Broadneck Baseball & Softball Club

Coaching Approach & Concepts

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Introduction

For the purposes of teaching baseball effectively, we have divided all players into the following age groups: T-Ball, Rookies, Juniors & Minors, Majors, Babe Ruth & Colt. Some kids mature physically much faster than others. Motor skill development varies as well, but for the most part you can teach similar skills to the kids within these separate age breakdowns and have them experience success.

The Learning Objective Approach

We believe strongly in keeping things simple when teaching the game of baseball. With that in mind, we have developed six goal areas for each of these age groups. You'll want to keep these six goal areas in mind every time you plan a practice. They represent the fundamental building blocks for success. The goals at one level need to be accomplished before the goals at the next level can be pursued. If you are able to move beyond the goals for a given age group, great! Consider yourself an expert coach. But, don't feel that you've failed if you don't get beyond the goals for a particular age group. If your team achieves these basic goals, you should consider your season a success. If you don't reach the goals, that's okay, too. Learning to enjoy exploring challenges is a key part of a growth mindset. Combine that with celebrating successes and you've provided a very positive and productive athletic experience. Stress all of the positive things that were accomplished and try to figure out how to accomplish all of your goals the next season. Remember: Look to the future and learn from the past.

Always keep in mind that just as some kids mature faster than others, some kids will master fundamental skills faster than others. Stay in tune with each child's needs and abilities so that you can tailor your work with each player during a particular drill to suit his or her situation. For example, if you're working on catching ground balls properly, some kids will be ready to field balls that are rolled or hit harder or to one side or the other before others. You can either group kids according to skill level, or make sure that you adapt the drill to meet everyone's individual needs and abilities on a player-by-player basis.

The Fun in Fundamentals

Teaching an athlete how to enjoy learning a skill is as important (or it could be argued is more important) than learning the skill itself. The usefulness of a particular baseball skill is measured. The lifelong benefit of the athlete adopting the orientation that trying new things, working through initial setbacks, and developing a new skill is a joyful process is boundless.

As you plan and execute practices, think like an elementary school PE teacher. You'll do some teaching, but most of the time spent will be in games that apply the skills. The students are able to explore use of the new skill while enjoying the invigorating experience of competing. Another good point of orientation is to picture elementary school field day (the day long event in the spring where the PE teacher sets up dozens of stations and games. There are young students using all of

the concepts of athletics (coordination, flexibility, teamwork, overcoming setbacks, sportsmanship, etc). The consistency of enjoyment from the students in that environment is nearly 100% and is independent of how well they perform a given physical skill.

Your primary goal should be to structure your practice and game experiences in such a way that the players all want to play the following season.

Coaching Concepts

The last category of our approach is to be aware of two teaching and training concepts. The first is block vs random training.

Block Training vs Random Training

Block training isolates a particular skill so the athlete can build comfort and confidence with the skill. An example of block training is repeating a rolled or hit ground ball to an athlete's left so they develop a feel for moving to their left to field and then getting their shoulders around to line up a throw to 1B. Random training injects a game like aspect and some challenge into drills by varying the skill needed to accomplish the goal. An example of random training would be a mixture of balls to the left and right. The shift between block and random training is one of the coach's principle tools in striking the balance with establishing confidence and creating challenges to keep young athletes engaged and growing.

Internal vs External Cueing

The second teaching and training concept is internal and external cueing. Internal cuing is when a coach suggests the physical solution to the athlete. Examples of internal cuing include "swing the bat a little more level" or "keep your fingers behind the ball pushing through as you release." External cuing is a results based approach where the coach sets up an external goal to force the athlete to make the necessary internal physical adjustment to achieve the goal. Examples of external cuing related to the hitting internal cue above include "hit the ball in the air past this cone" or "hit the ball into the fence above this line." Examples of external cuing related to the throwing internal cue above include "throw this 2 inch wide roll of tape and keep the tape 'up and down' as it moves through the air" or "throw this ball with black electrical tape on it so that the black line stays 'up and down.' Both internal and external cues have their place. Internal cues can be more efficient (to make a quick adjustment). External cues are generally more enjoyable for the athlete and also can have a longer term effect.

Finding Fast Paced Fun in a "Slow" Game

Coaches can help young players appreciate that the movement in the game is limited between pitches, but that doesn't mean the game is "slow." Sure it is slower from a consistency standpoint compared to basketball, soccer, and lacrosse. But by encouraging all of the players to move every

time a ball is put in play and to strive to enhance their thought process and communication between pitches to prepare to move to the correct positions, you'll help them learn to appreciate and enjoy the fast paced thinking parts of the game.

A Great Part of our Game = A Great Challenge

The last thing to keep in mind when coaching and teaching the game of baseball is the aspect of being a "solo performer." The game of baseball gives unique opportunities when compared to other commonly played youth sports. Those opportunities to perform alone at the plate, on the mound, and have relatively large spaces between you and your teammates on defense with a clear impact (safe or out) based on your catching, throwing, and decision making are a double edged sword. On the plus side, there's an exhilaration with being a solo performer. On the down side, is the pressure athletes feel in those situations and the challenge in dealing with a failure in that "solo spot light." Use our mental side of the game suggestions to address these items and also find space for practicing a positive response to a negative play in your practice plans.