

PART I: **PRACTICE ORGANIZATION**

The importance of a well thought out and written practice plan cannot be over stated. Regardless of the age and level of the players that you are coaching, planning your practice is the foundation of a successful season. The saying “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail” might be a little severe in the context of coaching youth baseball. Planning your practice will allow many of the following positives to take place during your season:

- 🏆 Your players will have more fun because they are busy and active at practice
- 🏆 Your players will improve their skills at a faster pace
- 🏆 Your players will be better prepared for game situations
- 🏆 Your assistant coaches will be better utilized
- 🏆 Your assistant coaches will be more confident in performing their practice responsibilities.
- 🏆 Your parent volunteers will have more direction in their responsibilities at practice
- 🏆 Your parent volunteers will be more confident with a specific plan for their practice duties.
- 🏆 Your players will be more enthusiastic at practice with a planned and organized practice session
- 🏆 You will be more effective at practice and will cover more situations and fundamentals.
- 🏆 Your players and parents will appreciate an organized approach to the season.

Now let's take a more in depth look at the specifics of practice organization. You will be given the rationale and basics behind effective practice organization as well as examples of sample practice plans.

1. Define your goals

- A. Determine the skill level of your players
- B. Acknowledge your own teaching ability and how it relates to your team.
- C. What is your philosophy for success?
- D. What type of atmosphere are you trying to create?
- E. Define winning in your own mind and relate it to your players and their parents.

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2. The coaches' responsibility

- A. Set the tone for the season in a parent/player meeting prior to your first practice.
- B. Give individual players an opportunity to develop their skills.
- C. Prepare a written practice plan for each practice. Share it with your team.
- D. Have a consistent starting and ending time to your practices. Stick to it.
- E. Prepare the team for maximum performance.

3. Take inventory

- A. Facilities available – how can you maximize the facilities for practice.
- B. Equipment available – batting cage and or tunnel, protective screens, hitting nets, batting tees, baseballs, wiffle balls, baseball gloves, bats, catcher's gear, backstop, batting helmets, pitching machine, rubber or dimpled balls, bases, and other training devices.
- C. Number of players – this will help determine the length of your practices and the facilities and equipment you will need.
- D. Number of coaches – the number of assistant coaches or parent volunteers will be a major determinant to your practice organization. Reliable people are important. They do not need to be “experts” in coaching.
- E. Time restrictions – amount of day light, sharing the field with others, school hours, your work schedule, transportation problems, and the weather.

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THE ACTUAL PRACTICE

Keeping your players active during practice and have them working on baseball specific activities is both the goal and the challenge of baseball coaches everywhere. Paying attention to meeting your goals, your responsibilities and taking inventory of the logistics of your situation will be the basis for planning a practice that is organized , keeps your players moving, teaches effectively and is actually FUN.

General principles

1. Write or type your practice plan and make copies for each assistant coach and parent volunteer.
2. Break down each segment into time blocks by minutes needed for each and then fit them into the actual time of day that the practice will be held. Ex: individual defense – 15minutes; 11:00 – 11:15.
3. The following general areas will need to be practiced during the season. Not all of these will be done at every practice. The areas highlighted in bold are suggested to be included at almost every practice.
 - A. Catch playing**
 - B. Individual defense
 - C. Base running
 - D. Team defense**
 - E. Pitching practice (bull pens)**
 - F. Hitting**
 - G. Bunting
 - H. Stretching and general warm up**
 - I. Form running and agility work
 - J. Individual skills**
 - K. Game situations
 - L. Mental preparation – mind set**

The great thing about baseball is that your practices can be creative and you can combine general areas together to keep your entire team occupied on learning the fundamentals of the game. Here are some examples.

1. Catch playing and individual skills of throwing can be combined when you have infielders warm up with infielders, outfielders with outfielders, and catchers with catchers. Position specific throwing techniques can be emphasized and practiced.
2. Base running can be incorporated in batting practice, defensive drills and game situation drills during practice.
3. Bunting drills can be combined with base running and defensive drills.

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4. You can use 2 or more coaches and divide the infield into 3 or more areas. One area can be the shortstop and second baseman working on double play turns and feeds with the coach rolling the ground balls. Another area can be the third baseman, catcher and pitcher working on fielding bunts. A third area can be the first baseman working on low throws in the dirt thrown by a coach or parent volunteer.
5. You can work on pop up priorities with your SS, 3B and 1/2 your outfielders on the 3B/LF side of the field and with your 2B, 1B and other 1/2 of your outfielders on the 1B/Rf side of the field, both at the same time.
6. During pitching practice or Bull pens as they are called, you can have your catcher in full gear. He must block every pitch in the dirt. A player will stand in as a hitter (with a helmet on) and take pitches as if he was in a game. This gives the pitcher an opportunity to pitch with a hitter actually in the batter's box. The hitter will learn to track pitches and develop a rhythm with the pitcher. Early in the season allow the hitter to have his fielding glove on for extra protection if needed.
7. Game situations where you have a portion of the team doing live, full speed base running will prepare the defense for game speed plays. Your base running will also improve.

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EXAMPLES OF DRILLS THAT INCORPORATE THE ENTIRE TEAM

SERIES ONE

1. Drill One

- Out fielders in left field – fly balls, ground balls and throw to second base. SS and 2B are the relays.
- Pitchers, catchers, 3B and 1B work on bunt defense and communication

2. Drill two

- Outfield moves to CF – throws to 3B. SS acts as relay.
- Pitchers, catchers, 2B and 1B work on covering first base and communication

3. Drill three

- Out fielders move to right field – throws to home plate. 1B is relay, pitcher backs up the plate, C receives throw and works on communication. After the tag the c throws to the 3B covering the base, SS gets ground balls and feeds 2B for double play (2B simulates the throw)

Each of these drills will be 5 minutes in duration. They are fast paced and get a lot of work done on the fundamentals of the game.

SERIES TWO

1. Drill one – double play series – 3B, SS 2B, 1B P, C

- Coach will fungo in the following order: 1-6-3 DP; 5-4-3 DP; 3-6-1 DP; 2-6-3 DP; 6-4-3 DP; 4-6-3 DP. The first position listed gets the ground ball, the second position listed is the pivot man, and the last position listed is at first base.
- The outfielders will be working on call drill, communication in the outfield.

2. Drill two – Keep the batter/runner off of 2B – Entire team involved. Split your team into separate teams – one will base run from Home plate and second base. The other will play their defensive positions.

- The objective of this drill is the following – The base running team will practice their reads and game type reactions to score the run and get the batter-runner into scoring position. The defensive team will either make the out at home plate and/or keep the batter runner from advancing into scoring position at 2B. There are always less than 2 outs for this drill.
- The coach will fungo base hits at various speeds and direction to the outfielders. The runners will run on contact. The defense will then make the proper throws and communication to achieve their goals.
- Keep track of runs and advances to 2B for the offensive team.

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- Switch the runners and defense every 5 to 7 minutes or when the defense gets 3 outs.
 - Stress game speed, hustle and good decision making for the base runners. You can employ a 3B coach if you wish.
 - Stress hustle to the ball and good decision making, especially by the out fielders. Young, inexperienced out fielders throw to home plate too often, especially when the play doesn't require that throw.
3. **Drill three – 2 Ball – The ultimate game situation drill.** This drill can be used with as few as 9 players or as many as four 9 player teams. The purpose of this drill is to replicate as many game situations as you, the coach can think up. This especially effective in areas where games can be difficult to come by on a regular basis. Here's how it works.
- Each game situation will be consistent through out the drill. If you set up a runner on 2B and one out, this situation stays that way through out the drill. After each batted ball and play ends, the runners start at 2B and there is one out.
 - The coach pitches to the hitters. The hitter has two swings to put the ball in play. If he does not make fair contact in these two swings, the next hitter comes to the plate. There is no penalty for failing to put the ball in play.
 - Keep track of either team outs or set a time limit on each hitting group or team. Rotate the next group to be hitters according to the criteria you have established.
 - After the play has ended the player will toss the ball to bucket or bag set up near the dugout or side fence. The coach will have a bucket of balls and be ready immediately for the next hitter.
 - You will be able to observe and comment constructively on all aspects of the game – team defense, base running, hitting, hustle, back up plays, individual defense and decision making in a competitive situation. Plus a whole lot more.
 - You can create any game situation you choose. Your imagination and creativity will be turned loose.
 - Professional teams and College programs use this drill extensively to create game situations in practice.
 - Other examples : R on 3B and 1 out, infield playing in; R on 1st and 2nd ,0 outs – bunt offense/bunt defense; Bases loaded, 1 out, double play or double cut?

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PRACTICE PLANS

PRACTICE PLAN NUMBER ONE

12 players and one coach; 14 players and 2 coaches; 15 players and 2 coaches, 2 parent volunteers. All with one field, one L screen, a back stop and one bull pen mound, one batting T. 15 player scenario has a pitching machine with electricity only to the main diamond. Actual practices – Brighton, Varazdin, Karlovacs, Athens, INSEP, Stockholm, Hull, Bonn, Prague, Dublin, Yugoslavia,

Practice Plan – 12 players/one coach – 13 to 15 year old players

Practice will be 90 minutes. The time will be a weekday evening. The field has a backstop, no side or outfield fence, no hitting tunnel or portable cage. There are two batting T's and one portable hitting net available. This practice is held during the season with enough day light to practice effectively until 8:30 pm.

6:00

1. Players arrive.
2. Short meeting and announcements.
3. Game on Saturday – meet at field, 9am.
4. Bring a lunch – double header.
5. Team pictures on Saturday also – bring packet and money.

6:10 – 6:20

1. Run (2 times around the whole field).
2. Stretch (in center field). Tim and Chris will be stretching leaders.

6:20 – 6:35

1. Catch playing by position.
2. Pitchers will do 20 throws with their change up grip.
3. Hat drill from 125 feet – final 8 throws, long hops!

6:35 – 6:45

1. Individual defense. Infielders(6) – form ground balls, roll to your partner – 10 glove side, 10 backhand, 10 short hop – all at shortstop.
2. Outfielders (4) with coach – drop step, line drives over your head.
3. Catchers (2) – block drill reaction – 2 rounds of 6, footwork on steal of third – 6 throws each.

6:45 – 6:50

1. Water break.

6:50 – 6:55

1. Base running home plate to first base. Run through on a ground ball.
2. Coaching points: quick out of the batter's box, touch closest part of the base to home plate, lean into the base, run through the base, chop steps and get under control after the run through.

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6:55 – 7:00

1. Set up field for batting practice.
2. Batting Tee's (2) and wiffle balls down right field line.
3. Bucket of baseballs and protective screen set up 40 feet from home plate, extra bucket in short center field.

7:00 – 7:25

Batting practice. 3 groups, 8 minutes per group, 4 players in each group.

<u>Group A</u>	<u>Group B</u>	<u>Group C</u>
(Live BP)	(Tee work)	(Shag)
Chris	Tim	Kevin
Sean	Pat	James
Mike	Jason	Dan
Clive	Jim	Paul

Rotation: A to C; C to B; B to A, continue in this rotation.

1. Live

1. **Round 1** – 2 bunts, 3 line drives up the middle.
1. **Round 2** – 3 hard hit balls, squeeze bunt.
1. **Round 3** – Game winner round, coach be the judge. Base runners react at 3B to ground ball and fly ball. Rotate with each hitter.
2. **Tee station** – 2 Tees, 2 players at each Tee. Set up T for pitch down the middle. 8 wiffle balls at each Tee. One player retrieves the balls, hitter sets ball on T and then swings. 8 swings and change.
3. **Shag station** – one player on the bucket in short center field, players will roll balls towards the player in charge of the bucket. Spread players out so they cover the whole outfield(no one in the infield)

Groups “hustle” to change and move to their next station.

7:25 – 7:30

1. Clean up, count the balls.
2. Each group responsible for picking up the area they ended the practice.

7:30 – Final words

1. Remarks by the coach.
2. End on a positive.
3. **Players take the gear to the coaches' car.**

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PRACTICE PLAN NUMBER TWO

Practice for a team of 14 players and 2 coaches – 10 –12 year old players.

Practice will be for 1 hour and 50 minutes. Field will have a back stop, be fenced in completely, and have one practice pitching mound in the left field foul area. There will be one hitting net for toss drills or Tee work. Practice will be held on Saturday morning and be the week prior to the first game.

10:00 – 10:05

1. Welcome players short meeting and announcements.
2. Share the practice objectives and general plan.
3. Announcements
4. First game a week from Saturday.
5. Uniform handout next practice (Wednesday).
6. It's Mike's birthday!

10:05 – 10:15

1. Run and stretch.
2. Laps/stretch in left field – James and Mike lead.

10:15 – 10:20

1. Base running. Home to 2B; 2B to home.
2. Groups with base coaches.

10:20 – 10:25

1. Base running. 1B to 3B.
2. Batter runner from home.
3. Base coaches. R at 1B must pick up coach before touching 2B and immediately after touching 2B.
4. Batter runner must be alert for the lead runner being held up by the coach.

10:25 – 10:35

1. Catch playing
2. 2 knee, chest to chest, 4 corner catch for all except Catchers (Dan and Jason).
3. Catcher will do special footwork and throw with Coach Pat.

10:35 – 10:40

1. Water break

10:40 – 10:47

1. Cuts and relays.
2. 1/2 OF plus catchers are runners at home plate.
3. 1/2 OF in LF. Infielders at their positions.
4. 1B down line, 1B to the left field gap.

10:48 – 10:55

1. OF switch, Dan and Jason move to SS and 3B.
2. Pete and Mark run.

10:55 – 11:00

1. Pop up communication – all on defense.

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🕒 11:00 – 11:05

1. Set up field for batting practice.
2. 3 hitting groups plus one for pitching practice.
3. 2 groups of 3 players, one group of 4 players.
4. Pitching group will be 2 pitchers and 2 catchers.

🕒 11:05 – 11:30

1. Set up – hitting net and 8 baseballs set up down RF line.
2. Hitting net set up 15 feet directly in front of home plate, bucket of balls on the first base line for coach.
3. Bucket in short center field for retrieving of the balls.
4. 8 balls down left field line for bunt station.

Rotation – A to B, B to C, C to A

Group A	Group B	Group C	Pitcher/catcher
(Live)	(Toss drill)	(Bunting)	(Bull pen)
Jason	George	Bud	Sandy
Bob	Tim	Paul	Leroy
Dan	Clive	James	Mike
(Head Coach)	Kevin	Pat	(Asst. Coach)

8 minutes for each station, pitching station will stay for all three rotations.

1. **Live** – side toss, rhythm and balance, hit the target.
2. **Toss** – firm/soft – change of speeds and balance
3. **Bunt** – Sacrifice to targets – fielders' gloves on the first and third base sides.
Hit the target.

Pitcher/catcher – Catchers with full gear, pitchers will throw 60 pitches in sets of 6 pitches, each simulating a batter. Extra P will stand in as a hitter. C will alternate with each 6 pitch set.

🕒 11:30 – 11:40

1. Pitching/catching group will hit.
2. Rest of the team will play their positions and react to each ball hit.
3. Throw the balls to the bucket located near third base.

🕒 11:40 – 11:45

1. Gather the equipment
2. Meet at the mound in the middle of the diamond.

🕒 11:45 – 11:50

1. Review practice
2. Comments on the positive things accomplished from individual players.
3. Team cheer and dismiss.
4. **Players take the gear to the coaches' car.**

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PRACTICE PLAN NUMBER THREE

Practice plan for T ball team – ages 6 and 7 years – 2 coaches and 2 parents

This is an early season practice, 2nd or 3rd of the season. Practice time is one hour and 15 minutes. Practice is on a Saturday. There are 15 players at practice

10:00am

1. Welcome players.
2. Introduce a new player, Paul, to the group.
3. Introduce the parent volunteers – Jason and Tom.
4. Explain the idea of having fun but following directions and trying the new things they will learn.

10:10

1. One lap around the field as a group.
2. Stretch.
3. Coach leads the stretching

10:20

1. Coaches demonstrate proper throwing technique.
2. Show the 2 knee drill and the face to face.
3. Emphasize the shoulder and elbow positions.
4. Also go over the glove position for catching the thrown ball.

10:28

1. Dry runs on throwing and catching. No ball.
2. Hands on with coaches and parents.
3. Correct the low elbow; show the palms together concept for catching the ball.

10:35

1. Partner up by skill levels.
2. Use soft dot balls for safety.
3. Coaches and parents are two to a line. Positive verbal feedback, stop and help individuals.
4. The lines are 12 feet a part to begin with. After 12 – 15 throws lengthen distance to 20 feet, then 25, 30, 35 etc. after about 8 – 10 throws at each distance. End at 60 – 65 feet

10:50

1. Outfield/infield fundamentals.
2. Divide into 3 groups. 4 minutes per group
3. Ground ball fundamentals – 1 coach rolling the ball
4. Fly ball fundamentals – 1 parent tossing the ball slightly above the head of the player
5. Fly balls over the head – on the run. 1 parent tosses the ball over the players head as the player drop steps and runs as if chasing a fly ball.
6. Head coach rotates between the groups looking for one on one coaching opportunities.

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🕒 11:02 – 11:20

Divide into 3 groups (coach has done this as part of his planning)

<u>Group 1</u>	<u>Group 2</u>	<u>Group 3</u>
Tim	Tanner	Chris
Mike	Scott	John
Pat	James	Dan
Jim	Paul	Tyler
Kevin	Rob	Phil

1. **Group 1** – Hit off T and base run. Runners at each base, hitter and on deck hitter. Each hitter gets three swings to put the ball in play. Base runners advance according to the type of hit. Start each hitter with the bases loaded. 5 minutes.
2. **Group 2** – Play in defensive positions. React to the batted ball. They will be the second hitting group
3. **Group 3** – Play in defensive positions. React to the batted ball. They will be the third hitting group.

As the groups rotate have them play different positions each rotation. Having the bases loaded will allow for force outs at each base. This should keep the tempo moving at a good pace.

Coaches will be stationed at:

1. Home plate to set the ball on the T and coach the hitters.
2. In the outfield to help with the defense.
3. A roving coach to help with base running and infield defense and
4. In the 3B coaches box, working with the runners.

🕒 11:20

1. Bring all players to the middle of the diamond.
2. A short review and a big cheer.
3. **Dismiss and take the gear to the coaches' car.**

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The information contained in this section is geared as both a template for practice organization and as a tool for you to be creative in your own unique baseball situation. As was mentioned earlier in this section you will be afforded the opportunity to personalize your practices to meet the needs of your players. Planning a practice does not require an inordinate amount of time nor does it need to be typed or copied for all of the players. Taking 30 minutes to plan a 90 minute practice should be enough time for you to incorporate the practice routines, rotations for batting practice and individual drills. As you progress into the season you will find that the games you play will be a primary tool for developing your practice plans. Making the connection between games and practice is an excellent teaching tool and will be something you will relate to in a meaningful way. Players who are kept busy, active and feel they are learning and improving will be more likely to continue to play baseball. If they are standing around and feel bored at practice, they will lose interest. Coach, you are the major influence – plan and good things will happen!