Coaching Handbook: T-Ball

Somerset Youth Baseball Asso.

The following handbook outlines SYBA coaching tips and practice drills to be used in conjunction with the Player Development Plan for Somerset Youth T-Ball.

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FAILING to PREPARE is PREPARING for FAILURE
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General Coaching Tips

- Do Not display negative criticism, hostility or anger
- Always remember safety – when helmets are to be worn and where bats are to be swung
- When talking to players, kneel down so that you are eye level
- Start every practice with a review of what you plan to work on
- Split team up at stations which include drills with many repetitions
- Arrive early to prepare equipment
- Demonstrate what you are coaching whenever possible
- Create games out of drills – kids love games
- Recruit parents to help – the more direction they are provided the more likely they are to help
- Be consistent with simple terminology
- Do not assume anything – go over all of the basics
  - Base locations, defensive locations, how to run bases, when to start and stop running, how to hold a bat and glove, number of outs, fouls, etc.
- Have a snack sign-up
- Parents want communication – be sure you provide it
- Remember the 3 “C’s” to coaching:
  - Confidence – Take time to build self-esteem in each player
  - Composure – Remember mistakes will happen
  - Compliment – Recognize performance and effort verbally

Keep it FUN! Keep it SIMPLE! Keep them BUSY!
Game Coaching Tips

Hitting

- Players should sit on bench in the order in which they will bat
- Be sure to have coaches at home plate, 1st and 3rd bases
  - If possible, have coach or parent in dugout directing players
- Help batters align feet properly in the batter’s box for a successful at bat
  - Use “toe touching” method where the coach places their feet across from where the batters feet should be aligned and tells the player to “touch my toes”
- Adjust the tee to approximately waist height for each batter
- If needed to help prevent the batter from throwing their bat, make a circle on the field and instruct the batter that after hitting the ball they must drop the bat into the circle before running to 1st base
- When the last batter of the inning is up to bat, remind all base runners and batter to run the bases all of the way home

Fielding

- A minimum of two coaches should be in the field, one on each half
  - The coach on the right have should be positioned around 1st base to help remind the 1st baseman of their responsibilities
- Make a “X” on the field when aligning players at their positions so they know where to stand
  - Remind the players that they need to return to their position (“X”) whenever a player is up to bat
  - Also remind the players that if the ball is hit in their direction, it is ok to move from their position to field the ball
- Focus on the ready position for all players – verbally acknowledge players
- Remind players to keep their focus on the ball at all times
- Once the ball is fielded, the fielder should make the throw to 1st base
- When the last batter hits the ball, the ball should be thrown home to be placed on the tee

Completion of Game

- Each team lines up in a single file line to shake hands
  - Remind the players to tell the opposing team “Good Game”
- Following the hand shake, gather the players in a huddle for a brief discussion of what they did well during the game – positive feedback
- End the huddle by bringing the team together and placing their hands in the middle of the circle for a team cheer – “Go Spartans”
Hitting

Goal: Properly line up the batter to give them the best opportunity to make solid contact. Stress taking full swings while working towards proper form. Do not try to completely change the child’s natural swing and don’t overwhelm with fundamentals. Full hard swings are the goal.

1. Grip: The batter should have a loose comfortable grip with their hands together. When holding the bat the batter should line up their “door knocking knuckles”. Look out for players who choke the bat lining up their “punching knuckles”. The “door knocking knuckles” do not need to be completely aligned, but should be close. A proper grip will help the batter have a much more fluid swing.

2. Lining up the batter: Each batter will line up differently depending on his/her size. To line the player up have them extend their arms as if they would when swinging, then move them in or out to line up the sweet spot of the bat with the ball.

You will also move the player forward or back so they hit a teed ball in the same position they would hit a pitched ball. To accomplish this you will
move the player a little further back in the batter’s box than you would if they were hitting a pitched ball. A rule of thumb is you want the ball lined up with the batter’s front shoulder and not in the middle of their body.

3. Positioning the Tee: The tee height should be set at the height of the player’s belly button. You can raise and lower the tee slightly for player preference, but the bottom of the chest is too high and the middle of the thigh is too low.

4. Stance: The player’s feet should be slightly wider than shoulder width with a slight bend in their knees and their feet should be parallel with their toes lined up. The player’s hands should be near their back ear.

**NOW SWING HARD!!!!**

When working with T-Ball players, try not to overwhelm them. They will only retain small amounts each time you work with them. During games only stress lining up properly and swinging hard. Other fundamentals will develop with repetitions at practice.
Practice Drills

Warm Up
- The team should briefly warm up at the beginning of each practice through arm preparation movement and dynamic stretching.
  - Skip
  - Shuffle
  - Lunges
  - Sprints
  - Arm circles – forward and back

Base Running Drills
Learn the Bases
Purpose
- Learn the base names and the proper way to run them
- Great way to burn energy to start practice

Player Execution
- Players should line up in a single file line behind home plate
- On the coaches signal, each player runs the bases all the way home
- Players should yell out each base as they touch it to help them learn base locations
- Players return to end of the line once they reach home plate

Coach Responsibilities
- Coach needs to be standing by home plate letting each player know when to run
  - Typically once the player rounds first base the next player can start
  - Space kids out appropriately so they are not slowing up for teammates or trying to pass them on base path
- Coach at home plate must also keep player line far enough behind home plate to assure they do not interfere with players running the bases trying to touch home plate
- Remind players that they must touch each base with their foot
- If available, it is helpful to have multiple coaches in field helping players and encouraging them to run hard and yell out the base

Snatch the Cap
Purpose
- Practice running the bases in the correct order
- Encourages hustling while running the bases

Player Execution
- 3-4 players line up at home plate
- On the coaches signal, the 3-4 players run the bases simultaneously all the way home
- Players should run the bases as fast as they can while being sure to still touch each base

Coach Responsibilities
• Explain to the players that the goal of the drill is to reach home plate with their hat still on their head as a coach is going to be chasing them around the base path trying to ‘snatch their cap’ (tagging the runners also works in place of snatching cap)
• Give the group of players an approximate 5 second head start before starting to chase
• Coach must run the bases appropriately while chasing the players
• Activity could be modified my using the whole team instead of 3-4 players

Run to First

Purpose
• Players learn to overrun first base following a hit ball but to stop on all of the other bases

Player Execution
• Player swings the bat (or hits a ball), sets the bat down and runs from home plate to first base without slowing up to stop on the base
• The next player does the same with the runner now on first base advancing and stopping on second base
• Players continue execution until everyone has had a chance to run to at least first and second bases

Coach Responsibilities
• Remind the players they must set the bat down following their swing prior to running to first base
• Encourage the players to overrun first base and explain that it will allow them to get to the base faster
• Remind the players that first base is the only base that they can overrun and that they must stop on second and third bases

Throwing Drills

Target Practice

Purpose
• Players work on throwing form and accuracy

Player Execution
• Using proper throwing form, players take turns throwing a ball at a specific target

Coach Responsibilities
• Hang paper plates with clothes pins on the backstop fence at approximate chest height of the players
• Line the players up starting fairly close and have them throw at a plate one at a time
• Move the players further away from the plates at the completion of each round of throws for added difficulty
• If paper plates and clothes pins are not available, a 5 gallon bucket will work placed on the ground as well

Fielding Drills

Move Your Feet

Purpose
• Players are forced to move their feet to get in front of the ball for fielding

Player Execution
• Player will be required to move right or left to square up to the ball for proper fielding position

**Coach Responsibilities**
• Line the players up in single file
• One at a time, roll the ball to the right or the left side of the player assuring the ball isn’t rolled too fast therefore not allowing the player to get in proper fielding position
• Challenge the players to properly field the ball between their legs

**Charge It**

**Purpose**
• Players are forced to go get a slow rolling ball (charge it) instead of waiting for it to come to them

**Player Execution**
• From the ready position, players will charge the slow rolling ball, properly field it and make a quick throw back to the coach

**Coach Responsibilities**
• Place a ball about 5 feet in front of the player or roll a ball that stops a few feet before them
• Instruct the players to go get the ball and pick it up with their bare hand if it is not moving
• Encourage a quick and accurate throw once the ball has been fielded

**Block It**

**Purpose**
• Players attempt to block a ball from getting by them

**Player Execution**
• Preferably, players are able to field the ball with proper form but any form of stopping the ball in this drill is considered a success

**Coach Responsibilities**
• Coach will throw/roll the ball to the player
• Instruct the players to do their best to field the ball with proper form but the goal is to assure the ball does not make it past them

**Batting Drills**

**Batting Practice**

**Purpose**
• Players work on their swing form while hitting the ball off a tee

**Player Execution**
• Using proper form, the player is allowed to hit balls multiple times from the tee

**Coach Responsibilities**
• Assure proper swing form is being used by the player
• Verify feet positioning, distance from tee and proper tee height for hitting success
• Hit balls into the field of play and have the player run to first base after five hits
• For increased repetition, set up multiple tees and have players hit the balls into a fence
  • Assure tees are spaced appropriately for safety purposes
Swing Through the Ball

Purpose
- Players learn to swing through the ball, not stopping their swing by hitting a soccer ball.

Player Execution
- Using proper form, the player is allowed to hit small soccer balls multiple times from the tee
- Those players who are not batting should be trying to prevent the ball from getting by them at a safe distance

Coach Responsibilities
- Assure proper swing form is being used by the player
- Verify feet positioning, distance from tee and proper tee height for hitting success
- Encourage players to swing hard and follow through the ball
- Using a larger, heavier ball than a baseball will force the players to follow through with their swing to make the ball go further
- This is an easy drill to make into a game by having the players not batting try and stop the hit soccer ball from getting by them at a safe distance

Scrimmage

Purpose
- Simulate real game situations

Player Execution
- Just like in a real game, players are placed at fielding positions and batters hit the ball and run the bases

Coach Responsibilities
- Place defensive players in the field at various positions
- Keep 2-3 players out of the field as batters
- Have each batter hit the ball and run to first base just like in a real game
- In the same manner, the fielders should properly field the ball and make the throw to first base using proper form
- Rotate the batters and fielders so everyone gets a chance to bat and field

References