

1. Throwing mechanics – Baseball is a game of catch, this is the most important aspect of the game and should be a strong point of emphasis at ALL levels! Can't emphasize this enough!!!

- a. Grip (4-seam, smaller hands may need a 3 finger grip)
 - a. Most Instructional level kids will not understand a 4-seam grip but Mite level and up (some 1st grade and all 2nd grade) should be able to grasp the concept of a 4-seam grip. As they age a proper grip will help them play good catch.
 1. Proper grip promotes stronger and more accurate throws.
- b. General throwing motion is Sky, Scratch, Throw - We can break it down a little further.....
- c. Scope Position
 - a. Wave Goodbye to the PS3
 - b. Front Glove/Elbow/Shoulder pointed toward target
 - c. Elbows Above Water, Like a Goal Post
 - d. Feet/Stance - Athletic position, Bent knees, Hips to Target – Skateboard
- d. Throwing Motion - *It's more than throwing arm. Typically front side and legs are underemphasized! VERY COMMON, young kids do not use their front side properly. It's very difficult to hit a target and strenuous on the throwing elbow and shoulder when the front arm does not scope to target. Also, accuracy and velocity can be attained with proper lower body usage.*
 - a. Say Hello to your baseball buddies
 - b. Front Arm Strong, Glove and front shoulder lead toward the target. Front Elbow tucks into side – Protect The Skittles. Glove ends near chest (like holding a football)
 1. It's a vertical motion, like a windmill – miss high/low
 2. It's NOT a helicopter motion – miss left/right [exception shoulders]
 3. Load up body weight and send it towards the target. This is done with the bent knees and pushing off of the back leg.
 4. Another way to load up is Power step back foot over front foot, just prior to scope position.
 5. Also back foot under front foot, just prior to scope position.
- e. Follow Through
 - a. Throwing hand reaches toward the target
 - b. Nose points toward the target
 - c. Backfoot steps over and follows the path of the ball
 - d. Upon release of the ball, good partner in ready catching position
- f. Highlights
 - a. Have a consistent throwing routine
 - b. Play catch with a purpose
 - c. Be very diligent to encourage kids to play proper catch
 - d. Spend more time than you think on playing proper catch at practices
 - e. Encourage kids to play catch at home away from practice

2. Practicing both throwing and catching (drills and points of emphasis)

- a. Have all players practice catching thrown balls with coaches or adults throwing
 - a. Have the kids be ready to catch the ball like a middle infielder that is about to receive the ball **(knees bent, both hands up around the chest, palms up)**
 - b. Have the kids learn to catch the ball out in front of their body
 - c. Emphasis 2 hand, this helps eyes track the ball into the glove
 - d. If the ball is thrown above the waist, the glove should face up to catch the ball
 - e. If the ball is thrown below the waist, often the glove should be turned down to catch the ball
 - f. This can be done with baseballs or tennis balls (depending on the skills levels of the kids)
 - g. Aim for the glove side of the kids when throwing to them at first, once they show that they can catch then you can start to throw to different areas.
- b. Underhand Feed/Throw

- a. I like to roll grounders to the kids and have them turn double plays to emphasize this, but learning to throw underhand for short range throws is a very important skill to teach. A high percentage of outs are short flips to bases.
 - 1. It makes it safer for everyone on the diamond when kids know when to step on the base themselves for the out or what type of throw they need to make when a throw is required.
 - 2. Have the kids throw underhand flips, but not side flips
 - 3. Like a pitcher or hitter, the knees should be bent and the player should stride towards the target so that the ball stays flat and accurate
 - 4. I like to equate it to bowling as bowlers need to stay low and not let the arm come up (otherwise they kick you out of the bowling alley!)
 - c. Relay Drill (for Mites level and up)
 - a. Open up glove side to catch (if possible)
 - b. Hands up to show the thrower that you are ready and that you are the one to throw to.
 - c. The throws need to be accurate to make a good relay work.
 - d. This drill can be done in groups of 3 or larger.
 - d. Four Corners Drills (for Mites level and up)
 - a. This is a great drill for kids of most ages as it incorporates throwing, catching, proper footwork.
 - b. Follow the ball variation – roll front, flip left or right, have player follow the throw
- 3. General Fielding Drills (and points of emphasis) for the Infield**
- a. Fielding Progression
 - a. Ready Position – Knees bent in athletic stance or Deep and Creep
 - 1. The goal is to get kids moving into the play, rather than sitting in an idle position. It takes constant reminding to not stand around like a zombie and be ready to attack the baseball from a good athletic position.
 - b. Approach – Airplane, land the airplane, don't crash, under control
 - c. Triangle Position – Feet wide with Hands out, butt down, in triangle position
 - d. Hands – top or side alligator, just like catching a baseball, two hands helps eyes see it into the glove, helps control an erratic bounce and will allow faster transition to scope position.
 - e. "Catch" the ball, Draw the ball toward belly button and proceed to power step and scope/skateboard position. Stay Low.
 - b. Hitting ground balls to the kids is fine and something to do at least during some of the practice time, but also work on throwing grounders for the following reasons
 - a. It is easier for 2-3 coaches to split the team out and roll grounders in smaller spaces
 - 1. More reps for the kids
 - 2. Less standing around in lines for the kids
 - 3. More coaches and assistants can feed solid grounders by hand at the lower levels than by hitting them – It is easier to vary the speed or roll a ball that they need to move right or left by hand.
 - b. Developing good infielders isn't just about whether a kid can field a really fast grounder or make a great play, but how consistently they can make routine plays with good skills. Mixing up the types of grounders but giving the kids lots of reps with mid-level grounders is a great way to develop repetitive skills and develop confidence!
 - c. To increase number of GB reps, set up a screen at 1B as a target. At the same time 3B, SS, P, 2B can all field ground balls at the same time and throw into a net at 1B.
- 4. Position Emphasis**
- a. Underhand feeds around 2nd base
 - a. Anticipate a bad throw. Stay behind the bag until you see where the ball is going for a potential double play. If overcommit there is a high probability the catch cannot be made. Generally when you see botched plays around a base it is due to what appears as a bad feed when in reality it's due to a bad setup by the receiver.

1. Wherever the throw takes you, tap the bag and clear the baseline on that side of the bag.
 2. Palms up around the chest when getting ready to receive the ball.
- b. 1st Base
- a. Knees bent with feet on both corners of the bag in fair territory.
 1. Don't stride out to catch the ball until you know where the ball is going
 2. Step towards the ball with your glove side leg.
 3. You can come off the bag if the throw is bad and still go back to tag the runner
 4. Playing kids at 1st base in games that can pay attention and catch the ball is important from a safety standpoint.

5. Catcher

- a. At any level, the catcher has a major influence on the pitcher's ability to get into a rhythm. The catcher sets the tone. The pitcher and catcher working in tandem to control the pace of the game. The catcher and pitcher positions are the most important positions in the game of baseball. If the catcher position is not taken seriously the other 7-8 fielders are penalized and will drift away from the game very quickly.
- b. Putting an emphasis on the catcher position is going to enhance the game experience for everyone. At the Cub level we are going to allow stealing of 2nd base and 3rd base. The hope is to create more excitement in the game – for everyone, pitcher, catcher, runner, batter, fielders! Baseball is a team game so getting middle infielders and outfielders involved is a positive. There are no negative consequences for throwing down and taking a chance. If the catcher and middle infield make a play on the runner and the ball gets away, the runner can't advance to the next base.
- c. Cub Level – in the grand scheme, allowing advancement to 2nd base will not significantly impact the game. The reality is there are a high percentage of walks, which means a high percentage of back to back walks. The opportunity for a catcher to throw out a runner at 2nd base is a free chance for the defense to make an out. The emphasis on the pitcher "to play catch" with a catcher is being promoted with this concept which is good for the game.
- d. Catcher Focus Areas
 1. Good Targets – big open mitt staying still over the plate
 2. Don't have to catch balls in the dirt (use the gear to smother it)
 3. If missed, show some hustle and go get it
 4. Throw the ball back to the pitcher harder than it's pitched.
 5. Throw the ball to the pitcher from feet.
 6. On throws to 2nd, Low head high throws, no arc, Bounce it with a long hop!
 7. Location to the Plate – As close as possible without risk of getting hit by the bat
 - a. Lining up too deep from the plate is difficult for umpire to see the strike
 - b. Too far back is difficult for the pitcher to hit the target
- e. Baseball is a great team game, but it is even better when there is a rhythm to the game! Please don't just use games as the time to try out raw pitchers and catchers. Not everyone is a pitcher or catcher at the start of each season. Work with potential pitchers and catchers in practice and other opportunities to develop skills and confidence.
 1. Start with simple drills that rely on good targets and catching the ball.
 2. Footwork and throwing (proper footwork comes from proper playing catch.)
 3. Jump turn is an advanced skill for kids that like catcher and want to learn.
 4. Blocking drills are fun and simple. Use tennis balls for safety if necessary.

6. Pitching

- a. Baseball is a great game, but it is even better when there is a rhythm to the game! Not everyone is a pitcher to start each season. Work with them and put them in a position to succeed after they are developed.
- b. **Rocker – Pivot – Balance – Stride – Follow Thru - Fielder**
- c. All pitching mechanics build upon the throwing mechanics that are being stressed to all of the players.

- a. Point your glove (and nose) at your target [scope & front side strong]
- b. Take your arm back (stay away from short-arming the ball) [wave goodbye]
- c. Bend your knees [load, use the legs]
- d. Stride towards the home plate and the catcher mitt [skateboard & use the legs]
- d. Sometimes less is more
 - a. Having a windup like Bob Feller worked for Bob Feller and others, but the main goal of pitching at youth levels is to do the following:
 - 1. Throw strikes on a consistent basis
 - 2. Find balance before releasing the ball
 - 3. Use your body (legs and front side), throwing arm, and hand in a proper fashion
 - 4. Finding mechanics that can be repeated over and over
 - 5. Deception can be important to getting the hitter out, but deception should not be more important than the things listed above!
 - e. Work on throwing out of a windup and out of the stretch
 - f. Pickoffs - Discussion
 - g. Pitch Counts and Pitching Rotations - Discussion

7. General Fielding Drills for the Outfield/Infield

- a. Using tennis balls for Instructional for sure when throwing pop-ups for the first time. Probably Mites as well as you should find out what the capabilities of the group are for catching both pop-ups and fly balls
 - a. Starting off with pop-ups that come down near the glove side of the player is a safe way to start.
 - b. Have the players catch pop-ups above their body, if possible. The vast majority of balls hit in the air that get caught can be caught by a defender hustling into position and having their feet under them as they catch the ball over their throwing shoulder.
 - c. Make the kids run and move some if they show they can protect themselves and have enough glove skills.
 - d. Have them do DB/WR drills (running away from the coach/thrower and catching over the shoulder catches) is great if they have the general glove skills to get something from it (Mites Level and up).
 - e. It also is great to work on having outfielders line up in their position and work on calling the ball and finding who to throw it to in the infield (Mites Level)
 - f. The goal of all of these practices is to develop skills and confidence while hoping that they are having fun!

8. General Hitting Progression – Many different styles, some commonalities should be emphasized

- a. Routine – Starts in the on deck circle, all good hitters have a routine
- b. Grip – knocking knuckles – index fingers both point upward to the sky
- c. Stance – open, straight, closed – both eyes on the pitcher
- d. Feet – open, straight, closed – toes should point straight or slightly inward, helps for rotation
- e. Feet Position relative to plate – up/back, outside/inside – error on the side of closer to the plate
- f. Bat Angle – 45deg, knob pointed toward corner in the opposite side batters box
- g. Rotation – The back hip/foot pivot starts the swing, emphasis back hip rotation
- h. Weight distribution – more weight on the back foot (50/50 – 60/40)
- i. Stride/Load – Keep Quiet, Less is Better
- j. Bat Path – Down, level extend through the zone, up
- k. Rotation – The back hip/foot pivot starts the swing, emphasis back hip rotation
- l. Follow-thru, count to 3 – falling backwards on heels is not good, toward plate ok, balanced is best!
- m. After Contact – At this level emphasize safety in dropping the bat, draw a circle if necessary

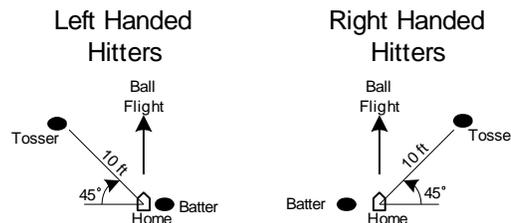
9. Hitting Philosophy

- a. Fundamentals – working on hitting mechanics
- b. Repetitions – Quality swings, muscle memory

- c. Physical – Natural Strength, Good mechanics help overcome strength deficiencies
- d. Emotional – Level mindset, Ability to balance times of failure which far outweigh times of success
- e. Focus on hitting balls over and between SS & 2B.
- f. Short and Quick, swing knob to the ball
- g. Hit “Inside” the ball – Higher probability for solid contact, Barrel stays in hitting zone longer.
- h. Comfortable, relaxed, confident – swing like you don’t care, loose muscles are fast muscles.

10. General Hitting Drills

- a. Find good accurate adult pitchers for practice!
 - a. Speed and pitching style matter, but the main thing is if you can find people who consistently throw pretty well, the kids will adjust (hopefully!)
 - b. It helps to find a pitching speed and style that helps most of the hitters on the team
 - 1. For Instructional, there is nothing wrong with throwing an accurate underhand throw from 25 feet or throwing off a knee. Many of us are much taller than the kids and I think flat pitches are more fun and better in the long run to hit than high arc pitches.
 - 2. Mites is 40 feet and the pitching should be overhand. There will occasionally be those that throw from a knee.
 - 3. BP for older players Cub and up, if accuracy is an issue short toss underhand behind and L-Screen is an efficient way to deliver pitches.
- b. Have hitting stations in practice rather than just having the whole team fielding with one player hitting.
 - a. Soft toss (see diagrams below) and hitting short toss are ways to develop hitters while getting more reps than general batting practice. More adults are capable of doing this than throwing strikes from distance. Short toss can be dangerous to the pitcher without the use of a L-screen, but tennis balls and waffle balls are safe. When feeding soft toss, aim firm and flat at the front



hip. Do this from the knees, not standing up on side of the hitter. Tossers should be 45deg relatively close to the batter.

- b. Hitting off a tee is important for every level of BAA as major league hitters often still start from a tee before taking batting practice.
 - 1. A tee is a great station to work on the proper arc of a swing
 - 2. Tee work can often happen in a small area if you use whiffle balls or something that does not travel far.
 - 3. If possible, put a home plate or base behind the tee so that the kids know where to generally set up if they are going to hit the ball up the middle or slightly pull it.
 - 4. It’s not a race, go slow and allow the hitter to work on routine.
 - 5. Hitters should watch imaginary pitcher and envision a pitch coming in, not staring at the ball on the tee.
- c. Each kid is different and there are different ways to hit, but try and improve skills within what each kid does
 - a. Having kids set up in a good athletic stance will reduce lots of hitting problems
 - 1. It helps to have the feet shoulder width apart or so with the hitters on the balls of their feet

- a. Really narrow stances can lead to huge strides and a lack of balance or consistency. I would let them hit that way if they are the next Babe Ruth though!
- b. A huge stance can lead to a lack of balance and a long swing. Jeff Bagwell was great with this, but he was a pro.
- b. The arc of the swing is a really big deal!
 - 1. Having the elbows out or back elbow up is not necessary for a hitter to have success.
 - a. Some hitters like Yaz were big on having the back elbow up. I don't want kids to dip their shoulder, but the elbow up is not the only way to fight that problem.
 - b. The elbows come down and in when you throw your hands at the ball, so I am fine with a solid hitter having their elbows in.
 - c. I have never liked any sort of exaggerated front elbow out. It is good for both power and bat arc to have the front armpit closed.
 - 2. Having the hands holding the bat on your back shoulder (in general terms) is a basic steady way to start to put together a good swing.
 - a. Attacking the ball by throwing your hands and barrel in a tight downward arc is a great way to hit the ball.
 - i. It gives the hitter more time to read the pitch if the hitter has not false movements with the hands. Let it get deep.
 - ii. The hitter will be more likely to hit line drives
 - 3. If a player has a hard time hitting to all fields or something looks off, check the following:
 - a. Are the knuckles lined up within an acceptable level?
 - b. Is the hitter casting his bat before swinging?
 - c. Is the hitter upper cutting in an extreme way?
 - d. Is the swing a sweeping swing that they only hit the ball out away from them (see the knuckles)?
 - e. Are they moving the back foot too much or moving away from the ball?
 - f. Like throwing, what direction is the front foot stride? Common flaw "step in the bucket" will reduce chance for solid contact.

11. Running the Bases

- a. On a ground ball in the infield, have all runners run through 1st base and then start to break down past the bag.
 - a. Don't lunge, short quick choppy step through the base
 - b. Touch the front of the base, not the top or backside
 - c. Always touch the base, never know if there's a bobble or a bad throw
 - d. Turn to the right (don't veer right, just rotate right) as you run through the bag to see if the ball was overthrown
 - e. Start to chop your feet
 - f. Do not turn left as the umpire may think the runner attempted to go to 2nd base and could be tagged out
- b. Show how a runner should round the bag on a hit to the outfield
 - a. Hit the inside corner of the base to get to the next base as quickly as possible
 - b. Widen the angle as you approach first base to you can hit the inside corner of the base and head to 2nd base in a very tight route. Banana turn, use cones if necessary.
- c. Show how to return to the bag after either leading off or after getting a single
 - a. Hit the back corner of 1st base with your left foot and then spin away from the tag.
- d. Show angles to rounding bases when trying or thinking about advancing two bases.
- e. Read signs from the coach
- f. Left – Right – Shuffle Shuffle – far enough for a step and a dive if necessary
- g. Trust your instincts, challenge yourself and the fielders

12. Resources

We are all students of the game! There are multiple techniques and ways to teach baseball fundamentals. A simple YouTube search will return thousands of tutorials, many resonate commonalities to the techniques discussed in this clinic. Explore! Here are some examples:

- **Grip** (3:30min, emphasis on 4seam) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dFUes1pd98>
- **Throwing** (4:30min, emphasis fluid continuous motion) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyGMq_2IeM0
- **Throwing** (3min, emphasis on front side pull) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrbdMwNCcg>
- **Throwing** (3:14min, wall drill, ball flip drill, thumb down drill, elbow up drills, footwork drill) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HYaOIDEamHY>
- **Throwing** (15min, longer but great breakdown) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmNFDti4Oes>
- **Throwing** (3min, throwing knuckles away with front elbow target and tuck) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5PbsQ3g33YQ>
- **Throwing** (6min, Top Gun Throwing series 5 step progression) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9XCX3_MNvg
- **Grip and Throwing** (5min, basic throwing mechanics, grip, power position, front arm tuck) - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yMo2g58k_Q
- **Catching** (2:30min, catch drills, two hand catch, short flips high reps, wider flips to promote feet movement) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JTuopUgmg1w>
- **Catching** (4:45min, glove orientation tips, confidence with glove, specific for kids that struggle with the glove) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HugaaVlmNo>
- **Infield** (16min, balanced athletic position, alligator or sandwich, GB drills) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nlh5wIXLSkg>
- **Base Running** (4:30, running to 1st base, straight & banana/question mark turn) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E0hQU51ms58>
- **Pitcher** (1:48, Balance, Power, Finish) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEztxVktWA8>
- **Pitcher** (3:47, 6 steps, weight shift, pivot, lift (balanced), stride/separate, rotation, follow through) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJ7YIR6bY1M>
- **Catcher** (5:23, basic drills and techniques for catchers) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArB259fVM78>
- **Hitting** (1:30min, grip and stance for youth) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BYSayqWILU>
- **Hitting** (14min, balance, stance, limited movement, grip, Back Elbow DOWN, load, head center, hips rotate, still good balance) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5NQfoC9Paw8>