

Practice 2

PURPOSE

To defend space by an infield position, focusing on the situation in which there are no outs, no runners on base, and a grounder to the infield. The objective is for the players to learn the infield positions (first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher), to hit and run to first base, and to field grounders and make an accurate throw to first base. They also should demonstrate proper batting technique when hitting a ball off a tee.

Equipment

- ☒ Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- ☒ One glove per player
- ☒ One ball per player (minimum)
- ☒ Four batting tees
- ☒ Five balls at each tee

Warm-Up (10 minutes)

Players play catch with you or an assistant coach.

Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Cardiorespiratory fitness

Children gather into a group. "Everyone hold one hand up and make a fist. Squeeze your fist tightly, then let go. Keep tightening and letting go." Children continue for 10 counts. "Your heart is a special muscle that tightens and relaxes just like your fist is doing. Your heart is about the size of your fist. Let's put our fists over our chests. Every time it tightens, or beats, your heart pumps blood all over your body. When you run during baseball [softball], your heart beats faster. The beat slows down when you slow down. Let's run with high knees for 15 counts while we count together. Stop and feel your heart beat by putting your hand over your chest." Model for players. "Running strengthens your heart and lungs and improves your fitness."

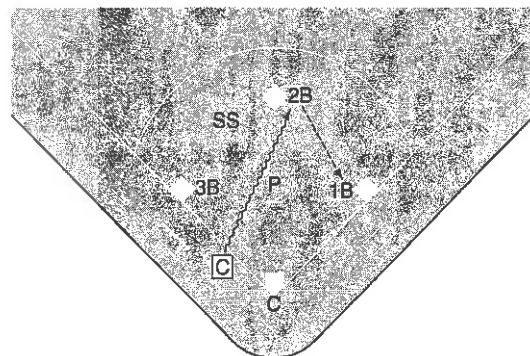
Game 1 (10 minutes)

Goal

Players will learn the basic positions of infielders: first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher. Players will field grounders and throw accurately to first base.

Description

Group of six—for each field, set up an infield with six players (first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher). 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. Count the number of good catches and good throws.



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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."



Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

Description

Pairs—players choose partners and stand about 10 feet apart from each other. They then roll a ball back and forth. When the partners get 10 in a row without a miss, both should take one giant step back and repeat the drill.

Then partners stand about 15 feet apart from each other. One partner rolls the ball to the other; the other fields the ball and throws it back to his or her partner. After one partner rolls the ball five times, the players should switch so the other partner gets to roll 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.



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.)

For Throwing

"Bring the ball WAY back."

"Step with the opposite foot."

"Follow through to the target."

Skill Practice 2 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to use proper technique when striking a ball off a tee with a bat (see "Hitting," pages 128-130).
2. Practice striking a ball off a tee with a bat.

Description

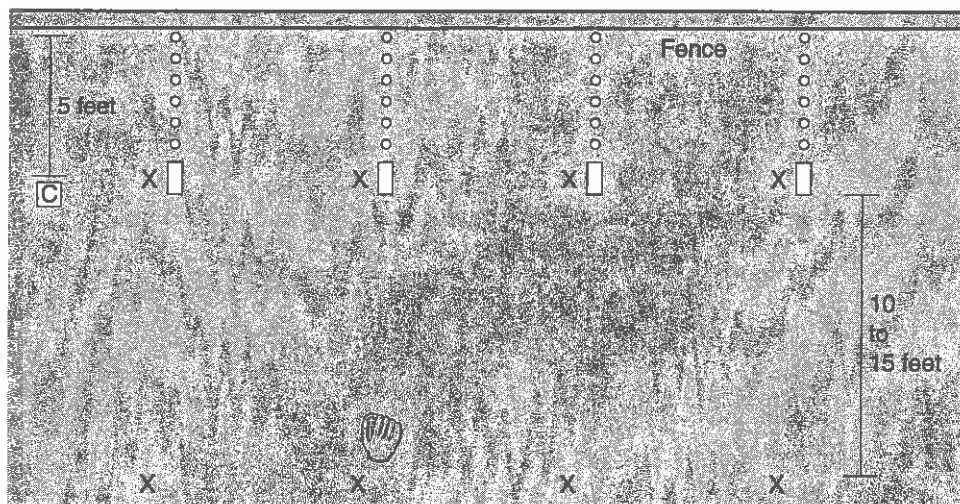
Set up three or four batting stations. Position them within five feet of a fence, with two players at each tee. With you or an assistant coach present, one player in each pair works on striking the ball off the tee, hitting it against the fence. The partner places the ball on the tee for the batter, then stands way back. (You or the assistant coach should



Repetition is necessary for young players. For example, when you teach hitting, let each player practice for about 5 to 10 minutes, then work on fielding for 7 to 10 minutes. Set up four stations (two batting stations and two fielding stations), and rotate players every 5 to 7 (or 10) minutes.

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(cont'd)



put a glove on the ground 10 to 15 feet behind the tee and have the partners stand behind the glove.) Each player should hit five times in a row, then switch places with his or her partner. Continue for five minutes, then repeat. Discuss rules related to balls and strikes (see pages 137-138).



"Get in the ready position."
"Watch the ball on the batting tee."
"Step and swing fast."

Game 2 (10 minutes)

Goal

Players will learn the basic positions of infielders: first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher. Players will hit and run to first before the throw gets to the first-base player.

Description

6 v 6—players hit off a tee and run to first base. A point is scored if they are safe at first. They can continue running bases, but the play will only be at first base. The runner can score a run if she or he crosses home plate.

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Team Circle (5 minutes)

Key Idea: Responsibility

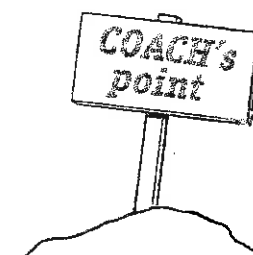
Gather children into a group. "I want us all to pretend we're eggs. Eggs have shells that can break. What would happen if we bumped into each other as eggs? Right. We would crack and break. Let's move around the field being eggs. Don't bump each other or we'll break!" Continue for about one minute. "We were all careful not to bump each other so our 'shells' wouldn't break! That was great! You were in charge of or 'responsible' for your moving. When we're careful of each other, we're responsible for our space and other players' space. This shows responsibility during practice and games."

Wrap-Up

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

Variations

- Games may be played 5 v 5 or 6 v 6, depending on the number of players on the team.
- During the final game, players can hit and not run. This makes the game less complex.
- Try this variation with advanced players: have four players form a square, with a person at each corner. The first player rolls the ball to the player to his or her left. That player catches the grounder and throws the ball to the next player, who then rolls the ball to the next player, and so on. After the ball goes around the square five times, the players change roles so that the players who rolled the ball throw, and vice versa. Continue for 7 to 10 minutes.



☞ Explain the rules as the game is played, but be quick, brief, and to the point. Don't be afraid to repeat something or to question players to see if they understand the rules or a particular situation.

☞ Frequently refer to the situation. For example, say to them, "There are no outs and no runners on base. Where should you throw the ball?"