



Version: 2024-03

AA Ball - Coaches Overview

The Coaches Overview document is designed to guide coaches at the AA level to create league-wide alignment on overarching goals and values. The document breaks down as follows:

- (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: Pitching and Catching

At the AA level, players should be somewhat comfortable with the fundamentals of baseball, and we start to focus on individual player development at certain positions, as well as whole team strategy. Fun is always the #1 priority. We have more than twice as many AA Players as AAA Players. If your Players sign up for AAA ball next year or the year after, you've done your job well!

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:

- Move towards Player-led Highlands Way of Warmup
- Develop pitcher and catcher positions
- Work on defensive scenarios – force plays, tagging, fly balls and tagging up, cutoffs, stealing, knowing where the play is, player communication
- Develop offensive strategy – baserunning, stealing, being aware of the count
- Introduction to Coach signals

B. The Highlands Way: Daily Warm up Routine

At the AA level, players will be comfortable with the idea of being led through a warm-up. As the season progresses, try to identify “leaders” on the team and by mid-season, experiment with having those leaders run warm up. As coaches, you'll be there to get things back on track quickly if necessary.

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)
 - Secure the ball RIGHT AFTER it hits the ground. It is a bang-bang play
2. Forehand position (x10 per partner)
 - Field the ball by shifting weight from the backside to the front side
 - Try to field the ball when it is between the legs
 - Quickly transfer and switch feet into a throwing position toward your partner
3. Backhand position (x10 per partner)
 - Field the ball by shifting weight from the backside to the front side
 - Try to field the ball when it is between the legs
 - Quickly transfer and **shuffle** toward your partner in a throwing position

Throwing - 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.

C. Practice Structure and Concepts

At this age level, practices will involve a mix of individual skill development and team development. Pitchers and catchers can be separated from the group to work on their skills. Other Players will work as a group or at smaller stations.

Practices should focus on the fundamentals of baseball and progress towards team concepts such as defensive strategies and scenarios such as cutoffs, rundowns, and base stealing. Players should learn coach signals for baserunning.

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

D. Skills and Drills

Athleticism

New this year, Highlands has purchased ladders for each team. 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.

Pitching



Developing pitchers is critical for this age group, but coaches will have to start slowly and build from ground zero. Most of your Players will not have pitched in the past, so the entire process will be a bit of a mystery. During the beginning of the season, encourage players with less powerful arms to pitch several feet in front of the mound. This may help grow their confidence and it is acceptable in game play for the first half of the season. Some drills:

- https://youtu.be/zNDZb_1eucg?si=HZ2Ip9AFkUd5sWIX
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4W_a5VIXSuI
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ImeXGgKYP7Y>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NOo7JSK6eA> (at this age, focus on the stretch position, don't worry about the wind up)

Catching

With updated AA Rules taking effect in 2024, the catcher position takes on increased importance. Catchers will want to work on blocking the ball and throwing down to bases. 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=qKBDVzrJlg>

Fielding

Fielding in AA 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_Id_CM
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6T5WWG1E8WM>

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.

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=pmZjRdtgIQg>)

- 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

E. Game Play

Games in the early part of the season focus on batting, defence, and to a lesser extent, pitching. As the season moves along, the importance of pitching will come to the forefront.

F. Field Set up and Equipment

- Home team should set up the field, however visiting team is encouraged to assist
- If playing on D1, infields must be raked after the game, including plate and mound areas; at Sowden do this before the games
- Bases 60 feet apart
- 1st and 3rd base lines chalked; Batter's Box as well (metal template available)
- Home Run line should be chalked and/or coned at ~130 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/>