





# PLAYING THE GAME

Designed for Minor and Majors (Ages 8-12)

The "Flipbook" is an Official Little League® Baseball Canada training resource produced and copyrighted by the Prairie Baseball Academy

# WHAT IS THE FLIPBOOK?

First and foremost the flipbook is a tool. A tool for coaches to design quality practices with drills that WILL help young ballplayers improve and enjoy baseball. This flipbook has dozens of Little League® appropriate drills to incorporate with your own team.

The flipbook is small enough to fit in your back pocket, colour coded and simple to use. If you have five minutes before practice you have enough time to use the flipbook to create a quality practice plan that will maximize the efficiency of your practice. Everyone is busy, and it can be difficult to find time to practice during the season. With this flipbook you can make sure you never waste another practice again!



In 2016 the Prairie Baseball Academy partnered with Little League® Canada to create the first ever flipbook. This is the updated version of that original flipbook and we are extremely excited about the updates we have made to this book.



onto onto		TABLE OF CONTENTS	WHATEN BASE WAR
4-6	INTRODUCTION	45-55	OUTFIELD
7-11	ASSESSMENT	56-71	HITTING
12-19	WARM UP	72-82	PITCHING
20-27	LADDERS	83-93	THROWING PROGRAM
28-44	INFIELD	94-100	GAMES 3



# INTRODUCTION



Little League® Baseball Canada is excited to provide you with this step by step manual in our flipbook format. The Playing the Game flipbook is a more in depth version that builds off of the Learning the Game flipbook designed for kids ages 4-7. This flipbook will focus more on drills and less on coaching philosophy.

Before we get into any baseball specific drills, there are several general ideas that need to be covered. We have quickly described some of these general coaching concepts as well as how they can be applied to your youth baseball team. These concepts should help you create fun, informative practices and get the most out of your group of kids.

**Parent Involvement** – Depending on what type of team you are coaching parent involvement should always be encouraged. On the first day of practice the head coach should plan out a player/parent meeting. The meeting doesn't need to be any more than 15 minutes long, but it gives the coach a chance to go over expectations for that season. This is a perfect time to ask for parent volunteers to help at practices throughout the season.

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# INTRODUCTION



**How to address coach** — Whether a coach is in his first year or has been coaching for years there needs to be a relationship between player and coach. Some coaches prefer to be called coach \_\_\_\_\_. Other coaches prefer to be called by their first name. There is no right or wrong way to go about this as long as it is established early on in the season. Kids need a way to open up a line of communication with their coach if they have questions or concerns.

**Establishing a Practice Time** – The world is a crazy place, and time is money. Everybody is busy, especially parents with young families. The weekly grind can be very hectic so setting up a weekly practice time can make life easier on everyone involved. For example, making Tuesday night's practice night from 5:30-7:00pm all season allows parents to block off at least one night that they know is baseball practice night. This is easier said than done because of diamond availability, but at least try to set up a time to work on skills!

5



# INTRODUCTION



#### Five Pillars of a Good Team

Attendance – Without regular attendance building a team dynamic is impossible. It is imperative that parents do their absolute best to get players to games or practice on time or early. Without regular attendance, it is very difficult for a coach to develop effective practice plans.

Discipline – At this age kids attention spans can be very short. Coaches need to develop plans for each practice that keep the kid's active while learning and enjoying the game. By developing a routine, kids will know exactly what is expected of them once they get to the field on a practice day and a game day.

**Effort** - Effort level is something that requires no skill. As coaches we should focus less on the player's skill level and more on their effort level at practices and games. As a coach or a parent this is something that you should be constantly preaching to your sons or daughters. If you put the effort in each day you get to the field you will accomplish more as a team, which leads to more fun.

Attitude – Effort and attitude are similar. We want the kids to have a positive attitude because they have had a positive experience. Kids are temperamental at this age, and attitudes can change drastically, quickly and for no apparent reason. As coaches it is our job to keep kids engaged, learning and having fun while at baseball.

Listening – There are always going to be listening issues with kids in this age group. It can be very frustrating for coaches. You need to have a plan in your head of how to deal with kids who are constantly not listening to your instructions. Getting on their level (crouching or kneeling) is a good way to start. Do not try to change your voice because of their age, treat them as you would treat anyone else when speaking. The last tip to encourage listening is to pause and wait until you feel like you have the group's full attention.



# **ASSESSMENT**



One of the most overlooked aspects as a coach is how to assess your players. Every coach assesses their players in some way whether they know they are doing it or not. In a coaches head there is always an idea who your best players are, and who your weaker players are.

At the Minor/Major level, coaches need to be constantly assessing their players. It is recommended to assess all of your players on the first day of practice, so you can set goals and monitor their progress throughout the season. As a coach at the Little League level we want kids to have fun, learn this great game and have a social setting to interact with kids in the same age group. There are many ways to assess your players, and as the coach you can decide how you want to assess. The example we will provide breaks kids into three separate groups.

7



### **ASSESSMENT**



**Group 1 – Advanced Group** – Your top group of players who are the most experienced. Have a good understanding of the base-ball skills you are trying to teach and doesn't need a lot of extra instruction.

**Group 2 – Average Group** – This is your group in the middle. They have some understanding of the skills, but it is clear that there are things that they need to continue to improve on.

**Group 3 – Beginner Group** – This is your group of players who may never have played before or are a little bit behind the other players on the team. They will need the most one on one instruction throughout the season.

Just because a player falls into one of these 3 groups on day one doesn't mean he or she should be locked into this group for the entire season. Kids learn at different speeds and some may advance quickly while others may regress throughout the season.

8



# **ASSESSMENT**



We will provide you with a brief breakdown of what you could do on the first day of practice to assess your players quickly and efficiently. We have broken it into 6 assessment stations. Feel free to add more if you think it's necessary.

**Running** – At the older ages the baseball standard distance to run is 60 yards. This is a little bit excessive for the 8-12 age group, but you can still use it. You could use the 40 yard dash or just home to first base, which is 60 feet or 20 yards. Allow the kids to run at least twice, and if possible have more than one stopwatch on the kids to adjust for human error.

**Throwing for Distance** – This will give you an idea of the arm strength you players have. Give them 5-10 throws for a more reliable set of data.

**Throwing for Accuracy** – Set up a target for the kids to throw at. Rate their accuracy based on how often, and how close they throw the ball at the target.

**Fielding Ground Balls** – Hit or roll each player 5-10 ground balls at shortstop and have them throw it to 1st base. Evaluate how well they are picking up the ball, their footwork and the accuracy of their throws to 1st base.



# **ASSESSMENT**



Catching Fly Balls – Hit or throw each player 5-10 fly balls. You are looking to see how well they track the ball in the air, and if they can catch the ball above their forehead with a good glove position.

**Hitting** – Give each player 10-20 swings off a tee, front toss or live batting practice depending on the team. You are looking for contact first, and then power. We want to encourage the kids to have a level, smooth swing.

These 6 assessment stations can be adjusted as the coach desires, we are just offering a guideline. It is a good idea to keep a record of how the kids did on the opening day. If you have time it is always fun to re-test the kids halfway, or near the end of the season to see how much they have progressed or regressed. Your goal as a coach is to see improvement in the majority of your players throughout the season.

10



# WARM UP



The warm up is an integral part of any practice. In most situations you want to maximize your practice time. This is why you need a quick effective warm up to prepare your kids for what you want to accomplish in that practice.

The dynamic warm up can be customized to any age or skill level. A sample dynamic warm up can be seen in this section of the book. Coaches can add or subtract any movement to suit their team's needs. This warm up can take as little as 5 minutes or upwards of 15 minutes if time permits. Communicate with your kids. Ask which exercises they like, and what they don't like. Challenge your players to come up with exercises of their own.

The warm up is a great chance to add quick baseball related drills that don't take long, but focus on a particular aspect of the game. For example if a coach wanted to focus mostly on infield work for a practice, they could use the quick hands or ball drop drill.

Don't forget while the kids are warming up you have a great opportunity as a coach to talk with the group. You can recap the last game or practice. Go over what went well, and what needs to be worked on or take the 5-10 mins to get to know the kids better. Ask about school, other sports, weekend plans, etc.

11



# DYNAMIC WARM UP



### **Baseball Application:**

This warm up will get your players ready for any practice or game.

#### Setup:

Start in as many lines as needed depending on the amount of players.

Lined up single file with a minimum of 20m of space in front of them.

#### How it Works:

Players will go through 6+ different dynamic exercises.

The first person in line starts, when they are far enough ahead the second person starts.

Coaches can have players do the same exercise down and back, or switch the exercise on the way back.

### Extra Thoughts:

If your team has captains, they can be the leader of each line.

Come up with your own dynamic exercises, or see if the kids can come up with new ideas on their own.



# DYNAMIC WARM UP



List of movements to choose from:

Jog

Sprint

Trunk bend and reach

Trunk twist

Lunges

Leg raises with toe touch

Quad pull

Skips for height

Skips for distance

Shuffles

Karaoke

Hip Swings Inward

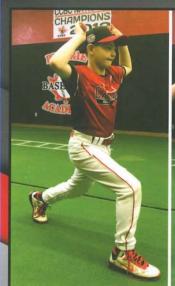
**Hip Swings Outward** 

 $Jog x 2 \rightarrow Sprint x 2 \rightarrow Leg raises w/toe touch \rightarrow$ 

Quad pulls → Trunk bend and reach → Trunk Twist →

Shuffle x 2  $\rightarrow$  Karaoke x 2  $\rightarrow$  Sprint x 2 (Approx. 5 min)

13









**Trunk Bend & Reach** 

Leg Raise w/ Toe Touch

**Trunk Twists** 

**Quad Pulls** 

14

# **RELAY RACES**

#### **Baseball Application:**

Body movement and awareness • Changing directions • Teamwork Setup:

Split kids into 2-4 groups.

Have each group stand in a single file line.

Put a cone 10-20m in front of each line.

#### How it Works:

Coach will yell "go" the first player in each line will sprint around the cone and back towards their line

The next player in line waits until his teammate gets back, and cannot leave until he receives a high five from the player in front. When players finish they can take a knee.

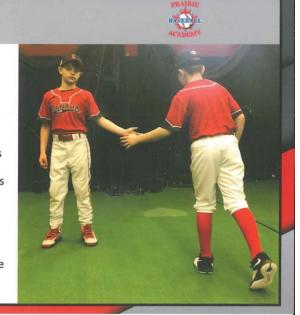
Continue for as long as time permits. Make sure to change the movements. (Skipping, jumping, shuffles, etc.)

When they are far enough ahead the second person starts.

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

A fun competitive warm up idea for kids. Relay races always get them engaged quickly at the start of practice.

Continue to update movements, and make more difficult as the season progresses.





# **BALL DROPS**



### **Baseball Application:**

Quick explosive first step . Reaction time

#### Setup

Players line up single file. The coach will be about 5 steps in front of the first person in line.

The more lines you can get going the better.

#### How it Works:

The coach holds his arm straight out with a ball in it.

The first player in line gets in their ready position.

The coach drops the ball, or throws the ball down depending on what kind of surface you are doing the drill on.

As soon as the ball drops the player reacts and tries to catch the ball before in bounces twice off the ground.

To make it more difficult have the coach stand with a ball in each hand, and only drop one.

### **Extra Thoughts:**

Great drill that doesn't take long. Can be used as a warm up drill.

Make it a competition, see which group can catch the most balls in a certain amount of time.

16





# **QUICK HANDS**



### **Baseball Application:**

Ball to hand transfers • Infield/Outfield catch and throw quickness • Double Play turns

#### Setup:

Have players spread out into their own personal space with a ball.

#### How it Works:

When the coach says "go" players race to transfer the ball from their hand to their glove behind their back.

Players bring the ball in their glove back to the front of their body and transfer back to their hand and repeat.

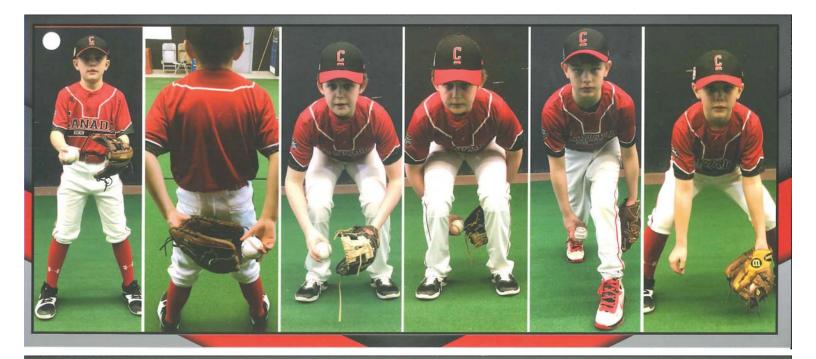
Set how many times you want players to transfer. Usually 5-10 times. When players finish have them raise their hand. All kinds of variations: Around the knees or head, through their legs, bounce off the ground or a wall.

# Extra Thoughts:

Fun, quick, and competitive drill (if you want it to be)

Challenge kids to keep the ball from hitting the ground.

Compete player vs. player or split into teams and go team vs. team.





# **LADDERS**



At the Prairie Baseball Academy we have found that one of the most neglected skills for kids is proper footwork. Coaches are mostly concerned about the basic baseball skills that they forget that footwork is extremely important in all aspects of the game. We try to incorporate ladder drills every day, whether it is with our youngest campers or our 18-21 year old college players. It is a part of our daily routine and it is recommended that you try to include these drills in your practices.

In the ladder section of this book we have provided you with a range of ladder footwork skills. Some of the skills are very basic, and some are much more difficult for the kids. You will immediately see that some of your players will pick up the movements right away, and others will take some time before they understand how to move their feet through the ladder. Encourage your players to do their best, as they will improve quickly. Make sure you encourage the players to have quiet feet through the ladder. Some kids will stomp their feet down without even knowing it. We want to be quick and athletic, quiet feet are quick feet.

20



# HIGH KNEES. STRAIGHT ON.



- High knees, both feet hit in each rung of the ladder.
- Run through as fast as possible while staying in control.
- Make sure to pump arms in a running motion through the ladder.





# HIGH KNEES. SIDE.



- Start on the side of the ladder.
- High knees, both feet touch each rung of the ladder.
- Lead foot should hit the ground first in each rung.



22



# **HOP SCOTCH**



- Start with feet straddling the first rung of the ladder.
- Jump and land with both feet inside of the ladder.
- Continue to hop in and hop out of each square.



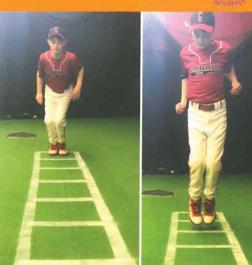
23



# **BUNNY HOP**



- Hop with feet together through each rung of the ladder.
- Kids struggle to keep body control.
- Encourage them to go as fast as possible while staying in control.
- Try two hops forward and one hop back.



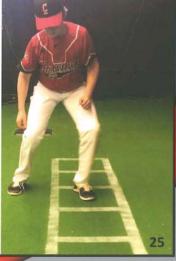


# **SKATERS**



- Players "skate" from square to square
- Hop side to side, alternating which foot hits the next square.



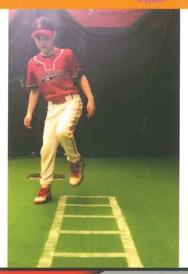




# **2 IN 1 OUT**



- · Start on one side of the ladder.
- Both feet tap the inside of the ladder. Lead foot lands outside the ladder, have players hold for half a second and then continue through the ladder.
- Work through the ladder, alternating which foot they hold with.



26

# CAMPAGE

# SINGLE LEG HOPS



- Hop on one foot through each rung of the ladder
- Make sure to switch feet
- Try having them skip a rung and hopping through.





# **INFIELD**



Infield is the most practiced part of any baseball team at almost all ages. Every practice or game players work on their infield skills. The main issue with most kids is they are not getting into the key positions to be successful. We stress footwork before anything in our program. If an infielder can perfect their footwork early on it will make all the other parts of infielding significantly easier moving forward. When you are teaching your kids infielding make sure to emphasize the footwork. If your kids are doing it wrong make sure you correct them. You cannot let them continue to get away with performing the footwork incorrectly. If they continue to do it incorrectly it is only going to be a harder habit to break as they get older. After the ball is fielded, infielders only need two steps to get into a good throwing position. The first step is **ALWAYS** with the throwing foot. The glove foot comes next and they should be in a great position to throw the ball anywhere on the diamond.

Infielders at these young ages have a difficult time performing the correct glove action while fielding. Most kids want to funnel the baseball towards their stomach. We preach that they do the opposite and push their glove forward "through the ball." There are three types of ground balls: straight on, forehand and backhand. All of these are easier to field if the player is working their glove "through the ball."

The last thing that is essential for young kids is to have them start with their gloves open and on the ground. As a coach you should be able to walk around and see the logo of the player's glove as they get ready to field a ground ball. Many players at this age will try to time ground balls and flip their glove down at the last second when the ball gets close to them. This leads to extreme inconsistency and you will see a lot of balls kick off their gloves or even worse, roll through their legs.

28



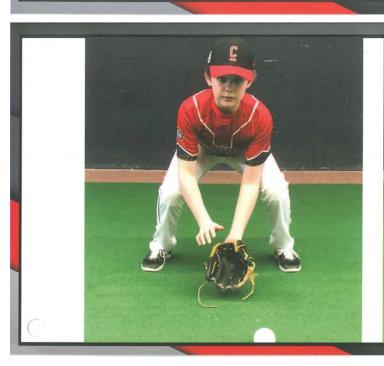


# PROPER FIELDING POSITION



This is our proper fielding position as seen in the pictures provided. There is a checklist below with the key points of this position. Obviously it is going to differ slightly from player to player, but the principles stay the same. It is our job as coaches to make this position muscle memory for the kids.

- · Feet a little more than shoulder width apart.
- Bum down like you are sitting in a chair.
- Glove open, so a person standing in front of them could see the logo in the palm.
- · Glove well out in front of feet. Do not want the glove back between the feet.
- Glove foot slightly ahead of throwing foot.
- Eyes up and chest up as much as possible.
- Throwing hand right beside the glove.







# **PICK SERIES**



### **Baseball Application:**

Simulates every ground ball a player will receive in a game • Proper glove action on ground balls

### Setup:

Have players partner up.

Partners will face each other, approximately 5 steps apart from each other.

Players take turns rolling an underhand groundball to their partners.

For more advanced players throw an underhand one hop ground ball to partner.

#### How it Works:

There are four different positions that will be used in this drill: straight up, forehand, and two backhand positions.

Depending on how much time you have, go through each position for at least 30 seconds.

Players take turns rolling or one hopping the ball to each other.

Make sure partner is in proper fielding position before rolling the ball.

31



Coach can add footwork if needed or focus on the glove action.

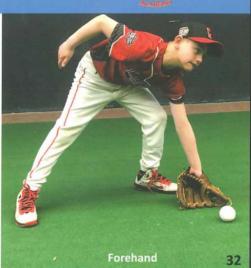
Throwing foot → Glove foot → Throw

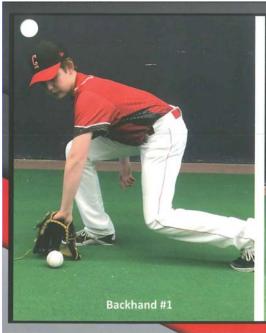
### Extra Thoughts:

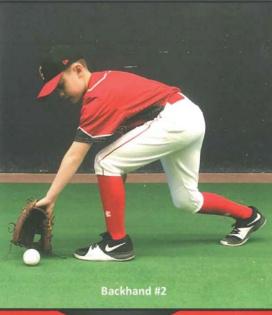
Glove should always be moving forward while fielding the baseball. Kids will want to suck their hands into the stomach, encourage them to "go get the baseball."

# **PICK SERIES**













# STAR DRILL



### **Baseball Application:**

Great for getting a lot of ground balls in a short amount of time.

Forehand and backhand flips

Simulates all types of ground balls a player might get.

#### Setup:

Coaches organize the players into the shape of a 5 point star.

If you have enough space you can make more than one star or have more than one player at each point of the star.

#### How it Works:

Each point in the star is the start of a new line.

If you are working on infield flips, start the players fairly close together. If you are working on ground balls make sure there is plenty of distance between the players.

The player at position 1 in the star will start with the ball. He underhand flips the ball to the player in position 2, followed by position 3 until the ball gets back to position number 1.

The drill is continuous so you can go for as long as you need.

34



# STAR DRILL

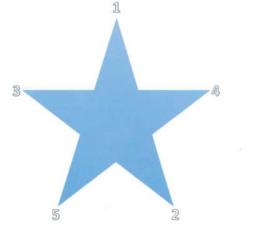


If you are working on ground balls the player in position 1 will roll a ground ball to the player at position 2. The player at position 2 will field it properly and make a full throw to the player at position 3. The player at position 3 will then roll a ball to player 4, who throws to position 5 and the process repeats itself.

If setup correctly players will alternate between throwing a ground ball and receiving a ground ball.

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

Mix it up with the kids. Start by throwing ground balls right at each other. Then have the kids focus on throwing to the forehand side, then the backhand side, and you can finish with slow rollers.



35



# **BOUNCE BACK**



### **Baseball Application:**

Infield reaction time • Simulates unpredictable hops • Lateral movement in the infield.

#### Setup:

Have players partner up.

One partner gets into his proper fielding position in front of a wall.

The other partner is behind him with a tennis ball, or baseball.

### How it Works:

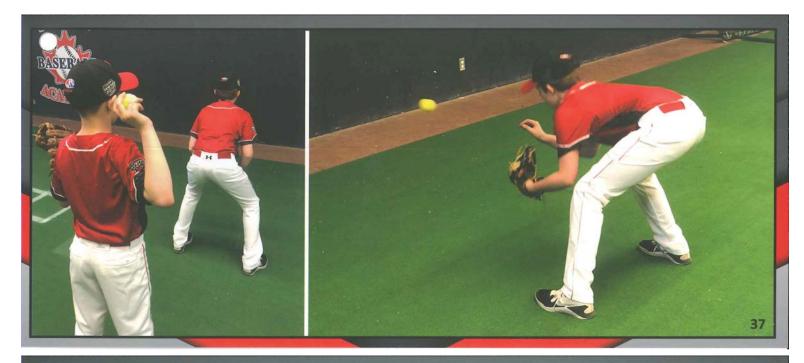
The partner that is behind throws the tennis ball off the wall. His intention is to get it to bounce back like a ground ball towards his partner.

Have the kids make 5-10 throws and then switch places.

The closer the players are to the wall, the quicker they will have to react, and the more difficult the drill will be.

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

Have the throwers aim to the forehand or backhand side to practice both glove actions.





# **SUNGLASSES**



### **Baseball Application:**

Helps players watch the ball all the way into their glove

Staying low on ground balls • Getting into the proper fielding position

#### Setup:

Tape the bottom half of a pair of sunglasses or glasses so you can only see out of the top half of the lens.

#### **How it Works:**

Have players take turns fielding ground balls hit or rolled by the coach with the glasses on.

Players will learn quickly that they have to watch the ball all the way into their gloves with the glasses on or they will not catch many baseballs.

Add the glasses to any infield type drill.

### **Extra Thoughts:**

Great fun drill that the kids really enjoy. Something you wouldn't normally do at practice.

Test it out yourself. Hit ground balls without the glasses for 5 mins, and then 5 mins with the glasses and see if your team catches one with them on.







# TWO BALL



#### **Baseball Application:**

Hand eye coordination • Teamwork • Quick hands

#### Setup:

Have players partner up.

Partners face each other, about 5 steps apart.

Each partner starts with a ball.

#### How it Works:

Players underhand toss the ball back and forth to each other.

Encourage them to throw the ball at the same time. Try to hit your partner in the chest.

Once they get into a rhythm they should be able to start picking up the speed.

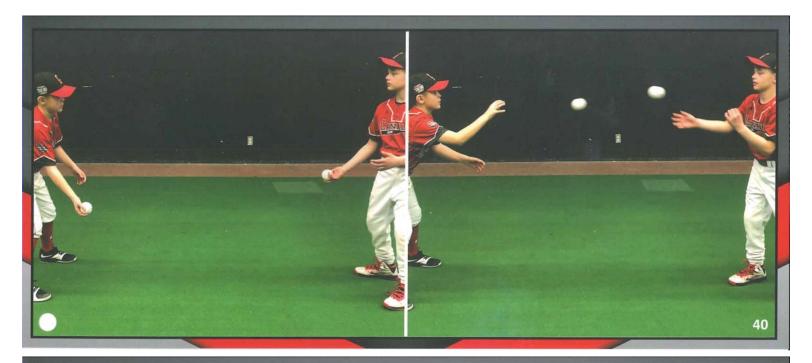
To make it more difficult restrict players to catching the ball with just their glove hand.

Try having them bounce the ball off the ground to each other to make the drill more difficult.

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

Another great drill that is quick and could be used as a warm up.

Turn it into a competition. If your team's ball drops, take a knee and see who the last group to drop a ball ends up being.







# **KNEES ONLY**



### **Baseball Application:**

Proper glove action.

Straight up, forehand and backhand ground balls.

### Setup:

Can be done in partners or have the coach throw the balls.

Players will start on their knees, with their glove ready.

#### How it Works:

Whoever is throwing will throw one hop ground balls to the players.

Start with straight up and work in forehand and backhand.

Emphasize that the players work their gloves "through the ball."

Try to throw multiple balls per player to maximize reps. 3-5 each.

# **Extra Thoughts:**

Glove should always start on the ground.

On the backhand talk to the kids about trying to get their thumbs underneath the baseball as they push their glove through.

Once players get the hang of the drill you can speed up the rate you throw the balls.





# SHOOTOUT DRILL



### **Baseball Application:**

Lateral movement fielding ground balls.

Straight up, forehands and backhands

#### Setup:

Set up two cones as goal posts. Can have multiple stations set up.

Players partner up, one is the shooter and one is the goalie.

#### How it Works:

Have the players who are rolling ground balls try to score on the goalie.

The goalies job is to obviously field the ground ball cleanly without letting it go past them and into the goal.

Encourage players to remember that they are trying to help their teammate improve and to roll them realistic ground balls.

Adjust the size of the goals to make it fair for both sides.

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

Turn it into a competition. Put a time limit on each game, and switch the roller and the goalie to see who can score more times.

43





# **OUTFIELD**



The outfield is one of the most widely overlooked positions on the field, especially at the younger levels. Usually players with lesser abilities are put in the outfield. At the Prairie Baseball Academy, we strive to put our players in a position to succeed in the outfield. Arguably the most important aspect of outfielding is the first step they take. If you can train your players to have a quick and powerful first step to the ball, the better chance they will have to catch balls hit in the air.

All of the drills provided for outfielders can be modified for players at any age. The drop step drills can be done with a glove and a baseball, a glove and a tennis ball or a tennis ball and no glove. We want to provide coaches with a way of improving outfield play. Most coaches just hit fly ball after fly ball without ever really working on the fundamentals. It is important to take good angles to the baseball. If a player is not running at the correct angle towards the ball in the air they will not be able to maximize their range. A player's range is the amount of ground they can cover in the outfield. With a proper first step, and good angles players will have more range, and catch more fly balls.

There are a couple more things that are very common with young outfielders. The first is running to the ball with their glove in the air. This drastically slows down a player in pursuit of a fly ball. As coaches we want our players to sprint to where they think the ball may land, and when they get close that's when they put their glove up to catch the ball. This is easier said, than done though. The last thing is trying to get your kids to catch fly balls at the highest point, directly overtop their forehead. As soon as a ball falls below a players eyes, and they are trying to catch it at their chest or lower, they are really going to struggle.



# **THROW UPS**



### **Baseball Application:**

Basic outfield fly ball technique.

Catching fly balls at the forehead.

**Body awareness** 

#### Setup:

Have every player get a baseball or tennis ball and spread out so they are not close to anyone.

#### How it Works:

Start by having the players throw the ball up to themselves, and catch it at forehead height.

Continue to get the kids to throw the ball higher and higher. Emphasize that they should not be catching the ball any lower than their forehead.

Young players will want to turn their glove over and "underhand" catch the ball. We want to avoid this as much as possible. To mix it up and make it fun, have the kids throw the ball up, spin 180 or 360 degrees and then catch the ball.

### **Extra Thoughts:**

Quick fun drill that works on outfielding skills. Can be used as a warm up.

46





# **DROP STEPS**



#### Baseball Application:

Tracking fly balls • Explosive first step

#### Setup

Players stand with chest facing coach. Only a step or two away.

The rest of the players line up off to the side.

#### How it Works:

The coach will say "go." The player will drop step to the right or left depending on which side you're working.

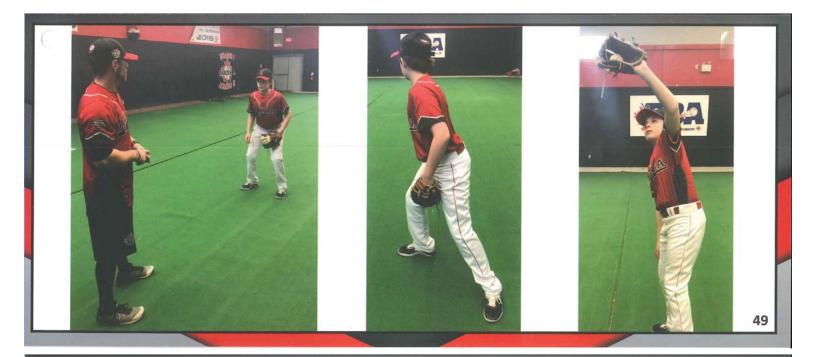
Player takes 3 hard steps and the coach will yell "peek."

Player needs to find the ball in the air and make the catch.

Adjust the height of the ball depending on the skill level of the player. Can substitute tennis balls if you are worried about safety.

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

Players will want to stop their feet as soon as you yell "peek." Encourage them to keep their feet moving the entire time. Try to avoid having players run with their glove in the air. Sprint to the spot and then put the glove up





# 3 BALL



# **Baseball Application:**

Keeps players feet moving • Catching balls at different angles • Acceleration

#### Setup:

Players stand with their chest facing coach. Only a step or two away.

The rest of the players line up off to the side.

### How it Works:

The coach will say "go" and the player will drop step and run straight back away from the coach.

The coach will throw a ball over the player's head they need to track down and catch.

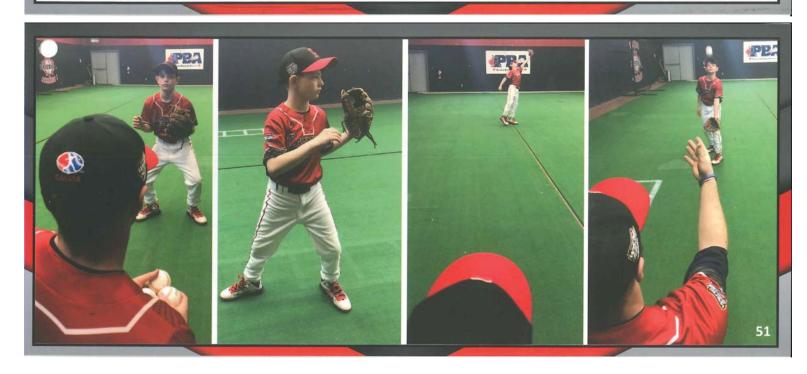
As soon as the catch is made the player drops the ball and runs back in towards coach to catch a second short ball.

After the catch the player plants and heads straight back out to catch a 3rd and final ball.

### **Extra Thoughts:**

Try turning it into 5 ball with 2 extra throws.

Adjust the height and distance of the fly balls depending on the skill level of the player you are throwing to





# ZIG ZAG



#### **Baseball Application:**

Lateral movement in the outfield • Angles • Adjusting to the ball in the air

#### Setup:

Players stand with chest facing coach.

The rest of the players line up off to the side.

Set up cones in a zig zag pattern so kids know where to plant.

#### How it Works:

The coach will say "go" and the player will drop step left or right.

Player runs towards the first cone and catches the ball thrown from coach.

The player accelerates out of their turn and runs towards the next cone.

Set up 3-5 cones for the players to catch a ball at.

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

Make sure the kids have a good plant foot at each cone.

foach needs to put enough air under the ball so players can run underneath it and adjust accordingly.

52





# LAY DOWN



### **Baseball Application:**

Quickness • Tracking the ball in the air.

#### Setup:

Have kids line up, one player goes at a time.

#### How it Works:

Kids will start laying down on their stomach facing coach.

When the coach says "go" the player gets up as quickly as they can.

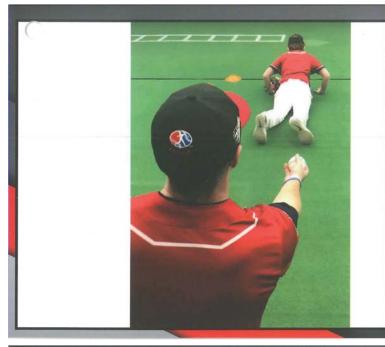
While they are getting up the coach throws a ball in the air.

Player gets to his feet, finds the ball in the air and catches it on top of the forehead if possible.

Start by making it easy, and increase the difficulty as the drill progresses..

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

To make the drill more difficult have the kids lay down with their head facing away from coach. Give the kids a little bit of extra time to get up before you throw the ball in this variation.









# HITTING



At the Prairie Baseball Academy are main goal when it comes to young hitters is to keep them individualized and athletic in their approach to hitting. There is no one proper way to hit, and we certainly do not want to create a team of robots who all hit the exact same way. In most cases as a coach at this level you will see a large discrepancy between the skill levels of your hitters. Our main goal as coaches is to get hitters into several key positions throughout the swing to maximize their chance of success. The drills provided in this section will help your hitters get into these key positions in their own swings.

The first key is to have a strong base because hitting really comes down to rhythm, timing and balance. If a hitter does not have a strong base their balance will be effected which can throw off rhythm and timing. As a coach you want to emphasize that your hitters are getting into the batter's box the same way every time. This means their feet are in the same place, they stand the same distance away from the plate and they are in the middle of the batter's box. If a hitter changes where they stand each time they get into the box it will inevitably lead to inconsistency. Rhythm and timing are harder to teach, some hitters have it, others have it at times, and some really struggle to find it. The only way to really develop rhythm and timing is through repetition and practice.

The next key position to talk about is where the hands should be before the swing starts. We want our hitter's hands to be in a powerful position, that we call the "loaded position." In this position the player's hands are directly behind their ear with good bat angle. (See picture) When timing up a pitch a hitter's hands and stride should work together. As the player strides out, his hands should "trigger" back into the "loaded position." When the front foot hits the ground that is when a player needs to start his swing, every time.

The last thing that needs to be talked about for youth hitters is effectively using their lower half. Every hitter can get more out of their swings by engaging their lower half. The strongest muscles in your body are in your legs so we need to make sure we use them in the swing. The hitter's weight should start mostly on their back foot, and transfer into their front foot through the swing. Again refer to the pictures to see the proper position we want hitters to get to before, during and after they complete a swing.

56



# WAGGLE



#### **Baseball Application:**

Hitting with weight into the front foot.

Balance, rhythm and timing.

Staying loose and athletic throughout the swing.

#### Setup:

Front toss

Tee

#### How it Works:

Feet start together, hands start at the belt with the bat in line with the players head.

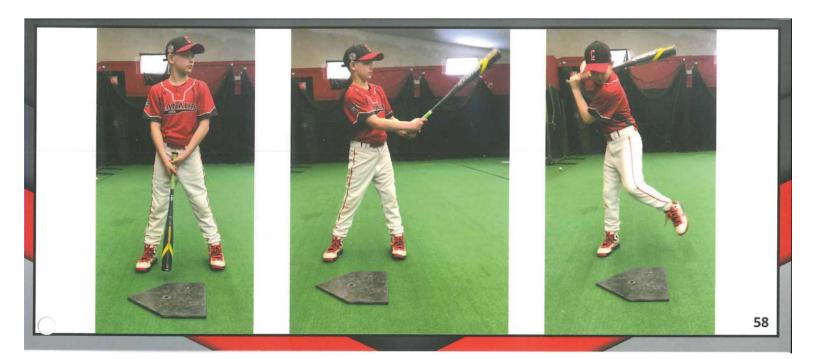
Player waggles his bat back and forth 3 times. On the 3rd waggle the player brings the hands to the "loaded position." Tosser throws the ball after the 3rd waggle

### **Extra Thoughts:**

Great as a warm up drill.

It may take a few attempts before the hitter and tosser develop a rhythm together.

Keeps hitters loose and relaxed throughout their swings.





# **JUST HANDS**



### **Baseball Application:**

Helps kids stay inside the baseball • Help with hitting outside pitches • Creates a more level swing path **Setup:** 

Front Toss

Tee

Live batting practice

#### How it Works:

The main difference from a normal round of front toss is the setup of the player's feet.

Players will open their stance 45 degrees. Use the edge of the plate as a reference.

When the thrower gets ready to toss the ball the hitter turns his front shoulder in and points it at the pitcher.

Instead of using their legs in the swing we want them to just swing with their hands. Or to "throw" their hands at the ball.

# **Extra Thoughts:**

Try to keep the elbows tight to the body throughout the swing.

Aim for the middle-opposite side of the field or cage.





# KARATE KID



### **Baseball Application:**

Getting hands set • Balance • Staying loose through the swing

#### Setup:

Front toss

Tee

#### How it Works:

Front knee starts at 90 degrees in the air.

Hands start on the knee.

Hands get set to the "loaded position."

Front leg falls, lands in a powerful hitting position.

Once the foot is down the hands go.

### **Extra Thoughts:**

Helps players maintain their eye level during the swing.

Will help players keep their weight from "floating" forward too early in their swing.

61





# **FINGER POINT**



#### **Baseball Application:**

Hitting with the proper grip

#### Setup:

This drill can be done with any type of hitting.

#### How it Works:

Teaching the proper grip can be very difficult for young kids.

Breaking the habit of an improper grip is even more difficult.

In this drill have the players point their index fingers straight out.

If their fingers are parallel when pointing they have their hands in the correct position. If their fingers are pointing in opposite directions then you know they are holding the bat incorrectly.

Encourage the kids to get their fingers lined up. Can be an easy tip that kids can use before they get into the batter's box.

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

Have the kids try to hit with their fingers pointing out. It will feel a little bit awkward, but it also keeps their hands loose on the bat which is another very important part of hitting.





# **3 PLATE**



### **Baseball Application:**

Great drill to help players who have timing issues.

If the swing looks good, but players keep missing the ball, their timing is probably the biggest issue.

#### Setup:

Front Toss

Live batting practice

#### How it Works:

The coach sets up three plates one step apart. One of the extra plates needs to be in front of the normal plate, and one plate behind the normal plate. (Can use cones instead of plates)

Players will move from plate to plate taking swings.

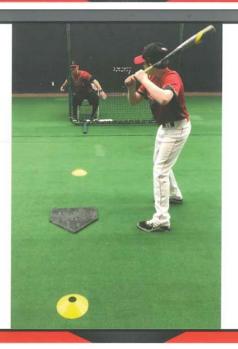
Start at the normal plate, take a swing. Move from plate to plate swinging at each spot.

The extra distance will simulate a slower pitcher, the shorter distance will simulate a player who throws harder.

By changing the distance the ball has to travel it will mess with the players timing and they are to adjust accordingly.

### Extra Thoughts:

Players need to try and wait for the ball to get to them. Most kids will be early when they move back, and late when they move forward. Mix in faster and slower pitches to throw off the timing even more.





# **DOUBLE PITCH**



#### **Baseball Application:**

Hitting off-speed pitches

Rhythm and timing

### Setup:

Front toss

Need two tossers behind the screen.

#### How it Works:

Have both tossers standing single file behind the screen with a ball.

Tossers bring their arm back at the same time, but only one of them will actually throw the ball. Make sure tossers know who is throwing each time, and switch it up.

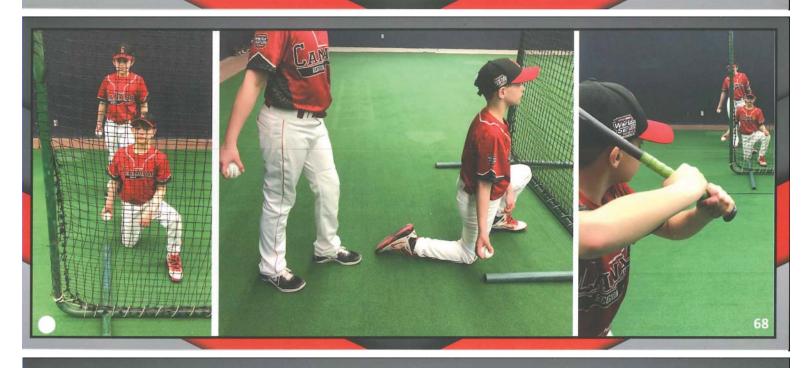
Players have to react to whoever throws the ball.

This mixes up the players timing, and forces them to react to the pitch. This simulates reacting to a change up or breaking ball in a game. Fun drill to mix things up with the kids.

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

Mix in faster and slower pitches to continue working on rhythm and timing with hitters.

67





# **DOUBLE TEE**



#### **Baseball Application:**

Hand eye coordination

Level swing path through the strike zone.

#### Setup:

Need two tees to do this drill.

Setup the tees in line, about two feet apart from each other.

#### How it Works:

Instruct the players to swing the bat and attempt to hit both balls.

In most cases hitters will hit only one ball or the other. If they are able to hit both balls consistently, then this drill is not for them.

If a player is consistently hitting the first ball then they most likely have a little too much "uppercut" in their swing.

If a player is consistently hitting the second ball then they most likely have a little too much "chop" in their swing.

A great drill that gives immediate feedback to coaches and players about their swing path.

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

Not a drill that needs to be done regularly.

Fun drill for the kids to try out if they are struggling making solid contact.



# **VLADDY**



### Baseball Application:

Helps eliminate the "uppercut" swing • Proper bat path through the zone • Proper shoulder tilt

#### Setup:

Front Toss

Tee

#### How it Works:

Make sure to let the kids know to have fun with this drill.

Players exaggerate their set up with their hands high and their back should above their front shoulder. This is the shoulder tilt we want instead of the front shoulder higher than the back, which promotes an "uppercut" type swing.

Try to keep the hands as high as possible through the swing, and avoid dropping the back shoulder.

Have the kids waggle their hands and mess with their stance to keep it fun and loose.

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

The drill is named after Vladimir Guerrero who had a very unorthodox setup, but it worked as he was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2018.

Have the kids go home and look up a video of him swinging.

70





# **PITCHING**



Pitching is arguably the most difficult part of baseball to teach to young kids. Everybody wants to be a pitcher, but not a lot of people know how to teach pitching to kids the correct way. The most important pitch in baseball at any level is strike one. If a pitcher can repeatedly get strike one while they are pitching, the rate of success at getting outs is going to go up dramatically. When a pitcher falls behind hitters with ball one and ball two the hitter has a huge advantage. Kids are always worried about how hard they are throwing, we want to try to change that focus to throwing strikes first, then worrying about velocity.

As far as mechanics go we like to keep it as simple as possible. Balance and direction are our two main focus points. If a pitcher can maintain their balance through their pitching motion, and repeat the same pitching motion time after time, they WILL throw more strikes. When a pitcher's mechanics vary from pitch to pitch it will make it much more difficult to throw strikes. The other concept is direction. We want all of our pitchers to pitch in a straight line to the catcher. When a pitchers mechanics take them off line it will lead to inconsistency and potentially create bad habits that contribute to arm injuries as kids get older.

Lastly, we preach having quick arms. A quick efficient arm action will help your players throw harder, more accurately and be healthier. Our throwing program is designed to help your players throw the correct way, and by correct we also mean the safest way. The Prairie Baseball Academy prides ourselves in building arm strength safely and effectively so players have less arm issues as they get older.



# PICK UP



### **Baseball Application:**

Balance and rhythm

#### Setup:

Have your players spread out into their own personal space with a ball.

#### How it Works:

Start with the ball on the ground in front of the player.

On the coaches command player will left their leg like they are about to pitch. Without touching that foot to the ground the players will bend down and pick the ball up off the ground and return their leg to the lifted position.

While maintaining balance the player bends back down and places the ball on the ground in front of them.

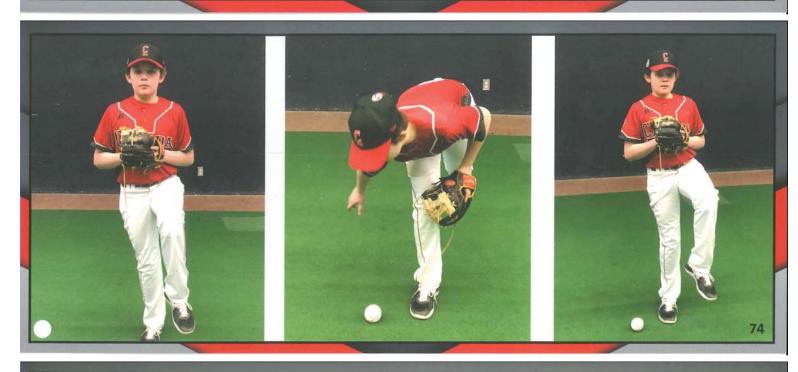
Repeat as many times as possible without losing balance.

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

Great drill that can be done anywhere to work on balance.

Turn it into a competition, and see which player can pick the ball up the most times without losing their balance.

73





# **DOUBLE PLAY**



### **Baseball Application:**

This drill will help speed up player's arms while pitching.

Arm speed = velocity.

#### Setup:

Have a partner or coach stand a couple steps away from the player doing the drill. Face to face.

#### How it Works:

The player starts with his landing leg (glove foot) in the air.

The tosser will underhand toss the player a ball.

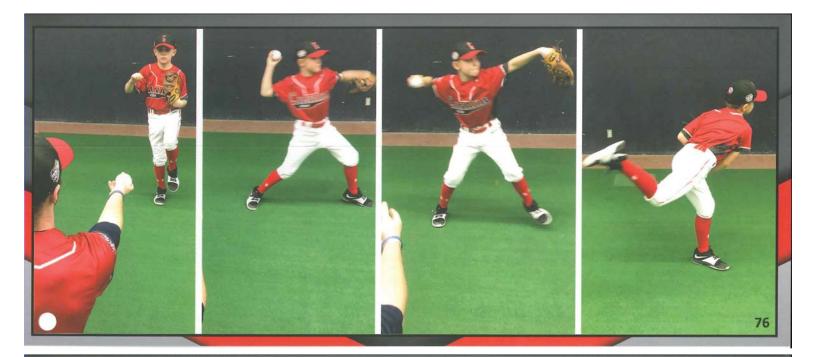
The player catches the ball with his bare hand and throws the ball to a catcher as if he were trying to turn a double play at second base. He is simulating throwing to the 1st baseman.

Emphasize that when you turn a double play you want to do it quickly.

It should help shorten, and quicken up arm actions.

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

Doesn't need to be used just for pitchers. Can help anyone who needs to clean up their throwing motion.





# HOP BACK



#### **Baseball Application:**

This drill will help pitchers stay strong on their back leg during their pitching motion.

The back leg is the base for any good pitching motion. It provides the power.

#### Setup:

Can use this drill playing catch at the start of practice or a game, or throwing into a net.

### How it Works:

Have players start with an even amount of weight on both feet.

Instruct them to hop backwards and stay strong on the leg they hopped on.

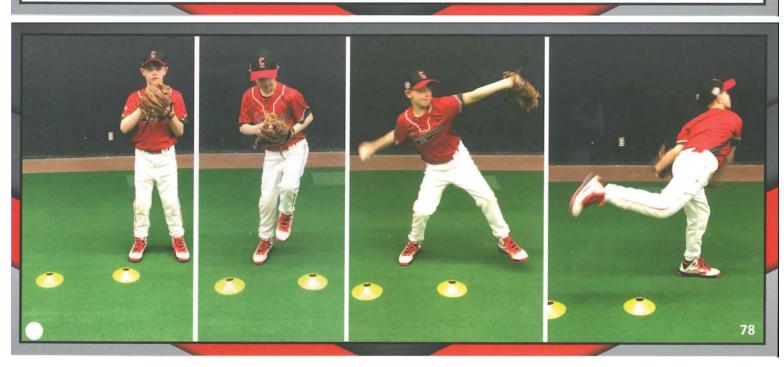
The less knee bend when they land the better.

Have the players gather their weight, and push off the back leg into a normal throw.

# **Extra Thoughts:**

Try having them hop back 3 times, to force them to stay strong on the back leg.

Mix it up with a hop forward, a hop back and then a throw.





# BOX



### **Baseball Application:**

This drill will help young players use their legs more when they pitch.

Good drill for players who are struggling to throw strikes, and the majority of their pitches are missing high.

#### Setup:

Need a box, chair, bucket, etc. to rest their back leg on.

Players can throw into a net, partner or catcher.

#### How it Works:

Players start with their back leg resting on the box.

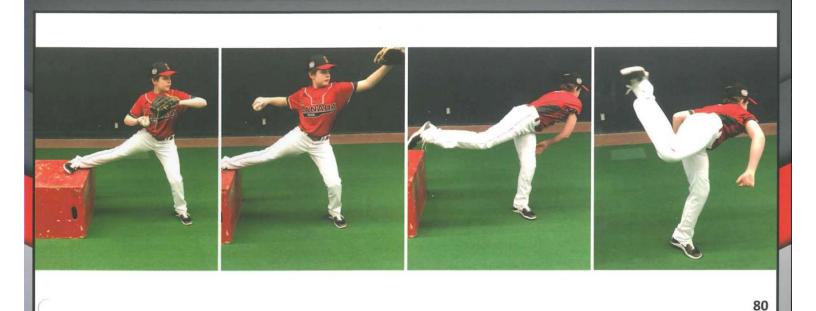
Have the kids try to use their normal throwing motion. It will be difficult and uncomfortable for most.

Try to get them to push their leg off the box and get their foot up in the air as high as possible before it comes back to the ground.

### **Extra Thoughts:**

Easy drill to try with a pitcher who may be struggling with getting the ball down into the strike zone.

79





### REWIND



### **Baseball Application:**

This drill will help pitchers "finish" their pitching motion.

Will help correct a pitcher that is consistently missing up in the strike zone.

#### Setup:

Players can throw into a net, partner or catcher.

### How it Works:

Great drill to do while a player warms up to pitch.

Have player start in their finish position after a pitch.

Tell them to "rewind" back to the normal high leg pitching position they would be in.

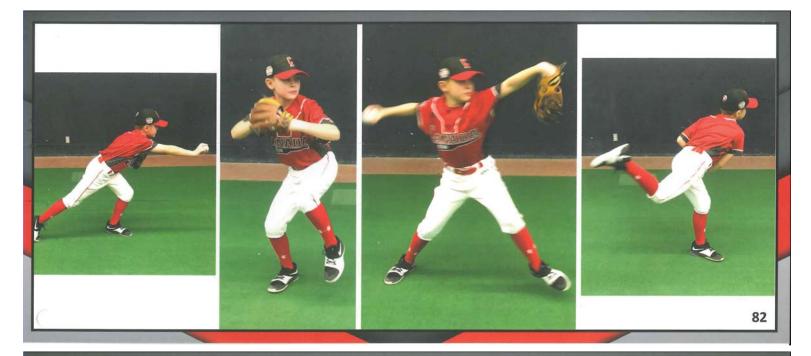
Pause at the top of the motion and then throw the ball.

The goal of this drill is to feel the proper finish position first, then go through their pitching motion and get back into the position they started in.

## **Extra Thoughts:**

A fun drill that really helps with pitching "feel."

A lot of kids don't realize that they stand straight up after throwing a pitch.





# THROWING PROGRAM



The throwing program that we have created at the Prairie Baseball Academy is a combination of years of learning and philosophy on the correct and safest way to train baseball player's arms. If done correctly, at least twice a week, we have seen anywhere from 2 to 10mph velocity improvement over a 4 month time frame. Our kids do this program throughout the winter inside, and we do all our throwing into a batting cage. Obviously this program can be done outside with a partner as well. As a coach make sure your kids are throwing the ball with a nice arc in the first 3 phases. In the 4th phase, or the pull down phase, players will throw the ball on a line. The true beauty of this program is that it takes 10-20 minutes per day, can be done before games and practices, and works for players of any age or skill level.

Refer to the pictures to help get your players into the correct position in each phase. This program will not only work on correcting arm mechanic issues, it will help involve the lower half of the body, which many young players neglect to use while throwing. When a player uses "all arm" to throw they are going to be at a much higher risk for arm injuries as they get older.

It is imperative that coaches communicate with their players in this program. We tell our guys to "listen to their arm." What we mean by this is depending on how a player's arm feels that day will determine how aggressively they throw during the throwing program. If their arm feels great they can throw more balls during the pull down phase which is 90-100% effort level. If their arm is a little sore or tired they can do less during the pull down phase or skip it entirely.



# **OPPO CHUCK**



### **Baseball Application:**

Helps kids feel their hips work through their throw.

Great add on to the throwing program to use before Phase 1.

#### Setup

Have the player's setup with their throwing shoulder facing their target.

#### How it Works:

Player's will turn their hips 90 degrees without moving their feet so their chest ends up facing the target through the throw. Once they get to the position where their chest is at the target the arm makes a small circle and throw the ball. Encourage the kids to really work hard to release the ball out front of their body.

#### Extra Thoughts:

A drill that doesn't need to be done every time your players throw, but can be added in occasionally to mix up the throwing program.





# **PHASE 1 - 25%**



### How it Works:

Players start with their weight about 70/30, back leg/front leg.

The front shoulder should be facing the target.

Hands break with the ball facing away from the target.

The glove elbow is used as the "scope" for players to aim down.

Players throw at 25% of their maximum effort.

Kids will want to progress to more than 25%. Emphasize that they are just getting loose, and to build their way into throwing harder.

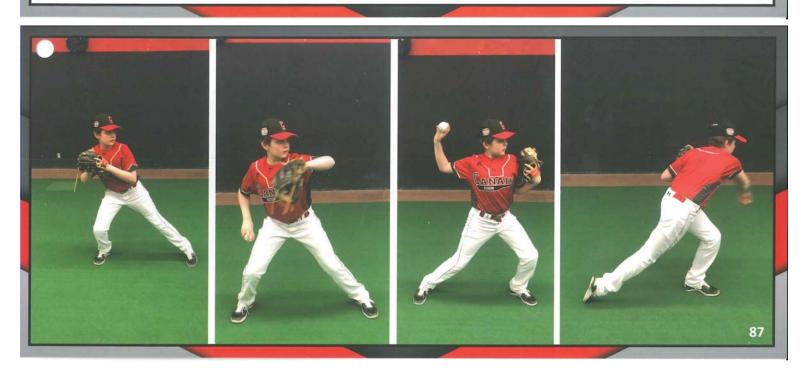
Finish the throw releasing the ball on an upward trajectory to their partner.

Glove hand pulls hard into the chest. Very important to not forget about the glove hand in the throwing motion.

Back leg should not come off the ground in this phase.

Chest should finish parallel to the ground.

10 -15 throws in this phase.





# **PHASE 2 - 50%**



#### How it Works:

The second phase of this program is very similar to phase 1.

Again the front shoulder should be facing the target.

Players will go through the same motion with their weight starting 70/30 on the back leg.

Instead of keeping their back foot on the ground through the throwing motion kids should try to get their foot as high as they can in the air after releasing the ball.

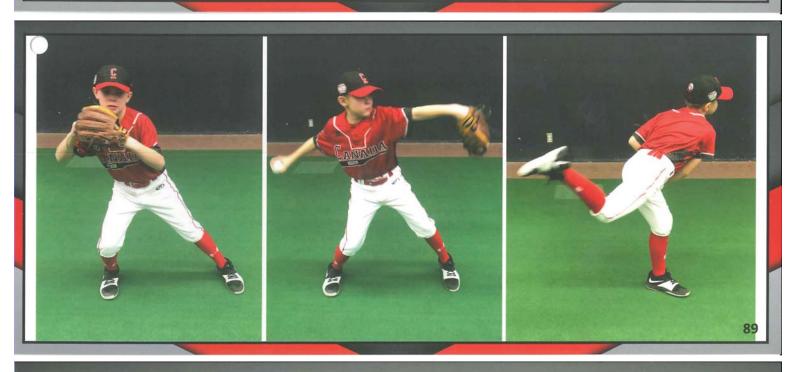
Use "sole of the shoe to the sky" as you key phrase.

Chest should still end up parallel to the ground when they finish the throw.

Players should be throwing at 50% of their maximum effort in this phase.

10 -15 throws in this phase as well.

88





# **PHASE 3 - 75%**



#### How it Works:

In the 75% phase of this program players will start moving into their throws.

Have the players start with their chest facing the target.

The first step into the throw is always with the throwing foot.

The second step will be with the glove foot, and this should get them back into a very similar position as they were in, in phase 1 and 2 of the program.

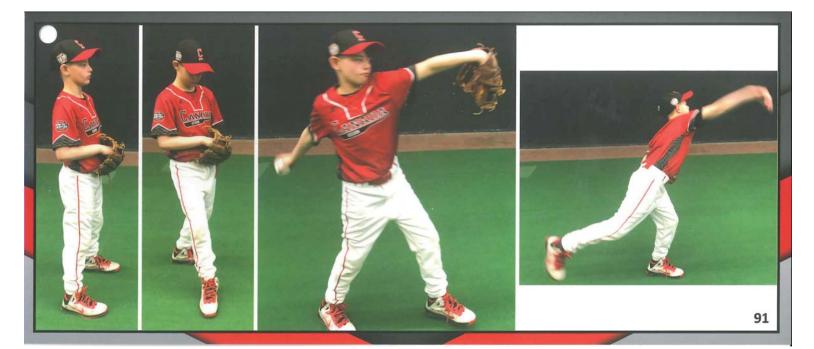
Players can just walk through the steps at first to get the feel for it. The steps should always be: Throwing foot  $\rightarrow$  Glove foot  $\rightarrow$  Throw.

To emphasize getting the weight loaded on their throwing foot you can have them add a little hop into the motion.

Players are now throwing with 75% of their max effort.

The finish should be the same as the first two phases. Glove to chest, back foot high in the air, and chest parallel to the ground. Partners should be continually moving back throughout the program. Balls should still be thrown with lots of air underneath them. We do not want them throwing it on a line yet.

0-15 throws.





# PHASE 4 - 90-100% - PULL DOWN PHASE



#### How it Works:

The pull down phase is the most important part of this throwing program. This is where kids really build arm strength.

Players can continue using the same motion as in phase 3.

They should be throwing at 90-100% of their max effort.

After each throw of the pull down phase, partners should take a couple steps in and get closer to each other.

In this phase we want the kids to "pull down" and throw the ball on a line close to as hard as they can.

Encourage the kids to "get on top" of the throw. This means releasing it out front of their body.

We also use the back pedal drill during the pull down phase.

This drill is best done into a net, or screen because throws tend to be very erratic.

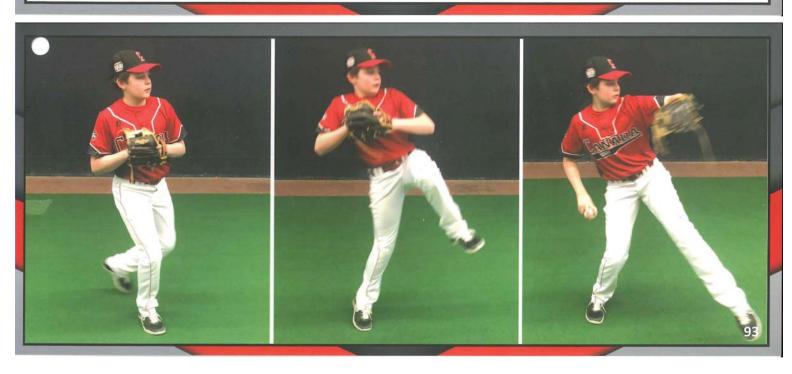
Players start with their back facing the target.

Players will take 3-4 hard back pedals toward their target.

Coming out of the back pedal players plant their throwing foot and spin hard creating a whipping motion with their hips.

Emphasizing quickness in their hips should speed up their arms and create more velocity.

This is a difficult motion for a lot of kids, and should be done later in the season, as a way to build on the throwing program.





# **GAMES**



Baseball is one of the most intricate sports there is. For young kids, playing a complete game of baseball is very difficult, because there are so many skills you need. This being the case, we have included a handful of games that you can play with your teams. These are not complete baseball games, but they are fun, interactive and use skills that are needed in baseball. Baseball is supposed to be fun, and we want kids to stay in this great game as long as possible. The longer kids stay in baseball the more exciting the game gets. It is our job as coaches to keep it fun, and to keep kids coming back season after season.

At the Prairie Baseball Academy when we are working with kids we almost always try to finish a camp or practice with some sort of game. These games simulate the skills we were working on that day. It is also important that the kids go home and the last thing they remember from that day at practice was participating in an enjoyable game with their teammates.

94



### PEPPER



#### **Baseball Application:**

Ground ball glove skills . Bat control

#### Setup

Have 3-8 players stand shoulder to shoulder in a line. Decide which end of the line is the front, and which is the end of the line.

One player is the hitter. The hitter should stand at least 5 big steps away from the line of players.

#### How it Works:

Players in line take turns underhand tossing the ball towards the hitter.

The hitter half swings or bunts the ball back towards the line. The hitter's objective is to hit a ground ball.

The player's in line are to field the ball cleanly and toss it back towards the hitter.

If a player in line bobbles the ball they move to the back of the line.

If the player swings and misses 3 times during his or her turn they go to the back of the line, and the player at the front of the line becomes the hitter.

If at any time the hitter hits a ball that stays in the air long enough to be caught by a person in line before touching the ground, that player becomes the new hitter.

#### Extra Thoughts:

Make sure to monitor the speed hitters are hitting the ball. For younger ages, the coach can hit the entire time.

95



# **ELIMINATION**



#### Baseball Application:

Ground ball work

Fielding with added pressure

#### Setup:

Have all the kids playing line up at short stop or second base.

Coach can split into multiple groups with similar skill levels.

#### How it Works:

Players will take turns fielding ground balls.

If they successfully field their ground ball and make a good throw they remain in the game.

If the make an error while fielding or make a poor throw to 1st base, that person is eliminated.

Continue playing until there is only one player remaining.

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

Use the player's hats as a life. If they make a mistake, they remove their hat so the coach knows they have only one life remaining. If you do not want to have one winner at the end, split the group into two teams. Whoever is the last player remaining wins for their team.



# **HOMERUN DERBY**



#### **Baseball Application:**

Simple and fun hitting game

#### Setup:

Without letting the kids know, split them into 3 groups.

Try to group the kids with similar hitting abilities.

Set up a tee at home plate, or coach can throw live batting practice.

#### How it Works:

Each player gets 5-10 swings depending on time.

Set up cones in the infield/outfield at 3 different distances appropriate for the 3 groups you've already created.

Have the kids take their swings and if the ball they hit lands past the cone you set out for that group it counts as a homerun for that player.

Have kids keep track of how many homeruns they hit in their round.

Kids absolutely love this game. Compete against each other or against the score they got in the previous round, or practice.

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

Add a point or a "homerun" to a player's total if they successfully catch a ball hit in the air during the game. This keeps the kids who are not hitting involved.

97



# WALL BALL



#### **Baseball Application:**

Ground ball glove skills and footwork.

#### Setup:

Have all your kids stand in front of a wall.

Coach will need to make a boundary with cones. Rectangle around the wall.

Only need one tennis ball. Can add balls as you see fit.

#### How it Works:

Players take turns throwing the ball against the wall. When the ball bounces back the player closest to the ball attempts to field it.

If the ball is not fielded cleanly, that player loses a life.

If a player fields the ball cleanly he or she then immediately throws the ball off the wall.

If the ball bounces off the wall and hits a player they also lose a life.

Once a player loses his lives he is out of the game. Play until one player remains.

#### **Extra Thoughts:**

Encourage kids to throw the ball low into the wall. Creates more realistic ground balls.

You can penalize kids for jumping out of the way of the ball.

Use the player's hats as lives. When they lose their first life they take their hat off.

98





# WIFFLE BALL



#### **Baseball Application:**

Playing the game.

Trying all the positions on the field.

Learning game situations.

#### Setup:

Set up like you are going to play a normal game of baseball.

Fun to use the outfield grass, so players can slide. Use cones as bases.

Create two teams, doesn't matter how many players are on each team.

Works best when the coach pitches the whole time. Speeds the game up.

Kids do not need to wear gloves, but can if they like, or coach wants them to.

#### How it Works:

Coach throws to each hitter. Can play no strikeouts, hit until contact.

When players hit the ball, the fielders try to get them out like a normal game.

No walks, no bunting, no stealing.

Can keep score, but do not have to. The kids will try to keep score anyways.

### **Extra Thoughts:**

Set up a homerun line with cones. If the ball flies past the cones it is a homerun.

Stop the game from time to time and call out the situation: "runners on 1st and 2nd, one out. Where are we going with the ball?"



# **SCRUB**



#### **Baseball Application:**

Playing the game.

Learning the positions on the field. Trying them all.

Hitting, fielding, throwing, catching.

#### Setup:

Coach sends a player to each of the 9 positions. Can have a player pitch, or coach can pitch the whole time.

The players who are not sent out to the field will be hitters in the game.

#### How it Works:

Each of the hitters will get a pre-determined amount of at bats per turn. (1-3)

Hitters take turns hitting in order. They are trying to hit like they would in a normal game. They are trying to get on base, and ultimately score a run.

Players on defense are doing their best to get all of the hitters out.

Positions are numbered (P 1, C 2, 1B 3, 2B 4, 3B 5, SS 6, LF 7, CF 8, RF 9)

Once the hitters finish their turn, they head to RF or position 9. All of the other players move up one position.

Can play for as long as you want. The game will continue to move along.

#### Extra Thoughts:

Make sure to stop the game from time to time to announce the situation to your team. Kid's need to start learning what to do with the ball cretain situations.

The Prairie Baseball Academy was founded in 1995, as a way for young athletes to continue their post-secondary education and baseball careers in Southern Alberta. Over the past 20 years the PBA has developed 650+ alumni spread over Canada from coast to coast. More than 120 athletes have graduated from the program to play college baseball in the United States, and close to 40 players have gone on to play professional baseball. Little League® Baseball Canada, in association with the Prairie Baseball Academy, is aiming to provide coaches with an effective tool to help motivate kids to succeed not only in baseball, but in life. This Flipbook is the ultimate tool to help coaches and players of all ages improve their baseball skills quickly and effectively.

If you would like to contact the Prairie Baseball Academy you can at 403-320-1302 or at PBA@Telusplanet.net

Thank-you for your support in helping develop baseball in this country.



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101



Little League® Baseball Canada has partnered with The Prairie Baseball Academy to update our Teaching for Tomorrow Coaching program and to add new components to help develop the skills of Little League coaches across the country.

Little League® Canada, is aiming to provide coaches with an effective tool to help motivate kids to succeed not only in baseball, but in life. This flipbook is the ultimate tool to help coaches and players of all ages improve their baseball skills effectively, and have fun while doing it.

Thank you for your support in helping develop baseball in this country.

Prairie Baseball Academy can be reached at:

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