



# The Top 30

*The 30 most popular posts from  
Baseball By The Yard*

[www.BaseballByTheYard.com](http://www.BaseballByTheYard.com)

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Founder - Coach Bob McCreary

Introduction: .....	4
#1 - How to make a batting tee .....	6
#2 - Best outfield drills for indoors .....	8
#3 - How to make a batting tee (Part 2).....	9
#4 - Concentration grids .....	10
#5 - Cold weather gear for baseball.....	13
#6 - Fast paced practice drills for defense.....	17
#7 - Two fungo drills you may not have done .....	19
#8 - Infield communication: Open and closed mouth .....	21
#9 - Little League practice templates .....	24
#10 - Breaking up a double play.....	25
#11 - The Suicide Squeeze - Part 5: Defending the Suicide Squeeze .....	29
#12 - Indoor drills for outfielders.....	33
#13 - Is it ok to take the top hand off the bat after the swing?..	36
#14 - The Chuck-It hitting drill.....	38
#15 - An easy split finger / change-up .....	38
#16 - Letting the ball get deep vs Hitting the ball out front .....	40
#17 - Infield footwork .....	41
#18 - Weekly pitching routine .....	43
#19 - Pickoff moves to first base: Part 2 - Proper footwork.....	45

#20 - Fake pickoffs to second base .....	45
#21 - Playing behind the runner at first base .....	47
#22 - Indoor hitting drills .....	48
#23 - The best infield drill I've never done.....	50
#24 - The wipe off sign .....	52
#25 - The Curve Ball Drill .....	54
#26 Soft hands drill for catchers.....	56
#27 Joe Madden's stages of a ball player.....	58
#28 Seminar - Outfield Drills.....	60
#29 Seminar - How to throw batting practice.....	61
#30 Baseball tryouts and what coaches look for.....	62

# Introduction:

I woke up one morning and checked my Baseball By The Yard email like I usually do and I was happy to see that I had received one from a reader. Let me stop here for a moment and explain some things about running a website such as mine. Everyday I receive garbage robo-emails from businesses looking to advertise/sell their products or services. None are personalized and most of them are not worth my time. Emails from readers are different.

Since the start of Baseball By The Yard back on December 12, 2010, with the post [First impressions](#), I have published well over 1,000 posts with the intention of passing on the finer points of the great game of baseball. But when I stare at my laptop as I produce them, the thought “*is anyone actually going to read this?*” always pops into my head. I click the PUBLISH button for a post (after editing it about 20 times!) and it just seems to go off into space. Amazingly, people actually read them! It may sound pretty silly but the fact that people around the world read my work and watch my videos still astounds me.

That’s why emails from readers delight me more than you can imagine. They are proof that someone on the other end of a computer, tablet, or phone is looking at what I produce! I’m not just producing them for myself.

And now, back to the story ...

I opened up this reader’s email and was stunned by what I read. Here is a portion ...

***“I’ve since overcome my baseball shortcomings thanks to your site. I feel confident that the technical advice I give my son is sound (and it shows). Just recently I found the courage to coach his team....Anyway, your video on how***

***to throw batting practice changed my life - and my son's. I can now throw him perfect strikes every time (figure 8!). We've spent hours in the cages and have grown very close."***

To think that one of my posts "changed the life" or at least effected their father-son relationship is very humbling to say the least. My father and I spent countless hours playing catch and taking batting practice. I cannot imagine my relationship with him without baseball. The fact that a video I produced is allowing a father and son to experience the game and each other on that level inspires me to keep going and look for more ways to help players, coaches, and parents learn more about the game and help themselves or their players to experience all that the game of baseball has to offer both on and off the field.

This eBook is a collection of the Top 30 posts in terms of readership based on the internal stats I am able to view behind the scenes. Some of these you may have already seen. Others you may have missed. Either way, this free eBook is a big THANK YOU! to all of you out there who take precious time out of your day to see what I have produced.

I hope you enjoy the Top 30!

*Coach Bob McCreary*



# #1 - How to make a batting tee

January 29, 2014

A reader recently sent me an idea for homemade batting tees that he uses quite successfully at the high school level. With his permission I am posting his comments along with the photos he sent me. It appears as if his tees are well worth the effort! If you are handy, see what you can create. If you do, send me a photo! I'd love to see how other people do it.

I don't have the pocket book to purchase a bunch of Tanner Tees, but our team needed some good quality tees. The \$20 rubber ones last just about that long. So a trip to Home Depot, the Rawlings outlet in Reading, a little imagination and time on the workbench in my garage, I came up with my own Tees for our kids. Total cost is around \$20 versus \$80 for a Tanner Tee or now \$110 for some of the latest type of Tees I just saw at the "Be the Best You Are" Coaches Clinic in Cherry Hill last week.



The item that costs the most is the metal floor flange (\$12). The next cost is the Tee Topper (\$7.95 @ Rawlings Outlet in Reading, but can get online as well). The PVC piping is about a \$1 or \$2 and

the rubber stoppers are the kind that are rubber leg tips for poles/walkers/chairs – drill a hole in the end of them and it provides just the right amount of friction to hold the tubing to the height you want.

I made standard length Tees and low Tees (the “shor-tee”) which can be used for all different types of Tee work drills. The bases came from scrap wood (2×12 planks from my neighbor who’s building his house) heavy enough that no extra weight is required. The low tees are great for low strike zone hitting and one knee/chair hitting drills.

A tee drill I love to do with our hitters is the “inside-outside” drill.

Using 2 tees, place one tee at the inside location and one on the outside location. Place a ball on each tee. When the hitter begins to stride/load, the coach calls out either “inside” or “outside” and the hitter reacts and hits the called-out ball.

I took this one step further and made the three tee version seen here (shown from catcher’s point of view):



We tried it out this fall and put a ball on each tee and called out “inside”, “middle”, or “outside”. The tee positions promote a

compact swing and detects casting if casting is a problem. It promotes proper swing path and plane.

I also put it to use when we were working on our defense and situational play. With me with a Fungo at the plate, I'd put 3 balls on the tees and picked one to hit, spreading the hits around to all fields, helping our defenders with reading bat angles at the point of contact, getting better jumps on the ball off the bat. Taken one step further, we incorporated players doing the hitting with the 3-tee drill (inside-middle-outside) at the plate, another group for runners from home to first (and on the bases), and the other players defending. I call this "High School T-Ball". The good hitters learn to hit line drives and to the gaps.

The Tee is a beautiful piece of gear. I don't sell any of these. Just letting you know what you can do with a little imagination and borrowing your dad's "awesome set of tools".

I love it! Well done coach!

## #2 - Best outfield drills for indoors

February 15, 2013

A few weeks ago I gave a seminar at a Philadelphia area coaches clinic. The topic was "An indoor/outdoor approach to developing outfielders." I basically explained that in the colder states, the weather early on in the season forces teams to do a lot of practicing indoors. Pitchers, hitters, fielders, and even base runners can get



a lot of work done indoors but often it's the outfielders that get screwed. My seminar was an attempt to show how coaches can very easily give outfielders plenty of work in a typical sized gym.

If you have been a subscriber to the site, you probably received the following link that I emailed out to you a week or two ago (By the way, that's one advantage of becoming a subscriber – you get things first). The link below takes you to a document that I created to go along with the seminar. It provides 10 drills that can be easily done indoors for outfielders.

If you need to put more time into your outfielders, whether indoor or out, here are 10 drills that can help. If you have trouble with the Google Docs link below, the document is also on my [Resource Page](#) at [BaseballByTheYard.com](#) under “Outfield Drills Chart.”

Link: <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0BzOzQBlyypV3SnhhdnFCR280ZXM/edit>

## #3 - How to make a batting tee

### (Part 2)

March 2, 2015

When it comes to total number of views, the most popular post on this website is the one I wrote back on January 29, 2014. It was called [How to make a batting tee](#).

If you have the money, my pick for the best basic batting tee is the **Tanner Tee**. It is the tee that many college and pro team/players use and they do so for a reason. There are some other great specialty tees as well like the one I previewed **HERE**.

If you are short on funds or just a handy person by nature, making your tees is a great option. The original post (linked above) showed a few photos and a description sent to me and reprinted with permission from my friend Coach Bob Sopko of Allentown, PA . I recently contacted him again because I was receiving quite a few requests for the parts list and dimension sizes. He graciously passed them along with permission to post these as well. Shout out to Bob once again!

If you'd like a printable pdf version, click this link here – **Tee Material List copy**.

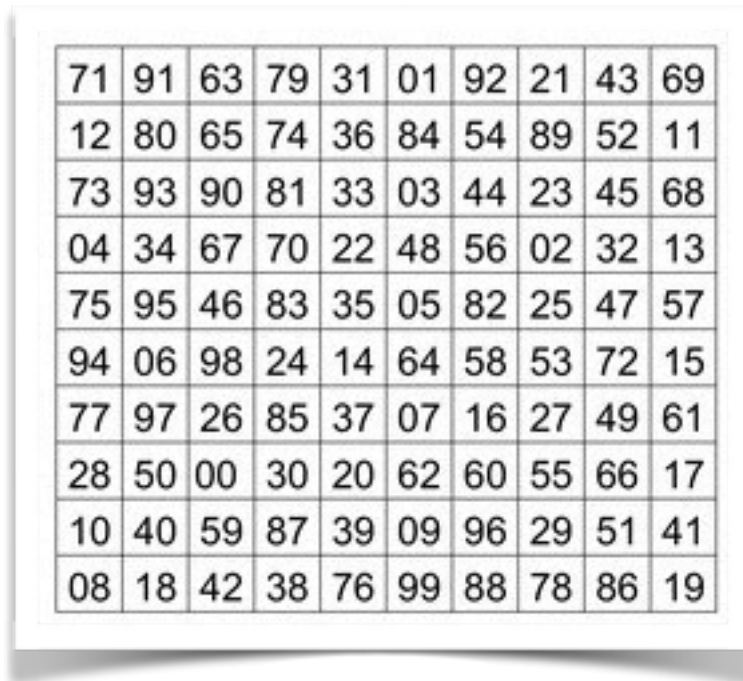
Happy building!

## #4 - Concentration grids

October 27, 2011

Many players suffer from a poor ability to concentrate. Concentration is quite a broad term. It is obviously tied to the concept of focus. I've done a number of posts about focus and what causes players to be distracted away from the thoughts and activities that truly matter on the field. The point of this post is to provide players and coaches with an activity that can actually do something to help players get better in the area of concentration. Telling a kid he needs to concentrate more may be obvious but it

does nothing to explain what specifically he should be focusing on, for how long, or even how to actually do it better. This activity can help.



71	91	63	79	31	01	92	21	43	69
12	80	65	74	36	84	54	89	52	11
73	93	90	81	33	03	44	23	45	68
04	34	67	70	22	48	56	02	32	13
75	95	46	83	35	05	82	25	47	57
94	06	98	24	14	64	58	53	72	15
77	97	26	85	37	07	16	27	49	61
28	50	00	30	20	62	60	55	66	17
10	40	59	87	39	09	96	29	51	41
08	18	42	38	76	99	88	78	86	19

It's called a Concentration Grid. The grids are a series of scrambled numbers from 00-99 (some are 1-100) on a page. The person doing the activity gets a designated time to X-out the numbers starting at number 01.

Basically, when the instructor says "Go," the person turns the page over, searches for 01 and puts an X over it. Then he searches for 02 and puts an X over that one. The process continues onward until the time expires. How many numbers they got to is recorded (say, 11 for example).

After a break, the person tries again by starting with the next number (12) and continues like before until time expires. How many they found in order in that time period is again recorded. To benefit baseball players, a good strategy to use is to keep changing the time to find the numbers. This is valuable because there are

times in baseball where longer periods of concentration are necessary such as over the course of an entire game. However, there are times when shorter, more intense periods of concentration are needed such as when a batter tries to pick up the ball out of the pitcher's hand and decide to swing or not. The window of concentration is very tiny for that task. 5 seconds, 15 seconds, 30 seconds, and a minute could all be used at various stages of the activity to force the person to concentrate over different time periods which mimics what they would have to do during game conditions.

The purpose of this activity is to give the person doing it some practice in concentrating on a single task. The more distractions, either external or internal, the harder it will be to find the next number and the longer it will take. Grid exercises simply provide a way for people to practice blocking out everything in order to focus and concentrate. Usually the more someone does a grid, the better they get.

To benefit the most, multiple grids are necessary. If the same one is used, people will begin to remember where the numbers were which obviously would alter their scores. The link above provides three different grids for this purpose. I'm sure others can be found online as well.

In school, students with concentration issues commonly get accommodations like increased time to get work done or take tests. Of course, there are no accommodations for these kids when it comes to baseball or any other sport. They either learn to concentrate better on what they need to or their playing career will be very short.

Concentration grids are a good way to help these kids and others to improve and hopefully keep them playing longer with more success.

# #5 - Cold weather gear for baseball

January 22, 2014

As I type this post, the low temperature for this evening is 2. No, that's not a misprint. For those in the warm states, there is not supposed to be a 7 or an 8 before the 2. Just 2 degrees. Tomorrow is supposed to improve dramatically and be six times as hot. 12 degrees. Oh ... and I just finished shoveling 6 inches of snow. About 3-4 inches more to come. I love Pennsylvania.



*Good cold weather gear can make these days more bearable.*

I figured now might be a good time to talk about cold weather gear for baseball players. Actually, this is a very good time to talk about cold weather gear because after the holidays is when winter clothes start to go on sale to make room for spring clothes. You can get some good deals and more importantly, if you wait until the season

starts to get what you need, all the good cold weather gear stores provide has either been sold or packed away in back rooms for the following year.

If you venture out to look for gear, keep the following general tips and specific items in mind:

### General Tips:

When you look for cold weather gear, go with the experts who know what “cold weather” actually means. Rawlings, Mizuno, and Wilson are great companies if you are looking for baseball equipment but they are not experts in cold weather clothing and accessories.

Companies that specialize in outdoor clothing for skiing (especially cross-country skiing), snowboarding, and even hunting tend to be better at keeping you warm because they are specifically designed for active people in bitter cold weather. Companies like **WSI Sports**, **LLBean**, **Swix Sport**, **REI**, **Eastern Mountain Sports**, **Campmor**, and **Columbia** have great stuff that can be used by baseball players to keep warm and more importantly, not lose mobility.

Having played and coached in bitter cold temperature and even snow, I unfortunately have a lot of experience in what it's like. I absolutely hate cold weather and have experimented quite a bit in order to find the right combination of warmth and mobility. Here are my suggestions for gear.

### Specific Items to Consider:

Hat liner – Companies like **Under Armour** as well as biking gear companies sell thin skull caps or beanies that can be worn under your game hat. Keeping your head warm can make all the

difference in the world. Especially if you are “folically challenged” like myself!

Football gloves – Because football is played in colder temperatures, the gloves that they wear are generally thicker than batting gloves. To get a feel of the bat, most baseball players would rather use thin batting gloves but in a pinch, football gloves may actually keep some feeling in your hands. If you coach, Swix Sport makes some great [cross-country skiing gloves](#) that are warm and allow for mobility.

Tights – As you are well aware, baseball uniform pants are pretty much worthless when it’s cold. Tights for the legs are a must. At least they were for me. Thin running tights or thermal underwear pants in either white or gray (so they don’t show through white uniform pants) are good. I used fleece tights. I’m ashamed to admit how far into the season I’d wear them.

Dickeys – Don’t laugh. Dickeys are a must. Find a color that matches your game sleeves and keep it in your baseball bag at all times. They keep your neck warm (a must to keep me warm) but do not add bulk like a heavy turtleneck would. If you get hot, pull it right over your head and move on. Seriously. Get one or two. Get a team logo embroidered on the front to look even better.

Performance vest – By performance vest I mean a thicker, form fitting shirt with no sleeves. Nike cold weather gear may offer one. UnderArmour may also. My favorite is Inteliskin. They are thicker than just a Nike running tee and much more form fitting. And I mean MUCH more form fitting. If you’ve never heard of Inteliskin, check out their website [HERE](#). I would only recommend their sleeveless shirt for baseball because I found the shirts with sleeves to be too tight for throwing. The basic purpose of this kind of shirt is to keep the heat of your torso inside.



Long sleeves – Everyone has a comfort level with regard to wearing sleeves. I always wore them. Others hate them no matter how cold it is. If you have a good performance vest then your need for real heavy sleeves drops. I recommend that all kids below the college level wear a good set of sleeves to help protect their arms. I practically made them mandatory for all my pitchers. If you are a position player or a coach then wearing multiple shirts (even sleeves) can work. Bad hops to the chest are not an issue when multiple layers are present. Better to lose a little mobility when throwing then to hurt your arm due to stiffness when cold.

Sunglasses – When it's cold, sunglasses are not just for the sun. Springtime usually brings cold winds as well. Cold winds and eyes are not a good fit. Keep the wind off with sunglasses. Try out different lenses as well. Some are for bright light and others are good for cloudy weather. Experiment and make sure you wear them in practice before trying them during games. It will take some adjusting.

Hand warmers – Keep a hand warmer in your back pocket (back right pocket if you are right handed and back left for lefties). In between pitches a position player can put his throwing hand in his back pocket to warm it up.

### Cold weather No-No's:

- 1 I don't care how cold it is, no player should ever wear a hooded sweatshirt under their game jersey on the field. This goes for coaches as well.
- 2 No players should wear anything over their jersey during pre-game infield outfield drills. Uniforms only.
- 3 If players wear sleeves, they ALL MUST BE THE SAME COLOR! And be specific. Blue could mean royal blue, light blue, or navy. Pick one and everyone wears that. No exceptions.



Cold weather and baseball are usually not a good mix. However, with the right clothing, a player's performance should not suffer.

## #6 - Fast paced practice drills for defense

May 2, 2011

The following are defensive drills that are great for keeping everyone moving and working on game-like situations. Each sequence is intended to be run for about 5 minutes to keep focus high. Some of the situations require a coach to either throw or hit balls but many can work by players rolling or throwing each other balls. There are 10 scenarios total. We usually do not get through all of them in one practice session. It is pretty fast paced and players can get pretty tired. They can get sloppy and develop bad habits so a built in water break after a few is a good idea. Maybe try 5 of them one day and the next five another day. Create and implement your own sequences based on the needs of your team. It takes a little planning ahead of time but it's well worth it.

### DEFENSIVE DRILLS / FIELD USE

1. Pitchers and catchers – pass balls to the screen with a throw to the plate.  
3B – slow rollers, throw to 1B

- 2B and SS – double plays (place a guy half way to first base to receive the throw)  
OF – find the fence
2. Pitchers and catchers – squeeze play  
3B and 2B – 5-4 play  
SS – slow rollers play to 1B (start on the grass so as to not get hit by the 3rd baseman's throw to 2nd)  
OF – charge a base hit and throw (can be done anywhere in the outfield)
3. Pitchers and catchers – pick-offs to 1B  
OF – ball down RF line, throw to 2nd (SS and 2B are cutoffs and at the bag)  
3B – backhands
4. P, C, 3B – pitch and throw to 3B on steal attempt  
1B – scoops  
OF – ball down LF line, throw to 2nd (SS and 2B helping)
5. P, SS, 2B, 1B – 1-6-3  
3B – hard grounders in all directions  
OF – normal fly balls
6. P, 1B – pitcher covering first  
C – blocking (straight on)  
3B – pop-ups in foul territory  
SS, 2B, OF – pop-ups in short OF, call offs
7. 3B, SS – diving after balls and getting up (fielders dive with ball already in glove)  
P, 1B, 2B – ground ball in hole, pitcher covers  
OF – sun balls
8. C – pop-ups over the plate  
P, 1B – Come backers, step & throw

SS, 3B – 6-5 play when the runner makes the mistake of trying for third

OF – charging in on shallow flies

9. C, 3B, 2B, 1B, OF – 5-2-3 play (let some throws to 1st go to the outfield so the outfielders get used to backing up)  
P, SS – bunts back to pitcher, throw to 2B (2B acts like a 1st baseman and stretches on the force)
10. C, P, 1B – 1-2-3 play  
3B, SS, 2B, OF – fly ball communication

## #7 - Two fungo drills you may not have done

September 6, 2011

Using a fungo bat is synonymous with coaching baseball. With the amount of ground balls and fly balls I hit during the course of a normal season, I'd be lost without mine. Below are two drills that you may not have thought of that involve the use of a fungo bat.

Note: Both of these drills require the user to be pretty skilled in handling a fungo bat. Consistently being able to hit balls straight ahead is key for these two drills to be effective. Hitting a fungo is a learned skill so if you need work, get out there and practice! It's well worth it!

Scoops at first. This drills involves having a coach stand in relation to where the fielders will be throwing the ball to first base.

Let's use third base as an example. In this version of the drill, the fungo hitter stands in the infield grass about 40-50 feet away from first base and in line with a typical throw from the third baseman.

The first baseman sets his feet as he would before the throw. The fungo hitter hits a hard ground ball or line drive at the first baseman. The first baseman reacts to the batted ball as if it was a throw in a game by catching it and/or attempting to scoop or block the throw. The coach could then move around the infield to give the first baseman work on every angle. The coach should also make it a point to stand at second base and hit balls to the first baseman in order to represent a throw in the dirt on a double play.



*A fungo can work very well when practicing  
this catch and tag play at home plate.*

Plays at the plate. This drill involves the same concept as the one explained above but applies to catchers on plays at the plate. On

such plays during the course of an actual game, the catcher must be prepared to catch any type of throw coming at him and apply the tag. Short hops, in-between hops, balls thrown left and right of the plate, and balls thrown high all have to be practiced. To do this, the coach stands in various parts of the infield – about as far back as where the infielders would be if they were playing in on the grass – and hits hard ground balls and line-drives at the plate.

The catcher reacts like he would in a real game and tries to catch and make a tag properly. **IMPORTANT:** All catchers **MUST** wear full equipment in this drill including their mask for obvious safety reasons.

Of course, there are other variations to this type of fungo drill.

Balls can be hit at the second base bag so the middle infielders can work on poorly thrown balls by the catcher on steal attempts. This can also be done for third baseman on steal throws to third as well as pick-off throws to first base from the catcher.

Use your imagination and think of some more!

## #8 - Infield communication:

# Open and closed mouth

April 13, 2012

At the higher levels, we've probably all seen middle infielders give a signal to each other after the catcher gives the sign to the pitcher with a runner on first base. The signal they give each other indicates who is going to cover second base on a steal attempt on

that pitch. At the lower levels, it's not a very complicated process when determining who covers. Basically, if a right hander is up to bat, the second baseman covers. If a lefty is up, the shortstop covers. However, the



*The communication involved when deciding who is covering on the steal is an important job for middle infielders.*

higher you go up in baseball the more variables come into play that can change the decision on who covers on a steal. Here are just some that can cause middle infielders to switch up the coverage:

- A batter with a very slow bat who rarely pulls anything.
- A pitcher who throws very hard and makes it difficult for most hitters to pull the ball.
- A pitch that is called on the outside corner.

At the high school level and above, it becomes more likely that teams will know a little more about the hitters' and pitchers' tendencies. This information can be used when deciding who covers. The point is, as kids get older, it's not always so clear cut on who covers and middle infielders need to decide on how to respond to each situation.

Whatever the decision is on who will cover the bag, the middle guys need to communicate to each other who is covering and don't have a lot of time to do it. Like everything else in the game, there is a right and wrong way to do it.

The wrong way is to announce it so all can see. Unfortunately, this is what I still see to a large extent at the high school and even some college levels as well. For example, the second baseman often taps his chest and literally says "I got the bag." At the high school level and below, doing just that probably will not matter too much. However, a smart team with hitters who have good bat control can make an infielder pay for that mistake. (Tomorrow's post will describe a play that the offense can use when this mistake is seen.) To prevent the mistake, infielders can use a signal to determine who gets the bag on the steal. Most often it is the "open/closed mouth" system. It works like this. One of the two middle infielders takes the lead in giving the signal. After the catcher gives the sign to the pitcher, the lead guy turns his head and faces the other fielder, puts his glove up in front of his face, and either keeps his mouth closed or opens it wide. A closed mouth means "I got the bag" and an open mouth means "you have the bag."

Personally, I've never been a fan of both middle infielders giving each other the sign. They will eventually run into a problem where both fielders will give the same sign (open or closed mouth) and therefore get confused on who is covering. When the pitch is on its way to the batter is not a good time to be clearing up who is covering. Especially at the lower levels, I'd recommend having one trusted middle infielder decide and give the signal to the other guy.

Many college players and all major league middle infielders do this signaling before every pitch. This is because at that level, the situation literally may change on every pitch. At the high school level and below, it may only be necessary to give this signal once per batter instead of before each pitch.



The point is, regardless on how you decide to do it, it's never too early to begin this type of signaling so the offense cannot alter their strategy based on knowing who is covering on a steal.

## #9 - Little League practice templates

February 17, 2015

Date : _____	Practice Time: _____	Location: _____
<b>6-7 yr old Practice (1.5 hrs)</b>		
<b>2-3 Minutes: Pre-Start Meeting - Today's Points to Emphasize:</b>		
_____	_____	
_____	_____	
<b>8-10 minutes: Functional Warm-Ups, Throwing, and/or Base Running</b>		
Warm-Up activity #1: _____		
Warm-Up activity #2: _____		
Warm-Up activity #3: _____		
<b>5 Minutes: Base running Drill:</b> _____		
<b>8-10 Minutes – Throwing/Receiving Drills:</b>		
Drill / Activity #1: _____		
Drill / Activity #2: _____		
<b>3-4 Minutes: Group meet – Explain Hitting &amp; Fielding Rotations and divide players into groups</b>		
<b>25-30 Minutes – Hitting Rotations</b>		
Hitting station #1: _____		
Hitting station #2: _____		
Hitting station #3: _____		
Hitting station #4: _____		



Over the past month or so, a good friend and I did a few coaching clinics for Little League coaches. One of our big priorities for the clinics was to pass on the importance of organizing good practices.

To help them do this, we created practice templates for practices involving four age groups that range from 5 to 12 years old. Of course, the templates could be used or tweaked for any age group over 12 as well.

As you will see, all the templates are structured to allow coaches to plug in whatever drills and activities they like depending on the needs of their team. You are certainly welcome to print out and use the templates as they are. If you'd like to edit them to fit your needs, that's fine too.

Below are links to the templates in both Word and PDF formats. Click on whichever fits best for you.

To download the templates in a Word Document or PDF form, go to my [Resource Page](#).

Whether you use the templates above or create your own, be sure to plan very efficient practices down to the minute in order to keep all your kids moving as much as possible.

## #10 - Breaking up a double play

August 16, 2012

One of the many jobs of a first base coach is to tell every runner at first base to “break up a double play” if there are less than two

outs. How it is done depends on what level the player finds himself on but the main idea is that going hard to second base and



*Sliding hard according to the rules to break up two  
should not be optional for runners*

sliding hard as well should not be optional. Unfortunately, along with bunting, it seems to be a forgotten part of the game for many players.

I found myself shaking my head again last night as a major league player coasted into second base and then peeled off to get out of the way of the throw to first by the shortstop on a double play. Didn't run hard and didn't slide. In a one run game (his team was losing) in the 8th inning. Inning over and his team went on to lose. I shake my head because that's not how you play the game. You play it hard all the time. No exceptions.

When it comes to breaking up a double play, there is a big difference between sliding hard according to the rules and playing dirty. Below are some do's and don'ts when it comes to breaking up a double play. Be sure to read both regardless of what your rules are. Several of the tips apply to all runners at all levels.

If the rules say you must slide directly into the bag (usually high school and below):

- Anticipate having to break up two every time you get on first base. Take an aggressive secondary lead on the pitch and if the ball is hit on the ground, put your head down and run as hard as you can in a straight line to second base. When sliding, slide as you would on a straight steal. Feet first and into the bag. Keep your lead leg down like you normally would. Dirty slides occur when the runner lifts his lead spike shin-high or higher to get the fielder with it. Not good.
- Do not slide past the bag in order to make contact with the fielder who might be behind it.
- Slide with your hands off the ground. Not waving in the air to distract the fielder or to touch the ball but to avoid your hands and fingers from being stepped on by the fielder.
- Pop-up slides are ok if it is done in a normal fashion and not just to ram into a fielder.
- Don't assume you are out. Stay on second base until the umpire tells you that you are out.

If the rules say you are able to be within an arms length of the bag when sliding:

- Watch infield practice!! Do so in order to see where the middle infielders go on double plays. The shortstop will just about always go across the bag. It can vary for the second basemen. Some like to come across. Some step back off the bag. Some stay behind the bag and use the bag for protection. Do some scouting to see who the starting second baseman will be and where he likes to go on double plays. If he takes all his double play feeds in practice by going across the bag,

you know where he is going to be in the game. If you are on first and a grounder is hit, put your head down and run to the spot where you know he will be. Note: If you are a second baseman, it's important to use a variety of double play turns in pre-game practice to not allow the runners the chance to know beforehand where you are going to be.

- Wherever the fielder goes, slide on that side of the bag within arms reach and as before, keep your lead foot/spikes down. Let the contact with the fielder occur naturally on the slide. Do not kick, grab, or reach for an infielder on the slide.

Other notes:

- Peeling off means veering left or right out of the baseline without a slide to avoid getting hit by the ball. The only time this would be somewhat ok is when the play happens so fast that the runner isn't more than half way to second base when the ball is being thrown to first. Personally, I'd still like to see my runner slide even if they will never reach the bag. Veering off is just giving up. Any slide and/or runner in the path of the throw can spook a fielder enough to alter his throw.
- Do not go into second base standing up. I've seen a couple runners do this in order to disrupt the fielder and his throw. A runner tried to do this to me and almost got a ball between his eyes in the process. Play hard but don't be stupid either.

# #11 - The Suicide Squeeze - Part 5: Defending the Suicide Squeeze

August 24, 2011

As I have stated numerous times in this series on the suicide squeeze, if the offensive team hides it well, uses the proper timing, and executes the fundamentals of the bunt, there is virtually nothing a defense can do to stop the suicide squeeze. Therefore, defending the squeeze play basically involves taking advantage of any mistake the offensive team makes during the process.

Defending the squeeze involves many people but the major players are the pitcher, catcher, 1st baseman, and the 3rd baseman. This last part of the Suicide Squeeze series will focus on each separately and conclude with another very profitable tip for the team on defense.



*A pitcher MUST look at the runner at third base  
BEFORE starting his delivery.*

The Pitcher. The first tip for all pitchers involves peaking at the runner at third prior to the pitch. Click [HERE](#) to read a previous post for more details on this topic. When it comes to a pitcher's delivery, it is generally a good idea to go from the stretch position with less than two outs and a runner on 3rd base. I mentioned in Part 4 that a runner at 3rd has a more difficult time getting a good jump towards home plate when a pitcher is in the stretch.

However, when a pitcher goes from the wind-up, a runner may be too anxious and leave too early. The wind-up gives the pitcher more time to adjust his pitch if this occurs. Should the batter or runner tip off the squeeze too early the pitcher has a couple options. First, the pitch can be thrown in a pre-determined location like up and away or even a normal pitch out location.

The key is that both the pitcher and the catcher have to know beforehand where the pitch will be thrown. The second option poses an ethical dilemma that involves throwing at the batter.

Should the pitch hit the batter, a dead ball is the result and the runner will have to go back to third base. You would normally only see this strategy if the runner on third is the game-winning run. It goes without saying that there is a significant danger in telling a pitcher to take this option. Should a batter get seriously hurt and it comes out that the coach instructed his pitcher to purposely hit the batter, the coach can understandably be in a world of trouble. I am not condoning this play. I'm simply stating that it has been used as an option.

Fielding a squeeze bunt and tossing it to the catcher is obviously an important responsibility for any pitcher. PFP (Pitchers Fielding Practice) should include drills that help prepare pitchers to do this properly.



The Catcher. Much of what the catcher does involves looking for clues as to when it may be coming. Observing the batter is his priority. Watching for changes like where the batter positions his feet in the box or how the batter acts after he gets the sign from the third base coach would be a catcher's responsibility.

The 1st Baseman. Like any bunt situation, the first baseman's job is to charge towards home plate when able and hopefully be in a position to make a play at home on a poorly bunted ball.



*Be in the area when the coach is talking to the runner at third base.*

The 3rd Baseman. The role of the third baseman is similar to the first baseman in that when the play is identified, he charges towards home plate. However, there is something else the third baseman can do prior to the pitch. Many times a third base coach will talk to the runner at third before and/or after the sign is given to insure that he knows the squeeze is on. As a result, it's not a bad idea for the third baseman to wonder over towards the third

base bag before each pitch in an effort to hear what the coach is saying. There is nothing unethical about this. The third baseman can go anywhere he wants as long as he is not interfering with the runner.



*If you watch carefully, these guys can  
be your best source for information.*

Final Tips. In this series, a lot of attention has been given to watching the third base coach, the runner at third, and the batter for clues that a squeeze might be coming. That being said, there is another area that should be watched. The offensive team's bench.

In my experience, I believe this to be the most profitable area to watch. The major players involved in the squeeze play – the third base coach, the runner, and the batter – basically know that they are being watched and normally conduct themselves accordingly.

However, players on the bench sometimes make the mistake of assuming that nobody is watching them. Personally, I don't spend much time trying to decipher signs from the third base coach. I



usually just watch the other teams' bench and look for anything out of the norm. To follow what's happening in the game, many players on the bench pay attention to the signs given by the third base coach. Players who all of a sudden become very alert after the sign is given may be indicating that a play is about to occur. You may see a bench player elbow a kid next to him as if to say "Pay attention. The squeeze is on." An on-deck batter may stop his routine so that he can watch what is about to occur. There are many variations. The key is to watch them throughout the game so you can pick up their normal behaviors. You can then compare that with what you see in big situations later in the game and hopefully pick up anything out of the ordinary.

The suicide squeeze can be a valuable play for any offense. Practicing it and paying attention to the many little things involved can pay dividends for both the offensive and defensive teams.

## #12 - Indoor drills for outfielders

January 12, 2011

Of all the positions on the field, the outfield positions tend to get shafted the most with regards to indoor practice. I'm based outside of Philadelphia so we routinely have to spend many practice days indoors because of rain or snow. Farther up north is certainly worse so don't feel the need to shed tears for me.

If it is not possible for outfielders to find a clear, dry area to practice on (other field, parking lot, etc), try these indoor drills that work basic outfield skills. As always, if you have other drills, pass them along!

Pass drill: Each outfielder gets a ball and stands in line. One at a time, an outfielder jogs towards a coach and flips the ball to him. The player runs around the coach and goes out for a pass. The coach throws a pass with the ball and the outfielder runs it down. The next player then goes and the drill continues. This works on running technique, glove technique, catching on the run, keeping your head still when running, eye-hand coordination, and timing. After each player has gone twice, have players approach the coach from the other side so the player is running and looking over the other shoulder this time.

Corner drill: This drill replicates a ball hit to an outfielder's left or right. Players line up on one side of the gym (to the left or right corner of a base-line on a basketball court for example). A coach rolls a ball towards the other corner of the gym. The outfielder cuts the ball off (running down the base-line towards the opposite corner) before it hits the wall, turns, and throws to a middle infielder who acts as a cut-off man at the other end of the gym. This works proper angles, footwork before and after catching the ball, and hitting the cut-off man.

Wall drill: An outfielder stands in the center of the gym and sets up as if a pitch is being thrown. The coach tosses a ball over the outfielders head so the ball rolls to the wall. The outfielder turns and chases the ball, fields it off the wall and throws it to a cut-off man at the other end of the gym. This works the footwork going back on the ball, reading balls off the wall, getting to the proper side of the ball before catching (right side if right-handed, left side if left-handed), and throwing accuracy to the cut-off man.

Zig-Zag drill: Outfielders line up next to and to the left of a coach at one end of the gym. A player runs straight ahead and looks over his right shoulder for the throw. When the coach yells "now" the player whips his head around to his left shoulder as the coach tosses the ball over that shoulder. The outfielder tracks it down

and catches the ball. This drill mimics a ball hit over the outfielders head that curves or is wind-blown to the other side of the outfielder. Players should quickly whip their chin/eyes around to the other shoulder (yes, they will lose sight of the ball for a split second) so that they continue running with the same forward mechanics. After a few turns apiece, have players line up on the other side of the coach to practice the other side as well.

Come-up throwing drill: Players line up on one side of the gym facing the other side. A coach starts the process by throwing a ball at the far wall. The first player in line charges the ball that is now bouncing towards him, gloves it, and throws it to the far wall. The ball bounces off the wall and the next outfielder then charges and does the same. The round-robin drill can continue as long as the coach wishes. This drill works on charging balls, footwork before and after catching, being aggressive through the ball, proper arm angle (over-the-top) when throwing, and accuracy.

First-step drill: Place four cones on the four corners of the basketball court. One outfielder stands in the middle of the court – the others off to the side. The player sets up as if a pitch is being thrown and a coach points to a cone. The player reacts as if a ball is hit towards the cone. A coach could even toss a ball towards a particular cone for the player to try to catch. This works on first step quickness to the ball, proper angles, and aggressiveness.

Note: All the drills mentioned above certainly work outside as well. Modify them for your needs and the ability level of the players you work with. Create some new ones of your own!

# #13 - Is it ok to take the top hand off the bat after the swing?

June 23, 2014

The other day a high school player asked me, “Is it ok to take the top hand off the bat after the swing?” My answer was YES. In fact, virtually every time a player asks that kind of question, my answer will be YES. As I’ve said before, as soon as you say NO to that type of question, the player will turn on the TV and see a major leaguer consistently and successfully do the very thing you said shouldn’t be done.

When it comes to taking the top hand off the bat on the swing like this ...



it really isn’t a matter of “if” a batter does it. The issue is really a matter of “when” the batter does it. The problem that hitters have when letting go of the top hand is that many let go too soon and do not properly and aggressively extend through the ball before letting go of the bat. To show what I mean, here is another photo of Miguel Cabrera.



In this photo, Cabrera has aggressively extended through the ball and still has yet to let go of the bat with his right hand (top hand). Players who have trouble with letting go with their top hand usually do it before they get to this point.

Remember, after the ball and bat make contact and the ball leaves, there is nothing else a hitter can do to impact the ball. It's already gone. That's why I personally do not care too much about how a batter finishes his swing. Batters can hold onto the bat with two hands, they can let go with their top hand, they can finish with their hands high, and they can finish them fairly low. As long as they get through the ball well with both hands on the bat (2nd photo), it doesn't matter what they do after that.

Note: With players who are just beginning to play (tee-ball, coach pitch, etc.) I would not recommend a player take his top hand off the bat. Their lack of strength makes it more likely the bat will fly out of their hands if they do.

## #14 - The Chuck-It hitting drill

With 4 inches of snow arriving this past weekend, I guess it's time to mention some good indoor drills!

The video for this post is linked here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x\\_nTRliWxoA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_nTRliWxoA)

## #15 - An easy split finger / change-up

January 31, 2014

One of the challenges that young pitchers have is how to get the ball to move. When I say move, I don't mean velocity. I'm talking about getting the ball to "tail," "run," and/or "sink." A pitch with movement is almost always harder to hit than a straight pitch. I know. My fastball was basically straight as an arrow which is why my Bio Page doesn't include "former Major Leaguer" in the description.

When young players get enough velocity to make the ball move (10-12 yrs old-ish?), there are some easy ways to develop other pitches beyond the fastball that show the batter something different. Unfortunately, most young pitchers think that "something different" means a curve ball or slider. Too many young arms pay the price for that decision.



An easier way to develop some movement is to just vary the finger and thumb placement on the ball. This photo shows what I mean.



The photo is of the new Japanese pitcher who was just signed by the Yankees. Notice that his two fingers on top of the ball are a little wider than a normal fastball grip. Also notice that his thumb is on the side of the ball instead of underneath. In the photo he is about to throw a split-finger fastball.

One major mistake young pitchers make on a split-finger is that they spread their fingers apart too far and may even jam the ball in between their index and middle fingers. That is a forkball not a split-finger. In my opinion, the forkball should be avoided just like sliders and curveballs at the younger ages. Just moving (splitting) the two fingers apart more can help get some movement. Moving the thumb from under the ball to the side can help also.

For some pitchers, the result of this split-finger grip is a pitch that drops somewhat like a curveball. For others, the pitch doesn't drop much but it does slow down the ball similar to a change-up. If it breaks downward, use it as a breaking pitch. If it just takes some velocity off, use it as a change-up.

Throwing a curveball takes a lot of work and, of course, it isn't too safe for young kids. Throwing a change-up, especially a circle change, can be tough for young players with smaller hands. Throwing both by just altering the two fingers and thumb position can be a safer option and may even be more effective.

## #16 - Letting the ball get deep vs Hitting the ball out front

August 19, 2014

A friend and former teammate of mine is doing pretty well for himself in the instructional world of baseball. His coaching experience (including USA baseball), his hitting clients (several major leaguers), [his website](#), and now online radio show has grown more popular and I couldn't be happier for him. Kevin Wilson knows hitting and high level players are taking notice.

The video below was taken, with permission, from his website. I'd like you to watch it for two reasons. First, his demeanor will show you why he is so successful as a teacher of the game, and second, you'll learn about a common issue facing many hitters. That is, "do I stay back and let the ball get deeper so that I can see the ball longer or do I focus on hitting the ball out front?" I think you will find his explanation helpful.

To view the video from this post, use the following link:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TU-m0ABDTk>



# #17 - Infield footwork

July 4, 2011

If you look at the “Popular Posts” section on the right side of the page, you’ll notice that one of the most widely read posts is called [Shortstop Mistakes / Footwork \(Part 2\)](#). That post deals primarily with the footwork of a shortstop after they catch a ground ball.

[Part 1](#) dealt with the steps prior to fielding the ball. In this post, I want to add something else because if you watch many major league infielders (this includes shortstops and especially second basemen and third basemen), you may not see the “cross over step” I recommended in Part 2. I wanted to explain why that is the case.

Obviously, the overwhelming amount of infielders who play baseball are not on the major league level. This is usually because they come up short in one or more of the following areas: quick hands, quick feet, and/or arm strength. Because major league infielders are probably going to be high (or at least higher) in each of these areas, they can get away with certain techniques and mechanics that lesser players cannot.

Footwork is a good example. If a player is short on arm strength, he’ll have to make up for it by shortening the distance of his throw and/or generating a little more momentum before he throws. As a result, his footwork may need to be slightly different than a major leaguer’s because their abilities are different. A cross-over step after catching the ground ball will enable the less gifted player to shorten the distance and generate a bit more momentum towards first base before the throw. A major leaguer would normally not need to do this. This is why many infielders at the major league level apply the “shuffle step” or “replace and step” method following the catch.



*“Replace and step” : The right foot replaces the left foot and the left foot steps to throw.*

The “replace and step” footwork involves a little hop and turn where the infielder takes his right foot and puts it where the left foot was and steps with his left foot to throw. If a shortstop has quick enough hands and a good enough arm, he can throw quite well after fielding with this footwork because he completes the process a little faster. The little less momentum created and slightly longer distance of his throw are more than made up by his quickness and arm strength.

Many young shortstops who try this “replace and step” or “shuffle step” footwork find that they have to add an additional hop before they throw to generate more momentum, close the distance of the throw, and allow their arm enough time to get to the release point on their throw. Of course, this adds time to the process. This is why I recommend the cross-over step on normal ground balls for shortstops. It adds what many younger players need without having to take too many steps or hops after they catch the ball.

However, even though their hands, feet, and arm may come up a little short, many young second basemen can apply this “shuffle step” footwork without a problem because their throws to first are shorter. Third basemen as well because the ball generally gets to them a little quicker and they also have a little shorter throw than a shortstop.

As players get older, the fine tuning for each position becomes more important, especially when it comes to footwork. Every players’ ability is slightly different so their footwork may need to be tailored to fit their individual needs and that of their position.

## #18 - Weekly pitching routine

April 17, 2013

At the younger levels (up to and including college) the likely pattern a pitcher is going to evolve into is the “once a week” appearance. Of course, a relief pitcher may throw more than once a week but for starters, once a week is usually pretty standard until they get into pro ball. The question that many coaches and pitchers struggle with is ... what does a pitcher do on the days he is not pitching?

There is no “one size fits all” answer to this question. Every pitcher is different and will need to tailor an off-day program that meets their individual needs. That being said, below is an example of a program that is required at a Philadelphia area college. I am posting it because I believe it is a good model to use or to at least start with and tweak over time. For younger players, all that is expected in this program may not be doable since younger players usually play other positions on non-pitching days. It’s much easier to follow the program below if all you do is pitch. The general point

is that pitchers should not just focus on pitching when it is their turn to pitch. There are things they should be doing on a daily basis to both help them recover from a pitching appearance and prepare for the next one.

As I said earlier, there is no program that is best for everyone. The program below should be tweaked according to the individual needs of the pitcher.

Weekly Pitching Routine based on one start a week

Day 1: Pitching start – Post-game light lifting routine using full range of motion.

Day 2: Run (combo of distance and sprints), bike, and/or swim

Day 3: Light catch using flat-ground pitching mechanics

Day 4: Long-toss routine

Day 5: Bullpen session (30 total pitches – 15 stretch / 15 windup)

Note: some pitchers may actually throw an inning or two in a mid-week game instead.

Day 6: Sprints, plyometrics, and/or medicine ball routine

Day 7: Light bullpen session – 10-12 pitches just to get a feel for your pitches; flat ground or mound

Day 8: Next pitching start

# #19 - Pickoff moves to first base:

## Part 2 - Proper footwork

October 22, 2013

In Part 1 of my tips for right handed pitchers when throwing to first base I talked about the negative aspects of the very popular spin-move pickoff to first base. In Part 2, I show the footwork I teach pitchers and also explain why I feel it is an all-round better option for right handed pitchers.

Note: In the video I reference another video tip I did in the past about quickening your throws to first by adjusting the way you throw. That video tip can be found by clicking [HERE](#).

To view the video from this post, use the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPbf4yPDHi4>

# #20 - Fake pickoffs to second base

May 19, 2014

As pitchers get older and runners are able to steal, the ability to hold runners becomes more important. What a lot of young pitchers fail to realize is that holding runners does not have to mean picking runners off.



*Don't wait for the infielder to go to the bag  
Spin and fake a throw!*

I'm a big fan of pickoffs and think pitchers often overlook that possibility during games but even so, a pitcher can do many things to keep runners close without actually picking them off. One such method is a fake pickoff to second base. Too often pitchers will only spin to second for a pickoff when a middle infielder goes to the bag. Spinning and faking a throw regardless of what the middle infielders do has a lot of merit on its own.

Coming set, looking back at the runner, and then spinning like you're going to throw to second base has a few big advantages for pitchers. First of all, you let the runner know that you are paying attention to where his lead is. That alone will stop some runners from stealing on their own. Second, if you have quick feet, you let the runner know (and all his teammates who are watching as well) that you have a quick move to second base and next time there might just be throw. That also can shorten future runners' leads.

Third, if a pitcher has accuracy issues when throwing to second base, the other team doesn't know it. That's because a throw is not made. You are convincing them to shorten their leads based on your footwork, not your throw.

If you are a pitcher then don't sit back and wait for pickoffs to be called by someone else. Take it upon yourself to try some on your own and just don't throw the ball. You can do this to any base but the fake pickoff to second base is the most effective.

Note: If you try a fake pickoff to first base, you must step back off the rubber first before faking otherwise it will be called a balk. It can be done but I don't recommend fake throws to first. Personally, I don't think they are very effective.

## #21 - Playing behind the runner

### at first base

May 27, 2014

Here are my situations when playing behind the runner at first base is either the right move or at least a possibility:



*Not every situation demands holding the runner on at first*



- 1 A runner on second or second and third as well. This is one of the few absolutes in baseball. DO NOT have your first baseman hold the runner on when there is also a runner on second base or second and third base. I was disappointed how many times I saw this at the high school level.
- 2 Late in the game when you have a few run lead and a lefty is up. If the runner is quick you can have the first baseman play right behind the runner. If the runner is slow, he can play a little deeper.
- 3 3-2 count with two outs. Play right behind the runner so his lead does not get too big.
- 4 A left handed batter up and a complete non-runner at first base. You'll sometimes see this done on MLB teams when there is a pitcher at first base.

When you tell the first baseman to play behind the runner, be sure to let the pitcher know that this is happening. You don't want the pitcher thinking he is there and throwing a pickoff throw to first base when nobody is there.

Also, in some situations it may be better for the first baseman to play in front of the runner instead of behind him. Playing corners up for a bunt is one example.

## #22 - Indoor hitting drills

March 11, 2011

Yesterday's post dealt with some indoor practice tips. Below are some drills specific for those hitting stations that allow you to

maximize the time and space available. Of course, these tips and drills are also great for individual players who are looking for ways to improve their hitting when they are stuck indoors at home.

### Hitting drills for station work:

No stride drills – I'm a big fan of these drills because they stress to players that you don't need a big stride to hit. Live hitting, short toss, soft-toss, and tee work are all options for no-stride stations.

High pitch Tee – set the tee to the highest position to work on the highest pitch a batter can hit. Placing the tee on a chair works great. This forces the batter to work on getting on top of the ball.

Low pitch Tee – Set the tee to the lowest position. As kids get older, more pitches will be down there so they better learn how to hit it. A future post will show a video clip of this one which has a different twist to it!

Soft toss – Options for stations include normal bats and indoor balls, broom handles and tennis balls or golf Wiffle-balls, inside pitch, outside pitch, high pitch, and low pitch.

Stand in – Great option for a station if pitchers are throwing as well.

Wall 1 – Often called the fence drill where a hitter faces bat-distance away from a wall or fence and swings. Works on keeping the hands inside the ball so the bat doesn't contact the wall. A padded gym wall helps in case the player does make contact with the wall.

Wall 2 – Batter stands as if the wall is where the pitcher is. His front foot is proper stride distance from the wall. He strides to the wall and completes a fundamentally sound slow motion swing until

the bat gently taps the wall. This works on swing mechanics, proper stride length, and prevents lunging.

Soft-toss / Top hand – The batter places his back knee down on the ground and extends his front leg out towards the wall or catch net. Batter swings using only his top hand on the bat. Tiny Little League bats are good for this drill. Works on proper top hand performance on the swing.

Soft –toss / Bottom hand – Same as above but with the bottom hand.

Mirror swings – Slow motion or full speed swings where the batter can watch their own mechanics and make adjustments. Windows work very well also depending on the reflection.

Bunting – Stations may include bunting to first, bunting to third, suicide squeeze, base-hit bunts to first, and base-hit bunts to third.

## #23 - The best infield drill I've never done

February 4, 2013

One of the great things about attending/speaking at coaching clinics is you get to talk to and hear other coaches. Just when you think you've seen everything, a coach will give a tip, a phrase, a technique, or in this case a drill you have never seen before.

Recently I did a post called [Reading hops as an infielder](#). In terms of views, it has been one of my more popular posts in the last few months. For infielders, one of the most important skill is being able to slow up or quicken up their footwork to ensure they get the ball on the proper part of the hop. Doing so will help prevent the infielder from being at the mercy of bad hops.

The problem with this skill is that it is tough to practice other than just getting ground ball after ground ball and making the adjustments as necessary. Complicating matters is the fact that many players are still indoors and don't have to worry about bad hops on a gym or turf floor. So how can you get kids to practice making these adjustments? Well, here's a drill that can help. It was called the "Rhythm Drill" by the former head coach of Temple University, Ryan Wheeler. I think I'll call it the "Reading the hop Drill." Here is how the drill works:

In a gym or on a turf field, a coach uses a ball that is able to bounce fairly well. Before bouncing the ball to the fielder, the coach says something like "3 and a short hop." That means that the fielder must catch the ball on the short hop after three full bounces. In this case, the player actually catches the ball just after the 4th hop. If a coach said "2 and a big hop," the fielder will time his approach and footwork so that he catches the ground ball on the big hop after the 2nd bounce. The coach just changes the number of hops and whether he wants the fielder to catch on the short hop or the big hop.

It is a drill I've never done but I can fully guarantee that this drill is now towards the top of my infield drill list!

# #24 - The wipe off sign

August 26, 2013

My three older sisters were not into sports and didn't know much about baseball. However, for some reason, all were fascinated by coaches signs. When they watched a game, they loved watching coaches flash signs to the



*Make things simple. Add a wipe-off sign.*

players and always wanted to know what my signs were for my players. When I told them a few, they were usually a bit disappointed. "That's it?" is what they would typically say.

Basically, they thought signs were supposed to be very complicated. They are not. At least they shouldn't be.

This past winter I had a chance to meet and talk with Nick Leyva who is the current third base coach for the Pittsburgh Pirates. I asked him how complicated his signs were. He said if a player can count to four, he'll never miss a sign. He elaborated on what that meant but the basic message was, they were not difficult at all.

By far, the most effective way to simplify your signs as a coach is to incorporate a “wipe-off sign” into your repertoire. I don’t care how simple your signs are, if you use a wipe-off sign, your signs will never be stolen.

Here is what I mean:

Let’s say your signs involve only the very first sign you give. No indicator sign at all. Just the first sign.

(Note: For those who don’t know, an indicator sign is a “trigger” sign that tells the batter that the actual sign is coming next. For example, if the sign for bunt is the ELBOW and the indicator is the HAT then the coach will give the indicator sign and then the bunt sign after that – HAT then ELBOW. If the coach just gives the bunt sign – ELBOW – without the indicator sign first, no bunt is on.)

For our example, just the first sign is used. The elbow is the bunt sign. If the coach touches the elbow with his first sign, the batter bunts. No indicator. You can’t get more simple than that unless you just verbally tell the batter to bunt – which I have done on a few occasions.

However, if the signs are that basic, they can more easily be deciphered by the other team. That’s why you use a wipe-off sign.

Let’s say the wipe-off sign is the belt. The coach gives any signs he wants at any time in the sequence but if he ever touches his belt, nothing is on. It wipes everything away.

When I gave signs, I would typically give steal signs, bunt signs, suicide squeeze signs, etc. all game long and just used the wipe-off sign to take it away. The other team got used to me giving all those signs so when I actually put a play on, I just didn’t use the wipe-off sign.

Some coaches will use a wipe-off sign as their first sign as a way of telling their players, “No matter what sign I give afterwards, it means nothing.” Some will give the wipe-off sign only as their last sign in case they mistakenly give a sign early on in the sequence.

The wipe-off sign allows them to take it off after the fact. Some coaches use it at any time during their sequence.

Often, making your signs complicated does more to fool your own players than the other teams’. Make it much easier by adding a simple wipe-off sign.

## #25 - The Curve Ball Drill

June 29, 2012

In [yesterday's post](#), I diagrammed and explained a drill that hitters can utilize to practice a slider from left handed and right handed pitchers. Today's drill is for hitters who would like to become better at hitting the curve ball.



*The larger arc mimics the action of a curve ball*



The photo above shows the typical soft-toss drill most older hitters have experience with. This normal batting drill can be used as a curve ball drill by simply changing the arc of the toss. A typical soft-toss involves the thrower underhanding a ball without much of an arc on it. Like the red arrow shows, the curve ball version of this drill has the thrower tossing the ball upwards thus creating a larger arc. The batter's job is to wait for the ball to get down to his knees before making contact. The "Wrong" arrow shows where many hitters will want to make contact with the ball during this drill.

The point of the drill is to get the batter some experience in hitting the ball as it is coming down like a curve ball. The star represents the location where the batter needs to make contact. Low line drives and hard ground balls are the goal.

A couple other variations of this drill:

- Have the thrower sit in a chair behind an L-screen about 10 feet in from of the batter. The thrower lobs the ball over the screen with a similar arc as the previous drill. Once again, the batter waits until the ball gets to his knees to make contact.
- Move the screen off to the side like [yesterday's drill](#) to simulate a "slurve" or curve ball that breaks down and away. The hitter waits once again on the arc and tries to hit a low line drive or hard ground ball up the middle or the other way.

Note: The toughest part to these "high arc" drills is mastering the actual arc on the part of the thrower. It takes some practice to get the correct arc so that it mimics a curve ball and lands properly in the strike zone. With a little practice it can become pretty simple.

## #26 Soft hands drill for catchers

December 12, 2012

The off-season and especially spring training can be brutal for catchers. With all the emphasis on developing pitchers, often it's the catchers who are left to simply catch bullpen after bullpen. I've written before about the importance of **not neglecting your catchers** but here is an easy drill that can do a lot to develop those guys behind the plate.



*This simple drill can work many of the basic techniques of receiving*

This soft-hands drill has a coach or partner simply lob balls underhand to a squatting catcher who catches the ball with his bare glove hand. Tennis balls work well for younger kids. Older kids should be able to handle hard balls. The distance the coach

throws does not have to be more than 10 feet. In the process, the catcher is able to work on the finer points of receiving that include the following:

- Funneling each pitch slightly in (an inch or two) towards the bellybutton to keep the corner pitches in the strike zone and to prevent the pitch from bouncing out of the hand.
- Catching the ball by lightly pinching the index finger to the thumb as the hand closes to catch the ball. This is the proper way the hand would work if the glove was on so it becomes important to do that same technique when catching bare handed. The picture of Yadier Molina to the right shows this technique.
- Good body receiving posture which includes a flat-footed wide base with more weight on the front half of the feet, the catching arm's elbow above and/or outside the knee, quiet movements, and good balance.
- Tracking the track with your eyes all the way in to the hand. This involves turning the head to look the ball into your hand instead of keeping your head still and just tracking the ball with just your eyes.
- Catching the ball closer to the body if it is a high pitch – this allows gravity to bring the pitch down a bit more before catching – and catching the low pitch farther out front – this allows the catcher to catch the ball before it has a chance to drop down further. Both techniques make it more likely the pitch will be called a strike.

Using drills like this one for your catchers can go a long way in developing their catching skills and also will send the message that this time of year isn't just for the pitchers.

## #27 Joe Madden's stages of a ball player

October 4, 2013

I'm a huge fan of Joe Maddon, the current manager of the Chicago Cubs. If you need to know how to manage the modern professional athlete, just study him.

During a Rays game I was watching, the announcer listed the stages of a pro ball player as described by Joe Maddon.



*Joe Maddon*

Even though he applied them to major league ball players, there is a lot of truth in the stages when it comes to players at any level. Here they are according to Maddon. My take on the stages appear afterwards.

Stage 1 – I'm happy to be here. You see this in mostly new players. At the big league level, some new players get so caught up in the excitement of the big stadiums, the number of fans, and the awe they have of players played with and against. They finally

reached their dream but unfortunately, some cannot seem to get through the awe in order to move to the next stages.

Stage 2 – Survival mode. After experiencing a taste of the big leagues, many players never want to play anywhere else (the minors) again. Everything they do is an effort to stay at their current level. They know that one bad week can result in them being sent down so every at-bat gets magnified in their head. Their emotions tend to exist on the extremes. A good game makes them euphoric. A bad game causes panic. These ups and downs can wreck havoc on the mind of a player.

Stage 3 – I belong here. I can do this. This stage is when the player starts to relax and understand that a bad game is not the end of the world. They focus on putting in their work everyday and accept that good and bad days are going to occur. Come what may.

Stage 4 – I want to make as much money as possible. When players see that they have a chance to stick around for a while, many start to think that they may just be lucky enough to make this a career. Because they know how quickly someone can leave the game, they start to focus on making as much money as quickly as they can. Too much focus on external parts of their career can create unnecessary distractions. For kids in amateur ball, getting your name in the paper or some other public accolade might be the equivalent.

Stage 5 – All I want to do is win. According to Madden, this stage is the most enlightened. Players who get here recognize that consistently doing everything to help a team win will make them 1) more happy to be here, 2) allow them to stay, 3) increase their confidence that they belong there, and 4) make them money.

Other notes:

- Obviously, not all players move through all the above stages. Some get stuck and never progress beyond the first or second

one. Some bypass the early ones and are able to jump right in on one of the later stages.

- The stages don't have to come in order. For example, a player may come into the league and be very successful right away and move right into Stage 4 or 5. However, when they hit their first slump, some may revert back to "survival mode" and spiral downward rather quickly.
- Understanding where each player is according to the stages can and should impact how they are treated by coaches. For example, if you think a player is in Survival Mode, yelling at them will probably make things worse.

I think a big reason why Joe Maddon is a successful and well-liked manager is because he understands that every player is unique in their ability and mind-set. He understands that a one-size-fits-all coaching style is not very affective when every player is different.

## #28 Seminar - Outfield Drills

April 1, 2013

The following video is a 45 minute seminar I gave in February in Malvern, PA. The link to it was sent out to my subscribers a week ago (that's the benefit of subscribing!). Now I'm making it available to everyone. After today it will appear in the VIDEO section as well. Because of its length, my next post will not be until Thursday to give people a chance to watch it.

It was meant to show how coaches can easily train outfielders indoors on the core movements and fundamentals we all want in our outfielders. Even though all the drills shown are done indoors, all can be adjusted easily for outdoor work as well. These drills

incorporate the key footwork and timing needed for good outfield work.

I'd love to hear what you think so please leave a comment and/or shoot me an email.

Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psmQjEGDdLQ>

## #29 Seminar - How to throw batting practice

April 15, 2013

On Friday, April 12, 2013, I posted a short video that gave a [tip for throwing better batting practice](#). The clip was part of a longer video I did that gives a number of tips for coaches of all ages who would like to become better at one of the most important skills of coaching baseball.

I wasn't sure if I wanted to post this 20+ minute seminar in its entirety but ... what the heck. I did it anyway.

Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hVkGGBXDxEY>



# #30 Baseball tryouts and what coaches look for

February 11, 2011

I hear that many high school baseball teams around the country have begun tryouts. I look outside and still see a few inches of snow and temperatures in the teens so I'm envious of those warmer states. Anyway, I thought I'd dedicate a few posts to high school tryouts. **Yesterday's** was about getting your coach to notice you. Today's is what I look for during tryouts.

The following is information I provided for my high school players and parents before tryouts began. I'm guessing most coaches probably approach tryouts similar to the way I do.



*60 yard times are one thing.  
"Usable speed" is another.*

Speed: As players get older, the game gets faster. The players who are able to keep moving up the ladder from middle school to high school to college and to the professional levels are the ones who can keep up with the faster paced game at each level. Players are evaluated to see if they can perform at the speed needed to be successful in high school. Speed, however, does not simply mean running speed. It also means first step quickness, the speed of catching and throwing, bat speed, and the ability to think quick to adjust to changes in the play and/or game. When we time players in the 60 yard dash, we are looking at the player's overall athletic ability. Professional scouts look for times generally under 7 seconds but it can vary due to the position you play. If a player is slow compared to others, it doesn't mean he is at a disadvantage since we are more concerned with what is called "usable speed." A player might be very fast in the 60 yard dash but very slow with his first step when getting to a ball or getting a jump on the base paths. We would rather have players with speed that will help him in game-like situations.

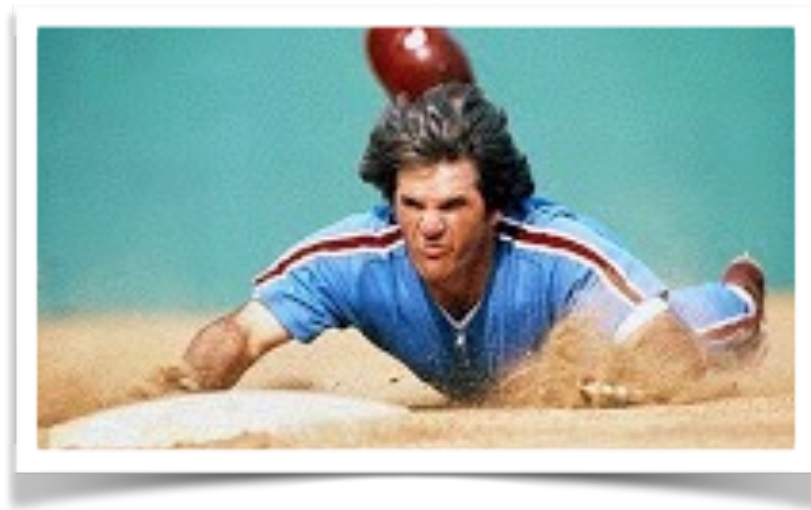
Throwing: The ability to throw a baseball is toward the top of our list of things we look for during tryouts. If a player has a strong, accurate arm with good mechanics, he can generally be taught to play any position on the field. If a player lacks a strong arm or has problems with accuracy, there is no place for him on the defensive side of the ball. He would need to be an outstanding offensive player in order to make up for his throwing difficulties. Remember, there are nine defensive positions. There is only one Designated Hitter.

Offense: Offense, in our opinion, does not simply mean the ability to get hits. It means bat control, the ability to get on base, and the ability to score runs. It includes both hitting and base running. A player does not need to show the ability to hit .400 to be valuable. He must show the hitting mechanics and bat speed that will allow him to keep pace with high school pitchers. We look for a player's

ability to hit the ball to all fields, bunt, and move/score runners. On the bases, he should hustle and show baseball knowledge and “instincts” that help runners take the extra base and score runs.

Defense: The player who shows good defensive skills has an advantage over others because that will allow him to play numerous positions and therefore be more valuable to the team. The ability to catch and throw properly and effectively is the number one skill needed for defense. We look for players who have good, quick footwork and hands on the field. For outfielders, we look for the ability to get good, quick jumps on batted balls and their ability to catch. We also look for quickness in their ability to return the ball to the infield with strong, accurate, overhand throws.

Pitching: Although many kids tend to focus on velocity, we focus more on command of pitches. Throwing the ball harder does give a pitcher an advantage but it does not guarantee success. The ability to throw strikes with all pitches and to locate them within the strike zone is what ultimately will determine a pitcher’s success. The pitcher who can do this with the added bonus of velocity has the advantage over others.



*Showing passion and enthusiasm  
can go a long way during tryouts.*

Potential: Player potential is a difficult thing to judge because every player peaks at different times. Some peak prior to coming to high school. Others peak at the JV level. Some start out as average players but grow into very good players by the end of their high school career. Some don't peak until college or even after college. We try to keep the players that, in our opinion, have more potential for growth in their baseball skills.

Work Ethic: Players should show a strong work ethic during the tryout period. The level of work a player puts into his game can tell a lot about the character of the individual. It can provide a clue into how much he enjoys the game and how well he can handle the length of the season and the huge amount time spent in practice. It also provides a window for coaches to see how interested the player is on improving on a daily basis. We understand that some people improve their work ethic over time but in many cases, if a young man has not developed a strong work ethic by the time they are in high school, it's almost too late.

Passion: Passion for the game never goes unnoticed by coaches. Many athletes have talent but talent + passion is something special. Coaches love kids who want to be on the field, who never seem to get enough baseball, and who always want to learn more and get better. The more time you are expected to put into the game at the high school level the more you have to enjoy the game. If you don't, you will begin to resent the game, complain often, and become a problem to coaches and teammates. Kids with no passion for the game are easy to spot. No coach wants one.



Thanks for reading and best of luck  
on your baseball journey!

Coach Bob McCreary

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