

Colchester CBSL Coaches Guide

Welcome to coaching in Little league, we would not be able to make this happen for the kids without you being a volunteer. We recognize that not all volunteers have coached in baseball or other sports and we are creating a guide to help aid you.

This guide or matrix is going to help cover the different levels / divisions and the level of skills that should be taught during the season and also what skills players should be learning to prepare for the next level. Our goal is to make sure that all of the coaches are on the same page with guidelines to help with planning practices and helping with strategy for lineups

All baseball divisions are considered instructional with varied levels of competition. As players move up through the divisions, team mentality and winning mentality is important to be introduced along the way. We want the kids to have fun but also understand that the higher you move through each division the level of skill increases and each progressive level the competition increases as well.. Winning is fun, losing is not. We want the players to learn to learn gracefully and to understand that there is learning in both winning and losing. . In every game of competition someone has to be the victor, which on the flip side means losing is part of it as well. Make players accountable when you can and make teachable moments out of it.

Team unity must be taught at every level of play. We understand that not all players are going to be superstars, in fact more than 75% of the league/team will not continue baseball after 12 yrs old. It is our job as coaches and influencers of children to teach good sportsmanship and to also try and instill some morality into our instruction. Teammates putting down other teammates and/or other players should never be tolerated at any level. . Similarly, coaches and parents also must adhere to this standard, as the kids are always watching even though you think they don't listen. Please make sure that we are doing our part to help raise these players to be good upstanding community members one day. We may only have them for 3-5 hrs a week, but that is for 10 weeks or more and at the most critical learning periods in their lives.

Players can be retained and lost in this game from how they are treated by teammates and coaches along the way. With competition from other sports within the same season as ours, we want to retain as many of the players we can by giving them the best experience.

Good coaching can help win games. Making the correct move for the team brings that team closer. Putting a player on the mound in a game who has not practiced or ever pitched or a catcher who has never practiced is not a good coaching choice. We need to put the players in positions that help the team and players to be confident, not just try someone out unless injuries have gotten you to that point. Practicing and understanding where best to put the kids is a major part of coaching. Building up self esteem and confidence within the players/team goes a lot further than wins and losses in some aspects.

Expectations

At every level you need to set expectations with parents and players. As players progress through the divisions, the expectations of them increase and this should be communicated from the onset with the team. Coaches should hold a parent meeting before the first practice of the year. During this parent meeting you lay out the expectations you have of them and also of the players under you. Be clear and to the point. Have a game plan from where you are from the beginning of the season to the end of season. Talk about when you expect players to arrive for practice as well as game times. Talk about what you are going to do to make the players better throughout the season. Explain that you are a volunteer and you will do your best to make sure the players are getting the most out of the experience.

Higher level (Minors, Majors & Juniors): Make sure you tell the parents you will put the kids in the best possible position to succeed personally but also for the team too. At these levels of competition players can be turned off if they feel they are not doing well and their attitude towards the game could change quickly. In other words, if they can't catch the ball do not put them at first base or catcher! Team practice time becomes very important to work with those players on skill development and have them understand your expectations as well. Be realistic with your expectations. Do not expect the top players at the beginning of season and a lesser skilled player to accomplish the same goals; however, do work with both types of players to increase their skills throughout the season. With enough time & practice the gap between them will be a lot less by the end of the season and that is a victory and why we decide to coach.

Explain to parents that we (coaches) keep our own records as well. As a coach you know what your players are capable of doing or are not accomplishing. Parents have a tendency (higher level) to think that their child is better than where they play on the field or in the batting order. Things like this do not happen often but when they do it can be an uncomfortable conversation you are involved with. The easiest way to handle this is to explain at the beginning of the year that sometimes you will have to put certain players in different spots than where they have played before. Remind parents that you have to think about the entire team when coming up with lineups and positions, while also thinking about the best way for the player/team to learn/win. Players notice these things and winning should be an expectation that they have from you. Having fun is another expectation that players should have as well, we have to remember they are still just young kids and being goofy and playful is a part of their makeup. Be sure to add levity into your practices while also teaching a skill or drill. **ALWAYS END PRACTICE OR GAME WITH POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS**

Tee-ball (ages 5-6)

This is where we try to teach the basics of throwing and hitting and which direction the kids should run the bases. Stances in the batter's box, throwing to something, understanding the running aspect. Instruction has to be goal oriented as players have the least amount of attention at this level, stations and things that last 5-6 mins with fun time inserted.

Rookies (ages 7-8)

We are reinforcing the same hitting/throwing fundamentals from tee-ball while also introducing coach pitch and kid pitch with minimal strategy within lineups. This is an introduction into things they may face at the next level of baseball. Players should be taught proper baseball stances in the batter's box, the correct base to throw to but also be sure to include fun non baseball things towards the end of practices. Coach pitch ends at this level.

Minors (ages 9-10)

Competition level should be expected to increase. Players at this level should understand that games are played out of town and score is being kept and records matter. Fundamentals are still very important to reinforce, but different elements will be introduced like bunting, base stealing, advancing on wild throws and so on. Strength training and agility training should be introduced. Practices should be run with 2-3 drills that all combine with the skill you are trying to teach for that day.

** Please note that All-star / Tournament teams are picked at this level, where the best of the kids within this division will be representing that division for our town and program.

Majors (ages 11-12)

Competition level should be considered at its highest level. While fundamentals are still very important and should always be reintroduced, higher level strategy skills should also be introduced. Emphasis on hitting faster pitching, defensive strategy, line up strategy, pitching and catching. Strength training and agility training should be a part of every practice.

**Please note that All-star / Tournament teams are picked at this level, where the best of the kids within this division will be representing that division for our town and program.

Junior/Senior (ages 13-15/16)

Bigger field for this division: Players move from the 60 ft base paths to 90 ft. This is typically a big shock to players. The Pitching mound is 14ft longer and things like stealing and leading are introduced, along with balks by pitchers from the mound. While also continuing to reinforce fundamentals, baseball situational drills should be continued. Strength training should be a major focus in every practice. New bats are now able to be used by BBCOR-3. Throwing distances between bases are also much longer so continuous reps to get accuracy down are important. First year players seem to have the harder transitions. Playing in a fall league after your last eligible LL season is a great way to transition for spring. Also in many aspects you are dealing with 7/8/9th graders, if from high school level it is very possible they didn't make the school team but still have passion for the game and could be 2nd yr players that can help the younger players. Competition level is medium/high because of that aspect.

Tee-Ball Division

Tee Ball is often the first organized baseball for a child so we want this experience to be a memorable one that helps kick start their early baseball career. As a coach it is very important to make practices both fun and focus on fundamentals. The 2 most important things to teach your players are proper baseball safety and sportsmanship. Baseball Bats and Balls hurt when you get hit with them so you have to teach them the proper ways to be safe when using them. For example only holding their bat when they are about to hit. If you have young kids holding their bats when they are hanging out in the dugout kids will get hurt. As for sportsmanship this is a time where you can teach kids how to be a good teammate as well as opponent, teach them how to cheer their teammates on, and shake hands and say good game.

Practice

Areas that need to be focused on during practices are many of the basic skills such as proper throwing motion, batting stance and swing, learning how to catch, fielding ground balls, learning where the bases are, how to run the bases, and learning the different positions. When given the opportunity it is much easier to break your team up into smaller groups with each group working on different skills - it keeps the kids more involved and engaged. The less the kids are standing around the more you will be able to keep their attention.

Some examples of some fun drills:

- 1) Run the bases (Kids always love to just run, have them run the bases even have them run to specific bases to teach them where the different bases are)
- 2) Target Throwing - working on throwing motion and accuracy (Put out a bucket, target , cone and have the kids throw at it trying to hit it)
- 3) Ground Ball Practice - Have the kids start with no glove and work on getting in fielding position and catching grounders with 2 hands and work up to using the glove
- 4) Playing Catch - Simple as it gets have them learn how to throw and catch with a teammate
- 5) Soft Toss Hitting - Coach sits next to hitter tosses ball up to hit into net or even the field. This allows for a lot of swings in a short time period and has them work on eye contact seeing the ball and hitting it

The more repetition and practice with all the skills will only help the kids improve. So the more they do it the more natural it will become.

Games

Tee Ball Games are basically a glorified practice. Each game is 3 innings long and both teams have every player hit and run the bases each inning. Players advance one base each hitter until they reach home plate and there are no outs. To start the season teams often use a tee for the

batters to hit off but by mid season we hope to have worked players up to coach pitch. If you have players that are already ready for coach pitch feel free to pitch to them as it only helps them improve. When we are in coach pitch if the child has missed 5 or 6 pitches bring the tee out and let them hit off it to keep the game going . While in the field (on defense) the players try to field the ball and throw to the proper base. Coaches will be in the field helping with instruction of what to do. Having the kids playing individual positions is often easiest instead of just clumped together (Makes it easier to get more kids chances at fielding the ball). Lastly, just try and make it as fun as you can. If the kids see that you are having fun they will join in . Make it a fun season.

Rookies Division

This is a fundamental league that is coach driven. There is a wide gap in player skill at this level so fundamental skill work and understanding of the game is essential. Typically you will have two practices and one game at the start of the season and then transition to two games and one practice at the end of the season. This league is the first that many find glimpses of “real baseball” where players will throw out lead runners or make tag plays. It is essential that practices and games are enjoyable as well as informative. This is still a league where the more parents you can get to assistant coach the better.

Practices

Practices in this division should focus on fundamental skills such as throwing, hitting, fielding, and catching. This division has historically had a wide gap in player development with some players entering their fourth year in the league and many others their first. Station activities are typically the best method for practice time. At the beginning of the season, practices focus on fundamentals through basic hitting and throwing drills and as the season progresses, the throwing drills become more targeted on accuracy and distance. Baserunning and game awareness should also be taught throughout the season. During practices, scrimmages, and games, coaches should encourage players to identify what base they should throw to or when to run if not in a force play.

In the second half of the season kid pitchers and catchers are used. These are typically the second year players and the high achieving first year players but all players should be encouraged to try every position. Coaches should use drills in practice to identify potential pitchers and catchers. If a player wants to play catcher, they must wear a protective cup or guard regardless of gender.

Most likely there will be two practices per night so teams will split the time in the infield and outfield at the start of the season. Later in the season you will integrate quick scrimmages to end most practices.

Possible drills or activities:

- Kickball: it teaches the fundamentals of baserunning and where to throw the ball.
- Soft toss: Stand to the side of the batter and toss the ball up to the batter. Face the backstop and hit into the fence
- Throw it in the bucket or hit the helmet: Teaches players accuracy when throwing
- Ground balls and fly balls: coaches should start by throwing the balls so they can easily be fielded. As the season progresses, coaches can use bats to hit the balls to players.
- Water balloon toss: Start by pairing players up and facing each other. Take a step back everytime a toss is caught without a drop

[12 week coach pitch practice guide](#)

Games

- 4 innings or 1.5 hours
- Coach pitch exclusively to start but then transitioning to kid pitch by the second half of the season
- Each inning is 4 runs or 3 outs
- No strikeouts or walks. If a player needs a tee, use it but attempt coach pitch first.
- Assistant coaches can be on the field to help coach. One behind the catcher to help with fielding of the balls.
- Once there is kid pitch, each pitcher throws at most 4 balls to each of the first 5 batters of the inning. After 4 pitches, the coach will then pitch to the batter and the pitcher will get into a defensive position.
- No pitcher will pitch more than 1 inning and there will be at least 2 innings of coach pitch.
- Catchers should be used when players are available in the second half of the season to prepare players for the next division.
- No more than doubles can be hit and there are no steals or leading.

Minors Division

Introduction and communication with parents and players:

- Provide your contact info
- Congratulate the players for being part of your team
- Give overview of schedule, practice (1-2 days) and games (1-2) (play out of town teams).

teams).

**Note: As the season progresses, you will have 2 games and 1 practice per week.

Minors is all player pitch and pitch counts apply

- 75 pitches max per day ⇒ 4 days rest
- 66+ pitches ⇒ 3 days rest
- 51-65 pitches ⇒ 2 days rest
- 36-50 pitches ⇒ 1 day rest
- 21-35 ⇒ 0 days rest
- 1-20 pitches

Refer www.littleleague.org as needed.

All-stars are Memorial Day weekend (typically two teams of 10 players).

Tournament play (LL world series) TBD, based on player, coaches interest and availability

SAFETY FIRST:

- No on deck batters, which means nobody picks up a bat until they are going to the plate.
- Whenever you are doing batting drills (i.e. off tees/soft toss), everyone is to wear a helmet, even while waiting their turn.
- Most practices will be shared, split infield with batting cage (pitching machine) while the another team takes the outfield.

Infield work: coach bat, pitcher pitch to 9 hole and catcher, play to first, second, third.

Outfield work: throwing and catching; cut off drill, get in two lines and race back and forth, turn into glove hand. Pop fly's, start with tennis or soft balls to build confidence.

Tee work; line up 4 at a time work high, low inside outside swap out different size balls, soft toss with weighted balls (swing thru the ball).

Practice overview (maintain structure and routine)

- As kids arrive for practice, line them up on the line to toss, remind them to keep in close, playing catch not fetch!
- Warm-ups (rotate players who lead the exercises)
 - Stretch out; arms, forearms, legs, little cardio
- Ball grip: encourage two finger 4 seam for best control.
- Review proper throwing technique: T position, elbow from glove hand aims at target, pull throwing arm back, step towards target, push off back leg. (Be sure your receiver is looking at you, with an open glove, ready position).
- Receiving the ball: position glove as if you were a clock, anything above your chest GLOVE UP! Glove down for grounders (alligator hands).
- On one knee a partner pass, work on grounders
- Flick drill; for close outs (i.e. SS to second), use 4 cones and 4 or 5 players.
- Use multiple tees in outfield down the right field line.
- Utilize stations as much as possible, minimize downtime.

Offense

Batting: review proper hand grip; knuckles on top hand aligned with fingers from bottom hand.

Stride: weight on back leg, lead foot slight lift towards the pitcher (4 to 6"), use two cones to practice. Load, swing through the ball, keep eye on the ball

Bunt: Spin on back leg (squish the bug), square to the ball, use knees to adjust up and down, use turtle bite about halfway down bat keeping hand behind the bat.

Teach how to turn away, twist back, on a wild pitch; get bat and head down, flat back.

Let the ball hit your backside if you can't avoid it.

Base running: No leading. No sliding into first base, run thru to the right on single, round

to second if the ball is hit into the outfield.

Defense

Pitching: Four-seam fastball, two-seam fastball, change-up (three finger). Two options; Stretch and wind up. Stance (back foot on pitching mound), bring front leg up (keep balanced), separate arms, push off back leg, follow thru. Be ready to field the ball.

Ground balls: triangle, glove down, charge ball, turn shoulder towards base and throw hard. Under hand if going to a close base (i.e. SS to second)

Fly balls: practice with tennis or other soft ball to gain confidence. Take a step back towards the ball; side run diagonal not straight back. Look for a cut off when needed.

Additional Resources

- “Coaching Youth Baseball 101 An in-depth guide for new coaches with tips for experienced coaches too” by David Grossman and Paul Allen
- “Survival guide for coaching youth baseball” by Dan Keller
- “The Youth Baseball bible” by Dan Gray
- <https://usabdevelops.com>
- WWW.CBSL.org

Majors division

New for this level:

Dropped strike 3 advance from plate

Stealing home

Infield fly rule

A great way to help with practice planning and seeing how drills are run is through <https://usabdevelops.com/> please use this free resource.

WARM UP BY STRETCHING FIRST- Use the stretching drills applied from Winter Clinics before throwing a baseball. Early in the season stretching is very important for players so that injuries are mitigated as much as possible.

Fundamental drills (i.e. throwing, catching, base running, sliding) still needed to be taught at this level.

WARM UP DRILLS THROWING

- Stage 1: 10ft across from each player on one knee without gloves throwing to partner(softly, but accurately)
- Stage 2: increase distance to 20 ft also without gloves

- Stage 3: stand with gloves and the same drill (start at 20 ft) slowly increasing the distance.
They should be aiming for the other player's chest. If you see players having trouble decrease the distance and show them correct throwing stances
- **Part 1:** Have players stand within 20 ft of each other. Feet and legs only shoulder length apart, without stepping into the throw have them throw to their partner. Using only the top half of the body, twisting the torso and having them throw and follow through (not fast), while keeping the lower half still.
- **Part 2:** Have them stand in a set position catching side pointing at their partner, (like a pitcher's set on a mound) longer distance to 40-45 ft. Have players throw without stepping but following through to partner, **ensure accuracy and follow through**, if players are understanding the drill have them increase distance to 60 ft.
- **Part 3:** Have players do a normal throw using all the parts they just went through. Accuracy and distance are the keys to this warm up and if all 3 steps are followed it all comes together. Players will be less accurate the farther the distance, make sure that progression happens from beginning of year to end of year. Follow these drills every practice. Being consistent will help the mind and body learn it.

Throwing

Accuracy is a huge part of being able to make plays. After all warm up drills have been done improving accuracy is **EXTREMELY** important. Make sure players are not only throwing to either first base, but also pitcher/ catcher exchanges which are the most important and happen most frequently in a game. Not every player will be able to meet expectations and make sure that you coach to that accordingly.

Infield Drills: Every player should attempt infield throw from shortstop and third base throwing to first base

Use things like targets, L-screens, buckets, and of course a first baseman

Outfield Drills: Every player should take throws from center field to 2nd and 3rd base

Using again targets like buckets, cones and a third baseman

Same drill should be done for infield to home from 2nd base and shortstop

Make players accountable for missing a target, have a reward and a punishment (teachable) like running pole to pole for missing (build endurance and strength), push ups (builds arm strength) sit ups (builds core)

Punishments are things that will eventually help players understand but at same time help them also build endurance with arms, core and legs which are the 3 most important things in throwing.

Pitching

Identifying your pitchers and getting them ready for the year is critical. On any team you will probably have 1-2 solid starting pitchers, and the rest (players that have pitched and just have less experience for a variety of reasons). Ensuring you have enough depth in pitching is really key as pitch counts and back to back games can really take players out. Managing a player's pitch count is defined within the LL rule book - it outlines numbers of pitches by division and number of rest days required. Be sure that you know and understand this rule as it is very important to the management load of your players. During practices work with the pitchers with lower skills to build up accuracy and strength (without pitching them too much) 3-4 batters per practice MAX. Your stronger pitchers can also do the same; these players are probably good fielders as well. **DO NOT MAX OUT KIDS PITCH COUNT UNTIL AT LEAST HALF WAY THROUGH SEASON**, or until they have built up enough strength to make it 3-4 innings. If the pitcher is also a catcher make sure you are familiar with the rules behind using them in the same game/day.

Running

Running to first base and through it: Have players set up at home plate, take a swing (without a bat) and run down all the way through the 1st base bag. This will need to constantly be done every practice. Kids forget to keep running hard down the baseline (*they tend to slow and stop before 1st base which could cause an out*)

Drill: Have one coach behind the plate rolling balls or throwing them to simulate contact or use a tee. Make sure the player is running hard down the baseline and through 1st base.

Taking extra bases: same drill as previous, except you are adding another element in your job as a coach. Judging to send them on to another base. YOU need to teach kids to listen to a first base coach. This should always be the same coach, not a rotation of different coaches (consistency). Teach kids the correct way to round a square base. (*inside corner and explode through, not taking a wide turn and slowing themselves down*) Looking to a 3rd base coach $\frac{1}{2}$ way to second base if they should keep going (*not looking at the play or where the baseball might be*).

Stealing/Extra bases/Leading/Sliding: At the majors level stealing of home is allowed like any other base on the field. The runner is allowed to take a lead or steal/advance after the ball crosses the front of the plate.

Teach players to take a lead on every pitch, typically it is 3 big steps or the player's height plus 3 ft - this allows enough time and space for players to get back if needed. Players are allowed to dive back head first to a bag, but are not allowed to slide head first into a bag. This means you also need to teach proper sliding to every player as well.

Sliding: Hooked leg under other leg sliding on upper thigh(not buttocks) one foot into bag, be sure they are sliding at least 5-7 ft before the bag to reach and not be on top. A player must slide if there is going to be a play to the base they are advancing to, if stealing home on a passed ball you must slide or avoid (**could be called out if player**

doesn't), Secondary drill: Have catchers work with throwing out players and also snap throws to 1st base while doing a sliding drill, this includes a 2nd base and shortstop.

YOU CAN'T SLIDE INTO FIRST BASE, The player will be called out!

Extra bases: Advancing on passed balls from the pitcher to the catcher, overthrows of bases, should be taken advantage of at all times. Coaches should be teaching players in practice not to wait for a signal from the base coach or wait to go if they think they can make it. This is a constant drill that will need to be gone over repeatedly.

Stealing/Delayed Steal: Firstly you will have to go over your stealing signs, this is something that should have been taught in the minors level, but I'm sure you will have to refresh. Make signs easy to understand and make sure that you and your coaches are teaching players to look for signs at the plate and on the base path. The signs should again be from the same coach at all times unless that coach is absent.

Teach players to take off the second they think the ball has crossed the plate, make sure the kids are not looking back at the catcher as this will slow them down. Make sure they are only looking to where they need to be and listen to the coach for possible advancement. **Delayed stealing is allowed by LL**, this is when the catcher is throwing back to the pitcher, if the pitcher is not on the pitching rubber the runner is allowed to steal any bag. This is certainly a riskier move and should only be used by the most focused/fastest/aggressive runners you have. **BE SURE TO TEACH PLAYERS TO ALWAYS BE LOOKING TO WHERE THE BALL IS AND WHERE IT IS GOING, PLAYER AWARENESS/FOCUS WINS AND LOSES GAMES AT THIS LEVEL!!!**

Tagging on Fly ball: Teach the player what it means to tag up and proper way to do so. Understanding when to tag up and how to make sure they aren't leaving early.

SITUATIONAL AWARENESS/PLAYER FOCUS

Hitting

Proper set up in the batter's box: Many hitting issues at this level come right from footwork and set up in the batter's box. It is hard to fix a bad swing at this level, but what you can do is teach the player to understand the swing they have and where to place themselves within the box to get consistent better hitting possibilities. If they are stepping out when they swing then move the batter in closer. Recognize where they are swinging in the box and where they are making contact.

DRILL: *If a player is consistently stepping out, place a bat/stick behind their feet in the box and make them keep swinging, you and they will see the results and be amazed. If they step on the bat they will feel and see it, this does not make a fix forever you will*

need to keep this up with every player you identify during every batting practice/hitting drill.

IF A PLAYER MAKES CONTACT WITH THE BALL FROM BAT AND ONE FOOT IS OUT OF BOX THEY ARE OUT, UMPIRES AT THIS LEVEL LOOK FOR THAT.

If a player is swinging either way ahead of or very behind the baseball swinging then you will need to teach them to either move up or move back in the batter's box depending on the situation/pitcher. It's tough to tell someone who may have a bad swing to understand to be faster or wait back on the ball. Changing footwork is an easy way for the player to understand and adjust within the at-bat. Make sure to constantly go over this with your players during practice. Another quick and easy adjustment is to ensure your players are using correct size bats for them. Many players have bats that may be too big for them and slow down their swing. **Teach your batters to choke up on the bat for better control and adding speed to swing.** Ensuring your player makes contact and is swinging the bat is a big part of the game. Defenses aren't always of great quality and you can make a lot of things happen when players put the ball in play. **Teach slap/contact hitting with 2 strikes.**

DROPPED 3RD STRIKE: The batter can advance with no outs and first base not occupied, also if 1st base is occupied and there are 2 outs. TEACH KIDS TO RUN NO MATTER WHAT! EVEN IF 1st BASE IS OCCUPIED AND 0 OR 1 OUT. GET THEM IN THE HABIT TOO, OTHER RUNNERS COULD ADVANCE ON CONFUSION

Bunting:

This is a drill that should have been taught in the minors division, but must be redrilled back into players. Bunting is a great way to help manage a baseball game in situations that call for the strategy. Bunting defenses aren't typically done well at this level and putting the ball in play gives you that much more of a chance. Every player should know how to bunt properly. Even your top 4 in the order. Bunting also teaches players to make contact while watching the ball meet the bat.

DRILL: *Set up players in the batter's box, teach the turn and drop bat technique. Keeping the front hand/arm stiff(bottom hand) on the bat and having back hand (top hand) pinch with pointer finger and thumb about half way down the bat(or what they call the label),while keeping other parts of fingers/hand protected behind the bat. Teach players to bend up and down with knees/torso for lower and higher pitches while not changing the angle of the bat. Keep the bat flat and straight and let the ball make contact with the bat (not pushing the bat to make contact with the ball). Players should present the bunting stance when the pitcher begins his motion so as to not give up what they are doing right away.*

For the players that are either struggling to make contact or are going through a slump, bunting can help them get back to some basic contact and also confidence while causing confusion on the defensive side. Practice bunting at every batting practice with every player, the first 3-4 balls seen in batting should be bunts. Do not let them just kinda do it - emphasize game situations and real form.

Defensive FIELD positions

*This level of baseball and up is not really a place to be trying to get all players to play all positions. You want to start really solidifying players in positions where they can succeed, which in turn makes your team succeed. If you have a first year player who says they want to pitch, the answer is no, but tell them why it's a no, and explain to them that while they may certainly try something in practice if they have aspirations to pitch, they also need to practice at home. This is also the same answer you should give to parents if they ask why. Your job is to keep players safe from any situation that they could be injured in. **CBSL has a rule that all players should play the infield in a game. If you feel you have a player that should not be playing an infield position you may petition the baseball director for an exception to that rule. This should only be used for players who pose a safety risk to themselves or others while playing in the infield.***

Safety is critical in other positions like pitcher, catcher, first base and shortstop. If a player can't catch or throw they need to use time in practice and outside of practice to get better. Do not put your players in positions where they are going to fail more than they will succeed. Being all inclusive is a great theory, but not always possible in sports. Intrasquad scrimmages are a good place to give kids chances they would not normally get in a regular season game.

Catcher - Needs to be able to catch the ball. **PERIOD.** Do not play someone as a catcher who will consistently miss balls pitched. This creates a defensive nightmare for you and your team. They also need to have at least an arm accurate enough to get it back to pitcher's mound 46 ft away, throwing out runners is an added bonus too.

COACHES NEED TO TEACH PROPER BLOCKING OF BASEBALLS IN THE DIRT & THROWING RUNNERS OUT

First Baseman - Needs to be able to catch the ball. **PERIOD.** A first baseman that can catch the ball will save 3-5 outs a game for a team. Finding a skilled player to understand correct footwork and glovework is needed for this position. Being able to block or pick up errant throws is a very good skill to learn and understand.

COACHES NEED TO TEACH HOW TO PROPERLY SCOOP SHORT THROWS AND CUT OFF RESPONSIBILITIES

Second base - This position has many different roles and players that are here need to be taught what they are. This has been saved as a position for sometimes the less skilled of players, but it doesn't mean that they shouldn't understand how and what plays need to be made. All players should play this position at some point as it carries things like backing up throws, covering a bag, helping on a cut off and certain defensive shifts and alignments.

COACHES NEED TO TEACH DEFENSIVE COVERING OF BAG, CUT-OFF POSITIONS AND BACKING UP POSITIONS

Shortstop - Typically this position is for the strongest/most accurate throwing player, could be the best player on a team that can play multiple positions. They can be a leader if you teach them properly, natural instincts in many cases can take over. They still need to know the positioning of players and covering on defensive alignments, shifts, and cut offs.

COACHES NEED TO TEACH BAG COVERING RESPONSIBILITIES, CUT OFF POSITIONS, AND BACKING UP POSITIONS

Third base - HOT CORNER, named as most batters are righty and pull the ball. The baseball gets on a player faster in this position as the proximity from home plate is less. You want your backup shortstop to play here, good glove with decent arm. They have covering duties and also cut off duties to home plate. These need to be taught and shown, backup catchers are also great here.

COACHES NEED TO TEACH BAG COVERING RESPONSIBILITIES, CUT OFF POSITIONS AND BACKING UP POSITIONS

Left field - This position gets a fair amount of opportunities to make plays. If a ball gets through the infield on the right side of fly balls. Players need to be attentive.

COACHES NEED TO TEACH CATCHING OF FLY BALLS, THROWING TO CUT OFFS, THROWING TO CORRECT BASE AND BACKUP RESPONSIBILITIES

Center field - Typically strongest fly ball catcher and has a good arm. He is the backup for the other 2 outfield positions and also back up for infield over throws especially from catcher to 2nd base.

COACHES NEED TO TEACH CATCHING OF FLY BALLS, THROWING TO CUT OFFS, THROWING TO CORRECT BASE AND BACKUP RESPONSIBILITIES

Right field - Unless there are a lot of lefties in the line up this position sees the least amount of plays. They still need to have an understanding of all the same things the other outfielders do.

COACHES NEED TO TEACH CATCHING OF FLY BALLS, THROWING TO CUT OFFS, THROWING TO CORRECT BASE AND BACKUP RESPONSIBILITIES

Fielding/Defense

Fundamentals of fielding need to be reviewed frequently. Defense is a key part to getting your team in a position to succeed

Too many outs are given up within a game which leads to extended pitch counts where you may have intended your starting pitcher to go 5 innings, but only get 3. Players are going to make errors, it's a part of LL and baseball in general. How the players and you respond to those errors makes it better or worse.

Fly balls - Fundamental drills teach kids to take a step back at first when the ball is hit into the air, this is probably the hardest task to keep coaching players about. Most players have a tendency to step in and become flat footed/deer in headlights and the ball sails over their heads or into the gap. Just hitting fly balls in practice is good but not if they haven't worked on the fundamentals of what they need. Use all the drills below in one practice and see the results when you hit to your outfielders

DRILLS:

1. Set up a pitching machine to be consistent with fly balls and where they land. Set up 4 smaller cones around where the ball will land, within 8 ft of the center landing zone. Make the player touch each cone while the ball is in air while tracking the fly ball. Make sure the player has enough time to catch the ball over the correct throwing shoulder and then catch the ball with the glove and throw the hand over the ball once in the glove (2 hands). This is a speed and tracking drill, making sure that the first step is **back**, but also having the player recognize to move around. **DO NOT LET THEM BASKET CATCH OR MOVE TO THE SIDE.** Players must catch in front of them and be in a good throwing position.
ALSO WORK INTO DRILL THE CROW HOP THROW AFTER CATCHING BALL
2. Have players set up in a line, backs turned to you on a foul line. Throw a ball about 20- 30 ft in the air and make the player watch and track the ball from your throw. The purpose of the drill is to have the player sprint while looking at the ball and have enough time to be under the ball and turn around and make the catch. Teach how to dive safely as well if needed. But do 4-5 rounds of this. 2 lines make it go faster, make it a competition between each line.

3. Without gloves each player (partners up) about 15-20 ft apart underhand tosses to their partner in the air, simulating a fly ball, making sure players get under ball and catching high (2 hands) and then setting up in a throwing position, then repeat back to partner on the other side. This teaches them to track the ball from hand and use 2 hands to catch the ball

Relay throws Drill: Set up 2 lines (both foul lines). Have players line up 25-30 ft apart from home plate to the outfield fence. Begin a relay toss all the way down the line, making sure the player is catching, catching on the correct side, turning the correct way (always glove side, shoulders parallel to target) and throwing to the next relay partner. Continue this drill up and down until every player is hitting all the correct marks. 3 mins on first attempts through. Make it a competition between lines, rotate players after 2-3 100% completed throws.

Ground balls - Fundamental drills need to be reviewed frequently. Players tend to not keep gloves down, stay in front of the ball which leads to more opportunities for the other team. Making certain drills a part of every practice is very important, while also teaching possible variations for each player to adapt to. Players need to keep improving at these positions or you will have to rotate in other players who might.

DRILLS:

1. Without gloves about 15-20 ft apart (partner up) have players get on knees, have one partner roll a ball without hops to another player in front of them. Receiving player should scoop up the ball with glove hand while covering with throwing hand. After 10 rolls, have players stand up, spread apart farther. Have the partner roll just to either side of the player's foot. Make sure the receiving player is moving feet to keep the ball in the center/front of them. Repeat back to your partner. In both drills players should mock getting into the correct throwing position before returning a roll. Another 20 rolls. Make them count the highest amount of caught without dropping or missing.
2. **Teach the proper way to field ground balls as well. Not flat footed, front foot toe pointed up, back heel down and ready to step and throw.**
3. **Teach the 1-2 1-2 drill**
This drill is as easy as it sounds. Hit a ground ball to the player and
 1. Getting gloves down to receive
 2. Watch the ball go into the glove
 1. Get into the correct throwing position
 2. Throw the ball accurately

Do this drill in slow motion at first or even just have players stand in a line and go through the drill without a ball being hit to them. Help players understand not to complicate it more than it needs to be. Then go full speed, by the end of the drill you should see the improvement.

4. **Charging the ball:** After all these drills you have to teach how and when to charge the baseball. Many LL players wait too long in a position for the ball to come to them and when/ if they field the ball the runner is safe by the time they throw it. This is a missed opportunity to get the out. In practice teach being aggressive getting to soft ground balls, when to charge, where to position players on certain hitters (playing in or back/shifting on a pull hitter).

Hit big hop grounders in practice to help players understand when to charge, how to field and throw.

BUNT DEFENSE: Teach infielders the wheel cover play. This is where certain positions charge to the ball on a bunt and the other position players are covering a bag for a play.

Example: If there is a runner on first base and the batter bunts to the left side, the pitcher would take left side, the first baseman would charge, second base would cover first, shortstop would cover 2nd and 3rd base would hold bag in case the runner tried to advance. If the ball is in front and the catcher makes a play for it then the pitcher would cover home plate. All bases are covered in case a play would need to be made. Get out the easiest way possible, but teach your team this as many teams fail to understand that. There are different variations depending on base runners and where the ball is hit, this drill can coincide with a bunting drill you are doing with players as well.

Situational defense drills: Have live game scenarios with runners and you hitting infield/outfield drills. Make sure players are calling out how many outs, where the play is next, get them thinking ahead, get them staying in the game. This is a high energy drill to keep players moving and thinking. Roll all the skills from that day's practice into this drill. Hoping all the points made in that practice come together for the players. Make sure to rotate players into the positions and also rotate who's running so they get the skill building on both sides.

Juniors division

New for this level:

- Leading stealing, and getting back properly
- Suicide squeeze (bunting with the runner at third base to score)
- Safety squeeze (bunting to advance a runner)
- Pitching from a wind up and set position
- Throwing over to first base (pitchers)
- Double cutoffs for outfield

Stick with many of the FUNDAMENTAL DRILLS from previous divisions. Juniors is a big move for players coming from the 60 ft diamond. Have expectations on drills you want players to learn. The mental aspect for first year players is HUGE. Hits they may have gotten before on a smaller field are now easy ground balls or pop outs to infielders. Pitchers who dominated on a 46 ft distance tend to struggle with command on a 60 ft distance.

Helping the players acclimate to the extended distances is paramount for their success. Here, even more than on a smaller field, it's important to have the right players at the correct positions.

The Junior/Senior division is still a part of LL America. There are new rules and new skills introduced at this level. This portion will explain the new rules and new skills and give guidance on how to incorporate drills and practices.

NEW RULES/SKILLS:

LEADING/ STEALING: At the juniors level, leading before the pitch is thrown is allowed from **every** base. Leading typically consists of the player's height plus one slide step.

I.E. If your player is 6 ft, they should be getting 6 ft plus and arms length off the base. If not stealing, the player should get a secondary lead of at least 2 slide steps towards the next base during every pitch. **WATCH SNAP THROWS BACK FOR CATCHER AT FIRST BASE, STAY AWARE OF WHERE THE BALL IS**

If stealing, the player can leave their base on the pitcher's movement towards the plate. If a pitcher is throwing back over to the base, players need to learn the differences and how to get back to the bag properly.

Lefty pitchers are harder to steal off of as they have a direct look at runners and can have a more deceptive pick off move. Teach the difference.

PITCHING/PICKOFF PLAYS: Adding 14ft distance is a shock to many players, building arm strength and relearning accuracy is something you really want to work on early in the year with pitchers. Also working on a pick off play to each base as well.

There are 2 positions a pitcher can be in while on the mound.

1. Wind-up or stretch positions: In the wind-up position there are no runners on base, bases loaded or just a runner on 3rd.
1. Stretch position or SET position is where a pitcher **MUST** make one of 2 moves, Either come to a pause (SET POSITION 1 SECOND) before pitching to plate, or throw over to a base.

If a pitcher decides to throw over to a base they must do so in one complete move, or they have an option to step off the pitching rubber and either throw or not. If pitchers do not step off and make a motion towards first base and do not complete the throw, it will be called a BALK!

Lefties have different rules, they may come to a set position and not break from the rubber and throw over to first base as long as they don't cross a 45 degree area on the mound, they must throw to the plate if they have the planted foot cross the pitching rubber or move farther past the 45 degree plain of the mound.

Suicide Squeeze: This involves bunting with a runner stealing from 3rd base.

A player is automatically stealing from 3rd base and the batter must square to bunt and try/make contact with the baseball no matter where the pitch is thrown. Intent is to score a run from third no matter what.

Safety squeeze: This is when the intent is to make contact by bunting and then the runner makes towards the next base, they do not leave their base until they have seen contact made. This is used to move runners into a scoring position while most likely giving up an out.

Double cutoffs: Using the same drills from prior divisions you use both shortstop and 2nd baseman together for this. Having your position players for each side go out for a cut off and having the person that is supposed to cover 2nd base stand 10-20 ft behind the cut off player to possibly help for under or over throws. 2nd base would be covered by the 1st baseman in this scenario.

All other skills and drills from prior divisions should be used here. Incorporate fundamentals while also teaching the new skills in every practice. Running and throwing are the biggest things at this level that take time for players to get used to. Star majors players look very normal on this field and will humble great players quickly. Be sure to have a plan to help them understand everything is in scale to size of the field now. Begin the season with **EXPECTATIONS** that are real and easy to reach and then raise those expectations higher throughout the year to get greatness from your players.