

AYRA Pioneer II League Minimum Skills

The Pioneer II League should continue to work on all previous teachings and build upon these skills. This is a good age to start introducing a few slightly advanced skills, while still stressing the fundamentals through repetition. Remember, many kids start playing baseball at this age and may not have mastered the Pioneer I skills. Be sure to evaluate each player and bring him up to speed on the skills for which he is lacking. Also make sure all of your players understand the rules of baseball.

Throwing a Baseball

Continue stressing proper throwing technique. Work on strengthening arms and improving accuracy. Coaches can work on ensuring every player is throwing in the most comfortable arm slot, i.e. directly overhead, 3/4 , or 1/2. Work on eliminating palming the ball while throwing if the player's hand is big enough. Work on balance, bending as you throw, and proper follow through. By the end of this age group, throwing mechanics should be second nature.

Hitting

The Grip

Be sure hands remain together during swing. Stress proper grip. By age 8 the grip should be automatic. Teach the players to watch the ball all the way to the catcher's mitt on every pitch.

The Stance

Continue to stress the proper stance. Introduce the concept of loading the back foot with more weight before the pitch is made.

The Swing

Introduce the concept of weight transition. 60% of their weight should start on back foot and 40% on front. During the swing, the batter should transition to 60% of their weight onto the front foot while leaving 40% on the back. The kids need lots of repetitions at this age. At the point of contact with the baseball, the bottom hand on the bat should have its palm facing down and the top hand on the bat should have its palm facing up. Be sure the kids follow through with the swing and do not stop the swing immediately after contact.

Fielding

The Stance

Continue to stress the ready position. Begin introducing simple footwork.

The Alligator Snap

Strongly stress the alligator snap and covering up on every fielded ball. Introduce the concept of using not just the glove to block the ball, but also their body. Balls that don't make it into the glove should be knocked down with the player's body.

The Throw

Stress the pop-up, step, and throw technique. Concentrate on consistently hitting their target. The target should be the center of the chest of the person they are throwing to.

Fly Balls

Continue working on proper glove placement for palm up or palm down. Introduce the concept of the first step you take on a pop-up is always backwards in order to gauge where the fielder needs to be to make the catch. Remember, it's a lot easier to run in than out. Introduce the concept of calling off another player who has also called for the fly ball.

Advanced Skills

Teach that every player should be moving when a ball is hit, either to make the play or to back up another player or cover a base. Introduce the concept of forcing out players at different bases. Teach them the proper technique to tag a player: tag low and always cover up so the ball does not pop out of the glove. Introduce the middle infield double play. Introduce basic cutoffs for long throws from the outfield.

Base Running

Introduce the "banana" turn for rounding bases. Introduce the concept of rounding the base and holding. Introduce the concept of looking to their third base coach after rounding first to look for a signal to advance or hold. Stress running through first base and turning into foul territory. When rounding a bag, be sure to touch the center of the edge facing the next base so the player can push off.

Introduce to the players the proper way to slide: the Figure 4. The right leg is the vertical portion of the 4 and the left leg is bent underneath the right leg. The player should slide with most of the weight on the left buttock. Players should not slide on their side, on both buttocks, or with both feet out. Teach the players when to start their slide. If it's too early, they will not make it to the bag. If it's too late they risk injury by colliding with the bag. They should also be taught to not use their hands; this will help avoid injuring the palms and wrists. AYRA does not permit sliding head first.

Catcher

Introduce basic catcher skills. A catcher's shoulders should be square to the pitcher. Hide the bare hand behind the glove, back, or leg when receiving the pitch. Funnel the ball back to home plate. On balls in the dirt, teach catchers to drop, block, and tuck the chin. Introduce pop-ups and how to properly field them.