

Game Planning

Just as important as an organized practice plan is to plan out your game routine. What follows below should help guide you for your first game.

PRE-GAME ROUTINE

- Clearly communicate through email and at practice what time you want the players to arrive before the game, I usually recommend 30 minutes prior to the game. Be understanding that some parents won't be able to get their kids to games early because of work conflicts.
- Since your players cannot drive, they have no control over what time they arrive, but as soon as they hop out of the car, they can hustle to the dugout, especially if they are late. Set the expectation with your players that they should hustle to the dugout and be ready to warm up as soon as they get dropped off, especially if they are running late. This is less of an expectation for t-ballers. Encourage them to hustle, but know that t-ballers are probably 5 years old and following directions might be hard for them.
- Once a majority of the team has arrived, start your warmup. For T-ball and A ball I recommend running the bases. It's a good reminder and also a way to get out the excess energy before the game. Have every kid line up and go one at a time. Run through first base, run to 2nd base and stop, run to 3rd base and stop, and run through home.
- Have the kids line up to do dynamic warmup drills, the younger they are, the shorter the warmup session should be.
- Have them circle up to stretch and while they are stretching go over your team rules and pick 1-2 things for them to focus on during the game.
- AA - have the kids pair up to play catch and have them play catch with intention, it's not fetch, make sure they are hitting each other in the chest with the ball. For T-ball and A Ball I recommend breaking them into the 3 small groups below instead of having them play catch.
- Break the players into 3 small groups and have them rotate.
 - Group 1 - work on fielding and throwing - roll them the ball, make sure they have proper form and have them field and throw back to a coach.
 - Group 2 - have them work on catching or for AA throw them easy pop flies to try to catch.
 - Group 3 - have the players hit off a batting tee into a net and if you want later in the season you can work on soft toss or throw them wiffle balls for your AA kids.
 - **Group 4 (AA only)** - the kids you plan to pitch in the game should throw a few warmup pitches to a catcher or coach before the game. I recommend they throw to a coach, otherwise your pitcher will only get in a few pitches while waiting for the catcher to run down the ball.
- After everyone is warmed up, bring them into the dugout and go over your lineup. I recommend having it printed off to post in the dugout and have extra copies for your coaches to hold onto during the game. Have T-ball and A ball kids sit in their batting

order in the dugout. AA make sure the players know the player hitting before them so they are ready to go.

- Talk to your coaches before the game and make sure they are clear on who is coaching 1st, coaching 3rd, and who is helping the kids hit. You also probably want someone in the dugout making sure the kids know when it is their time to hit and in general keeping an eye on them, so having a fourth parent is helpful.
- **T-ball** - the head coach is usually at home plate. Ask the kids before they hit which direction they are running. Set up the tee to the right height for them, position them properly, and have them take a couple practice swings. Then set up the ball and let them hit the ball. If the tee is knocked over or the ball is barely tipped and falls in front of the tee, call a foul ball and let them hit again. If they continue to miss the ball over and over again, any contact at all, even if weak counts and tell them to run. When it's your last batter, tell the opposing team "last batter" and tell your player after they hit the ball they can run around the bases. Remember to encourage the other kids on the bases to keep running since it's the last batter. The last batter of the inning runs around the bases should be discussed pre-game with the opposing coach. This is not an official rule, but a fun one that the kids always enjoy.
- **A Ball** - the head coach is usually managing the pitching machine. Make sure the kids take a few practice swings and are positioned correctly at home plate before pitching the ball to them. If they don't hit the ball, set up the batting tee for them (prior to Memorial Day). Have the tee ready to go.
- **AA Ball** - watch the opposing player pitch and when they get to four balls, go out to pitch. Make sure you know how many strikes are on your player and when you get to five pitches, let the batter know they have to swing at this next pitch or they are out.

GAME PLAN

- Have your lineups established and printed off. You can use this [template](#) when creating your lineups. You will most likely follow the lineup and cycle through it for the remainder of the season. The last batter who was able to hit in the game prior, will hit last in the next game and the player who was on deck would be your first batter for the next game.
- Have your positions figured out as well. You do not want to wing it and you don't want kids pressuring you before they go out into the field asking to play specific positions.
- You will need to make sure to keep track of minimum position requirements. For T-ball you can cycle the players evenly through each position. If you have 9 players, play with four outfielders, so you don't have one player on the bench by themselves. If you have 10 players or more, only put 8 players in the field (no catcher) so the players on the bench have someone to hang with. Never put a player on the bench by themselves. Also make sure to cycle the players through the bench evenly too. Do not play a player in a position for more than one inning per game. One thing you might want to think about is not having a kid who might not be paying attention and has issues catching playing first base when you have the kid who really pays attention and throws really hard playing pitcher or second base.

- I highly encourage you to have every kid play every position. None of your players should be establishing positions this early. Also make sure every player has a chance to play catcher (AA ball). Most won't want to do it, but they also might have fun with it.
- In AA, think of every player at the beginning of the season as a pitcher. Some kids may opt out and other kids might not be physically ready. A clear expectation I've made sure to communicate to all of my kids and parents is if the kid can throw the ball past home plate they can pitch. I don't care if they are accurate or not, they just need to be able to throw the ball from the pitcher's mound past home plate. If they cannot do that, they can practice pitching, but they won't pitch in a game yet. This is an important lesson about respecting your team and the game. Letting a kid pitch who has a 0% chance of throwing the ball past home plate is disrespectful to the team, the opponents, and to the families watching the game. They can pitch in practice and they can pitch in a game at some point in the season, they just need to work on improving their throwing in practice and also outside of practice at home too. Give them a goal and a path to achieve it. This will be more rewarding for them.
- Play with outs. It is not your responsibility to pull opposing kids off the field when they get out (in T-Ball and A-Ball), but you are responsible for making sure if your players get out you cheer them for hustling and ask them to come off the field. In AA, the umpire will call and enforce outs. Don't be afraid to pull your t-ballers and A-ballers off the field when they get out. If you don't make it a big deal, it won't be a big deal for them either.
- When on defense in T-ball and A-ball you can have a coach or two out in the outfield helping direct your players. You will need to position them and make sure they are paying attention and aware of where they need to go with the ball when it's hit to them.
- Be aware of the rules. For example in T-Ball every player hits regardless of the number of outs. For A-Ball and AA-Ball there is a five run limit per inning or sides can be changed after 3 outs. Make sure you are clear on the rules.
- Make sure you and the opposing coach are clear on game time limits. Keep an eye on the time and know when you are wrapping up a game. Ideally both teams get an equal number of at bats before the game ends.
 - T-ball the game time limit is 75 minutes or four innings
 - A Ball the game time limit is 90 minutes or six innings
 - AA Ball the game time limit is 120 minutes or six innings.

POST GAME

- Before the end of the game make sure to ask the other coach what their team name is.
- Bring the players together at the end of the game before they run off to play and celebrate with their families and for sure wait on snacks. They will want to run off to snacks immediately. Bring the team together, tell them they did a great job, because they will have completed a game and that is an accomplishment. If you want, you can highlight 1-2 players each game (just make sure every player gets a chance to be highlighted at least once before the end of the season and I recommend writing their names down to track things) and tell the team what they did well (got outs, they listened really well, they cheered on their teammates, they swung the bat hard, etc.) and then have them do a cheer for the other team "2-4-6-8 who do we appreciate, other team!"

Have them line up to give high fives if the other team wants to do that and you are OK doing that. After your players recognize the other team, they are welcome to be released for snacks. If you need to, ask the parent responsible for snacks to wait to give them away until after your team has had a chance to high five the other team. Do not use the end of the game meeting to tell the kids what they did wrong. Focus on and reinforce the positive. Use practices or pre-game warmups to talk about the things they can focus on improving.

Something you should be focused on from day 1 through the last game of the season is team building. Baseball is a team sport, not an individual sport, so building relationships with your players and between your players during the season is crucial, plus it makes the experience so much more fun.

[Team Building Recommendations](#)