

Capitol Hill Little League Skills Benchmarks & Development Plan



General League Philosophy	2
Practice Philosophy	2
Game Philosophy	2
Dugout Behavior	2
Parent Guidelines and Expectations	2
Batting Benchmarks	3
Base Running Benchmarks	4
Throwing Benchmarks	5
Fielding (Infield) Benchmarks	6
Fielding (Outfield) Benchmarks	7
Pitching Benchmarks	8
Catching Benchmarks	9
Running a Successful Practice	10
Sample A Practice Outline	12
Sample AA Practice Outline	13

General League Philosophy

Capitol Hill Little League (CHLL) provides a place for children ages 5-16 to have the opportunity to learn the game of baseball and softball. While set in a competitive environment, CHLL strives first and foremost to teach our players not only the rules of the game and the skills needed to play but to play the "right way" with honesty, respect, sportsmanship, confidence, responsibility, perseverance, and good judgment. Everyone involved in CHLL baseball and softball is expected to respect the umpires, their teammates, their coaches, the fields, and especially the players and coaches on the opposing team. We expect 100% effort from everyone on the field at all times. Our managers, coaches, and other volunteers are supplied with the training, resources, and support necessary to help our children become better baseball and softball players, competitors, and people.

Practice Philosophy

Our coaches are the mainstay of our league. Not only do they provide high-quality baseball instruction, they also focus their energy on helping players learn to play the right way. In order to support our volunteer coaches in their work, all players are expected to be on time for practices, to arrive ready to participate, and to give 100% effort and focus on the field at all times.

Game Philosophy

Our players will be prepared to play. They will be competitive and aggressive no matter the situation or the score. Our fielders will be ready and have a "want the ball" attitude. Our batters will want to make contact with the ball and be aggressive at the plate. Our pitchers will keep the game moving by minimizing time between pitches and will also focus on throwing in the strike zone with the intent of forcing contact. Our players will do all of this while playing the "right way" with honesty, respect, sportsmanship, confidence, responsibility, perseverance, and good judgment.

Dugout Behavior

Coaches will ensure that our players understand that the dugout is part of the field and will act responsibly while using it. Our players will pay attention to the game and support all of their teammates, whether they are successful or struggle. Players will not yell or laugh at the other team. Teams will respect the dugouts by keeping them clean and picking up trash at the end of a game. Coaches must enforce the no "on deck" batter rule and ensure no bats are being swung in the dugout. It is important to avoid distractions during the game that may result from having parents and other family members in the dugout, and so only coaches and players should be in the dugout during a game.

Parent Guidelines and Expectations

Parental support is essential to the functioning of an all-volunteer organization. Parents are key to getting players to practices and games on time and prepared to play. They also support the team during games, offering only encouraging words (not coaching advice) to players, and help out when asked by coaches. Our parents respect the opposing team players, coaches of both teams, and umpires. While our parents root for a team victory, they also respect the hard work and dedication to the game exhibited by both teams.

Baseball Benchmarks

This section of the document provides a series of benchmarks for different baseball skills, indicating the level at which it is hoped that a player of average ability will have mastered the skill. Players may begin to learn and use a given skill much earlier than the division in which the skill is expected to be mastered. This early exposure to a given skill is what will help the player master the skill at the appropriate time. There will always be players ready to move through these benchmarks faster than others, while other players may struggle to attain a certain benchmark or numerous benchmarks.

These benchmarks are not intended to be the final word on what must be taught and when. Rather, these benchmarks were compiled to establish a set of common expectations across the league about what players of average ability will be able to do when they move on to the next division.

Having said that, each skill area (e.g., batting, base running) contains numerous benchmarks. In some cases, a disproportionate number of the benchmarks may fall to one division for a particular skill. While this balances out when all of the skill areas are considered together, it may feel like the division in which you are coaching has a lot to cover. You are not imagining it; there is a lot to cover in every division. To that end, some benchmarks are listed in bold. These are the benchmarks that the league is most concerned that players master at the appropriate division level.

Over time, the benchmarks will be revisited to see if new benchmarks need to be added, refined, dropped, or moved to a different division. After you have had a chance to work with the benchmarks, your feedback will be one of the primary ways by which needed changes are identified.

Above all else, please keep in mind that these benchmarks are intended to be guidance. The particular situation in which you find yourself coaching in a given season may necessitate that you make different decisions about how you focus your coaching efforts. Should you find yourself in a challenging coaching situation, needing some help with practice or game plans, struggling through the benchmarks, or confused about the benchmarks, CHLL has a cadre of veteran coaches, led by our CHLL Coaching Coordinator(s), that can provide assistance. Please just reach out to the Coaching Coordinator(s), and we will get you the help you need.

Batting Benchmarks

Skill	A	AA	AAA	Majors
Wearing a batting helmet (why/how/when)	✓			
Understanding how to select the right bat	✓			
Understanding when to swing the bat	✓			
Understanding the basics of a proper batting stance	✓			
Understanding how to hit off a tee	✓			
Understanding how to hit a coach pitched ball	✓			
Understanding to hit and run through 1B	✓			
Understanding the proper way to hold a bat (Which hand on top)	✓			
Understanding how to drop, not throw, a bat, after making contact	✓			
Understanding how to hit off a pitching machine		✓		
Understanding the proper way to hold a bat (Hands & Knuckles)		✓		
Understanding the proper way to swing the bat (load, trigger, and fire)		✓		
Understanding how to follow through on contact		✓		
Understanding the proper way to swing the bat by using the lower half of the body for power		✓		
Recognizing clearly unhittable balls			✓	
Understanding how to swing the bat while tracking the ball through the strike zone			✓	
Recognizing hittable pitches			✓	
Recognizing the strike zone and how to adjust to different pitchers			✓	
Understanding how to adjust hitting approach with two strikes			✓	
Understanding how to bring the bat down when avoiding getting hit by a pitch			✓	
Understanding how to avoid injury in the batter's box (stay or go)			✓	
Understanding the need to observe the pitcher from the dugout, before an at bat			✓	
Understanding where to stand in the batter's box based on pitch location				✓
Understanding the hit and run play				✓
Understanding the basic mechanics of bunting				✓
Understanding situational bunting				✓
Understanding situational hitting				✓
Understanding running on dropped third strike				✓

Base Running Benchmarks

Skill	A	AA	AAA	Majors
Understanding to run on contact as the batter	✓			
Understanding how to run through first base	✓			
Understanding the direction of the base paths	✓			
Concentrating on base running and not watching the ball after it is hit		✓		
Understanding the need to run the bases until a ball is called foul		✓		
Understanding the benefit of running through 1B on a hit instead of sliding		✓		
Understanding the basic mechanics of turning at 1B (e.g., no 90 degree turns)		✓		
Becoming aware of base coaches		✓		
Staying aware of the game and the current situation while on base		✓		
Knowing to run on contact with two outs		✓		
Understanding what to do when a pop fly is hit while on base		✓		
Understanding when to take an extra base on an overthrow of a base		✓		
Introduce proper feet-first sliding technique		✓		
Understanding the difference between a force/no force situation			✓	
Understanding the need to remain in the base path			✓	
Understanding how to work with base coaches, including transition from 1B to 3B			✓	
Understanding how to make proper and efficient turns at all bases			✓	
Understanding how to react to an infield fly call			✓	
Understanding the fundamentals of sliding			✓	
Understanding the prohibition on head first slide when advancing			✓	
Understanding how to take a secondary lead			✓	
Understanding how to avoid running into a tag			✓	
Understanding how to avoid fielder obstruction			✓	
Understanding how to tag up on pop flies			✓	
Understanding situational base running (e.g., when to take an extra base)			✓	
Understanding the basic mechanics of stealing			✓	
Understanding in what situations a runner should steal a base			✓	
Understanding how to avoid contact with the catcher for plays at home plate			✓	
Understanding the mechanics and allowance of a headfirst slide for retreat			✓	
Understanding the Infield Fly rule				✓
Understanding to run on a dropped third strike				✓
Working with base coaches to understand signs				✓
Understanding how to execute a delayed steal				✓
Understanding how to execute a double steal				✓

Throwing / Catching Benchmarks

Skill	A	AA	AAA	Majors
Understanding proper weight shift and use of lower body to throw	✓			
Understanding proper alignment to throw (perpendicular to target)	✓			
Understanding the proper arm motion	✓			
Using the front shoulder and glove to aim a throw	✓			
Understanding the proper way to grip the ball (2 or 3 fingers depending on hand size)		✓		
Understanding a 4-seam grip		✓		
Understanding how to be a good target		✓		
Understanding how to position the glove based on where the ball is going to be (fingers up/fingers down or “steering wheel”)		✓		
Understanding the need to squeeze the glove on a catch		✓		
Understanding how to move feet to the ball to be centered to receive the throw		✓		
Understanding how to create an “L” as you pull the ball back to throw; ball faces backwards		✓		
Understanding the “equal and opposite” concept (“L” with throwing arm and with glove arm)		✓		
Understanding to use the wrist		✓		
Understanding when and how to use an underhand toss (e.g., flip and follow)			✓	
Understanding proper follow through and release of energy in rear leg			✓	
Understanding quick release in order to throw the ball quickly upon fielding it			✓	
Understanding correct arm follow through on throws (and pitches)			✓	
Understanding to gauge strength of throws (based on distance and person catching the ball)			✓	
Understanding the need to keep the ball on the fingertips, not the palm				✓
Understanding crow hop for long, deep throws from the outfield				✓

Fielding (Infield) Benchmarks

Skill	A	AA	AAA	Majors
Understanding where the infield positions are.	✓			
Understanding “ready Position”	✓			
Understanding how to move to the ball to be in position to field it	✓			
Understanding correct fielding position: rear-end low, feet wide, hands out in front, glove down touching the ground (“triangle stance”), throwing hand alongside to help	✓			
Understanding how to watch the ball into the glove and cover with top hand (“alligator”)	✓			
Understanding proper base footwork		✓		
Understanding whether a given play is a force or a tag		✓		
Understanding how to cover a base based on where the ball is hit			✓	
Understanding how to call for the ball on a pop up			✓	
Understanding how to run a baserunner back to the base of origin			✓	
Understanding when and how to flip and follow a throw to a base			✓	
Understanding how and when to do a creep/ready step			✓	
Understanding how to prepare to throw after fielding by shuffling toward the target			✓	
Understanding how to cover a base on a steal attempt			✓	
Understanding how to back up other fielders and the pitcher			✓	
Understanding how to call off another infielder			✓	
Understanding where to throw the ball based on the situation			✓	
Understanding the proper footwork to field a grounder (grounder nearby, grounder further away)			✓	
Understanding proper positioning to receive cut-off throw from outfield			✓	
Understanding where a right-handed versus a left-handed batter is likely to hit				✓
Understanding proper use of glove when ball is to the backhand or forehand side body				✓
Understanding how to execute a double play				✓
Understanding when to throw the ball during a rundown				✓
Understanding how to establish a throwing lane				✓
Understanding when and how to look a runner back in a non-force situation before trying to get the force out				✓
Understanding the proper positioning to receive a cutoff throw				✓
Understanding bunt coverage				✓
Understanding pick-off plays from the catcher				✓
Understanding how to communicate with other infielders				✓
Understanding how to make the correct tag (tag low)				✓

Fielding (Outfield) Benchmarks

Skill	A	AA	AAA	Majors
Knowing where LF, CF, and RF are	✓			
Understanding the proper glove position to watch the ball into the glove		✓		
Understanding how to backup the infield		✓		
Understanding how to backup other outfielders		✓		
Understanding how to call for the ball		✓		
Understanding how to keep the ball in front of you			✓	
Understanding how to pay attention while playing in the outfield			✓	
Understanding how to move to the ball (In, out, left, right)			✓	
Understanding proper body position to receive a fly ball with baserunners			✓	
Recognizing cut-off			✓	
Understanding when to hit cut off or throw through				✓
Understanding where a right-handed versus a left-handed batter is likely to hit				✓
Understanding how to take an arced line to the ball				✓
Understanding how to do a drop step				✓
Understanding how to field a ground ball in the outfield, depending on whether there are runners on base or not				✓
Understanding an over the shoulder catch				✓

Pitching Benchmarks

Skill	A	AA	AAA	Majors
Understanding the strike zone			✓	
Developing a basic knowledge of a balanced, aligned delivery, the use of the rubber, release points, finishing in a good fielding position to be ready for the ball to be hit to the pitcher			✓	
Understanding how to throw a 4-seam fastball			✓	
Understanding how to throw from the stretch			✓	
Understanding the difference between throwing and aiming			✓	
Understanding how to adjust position on mound based upon location of previous pitches			✓	
Understanding how to control the running game by getting back to the mound after a pitch, hit, or out			✓	
Understanding how to make basic plays at their position			✓	
Understanding the procedure after hitting a batter (shake hands)			✓	
Understanding of when the catcher and umpire are ready for a pitch			✓	
Having the opportunity to pitch in a game (minimum of three consecutive batters)			✓	
Understanding of how to cover 1B on a ground ball to 1B			✓	
Understanding how to cover home on passed ball/wild pitch with runner at 3 rd				✓
Introduce use of the full windup				✓
Understanding how to throw a 2-seam fastball				✓
Understanding the basic mechanics of a change up				✓

NOTES

Managers/coaches are asked to give every AAA and Majors player an opportunity to pitch in a game for a minimum of three consecutive batters, unless there are concerns about a player's safety or a player absolutely refuses to try to pitch. Managers/coaches should be trying to develop as many pitchers as possible.

At the AAA and Majors levels, players should only be throwing fast balls and change ups. Players should be strongly discouraged from throwing breaking balls or curve balls.

Catcher Benchmarks

Skill	A	AA	AAA	Majors
Understanding how and when to put catcher's gear on		✓		
Understanding how to catch with a catcher's mitt		✓		
Understanding the basics of where to setup and proper catching position		✓		
Understanding how to safely position the throwing hand		✓		
Give all players a chance to try the catcher position		✓		
Recognizing need to hustle on wild pitch to limit stealing			✓	
Understanding the basics of receiving the ball (e.g., moving the arm to the ball)			✓	
Understanding how to move the body to receive the ball			✓	
Understanding how to provide a target for the pitcher			✓	
Understanding the importance of making good, accurate throws back to the pitcher			✓	
Understanding how to handle pop ups at/around home plate			✓	
Understanding how to throw to a base when a runner is stealing (1B, 2B, 3B)			✓	
Understanding how to cover the plate on a play at home			✓	
Understanding how to make a proper tag on a play at home			✓	
Understanding the rules on blocking the plate			✓	
Knowing how to communicate outs and base runners to team			✓	
Give all players a chance to try the catcher position			✓	
Understanding how to handle the catcher's mask				✓
Catching from a relaxed stance (no base runner, less than two strikes)				✓
Catching from a ready stance (runners on base, two strikes on batter)				✓
Understanding how to block balls, including balls that bounce in front of home plate or are outside				✓
Understanding how to handle wild pitches				✓
Understanding how to handle bunts				✓
Understanding how to cover a delayed steal				✓
Understanding where to setup and be in position based on the pitch call				✓
Understanding how to frame the strike zone				✓
Understanding how to backup first base on a routine grounder				✓
Understanding the rules of a dropped third strike				✓
Understanding when to throw or not throw on a steal				✓
Understanding how to give signals to the pitcher				✓
Understanding how to execute a pickoff play at 1B and 3B				✓

NOTES

All male catchers must wear a protective cup.

Coaches should make the best effort to have every player try the catcher position for at least one inning at the AA and AAA level.

Running a Successful Practice

Philosophy

- Teams will hold regular practices at least once per week.
- Efficient practices will require a measure of discipline. Coaches are expected to have a practice plan, while players are expected to arrive on time and follow the instructions of coaches.
- Disruptive players that affect the entire team will be asked to sit out or leave altogether.
- Coaches should have their teams work each of the skills areas (hitting, base running, fielding and pitching) every other practice. Teams should not go two practices in a row without working each of these.
- Minimize scrimmages and instead focus on skills-enhancing drills and hands on instruction regarding on-field scenarios.

Practice Structure

- Warm up and stretch – “Warm up to throw. Do not throw to warm up.”
- Segment 1
- Segment 2
- Segment 3....

Equipment

- Ideal practices make full use of all resources available.
- Equipment will be provided by the CHLL, and made available, in storage at the various practice fields or be in the team’s assigned equipment bag.
- Take advantage of the batting cages and other such resources at our various fields to allow for a greater number of reps for the players and greater flexibility for coaches at practice.

Sample Practice Drills

Practicing a skill over and over again is an important method of improving. The more reps a player gets the more they will learn. Baseball drills can get somewhat monotonous, though, so try to turn your drills into fun games and competitions whenever possible. Kids love competition and they will love the drills that involve competition. Not only will the kids enjoy it more, they'll also work harder at the skill. You may find that incorporating some of the following drills to aid in this goal:

Drill	Skill Being Targeted
5 Grounders This quick grounder drill reinforces good glove/receiving habits. Start your player in a strong fielding position and you are directly in front of them about 12'-15'. Roll 5 grounders in rapid succession at your player, allowing for them to field the first one and discard to the throwing hand side then immediately receiving the second and so on up to 5 grounders. Since the grounders will come fast, it is important not to make the player move to field them, you are just working on glove work. Pay attention to form here with the glove and throwing hand securing the ball.	• Fielding
Follow the Ball Start with 1 player at each base, including home plate. All other players are in a line at SS ready to receive a ground ball. The coach hits a ground ball to the SS who throws to 1B, who throws to 2B, who throws to 3B who throws home. After each throw the player goes to the base they just threw to for the next round. The catcher goes to the back of the line at SS.	• Fielding • Throwing
Situational Fielding Split your team into 3 groups. One at 1B, one at 2B and one as runners starting from home. When the coach hits a grounder to 2B, the runner takes off and 2B tries to throw them out. 1B starts off the bag and has to move to cover it.	• Fielding • Throwing • Base running

<i>The Bucket Game</i> Set up a bucket on 1B. Divide your players into two teams placing them in lines at SS. The coach at home plate alternates hitting grounders to each team, with the player fielding the grounder and making a throw to 1B trying to hit the bucket. You can give points for hitting the bucket or knocking it over. Players must get rid of the ball quickly. If a players missed the ball, they must run to it and make the throw from where it is picked up. Variations include moving the teams to other positions on the field.	• Fielding • Throwing
<i>Mobile</i> 3 cones/bases are placed in a straight line up the first base line (20ft apart) and 2 cones are placed a few feet apart a few feet in front of home plate. Divide players into two teams. Defense takes the field (positioning themselves wherever they want). Coach pitches a whiffle or tennis ball. When a player hits the ball, they decide which cone to run to (1pt for the closest, 2pts for the middle, 3pts for the farthest). Player must touch the cone and make it back to home plate before the defense throws the ball back into the infield between the 2 cones. If the batter makes it back before the defense, they get the points. Each player bats in the rotation, then switch.	• Hitting • Running
Tennis Ball Pop Flys This drill teaches players to recognize a ball in the air and how to properly position themselves under it to make a catch. Send the team to the outfield (players can stand anywhere) with the coach at home plate. Using a tennis ball and tennis racquet, the coach calls a player and hits a high deep pop fly. When a player catches (or runs to a missed ball), they make the throw to a coach or player near the infield to practice the “cut off” play.	• Fielding pop flys • Throwing
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	•
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Sample A Practice Outline

90 MIN	ACTIVITY	NOTES
10 Minutes	Warm-up	• “warm up to throw” NOT “throw to warmup” • Full body exercises and warmup • Fundamentals of warming up the body to prepare for exertion
10 Minutes	Introduce teaching principles for practice e.g. • Basic throwing technique • Basic fielding/catching • Hitting • Baserunning	Introduce meta themes and teaching points • Footwork and body position/leverage plays a big role in all that we do • Understanding to move to and in front of the ball when playing defense • Always be thinking about the “situation” and what you’ll do with the ball or when on base
15 Minutes	Stations X 3 1. Throwing 2. Fielding (grounders) 3. Hitting	
20 Minutes	Group exercise/drill/game	
5 Minutes	Close: Reinforce key teaching points	Stick with a teaching theme

Sample AA Practice Outline

90 MIN	ACTIVITY	NOTES
10 Minutes	Warm-up	• Warm up to throw • Light jogging and full body warmup • Throwing progression from flips all the way to full throws
10 Minutes	Intro key teaching principles: • Emphasis on mental aspect of the game • Fundamentals, fundamentals fundamentals • Movement without the ball on Defense	Examples: • Situational awareness • Body position and preparing to throw, field or hit •
15 Minutes	Stations X 3 • Fielding and Catching • Pitching • Hitting	
20 Minutes	Group exercise/drill/game	
5 Minutes	Close: Reinforce key teaching points	