

Practice 1

PURPOSE

To defend space by infield position, focusing on the situation in which there are no outs, no runners on base, and a grounder to the infield. The objectives are for the players to learn the infield positions (first, second, third, and shortstop) and to field grounders and make an accurate throw to first base.

Equipment

- ☒ Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- ☒ One glove per player
- ☒ One ball per player (minimum)

Warm-Up (10 minutes)

Begin each practice with five to ten minutes of warm-up activities to get players loosened up and ready to go. Players play catch with you or an assistant coach.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Following the warm-up, gather the players and briefly discuss the fitness concept for that practice.

Key Idea: General fitness

Gather children into a group. "Everyone jump 10 times. Our muscles help us jump. When you use your muscles a long time without getting too tired, it improves your *endurance*, which means you can run longer without getting tired. Now run really fast to second base and back." Wait for them to return. "Running strengthens your heart and lungs. Now touch your toes; try to keep your fingers down there while I count to 10. Stretching makes you flexible, like a rubber band. When we play baseball [softball], our bodies run, jump, and move. It makes our bodies stronger and improves our fitness, which means we can run and play longer and faster. Having good physical fitness is important for baseball [softball] and for being healthy. Every practice we'll talk about fitness in our Fitness Circles."

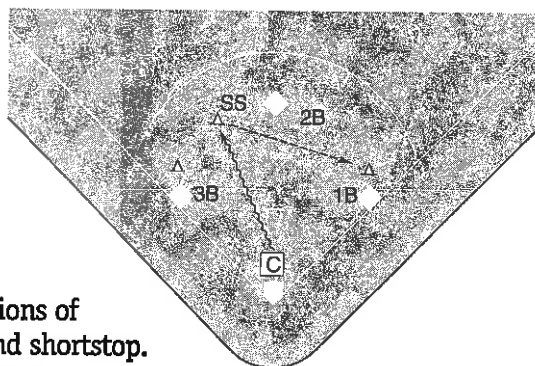
Game 1 (10 minutes)

Following the Fitness circle, get the kids playing a game. Follow most games with a time of questions and answers—with YOU asking the questions and your PLAYERS providing the answers (about what the goal of the game was and what skills and tactics they needed to perform to succeed in the game). For many games, we provide diagrams or figures showing how the game is played. We also often provide "coach's points" for you to pass along to your players during the games.

Goal

Players will learn the basic positions of infielders: first, second, third, and shortstop.

Players will field grounders and throw accurately to first base.



Practice 1

Description

Group(s) of four players—for each field, set up an infield with four players (first, second, and third base players and a shortstop). Show the players each infield position (see page 35), and use cones to mark each infield position. Then you or an assistant coach should throw or roll grounders to each infield position. Each player fields the grounder and throws the ball to first. Have players rotate through the different positions counterclockwise (first, second, shortstop, third).

As a motivational technique, count the number of good catches and good throws for each rotation. Challenge the children to improve from one rotation to the next. Keep a record of their accomplishments for future reference and future challenges.

Coach: "What were you trying to do in that game?"

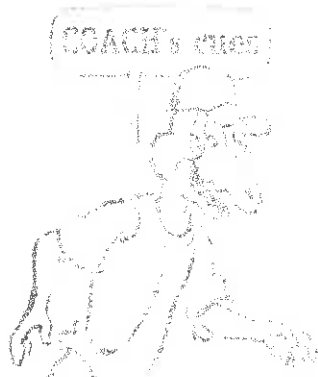
Players: "We were trying to catch the ball and throw it to first base."

Coach: "Was any group able to get four good catches and four good throws in a row?"

Players: "No."

Coach: "How do you think we could get better?"

Players: "We could get better if we practice more."



For Fielding

"Get in the ready position."

"Move your feet to the ball."

"Put your glove on the ground."

"Catch and cover" (Cover the ball with the ungloved hand.)

You'll follow Game 1 with a Skill Practice, during which you'll introduce, demonstrate, and explain a skill or tactic, and then attend to your players as they practice it. The question-and-answer session, in which your players tell YOU what skills and tactics they needed to be successful in the game, leads directly to the Skill Practice. We often provide coaching points with the Skill Practices; pass these points along to your players. We also provide "coach's cues"—phrases to help your players focus on the task at hand—during many Skill Practices and Games.

Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to field a grounder with a glove (see pages 125-126).
2. Practice fielding a ball properly.

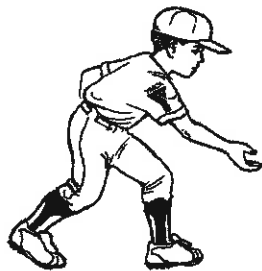
Description

Pairs—players choose partners and stand about 10 feet apart from each other. They then roll a ball back and forth between them. When the



Practice 1

(cont'd)



partners get 10 in a row without a miss, both take one giant step back and repeat the drill.

Use the Coach's Cues for fielding. Repeat them frequently.

Skill Practice 2 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to throw a ball accurately (see pages 121-123).
2. Practice throwing a ball accurately.

Description

Pairs—players choose partners and stand about 15 feet apart from each other. One partner rolls the ball to the other partner five times in a row. The other partner fields the ball and throws the ball back to his or her partner. After one partner rolls the ball five times, players should switch so that the other partner rolls the ball. If both of the partners complete four of five good catches and accurate throws (within one step of the person's catching the ball), both should take one giant step back and repeat the drill. Encourage them to focus on using good throwing form.

COACH'S cues



For Throwing

"Bring the ball **WAY** back."

"Step with the opposite foot."

"Follow through to the target."

Use the Coach's Cues for fielding to help with this practice, too.

Practice 1

Game 2 (10 minutes)

Follow the same directions as Game 1.

Team Circle (5 minutes)

Conclude practice by gathering your players and discussing a character development concept. These aren't lectures; you want your players' active participation in these discussions. Following the discussions, wrap up the practice with a few comments.

Key Idea: Four core values

Gather children into a circle. "This season we'll talk about four qualities of a good person and teammate. Number one is *caring*. Can you tell me ways you show caring to others? Helping someone up when they fall? Good! Number two is *honesty*. What ways do you show honesty? How about if you tell someone if you played with their game or toy? That's honesty. Number three is *respect*. Do you know what respect is? One thing that shows respect is listening to adults when they speak to you, like you're doing now. Number four is *responsibility*. One way to show you're responsible is to pick up after yourself. Don't wait for others to pick up for you." Ask them to share ways they show the four values in other areas of their lives. "Good teammates show these values to each other. We'll talk more about these four values during the season."

Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the youngsters of the next practice's day and time, and give them a sneak preview of that practice—fielding grounders, throwing to first base, and hitting a ball off a tee.

Variations

- Games may be played 5 v 5 or 6 v 6, depending on the number of players.
- If several players are having difficulty, design a special drill with multiple trials. The drill should last no longer than 10 minutes; then move on to another game or drill or return to the game or drill that they were playing previously.



COACH's
point

☞ The player on first base will need some help covering the base on the throw. Be sure to put one of your more proficient players on first base initially, but give all players a chance to play first base eventually.

☞ Frequently question the players about the proper infield positions. For example, you might say, "Jeffrey, go show us where the first-base player stands." "Kolicia, what position are you playing?" "Raymond, tell me what position Theresa is playing."

☞ If you have a player who is having difficulty, send him or her off with an assistant coach for some one-on-one attention for 5 to 10 minutes.