



ATTENTION MANAGERS, COACHES AND PARENTS!

The following pages contain some tips for coaches and drills to help you develop the baseball skills of your players. These were selected from various sources and some were slightly revised to be more age appropriate for our younger divisions.

Before proceeding to the following pages, I ask you to first review these important points;

- **Murrieta Valley PONY Baseball does not specifically endorse any of these drills as a required part of a team practice or preparation. These are simply some ideas to help you teach basic skills and to create more productive practices.**
- **A minimum age (division level) is included for each drill. These are just my recommendations. You are welcome to use or modify any of these drills if you feel it can be effective with your specific age group.**
- **These are just a few ideas that I assembled for MVPB from various websites. There are many sources available with outstanding ideas and information on coaching. Many of these websites contain tips and drills from other coaches at various levels. A list of some of these resources is included at the end of this document.**

I hope you find this to be a useful tool and that it helps you to have a more fun and productive season. If you have any tips, drills or other ideas that can be added to this list, please feel free to email them to me any time. I will update this document as often as possible.

Have a great season!

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**MURRIETA VALLEY PONY BASEBALL
COACH/PLAYER DEVELOPMENT DRILLS**

Updated Spring 2006

Coaching Tips

MAKE A PRACTICE SCHEDULE

Always make out a daily practice schedule. Outline each drill or play you will work on with your team that day. If you plan to split the kids in to groups, have your groups chosen before practice begins. Assign start times and end times for each drill.

Bring extra copies of your practice schedule to distribute to other coaches or parents. This will help you to stay on schedule and understand what is expected for the day.

Stick to the schedule! Organization is a sign of discipline and also emphasizes the value of practice time. Players pick up on this very quickly.

CONDUCT DRILLS IN SMALL GROUPS

Your practices will be much more effective by breaking the kids in to small groups. For example, if part of your practice is dedicated to hitting, run 4 stations (each with 3 players) simultaneously.

- **Station #1 - Soft toss**
- **Station #2 - Tee drills**
- **Station #3 - Bunting**
- **Station #4 - Live hitting**

With 3 players in each group, 10 minute rotations will give each player plenty of time to work in each station and you will have the entire drill completed in 40 minutes. This will also keep your kids engaged and productive.

KEEP RECORDS

Important in long-term practice scheduling. Keep your practice schedules in a folder. Date your practice schedules. You can then go back to see when you last covered a task or practiced a skill or play. This record keeping also makes it easier to make out future practice schedules.

UMPIRE NAME CALLING

It is important to build a good rapport with the umpire or umpires working your game. Calling them "blue" often does not help in this endeavor. It is suggested that you address them by their names. If you are not good at remembering names, write their name on your palm or on your line up card. Remember, you are all there for the kids. It is a demonstration of respect when you address the umpire by their first name when asking a question or having a conversation between innings.

GAME DAY LINE UP

Create your line up prior to each game and keep a record of each starting line up. Use this to make sure that you are properly rotating your players defensively and in the batting order.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT DRILLS

Throwing

ZIG ZAG THROWING DRILL (Pinto and up)

This drill is designed as a fun way to help kids improve throwing accuracy.

Divide your players into 2 rows. Separate each row to the same distance as the base paths in the division you play in. Make sure there is enough distance between players in each row. The ball will start with player #1 who will throw the ball to player #2 directly across. The ball is then thrown back and forth in a zig zag pattern until it has been thrown to all players. The objective is for the ball to be thrown to all players without being bobbled or dropped. If the ball is bobbled or dropped, it goes back to the beginning player and the drill starts over.

Make this a fun competition. Once the drill is successfully executed, challenge the kids to see how many consecutive times the drill can be executed.

8-BALL THROWING DRILL (Pinto and up)

This throwing drill is called the "8-Ball Drill" because It is divided into eight steps. Each step is designed to focus on one key area of proper throwing mechanics.

1) Player stands with feet shoulder width apart, puts throwing arm up at 90 degree angle holding the throwing elbow with glove. Throw the ball to a partner using just the wrist action.

2) Player sits with legs spread and has arm in same position, only this time he can use from his elbow up and throws the ball to his partner.

3) Player remains sitting, only now he can rotate his hips and turn his upper torso to throw the ball. Follow through is not necessary yet. There is an emphasis on using the glove arm or elbow to direct throw.

4) Player now goes to one knee. He rotates his hips and upper torso and throws the ball, only now he puts the emphasis on following through across his knee, which is raised.

5) Player now stands with glove arm closest to partner, and feet shoulder width apart. Using all of the above steps, he throws the ball concentrating on follow through, only he cannot move his feet.

6) Player now goes to the post position as in pitching, and throws the ball using the above steps. Emphasis in this step is balance at the post position.

7) Player now uses all the steps above, crow hops and throws the ball to his partner. Emphasis in this step is on proper technique of the crow hop.

8) Finally, the last step is long toss. Additionally, we add playing quick toss to the last step, primarily intended for the benefit of the infielders. They stand about 10 feet apart and toss the ball to each other as quickly as they can for one minute. You can even keep track of the number of catches to turn this into a competition. Emphasis here is on a quick release and concentrating on the ball entering and leaving the glove (transferring).

CATCH...NOT FETCH (Pinto and up)

For kids from 5 years to 10 years old, one of the most frustrating drills for the players and the coach is the warm-up throws.

No matter what you say, the two lines will grow farther and farther apart, the kids will start throwing humongous rainbows to each other and they will spend most of the drill running after the balls.

But this is a necessary evil as the kids need their arms and shoulders stretched and warm and they need to develop catching and throwing,

or else they will be playing defense all day long.

Here's a drill to get your team to stop playing FETCH and to start playing catch:

First, circle up your players with 15-20 feet between players and coach in the middle. Give one player a ball and have them throw to the next player (clockwise or counterclockwise). Have them throw around easy until you get 2 laps and expect them to drop it a few times.

After 2 laps, tell them you want 2 more laps faster but anyone who drops a good throw or makes a wild throw will owe a lap around the outside of the circle.

You can inject a 2nd ball and a 3rd ball if they get going good. Also, you can develop the relay-pivot maneuver with this same circle drill.

You'll be amazed at how the challenge aspect of this drill perks of their enthusiasm and skills!! It really works.

Infield

INFIELD PRACTICE DRILL (Pinto and up)

- **An infield player stands in the ready position in the infield.**
- **The coach is about 15-20 feet away with 2 to 3 balls (1 in pocket).**
- **He throws a grounder and as the fielder is fielding the ball, he throws the second.**
- **The fielder must concentrate on making a good throw back to the coach and at the same time pick up the location of the second ball, field it cleanly, and throw it back.**

The coach should pick up the pace and move the fielder from side to side until they miss. The third ball is if the coach drops a ball he has another to keep the drill going longer.

BUCKET (Pinto and up)

This drill is designed to teach the kids to get rid of the ball and not hold it. As coaches, we are trying to avoid the situation of young kids sometimes getting confused and holding the ball.

Split your players into two teams. The first team will line up, one

behind the other, at the shortstop position. The others line up behind first base. A five-gallon bucket is placed upside down on first base. A coach will drop a ball in front of the first person in line at shortstop. The player has 3 seconds (which the coach counts out loudly) to pick up the ball and throw at the bucket. If the bucket is hit, that team scores one point. If the bucket is missed the fielders behind first will field the ball and throw it back to the coach. This drill works best with a large number of balls. You go through each team member 4-5 times and keep track of the hits. Switch sides and keep score.

The kids thrive on the competition. This teaches quick release, fielding, throwing accuracy and keeping the throw where the first baseman can catch it.

FENCE (Mustang and up)

This drill is designed to quicken reaction time to grounders and line drives using lateral movement.

This drill takes place in front of any chain link fence. Each player is to defend an area approximately 20 feet wide. The players stand with the fence at their backs. Coach or parent will hit ground balls or soft line drives anywhere within the 20 foot area. The player is to catch or stop the ball before it makes any contact with the fence.

Make it a competition. Make it a best of 3 to 5 balls and total each players catches after each round. Or, eliminate any player that allows a ball to hit the fence until the last player is still alive. You can also make the drill go faster by splitting your team into 2 groups.

GROUND BALL FIELDING DRILL (Pinto and up)

Too often, young players make the mistake of fielding ground balls with their glove on the ground, directly between their feet, rather than extended out in front of them. This is a simple drill to help kids learn to extend the hands forward when fielding ground balls.

Lay a bat on the ground perpendicular to a line of players. The first player in line should be 6-8 feet from the bat in a ready position. Coach is 8-10 feet from the bat, opposite the players. Coach rolls ball toward the bat. Player must approach the ground ball and assume a good fielding position right at the bat, without his feet touching or going over it. In order to prevent the ball from rolling into the bat the player must have his glove extended, rather than hanging directly down between the feet. In order to achieve proper extension, the player will also need to bend at the knees and keep their rear ends down. Once player secures the ball he sprints forward and places the ball at the

feet of the coach who is already rolling a ball to the next player. Continue until all players have had sufficient reps.

GROUND BALL FIELDING DRILL 2 - HAT IN MOUTH (Pinto division and Up)

The purpose of the "Hat in Mouth" drill is to teach infielders to keep their hands extended in front of them while fielding ground balls. Proper fundamentals of fielding a ground ball include extending a player's arms well in front of the body. With an infielder's hands held closely to their body, there is little room to react to a groundball and a smaller margin for error.

To help prevent players from holding their arms too close to the body, have each player take their hat off and put the bill of the cap in their mouth, holding it with their teeth. This should be done so that the back half of the hat is pointing away from their body, and the flat bill is held in the player's mouth. Then, as a coach feeds them ground balls, have the player field the ball with proper footwork and fundamentals. Be conscious to notice if the player is reaching well out in front of them to field the ball. Having the bill of the hat in a player's mouth causes a vision block on the ground directly in front of them. This will force the player's hands farther out in front of their body position, so they can see themselves field the ball.

Beginning players, this drill should be done with close coach supervision and starting with soft toss ground balls. This will help beginning players get a feel for the proper fielding mechanics. Beginning level fielders should concentrate only on the position of their hands while fielding ground balls. More advanced players (high school and above), the "Hat in Mouth" drill can be combined with a regular fungo routine, where players are also making throws and covering bases.

IS IT BALL #1 OR BALL #2? (Mustang and up)

How many times do players, especially young ones, pull up too fast on a grounder in anticipation of making the throw to first only to leave the ball back on the ground or bobbling it because they have taken their eye off the ball? This drill helps teach the players to look the ball into their glove before they set and throw to a base. Since they have to read the number on the ball, they learn to pick it up and handle it first before throwing it. It also helps teach reacting and throwing to different bases.

Players line up between third base and shortstop position facing a

thrower at home. There is one player at first base and one at second base. The thrower has balls with either #1 or #2 written on the ball.

The thrower rolls a ball to infielder who fields the ball and reads the number on the ball.

If ball = #1, throw goes to first base. First baseman throws to second base. Second basemen runs the ball to the bucket that is at the shortstop position. The players rotate while ball is being put in the bucket (fielder goes to first, first baseman goes to second, and second baseman goes to end of line).

Once the ball is put in the bucket, the next ball is rolled. If ball = #2, throw goes to second base, second throws to first, first throws back to second and second baseman runs ball to bucket as the players rotate again.

Each time throw is made, player must tag base before next throw is made. Wild throws must be retrieved and the base tagged before the throw to the next base is made. Any of the three players can retrieve wild throws but the ball must go back to proper base before next throw.

The drill can be turned into a competition by splitting up into teams and simultaneously conducting the drill (other team starts in between home and first and throw to third for #1 and home for #2) or timing each team on how long it takes them to complete 12-24 balls. Emphasis should be put on setting the feet to throw to the proper base and that making good throws will avoid lost time chasing after wild throws. As players advance, make sure proper footwork for tagging a base and throwing to the next base is taught.

SOFT HANDS (Pinto and up)

One of the basic fielding drills that our kids use is called the "Soft Hands" drill.

We took a ping-pong paddle and cut the handle off and stapled a batting glove to the back. The player puts his glove hand in the glove and fields ground balls from a fungo. The drill emphasizes the use of the top hand, to ensure the ball doesn't become loose and so that the throwing hand is there to throw or flip the ball.

THE PIT (Mustang and up)

This game is similar to the Point game, but this game is an individual competition.

Have each player take a turn in the Pit. The Pit is a 8-10 feet horizontal span area up against any type of wall surface. Have each player take a turn in the Pit receiving a ground ball. If the any ball gets past the player in the Pit, within the span area, then he or she is out of the game. For the player who field the ground ball cleanly and makes an accurate throw back to the coaches hitting, make the ground balls faster and tougher.

We usually use a soft baseball in case the ball is missed (the ball then goes directly off the wall and back towards the player) and in situations were the players are fielding cleanly and the balls are starting to come faster.

2 TRIANGLE METHOD (Mustang and up)

Here is philosohpy number two in the process of fielding a groundball. We need to talk about body position before we field the groundball.

Taking into consideration the previous philosophy on approach to the groundball, we can now get our body ready to field it. We call this the 2 Triangle Method. Our infielders want to get their bodies so that they make two separate triangles. Lets explain...

Remember that the left foot is behind the right foot from the approach. When we put our glove out in front of our feet ready to field the ball we construct two triangles. The first triangle is made if we connect both of our feet and then from each foot to the glove. If this isn't in a triangle, your glove tends to be in between your legs...and that is no man's land. It is very tough to field a ground ball with your glove between your feet. This also keeps your butt down and back straight.

The second triangle is formed with the ground, your forearms and your shins. This is a vertical triangle while the other is a horizontal one. Again, if your glove goes between your feet, you lose that triangle as well. As infielders are fielding ground balls, you must look for both of those triangles to be formed, if not, they aren't in the right position.

Outfield

FOOTWORK (Pinto and up)

The most common mistake made by young players is running in on a ball hit in their area. This is a habit that can be broken with practice and patience.

Footwork is critical to becoming a successful outfielder. Teaching your kids these first step drills will help them to learn how to properly play a batted ball.

Breaking to the right side - Starting from the ready position, the first move is pushing off or driving with the left foot. The right foot stays down and is only a pivot. The first step is the left foot crossing over the right pivot foot.

Breaking to the left side - Starting from the ready position, the first move is pushing off or driving with the right foot. The left foot stays down and is only a pivot. The first step is the right foot crossing over the left pivot foot.

Drop back - There are two critical points every outfielder should know when fielding fly balls. 1) Never back pedal on a fly ball, and 2) Run hard to get behind the ball.

When a fly ball is hit, the first step is always back.

If the ball is heading over the right shoulder, the first move is to turn the right shoulder back. Then, the first step is a drop back step with the right foot. The same would apply to balls hit to the left side, but moving and stepping with the left shoulder and foot. It is important to run full speed at an angle that puts the fielder behind the ball.

A BASEBALL DRILL CALLED *FOOTBALL* (Mustang and up)

This is a fun drill for younger players.

End your practice with a game of "Football". Split the players into 2 teams and line them up about 10 feet apart with a coach in the middle, and a coach (or parent) on the outside end of each line.

Have each line alternate having a player drop back to their left or right (practicing the footwork drills detailed above) about 25-30 feet. The coach will then throw a pop up to the side the player has turned. If they catch the ball, they get 2 points. As soon as they catch the ball,

they have to set themselves and make a perfect throw to the coach on their side. If the throw is good, they get an additional point. Run them through this 3 times each, alternating the lines.

Then, have them repeat the same drill and throw the ball to either side of them, forcing them to adjust. The same point system is used.

The players have fun with this drill, and it helps them get used to judging fly balls, developing good footwork and making good throws to the cut-off man.

OUTFIELD COMMUNICATION (Pinto and up)

This drill is done with everyone, but the main intent is for outfield and communication.

Have all of the players make two lines about 100 feet apart. Then throw a ball in the air. Make the players call the ball by yelling “ball, ball, ball,” and then have the other player acknowledge by saying “you, you, you.” This does two things. First, it reduces injury and makes sure the ball is going to be caught. Secondly, it gives the athlete confidence to catch the ball with the acknowledgement of the other player.

Both of the players go hard to the ball at all times until one finally calls for it and the other acknowledges. This communication is essential for confidence and reduction of injury. Also, tell the players to never acknowledge until the ball is called. In other words, do not say “you, you, you” until someone calls for the ball. We don't want a player making a decision for another.

Defensive Plays

CONSECUTIVE OUTS DRILL (Mustang Division and up)

This is a pressure packed, intense drill that involves the whole team.

First, field a complete defensive team. Have a base runner ready to go. Coach puts the ball in play, base runner goes on contact. The defense must make the play correctly and flawlessly.

The object is to get a pre-determined number of outs in a row WITHOUT mishandling the ball (Number of outs to be determined by coach with respect to the age of the kids). Once the ball is put in to play, it must be fielded cleanly and thrown for an out. Then the ball

must be thrown cleanly to the catcher to record one out. There can be no mistakes. All throws must be hard, accurate and handled with preciseness. If the ball is bobbled, misplayed, or thrown awry, start again at zero. When the ball hits the catchers glove, everyone on the team yells the number of outs, or you start over again at zero. Yelling out the number of outs is a critical part of teaching the kids to always know the number of outs during the game. If someone doesn't hustle or run out a fly ball, start over. If the base running is not run correctly, or the pitcher doesn't back up a specific throw, start over.

A variation of this, would be to have the defense switched every 3 or 6 outs. This can be a good conditioner if you can do it right. It is critical for this drill to be successful that your rules are strict and that the players have the awareness NOT to stray from them at all!!! If you do this drill one time and slack off on the expectations, the next time you do it, you will be wasting your time. Do this drill with extreme focus and your game faces on, or don't do it at all.

In addition to the physical challenge of this drill, there will also be many opportunities to teach various mental aspects of the game. These might include:

- **Positive support for a team member when he makes a mistake.**
- **Teamwork. You win as a team and you lose as a team.**

DOUBLE PLAY (Pinto and up)

This is just the classic double play drill. You will need a catcher, two players at 1st base, and the remaining players evenly divided at the shortstop and 2nd base positions.

The coach hits a ground ball to the SS position, the 2B player runs to 2B and then pivots and throws to 1B. The two players then go around to the end of the opposite line they came from.

Once everyone has had a chance to field at the SS position the coach then hits the ball to the 2B position, the SS covers 2B, then pivots and throws to 1B.

Once everyone has had a chance to field at 2B the coach then randomly hits the ball to either the SS or 2B position. The two players at 1B rotate positions every three catches. The second player at 1B acts as a backup for overthrows.

Batting

BROOMSTICK (Pinto and up)

Make 2 or 3 bats from broomsticks about 30" long. Add length to the bats for older divisions. Pick up some practice plastic golf balls. Have players break up into two or three groups of four, one player pitching, one hitting and two others shagging. This drill will help the kids to focus better on the ball and see the ball make contact with the bat.

Coaches should pitch to kids in younger divisions.

COLORED BALL (Mustang and up)

Paint several baseballs with different bright colors (solids, of course) and place in a bucket behind mound. Have assistant place ball in the glove of pitcher or pitcher to keep the ball hidden from the batter. Pitcher keeps ball hidden as long as possible until he delivers the pitch. The batter must call out the color before he makes contact with the ball or before the ball is caught by the catcher. This drill helps hitters to focus on the ball as soon as it is released from the pitcher's hand.

Variation-

Soft toss two balls at once. Just before tossing, coach tells batter which color to hit. If you only have white baseballs - tell batter to hit top or bottom ball.

TEACHING HITTERS

As kids develop, it is important that we teach and reinforce proper mechanics as early as possible. Keep in mind, this is a long process that takes time and PATIENCE.

Below are some quick and easy drills that are designed to help hitters develop good mechanics by isolating various body parts.

HANDS (All divisions)

1) Top hand should hold bottom thumb to simulate holding a bat. Top hand should also hold a ball. Throw the ball into a net for all direction of hits (pull, middle, opposite field). The throw causes arms to extend and rolls wrist to attain a down and in or out swing.

2) The "Slap" technique involves two players. Have one player kneel in

front of batter with a hand outstretched in the strike zone. The batter then swings (WITH HANDS ONLY, NO BAT) at the outstretched hand and slaps it with both hands. This keeps the front shoulder in.

3) For a player that sweeps, stick a batting glove under the front arm pit to ensure that the swing stays closed and the batter doesn't fly open.

BAT SPEED (Mustang and up)

(Make sure that on these drills, the batter is in his full stride, but weight is back. Recommend a coach or parent at each hitting station to ensure player safety)

1) Rapid Fire: Use three balls and soft toss them immediately upon contact, one right after the other. This develops quick hands.

2) Fastball Drill: It is soft toss but from a distance and with more speed. Tossers stand to the side of batter and about 10 feet away and tosses underhand with a little bit more on the ball.

3) Back feed Extension: It is soft toss from behind the batter. Stand about 5 feet directly behind the batter and toss ball into strike zone. The batter can look at the tosser the first few times, but then must do it blindly. Develops quick hands.

ELIMINATING UPPER CUT (Pinto and up)

Use two batting tees, placing one in the contact zone and the other about 12 inches behind the front tee. Place a ball on the front tee about two inches lower than back tee. The hitter must hit the ball on the front tee solidly without making contact with the back tee. In order to do this, the batter needs to focus on the ball and not allow the back hand and shoulder to drop.

PREVENTING BATTERS FROM STEPPING OUT WITH THE FRONT FOOT (Pinto and up)

Stepping out, or pulling out with the front foot is very common especially with younger kids. Pulling out prevents hitters from making any solid contact with the ball. More importantly, pulling out means exposing the batter to potential injury from an inside pitch as they are facing the pitcher and are in no position to turn away. Below are drills to help younger players develop proper footwork and eliminate stepping out.

The first technique is to have the batter raise the BACK heel so only the ball of the foot and toes are in contact with ground. This makes it very difficult mechanically to step out when the batter's back foot is

raised. In addition, this technique allows the batter to accomplish several other critical hitting musts:

- 1. Makes pivoting the back foot much easier, thus allowing the hips to explode on the ball.**
- 2. Weight transfer tends to remain in center of the stance instead of overcompensating one way or the other.**
- 3. Shortens the stride**
- 4. The hitter focuses on pivoting and rotating on the center of gravity axis, instead of lunging.**

Another technique is to help the batter get set in the batter's box. Before the pitch is thrown, place a bat (a 30" piece of 2" PVC pipe can also be used) on the ground behind the batter's feet, directly against the heels of the batter. The goal is to get the batter to swing at a pitch without moving the bat or PVC pipe.

AVOIDING AN INSIDE PITCH (Pinto and up)

The last and most important technique is to teach players the proper way to turn away from an inside pitch. The goal is to teach kids to protect the face and the more vulnerable front side of the body. The batter must have proper footwork to be able to properly turn away from the inside pitch. This means the feet will always be even with the front line of the batter's box with toes pointed forward. To avoid the inside pitch, the batter must rotate away from the pitcher on the balls of the feet. This means the batter will be facing away from the pitcher and facing toward the backstop. The batter should also duck the head down slightly to avoid direct contact in the head. The point is to teach batters that if they are going to get hit by an inside pitch, they will get hit on the backside and eliminate potential serious injury.

Bunting

HULA HOOP BUNTING (Mustang and up)

You will need 2 Hula Hoops for this drill. Place one Hula Hoop down the first base line and the other down the third base line. The goal is for the batter to lay down a bunt that stops inside the Hula Hoop.

You can make this a regular part of your batting practice or you can make it a fun competition. The competition can be between individual players or you can break the players in to groups and have a team competition.

You can also move the hoops to various positions in the infield.

RESOURCES

The MVPB website includes a “Links” tab at the top of the home page. There you will find many links to resource website. Below are some of the websites that I have found useful.

www.baseball-excellence.com

www.eteamz.active.com/baseball/instruction/tips/

www.coachjohnwooden.com

www.baseballresource.com/youth/tips.php

If you enjoy reading, I recommend a book called “Coaching Your Kids To Be Leaders,” by Pat Williams with a forward by John Wooden.