**Verona Little League Coaching Philosophies and Principles**

Have your players address you and other coaches with a term of respect, such as “Coach,” or whatever works best for you.

Coaches are expected to hold practice a minimum of one time per week. Practices should be preplanned and incorporate various drills to keep players interested.

Coaches should treat all kids with respect. Yelling and demeaning kids for physical errors committed is not effective. Remember, you are not only a coach but also a teacher. Use errors and mistakes as opportunities to teach your players. Treat each player like you would want your child to be treated.

Be sure to work with each player individually to improve their confidence, knowledge of the game, and physical skills. You never know what a player is fully capable of until you work with them and teach them.

Teach your kids to play a variety of positions. Teaching kids to play outfield is very important too. It can improve their chances to earn playing time when they play for you, and when they advance to higher levels.

Work with your players to develop as many pitchers and catchers as you can. Having many players that can pitch will benefit any team. When taught properly, kids really enjoy learning to play the catcher position. Having solid catchers will improve any team’s defense!

Set a positive example for your players and team parents with your interactions with umpires and opposing coaches. If you have problems with officials or opposing coaches direct your complaint to your Little League representative. Remember, you represent your team AND your community!
Practice

The best way to improve baseball skills for a team or individual is through practice. Well planned practices are important to developing players’ abilities at any age level. Keys to organizing a successful baseball practice include:

- Have a plan by completing a Practice Plan itinerary
- Make the practice fun (include competition, games, scrimmage, etc)
- Keep all players involved (limit the standing around)
- To improve skills, ensure ample repetitions for each player
- Keep drills short 10-20 minutes per drill
- Include different drills to add variety throughout the season

During games each player only gets a few at bats and therefore only a handful of swings. However, during a well organized practice each player can get 50-100 swings during different drills. The same is true defensively for a player. A fielder may get a few fielding opportunities during each game but can get countless ground balls and fly balls during a well run practice.

Preseason practices are important, but continuing practice throughout the course of the season is just as important! Teams should try and schedule a minimum of one practice per week.

Coaches should give appropriate and constructive feedback to players to help them improve.

Coaches should make baseball practices fun!
Player Development Goals

- Establish a solid base of fundamental skills in each player. This will allow players to learn new and advanced skills

- Develop age appropriate skills for each player (listed in this section). This will prepare the player to have success at the next level

- Work individually with each player to help them improve their skills

- Prepare the player to have success in game situations
Rookie League 7-8 Year Olds

Introduction to Throwing Mechanics:
- Proper grip on the baseball, two or three fingers on the baseball. For those that have to use three fingers, encourage them to practice with two fingers on the ball as their hands will continue to grow.
- Step forward with the foot opposite the throwing hand. Right handed throwers will lead with their left foot, left handed throwers will lead with their right foot.
- Point glove side shoulder towards the target. Players should rotate their shoulders when throwing to their target.
- Players should follow through after releasing the baseball.

Introduction to Catching the Baseball:
- Give throwing partner a target using both hands in front of the body.
- Catch ball in front of body with arms slightly bent at the elbows
- Use bare hand to secure thrown ball into the glove
- Catch balls above the waist with the glove fingers pointed up
- Catch balls below the waist with glove fingers pointed down towards the ground
- Watch the thrown ball go into the glove

Introduction to Swinging the Baseball Bat:
- Knees should be about shoulder width apart with a slight bend in the knees. Players should be in a comfortable, yet athletic position. Body weight should be evenly distributed between both the front and back foot.
- The top and bottom hand should be directly on top of each other with no space between
- Players should watch the ball from the release all the way until the time of contact with the bat.
- Players should step with their front foot towards the pitcher, and avoid “stepping in the bucket.”
- The swing plane is difficult to teach consistently at this level, so try to encourage contact with the baseball. Help players avoid drastic “uppers” or other poor habits.
- Introduction to proper swing plane and path, by “keeping hands inside of the baseball.” The hands should be leading the swing with the barrel of the bat lagging behind to generate momentum.

Introduction to Fielding the Baseball:
- Ground balls should be fielded with knees bent and the glove out in front of the body. Glove fingers should be on the ground and the bare hand should be used to secure the ball into the glove.
- Many players will want to catch fly balls with the glove at or below the waist (a “basket catch”), but should be taught how to catch a fly ball with their glove above the waist and fingers of the glove pointed towards the sky. The elbow of the glove side should be directly underneath the glove, and the bare hand should be used to secure the ball.
**Minor League 9-10 Year Olds**

**Throwing Mechanics:**
- Proper grip on the baseball, two or three fingers on the baseball. For those that have to use three fingers, encourage them to practice with two fingers on the ball as their hands will continue to grow.
- Step forward with the foot opposite the throwing hand. Right handed throwers will lead with their left foot, left handed throwers will lead with their right foot.
- Point glove side shoulder towards the target. Players should rotate their shoulders when throwing to their target.
- Players should follow through after releasing the baseball.
- "Power position"

**Introduction to Pitching:**
It is easiest to teach pitchers to begin working from the stretch position. Pitcher will place back foot parallel to the pitching rubber.
- The front leg will bend at the knee and raise to waist height to come to the "balance point" (see below)

- Front leg will come down, then drive towards the plate to achieve the "power position" (see below)

- From the power position the pitcher leads with a high front elbow towards the target.
- The pitcher should release the ball and be in proper fielding position to field a batted ball. This also ensures proper follow through on the pitching delivery.
-Main concentration should be on proper mechanics which improves accuracy. Being introduction to the pitching windup once a pitcher has began to feel comfortable and established a fluid and repeatable delivery from the stretch position.
-Pitchers should start with both feet touching the pitching rubber.
-Step back behind the rubber with the opposite foot as the pitcher’s throwing hand (right handed players with the left foot, left handed players with the right foot).
-The other foot, while still maintaining contact with the rubber, will move in front of the rubber parallel to the rubber.
- The front leg will bend at the knee and raise to waist height to come to the “balance point”
-Front leg will come down, then drive towards the plate to achieve the “power position”
-From the power position the pitcher leads with a high front elbow towards the target.
-The pitcher should release the ball and be in proper fielding position to field a batted ball. This also ensures proper follow through on the pitching delivery

Catching the Baseball:
-Give throwing partner a target using both hands in front of the body.
-Catch ball in front of body with arms slightly bent at the elbows
-Use bare hand to secure thrown ball into the glove
-Catch balls above the waist with the glove fingers pointed up
-Catch balls below the waist with glove fingers pointed down towards the ground
-Watch the thrown ball go into the glove

Swinging the Baseball Bat:
-Knees should be about shoulder width apart with a slight bend in the knees. Players should be in a comfortable, yet athletic position. Body weight should be evenly distributed between both the front and back foot.
-The top and bottom hand should be directly on top of each other with no space between
-The player’s “knocking knuckles” (those used to knock on a door) should be close to being lined up with one another. This assures that the bat rests in the players fingers and not the palm of his hand.
-Players should watch the ball from the release all the way until the time of contact with the bat.
-Players should step with their front foot towards the pitcher, and avoid “stepping in the bucket.”
-Begin to develop the proper swing plane and path. Hands should be inside of the baseball with the barrel of the bat lagging behind to generate momentum. Work on developing compact swings making solid contact with the baseball.

Introduction to Bunting the Baseball:
-For sacrifice bunts, players should set up early and square around before the pitcher releases the pitch
-Players should pivot on their back foot and square their shoulders to the pitcher, with their knees slightly bent (see below)
- Bottom hand should move to the top of the grip on the baseball bat
- Top hand should be behind the barrel of the bat creating a "shelf" for the bat to rest on.

**Do not** wrap fingers around the barrel of the bat. (See below for proper technique)

- Player should be gripping the bat lightly
- Arms should be extended in front of the body with the elbows slightly bent
- The bat should be held at a 45 degree angle with the barrel of the bat being above the knob of the bat
- The player's eyes should be on the same horizontal plane as the barrel of the bat

(see below)
Fielding the Baseball:
-Ground balls should be fielded with knees bent and the glove out in front of the body. Glove fingers should be on the ground and the bare hand should be used to secure the ball into the glove (see below)

Catching a Fly Ball
-Many players will want to catch fly balls with the glove at or below the waist (a "basket catch"), but should be taught how to catch a fly ball with their glove above the waist and fingers of the glove pointed towards the sky. The elbow of the glove hand should be directly underneath the glove, and the bare hand should be used to secure the ball.
Throwing Mechanics:
- Proper grip on the baseball, two fingers on the baseball with the grip across the seams of the baseball (this is also referred to as a four seam fastball, as seen below).

- Point glove side shoulder towards the target. Players should rotate their shoulders when throwing to their target.
- Players should follow through after releasing the baseball.
- More work with the "power position"
  - "Power position" consists of glove side pointed at target with front elbow and glove shoulder height, while throwing hand is head height and throwing elbow is at shoulder height
- Introduction to using the bottom half of the body to generate more momentum on throws. Players should work on using proper footwork while throwing the baseball. For a right handed player, they will step first with their right foot as they rotate their shoulders so that their non-throwing shoulder points directly at their target. Next they will step towards their target with their left foot so that they are perpendicular to their target. The progression for a right handed player should go “Right, left, throw.” For a left hander, “Left, right, throw.”

Pitching:
- Pitchers should continue to become more familiar with the windup, balance point, power position, and follow through.
- Pitchers should learn to pitch from the stretch with runners on base
- Pitchers should work towards improving accuracy with the fastball and begin working on developing a change-up

Catching the Baseball:
- Emphasize giving your throwing partner a chest high two handed target. Bare hand should be next to glove so that the ball can be transferred quickly.
- Track the thrown ball into the glove, and watch the bare hand take the ball out of the glove.
- When the ball is transferred from the glove to the throwing hand it should be grabbed across the seams
Hitting:
-The player’s “knocking knuckles” (those used to knock on a door) should be close to being lined up with one another. This assures that the bat rests in the player’s fingers and not the palm of the hand.
-Players should be introduced to the three part swing philosophy of “Trigger, Stride, and Swing.”
-In the “Trigger” portion of the swing, the player loads his weight onto his back leg while simultaneously bringing his hands up and back 2”-4.”
-The next step is the “Stride” when the player steps forward with his front foot while keeping the majority of his weight on the back leg.
-The final component is the “Swing.” The “Trigger” and “Stride” must be completed before the swing begins. The swing should consist of the hands leading the barrel through the hitting zone on a downward angle.

-The above hitting tee made by Louisville provides the proper swing path.

Bunting:
-Players should use the bunting principles introduced in the Minor League age group.
-Players should begin to learn how to bunt the baseball down both the 1st and 3rd baselines. Players should set the bat angle early towards the baseline to which they would like to place the ball. Avoid keeping the bat parallel to the front of home plate or bunted baseballs will go directly towards the pitcher.

Fielding the Baseball:
-Ground balls should be fielded with knees bent and the glove out in front of the body. Glove fingers should be on the ground and the bare hand should be used to secure the ball into the glove.
-When the ball enters the glove the wrist should snap upwards with the bare hand on top of the glove securing it.
-To throw the ball, the player should point their glove side shoulder towards their target and go through the steps listed in the throwing mechanics section. Next they will step towards their target with their left foot so that they are perpendicular to their target. The progression for a right handed player should go “Right, left, throw.” For a left hander, “Left, right, throw.”
Juniors 13-14 Year Olds

Our goal is to prepare players in this age group to be ready to compete at the high school level. Players should be familiar with all of the concepts and techniques explained. Players should be proficient in all of the drills and skills below.

Throwing Mechanics:

- Proper grip on the baseball, two fingers on the baseball with the grip across the seams of the baseball (this is also referred to as a four seam fastball, as seen below).

- Point glove side shoulder towards the target. Players should rotate their shoulder when throwing to their target.

- Players should follow through after releasing the baseball

- Players should throw from the “power position”

  - “Power position” consists of glove side pointed at target with front elbow and glove shoulder height, while throwing hand is head height and throwing elbow is at shoulder height as seen below:
Players should work on using proper footwork while throwing the baseball. For a right handed player, they will step first with their right foot as they rotate their shoulders so that their non-throwing shoulder points directly towards their target. Next they will step towards their target with their left foot so that they are perpendicular to their target. The progression for a right handed player should go “Right foot, left foot, throw.” For a left hander, “Left foot, right foot, throw.”

Players should aim for their partner’s target to improve accuracy of throws

Pitching:

- Players should be able to pitch from both the windup and stretch positions

- With the pitching mound being moved to 60' 6”, coaches should monitor pitcher’s mechanics to check that the front side is staying closed and that the front elbow is shoulder height.

- Players should be able to throw both a fastball and change-up for strikes

- Curve balls are not a necessity at this age

- Players should learn how to pickoff runners from the stretch position at 1st, 2nd, and 3rd base

  - Right handed pitchers should learn how to step off the rubber and throw to 1st base in addition to being able to pivot on their right foot and throw over to 1st base

  - Left handed pitchers should learn how to bring their left leg to a 45 degree angle and be able to pickoff to 1st base.

- Pitchers should also learn how to incorporate the “slide step” from the stretch position to quicken their delivery to home plate

Catching the Baseball:

- Emphasize giving your throwing partner a chest high two handed target. Bare hand should be next to glove so that the ball can be transferred quickly.

- Track the thrown ball into the glove, and watch the bare hand take the ball out of the glove.

- When the ball is transferred from the glove to the throwing hand it should be grabbed across the seams

- Players should work on catching the ball on the right side of their body (if they are right handed) and get “around the baseball.” (Left handed players should catch the ball on the left side of their body). The goal is to get them into the power position as quickly as possible.

- Players should use the bottom half of their body to generate momentum using the following sequences:

  - Right Handers: Right foot, left foot, throw
-Left Handers: Left foot, right foot, throw

Hitting:

-The player’s “knocking knuckles” (those used to knock on a door) should be close to being lined up with one another. This assures that the bat rests in the players fingers and not the palm of the hand.

-Players should become comfortable with the three part swing philosophy of “Trigger, Stride, and Swing.”

-In the “Trigger” portion of the swing, the player loads his weight onto his back leg while simultaneously bringing his hands up and back 2”-4.”

-The next step is the “Stride” when the player steps forward with his front foot while keeping the majority of his weight on the back leg.

-The final component is the “Swing.” The “Trigger” and “Stride” must be completed before the swing begins. The swing should consist of the hands leading the barrel through the hitting zone on a downward angle.

-The above hitting tee made by Louisville provides the proper swing path.
**Focus** To teach hitters the importance of getting to a consistent hitting position for every swing. Every hitter, regardless of stance or size, must get to this position to begin a swing.

**Setup** A coach works with individual hitters. Do this drill using soft toss at one end of a cage. Set up the stance for the middle of the plate. The hitter’s goal is to drive the ball to the back of the cage.

**Procedure** Complete this drill in three steps: the stance, stride, and swing. The hitter begins in his stance and loads up to begin the swing. At the instant his front foot hits the ground, the hitter pauses. He holds this position for a three count, noticing his checkpoints during this pause. Following the pause, the hitter then takes his normal full swing, aiming for a hard backspin line drive off the center of the back net.

**Coaching Points** One major difference between successful and unsuccessful hitters is the ability to get in the best possible position to explode into a swing. The hitting position is reached after the hands and body have loaded and the stride foot has hit the ground. Look for these traits in the hitter:

1. An equilateral triangle formed by the legs and the ground
2. Shoulders almost level with a slight tuck of the front shoulder
3. Hands over the back foot at shoulder or slightly above shoulder level
4. Level through the belt line
5. Level eyes on the pitch
6. Closed front foot
7. Slightly flexed lead arm
8. Hands holding the bat at a 45-degree angle
THREE-TEE DRILL

Focus  To give hitters chances to visualize exactly where each located pitch should be hit.

Setup  A coach works with individual hitters. You'll need three tees. Set up home plate at one end of the cage. Set up the first tee on the inside corner at the front of the plate. Set up the second tee in the middle of the plate. Set up the third tee on the outside corner at the back of the plate. All three tees should be level to allow a swing through a ball on any one of them.

Procedure  The batter sets up his stance in relation to the plate. The coach is on the opposite side of the plate in position to place balls on a tee. Once the hitter is ready, he closes his eyes. The coach places a ball on the inside, middle, or outside tee. Once the ball is placed on a tee, the coach says, "Now." The hitter loads up his hands and body. As the front foot is about to hit the ground, he opens his eyes. He identifies which tee the ball is on and instantly drives the ball in the correct direction.

Coaching Points  Many young hitters try to hit every ball at the same contact point. Many start their swing before they know what they want to do with the ball. This drill helps them learn to change their point of contact. Hitters learn contact for pitches thrown inside, down the middle, or outside. They learn to see and identify a pitch before taking a swing. Have hitters occasionally open their eyes with no ball on the tee. Check the result. No swing should be taken, and the hitter should remain in proper hitting position. Repetitions of this drill give hitters a feel for where to make contact on each pitch and reinforce the importance of pitch identification.
SACRIFICE AND BREAK FROM THE BOX

Focus To bunt the ball into fair territory, 3 to 5 feet from the foul lines and 20 feet from home plate.

Setup This is a three-man drill. One player pitches to a bunter from 35 to 40 feet; the third player is fielding the bunts and returning balls to the pitcher.

Procedure Each player bunts 10 balls and then rotates. Emphasize the bunter running a few strides with each bunt attempt to get the feel of getting out of the box after bunting. All sacrifice rules apply.

Coaching Points The bunter wants to be skilled at bunting the ball on the left side or right side with equal efficiency. He should fully understand his role as a sacrifice bunter—this is most important. Once the batter appreciates his role, the bunt becomes a lot easier. The idea of sacrificing an at-bat for the good of the team should make all players want to bunt the ball. Unfortunately, it doesn’t for some players.

The important mechanics of the sac bunt are to get in front of the batter’s box, put your foot on the chalk in the front of the box, slide your top hand up to the trademark of the bat, and slide your bottom hand up the bat handle six to eight inches. The top hand should have a loose finger-tip grip so that the bat gives on contact and deadens the ball on contact. To make sure they bunt down on the ball, hitters keep the barrel of the bat 45 degrees higher than the handle. The back foot should be brought up almost parallel to the front foot. Some coaches (including me) prefer to bring the back foot only halfway up; the body is now at a 45-degree position rather than a complete 90-degree turn. The knees are bent, the hands are extended in front of the body as far as possible, the bat angle is set, and the eyes and head are almost at bat level. I like to have our bunters think they are making a pool shot (“eight ball in the side pocket”). Bunting is an art. Thinking they’re Minnesota Fats up there might help them attain proper body position.

Remind your bunters, “Bunt first, then run—not vice versa.” Tell them to get the bunt into a good location and then sprint to first base. A lot of bunters forget to apply good running techniques. We strive to make running a big part of our short game, which is obvious in these drills.
**Focus** To emphasize the importance of controlling body weight during the stride and reducing the tendency to lunge.

**Setup** A coach works with individual hitters. Set up home plate at one end of the cage. The hitter takes his normal position in the batter’s box in relation to home plate. The coach is on the other side of the plate, either on a knee or sitting down.

**Procedure** This drill is very similar to the traditional soft-toss. The difference here is that the coach can “hold” a toss when he wants to. As the coach begins his toss, the hitter loads up and prepares to swing. The coach randomly holds some pitches instead of throwing, observing the stride and body control of the hitter. On the “hold,” the batter will feel any time his weight shifts too early or too quickly. This helps eliminate unnecessary movement in the stride. Following each “hold,” the coach then tosses the ball after a three count. The hitter takes his swing from whatever position he was in following the stride and holds. A backspin line drive off the back net is the goal.

**Coaching Points** Make the hitter take many swings out of his hitting position. Hitters might initially have to take less than ideal swings from a weak-hitting position, but they’ll quickly feel the importance of proper balance at the completion of their stride. Quality of swing directly relates to quality of stride.
Focus  To work on two-strike hitting, face an assortment of pitches, and gain a better understanding of the strike zone.

Setup  Hitters work individually with a coach or pitcher. Set up a home plate at one end of the cage. Set up a pitching screen about 45 feet away. The pitcher prepares to throw a blend of pitches.

Procedure  Each pitch will be on a 3-2 count on the hitter. The hitter earns a point for each hard hit ball or for taking a walk. The pitcher receives a point for a strikeout or a weakly hit ball. Score is kept until either the hitter or pitcher reaches 20 points. The pitcher should be as hard as possible on the hitter. Facing a variety of fastballs, curveballs, change-ups, and other pitches will sharpen the hitter and help him develop into an effective two-strike hitter.

Coaching Points  To be a complete hitter, a hitter must be a tough out with two strikes. This is a great way to create a competitive environment in which the hitter can be challenged. Weaknesses should be identified and exploited. If a hitter is struggling with off-speed pitches, throw a majority of pitches off speed. Before long, you can develop a weakness into a strength. A competitive hitter does whatever it takes to reach 20 points before the pitcher does. This is the type of attitude a great hitter should possess. Becoming an advanced two-strike hitter begins with the right attitude. Stress the importance of taking a walk.
**Focus** To practice situational hitting with competition between hitting groups.

**Setup** Players are in groups of four or five, as follows:

- Group 1—hitting from home plate
- Groups 2 and 3—in defensive positions
- Group 4—toss hitting or playing pepper prior to hitting
- Group 5—with coach, who is throwing from normal batting practice distance

**Procedure** The drill is timed and competitive; the winning group is determined by a stopwatch. Each hitting group begins with a runner at first base (this runner will be the last hitter in his group). The stopwatch begins with the initial pitch to home plate in a batting practice situation. Each hitter must successfully execute the following:

1. Sacrifice bunt—advance runner at first base to second base successfully. On an unsuccessful bunt attempt, the runner returns to first base.
2. With the advancing runner now on second base, the hitter must advance him to third base with a ground ball to the right side or a fly ball to the right field. The runner remains on second base until the hitter successfully moves him to third.
3. Once on third base, the hitter must execute a successful squeeze bunt, either a suicide or safety squeeze (predetermined by the coach and the same for each group).
4. Once the runner scores, the hitter must get a legitimate base hit, and then he becomes the runner at first base, and the cycle is repeated. The coach decides whether a hit is a base hit or not; the hitter remains at home plate until he gets a hit.
5. Once the last hitter completes his routine with a base hit, the runners line up at home plate and circle the bases, one after the other, just as they would on an inside-the-park home run. When the last runner touches home plate, the stopwatch records that group’s time.
6. Announce each group’s time.
Coaching Points  This is an excellent drill to run near the end of practice. One of our assistant coaches saw a similar drill while observing the Houston Astros a few years ago, and we modified it to fit our situation. The enthusiasm runs high in this drill, and players enjoy the friendly competition. The drill is especially effective while on the road near the end of the season. Hitters focus on advancing runners in a game situation. Defensive players attempt to make each play while in the field, although sometimes they might be playing out of position. The coach always rules on whether the bunt or hit would have advanced the runner in a game situation.

Modifications  Limiting the hitting groups to small numbers makes for more fun and enthusiasm. Modifications to fit your players’ skill level are a good idea.

- For younger players—with a runner on second base, a sacrifice bunt might be more appropriate than hitting to the right side.
- Substituting the down-angle contact play for the squeeze bunt might be an innovative change with the runner on third base.
- On squads where pitchers don’t hit, try dividing them evenly and allowing them to hit after the last hitter completes the cycle. Pitchers take part in only the successful base hit part of the drill, with pitchers attempting to showcase their hitting prowess amid cheers and jeers. This adds to the fun at the end of a practice day.
**Throwing & Catching Drills**

“21” Each player receives 3, 2, 1, or 0 points for the accuracy of their throws to their partner. First partner to 21 points wins. Objective is to improve accuracy of throwing and improve catching skills.

“3 Player Relay” Form a straight line with 3 players standing 20’-30’ apart. One player on the end starts with the ball and throws it to the middle “relay” player who then throws it to the player on the opposite end. First team to complete the relay wins. The player in the middle of the line is the “relay” player and should be incorporating proper footwork and throwing technique. Objective is to improve throwing accuracy, arm strength, foot work, and speed.

“4 Corner Catch” Players are stationed at each base and being throwing from home plate, to 1st base, 2nd base, 3rd base, and then back to home plate. Can also reverse the order and throw from home plate, to 3rd base, to 2nd base, to 1st base, and back to home plate. Objective is to improve throwing accuracy, arm strength, foot work, and speed.
**ONE-KNEE DRILL**

**Focus**  To exhibit proper throwing mechanics beginning with the grip hand and progressing through the rest of the body.

**Setup**  You can do this drill with two or more players; for large groups, there should be one coach for every 10 players or so. Players position about 30 feet from a partner with one knee (throwing-arm side) on the ground.

**Procedure**  Step 1: The arm comes back from the glove extending downward with fingers in front of the ball.

Step 2: As the arm extends behind the body, fingers remain in front of the ball.

Step 3: As the arm comes forward above the ball, fingers are behind the ball.

**Coaching Points**  Ensure that the thrower's front shoulder is pointed at the target in a motion similar to shooting an arrow from a bow or firing a gun at a target. During release of the ball, the front shoulder should be pointing at the target. The arm action should be with a smooth rhythm, which includes drawing the arm down and back, extending before coming forward, and reaching above the head while advancing the arm toward the release point. Check for players wrapping their arms behind their backs rather than straight back. Also check for proper follow-through.
Focus  To develop hand-eye coordination, footwork, and timing with fielders' feet and hands.

Setup  You'll need one handball per player and a wall.

Procedure  The fielder tosses a ball against a wall about three feet away. When the ball returns, the fielder taps the ball off the bounce to the wall again, using his glove hand only. The fielder taps the ball back and forth to the wall with his palm up, as if the hand is the glove and in the proper receiving position to field ground balls. As the fielder is tapping the ball, he moves his feet to keep the ball in the center of his body and develop a rhythm. The fielder's goal is to keep the ball moving for 25 to 30 taps in a row.

Coaching Points  Focus on the infielder tracking the ball into his palm, working to get under the ball with his glove hand, tapping the ball out in front of his body, and developing a rhythm with his feet and hands.

Modifications  When fielders are doing this drill for the first time you might want them to focus on just tapping the ball against the wall without moving their feet and tapping the ball out in front of their body. The hardest part of this drill is the hand-eye coordination part of it.
FOUR-CORNER FIELDING

Focus  To work on proper routes to the ball, fielding ground balls properly, and throwing accurately.

Setup  Infielders and outfielders work together in groups of four. Groups form a square of players about 10 yards apart. You’ll need one ball per group.

Procedure  Player 1 rolls a ground ball directly at player 2. Player 2 fields the ball properly and throws the ball to player 4. Player 4 rolls a ground ball directly at player 1. Player 1 fields the ball and throws to player 3. Player 3 rolls a ground ball directly to player 4. Player 4 fields the ball and throws to player 2. Player 2 rolls a ground ball directly to player 3. Player 3 fields the ball and throws to player 1. The format is repeated for backhands and for balls fielded on the fielder’s glove side.

Coaching Points  Pay attention to the route fielders take to field balls that are being rolled directly at them. Fielders should be getting to the right of the ball or around it (for right-handed fielders). Focus on proper fielding techniques: fielding the ball from the ground up, getting under the ball with the glove, and good throwing mechanics.

Modifications  Another way to run this drill is to put infielders in one group and outfielders in another. This is a good drill to run indoors on a basketball court on rainy days.
Focus  To work fast-twitch muscle fibers to develop quicker direction change.

Setup  Only outfielders do this drill. You’ll need balls, cleats, gloves, and a large open space.

Procedure  Set outfielders up in a football format, facing the line of scrimmage. The coach is the quarterback; the outfielder is the receiver. The distance between the outfielder and quarterback depends on the pass pattern being run. Two pass patterns we use are the 12-yard post and the 5-yard out. Figures a and b show what the pattern routes look like and where the ball should be thrown.

- The 12-yard post pattern (figure a) is designed to have the outfielder take off, run 12 yards, angle in at 45 degrees while staying in stride, then picking up the quarterback and receiving the pass.
- The 5-yard out pass pattern (figure b) is designed to make the receiver run 5 yards past the line of scrimmage, explosively turn at a 90-degree angle, head toward the sideline about 5 to 8 yards, then receive the ball.

In this drill, you don’t want to make perfect throws to your receiver. Throw the ball behind the outfielder to make him turn around and adjust. Throw it far in front of him to make him dive. Make the pass pattern routes longer and farther to match receiver success.

Coaching Points  After players run 10 to 15 pass patterns (depending on the condition of each player), you’re no longer developing fast-twitch muscle fibers. Try to maximize the effort that each player has to put forth to catch the ball. Many times, outfielders take incorrect routes to catch fly balls and need to change direction quickly to recover lost ground and time. This drill practices that skill. Use a variety of pass patterns to challenge them. Forcing outfielders to divert their vision from where the ball is coming creates a gamelike fly ball that requires full-body turns. Regaining location of the ball, continuing pursuit, and making a great catch take practice; some players will need more work on this drill than others.

Modifications  Create variety by mixing up several pass patterns for outfielders to run.
12-MINUTE DRILL

Focus To maximize the number of ground balls and throws to the proper bases in the infield.

Setup Infielders take their positions on the infield. You'll need three players (coaches or pitchers) with fungo bats and three catchers.

Procedure Do three rounds of 4 minutes each, totaling 12 minutes. In the first round, fungo 1 hits ground balls to the shortstop, who throws to first base. Fungo 2 hits ground balls to the second baseman, who works on double-play feeds to second base. Fungo 3 hits to the third baseman, who is playing in and throws home. All hit balls are returned to the fungo from which they were hit. (See figure a.)

In round 2, fungo 1 hits to the shortstop, who works on double-play feeds to second base. Fungo 2 hits to the second baseman, who is playing in and throws home. Fungo 3 hits to the third baseman, who throws across to first base. All hit balls are returned to the fungo from which they were hit. (See figure b.)

In round 3, fungo 1 hits to the shortstop, who is playing in and throws home. Fungo 2 hits to the second baseman and throws to first base. Fungo 3 hits slow rollers to the third baseman, who is charging in to work on fielding bunts and throwing to third base. (See figure c.)

![Diagram a](image1)

![Diagram b](image2)
Coaching Points  As infielders are fielding ground balls, remind them not to sit back but to attack the ball, field it from the bottom up, and make a good, accurate throw or feed. For balls being hit to infielders playing in, remind players to field the ball and get their feet quickly into throwing position to get the runner at home.

Modifications  If you don’t have enough catchers, have infielders field the ball, get into a good throwing position, and then lob the ball back to the hitter. If you have more than one infielder at each position, have them rotate in and out or have them field five grounders and then switch. For plays going to the second- or third-base bag, infielders can catch for a partner who is fielding the ball (e.g., on feeds to second or bunts to third).
Sample Practice Plan

VERONA LITTLE LEAGUE

Date: Saturday June 1st

Location: Little League Complex

Practice Plan #1

10:00 am – 10:10 Warm-up and Stretching Routine

- Warm-up lap around the inside of the field
- Dynamic stretching routine

10:10 – 10:20 Progressive Throwing with a partner (always throwing to a target)

- Short Lever throws (10 each partner)
- Long Lever throws (10 each partner)
- Upper body rotation throws w/ legs planted
- Throwing incorporating proper footwork

Split Team into 2 Groups

Group 1 10:20-10:30 Infield “Crossfire”

- One coach hits ground balls to 3rd base & SS
- One coach hits ground balls to 2nd & 1st base

Group 1 10:30-10:50 Infield Ground Balls

- One coach hits ground balls to each position and throw to different bases

Group 2 10:20-10:50 Hitting Drills

- Soft toss with partner
- Hitting off a tee
- Live swings inside the cage with a coach throwing

10:50 – 11:20 Groups Switch
Sample Practice Plan

VERONA LITTLE LEAGUE

Date: Saturday June 8th

Practice Plan #2

10:00 am – 10:10 Warm-up and Stretching Routine
- Warm-up lap around the inside of the field
- Dynamic stretching routine

10:10 – 10:20 Progressive Throwing with a partner (always throwing to a target)
(Routine as done in Practice Plan #1)

10:20 – 10:30 Catch with partner, play “21”
“3 Player Relay” Drill

10:30 - 10:40 “Four-Corner Fielding” Drill

10:40 – 10:55 “12 Minute Drill”

10:55 – 11:00 Water Break

11:00 – 11:15 “Sacrifice and Break from the Box” bunting Drill

11:15 – 11:20 Review the day’s practice
Sample Practice Plan

VERONA LITTLE LEAGUE

Date: Saturday June 8th

Practice Plan #3

10:00 am – 10:10

Warm-up and Stretching Routine
- Warm-up lap around the inside of the field
- Dynamic stretching routine

10:10 – 10:20

Progressive Throwing with a partner (always throwing to a target)
(Routine as done in Practice Plan #1)

10:20 – 10:40

Hitting Drills, break the team into partners, two partners per group

 Group 1: “Stride, Pause, and Hit” soft toss Drill

 Group 2: “Hold a Soft Toss” Drill

 Group 3: “Three Tee Drill”

 Rotate through to each drill station

10:40 – 11:25

“Hitter’s Challenge”