

AYRA Pioneer I League Minimum Skills

The Pioneer I League is where we teach the players the fundamentals skills of baseball. Be sure to stress good technique through repetition and demonstration. Also make sure all of your players understand the rules of baseball.

Bat and Ball Safety

Players should be taught bat and ball safety before ANY practice or play commences. The adverse consequences of improper safety should be explained to players and parents. The importance of safety should be stressed at the beginning of every practice.

Ball Safety

Do not to throw a ball unless the recipient of the throw is looking and is ready to receive the throw.

Do not throw the ball too hard if the thrower is too close to the recipient.

Bat Safety

Do not handle or swing a bat unless instructed specifically to do so by a coach.

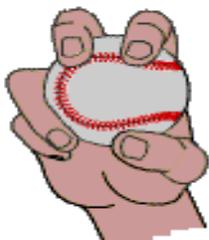
Check to make sure no one is close before swinging the bat.

Do not swing or handle a bat during a game unless the player is at bat or on deck.

Always wear a batting helmet when using a bat.

Gripping a Baseball

The ball should be gripped using the "four seam fastball" grip. The four seam grip is the basic grip for throwing a baseball. This grip is used by everyone: infielders, outfielders, pitchers, and catchers. The picture below shows a proper four seam fastball grip.



To practice proper throwing technique with the four seam grip, starting between the

index and middle finger, take a thick black magic marker and draw a line completely around the ball. Have the player throw the ball so the black ring remains vertical while the ball is in flight.

Throwing a Baseball

The "glove shoulder" (the shoulder on the same side of the body as the glove) should be pointing to the target before striding for the throw. The player should reach back and pretend to be picking the ball up off a table. The player should throw with their legs as well as their arm. The player should always step towards the target with their "glove foot" (the foot on the same side of the body as their glove) while throwing. When throwing to another player, the target should be the center of the chest. Lastly, the player should rotate the shoulders through the throw and finish with a good follow through that goes across the body.

Hitting

Sizing a Bat

To determine if a bat is the proper weight for a player, have the player grasp the bat with one hand at the end of the handle. With this one hand have the player hold the bat straight out from his or her side and parallel to the ground. If the bat starts to shake or the bat head drops in less than about 15 seconds, the bat is too heavy and a lighter bat should be chosen.

The Grip

The grip on the bat should be comfortable in the hand; ideally the middle (or knocking) knuckles on each hand line up. This helps in executing a proper swing. For a right handed batter, the left hand is the bottom hand. For a left handed batter it is the opposite, the right hand is the bottom hand. The picture below shows an example of a proper grip.



The grip should be firm, but the player should not strangle the bat. The hands should touch each other with no gap in between. The player should choke up or down on the bat until he or she can comfortably swing the bat with adequate speed and control. The back elbow should not be kept up, but it should be in a comfortable position. A back elbow too high forces the bat deep into the top hand which is unfavorable. A proper grip is more important than proper elbow positioning.

The Stance

The term batting stance refers to the position of the body and bat while awaiting a pitch. First and foremost, the player should allow comfort to dictate the fine tuning of the stance. Pioneer 1 players should start with the parallel stance where the toes are pointed to the plate, the feet are parallel to each other, and the feet are slightly more than shoulder width apart. The batter should be close enough to the plate so that he or she can comfortably reach down and touch the outside edge of the plate with the bat. This ensures complete plate coverage for all pitches. The batter should be comfortably balanced with equal weight distributed to both front and back legs. Both hips and shoulders should be parallel to the ground and there should be a slight bend in the knees. Hands should be just off the back shoulder and the height should be somewhere near or above the "letters" of the uniform. Lastly, the head should be turned to face the pitcher so both eyes can directly see the ball. See the figure below for a proper stance.



The Swing

The batter should stride a small, soft step toward the pitcher with the front foot stride timed to coincide with swinging the bat through the hitting zone. The batter should swing the barrel of the bat directly at the ball and should try to hit the ball with the fat part, or sweet spot, of the bat (the area generally located between 2 and 6 inches from the top of the bat). The batter's arms should be extended right before contact is made with the ball. During the swing, the hips should be rotated so that the belt buckle ends up facing directly at the pitcher at the end of the swing. Getting the hips involved increases bat speed and power. To help turn the hips, the batter should pivot on the ball of the back foot and perform the classic "squash the bug" technique. Batters should keep their eyes

on the ball all the way through contact with the bat. Lastly, after contact, the barrel of the bat should maintain a smooth, slightly upwards path which ends with the hands rolling over, sometimes called breaking the wrists. Be sure to follow through with the bat wrapping around the upper back.

Avoiding the Inside Pitch

Teach the batters how to turn away from an incoming inside pitch. If a pitch is headed toward the batter, the batter should turn his head away from the pitch, turn his back toward the pitch, drop his shoulders and upper body down and back toward the backstop to minimize the area exposed to a pitch. Batters should never "turn into" a pitch to avoid it. Lastly, the bat should also be dropped behind the body because a pitch that hits the bat is considered a foul ball.

Fielding

The Stance

Players should be taught the ready position. Before each pitch the player should get into the ready position prepared to field a batted ball. Shoulders and hips should be square toward the batter. Feet should be a little more than shoulder width apart. Knees should be bent, waist should be bent, and butt should be down. Both hands should be down and in front of the player with palms facing the batter, not resting on the knees.

The Alligator Snap

To field a ground ball, the player should move their body to get in front of the ball and have a wide stance. The glove finger tips should be pointed toward the ground and forward with the base of the throwing hand touching the heel of the glove. The player should extend their hands forward and field the ball in front of them rather than right at their toes. Form a triangle using the feet and glove. Follow the ball with their eyes all the way into the glove. Once the ball is in the glove, "snap the alligator's mouth" with the bare hand to cover the ball in the mitt.

The Throw

Once the ball is fielded with the Alligator Snap technique, the player should pop up, turn the glove shoulder to point to the target, shuffle step and throw. The player should not cross one foot over the other or hop. Proper throwing technique and smoothness should be emphasized.

Fly Balls

Introduce the concept of calling for the ball on a fly ball. Teach the players to get underneath a fly ball. Teach proper glove placement for palm up or palm down. Balls coming in below the waist should be caught with the palm of the glove facing up. Balls

coming in above the waist should be caught with the palm of the glove facing down. Work on rotating the glove from one position to the other to catch in the proper orientation. Be sure to emphasize using the bare hand to cover up after the ball enters the mitt.

Base Running

Teach the players to run through first base. They should not slow down until after they have passed the bag by a few steps. Teach them to tag the front of the base, not the middle. They should never lunge or dive head first for the base. After overrunning first base, teach them to turn into foul territory. Teach them that first base is the only base they can overrun. Second and third base must be held.