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A Ball - Coaches Overview

The Coaches Overview document is designed to give coaches a starting point for the season by reviewing:

- (a) High Level Objectives for the Season
- (b) The Highlands Way - a Standardized Routine for Players at the start of each Game or Practice
- (c) Practice Ideas
- (d) Game Setup and Rules

A. High Level Objective: Hitting

At the A level, players should be learning the fundamentals of baseball and becoming more proficient at certain skills. A Ball represents an introduction to “real” baseball, with outs being recorded and score being kept. Hitting takes centre stage and fielding starts to take on importance. With that said, the focus is still on fun as the number 1 priority. As coaches, the goal isn’t to win at all costs. Focus on making sure everyone has a chance to play everywhere, hit throughout the line up, and to shine at different points during the season. We want everyone who plays A Ball to sign up for AA Ball when the time comes.

Consistent with overall Little League culture, there should be a focus on decorum and compliance with rules. Hats should be on and Jerseys tucked in when on the field and pitch counts are to be followed. Protective gear should be worn as appropriate.

Goals:

- Follow the Highlands Way of warm-up for Games and Practices
- Become comfortable hitting off a pitching machine
- Introduction to the catcher position
- Learning baserunning and related rules, such as tagging up on pop flies
- Introduction to defensive awareness, calling the play, and making force and non-force plays
- Learning to get the ball back to the infield ASAP
- Introduction to certain concepts such as hitting the cutoff

B. The Highlands Way: Daily Warm up Routine

At the A Ball level, players will be comfortable with the idea of being led through a warm-up. There may not be anyone on the team who can lead the rest of the team through warm-ups, but if you do identify such a player, consider experimenting with that idea as the season progresses.

Warm Up

- Jog – 100m



- Sprint – 50m
- High Knees – 25m
- Butt Kickers – 25m

Stretching

- Circle around leader
- Arm Circles – Forward and Back, start big circles to small tight circles
- Cross Body Arm stretches
- Quad Stretch
- Sitting Hamstring Stretch
- Sitting Groin Stretch

Dailies

Do these every practice and game, without fail.

Pair up the athletes and have them stand 10 feet away from each other in an athletic stance. Athletes will flip the ball back and forth, giving their partner a short hop to field. They should try to have the ball bounce right below their partner's glove.

They should be able to touch the ground with their glove. Knees bent, back straight.

1. Ground ball position up the middle (x10 per partner)
 - Glove DOES NOT swipe up above the knees
2. Forehand position (x10 per partner)
 - Field the ball by shifting weight from the back side to the front side
 - Glove DOES NOT swipe up above the knees
 - Try to field when it is between the legs
3. Backhand position (x10 per partner)
 - Field the ball by shifting weight from the back side to the front side
 - Glove DOES NOT swipe up above the knees
 - Try to field the ball when it is between the legs

C. Practice Structure and Concepts

At this age level, practices will involve a mix of individual skill development and team development. It is expected that coaches will need to work individually or in very small groups with Players to advance their skills. Take advantage of the opportunity to do so – by the time Players reach AAA in two or three short years, opportunities for individual skill development are few.

All practices (and Games) should start with the Highlands Way of Warm Up, followed by development drills.



D. Skills and Drills

Athleticism

Highlands has included ladders in each team bag. These are a great tool for developing nimble feet, explosiveness, and coordination. Be creative and use the ladders (and any other aids that come to mind) to work on Players' overall athletic development. Give this some time at each practice. Ten to fifteen minutes is not unreasonable.

Hitting

Soft Toss - (<https://youtu.be/rV3EQ5tHcNE>)

- Slow and deliberate pace - show the ball to the hitter and bring it back to allow the hitter to load their swing
- Ball should be on a steady line (do not be too far away that the ball has a rainbow arc)
- Aim for the front hip of the hitter so they are hitting it out front

Hitting off a tee - (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmZjRdtglQg>)

- Have the player make contact ahead of their front foot
- Have the player start with their eyes towards an imaginary pitcher before locking in on the ball
- Additional hitting drills: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRjscfWpdMw>

Wiffle Ball Circle - (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ByCET3-s1sg>)

- Easy warm up drill prior to games

Catcher Position

For the first time, Players will don the catcher's gear and be responsible for receiving pitches. While there isn't base stealing until AA Ball, A Ball represents a good opportunity for Players to decide whether they might be interested in the position, in a low-stakes environment (i.e. a runner won't be sprinting down from third base to score if the ball happens to get to the backstop). The pitching machine (generally) ensures consistent pitches, which is nice for Players trying out this new position. Learning to catch the ball is key and for the sake of learning, it's good to practice blocking balls and some footwork as well. Some drills:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4Ep5hji9TI>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fixEVbEOlw>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wd8eYHPhAJA>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKBPDvzrJlg>

Fielding

Fielding in A Ball is still at the early stages of development. Recording outs in the field significantly increases your chances of winning games. Drills:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9C52IE4M6Y>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lnfgd_lid_CM



When in the field, there should be a defensive “captain” who calls out the plays in advance of each batter. For example, “one out, play is at first or second!”, or “two outs, play is at first!”. Usually the shortstop assumes this role, but it doesn’t have to be. Ensure everyone has several chances to be the defensive captain during the season. It will take a while for Players to learn this – and lots of help from the Coaches.

For infielders players should also learn to recognize force out scenarios and which base they should be covering (for instance the shortstop and second baseman should work on making force outs at 2nd with short flips to each other). For outfielders start to introduce the concept of covering for overthrows. Goal is to try to get every player moving when the ball is in play.

Fly Balls/Catching

Fly balls (and catching baseballs generally) may be challenging for some A Ball kids, so introduce these concepts in a manner for the kids to succeed - gradually and with low consequences (use soft balls, start without a glove, have the ball to the side of the player, etc).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6T5WWG1E8WM>

Throwing

By the end of the season the throwing routine below is what teams should be working towards. This will not happen in the first week or likely in the first month, but at the coaches discretion we’re looking to develop this warm up routine across all Highland A ball teams as it will continue during AA and beyond.

10 throws each

Tens Toes – Partners 10 feet apart

Players start by being grounded with ten toes facing partner, feet shoulder width apart, player should rotate their upper body so their chest faces 90 deg, getting into the proper throwing position each time (both elbows at shoulder height, throwing arm close to 90 deg upward, front elbow/glove pointing at target)

Rockers – 20 feet apart

Feet facing 90 deg to partner, slightly more than shoulder width apart. Keeping feet grounded, player rocks forward, then back, extending front leg straight and taking majority of their weight on their back leg, separating glove and throwing hand as they rock back, bringing elbows to shoulder height and using proper throwing technique

Hoppers – 30 feet apart

Player is positioned 90 deg to partner, standing on back leg, two small hops on back leg, and plant and throw

Regular Throwing – 20-30 feet apart



Players face each other, feet shoulder width apart, throwing foot steps forward and turns 90deg, player raises their glove leg and rotates 90deg to their partner, glove and ball hand separate into proper throwing form, back leg is loaded and player pushes off with back leg and throws the ball, when throwing, glove hand should be pulled to hip

Crow Hops – 40 feet apart

Players move laterally towards target to create momentum – avoid vertical movement. Player catches the ball and brings their throwing side leg forward to plant and shuffle once, loading the back leg up and throwing in one full motion. Throws should be catchable for their partners – between their chest and just above their head.

E. Game Play

Games in the early part of the season focus on batting. As the season moves along, the importance of defence will come to the forefront once the majority of kids can hit off the pitching machine.

A Relay Race is generally still enjoyed by kids at the very end and after the game. Divide the players into two evenly matched groups; one at home, one at second base. In the relay race the players run all the way around the bases, returning to tag the next player on their relay race team. After tagging their teammate that runner sits down.

F. Field Set up and Equipment

- Home team should set up the field, however visiting team is encouraged to assist
- Bases 60 feet apart
- 1st and 3rd base lines chalked
- Batter Boxes chalked (metal template available)
- Home Run line should be chalked and/or coned at ~120 feet

G. Coaching and Scorekeeping

- 3 x Coaches during games – Bench Coach plus 1st and 3rd Base Coaches
- A Coach or Parent Volunteer should track pitch counts (see Rules)
- Each team should have a designated scorekeeper using the official scorebook

H. Rules

- Coaches recommended to download the Little League App which has all LL Rules
- Rules on the Highlands website, linked here: <https://www.highlandsbaseball.com/divisions/>