



# Stuck Inside!

*A baseball coach's guide to  
KILLER indoor practices!*

by

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*1st Edition*

Hello everyone and thanks so much for checking out my very first eBook! This eBook is a guide to running a better indoor workout. For some players and coaches out there, indoor workouts are few and far between. Year-long, mild temperatures are the norm for those people. I'm very jealous. Where I am at the moment (Pennsylvania), players are going indoors as the miserable winter months approach. Even though players and teams head indoors, practice can be productive even though space and time are limited. And that's what this eBook is hoping to help with. All the things in this eBook are things I had to deal with as a player and as a coach. Some I learned by watching and listening to other coaches and some I learned by trial and error. Hopefully what you see on these pages will help your teams and individual players get the most out of their indoor baseball workouts!

To all my readers and subscribers, thank you so much for taking time out of your busy days to check out the Baseball By The Yard website and blog posts! I hope you find this eBook worth your time.

Coach Bob McCreary

Could you send me some feedback  
on this eBook?

Questions, criticisms, testimonials, and all other types of feedback are welcomed and greatly appreciated. Please sent to ...

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# The reality of indoor baseball

Let's face it folks. Baseball is a game that needs to be played outdoors in warm, dry weather. Of course, it doesn't always work out that way. Low temperatures, rain, sleet, snow, ice, darkness, and high winds all conspire (especially in early spring!) to drive baseball teams inside for days, weeks, and even months depending on where you live. Being a native of Pennsylvania I unfortunately have a lot of experience in indoor workouts. To the players and coaches north of me - New England states, mid-west and upper mid-west, upper-northwest, and Canada - my heart goes out to you. I can't even imagine what it must be like.

*The last thing I want coaches to do is to call off practice. If done correctly, indoor practices can be very productive and give a big advantage to teams that do them well.*

I am probably in the minority here but I actually enjoyed working out inside as a player. Of course, that had a lot to do with how the workouts were conducted. Workouts that are highly organized by coaches who had some basic understanding of the need to plan out and properly time the drills are much more enjoyable and productive for players. Those workouts that were not well thought out are an absolute nightmare. Looking back, most of my coaches did a very good job in those areas.

I created this eBook primarily for coaches and parents who might be looking for help in creating productive practices that because of bad weather, cold temperature, and/or poor field conditions, have to be held indoors. The last thing I want these coaches to do is to just call off practice. If done correctly, indoor practices can be very productive and give a big advantage to teams that do them well.

If you are a more advanced coach, hopefully you will pick up a few more tips to build upon the good things you probably already do.

This guide is certainly not designed to be all inclusive. I purposely did not expand on many issues, tips, and drills so that the eBook would not be too overwhelming. Hopefully, future eBooks will help fill in the blanks.

Wherever you are on your baseball journey, I hope that this eBook helps in some small way to enable you to reach whatever goals you and your teams have.

# Safety & Permission

First and foremost on our list of things to cover are issues related to safety and permission. The challenge with both is that there are so many options out there in terms of available spaces that it becomes hard to give tips that will cover every facility you plan to use. Each space carries with it a unique set of potential problems and safety concerns that it would be impossible to cover each and every one. It needs to be noted here that even if you incorporate all the tips included in this eBook, unique dangers still exist in your space. Please make it a point to fully inspect the areas you intend to use with a very critical eye to foresee any possible problem that may pop up. Thinking ahead is usually your best defense against all things related to safety.

That being said, let's start off with some general tips related to safety and then talk about issues connected to getting permission.

## SAFETY

When you boil it down, a coach is basically responsible for every players' health and safety while in their care. This responsibility should never be taken lightly. Parents need to know that when their children (both young and old) are under your supervision they are going to be in good hands. If you are a parent,

*“Parents need to know that when their children (both young and old) are under your supervision they are going to be in good hands.”*

you know that feeling you get when your children leave the house for whatever reason. In short, you worry. All the time. Coaches, you have to be aware of this. If you are then you can take some steps to alleviate some of those worries and score some major points among the parents - something all coaches would like more of! Here are a couple ways this can be done:

✓ **Send a letter.** Send home a letter outlining how you structure your practices. I

would recommend this for outdoor practices as well but especially for indoor workouts. If you are worried the letter will not get home, email it to the parents or post it on a team webpage/blog for all to see.

✓ **Bring in the parents!** Invite parents to attend an early practice so they can see first hand what their kids do when they are with you. They might not understand the drills or the terms/phrases you use but they sure will understand organization when they see it. Organize the practice well and let them see it! If you take this route, I would suggest NOT doing this until your players have a comfort level with the structure of the practice. Watching balls flying every which way because the players don't know the drills yet does not tend to produce a lot of confidence from the "parent posse." You want to give a strong impression that their kids are in good hands.

Now let's list some basic safety concerns found in most every indoor space.

✓ **Windows.** When you are looking at a space prior to practicing in it, look for anything made of glass and determine how you can either protect it, avoid it, and/or move it out of your way. Often, gym doors and windows will be made to be shatterproof. Notice I didn't say "break-proof." I learned this the hard way. Twice in two days actually. All glass will break. Figure out beforehand what can be done to make sure no ball, bat, or body hits the glass. Here are some ways it could be done:

- **Cover them.** Use extra L-screens or nets to cover the windows. Be sure to position them a foot or two in front of the window. If they are right up against the window, a thrown or batted ball that hits the net will hit the window too. Some gyms install a metal cage-like cover to their windows. If a school gym does not have them, talk to the principal, school AD, or head custodian. They are probably cheaper than having to continue replacing broken windows.

- **Create better lines.** By lines I mean throwing or batting lines. All thrown and batted balls need to be away from unprotected windows.

- Use backups. Have players not currently involved in drills to back up throws and/or position them in front of windows.

- **Move backboards.** This is one that is often overlooked. Most basketball backboards are clear plexiglass. A hard baseball CAN damage a backboard. I've never seen one break because of a baseball but I'm sure it has happened to someone. If backstops cannot be moved out of the way,



see if they can be raised. Most gyms in schools have the ability to do this. Arrange ahead of time for a custodian at the school to raise them out of your way. They would rather do that then deal with the potential mess afterwards.

✓ **Fire alarms.** Also overlooked. Notice where the fire alarms are located and protect/avoid them as well. Keep the following in mind. A broken window is not good but the damage is limited. Have a fire alarm get set off by an errant throw and you might just be involved in a mandatory building evacuation. Not the best PR for your program if you know what I mean. Oh, and by the way, school alarms are usually connected to the local fire station who **MUST** assume it is a real fire. That means sirens, fire trucks, police, and volunteers leaving work to get to the school. You might laugh but it actually happened to me. I'll have to write a post about that wonderful experience in the future!

✓ *“school alarms are usually connected to the local fire station who **MUST** assume it is a real fire. That means sirens, fire trucks, police, and volunteers leaving work to get to the school. You might laugh but it actually happened to me!”*

✓ **Thrown and batted balls.** In most indoor situations, the safety danger is going to come from thrown and batted balls as well as swung bats. Much of what will be addressed later in this eBook is an attempt to better manage your players and drills. This not only helps with productivity but goes a long way in creating a more safe environment for all involved.

✓ **Wrapping up:** When it comes to safety, thinking ahead and asking yourself “What could possibly go wrong here?” will force you to analyze the location and structure of your indoor workouts. When this is done thoroughly, most dangerous situations can be eliminated or at least lessened considerably.

## PERMISSION

✓ **Private facilities.** If you are using an indoor facility that is a business then permission simply involves reserving a time and paying your fee. If you are choosing this option, be sure to ask what equipment is allowed to be

used. Some facilities allow access to anything and everything the complex has on hand like pitching machines, balls, helmets, pitching mounds, batting cages, and so forth. Others just rent out space and force outside organizations to bring their own equipment. Whatever the policy, be sure to know it before paying your money. If the facility is the latter version and you don't have much equipment, it may be beneficial to offer them an additional fee for permission to use whatever it is you need. For private businesses, money usually talks. Don't be afraid to ask or even negotiate. Indoor baseball facilities come and go largely because it is so tough to consistently make money. Money talks so speak up.

✓ **Schools.** If you are an outside organization attempting to use a school gymnasium, be prepared to jump through some hoops. And sometimes a lot of them. Schools are bureaucracies that tend to have strict policies as to who can use their facilities and at what times. They can also have pretty complicated systems for signing up for facilities. Each school is different, though. Some are very welcoming and some totally ban outside organizations from using their facilities. The benefit in using a school facility is that often the space is large. If there are fees, usually they are fairly low since they realize your tax money (if you are a local resident) have, at least in part, paid for the gymnasium. However, some baseball teams avoid schools because of the red tape involved with getting permission. They also run into the fact that if a school team or organization needs some space for a special event, guess who gets bumped? You do.

✓ **School teams.** If you are coaching a school team then permission really is not an issue most of the time. Your difficulties come from other school teams who wish to use the same space at the same time. If it rains or snows and your field is unplayable, it is likely that the softball team's field is a mess too. Same for girl's lacrosse, boy's lacrosse, tennis, and track as well. A solid athletic department usually thinks ahead and develops an indoor schedule ahead of time so coaches at least know what Plan-B will be in advance. Of course, some schools do this better than others. Permission may be needed when it comes to practicing outside of your season. On that note, be sure you are not breaking any league, district,

✓ ***“be sure you are not breaking any league, district, and/or state regulations as to when team practices can occur outside of your official season.”***

and/or state regulations as to when team practices can occur outside of your official season. There can be some serious repercussions for coaches, teams, and athletic departments when these types of rules are broken so don't make the mistake of just sneaking into an open gym after hours and hoping nobody finds out. Take the high road, follow the rules, and ask permission when necessary.

✓ **Bonus tip**: When I coached at the high school level, I made it a point to communicate with the softball coaches as much as possible. We even shared much of the indoor equipment like cages, nets, tees, mats, and other training tools. Although some of that equipment will undoubtedly wear down a little faster, the benefit came in the form of less set-up time before practice. When softball practiced before us they just left much of the equipment in place for us. Vice versa when we practiced before them.

## Questions to ask yourself

Now that we've covered some administrative concerns, the next step in running a killer indoor practice is to ask yourself several questions well before the start of practice. Doing so will enable you to plan out everything much more effectively.

### WHAT IS YOUR SPACE?

To run a top notch indoor practice you obviously have to know the space where you and your players are going to be. Knowing ahead of time will allow you to plan out what drills to do and what equipment will best enable those drills to be performed at the highest level possible. Know the dimensions of the space and be sure to use as much of it as possible to get the most accomplished in the shortest amount of time. Continue reading for several tips on maximizing whatever space you have!

### WHAT IS YOUR TIMEFRAME?

Basically, how long will your practice be? Knowing that, you will be better able to plan ahead. Some drills are better suited for long practices. Others are perfect for small windows of practice time. Continue reading for several tips on *Maximizing Your Time!*

## HOW MANY PLAYERS?

Will only your players be involved? If you are a high school coach, will the indoor practice involve both JV and Varsity players? If your workout is an “open gym” type, do you have an approximate number of how many players you expect? Knowing your numbers is essential for planning ahead. If you are not sure, be sure to have alternative plans ready to go based on various player totals. Some additional tips for this are included in the *Maximizing Your Space* chapter.

## HOW MANY COACHES?

In most situations, the more coaches the better when it comes to indoor workouts. This is especially true when you are using stations to organize your routines. More about that later. Know beforehand how many coaches will be there and adjust your stations and drills to match your supervision needs.

## WHAT ARE YOUR NEEDS?

If you were to ask most coaches what their team needs to work on, the typical answer probably would be “everything!” Of course, when your time and space are limited, you have to prioritize. An indoor workout that is filled with hitting stations is fine but if your team is making 3-4 errors per game in recent days, you may want to address that instead.

Talk to your coaching staff ahead of time to get some input as to what the various needs are.

*Players usually have no say whatsoever in deciding what to practice. Giving them some input can have some great advantages.*

Their insight might differ from yours which is actually a good thing. Another tip is to survey (formally or informally) the players. Players usually have no say whatsoever in deciding what to practice. Giving them some input can have some great advantages. More about that later as well.

## DEAD SERIOUS OR MEGAFUN?

A big complaint from coaches about indoor practices is the lack of motivation. Even your best players are affected by this at times so don't think that you should have just chosen your players more wisely. Being in an outside routine for several days with great weather and then having to go inside due to rain, sleet, snow, etc. is tough for everyone. Players and coaches would all much rather be outside. Because of this, I have found that extremes work best when planning your indoor workouts. Either you force them to approach their indoor time with dead seriousness or organize it with total fun in mind instead. Your needs will determine which one you pick. If your team is drained mentally, turn up the fun. If your team is fundamentally sloppy, up the seriousness. Tips to organize around "seriousness" can be found in the Maximizing Your Time section. MegaFun tips has its own section later!

# Ways to maximize space

Most indoor spaces teams have access to are somewhat limited. If you coach at a college, you may have an entire indoor gymnasium the size of a football field. If you coach a young travel team or high school team, a typical basketball court size gym may be all you have. Either way, you'll want to get the most out of that space in order to run the most productive practice possible.

Here are some ways to do it.

## SIMPLIFY EQUIPMENT

Equipment takes up space. Think ahead and decide what would be the smallest amount of equipment needed to accomplish whatever your needs are for that practice. For example, pitching machines take up a good amount of space, especially in a batting cage. You may be able to replace the machine with a couple batting tees or soft toss stations instead. Indoor mounds are another example. If you have more than one, you may be able to get away with just one by rotating pitchers on and off similar to the changes of innings. 15-20 pitches on the mound and then 10 minutes rest off to the side while another pitcher completes his 15-20 pitches. It's more game-like and it saves space also.

Player equipment bags are a HUGE consumer of space in a gym. For some reason, modern players all seem to think their bags need to carry every baseball possession they own. Spikes, gloves, batting gloves, 3 bats, shirts, sweatshirts, water bottles, and God knows what else. When you have 20 players in a gym, just their bags can take up 25% of the space! End that in a hurry! Tell players ahead of time what they will need and hold them to it. Post a sign or send a text telling players something like this ... "Hey guys. We're inside today. Sneakers, glove, one bat, and helmet only. No bags." Problem solved.

## AVOID FULL LENGTH BATTING PRACTICE

Indoor cages are terrific but they take up a ton of space. Only having two guys in the cage at a time (BP pitcher and batter) is a total waste of space. Unless your team has a dire need to hit off live pitching at normal distances, break up that large space into smaller sections. Place a screen in the middle to cut the cage in half and have two soft toss, short toss, or tee stations both hitting to the opposite ends of the cage. You can also position a few soft toss or tee stations around the perimeter of the cage as well.

## GO OUTSIDE

It may seem a little stupid to have this suggestion in an eBook about indoor workouts but bare with me. Some things can be done outside for certain players if you are a little creative. Running drills can be done outside in almost any temperature using parking lots and paths. Long tossing can be done in those areas as well. You may have some supervision and safety issues to iron out but

anytime you can lessen the number of players inside the gym at one time the better off things will be.

## SEND SOME PLAYERS HOME

If space limits your ability to do outfield drills and their hitting has been fine, send them home. If a couple pitchers are expected to pitch the next day, have them do some light stuff and then send them home. In fact, Major League teams do this all the time. On a “getaway day” (team is traveling to another town after that night’s game), teams often have the next day’s starting pitcher miss that day’s game to get an earlier flight to the next city so as to get a better night’s sleep. No reason why you can’t work in the same type of thing at a lower levels as well. It also is a way to build in some breaks along the way during a long season. Today, many players are playing baseball just about year round. You may scoff at the idea of sending players home for a day during your season that may only last 15-20 games but for them, it may be just what they need to recuperate and recharge. It also frees up some valuable space as well.

## SPLIT YOUR TEAM UP

Let’s say you only have an hour for practice and you really need to do a lot of hitting or fielding. Bring in the outfielders and catchers for the first 30 minutes and run them through some rapid fire drills so that they get the most reps in whatever drills you structure. The next 30 minutes you bring in the infielders and repeat. When the players are not in the gym, they can be doing running drills in the hallways, watching video in a classroom, or engaging in a little “chalk-talk” in the locker room with an assistant. Any way you manage it, cutting the number of players in the space at one time can work wonders.

## MAKE TEMPLATES

When it comes to managing space, get in the habit of making templates of the various spaces you may have access to during your season. By templates I mean drawings of the space (drawn to scale) that you can file away and bring out in an instant when needed. On the templates, you can indicate where all the



drills and stations will go in the space. You can indicate what equipment is needed and where it should go in order to help those who are in charge of setting things up. If you post the template ahead of time, it can become a good time saver as well since players already know where they will be and what they will be doing before you even start the workout.

Here are some examples of templates of indoor spaces.

## Ways to maximize your time

As I alluded to a couple times already, when you are forced indoors, it is normal to have a shorter practice than you may like. If your space is a facility that you are renting then wasted time means wasted money. If you are a school team, other teams will probably want indoor time as well. To get everyone in, shorter practice times are a must. The point is, to get the most out of your workouts, you have to be very good at maximizing whatever time slot you are given.

Here are some tips to help you do just that.

### THINK AHEAD, PLAN AHEAD

Virtually all the tips I have provided so far involve some prior thought. I cannot stress enough the importance of thinking ahead when it comes to planning indoor workouts. Whether it is safety issues, getting permission, maximizing your space or maximizing your time, a little thinking in advance is essential to any good indoor practice. This is where the templates I mentioned earlier (see Appendix # for examples) come in handy. When you file away your templates you have created for your various spaces and time periods you can always pull them out in an instant as needed in a pinch. As I stated earlier as well, hopefully head coaches are getting input from assistants and even players as to what the team's needs are. If you prioritize those needs accurately then you have the ability to plan out the timing of your workouts more effectively.

I used the documents linked here - [http://www.npenn.org/cms/lib/PA09000087/Centricity/Domain/245/Situation\\_Checklists\\_-\\_Defense\\_Offense\\_Pitching.pdf](http://www.npenn.org/cms/lib/PA09000087/Centricity/Domain/245/Situation_Checklists_-_Defense_Offense_Pitching.pdf) to help me prioritize my workouts throughout the



year. Each item is something I wanted to cover at least once before the start of games. When it was explained or drilled, I would put an X in the first column next to the item to let me know I covered it. My goal was then to cover each area again at least one more time during the season. Obviously, some things we drilled routinely but some were tough getting to twice. They also helped my hitting and pitching coaches organize their sessions in practice as well.

## ORGANIZE TO THE MINUTE

Indoor workouts require a tremendous amount of efficiency. When you are creating your workout plans be sure to organize everything right down to the minute. As a teacher, I am doing this 8 times a day, every single day of the school year. I have to. Schools run on a bell system and if I don't get done everything in 45 minutes, the bell rings and the students are gone regardless of whether I am done or not. If you are a teacher, you know what I'm talking about. This is one advantage teachers have when they coach. They already have a ton of experience in maximizing short periods of time. Coaches that are not teachers often have to learn this skill. They can do so by being fanatical about organizing their plans to the minute and sticking to the clock. Here is an example:

<b>3:00-4:45pm Baseball Practice</b>	<b>2:30 - 3:00 Warm up as needed &amp; overview of stations and groups</b>
<b>3:00 - 3:05</b>	Equipment set-up
<b>3:05 - 3:25</b>	Hitting stations
<b>3:25 - 3:30</b>	Set up defensive stations
<b>3:30 - 3:50</b>	Defensive stations
<b>3:50 - 3:55</b>	Base running line drills
<b>3:55 - 4:00</b>	Break down equipment and recap
<b>4:05 - 4:30</b>	Long-toss on tennis courts
<b>4:35 - 4:45</b>	Team meeting - Room 102

## POST YOUR PLANS

Once you create your time sensitive plans for your practice, be sure not to hide them. Post it so all your players see the day's schedule before the workouts begin. This is another one of those little things that is often overlooked by coaches. When you are trying to maximize your time, transitions can kill. Think back to your younger days when you had a very disorganized teacher. You will probably recall that most of the behavior issues, loss of focus, and general disruptions occur during transitions from one activity to another. Better organize those transition times, especially those that involve physically moving around, and less time will be wasted. Posting your workout plans are a great way to do this. When players look at the schedule for the day, they know the order in which all the drills will take place. They know where to be at what time and will know what they need to bring with them along the way. If you do this correctly, you will not hear the most annoying sentence known to teachers and coaches - "Coach, what are we supposed to be doing?"

Be sure to share your plans with all your assistants as well. Email them. Text them. Do what you have to do but make sure your people know what's happening in advance. It's huge time saver. It also has the effect of improving your professionalism in the eyes of others. It gives the players the view that you are on top of things and have a clue as to what you are doing. Parents like that their players are working hard and getting more done. Administrators (Athletic Directors, Principals, etc) like it because it makes their hiring decisions look good and there are usually less parent complaints about poorly run practices. It can also help out with future coaching jobs. When you have an coaching interview in the future, these saved plans look very impressive and prove that you know how to manage various types of practices.

## WARM-UP AND COOL-DOWN BEFORE/AFTER

Let's face it. The early stages of baseball practice typically move very slowly. A 3 o'clock outdoor practice may start like this: players jog to centerfield and back and begin some dynamic stretching. They then run some sprints. After that they may partner up and begin throwing. Those activities alone can take you to 3:20 or even 3:30. If your indoor practice is only an hour, you just lost half of that time without really accomplishing anything! To avoid this, an easy solution is to

take care of all that BEFORE your time slot. That way you get the entire hour to do drill work with the most reps possible.

If your practice starts at our 3 o'clock example, have your players meet somewhere away from the space at 2:30. Maybe a hallway or an empty classroom. Get all your stretching and running out of the way before your official practice time. If your hour long workout involves mostly hitting, skip throwing altogether. It saves time and also gives some sore arms a day off. If the weather isn't too bad, throwing may be able to be done outside. Hitting is tough in those conditions but players are not impacted as much when it comes to throwing.

Utilize the time after your official practice slot as well. Running, throwing, cooling down, etc. can be done in other locations after your workout pretty easily. Manage it well and it is a huge time saver.

## MEET BEFORE AND AFTER

All the points just mentioned above apply to team meetings as well. Outdoor practices usually involve a meeting before and after practice where coaches address the players and provide information they need to know. When it comes to indoor workouts, plan those team meetings for before or after your indoor time slot. They are big time wasters. You have more important things to do.

Also keep in mind that if your players have been in school all day, the absolute last thing they are going to want to do is sit still and listen to a lengthy team meeting no matter how or when it is scheduled. They've been sitting all day in a desk and need to MOVE! When it comes to these lines of meetings, keep them under 5 minutes, consider skipping them altogether, or even type out your comments and have them read it later. It helps save time but it can also save your player's sanity!

## ASSIGN EQUIPMENT DUTIES

Another time killer occurs during equipment set-up and break-down time. Divide the work up and make sure all the players know who is responsible for what. This is another reason to post your practice schedule and space templates beforehand. Players know immediately upon entering your space what equipment they are responsible for and exactly where it needs to go.

On another note, make sure all players know HOW to set up all the equipment you have access to. Some cages, nets, and screens are a little complicated to put up or take down (Manero, are you reading this?) so giving everyone a short clinic early in the season on how to do everything can be a good time saver as the season moves forward.

## SHORT, FOCUSED STATIONS

When planning out your indoor practice schedule, it is usually best to keep all drills short and sweet. This keeps players moving which tends to keep them more focused as well. Limit all hitting drills/stations to 5 swings max. per player. This will force them to not waste swings. When players are given 10-15 swings each, the first few swings and/or the last few swings are usually not at peak performance. Eliminate that by reducing their swing totals. Do so and players are more likely to be locked in on every swing since they know their time is limited. This has the added benefit of helping them come game time. During his time at the plate, a hitter cannot afford to coast into the at-bat. He may only get one good pitch and it may come on the first pitch. He had better be ready for it. Reducing the number of swings per batter in practice helps prepare batters physically and mentally for what they need to be able to do in games.

Note: I would recommend this strategy for all drills (hitting, pitching, fielding, base running, etc.) whether your players are doing them inside or outside. I think the benefits to your batters when training this way are big. It forces them to focus on every rep which usually translates into better game performances.

## POST STATION SIGNS AROUND THE GYM

No matter how many copies of your plans you post before practice or how well you explain your plans to your players beforehand, players (and your assistants) are going to forget what to do and where to be. Make a few extra copies of the templates and plans and post them around your space for everyone to see. This even more important when you organize stations. Post signs where each station will be explaining in BIG PRINT what you want them to do and how to do it. Once again, it will avoid the dreaded *“What are we supposed to be doing here again?”*

## BE FIRM WITH TIME WASTERS

Every team has a variety of personalities included on its roster. You'll have at least one comedian. At least one ladies man. One kid who cannot take a joke. You'll have at least a couple players who are locked in every second of practice. and a couple players who are not. Of course, if tryouts are involved, hopefully you are choosing your players well in the first place. Even so, some players for a variety of reasons are not always there mentally. They may have had a girlfriend issue earlier in the day. They may have just failed a test prior to practice. Whatever the case, several of your players will probably be distracted to a certain degree by something going on outside of baseball.

To address this, be sure to clearly explain what your expectations are when it comes to practice. Let them know that screwing around will not be tolerated because it hurts their progress as individual players as well as the progress of the entire team. Tell them that you recognize the fact that distractions in life can be very hard to manage but successful people and teams have a better ability to compartmentalize their problems to not allow them to interfere with other responsibilities. Also be clear about what will happen if they are not performing up to expectations.

In school, some students would like nothing more than to be kicked out of class so they can wander the halls and avoid work. Not so much with players on a team. Your players generally want to be there because they are interested in playing and want to improve. Use this mentality to your advantage. Simply telling them in advance that non-focused players will be told to leave practice can be very effective in focusing players' minds. Throwing a distracted player out of practice can be even more powerful not only to that player but to his teammates who see it happen as well. The legendary North Carolina basketball coach, Dean Smith, used to tell his players that practicing is a privilege that doesn't last forever. He said that later in life they will wish they could go back and relive their playing days when they were younger. Being removed from practice, he said, is a day they will never get back. Those are days they will deeply regret in the future.

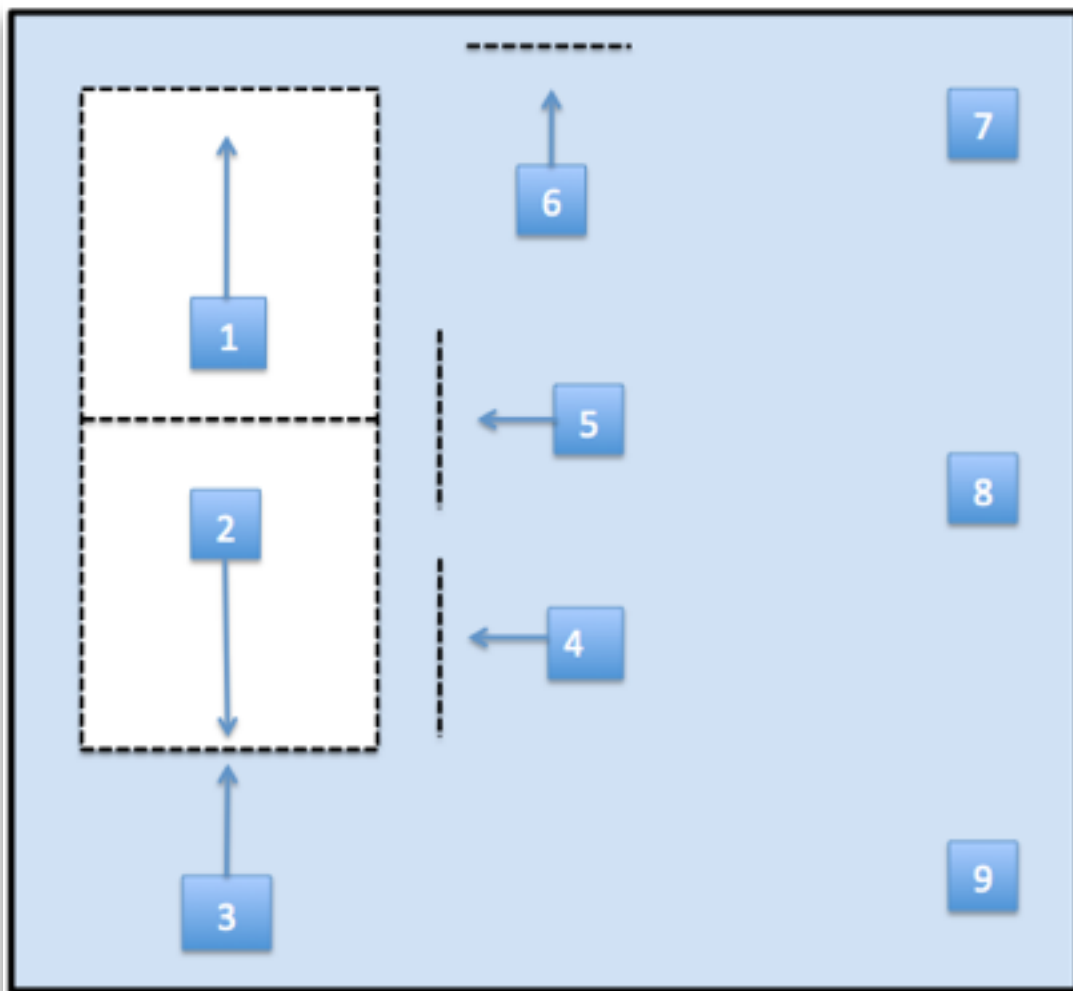
When it comes to time wasters, be firm and fair but don't be afraid to utilize that power to remove a player. Usually it only needs to happen once for everyone to get the message.

# Stations, stations, stations!

Phew! Ok. Now that we've gotten through the administrative side of running an indoor practice, let's get to the fun part and start seeing some usable examples of practice strategies you can take into practice starting today!

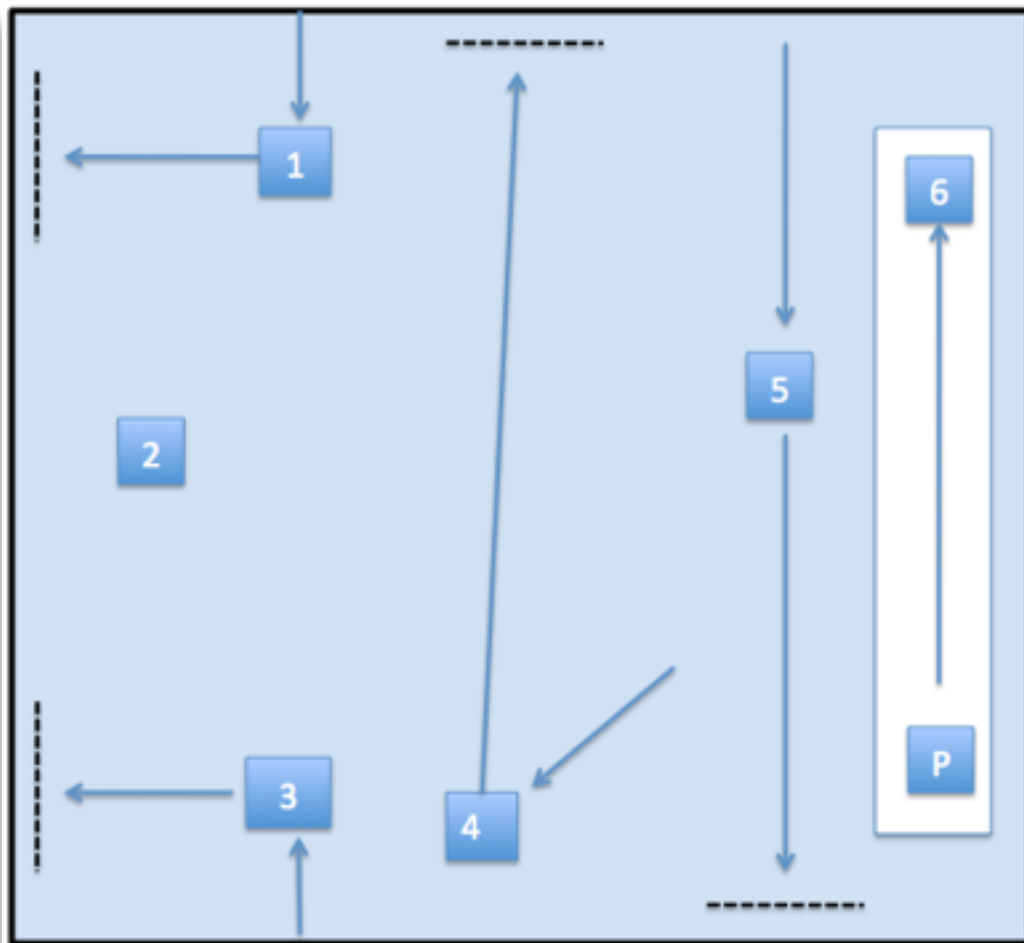
The following are templates I've created for a smaller space in order to show how stations can be organized to get a lot done in a short time. Below each diagram is an explanation of who does what at each station. There are so many variations of these stations that this eBook would be hundreds of pages if I showed all of them. Hopefully you get the idea of what is possible even in small spaces and short periods of time if you organize it properly.

## BATTING STATIONS EXAMPLE



Station	Drill
1	Short toss into far end of cage
2	Short toss into far end of cage (curve ball drill)
3	Soft toss into outside end of cage
4	Low tee drill into sock-net
5	High tee drill into sock-net
6	Tee drill using a stepper
7	Sac Bunting to 3rd base side
8	Wall stride drill
9	Sac Bunting to 1st base side

## DEFENSIVE STATIONS EXAMPLE



Station	Drill
1	SS Wall toss - Field & DP feeds to 2B into screen
2	Partner barehand pick-up drill
3	2B Wall toss - Field & DP feeds to SS into screen
4	Short grounder with paddles & throw to 1B (screen)
5	Cutoff footwork and throws into screen
6	Stand in drill with live pitches
P	Pitchers rotate through bullpen innings - 10 pitches each

## Station drills

The charts below are activities that can be accomplished in stations. They are certainly not meant to be all inclusive. There are literally hundreds of drills that can be utilized and even dozens of variations within each one. The lists are just meant to show all that can be addressed in stations. Which ones you choose and how you plan out the spacing and timing of the stations is up to the specific needs and limitations you have.

NOTE: It would take too long to explain each and every drill on these charts. If you have specific questions about drills, please do not hesitate to contact me at [BaseballByTheYard@gmail.com](mailto:BaseballByTheYard@gmail.com).

### HITTING

Basic soft toss	Soft toss CB drill	Push/drag bunt to 1st	Bounce-load drill
Basic short toss	Sac bunt to 3rd	High pitch tee drill	Stepper drills
Two ball soft toss	Sac bunt to 1st	Low tee drill	Walk-in drills
Three ball soft toss	Squeeze bunt	Inside tee drill	Golf-Whiffle ball drills



Short toss CB drill	Base hit bunt to 3rd	Outside tee drill	Stand-in drills
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## PITCHING

Normal bullpen	Flat ground drills	Stride drills	Pickoff drills
Short balance toss	Wall drills	CB drills	Bunt plays
Covering 1st base	3-6-1 DP	Squeeze play	Come-backers
1-6-3 DP	1-2-3 DP	Covering home	Pitch-outs

## INFIELD

Tagging	Partner pick-ups	Bag footwork - tags	Slow rollers
DP feeds	Paddle drills	Cutoffs	Backhands
DP turns	Rundowns	Bunt plays	Reaction drills
Wall drills	Steals	Double-relays	Diving drills

## OUTFIELD

Fence drills	Come-up throwing	Zig-zag drills	Slide catch drill
Sun/Light drills	Square drills	Over shoulder drills	Drop step drills
Corner balls	1st step drills	Diving drills	Footwork timing
Cut-off drills	Base line drills	Knee drills	Communicate drills

## CATCHING

Blocking drills	Bullpens	Wild pitch drills	Bunt plays
Pickoff throws	Throws to pitcher	Pick-ups	Collision drills
Pop-up mechanics	Transition drills	Steal throws	1st and 3rd plays
Framing drills	Rundowns	Home to 1st DP's	HP tags

## BASE RUNNING

1st step drills	Hit & run jumps	Leads	Squeeze play
3 step drills	Feet first slide	Secondary leads	Relaying signs
Delayed steal	Head first slide	Tagging up	Walking leads
Pickoff returns	Bunt plays	Pop-up slides	Rundowns

## TEAM DRILLS

Bunt plays	Pick-offs	Bunting games	Football conditioning
Rundown relays	Hitting games	PFP* drills	Fielding games

\* PFP = Pitchers Fielding Practice

# Must-have Equipment

It would be nice to have access to all the gadgets and equipment that are out there for baseball workouts but that will never be the case unless we are with the New York Yankees. Therefore, coaches have to get the most out of their budgets (and usually their own money!) in order to maximize their teams' productivity indoors.

Below are my suggestions for must-have equipment. Of course, if my funds or space was extremely limited, this list would have to be trimmed as well. Do the best you can.

## INDOOR BALLS

It doesn't matter whether your practices are indoors or out, you never have enough baseballs. Thankfully, you may rarely need real hardballs when you are indoors. First of all, hardballs can damage wood gym floors. They break windows and fire alarms. They also increase the chance of injury in small spaces. That's why your indoor collection of baseballs can and should include any type of ball you can get your hands on. Tennis balls, racquet balls, bouncy balls (SuperPinky style is best!), Whiffle balls, and sponge balls are all fantastic for station work. Heck, make your own using rolled up old socks with duct tape wrapped around them. Don't laugh, they work great and they are safe. If they rip, you just wrap it with some more duct tape. Problem solved!

Using a variety of types and sizes of balls not only can help with improving eye-hand coordination and other mechanics, they increase the fun as well!

If you have some money to spend and would like to improve the quality, I'd recommend highly that you get some IncrediBalls by Easton. If you do, be sure to get the cloth covered "SoftStitch" ones and NOT the vinyl covered type. The vinyl covered ones don't last nearly as long. I swear by these balls. A couple five gallon buckets filled with them was all I ever needed. For most of my indoor practices, camps, and clinics, only the pitchers who were throwing off the indoor mounds were using hard balls. Everyone else used IncrediBalls.



## MATS

This piece of equipment is often overlooked but can make a world of difference in improving the quality of your indoor workouts. Our school had a number of heavy duty fitness mats left over from refurbishing the weight room floor. If you are looking online, search for rubber horse stall mats that are about 4'x6' and 3/4" thick. Here is an example - <http://www.tractorsupply.com/en/store/rubber-horse-stall-mat-4-ft-x-6-ft>. They last forever and the 3/4" version are heavy enough that they do not slide around on gym floors. There are lots of brands and types so check around.

Probably the biggest problem hitters face when hitting indoors is having to stand on a slippery gym floor. If your space has a turf surface then it would not be a concern but any hard surface is going to need something so that hitters can remain grounded and balanced. These mats can also be used for catchers who are doing blocking drills with their shin guards on. Shin guards can do a number on a gym floor (learned that the hard way too!) so the mats can be used to protect against that.

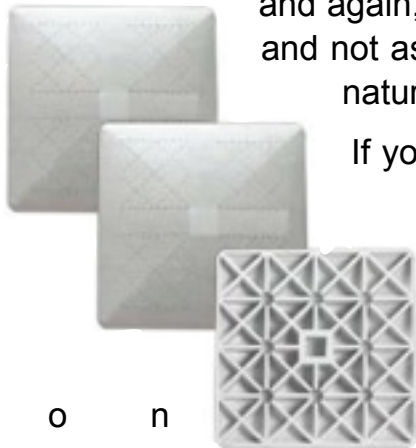
There are other types of mats and even rugs that can be used as well but I like the rubber mats best. We even had a few that we used on our field. We put one on the downslope of the mound so the dirt didn't get torn up during PFP (Pitchers Fielding Practice). We placed two others in each of the batters' boxes for the same reason.

## HOME PLATES

This is an easy one. Make your own! Get yourself some thick vinyl tiles at your local home improvement store and cut them into the shape of a home plate. If you cannot find tiles wide enough to fit the dimensions of a home plate (17"), use the roll of vinyl in the flooring department and cut it to size. Put some duct tape around the perimeter to soften the edges and presto! You have perfect indoor home plates that are light as a feather, stackable, safe for floors, and easily stored.

## BASES

Vinyl tiles can be ok for bases too if you are on a small budget. However, this is something I would spend a little bit more money on due to the importance of fielding getting used to a normal size base. I was lucky that my school had several old Hollywood style field bases in a storage closet. The picture to the right shows what they looked like. I just unscrewed the bottom off and again, presto! Several perfect indoor bases. They are heavier and not as easy to store but the infielders will appreciate the more natural feel when they are doing their infield drills.



If you do not have old field bases that you can doctor, indoor bases are now sold in many places. If you have seen a base used in my Baseball By The Yard video tips, this is the kind I have. They are heavy duty enough and stay where they are put. I would avoid the canvas style bags if you can. They just slide around too much indoor surfaces to be of much use.

## SOCK-NETS

This is another piece of equipment that is worth its weight in gold. The good news is that there are many types to choose from so you can get a couple without breaking the bank. Two suggestions though. Store them inside and they will last much longer. Also, hard balls hit into these nets will quickly destroy the nets, especially if you work with older kids. You are better off using lighter balls (IncrediBalls!) when doing hitting drills with these nets. They will last MUCH longer if you do. Using lighter, softer balls can also allow you to save money on a less durable net as well since it will last a bit longer.



Sock nets are also great for throwing into as well. Any station that involves throwing can be set up to have a sock-net. Double play feeds, pickoff throws, pitcher flat ground work, etc. all can allow players to throw to a target without having to throw to an actual person. With a bucket of balls they can get a lot of reps in a short amount of time. When the bucket is empty, they just go pick them up and start again.

For younger kids, this becomes a safer throwing option as well since their ability to catch is usually more limited. It allows you to separate throwing stations from catching stations. Having a separate catching station - with a coach doing the throwing - allows for more control of the catching process for little kids. Less black eyes too!

## BATTING TEES

Batting tees are like cars. There are so many options to choose from and everyone has their favorites. If you are working with younger kids (below middle school), you can get away with a lesser quality batting tee. If it's middle school kids on up, you better invest in some quality batting tees because they take an absolute beating. For what it's worth, here are my two picks for the world's best batting tees:



**ProX Tee** - you are going to pay more for this guy but the portability and versatility of it is tough to beat. The unique design allows you to do a lot of advanced drills with hitters and is quite rugged as well. A high school coaching friend bored mine and never gave it back. He also bought another one himself because his team liked it so much. To read the

product review he wrote for me, click here - <http://www.baseballbytheyard.com/product-review-the-prox-batting-tee/>.

**Tanner Tee** - If you are just looking for a basic tee that sets up and moves around easy, the Tanner Tee might be for you. This is the tee that most professional players go for because it is so easy to move around. It comes apart and fits in virtually any players equipment bag as well. You will need some kind of weight so it doesn't tip over, though. Most players use a barbell weight but the company sells specially designed tee weights for them as well. Several companies have created knockoffs of this tee because of its popularity so look around for other options if the price doesn't fit your budget. Expect the quality to drop, though.

## INDOOR PITCHING MOUNDS

This piece of equipment may be your biggest expense but if you can swing it, do so. With pitching being such an important part of any team's success, the ability to develop pitchers prior to the start of games is so big I cannot stress it enough. Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to do that effectively without having them throw off mounds indoors. I built two full size wooden ones myself for indoor use at my school and thankfully my school bought one as well a few years later. The mounds for purchase are so incredibly more easy to use, move, and store that if you have the funds, by all means buy those. If you are on a tighter budget, I'm sure you can find plans online to make one yourself. If you are taking the DIY approach, be sure to ask yourself the following before doing so:

✓ **Where are you going to store it/them?** If you are going to store them in a school gym, make sure you check in with the school's phys. ed. department first. They already have a ton of equipment to manage as it is and will NOT like having to move your heavy wooden mounds around so they can manage their classes. The mounds for purchase are much lighter and more easily moved around.

✓ **How are you going to store them?** If you lay them flat on the ground, they take up a lot of room. If you lean them up against a wall, there is the potential that they may fall. Wooden mounds are very heavy and if some idiot student decides to sit on it during a gym class and it falls on him/her, let's just say it will probably ruin your day. And you'll probably never see your handiwork again.



## INFIELD PADDLES

These are definitely a must for indoor workouts. They are so good for improving mechanics in so many areas of the game that if your players are not using them, you're ruining their careers. Ok, that's a slight exaggeration but the point is, they are great. They are inexpensive, they are light weight, and they pack and store easily in bags and buckets. You just can't beat them.

And they are NOT just for infield practice! Here are just some of the other ways they can be used beyond fielding ground balls:

- ✓ **Turning double plays** in order to teach middle infielders not to close their glove around the ball for quicker transitions.
- ✓ **Blocking drills** for catchers to get them to BLOCK the ball instead of CATCH the ball.
- ✓ **Pickoff drills** for pitchers to get the feel of getting the ball out of their glove faster.
- ✓ **Pitching arm path drills** for pitchers who are late getting to their release point. Once again, it helps give them the feel of getting the ball to exit their glove quicker.
- ✓ **Bottom hand hitting drills** that promote letting the ball get closer to you before contact.
- ✓ **Bunting drills** to promote the feel of "catching the ball with the bat."



## BATTING CAGE

Most every indoor facility that can be rented is going to have at least one batting cage. That's generally why teams rent those facilities. However, if you are using an indoor facility at a school, you are going to be at the mercy of whether or not the school has one. If they do, terrific. If they don't, you are probably not going to be able to convince them to get one unless you enjoy the bureaucracy of school districts. Especially in a bad economy. If they are up for it, you might also think it would be as simple as getting the principal to sign off on it and then have the maintenance people install it. You would be wrong. I could write an entire eBook just on this topic alone but to save space and to keep all those bad memories locked away, I'll just say that batting cages are wonderful (the longer the better!) for indoor workouts but be ready for the approval process.

Companies are coming up with new advances in batting cages so your options are, in fact, increasing beyond the typically batting cage. Several portable options are advertised even one that is inflatable! I have not been too thrilled with the set-up-and-take-down-as-you-go versions but the inflatable kind looks promising!

### **Safety Notes:**

- ✓ Make sure everyone in the cage (throwers and hitters) wears a helmet. Be sure to read the next section for important information about L-screens.
- ✓ When installing a batting cage in an indoor space, be sure to keep all sides of the cage at least three feet away from any walls, windows, and doors. Balls that are hit into the net will cause the net to move outward quite a bit. Cages that are too close to a wall, for example, will cause batted balls to dangerously ricochet around the cage. Of course, windows could be broken or people outside the cage can be struck as well. Think ahead!

## L SCREENS

If you do have a batting cage of



some kind then at least one L-screen must accompany it. Preferably two so that you can divide the cage into two halves for more than one hitter to be working at the same time (see space diagram # earlier in the eBook). You have to protect the guy throwing or tossing behind the screen. Nobody of any age should be throwing in a cage without one. They also can be used outside the cage for throwing targets, backup nets, and for covering glass windows and fire alarms when not in use.

For indoor purposes, I am partial to the kind that folds up. Once again, if you are hitting with real baseballs, you'll have to get a much more durable (and expensive) type. The folding kind is terrific but I would once again encourage you to use softer indoor balls for the safety of the net and the thrower.

#### **Safety Note:**

✓ L-screens can lead to a false sense of security. Be sure to teach your throwers how to throw and stay unexposed at the same time. Also demand that all players wear helmets when throwing from behind the L-screen.

## CAGE DIVIDERS

A cage divider can be a piece of additional net hung to divide the batting cage into two parts so more than one hitter can do work at the same time. An extra protective screen is another option as well. The screen or net goes in the middle and each batter hits towards the opposite ends of the cage.

## CHAIRS

It gets pretty tiring for your players and coaches when they squat or kneel down to do soft toss and short toss. Get a few chairs and ease their pain. It's another one of those little things that can help practice run a little more smoothly. If you are throwing live batting practice while standing, place the bucket of balls on a chair in front of you (and to your non-throwing side behind the screen) so you don't have to keep bending over as much to get the next handful of balls.

## BUCKETS

Five gallon buckets are an essential item for indoor and outdoor workouts. As an added bonus, many are sold with padded lids so they can double as seats for those doing the tossing during hitting drills. If catchers are working on receiving and framing drills, I have them sit on the buckets to save their knees. They are very appreciative!

I would recommend having a separate bucket for each type of indoor ball you use. Label them too and your set-up and take-down time will diminish as well. They are great for storing extension cords for pitching machines, infield paddles, and just about anything else as well. They easily stack in storage closets also.

Is it me or is your baseball closet always more organized then your own garage?

## Equipment storage

Speaking of storage, if you are involved in indoor workouts, where to store your stuff will be something to think about. If you are renting a facility, you probably will have to bring some of your own stuff. Buckets and duffle bags help but you may need to divide equipment up among coaches if it does not all fit in your car. I'll assume the indoor facility will not let you keep it there but you never know. No harm in asking.

*Your team/sport is no better than any other in the building. Be flexible. It's good PR for you and your program and people will also be willing to help you out when needed if you are.*

If you are a coach at a school, consider the following:

There are many other teams who also need to store their indoor equipment. Be mindful of the needs of others. Your team/sport is no better than any other in the building. Be flexible. It's good PR for you and your program and people will also be willing to help you out when needed if you are. And you WILL need help from other coaches at some point.

This approach also goes with your relationship with the school's physical education department. Keep in mind that phys. ed. departments often are the first to get hit with budget cuts when times are tough. Fair or not, they are generally seen as less important than the

more academic departments in a building and often are forced to bow to the needs of others. Most are coaches themselves and understand the difficulties with storing equipment. However, do not expect them to just bow to your needs when it comes to storing your equipment in their spaces. They can make your indoor life much easier or much harder depending on how you interact with them. Cultivate that relationship.

Ditto with the maintenance department. You will need their help when it comes to turning lights on, raising backboards out of the way, and opening/closing dividers that some gyms have. If you leave your equipment room keys at home, it's these people who will save your butt. Cultivate that relationship as well.

## Megafun!

Earlier in this eBook I mentioned that when it comes to planning indoor workouts, you'll have to decide on either a dead serious approach or one involving MegaFun. Usually the in-between approach isn't very effective.

You have to remember that even dedicated players can have a mentally tough time practicing indoors. This is especially true during the season when they have been outdoors for a while. Nobody enjoys having to go inside for several days because of bad weather or poor field conditions. To keep focus levels high, a dead serious approach works best. Little talking is allowed to keep the noise and distractions lower. No background music for the same reasons. Just get your work in and go home. All business.

*I didn't do it often but when I did, it always had a positive impact on the team.*

However, there are times when your team's sanity may be enhanced by a good day of pure fun! Totally setting aside skill work and seriousness can have a great affect on morale, team chemistry, and cohesion. If you want to take this approach, I suggest you go all in! I didn't do it often but when I did, it always had a positive impact on the team.

Here are some ways you might do it.

## WHIFFLE BALL

Is there anything better than a good game of Whiffle Ball? Have coaches play too and watch the competitive juices flow!

## KICKBALL

Why not?

## NERF FOOTBALL CONDITIONING

When I pitched in A ball, our pitching coach would often use this as our daily running routine. Here's how it works. Players are divided into two teams. A Nerf football is used so there are no jammed fingers when catching. "One hand touch" on players to stop the play. At no time are players not moving. A coach is the quarterback for both teams. A team that makes it past the foul line of the opposite side of the gym scores a touchdown. There are no first downs. Four plays is all the team gets. The ball starts at one end of the court and all players on the offensive team go out for a pass. If the pass is incomplete, all players jog back to the line and immediately start the next play. If the pass is caught, all players move to the new line of scrimmage including the coach and the next play starts immediately after that. The basic concept is that all players are moving all of the time. There is very little resting because any change of downs and possessions occur immediately after one another.

The first few minutes players tend to move pretty quickly but after that, players are pretty spent. It's a great way to build endurance without the typical boring distance running you may have them do. It's competitive too and also gets there mind off baseball for a bit.

## BASKETBALL

You're in a gym. There are probably basketballs around nearby. Use them! It's another way to build endurance while having some fun. Some suggestions, though. Tell your players to tone down the defense and rebounding. The point is

not to bang bodies around. The point is to score points and build endurance. You don't want anyone to turn an ankle going for a rebound or get a concussion taking a charge.

## FLIP

Have a Flip tournament! Have groups of three to five guys and have them battle it out for the Flip championship! If you have never seen or played Flip before, check out this YouTube video - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yy5mC2ffnSE>. Most players have played before and there are a million different rule sets. Set the rules ahead of time and then sit back and watch. You may never see your players more competitive again!

## TEAM BUILDING ACTIVITIES

These are activities that require tasks to be done using the assistance of everyone. they are great in building team chemistry and cohesion and reinforce the importance of teamwork. There are a million of them so search online and ask around for different activities. If you are in a school, the pays ed department probably has done several and may even have some props for the activities as well. Here are a few examples of activities - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6BBmBOu1as>

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**Thank you!**