” slots
  - This is when we will start to worry about making adjustments to the swing itself
  - For now, let’s just get them “looking” the part
    - They will also have THEIR OWN version of what this looks like
    - Let them be COMFORTABLE in the box and in their own stance
      - I will get more into this in their later stages of baseball development
      - For now, set them up for what it “looks” like then leave them alone and let them swing!



- Again, this is a “typical” stance to start from and build off of -

### **Learn to run the bases (Some kids will not know what direction to go!)**

- ◇ Need to teach them how to run to 1B correctly to keep bad habits from forming
  - This can be done right away with learning how to hit first base correctly
    - EVERYTIME!!!
  - Hit the front part of the base
    - Do NOT lunge at the base or overextend on the last step to hit the front
  
- ◇ Below are some examples on how to hit 1B correctly and incorrectly (causing an injury)



**CORRECT**  
**In-stride and front part**

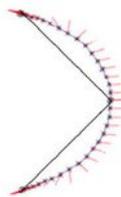
**Incorrect**  
**Lunging AND going to miss**

**Incorrect**  
**Missing 1B completely**

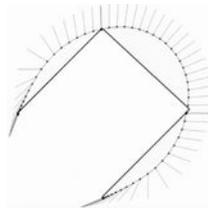
- ◇ By teaching this upfront at a young age, you will help prevent something like this following sequence from happening.



- ◇ Something as simple as hitting first base is extremely important and should be worked on daily or whenever running bases
- ◇ As you start to teach how to round the bases, below is an example of the most efficient route around the bases.



**DOUBLE**  
**HOME RUN**



**TRIPLE**

- ◇ Making these rounds are actually pretty tough on the runner and will have to be worked on regularly
  - The base runner will have to lean to the left and really tuck their left shoulder to hold this route



- o Use the base to keep them up as they are rounding the base



### **The “Question Mark” Round**

**-DO NOT TEACH THIS for balls hit out of the infield-**

- ◇ It will ONLY be used for ground balls that are hit and then gets through the infield creating this round as they are running to 1B

**Minors (8-11) Majors (10-12) Intermediate (11-13) Juniors (13-14)**

- **Once their hands are big enough to start using different grips**

### **Learn to hold the baseball when throwing**

- ◇ Four Seam Grip vs. Two Seam Grip



- ◇ Four Seam Grip will have more carry and hold a much straighter flight path
  - o Best for all purpose throwing, and should be used for ALL POSITIONS
  - o Do not choke the ball
  - o Nice and loose and feel the ball off your fingertips
- ◇ Two Seam Grip will tend to have an arm side tailing action to it with a little sink
  - o Used more when you begin to start pitching and you want more action to it
- ◇ **Grips below are really the only variations of pitches that we should be throwing when able to grip correctly. Stick with Fastball variations until you can develop**
  - o Grips can vary, but this is an intro to starting to learn how to move the baseball with little to no added stress to the arm
  - o Bigger sharper breaking pitches will come with development
  - o If you can throw all of these pitches before you get into Junior year of HIGH SCHOOL, you will be ahead of most people
  - o We should not be teaching big wrist snaps to break off a curveball
    - It’s all about release and action
  - o DO NOT teach something you do not know!
  - o Take care of the arm. Not just pitchers....
  - o **Nobody is getting drafted or signed out of Little League!**





The main focus of this entire process is not just for the kids. Parents and coaches have to be all-in. Everyone has to understand that it's a process. Some kids are more ready at certain ages than others. The skill levels involved with rec sports doesn't matter. It's all about the experience and the willingness to learn, support, and have fun. However, do not be mistaken. At some point things get to a competitive point. For VCLL we are going to start that "play to win" in the Minor A division. Part of the lifelong process of baseball and any sport is to install the competitiveness to the players. This can be toxic if done wrong and taken out of context.

Most of the time, it's the coaches and parents that screw this up. Learn how to win and learn how to lose, parents and coaches included. Almost every game will have a winner and a loser. Do it the right way by supporting the sport of baseball. If you see a good play, cheer, a good hit, cheer. It doesn't matter what team or kid made the play. You start to teach these kids that it's okay to cheer for good baseball and not be selfish in a TEAM game. You want to be selfish, go play golf or singles in tennis. Then it can be all about the individual. The best baseball players to ever play this game fail 7 out of 10 times at the plate. Your kid is going to fail. Guess what.....That's OK! They do not need parents and coaches jumping down their throat and yelling at them to "swing earlier", "get your elbow up", "run", "what are you doing" or any of that. Parents are at games to show their support. If you want to coach, then sign up to coach. If you think you are a better umpire, then sign up to umpire. If not, then be there to support or stay home. Pretty simple.

Parents need to know their role in all of this. SUPPORT the kids playing the game. Teach the kids what good sportsmanship looks like. Show them how to support the team and the coaches. If you as a parent tell your kid that "it's okay, the coach doesn't know what they're doing, you're better than that other kid", your kid is going to start thinking the same way and not listen, not try, and not want to play anymore. Also, DO NOT yell across the bleachers at other parents or at any coaches, umpires, or even other kids.

Coaches need to know their role and develop where/when needed and understand the level they are at. Support these kids and teach them. Give them a fair shot to EARN their way into positions. If a kid wants to try and pitch, play 1B, play SS, catch, whatever.... then give them a shot. If you as a coach are saying they are not ready,



then give them a chance to earn it in practice. The worst thing a coach can do as is give up on someone's ability and check out on an individual. That's what drives kids away from any sport at any level. They feel as they are not getting a fair shot and turn on you. They are going to remember their coach. How they remember their coach is on the coach.

The installment of competitiveness should be extremely healthy and helpful to these individuals if done in the right way. Be competitive, play to win, but do it the right way. Have baseball etiquette. Have some feel for what is going on and support the game as a whole. Errors are going to happen, strikeouts are going to happen, slumps are going to happen, everything will be alright. New situation, new opportunity, move on.

Let's enjoy the game of baseball and the opportunity we have to pass on some knowledge. I personally LOVE this game and VCLL helped me get acclimated to Valley Center when I moved here when I was 10. We won championships here, and we will continue to win championships here. We have a great community and great kids. This is baseball. Baseball is fun. It's all about the kids. Do not ruin it for them. - Here's to a fun season of Little League Baseball!

Matt Guiliano  
VCLL Player (93-98)  
VCLL President

