

Developing Plans for the Season

One of the first things to do after becoming the coach of a team is to prepare for the season. Determine if there is a home field, a practice field, a league, equipment, uniforms and, of course, players. If those are in place, that is a great start.

The coach has to have a game plan for the whole season before the first practice or meeting. That may sound a little intimidating but if it is broken down into sections, it is a lot easier to do.

Decide on the following:

- How many months in the preseason and season
- How many practices and games in the preseason and season
- What skills will be taught during this time

Then on a calendar:

- Pencil in all practices
- Pencil in all games
- Pencil in any fundraisers needed
- Pencil in any non-softball team activities.

Decide on the list of the coordination skills, fundamental skills, strategy, mental attitude and anything else the coaches want to teach the players. Start with the basics needed at the early part of the season and then progress into harder skills through the end of the season. Before adding a new skill, briefly review the skills already learned then go on to more skills teaching a little at a time.

The starting point really depends on the ability of the players on the team. Progress may go slowly or quickly depending on the ability of the players and the thoroughness of the coaches. One fact is that they will learn more and try harder if the coach treats them with encouragement and positive comments. There has to be discipline and the coach has to be in charge but the teaching needs to be done with a positive tone instead of a negative tone.

For the 6-8U players, the first thing needed may be development of their locomotor skill. It is hard to teach fielding, running, etc. when the players do not have the fundamentals of movement skills. Locomotor movements include running, hopping, skipping, jumping, sliding, galloping and any movement that takes the player from one place to another. They will also benefit from non-locomotor skills like bending, swaying, stretching (not the type of stretching done in a circle) and any movement that is done in one place. These skills need to be worked on for a short time at the start of each practice. These are types of a dynamic warm up for the players.

In face, older players in high school still may be growing into their bodies and would benefit from the same type of locomotor and non-locomotor skills. The same type of skills can be incorporated into a dynamic warm up for them along with more difficult movement skills like using an agility ladder, cones, spots and more.

Of course, things may change in any number of ways, but at least this is a starting point. If things do happen during a daily practice, the coach needs to stay calm and be able to change the practice to fit what has changed. A coach spends a lot of time “thinking on their feet” to keep the practice flowing smoothly without missing a step.

The yearly plan is only a plan and it may all be accomplished or only a part of it will be through the year. But progress will be made in an orderly fashion and it will be a starting point for many players the next year. Break it down day by day, week by week, month by month for the whole year.

A sample of a daily practice might look like this. It is recommended for the coach to carry an index card in their pocket to refer to if needed. Clipboards are fine but a small card in the pocket makes it easy to look at no matter where the coach may be on the field.

SAMPLE PRACTICE

Practice one

Date of the practice

Equipment needed for the day

Warm ups:

A dynamic warm up should be used in a progression of intensity according to age and skill. Locomotor movements should be taught first to the 6U and 8U players and progress after they become comfortable with the simple ones. 10U and 12U can use the same locomotor movements that are used in agility drills.

Skills practice:

Throwing: List the type of throws the team is to practice for the day.

6-8U players practice proper mechanics of throwing making sure they follow through.

10-12U player practice fielding slow rollers and throwing to first base on the run, then to second, third and home.

Teaching Point:

The follow through is one of the most overlooked parts of the throw. It is easy to watch for when the players are throwing. If the foot of the throwing hand doesn't come off the ground, there is no follow through. If the leg of the throwing hand doesn't come around so that the hips move toward the target, there is no follow through. When there is no follow through, the ball will not have the sharp velocity it needs to get to the target. The ball will not have the zip on it and makes the throw slower than needed. The players that do not follow through will also have the possibility of developing shoulder problems. All of the force of the throw is put on the shoulders since the hips and legs are stopping before rotation occurs.

Hitting:

6-8U players will be working on their stance and the way they hold the bat. The player practices hitting while the coach pitches to the batter. The emphasis will be on the stance and the hands.

10-12U players will be bunting for a base hit focusing on bunting down the lines. Emphasis will be on getting out of the box quickly and the correct position of the hands on the bat to assure the ball lands in fair territory.

Teaching Point:

It is really important to get the right bat for a player of any age. If the player is dragging the bat, it is too long or too heavy. They need to have a bat that they can easily swing.

Baserunning:

6-8U players will be running through first base with proper feet positioning and proper arm swings.

10-12U- Players will be practicing baserunning skills by rounding first, watching the ball while doing the locomotor sliding motion back to first. Progress with them running to second and rounding it. The coaches can call out randomly "steal" and they run to the next base or "back" and they dive back in to the base just rounded.

Teaching Point:

6-8U players-coaches watch to make sure that they are running with their toes slightly in and their weight off of their heels. Also, watch that their arms are pumping straight forward not side to side.

10-12U players-coaches watch their feet positioning and arm swing as they run to first. They also watch how the players stop after rounding the base. Are they in a good athletic position with toes slightly in and hands in front of the waist area? Are their feet still moving a little or are they dead motion? Are they balanced and have good body control?

Catching Pop ups:

6-8U players-the coach tosses the ball, the player moves and positions themselves to catch the pop up in front of their forehead. The emphasis first would be on following the ball while moving the feet to put the body into a good position to catch the ball.

Teaching Point:

Younger players will want to get under the ball too much, remind them to catch the ball above but in front of their forehead.

10-12U players-coach tosses balls over their heads to the right and left. Emphasis should be on floating the ball over their heads a little farther and farther each time.

Teaching Point:

Coaches should practice tossing the ball with accuracy to the players. Make sure at first that they have success when while going back to the right and to the left. When they have been successful, makes the next five throws just a little harder and the next five a little harder again.

End of practice:

At the end of practice have a fun activity of choice for them and a positive talk about the practice and any kind of team unity cheer.

Teaching Point:

Obviously, all of this will not be written on a card. Each coach will have their own individual type of shorthand so that they will know what they are planning for the practice.

Making plans for each practice through the season is extremely important. When the coach is very organized and tells the players exactly where to go and what to do, that leads to players having a good feeling about the program and earns the coach a lot of respect. Players will know when a coach is winging it and is not prepared. Putting the effort into making plans for the season will pay off on the field.