



How to Run a T-Ball Practice

The Principles

Some key principles in working with children of T-Ball age:

1. Work on the basics and repeat, repeat, repeat. Basic fielding, throwing, and hitting skills will need to be the focus.
2. Keep the children active through most or all of the practice. This can be accomplished by breaking into small groups to work on different skills. The number of stations will be limited by the number of adults that you have to help so, get parents involved.
3. Keep it fun for the kids. This is definitely not the “Pros”. Kids attention spans are typically short, so move children through different drills or stations frequently. Don’t let it be frustrating for you. Keep it positive...keep it fun. Winning is inconsequential at this stage of baseball.

The Practice

Begin the practice by separating the team into two groups. One group can work between First Base and Second Base and the other group can work between Second Base and Third Base. With one group, the coach will be on First Base and the group of children can form a line on the infield or outfield cut out. The coach will run through the *Ground-Ball Drill*, the *Pop-Up Drill*, and the *Catching & Throwing Drills*, which are shown on page #4 of this handout. All throws in this group will be made to the coach at First Base. The second group will do the same thing, with another coach on Third Base and the group of children lined-up on the outfield cut-out. All throws from this second group of children will be made to the coach at Third Base.

If a third parent is available, as the fielding drills are being run, you can have one player at a time go to the backstop using a tennis ball and instruct players on hitting off the Tee into the backstop.

When all the Fielding and Throwing Drills from page #4 are complete, you should run an Infield Practice. Outfielders should be in position for this part of the practice. Emphasize the importance of having the outfielders back up the play when hitting balls to the infielders. If the ball gets through the infield, have the infielders go out to the outfield cut out so the outfielders can relay the ball to them and they, in turn, will throw the ball back to the pitcher which will ultimately stop the play. During the Infield Practice, work mainly on making the out at first, then the force-out at second, and then the force-out at Third Base. During this workout, have the catcher covering home plate on all plays. After the infield practice is through, hit balls to the outfielders and have them relay the ball back to the pitcher via the cut-off man. This will stop play in a game situation. Next, run Hitting Practice with the batter running out the last ball hit.



Do this with the players in positions as if it were a real game. At the end of practice, you can run a Base Running Drill. Teach the players to run through the bag as if beating out a ground ball. Then, teach them to round and hold as if hitting a single into the gap. Also, teach runners on base to be aware of the coaches when the running. The runner should be looking for the Third Base coach's instruction when he is about two-thirds of the way to Second Base.

Things Players should know by the end of the season

1. Defensively, what to do with the ball when they get it. Tell the players repeatedly to ask themselves what they need to do with the ball before the ball is pitched. Comical reminder is the theme song from the TV Show "COPS" – "Bad Boy, Bad Boy, Watcha Gonna Do...Watcha Gonna Do if it Comes to You."
2. Situations: Such as a man on first no outs and the ball is hit to the shortstop. They should be learning at this time what each player's job is. You can teach this by quizzing them in the practice e.g., ask the Second Baseman where he needs to go when the ball is hit to shortstop...he should cover Second Base.
3. Base Running: Learning to watch the base coach(s) for directions such as: (a) running through the bag at First Base, (b) rounding and holding, and (c) rounding and going. Also, when to look for directions from the Third Base coach. Such as, hold at Second Base or continue to run to Third Base, or to hold at Third Base or to continue home.
4. Basic Hitting: The Three-Point Stance such as alignment of foot, belt buckle, and foot. Knowing how far to be from the plate when positioned in the batter's box. Learning to squash the bug with their rear foot and slightly stepping into the ball with their front foot. Learning to keep their head on the ball and watching the ball hit the bat. Tell them to remember "Shoulder-to-Shoulder" - Chin begins over the lead shoulder prior to the pitch, and ends over the rear shoulder after the pitch.

Points:

- Repetition of Drills will pay off by Season's End.
- Don't get frustrated with the kids if they are not quick to absorb the lesson. This is their first experience with organized baseball. Be persistent and patient with them. Repetition of drills is the key.
- If a player is doing something incorrectly, demonstrate the proper way that the skill should be performed and praise the child when he does it right.



Pony Ball Practice

Drills and practices in the Pont League are basically run the same as they are in T-Ball, but with more emphasis on situations. It is critical that all players understand who the cut-off man is on all outfield plays and that they are clear on the position of the cut-off man and relaying the ball back to the pitcher.

Example: On a ball hit to Right Field or Right/Center Field, the Second Baseman needs to position himself about halfway between the outfielder fielding the ball and Second Base. Proper position is with the Second Baseman as a mid-point in a straight line from the outfielder to Second Base. The Second Baseman should raise his hands and call for the ball so that the outfielder is reminded where it needs to be thrown. The Second Baseman should receive the ball, then turn and throw the ball to the shortstop who should be positioned on Second Base. Also, on this play, the Third Baseman should be covering his base, and the catcher should be covering Home Plate. This is the age where you need to get them thinking that everyone has a job and the game of baseball is 80% mental. Drill the shortstop and Second Baseman on who should be covering the base when the ball is hit to any outfield position. It should not be a mystery what needs to happen in a game when the ball goes into the outfield. Basic Rule: On an outfield hit, the infielders on the three corners move toward their bases (1st, 3rd & Home). The Shortstop & Second Baseman move in the direction of the hit. It may be difficult to have every player understand every position so you may want to develop a small rotation of players for each position with positions selected based on the skill level of each player.

Also, at this level we need to begin to teach the players to be more aggressive on the bases and emphasize heads up base running.

Hitting Drills

Teach the alignment of the Three-Point Stance with foot, belt buckle, and foot. All three should be aligned. Also, teach the proper position in the batter's box making sure that the player's position will allow him to extend his bat to the outside edge of the plate. Stress the squashing of the bug with the rear foot. Stress stepping into the ball slightly with the front foot. Stress the player's keeping their head on the ball to see the bat hit the ball on follow through. Tell them to remember "Shoulder-to-Shoulder" - Chin begins over the lead shoulder prior to the pitch, and ends over the rear shoulder after the pitch.

Remedies

- Pulling head off the ball: Take a baseball, paint half orange and half black. Do a soft toss to the player then ask him what color he hit. If he can't tell you then he is still pulling his head.
- Stepping into the bucket: Have the batter align with the tee, lay a bat behind him so that he can't step down the line. Continue to do this until he steps toward the pitcher.
- Not squashing the bug: Have the player distribute his weight at a 60 / 40 split with the 60% on his rear leg.



Drills

Ground Ball Drill

Have 3-5 Players line-up behind one another.

1st player moves to the line and assumes the ready position. The coach says “ready”, the player repeats “ready”, and the coach rolls the ball to the player. The player should field the ball with his knees bent, with his glove down and throwing hand open next to the glove, with his head down and with his glove hand leg slightly in front of the other leg. The player should watch the ball all the way into the glove and cradle the ball into his stomach. The player should quickly pop up, point their shoulder and glove-hand leg at the target and throw the ball back to the coach. The player then goes to the back of the line.

If the player has a hard time watching the ball into the glove, have them remove their hat and put the brim of the hat into their mouth and repeat the drill. This will force them to concentrate on watching the baseball all the way into the glove.

The coach should roll the ball to the left and to the right during this drill. Players need to learn how to move to the ball. Urge players to hustle and praise them for good hustle, good glove position, and good throws.

Pop-up Drill

Line the players up the same as the ground ball drill.

1st player moves to the line and assumes the ready position. The coach says “ready”, the player repeats “ready”, and the coach tosses a pop-up. You should start off with low throws and adjust with the skill level of the player. The player should catch the ball with two hands out in front. After the catch, the player should bring the ball and glove to their chest, point their shoulder and glove-hand leg toward the target and throw the ball back to the coach. The player then goes to the back of the line.

The coach can throw pop-ups slightly to the left and slightly to the right during this drill if the player’s skill level allows. Players need to learn how to move to the ball. Urge players to hustle and praise them for good hustle, good glove position, and good throws.

Catching and Throwing Drills

Line the players up the same as the other drills.

1st player moves to the line and assumes the ready position. The coach says “ready”, the player repeats “ready”, and the coach throws the ball. While in a standing position, the player places his throwing hand next to his glove, and catches the ball using two hands. The player immediately transfers the ball to his throwing hand, points his shoulder and glove-hand leg toward the target and throws the ball back to the coach. The player then goes to the back of the line. If the children are having difficulty with their gloves in this drill, improvement might be seen if you perform the drill with a tennis ball and with the coach under handing the ball to the player.

You can run these drills as frequently as the children’s attention span will allow. This could be about 10-15 minutes per skill per practice session.