

Conshohocken Little League



T-Ball & Instructional Level Coaching Guide

General Thoughts

Learning fundamentals and love of the game is of utmost importance – at the T-ball level. Coaching at the T-ball level is not easy either. At some points doing well is a matter of just getting everyone to pay attention. This is why the drills and practice plans that you choose are going to be very important. To be a successful T-ball coach, you need to mix skill development with fun. Since these are kids that are generally between the ages of 4 and 6 years old, they aren't necessarily looking for hard skill development. This is a time to help them learn the fundamentals but also develop a sense of fun and enjoyment for the game of baseball.

1. Use stations during practice – Practices work best when kids are kept moving and engaged – to minimize standing around time, one idea that has worked fairly well in the past is to split the kids up into 3 or 4 groups during practice time
 - a. Have those groups rotate through various stations where a coach or two can work on a specific drill/skill(s) with them – see some suggested drills below
 - b. Stations can include the basics – throwing, fielding and hitting – also can occasionally mix in base running, sliding, etc.
 - c. If you have 3 or 4 stations and spend 10-15 min at each, that's a great 45 minute practice!
 - d. You can also bring the team together for a drill or two – see suggested group drills below
 - e. Please try to avoid having one kid hitting and the rest of the team standing around in the field waiting for him/her to hit it – this gets old fast for kids and coaches alike

Batting

Hitting mechanics - focus on good stance and hand position

Work on bat coming through hitting zone on a level plane, and with a snap of the wrists

Instructional & T-Ball

Emphasize good hand position (Hands up and between back ear and shoulder)

Feet slightly more than should width apart

Knees slightly bent – make sure the kids bend at their knees and not at their waist

Good balance

Don't over grip bat (hold it lightly, don't squeeze it)

T-Ball

Line up second set of knuckles (the ones just above a ring, if you were wearing a ring) in hitting stance

Many kids at this age over rotate their top hand (so that their first set of knuckles are lined up, ie the ones where your fingers start) – a proper grip is key for bringing the bat through the hitting zone properly

Follow through – wrists flip over after contact, and bat finishes on front shoulder/tricep (ie don't let swing stop out in front of you as with a forehand in tennis – flipping wrists over after contact and bringing bat around to front shoulder/tricep will add power

Batting

T-Ball Con't

Some kids can start adding in a small step to start their swing – doesn't need to be a big step at this age which will just throw their swing off – just a small up and down to get them introduced to the idea of weight transfer

Most important thing at this and any age really – remind them to watch the ball

Batting Drills

Batting Tee Drills

You can do these drills into a backstop or tall fence to get more reps, or if the field is not in use by other groups you can have the other members of the group fielding and throwing batted balls toward a bucket or coach at the pitchers mound

Remember to avoid having all kids standing around in the field while one kid is batting

You also can use a larger ball – eg a kiddie soccer ball or a small beach ball to hit off tee – this emphasizes taking a good hard cut, especially for kids whose swings are tentative

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Teaching players to line up their swing

Put the ball on the Tee, place the height of the ball level with the player's belly button or just slightly below. At This point the batter should be in a batters stance with hands at ear level. Have the player extend their arms fully without making ball contact. Use a code word with the kids like "line up", "practice swing", "measure up" or "batters position". Once the player has done this tell them to bring the bat back, keep your eye on the ball and swing away.

Teaching players to watch the ball

Using a tee, draw a large black dot on the ball. Have the batter concentrate on hitting the dot and watching the dot until after their swing is complete. Using the tee helps to keep their swing level. They will get it - repetition is the key.

Don't Miss Drill

Set up a station starting with one batter and three or four fielders. Set up one base that the hitter will run to.

With a batter at the plate and fielders in the field for each station, the batter will attempt to put the ball in play by hitting it. If they miss the ball or if they hit the tee without knocking the ball forward, then it will be considered a strike. This is a perfect opportunity to teach them about how three strikes means an out. This will be one of the player's first introductions to an 'out'. The player needs to understand the importance of making contact with the ball in order to get to first base and to advance other runners.

Each time the player hits the ball, they must drop the bat and run to first base. The fielders should be fielding and throwing batted balls toward a bucket or coach. You can award points for balls hit in play and/or fielded by the fielders and make a game of it.

Batting

T-Ball

Soft toss

You also can do this into a fence or backstop – batter hits into the fence, coach is kneeling and faces batter about 5 feet away and directly in front of batter, “soft toss” ball underhanded toward and out in front of batter, who is in stance and in ready hitting position, to swing at ball and hit it into fence

Target Practice

Set up a tee and when the batter addresses the ball, they are facing towards the backstop. The back stop should have certain squares set up, with each square being a number of points.

This is an advanced T-ball hitting drill, but some of your more adept hitters should be able to understand what they have to do to hit the ball to certain areas. This drill will help them work through the understanding awarding points for hitting the squares with point values.

For example, start by giving a hitter 5 chances to make 20 points (targets can be worth 10 points each). They have to hit selected targets as the coach chooses. As the player becomes more skilled at hitting the targets the coach suggests, then they can increase the number of points needed to succeeding in the game

Throwing

It’s important to work on throwing at every practice – if each kid can learn the basics of throwing (namely proper mechanics), that’s a successful season of learning!

Instructional & T-Ball

Show Me the Ball

Teaching how to grip and hold the ball is the first step to learning how to throw. Have each team member get a ball and a glove. Teach them the proper grip by having the thumb on the underside of the ball and the two top fingers slightly spread apart on the top of the ball. They should have the pinky and ring finger on the side of the ball.



Start this drill off by saying to the players "show me the ball." When the players hear show me the ball they should grip the ball as they were taught, and get into the proper stance for throwing. They should have legs shoulder width apart with one foot in front of the other. The players should have the throwing arm up raised to shoulder height with the elbow at 90 degree.

Throwing

Throwing mechanic basics

- 1.) Start facing sideways with throwing hand away from target, and with hands in ready position, feet shoulder width apart, front hip pointing at target (ball in throwing hand with proper grip ready to throw, throwing hand in glove)
- 2.) Break hands from ready position - throwing hand comes up and back with ball facing away from target, and extend glove hand simultaneously toward target)
- 3.) Have the player(s) make an L shape with their throwing arm, and concentrate on hitting the coach's nose, chest, etc with the ball. Having a focal point helps players understand the ball will go where they aim.
- 4.) Step toward target with lead foot and throw ball, extending throwing arm out and down in front of thrower to extend and follow through

Emphasize throwing only when the receiver is giving a proper “target” – ie looking at the thrower with both hands up, and ready to catch the throw - “don’t throw to people who aren’t looking!”

Sit & Throw

Start with kids sitting down with legs together and extended straight in front of them, drag ball along ground with throwing hand to proper release position, and then throw and release

T-Ball

One Knee Throwing

Each player needs to have a ball to perform this drill. You may want to give the players a softer ball, like a tennis ball. The player starts with the body facing the target and the ball raised. The player can throw at a target, a fellow player, or a coach. The proper throwing mechanics should be watched for as the player throws the ball toward the target. A good follow through toward the target is important.

This helps players learn the upper body action of throwing, without using their legs. This drill emphasizes the upper body action: right from the grip, to the raised arm and elbow, the L-shape between the forearm and bicep, and then turning the body and following through towards the intended target.

Bounce to the Bucket.

Put a large basket or cooler on a base. Outfielders try to throw and bounce the ball into the open container. This can be done as a game with 10 points for getting the ball in, 5 for hitting the bucket and 1 point for the nearest bounce, no matter where the ball ends up. This drill/game teaches throwing from the outfield to a base.

Having a Catch

Two or more players play catch. Keep score of the number of successful catches to make a game of it.

Fielding

Techniques to work on here:

Work on good ready position – feet shoulder width apart, hands out in front at waist level with palms up (not on ground to start), slight bend in knees and at waist

Ground balls – slide laterally to get into position in front of ball, hands drop to ground with both hands out in front (ball should be fielded out in front, not between legs), knees bent, head up – then shift into proper throwing position either by moving feet or by “crow hopping” (a short hop) into throwing position

Pop flies – tough at this age for most kids – one good drill is to use tennis balls and either throw or hit them with a tennis racket, which helps get start to judge balls hit into the air and reduces the fear/injury factor

Instructional & T-Ball

Basic infield

Have group's field ground balls at second base position and throw to first – then graduate to shortstop position over time

Crab Drill

Put the gloves down and use a tennis or rubber ball. Roll grounders to them and instruct the players to use both hands. Player starts in the basic fielding set position stance, crouched forward with hands (glove) open and down. Player takes three or four steps as coach rolls the ball.

Have them field the ball properly and throw at a target – a bucket, trash can, etc. You can make a game of it by awarding points for properly fielding the ball, getting into their throwing motion quickly and making an accurate throw.

Get the players used to using both hands, then graduate to gloves. This drill may also be used to improve catching line drives or pop ups for the T-Ball division.

Scoop or Pick-up.

Two players [or two rows of players] line up about 10 feet apart. From kneeling position, one player rolls the ball to the other. Repeat 10 to 15 times.

T-Ball

Improving glove hand coordination

Cut off the bottom of a plastic gallon container. Turn the jug upside down with the handle in the glove hand of your player. Toss tennis balls to the player and have them catch the balls with the jug.

Fielding

Middle Infield Coverage

Another good drill is to have a line of kids at second base position and another line at shortstop – roll ground ball to either one and have other cover second for a force out at second, with fielder working on fielding ball and then making a proper easy underhand or short overhand flip (work on making it catchable)

You can make a game of it by awarding points for successful attempts.

Team Drills

Helping kids to learn their positions

I'm a first year coach and was worried about getting the kids to learn their positions which are obviously away from the bag (i.e. 2nd base is in between 1st & 2nd).

Put out small orange cones where all the positions are located helping the players find their way and keeps them from straying away. It also keeps them from swarming to the ball as they're told to defend 'their area'. Consider pairing up the players and giving them each a 'treasure map' showing the field and the position locations. Then call out positions for them to run to. They get excited and working with a partner helps avoid any one player being embarrassed if they forget where to go.

Catching Contest

Players are in pairs and throw the ball back and forth between each other. Last pair that has not dropped a ball wins. Alternatively, most catches in a set amount of time or last team to five drops wins.

Base Relay Drill

Put the bases out (shorter than normal if you like to start), and then put a player at each base. You can have players in a line up behind each base.

You can start the drill by hitting a soft grounder, or rolling the ball to one of the players. First they must throw the ball to third base, to second base, then to first base – and finally back to the coach. The players need to use all of the skills they have learned in order to make this drill work.

They should work on throwing the ball properly and accurately and then make sure they stop the ball when it is thrown to them. Reward the team that is able to get the ball around the bases without many problems.

Base Running

Have the players practice properly running the bases:

- Run through 1st base and don't slow up until you hit the outfield grass

- Stop on 2nd and 3rd base – do not overrun

- Round all the bases in the proper order making sure to touch each one

T-Ball game simulation

It is always helpful to simulate game play to help players bring everything they've learned together.

Once a player gets to the tee, they must get into their batter stance. The coach should help them set up properly so they can increase the chance of good contact. The other players are waiting, gloves in hand, to field the ball.

The coach says, 'hit', and the player swings. If the ball is hit the first time, the rest of the team yells 'one'. For each hit, they say the corresponding number. This provides encouragement to the player when they are hitting.

The coach should give each player five swings on the tee. On the final swing (and hit), the player should drop the bat and run to 'first' base.