



# COACHING

5 to 8 year olds



Focus on Player Development



# MEET THE AUTHORS



Big AL with son Scott

## AL PRICE

### *A Player*

- Competed in multiple Provincial and National Championships
- All-Canadian catcher of National Championship team in 1976
- Member of Canadian National Team in 1977 and 1980
- Competed in Canada, the United States, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Korea & Japan internationally

### *Teacher / Trainer*

- Professional High School educator, athletic director and coach 20+ years
- Principal of the National Sports School in Calgary, Alberta
- Presented coaching clinics to 100,000+ baseball and softball coaches

### *Coach*

- Coached from youth to elite levels for 30+ years
- Coached teams to League, District, Provincial and National Championships
- Coached team to the Sr. Little League World Series in 2003
- Provided training sessions to 50,000+ players

### *Author*

- Co-authored training resources used by thousands of leagues and over 1 million coaches, managers, players and their parents

## SCOTT PRICE

### *A Player*

- Competed in multiple Provincial, Western Canadian and National Championships
- Member of Canadian Championship Team in 2003
- Member of the Canadian Team at the Sr. Little League World Series 2003
- All Canadian SS at Canadian College Championships in 2006
- Graduated (Fall 2009) from University of Texas at Brownsville (SS/2B)

### *Teacher / Trainer*

- Graduated with a Bachelors in Kinesiology and Education (Certified All-Level Physical Education Teacher)
- 6 years coordinating and running summer baseball Camps for players aged 9-16
- Has assisted with his father Al at coaching clinics for the past 3 years

### *Author*

- Co author of the Big Al Baseball training resources





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for their help in demonstrating the skills:  
Connor Blake, Michael Goldade, Ken Wills,  
Tyler Scott, Nolan French, Michelle Smith  
and Jillian LaFrance.

The games of Tee Ball/Coach Pitch were created to give young players and their parents a fun introductory experience to baseball and softball. Coaches, you need to focus on creating safe, caring, fun activities as each of the players learn the basic skills of the game.

Youngsters ages 5-8 typically have a very short attention span and learn best by doing, not by listening. They have a lot of energy and can at times be quite a challenge to keep organized and playing safe. The best approach does not have players standing in long lines waiting turns. Players usually respond best to someone older than them, especially an adult. Some players at this level are first timers and others have played ball for 2-3 years, so on every team there is a wide range of talent and attitudes.

Regardless of their ability, players feel most comfortable with a coach who is kind, caring and fun to be with.

This 5-8 Coaching Manual and the matching player instructional booklet are designed to help the coach and the players and their parents have fun this season learning the game.

Coaches, each of the skills pages in this manual provide you with a photo sequence of the skill being performed the proper way, extra coaching tips and specific information on how to correct common mistakes. I have also included fun warm-up exercises, a practice planner, fun game activities and tips on how to get your parents involved.

The player handbooks are a great way to get the players and the parents learning the game together. When you hand out the booklets make sure you take a moment to tell the parents and players how to use them. First, have them print their name and the team name in the front of the Handbook. Point out where their photo fits inside the cover. Then show them the fun activities and drills they can do at home and how they can track their progress all season long. The more the players practice and have fun at home the more they will improve.

Your job as a coach is to find a way to help every player on your team feel comfortable and safe, improve and ultimately develop a passion for the game this season. These instructional materials are designed to help along the way.



# teaching the game the big AL way

The key role a coach has in any sport is to teach the fundamental skills of the game. It is important at every level of play and critical for the development of young players.

If you survey players on what they would like to do at practice, they would all rather "hit" or play games than "learn fundamentals".

Every coach needs to teach the fundamentals in an effective and fun way to have an impact. One of the biggest mistakes coaches make is to assume young players know the fundamentals even if they have played on their team previously. Even professional players re-visit the fundamentals every spring training.

Your teaching timeline is from the first practice to the last game of the year, so be patient and create a plan that extends through the season.

Here is the approach I use when I coach. I call it the: **"TEACH IT - TRY IT - GAME IT APPROACH"**.

I have learned the best time to teach a new skill is about 30 minutes into a practice. Here is how I fit teaching fundamentals into my practice sessions:



First, have the team get warmed up completely; jogging, stretching, baserunning and playing catch from short, medium and long distances. On my field this usually takes 20-25 minutes. They are completely warmed up, they have worked out a bit and have burnt off some of their energy, but are not physically or emotionally drained.

Second, send players to the dugout for quick drink break, and at about the 30 minute mark they jog back onto the field ready to go.

Third, tell them it is time to learn how to "Field Ground Balls" and remind them that as soon as you are done it will be time to HIT. Having hitting practice scheduled immediately after the teaching part helps keep all of the players focused because they don't want to lose any time from hitting.





# teach it - try it - game it - **approach**

## **TEACH IT (5 minutes)**

For example, teach the fundamental skills progression for ground balls. Teach the skill without a ball by having the players follow along and simulate the ground ball technique. Repeat the “RELAXED, READY, MOTOR, APPROACH THE BALL, FIELD IT, STEP AND THROW IT” technique several times. Your goal is to have every player understand the key parts of the skill by demonstrating the skill in slow motion without a ball.

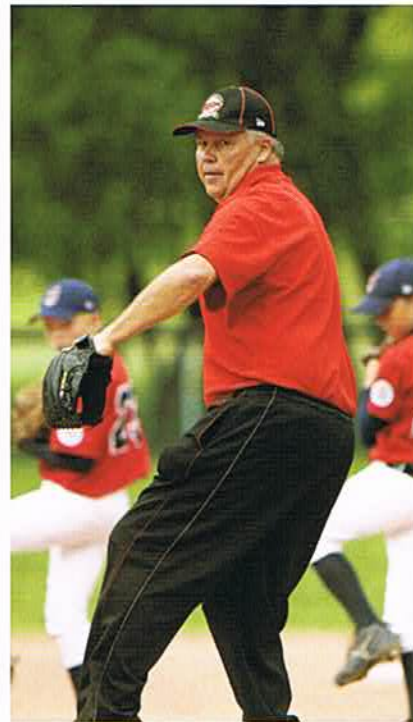
## **TRY IT (5 minutes)**

Organize your players into a drill at a safe short distance and have them practice the technique. In order for players to make progress it is very important to keep fear of failure and fear of getting hurt out of the TRY IT phase. Rolling a ground ball softly and at a short distance provides all players a chance to practice exactly what you have taught. If you hit hard ground balls at a line of players out at shortstop during this phase, fear becomes an issue and players immediately forget what you have just taught them.

## **GAME IT (5-10 minutes)**

Organize your team into a fun competition or game that matches their skill level so they can see how the technique works under a little pressure. Players love this phase as long as they can find some success during the game. Initially you might challenge the players to see who can field the most ground balls in a row using the proper technique. Later in the season you may have them compete in the “King of the Diamond” contest.

Move through the phases without wasting time and make sure you don't over teach during the **TEACH IT** phase.



After the players have been through the phase for ground balls, replace it with a 1-2 minute **REVIEW IT** phase in future practices.

Once your players clearly understand how to perform the skill properly you need to provide them with thousands of opportunities to practice the skill in drills and game activities and encourage them to practice the skill at home any chance they get.

This approach has worked for me and my players over the years. Give it a try and see how it works for you.



# throwing



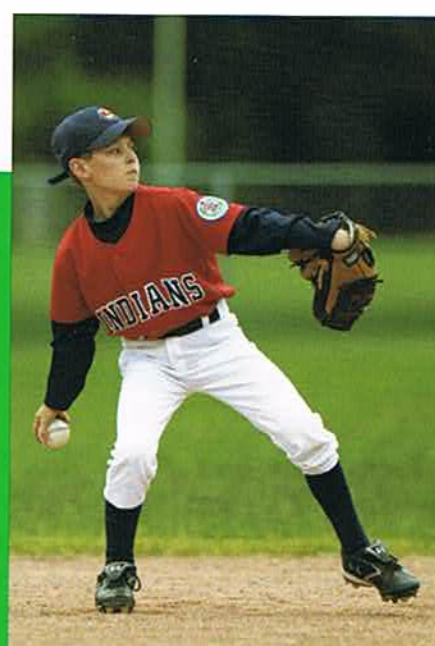
## 1. Catch and Grip

- Catch and cover up the ball
- Grip the ball
- Look at the target



## 2. Power Step

- Step forward on power foot
- Instep to target
- Turn glove shoulder to target



## 3. Arm Down

- Arm down to the hip
- Thumb to the thigh
- Glove to the target

## coaching tips

- Players need to throw at every practice, it is the most important skill to learn at this age.
- Don't be too concerned with developing power, it's more important to learn the proper technique first.
- Make throwing fun by throwing at all sorts of targets, to adults, or other players.
- To limit stress on their arms and get more repetitions let players practice with whiffle balls or tennis balls.

**SAFETY TIP:** Each player has different arm strength and conditioning, if a player complains of a sore arm, stop throwing and give the arm a rest.

Young players should practice the 1-step motion first then put the complete 2-step throwing motion together.



### Ready

- Look at the target
- Feet apart in wide stance
- Hands together
- Grip the ball

### Stretch it Back

- Lean back on power foot
- Glove leg up
- Arm down and straight back
- Glove shoulder and hip to target







#### 4. Arm Back

Swing arm straight back  
Fingers on top of the ball  
Point glove to target



#### 5. Step and Throw

Step forward at target  
Over-hand motion  
Release ball, fingers on top



#### 6. Follow Through

Snap wrist and follow through  
Shoulder to shoulder turn  
Push off power foot

### correcting common mistakes



#### Thumb on the side of the ball

Don't try and use a 2-finger grip like an adult. If you have a small hand, use a three-finger grip. Place fingers on top of the ball  
Thumb at the bottom of the ball. Fingers about a finger width apart.



#### Short arm throwing action

Don't bring the ball straight out of your glove up to your ear. Make your arm take a long trip with the ball. It should come out of the glove, go down and back and then over the top and through.



#### Noodle arm or shot put type throw

Don't bring your arm through with your elbow pointing down and hand close to your shoulder. Have players stretch their arm down and back and then throw with elbow higher than shoulder and hand above the elbow.



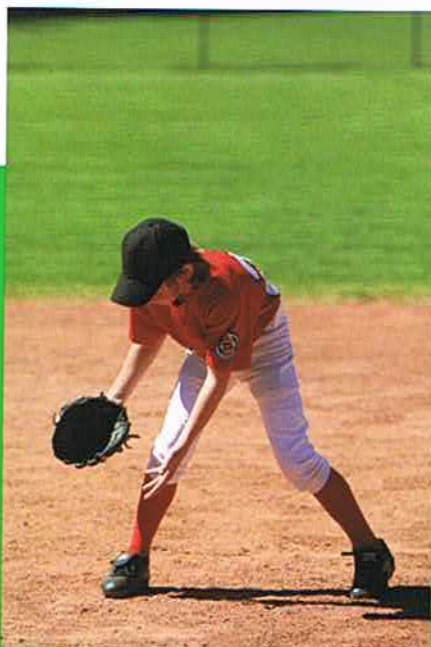


# catching



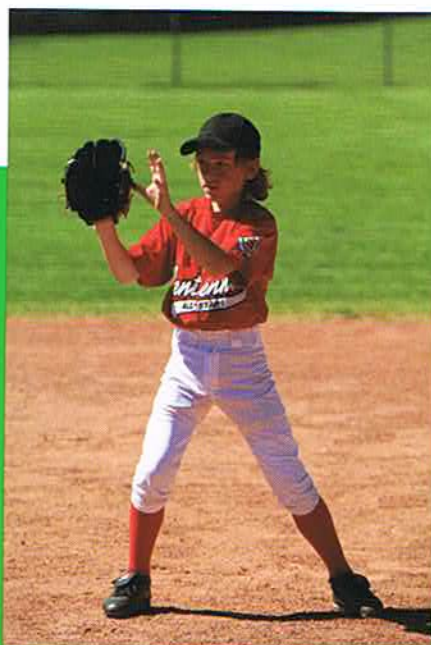
**1. Below the Waist**

Hands out front palms facing ball  
Little fingers together  
Eyes on the ball



**2. Forehand - Low**

Take a wider stance  
Throwing hand next to glove  
Catch and cover up the ball



**3. Forehand - High**

Throwing hand next to glove  
Watch the ball into glove  
Catch and cover up the ball

## coaching tips

- Start by tossing the ball from a short distance to develop confidence.
- Use softer whiffle, tennis or mush balls to reduce fear.
- Use coaching cues that work; "2 hands" and "catch it and cover it up".
- Practice positions #1, #2, #3 and #4 initially.
- Introduce #5 and #6 to your older more skilled players.



### The Glove

10-10" glove is a good size  
Back strap should be snug  
1 finger in each hole  
Soft shallow glove the best

### Cushion the Ball

Hands out front, ready to catch  
Catch and cover up the ball  
Bring hands into the chest  
Cushion it to reduce sting







**4. Above the Waist**

Hands out front thumbs together  
 Palms facing the ball  
 Elbows in under your hands



**5. Backhand - High**

Turn upper body to ball  
 Thumb down glove position  
 Throwing hand next to glove



**6. Backhand - Low**

Take a wider stance  
 Turn toward the ball  
 Watch ball into the glove

## correcting common mistakes



### Throwing hand behind glove

Don't hide your throwing hand behind glove, it needs to be next to the glove ready to cover up the ball. Have your players catch barehanded or with ovenmitt. This is a fun way to reinforce the proper technique.



### Glove facing up at chest

Don't use your bare hand to stop the ball. Practice position #1 first (below waist) and then #2 (forehand low). Then kneel down and toss the ball up to #3 (forehand high) and #4 (above the waist) positions from a low non-threatening angle.



### Moving out of way of ball

This is a natural reaction at this age. Tell players, "If a #4 is coming too fast make it a #3 and if a #1 is coming too fast move and make it a #2 then if you miss the ball won't hurt". Keep practicing and soon they will catch with their body behind the ball.





# fielding ground balls



## 1. Relaxed Position

Take this stance between hitters  
Face the batter in wide stance  
Glove foot forward



## 2. Ready Position

Take this position on the pitch  
Seat down head up  
Hands out front facing hitter



## 3. Move to the Ball

On release of pitch take little  
motoring steps  
Approach the ball

## coaching tips

- Roll the ball underhand softly to the kids until they have the confidence to field a bouncing ball.
- Call out the instructions "FIELD IT AND COVER IT UP" when practicing ground balls.
- As players progress, have them field the ball with the glove foot forward so the feet are in position for 2-step throw.
- This is a very difficult skill to master so be patient and remind them that it is OK to get out of the way of a hot smash in the game.
- Teach players the "RELAXED, READY, MOTOR, MOVE TO THE BALL, FIELD IT, STEP & THROW IT" progression.

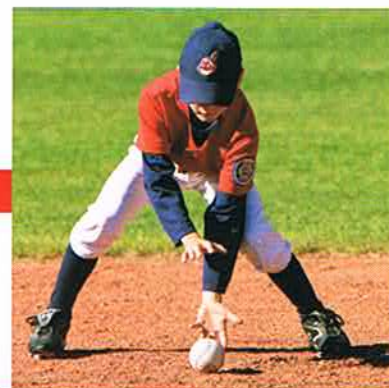


### Alligator Hands Position

Hands close together  
Palm facing - palm position  
Get ready to cover up the ball  
If it takes a bad hop use throwing hand to deflect it

### Field with 2 Hands

Practice ground balls barehanded  
with a bigger ball  
Reinforces the proper technique  
and eliminates the fear of ball







#### 4. Field and Cover it up

Hands out front and low  
Watch ball into glove  
Cover it up and grip it



#### 5. Suck it up - Power Step

Bring the ball in with two hands  
Then sight the target  
Power step to the target



#### 6. Step and Throw

Bring arm down and back  
Step to the target  
Bring throwing arm over the top  
and through

### correcting common mistakes



#### Feet too close together

Don't try to reach down with your feet close together. Get your feet wide, with glove leg forward. Palm of the glove faces the ball. Get your hands out front to form a triangle and watch ball into glove.



#### Scooping the ball up with glove hand

Don't try to field with one hand. The ball just pops out. Get low behind ball. Use alligator hands position and cover it up as soon as the ball goes into the glove.



#### Blocking a hard hit ball

Don't teach players to get down and block a hard hit ball at this age. It is better to let the ball go through to the outfield than getting hit and being afraid of the ball. Be patient, with confidence their skills will improve.





# fielding fly balls



## 1. Relaxed Position

Relax between pitches  
Knees bent, hands relaxed  
Head up watching hitter



## 2. Ready Position

On the pitch, eyes on the ball  
Hands out front  
Before ball is hit, take small  
motoring steps



## 3. Move to the Ball

Hussle to the ball  
Pump arms  
Run smooth

## coaching tips

- Always start practicing this skill by softly tossing balls to the glove side from a short distance.
- Use whiffle balls or tennis balls and then as they develop confidence start tossing regular balls.
- Remind players to pump arms and run naturally after the flyball and then put the glove up and catch with 2 hands.
- Don't hit fly balls when starting out, throwing fly balls is far more accurate and gives the players more chances to practice the proper technique without fear.

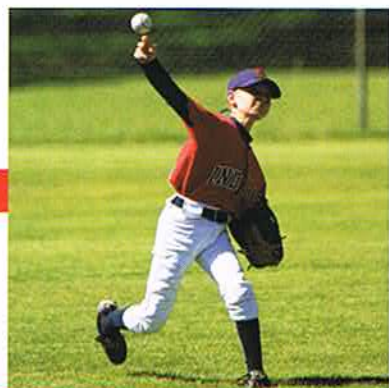


### Catch it and Cover it up

Watch the ball into the palm  
of the glove  
As soon as it hits the glove  
cover it up

### Set up to Throw

Catch and grip it  
Look at your target  
Power step, arm down and back  
Step and throw over the top







#### 4. Straight on Catch

Get behind the ball  
Two hands, thumbs together  
Catch in front of glove shoulder  
Catch and cover it up



#### 5. Forehand Catch

Reach out to glove side  
Two hands, thumbs together  
Watch the ball into the glove  
Catch and cover it up



#### 6. Backhand Catch

Reach out to throwing side  
Two hands, thumbs together  
Watch the ball into the glove  
Catch and cover it up

### correcting common mistakes



#### Basket Catch above the Waist

Don't have glove facing up on catches above the waist. This happens when a player is afraid of the ball up by the face. Move in closer and toss short flyballs with whiffle or tennis balls. Encourage the thumbs together position.



#### Afraid to catch the ball up near your face

Don't reach to make a one handed catch. Eliminate the fear by having the players toss a ball up to themselves. Use a ball of their choice. Toss it up, move under it catch the ball above shoulder height in thumbs together 2-hand position.



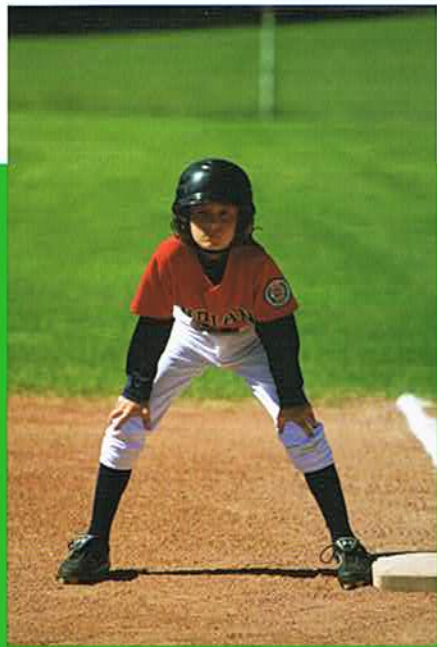
#### Glove turned the wrong way on backhand side

Backhand catches are the most difficult. Players often turn the glove around like a basket catch. Whenever possible have players move their body to get under the ball. Practice proper technique from a short distance.





# baserunning



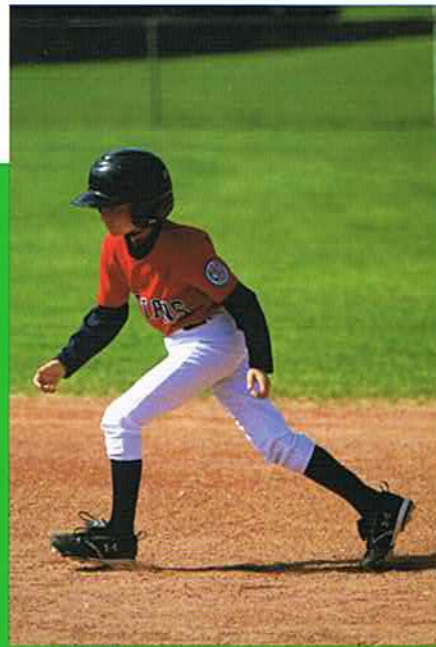
## 1. Relaxed

Left foot touching base  
Hands resting on knees  
Seat down - head up  
Watch the play



## 2. Ready

On pitch, hands off knees out front  
Lean ahead on balls of feet  
Watch the play



## 3. Cross-over

On contact take a step with left foot  
directly to next base  
Stay low for 3-4 strides  
Pump your arms

## coaching tips

- All players at this age love to run, make sure they hustle in practices and games to get a good workout.
- Remind them to run with their arms pumping forward and back with hands coming up in line with the chin and then swinging past the hips.
- Remind them they don't have to stop on two bases: first and home.
- Practice the baserunning sequence on your call; "RELAXED, READY, CROSSOVER SHUFFLE-SHUFFLE, GO AND BACK".



### Contact the Base

Run fast, pump your arms  
Step on the base with either foot  
Don't jump at it, just take regular strides  
Don't stop, run straight through

### Running from a base - Softball

Place your right foot touching the base  
Seat down in a running position  
Body facing next base  
Watch the play and get ready to run







#### 4. Shuffle off a Base

As ball crosses the plate, cross over and shuffle 2-3 steps to next base

Stay low, react to the play



#### 5. Rounding a Base

Curve out before the base

Run fast and look at the base

Step on the base with either foot

Continue running toward next base



#### 6. Run through First

Don't stop on first base

Run straight through

Stay on the baseline and come straight back to 1st

### correcting common mistakes



#### Don't stop on first base or home plate

Players need to know that there are 2 bases they don't have to stop on. Practice running through first base by having a coach give a "hi-5" 2-3 steps past first.



#### Running with arms swinging across body

Young players need to learn proper running form early. Cross flexing arms in front of the body makes the body zig zag. Pump your arms by swinging them forward in front of the nose and then back past the hips.



#### Running in an upright position

Don't stand up when you steal a base, stay low and powerful. Stand 3-4 strides from players with arm out at head height. Ask players to run staying low, until they pass you. It is like running in a tunnel or taking off like a jet.





# hitting



## 1. Stance

Hands back  
Head steady and eyes level  
Knees bent and shoulders level  
Wide stance, body balanced



## 2a. Step and Coil

Take small timing step on pitch  
Shift weight to back foot and leg  
Coil arms, hands and upper body back



## 2b. Step and Coil

Chin up, eyes level  
Hips and hands coiled  
Front heel slightly up

## coaching tips

- Teach the proper swing without being too technical and give the players lots of repetitions.
- Players from Tee Ball to Professional players should practice hitting off a Tee.
- Sit on a bucket behind a protective L Screen about 7 steps from the hitters to throw batting practice.
- Pitching from the mound to players this age is ineffective, boring and causes players to be afraid of the ball.
- Bats for 5-8 year olds should be light and easy to swing (25-26" in length and about 15-16 oz in weight).



### The Grip on the Bat

Wrap your fingers and thumbs around the bat  
Hold the bat so the second set of knuckles line up  
Right handed hitters - right hand is on the top  
Left handed hitters - left hand is on top

### Hitting off a Tee

Put a ball on your tee for your own safety  
Take your regular stance with front foot behind the tee  
Contact the ball with arms extended  
Head down watching the ball  
Follow through with both hands on the bat







**3a. Contact**

Push off back leg  
Front leg straight and firm  
Eyes on the ball to contact



**3b. Contact**

Bring hands and bat directly  
down to the ball  
At contact, arms fully extended  
Hips turn to face pitcher



**4. Follow Through**

Pivot and turn on both feet  
Keep both hands on the bat  
Finish with body balanced

## correcting common mistakes



### Lunging at the ball with a bent front leg

This results when a player starts with too narrow a stance and step with their lead foot pointing at the pitcher. Start in a wide stance, step and coil with the side of the front foot closed and square to the pitcher.



### Swinging, but not following through

Blocking the swing often results from the wrong grip. Grip the bat at base of fingers so that the middle knuckles line up. Practice swinging all of the way through keeping 2 hands on the bat.



### Letting go of the bat

Some players panic and let go of the bat with one hand or sometime both hands. Create a "Bat landing Zone", a circle in the dirt 2-3 steps down the baseline and have players swing and then carry the bat and set it down in the zone on the way to first.





# pitching baseball



## 1. Stance - Set

- Grip the ball in your glove
- Foot against rubber
- Look at the target
- Bring feet closer together



## 2. Coil Up

- Lean back on power foot, in balance
- Bring glove knee up of over back knee
- Shoulder and hip point to target



## 3. Arm - Down

- Arm down to the hip
- Bring glove toward target
- Flex your power leg
- Eyes on target

## coaching tips

- Players should start the pitching skill at this age but not from regulation pitching distance.
- Set them up for success, by hanging targets on the fence 5-6 steps away to practice the pitching motion.
- At this age practice from the "Set Position" and then introduce the "Full Windup" at 11 or 12 years old.
- The pitching motion is the same as the "arm down - arm back - step and throw" throwing motion when done properly.

**Safety Tip:** Any time you have a player pitch to a player in a catcher's position, the catcher must be wearing the catcher's gear, in practice and games



### Front Angle Coil - Up

- Keep hands in the glove
- Grip the ball, eyes on target
- Knee up to waist height
- Keep your shoulders in line with the target

### Front Angle Follow Through

- Release the ball
- Arm swings by glove knee
- Chest over front knee
- Keep watching the ball







#### 4. Arm Back

Arm extends straight back  
Fingers on top of the ball  
Point glove to target  
Push forward off power foot



#### 5. Step and Throw

Step toward target with glove foot  
Throw overhand with fingers on top



#### 6. Follow Through

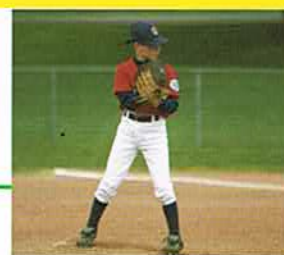
Release ball out front - arm extended  
Finish with throwing shoulder facing target  
Arm follows through outside of glove knee

### correcting common mistakes



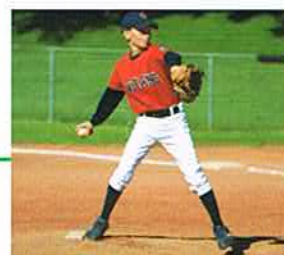
#### Full windup is too difficult for this age group

Facing the batter to start pitching motion creates a challenge. When players try to move into pivot position they find it hard to coil up to the power position. Stay with the "Set Position" until they get older.



#### Short arm pitching motion

The ball does not come up from the glove to pitch or throw. Train all of your pitchers to use the long ARM DOWN - ARM BACK - STEP & THROW overhand motion.



#### Sidearm Motion

If a player comes through with elbow pointing down it is too easy to miss the target. Practice playing catch next to a fence. On a good throw the arm comes through with elbow pointing out and up.





# pitching softball



## 1. Ready Position

Power foot on plate  
 Glove foot at back of plate  
 "Present the Ball" hand and ball in glove



## 2. Shift Weight Forward

Lean forward, glove leg up stride to plate  
 Palm down extend arm into large windmill circle



## 3. Arm Straight - Reach

Stride forward with glove arm at target  
 Extend pitching arm up in windmill action  
 At the top body in "X" position

## coaching tips



### Grip

Place pads of fingers across any seam  
 Fingers on top, thumb at bottom  
 If you have a small hand use 4 finger grip

### Release

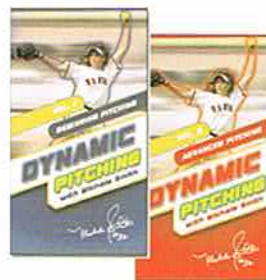
Release ball next to hip with palm forward  
 Snap the wrist on release  
 Drag power foot forward



*Big Al would like to thank Michele Smith for providing the details for the softball pitching progression.*

*Michele Smith is a two time Olympic Gold Medalist and eight time MVP and Champion of the Japan Professional League. Michele runs camps and clinics for both coaches and players teaching all aspects of the game of softball. She also chairs the Softball Advisory committee for Little League Baseball and Softball.*

*Michele has created an outstanding educational DVD library on beginning pitching, advanced pitching, hitting, and training for softball. She has also authored 2 softball books.*







#### 4. Turn Hips & Shoulders

Open up hips and shoulders  
 Bring arm down in big windmill circle  
 Fingers on top palm facing down



#### 5. Kick Step and Throw

Push off power leg into planted glove leg  
 Bend glove arm, pull it toward body  
 Bring back hip forward to 45 degrees



#### 6. Follow Through

Snap wrist, palm forward next to hip  
 Drag power foot into firmly planted glove foot  
 Hip to the target hands out front for defense

### correcting common mistakes



#### Stepping forward off the rubber

It is illegal to step forward with power foot when you start your motion. Keep power foot on rubber and then drag it forward on release.



#### Grip on smooth part of ball

If you put pads of your fingers on smooth part of ball, on release the ball will slip. For control and power put pads of your fingers on the seams.



#### Not using glove arm

Do not leave your glove arm at your side as you throw. Extend your glove arm to the target and as your throwing arm comes down into the release position bring your glove arm into your body for more power and energy in the pitch.





# the catcher



## 1. Relaxed Position

Weight on the balls of your feet  
Seat down  
Glove hand out front as target



## 2. Ready Position

Provide a target out front  
Protect your throwing hand behind glove or foot  
Seat up but stay low



## 3. Catch Above the Waist

With no swing catch with two hands  
Thumbs together, palms down position  
Catch, cushion and cover it up

## coaching tips

- Be sure that your catchers wear their protective gear when catching in a game or in a practice.
- Introduce the catching techniques to players who are interested in learning, but be sure that the players have the skills and confidence before you catch them in a game.
- Make all of the adjustments necessary to fit the gear to the player for protection and safety.
- Remind your catchers to always hustle because they can be a great role model for the rest of the team.



### Wearing the Catcher's Gear

Wear a protective cup  
Shin pads should be tight and clip up on the outside of your legs  
Chest protector should fit snug against chest  
Mask and helmet straps snug and neck protector in place  
Glove fits with thumb strap in the glove snug and tied back

### Safe Distance from a Hitter

Have the batter take position in the box  
Position at least an arms plus glove length distance from hitter's back foot







#### 4. Catch Below the Waist

With no swing catch with two hands  
 Little fingers together,  
 palms up position  
 Catch, cushion and cover it up



#### 5. Blocking the Ball

Drop to your knees behind the ball  
 Head down, chin to chest, watch ball  
 Glove covers hole between your legs  
 Hide throwing hand behind glove



#### 6. Receiving throw at Plate

Keep feet in front of the plate  
 Stay off the baseline  
 Stay out of the way of the runner  
 From this position, catch, tag runner

### correcting common mistakes



#### Don't turn your head sideways

When you turn to side the ball can bounce up and hit your neck.  
 On balls in the dirt face forward and put your chin to the chest.  
 Practice this technique with nerf balls  
 or whiffle balls first.



#### Protect your throwing arm

If the throwing hand is out front it may get hit by a foul ball. To reduce the  
 chance of injury protect your hand by placing it on your throwing side  
 foot or make a fist and hide it behind the webbing of the glove.



#### Stand up to throw to Pitcher

Don't toss the ball back at the pitcher from squat position.  
 Young players need all the practice they can get working on their  
 throwing technique. Standing up to make the throw back  
 also makes it easier for the pitcher.





# WARM-UP EXERCISES

Players should warm up before they play at home, at a practice, or before a game. Start every practice or game with a team warm-up routine so that players build the habit at an early age. The warm-up should last about 6 to 8 minutes. Start your practice and pre-game warm-up by taking your team for a jog and then have them spread out or form a circle and lead them through 6-7 exercises. The hi-5 circle run is a fun way to finish the warm-up.



## Follow the Leader Jog to the Outfield

Jog from the team bench and lead the players to the outfield and into the warm-up circle.

## Arm Circles

Feet comfortably apart, begin to rotate arms forward with no bend in the elbows, then rotate them backwards 10 to 15 each way. For fun, try rotating one arm each way.



## Hi Five Circle Run

2 coaches stand or kneel facing each other about 25 steps apart. Players line up and run in a circle around the coaches giving them a high five. Have them do 4 to 5 circuits giving them lots of encouragement as they run by.

## Elbow Pulls

Bring one elbow in front of the neck with hand on opposite shoulder. Take free hand, grab behind the elbow and pull for 5 second count 3 times each way for 5 second count.



## Jumping Jacks

Start with feet together, hands at side, legs slightly flexed. On first jump, hands go above the head and feet wide apart. On 2nd jump, hands go above the head and feet wide apart. Repeat without stopping 10 to 20 times.

## Flamingo Stand

Stand on one foot and grab your other foot with either hand. When in the proper stretch, the knee of the bent leg will point to the ground 3 times each way holding for a 5 second count.



## Windmill Toe-Touches

Take a wide stance toes facing forward. Bend your knees slightly. Arms stretched out straight. Swing arms down to touch your toes and at same time reach high above head.

## Elephant Stretch

Feet comfortably apart, lock hands out front with reversed grip. Stretch arms and hands over and behind the head, if possible, and squeeze elbows together. Then lean side to side at the waist for a full body stretch. Repeat 4-5 times.



## Spider Pushups

Take a wide stance with toes facing forward. Bend your knees slightly. Walk out on your hands to a pushup position do 1 pushup & walk back & stand up. Walk out, do 2 pushups in a row & stand up, then 3 in a row then 4 and finally 5.

## Mountain Climbing

Move to push-up position, thumbs touching and stretch one leg straight back. Point the bent knee outside the same side elbow. On command "switch", reverse positions of the legs. After 4 switches, repeat 10 times without stopping.





# fun practice planner

Team:

Date:

Pre-Practice Team Meeting: (announcements, here is the plan for today)

Fun Warm-up Activities (jog, stretch, baserunning routine)

Throwing and Catching Drills and Fun Activities

Other Skills Drill and Fun Activities

Fun Full Game Activity

End of Practice Team Meeting



# sample practice plan

**Team:** Centennial Blue Jays

**Date:** Tuesday, May 12

**Early Bird Time** \_\_\_\_\_ **5:45 PM**

- Randy needs help on catching wheel
- Scott needs help hitting off the tee

**Team Meeting** \_\_\_\_\_ **6:00 PM**

- Here is the plan
- Reminders about listening, cooperating and safety
- Happy Birthday to Josie

**Fun Warm-up Activities** \_\_\_\_\_ **6:05 PM**

- Follow me - Snake run
- Exercises and Stretching
- Baserunning routine (relaxed, ready, X-over and shuffle go and back)
- High 5 Circle Run

**Bubba Throwing** \_\_\_\_\_ **6:15 PM**

- Throwing (Lean back - step and throw)
- Bubba High Throw and Bubba Big Step Throw
- 5 buckets of balls today

**DRINK BREAK** \_\_\_\_\_ **6:25 PM**

**4 Stations in the Outfield** \_\_\_\_\_ **6:30 PM**

- 4 minutes "Catching Wheel" and set a record
- 4 minutes "Fly Ball Circle" and set a record
- 4 minutes "Ground Ball Shuttle" and set a record

**DRINK BREAK** \_\_\_\_\_ **6:45 PM**

**Hitting and Pitching Stations** \_\_\_\_\_ **6:50 PM**

- 4 stations off a Tee
- 4 targets hanging on the fence

**6 on 6 Bubba Baseball Game** \_\_\_\_\_ **7:10 PM**

**End of Practice Team Meeting** \_\_\_\_\_ **7:25 PM**

- Pick up the equipment
- Game on Tuesday (Team Photos after the game)
- Don't forget to tell parents about fundraising
- Stamps for each player



# extra equipment shopping list

In order to keep the players at this age fully engaged and having fun during your practices you will need lots of extra equipment. This will help eliminate, or at the very least, shorten up the time players stand around waiting for their turn. You will need to buy some of the equipment so you may want to consider having each of the parents contribute a little money to the team "extra equipment fund". Then once you have the list and the funds in place have your team members and their parents help complete the shopping list.



## **Plastic Ice Cream Pails with Plastic Lids (one for each player)**

You need one set for each player to help organize the team throwing and pitching drills. Have the players take the lids home, color them and print their names on them using big, bold letters. The lids will be used to help organize the players all year long at practices and games.

## **Balls of all Sorts (7-10 balls per player)**

Collect whiffle balls, mushballs, incrediballs, regular baseballs, rubber balls and tennis balls. Players need lots of action, so you need lots of balls to keep them active and having fun. Ask a local tennis club to donate old tennis balls to your team, they work great because they are lighter and smaller for the young players and even have seams, almost like the ones on a baseball.

## **Bats of all Kinds (7-8 bats for the team)**

It is important to have bats of different weights and sizes for the team. Tee Ball players can learn how to swing using a light plastic bat. They are safe and work great with whiffle balls.

## **Extra Hitting Tees (one for every 2 players)**

In order to keep your players active, you will need extra hitting tees so that at least 4-5 players can practice hitting at a time. They are quite easy to make, be creative.

## **Backstop Targets for Throwing Practice (one for every 2 players)**

Make your own targets by cutting out old carpet pieces about the width of a base and the height of 2 bases (20" x 30"). Then, punch a small hole in the top two corners. Snap in a clip that you can use to hang the target up with on the chain link fence at your diamond. Now, you have a great target about the size of a strike zone that players can practice throwing at.



# practice planning tips

## Get to the practice 15-20 minutes early

This is a great time to schedule a little extra one-on-one time with each of your players for skill development.

## Start on time with a short team meeting

Have the players jog out with their gloves to meet with you on the outfield grass. Have them make a stack of gloves and share your plans for the day.



## Start every practice with high five circle run

A great way to start your warm-up is to have the players run circles around 2 coaches standing about 15 steps apart. As the players jog by give them a hi-5 and call out their names.

## Players learn by doing, not by sitting

Don't ask your team to sit down and listen to you for more than 1-2 minutes at a time. Get them going with no lineups and use coaching cues during the activity or drill.

## Short lines, no waiting turns

Keep lines to 4 or less during all practice drills and activities. Kids at this age don't like to line up and shouldn't have to very often in a well planned practice.

## Focus on safety

Plan for safety in every aspect of your practice and teach safety along with every drill. This should be your number one concern at practices and games.

## Every part of your practice needs to be fun

If players are bored and stop smiling, you need to look at what you are doing and change it. Your job is to create a passion for the game by making every aspect of the practice fun.

## Trick them into learning

Players at this age cannot be taught in the more traditional way, so you need to get them active and trick them into learning the skills and the rules of the games along the way.

## Bring energy and enthusiasm to every practice

Players will feed off your emotions and approach. If you are having a great day, and a lot of fun, they will too.

## Be positive every chance you get

Look for positive things to say all the way through the practice. Make sure that you connect with every player in a positive way at every practice and game.

## Close off every practice and game with a team meeting

First have the players stack their gloves on the outfield grass and hustle to help put away all of the equipment. When they are done they jog back to the stack of gloves for a quick meeting. Give the players a sticker or stamp, tell them how proud you are of them and off they go.





# bubba baseball/softball game

This is a fantastic game to help the players learn the rules of the game as well as game strategy. It is fun to play, full of action and set up for every player to succeed regardless of skill level. You can play the game during your practice and it is a great game for players to play on their own with some of their friends.

## Getting Organized for the Bubba Baseball Game

- Split into 2 equal teams. (6 on each team works the best)
- You need a whiffle ball, a big plastic Bubba Bat and 4 bases or markers, played with or without gloves.
- Put the 4 bases down in a grassy area about 2/3rd of the normal baseline distance.
- Use the outfield grass just beyond 2nd base, no need to use the infield dirt.
- One Coach takes on the role of a pitcher and tosses the whiffle ball to the hitter.
- One Coach is the catcher and stands a safe distance behind the plate to retrieve the balls that get past the hitter.
- The game is safer for young players and moves along quicker with adults looking after these 2 positions.
- The players on defense play infield and outfield positions. (If you are 6 vs 6, have 4 players play the 4 infield positions and the other 2 players on the team cover the outfield.)
- Each inning, go through the line-up once so every player to gets a chance to hit.
- Play regular rules except, no lead-offs, no stealing bases and runners can only advance once the ball is hit.
- Include a special rule for the last batter each inning; To give the last hitter a chance to score, the only way you can get him out is to either catch a fly ball, or to field the ball and throw it to the catcher and touch home plate. You cannot force or tag runners to end the play, this gives the last hitter a better chance.
- No strikeouts, every player swings away until they hit a fair ball. With the bubba bat and the soft toss pitching all of your players will find success.
- Give the players who played outfield the previous inning a chance to play infield the next inning. With 6 players; 4 in the infield and 2 in the outfield, players get to play twice as much in the infield.
- Use a whiffle or jugs ultralite sponge ball so all players can play the infield without fear.

During the game when a rule comes up, or you want to quickly teach a little game strategy just call out "Coaches Timeout" and have the players listen to your comments, and then get right back into the action.

## Introducing positional play

Use lids as markers to introduce positional play to young players.

When you play bubba baseball or other mini games, position your players at the start of each inning by having each player bring their ice cream lid with their name on it onto the playing field. Take each lid and place it on the grass 2 steps behind where you want each player to play.

Then, during your game when the complete team leaves their position to chase a ground ball or flyball and the play is over, all you have to do to get them back into position for the next hitter is call out "RE-SET - find your lid and face the hitter".

Your team will look organized and well coached and you will save a lot of time. If you want the players to play different positions next inning, just move their lids.





# coaching SEQUENCE for skills

The following coaching sequence is designed to help you teach the skills in the proper order. The sequence for each of the major skills is planned out to match the development, the age and the skill of each player from 5 to 8 years old.

Use the 5-8 Coaching Manual (5-8) to learn the proper technique and to organize the progressions into "TEACH IT - TRY IT - GAME IT" activities for your players.

## THROWING

1. Learn the 1-step throwing motion
  - Simulate 1-step throw (5-6)
2. Learn the proper grip
  - Grip the ball (5-8)
3. Throw for power and distance - 1 step throw
  - Throw to an open field (5-6)
4. Throw for power and accuracy - 1 step throw
  - Throw to an adult (5-6)
5. Throw for accuracy - 1 step throw
  - Throw at a target on a fence or wall (5-8)
  - Play catch with a partner; short distance (5-6)
6. Learn the 2-step throwing motion
  - Simulate 2-step throw (7-8)
7. Throw for power and distance - 2 step throw
  - Throw to an open field (7-8)
8. Throw for accuracy - 2 step throw
  - Play catch with a partner; short and medium distance (7-8)
9. Throw for accuracy and power - 2 step throw
  - Short and medium toss with a partner (7-8)

## CATCHING

1. Catch with 2-hand technique
  - Simulate the 6 catching positions (5-8)
2. Catch with 2 hands - stationary
  - Soft toss to player below waist 2-handed catch (5-6)
3. Catch above and below waist - stationary
  - Soft toss to player catching positions 1-2-3-4 (5-6)
4. Catch the ball-on the run
  - Soft toss to forehand side (5-6)
5. Play catch with a partner
  - Play catch from a short distance (5-6)
6. Catch the ball on backhand side - stationary
  - Soft toss to player catching positions 5 & 6 (7-8)
7. Catch on backhand side - on the run
  - Soft toss to player catching position 5 (7-8)
8. Catch the ball from different distances
  - Play catch short and medium with partner (7-8)



## FIELDING GROUND BALLS

1. Learn the ground ball fielding technique
  - Simulate the final fielding position and technique (5-6)
2. Receive the ball with 2 hands
  - Alligator hands and toss back to coach (5-6)
3. Receive the ball and throw
  - Alligator hands, step and throw to coach (5-6)
4. Move to field the ground ball
  - Shuffle to the side, field the ball and toss back to coach (5-6)
5. Move to field the ball and make a throw
  - Roll ground balls back and forth between partners (7-8)
  - Throw a bouncy ball off a wall to practice ground balls by yourself (7-8)
  - Coach hits ground balls softly to players (7-8)
6. Learn the complete 2-step fielding technique
  - Simulate the complete 2-step fielding motion (7-8)
7. Move to field the ball glove leg forward
  - Coach rolls the ball underhand to players at a medium distance (7-8)

## FLY BALLS

1. Learn the proper fly ball technique
  - Simulate the catch - 2-handed catches forehand and backhand (5-8)
2. Catch a fly ball - straight
  - Coach soft tosses low from a short distance (start with a tennis/whiffle ball) (5-6)
  - Coach soft tosses to forehand side; short distance (5-6)
3. Forehand catch - on the run
  - Coach soft tosses to forehand side; short distance (5-6)
4. Backhand catch - on the run
  - Coach soft tosses low from a short distance (7-8)
5. Fly balls forehand and backhand - on the run
  - Coach tosses to players on the run - fly ball circle drill (7-8)
  - Coach tosses to players on the run - forehand and backhand shuttle (7-8)
6. Catching hit fly balls
  - Coach hits fly balls from short, medium and outfield distances (7-8)

## BASERUNNING

1. Learn the proper baserunning technique
  - Follow the leader around the bases (5-6)
2. Basic running technique
  - Proper stride and arm motion (5-8)
3. Running through first base
  - Contacting and running through first base (5-8)
4. Running and Shuffling from a base
  - Players run and shuffle from their bases at the same time (5-8)
5. Running and rounding a base
  - Practice veering out and rounding a cone and the base (5-8)
6. Extra base running technique
  - Team baserunning relay (5-8)



## PITCHING

1. Learn the pivot position technique
  - Simulate the pitching motion from the pivot (5-8)
2. Pitch with accuracy and control
  - Pitch to a target hanging on a fence - short distance (5-8)
3. Pitch with control and power
  - Pitch to a target hanging on a fence - medium distance (5-8)
  - Practice pivot pitching motion when playing catch (5-8)

## THE CATCHER

1. Learn the proper and safe way to wear the catcher's equipment
  - Help the player fit and put on all of the equipment (5-8)
2. Understanding the proper catching position
  - Simulate the relaxed position for the catcher (5-8)
  - Help player take a position a safe distance back from the hitter (5-8)
3. Catching the ball technique
  - Simulate the proper technique of catching the ball above and below the waist (5-8)
4. Catching the ball with 2 hands
  - Soft toss from a short distance to catcher in catching stance (5-8)
5. Relaxed and ready position
  - Simulate the relaxed and ready positions (7-8)
6. Blocking a low pitch (7-8)
7. Catching a pop-up (7-8)
8. Throwing technique to each base (7-8)
9. Making a tag play at home plate (7-8)

## HITTING

1. Learn to hit off a tee
  - Simulate the swing (5-8)
2. Learn the proper grip
  - Grip the bat (5-8)
3. Stance, position and distance from the tee
  - Position behind the tee and check bat coverage (5-8)
4. Hitting motion (stance, step and coil, the swing, follow through)
  - Hit off a tee - one on one (5-8)
  - Hit off tees - team drill (5-8)
5. Learn to hit a thrown ball
  - Simulate the swing (7-8)
6. Stance and position from the plate
  - Learn the 3 positions in the batter's box (7-8)
  - Learn straight away and open stances (7-8)
7. Hitting a whiffle baseball
  - Hitting whiffle balls with a bubba bat (5-8)
8. Hitting a regulation baseball
  - Coach toss from behind an L screen (7-8)
  - Team hitting practice routine (7-8)



# big AL's evaluation of a volunteer coach

## How would Big Al evaluate his son's Volunteer Coach?

If you were the coach of my little 7 year old son, I would want to know 5 or 6 things about you and I would have very high expectations of you.

I know that the coach is the number 1 reason that a player continues in this fantastic game but I also know that the coach can be the number 1 reason why players leave the game early.

You see, as a parent, I believe that one of the most important things I can do for my kids is to surround them with real good people as they grow up.

So, if you are going to be my son's coach, there are a few things my wife and I would like to know ...

Are you a **kind** person?

Is it **safe** for Scott to be around you physically and emotionally?

Are you a **fair** and **honest** person and a good **role model** for my son?

Do you **care** enough to treat my son special...because he is special?

Is my son going to find you **fun** to be around?



Can I **trust** you with the care of my son?

Finally, and least important, do you know how to **teach** a bit about the skills of the game?

If you can answer yes to these questions, I know my son will have a very special year. By the end of the season, I know that he will be a better person from being around you and working with you and the rest of the team.



# getting feedback from your players

Coaching young players presents many challenging situations and a great number of opportunities to develop the skills of strong character, courage and loyalty. As managers we are in an excellent position to influence the development of our youth by acting as positive role models and mentors.

Use this feedback form to get feedback from players and their parents a couple of times during the season. It will help you connect in the most positive way possible with all of the players on your team and at the same time will identify your approach and the kind of coach and person that you are working to be.

## Character Feedback for the Coach

There is a tremendous amount to learn from you, as players, in the form of feedback. In order to be the best coach I can be, your honest feedback to the following statements is appreciated.

Please use the scale below when responding and add your own comments at the end as well.

**A - ALWAYS B - USUALLY C - NOT USUALLY D - NEVER**  
(Please circle A, B, C or D for each comment)

My Coach ...

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| A B C D Expects me to be early for practice                       | A B C D Is concerned about my safety                        |
| A B C D Expects me to be prepared for practices and games         | A B C D Is prepared for each practice                       |
| A B C D Expects us to warm up before we start to practice or play | A B C D Uses my first name                                  |
| A B C D Treats me as an individual who is important to the team   | A B C D Cheers for me in practice and games                 |
| A B C D Puts me in the starting lineup                            | A B C D Treats me fairly                                    |
| A B C D Takes time to help me when I am having difficulty         | A B C D Is fun to play for                                  |
| A B C D Teaches the skills of the game                            | A B C D Notices the improvements I make                     |
| A B C D Makes the practices fun                                   | A B C D Notices the improvements that the team makes        |
| A B C D Shows an enthusiasm and interest in baseball              | A B C D Tells us what we do wrong                           |
| A B C D Knows when we do not understand what is being taught      | A B C D Tells us what we do right                           |
| A B C D Is patient  | A B C D Is positive when we win                             |
| A B C D Is polite with parents                                    | A B C D Stays positive when we lose                         |
| A B C D Is polite with umpires                                    | A B C D Takes me aside when he needs to correct my behavior |
| A B C D Tells me how I am doing                                   | A B C D Is a good person and a role model                   |
| A B C D Is there to help me out when I make a mistake             | I enjoy playing Little League Baseball because:             |
| A B C D Is honest   | _____   |
| A B C D Knows how to work with players who are not behaving       | _____   |
|   | _____   |



# getting parents involved

## IDEAS FOR YOUR LETTERS TO PARENTS

To set the stage for a successful season with players and their parents, it is very important that you have a pre-season meeting. I strongly suggest you send a letter home to the parents to outline the expectations of all participants: manager, coach, players and family members. Then walk through it at your meeting and have the parents sign it and hand it back to you.

### What do I expect from my players?

- To be on time for all practices and games
- To always do their best, whether in the field or on the bench
- To be cooperative at all times and share team duties
- To respect not only others, but themselves as well
- To be positive with teammates at all times
- To try not to become upset at their own mistakes or those of others
- To listen to the coaches, umpires and teammates
- To hustle at practices and games
- To have fun

### What can you and your child expect from me?

- To be on time for all practices and games
- To be as fair as possible in giving equal playing time to all players
- To do my best to teach the fundamentals of the game
- To be positive and respect each child as an individual
- To set reasonable expectations for each child and for the season
- To teach the players the value of winning and losing
- To be open to ideas, suggestions and help
- To always be positive with my team, the opposing team and the umpires
- To make the season a fun experience for all

### What do I expect from you as parents and family?

- To come out and enjoy the game
- Cheer and be positive with all players
- To try not to question my leadership; all players will make mistakes and so will I
- Be positive with coaches, players and umpires.
- Please contact if you have great feedback or if you have any concerns  
My phone number will be available for you to call at any time if you have a concern
- Please volunteer for off field activities

Team Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Manager: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Coach: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_



## COACHING PLAYERS 13+

### WARM-UPS

- pre-game and pre-practice routine

### FIRST BASE

- Footwork at 1st base and technique for receiving throws
- Fielding positions, cut-off and relay technique
- Defending the bunt, double play technique
- Cover responsibilities

### SECOND BASE

- Fielding positions, cut-off and relay technique
- Double play footwork and throws
- Pick-off play techniques
- Receiving throws at 1st and 2nd base
- Fielding straight, backhand and forehand

### THIRD BASE

- Fielding positions, cut-off and relay technique
- Double play footwork and throws
- Pick-off play techniques
- Receiving throws at 3rd, defending the bunt technique
- Cover responsibilities

### SHORTSTOP

- Fielding positions, cut-off and relay technique
- Double play footwork and throws
- Pick-off play techniques
- Receiving throws at 2nd and 3rd
- Fielding straight, backhand and forehand
- Cover responsibilities

### BASERUNNING

- Taking a lead-off, secondary leads
- Stealing from each base

### SLIDING

- Straight in, pop-up and fade away

### PITCHING

- Grip and throw: fastball, change-up, curveball
- Pitching from full wind-up and set positions
- Plays for pitchers (defense)
- Pick-off plays to 1st, 2nd and 3rd base
- Cover responsibilities

### THE CATCHER

- Receiving and framing the pitch, giving signs
- Blocking the ball; to the left and right
- Fielding bunts, double play foot work, intentional walks
- Throws to each base

### HITTING

- Pull hitting, hitting straight away, hitting to the opposite field

### BUNTING

- Sacrifice, drag, push and squeeze bunt techniques

### OUTFIELD PLAY

- Fielding ground balls in the outfield; safety, do or die play
- Technique for going back right, back left, straight back, and catching a fly ball at the fence
- Outfield throws to each base, to cut-offs
- Cover responsibilities

### PRACTICE PLANS

- Practice planning framework and sample set of plans

### DEFENSIVE GAME STRATEGIES

- Complete defensive system of play, multiple situations

### OFFENSIVE GAME STRATEGIES

- Complete system of play, multiple situations

### COACHING AT 1ST AND 3RD

- Coaching base runners
- Coaching signals
- Making a line-up





## 5-8 INSTRUCTIONAL SERIES

COACHING MANUAL    PLAYER HANDBOOKS    DRILLS DVD    BONUS RESOURCES



For **BONUS RESOURCES** from **BIG AL** go to  
[www.bigalbaseball.com/5to8](http://www.bigalbaseball.com/5to8)