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Farm 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: Keep Players Engaged and Learning

At this age, baseball is still a new sport to many Players. Throughout the season, aim to teach them some of the core fundamentals of the sport, such as:

- Progression to hitting soft toss from a coach
- Learning to swing the bat and not throwing the bat during follow through
- Learning to run to first base after contact and running through the bag
- Introduction to fielding a ground ball
- Introduction to throwing and catching
- Introduction to catching a fly ball
- "Play is to first base"

B. The Highlands Way: Daily Warm up Routine

At this age, the key points we want players to focus on are (a) glove contact with the ball, and (b) pushing the glove forward, through the ball. These drills should be the starting point of each practice or game. Ten minutes will suffice.

Drills

Pair up the athletes and have them stand 10 feet away from each other in an athletic stance. Athletes will roll the ball, taking turns performing the fielding drills below.

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)
 - a. Feet a little bit over shoulder width apart
 - b. Glove starts between the toes and works through the ball.
2. Forehand position (x10 per partner)
 - a. Standing at a 45-degree angle to your partner with your glove-side-leg back



- b. Start with glove touching the ground near their back foot
 - c. Field the ball by swiping arm forward
3. Backhand position (x10 per partner)
 - a. Standing sideways with glove side closest to their partner
 - b. Start with glove touching the ground near their back foot
 - c. Field the ball by swiping to front leg with elbow pointing to their partner

Activity

Set up cones as a net and have athletes try to save baseballs from being rolled past them using these mechanics. Send them rapid fire and keep it quick. You can set up multiple nets side by side and have athletes work as a team to save as many as possible.

C. Practice Structure and Concepts

Practice time is where players will develop the most. In Farm Ball, one of the big challenges is to keep players focussed and engaged. Try to keep it fun and keep it moving.

To ensure the kids get to Play every day they come to the ballpark we want to enlist a 50/50 Practice. Half of practice time is drills and skill development and half of practice is playing the game.

1. Highlands Way (detailed above, 10 Min)
2. Skills & Drills (20 Min)
3. Game (30 Min)

D. Skills and Drills

Station 1 – Hitting

Soft Toss (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rV3EQ5tHcNE>)

- Coach tossing the ball - if you're willing to stay in front try to serve up some meatballs, go for it, but if you prefer to toss from a 45 degree angle, aim for the right front hip
- Kids will often have a consistent swing (even if it's not fundamentally sound), if they are struggling, aim the ball towards their hitting zone to help create positive reinforcement

Focus on proper stance, as a coach you will often be next to the player adjusting how they are standing

- Front foot is even (perpendicular) with where the plate starts to angle back
- Stand one bat length from the tee (not a bat length and arm's length)
- Straight line from back toes to front toes to the 'pitcher'
- Feet to be slightly wider than shoulder width apart
- Hands back across the chest, knob of bat pointing down towards the 'catcher'
- Hands together on the bat
- Make sure they have their eyes focused on the ball



Station 2 – Fielding

Defend the castle (<https://youtu.be/xc-l7B0PGcs?si=6IU1DVuMVAebBe07&t=52>)

- Fun drill to get players moving side to side

Focus on good footwork and body position

- Running to the ball
- Slow down and get wide feet to field the ball (feet squared to the ball)
- Get knees bent and low to the ground when fielding
- Get feet moving again into a proper throwing motion (rotate so shoulders point at target)

Note: Recommend throwing or rolling ground balls instead of using a bat. Much easier to control placement and speed.

Station 3 – Throwing

Target Practice (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o3Qz0LtQZ_I)

- Have players throw to a specific target (ball on a tee, bucket, bow net, hoop, etc)

Focus on learning proper technique

- Face body sideways (shoulders aligned with the target) with the ball in the throwing hand and in the glove (ready position)
- Break hands from ready position – simultaneously the elbow of the glove hand points to the target and the throwing hand comes up and back with the ball facing away from the target (the kid should see the back of their hand if they look at their throwing hand)
- Step toward the target with the glove hand foot and throw the ball, finishing with the throwing hand foot coming forward

Recommend a slow and cautious approach for kids playing catch with each other. Most kids won't be able to catch so only look to progress with kids that are able to consistently catch the ball. Use soft balls as necessary.

Station 4 – Catching

Coach soft toss (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUDsOkGwPHk>)

- Ball to either side of the child (avoid aiming towards the body until they have demonstrated they can catch)
- Start with no glove and get them used to squeezing and receiving the ball towards their body
- Have them stand on a base to get them rooted if they keep diving away from the ball

Below is an illustration of where we want to throw the ball to get kids comfortable building up their catching skills (avoid aiming it at their body until they have shown they can consistently catch the ball – some kids will not get to this point by the end of the year).



Focus on the glove being in the correct position (above the waist the glove fingers point up and below the waist the glove fingers point down)

Station 5 – Baserunning

Run Around the Bases

Place 2-3 kids at each base. Holler 'go' and the first player at each base runs. A second or two later yell for the next player at each base to go, and so on. After they are all running, let them run around the bases 2-3 times.

Running To First Base

Teach the kids the fundamentals of running to first base after making contact with the ball with an emphasis on running through the bag (i.e. Not stopping on first base) and turning out away from the field after stepping on first base.

Focus on creating good habits out of the batter's box from a young age.

- Get them moving and looking towards first base after making contact
- **Teach them to run *through* first base** (can't emphasise this one enough, large amounts of A-ball kids still struggle with this concept – let's teach it early)

Station 6 – Athleticism

Highlands has purchased ladders for team use. These are great for developing co-ordination and footwork. Based on your team's ability, run them through a variety of single leg and double leg co-ordination drills. Be creative and encourage some competition.



E. Game Play

Like Tee Ball, Farm Ball games are all about fun and giving everyone a chance to succeed. Guidance on field set up, coaching and rules is below. Just like the practice portion, try to keep it fun and keep it moving.

Relay Race

Save this for 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 and a hitting tee will be located in the equipment box at the Tee/Farm Ball field. Coaches will be provided the access code. Please ensure the equipment box is locked up after the completion of the game
- Bases should be set up approximately 50 feet apart
- Softy baseballs should be used for Farm Ball. Team managers will be provided balls at the beginning of the season with some spares placed in the equipment box.
- Each player must wear a protective helmet while at bat and running the bases
- Each player must have a baseball glove
- Players are not required to wear a cup at this level

G. Coaching

- Coaches are allowed on the field, including one parent/coach at each base to assist kids on where to run and rules of the game
- A coach/parent can play the role of catcher as well to expedite game play
- Coaches should be focused on teaching the basic fundamentals of the game and safety on and off the field at all times, not winning or losing

H. Rules

- Each team will hit through their roster once each inning. The inning is over after the last player hits.
- Coach tosses the ball. If a player is struggling the coach can use discretion to hit off the tee.
- When the ball is hit in the field of play, the batter runs to first base. One base per hit for hits that do not go beyond the infield.
- Players are allowed to run more than one base on a hit that goes beyond the infield. Once the ball is returned to the infield area, the runners must stop advancing on the bases.
- Players are not to advance on overthrows.
- When the ball is hit, the ball must travel approximately six feet from the tee to be considered a hit (Coaches should use their discretion).



- The coach of the batting team should announce to the defence when the last batter of each inning is at the plate, which allows unlimited running. Each player on base can run through to home plate
- Only the batter is permitted to hold a bat. No on deck hitter
- Coaches should rotate the kids around to new fielding positions each inning
- Coaches should make sure fielders aren't standing too close to the hitter in the infield and staying closer to their bases and base path
- Coaches should instruct fielding players to not block base paths during a live ball with runners in play
- Maximum of 6 fielders in infield positions: Pitcher, First base, Second Base, Short Stop, Third Base and an extra Short Stop is between 1st and 2nd base.
- No score keeping