

7th Inning Stretch

Remember...If it isn't fun...it isn't Little League!!!



January 2009

Volume 4, Number 11

Happy New Year!

Happy New Year everyone!

A shorter than usual issue this month...not much news coming in...feel free to send me something if you have it. A bunch of coaching tips, the usual Brain Teasers, AND the dates are coming in for the Tournament Season...I will update them as I have them, but the first dates are in, check them out on the last page.

Until next month...

Remember...If you have ANY stories or photos you want to submit...nothing is refused!

Thanks for taking the time to read this and every issue.

Bob Taunton, Editor, The 7th Inning Stretch

Play Ball!

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Inside this issue:

Hitting Fastpitch Softball	2
Hitting Drills	2
Brain Teasers	3
Baseball Coaching Tips	5
Tournament Dates	7



Hitting Fastpitch Softball

*Taken from "The Coach's Box", a Little League International Publication
By Michele Smith, Two Time Olympic Gold-Medalist*

There are many components of a good fastpitch softball swing. Let's cover some of the essential parts you have to do right to help you become a good hitter. Remember hitting is complex, and just because you have a good swing does not mean you will have a high batting average. You must be mentally prepared, coachable, believe that you can do it, and most importantly, swing at good pitches or strikes. If you swing at balls, you will be helping the pitcher get yourself out! Always be positive and look at hitting as an opportunity for you to help your team win!

THE STRIDE

It is important to take a short and soft stride. If your stride is too long, the ball will look like it is moving because the level your eyes are on will drop. This gives the appearance that the ball is moving or rising. Keep the stride soft as well; this will help keep you balanced.

THE SWING

Always take a full cut. If you are going to swing, then swing! Do not hesitate or be too slow with your swing. The plan of the swing should be slightly downward, this will help you hit the ball on a line. An upward swing will create pop-ups.

THE HEAD

Keep your head over your body for good balance. Always watch or track the ball as the pitch is thrown and as you swing, keep your head down. You can't hit what you can't see, so make sure that both your eyes are on the ball all the way to contact. No pulling your head out and looking for mom in the stands!

Hitting Drills

*Taken from "The Coach's Box", a Little League International Publication
By Jamie Joy, Manager Of Operations, Little League International*

How many times have you seen a practice with one kid hitting and the rest of the team picking dandelions? I have seen this happen too many times. I am going to present you with some options that will have the entire team involved rather than just one player. Now you can implement a number of different hitting drills but for this example I decided to use the following five drills. Tee drill, bunting drill, cage, live hitting and whiffle balls. With these five stations you can save time and get more repetitions for each player rather than one.

Tee Drill: With this drill have one adult spotter and two players. The adult will place the balls on the tee and allow each player to hit 10-15 balls. By doing this drill players will become more proficient swingers. To make the drill more difficult have the adult name a field (Left field) and have the player try and hit to the named field. While one player hits the other stands far enough away and practices their swing. All players pick up the balls and switch places.

Bunt station: At this station there will be one adult (pitcher) and three players. Two players will be bunters and one will be a fielder collecting bunts and putting the balls in the bucket for the adult. Each player will bunt 10 balls then rotate to the next spot in this station. The fielder will become bunter one, bunter one will become bunter two and bunter two will now field. This station is complete when all three players have bunted 20 balls. To make this drill more challenging have players bunt down the 1st and 3rd base lines.

Whiffle ball drill: This is a great drill that allows more repetitions in a live setting. This station requires one adult and four players. At this station the adult will pitch to two hitters and the other two players will field balls. Each player will hit 10 balls and then rotate positions. Players will use their game bats for this drill. This drill can be done along the foul line or behind the back stop.

The Little League Pledge:

I trust in God
I love my country
And will respect it's
laws
I will play fair
And strive to win
But win or lose
I will always
Do my best

Cage: For this station you will need an adult and two players. Each player will hit ten balls and bunt two balls at this station. Once the first player is finished both players will pick up the balls and repeat this step when the second player has finished.

Live hitting on the field: With this drill you will need an adult pitcher and three players. For this station you will need one player hitting and two players fielding balls. The pitcher will throw from behind an L screen and pitch live batting practice to the hitter. Each player will hit 6-10 live pitches. Players in the field will gather hit balls and place in a bucket. These are just a few drills that will allow your practice to run smoother and at the same time get more players involved. It is encouraged to have players run from station to station when told to rotate.

Brain Teasers

1: The batter smashes a line drive base hit into right field but overruns first base. He/she makes no attempt to go to second. The right fielder fires the ball to the first baseman who tags the batter-runner before he/she gets back to the bag. **IS HE/SHE OUT???**

2: One out---Runners on first and second. Batter smashes a double to left field. Runner from second scores but runner from first is thrown out at the plate. The batter advances to second safely BUT is declared out on appeal for missing first base. **DOES THE RUN SCORE???**

3: Runner on first and an improper batter is up. The runner advances to second on a wild pitch...the improper batter then laces a line drive to right field to score the runner. The defensive manager properly appeals the batting out of order and the umpire upholds the appeal for the first out. **WHAT DO YOU DO WITH THE RUNNER WHO SCORED???**

4: The runner on first is attempting to steal second, the catcher cocks his/her arm to throw to second and accidentally strikes the umpire in the mask. He/she hesitates briefly...then fires to second in time to nab the runner. **DOES THE OUT STAND???**

5: The runner on first is attempting to steal second, the catcher cocks his/her arm to throw to second and accidentally strikes the umpire in the mask. He/she hesitates briefly...then fires to second---too late to retire the runner. **IS THIS A STOLEN BASE???**

6: One out, runners on second and third, batter hits a double and both runners come home. The runner from third missed the plate...the runner from second properly touched. Realizing he/she missed the plate the runner from third returns to touch it...before the catcher appeals. **DO BOTH RUNS COUNT???**
ember now he/she is standing in foul territory. So.... **FAIR OR FOUL?**

See answers on page 5

The Little League Parent / Volunteer Pledge:

I will teach all children
to play fair and do
their best

I will positively support
all managers, coaches
and players

I will respect the
decisions of the
umpires

I will praise a good
effort despite the
outcome of the game



Baseball Coaching Tips by Marc Shoenfelt

Off-season BASEBALL TRAINING: hitting

Baseball is a sport that requires basic fundamentals done well in order to succeed. Every season I see kids training for the upcoming season. Training is imperative if you want to play at the next level, or get better in the sport. Every year, however, I see players “training” incorrectly.

First off, to train correctly means starting early in the winter. Many players wait until March to dust off the glove and bat. The latest you should start training is January. Even if you play another sport in the winter, it pays to swing the bat or work on your arm earlier in the off-season. Baseball skills require putting it into muscle memory, and starting in late February or March is not enough time to accomplish this or increase your bat speed.

Hitting training seems simple. Find a cage and take batting practice. Not so fast my friend (stolen from ESPN College Football analyst Lee Corso). In January and early February, most of the reps should be taken off of the tee and from soft toss. Hitting off of a live arm shouldn't even cross your mind. The remaining reps should be taken from “soft toss from the front”. Placing the “L” screen in front of home plate approximately 10 feet away, the feeder should sit behind the long side of the screen and toss the ball underhand in the desired zone you are working on. The ball should be a crisp, straight throw as opposed to an arching rainbow.

When hitting these early months, focus on driving the ball in the three zones: middle, inside, and away at varying heights. In early January, get at least 200 reps off of the tee and work on fundamentals and balance. Teaching your hands to coordinate with the different zones, along with the lower half providing power is key off the tee. As you progress, work off soft toss and practice the same routine. As early February hits, the transition to soft toss from the front provides a different challenge and the ball coming from the appropriate angle as a simulated pitch. The key is to keep your focus and drive the ball in all three zones with good fundamentals. We play “panel ball”. We drive all three panels in the cage (left side, back center, and right side) without hitting the top of the cage or the ground.

As early February passes, it is time to move back and go to short toss, or about 30-40 feet away from the plate. The overhand motion and ball now become more realistic. All of your hard work over the past few weeks will start to pay off. Short toss allows the pitcher to place the ball in the zones and you will be able to successfully control the outcome. It is important not to “gun the ball” as a pitcher and try to overpower the hitter. The drill is for building success and not failure.

Late February and early March is batting practice time. The pitcher moves back to full length and the timing is the issue. Hitting the ball with correct timing is essential to success. The inside pitch needs to be hit in front of the plate, the one down the middle right in front of home plate, and the outside pitch needs to travel back on the plate in order to become a balanced hitter. Timing will be an issue for a week or so, but once you get acclimated to the speed and depth perception, your hard work will start paying off. Working off of a live pitcher when available is recommended. Many players see their first live pitcher when they take the field for the first time. Recruit a partner that can work on getting a bullpen session in and take batting practice from them. There is no better practice than live practice off of a real pitching situation.

While a progression was shown in training for the off-season, revisiting the tee, soft toss, and soft toss from the front are highly recommended. Each level builds off the other. After taking some batting practice in late February, finish off your workout by going back to the tee for 25 swings in each zone. You should never totally abandon any of the above during an off-season training. You might not need to go back to the tee every day, but you should revisit each one at least twice a week.

We say you win in the “win”ter. If your aspirations are to become better, get a jump in January this off-season. Start swinging the bat earlier and putting the skills into muscle motor memory. It wouldn't hurt to get some professional training in January to get you off to a good start either. Good luck this off-season, and we hope to read about you in the newspaper this spring!

Marc Shoenfelt is the founder and President of B2B Baseball and Softball Academy, an instructional baseball business that conducts youth coaching clinics. Marc has also written the book "Baseball's Forgotten Basics", an instructional book with a DVD companion.

The book can be seen and purchased at www.baseballsforgottenbasics.com,

or for an autographed copy or to book Marc for a coaching clinic, contact him at info@B2Bbaseball.com.

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Answers To Brain Teasers

- #1: 7.08(c) **NO**. He/she may overrun first base even on a clean base hit. If he/she attempts to advance and is tagged, he/she would be out.
- #2: 4.09(a) **NO run scores**. The runner crossed the plate on a play in which the batter-runner made the third out BEFORE he/she touched first base.
- #3: 6.07(b) **Put the runner back on second**. His/her advance to second on the wild pitch is legal...but his/her advance on the base hit is nullified.
- #4: 5.09(b) **YES!** This is considered umpire's interference but is disregarded since the runner was retired. The out stands (and the umpire is off the hook.)
- #5: 5.09(b) **NO!** Runners may not advance when the plate umpire interferes with the catcher's throw. The runner returns to first base.
- #6: 7.10(b) **Only one run counts**. He/she may not return after a following runner has scored.

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Little League Baseball Canada 2009 Tournament Schedule

Baseball

Major (Little League):

World Series: August 21-30 Williamsport, Pennsylvania

Canadian Championship: August 8-15 Val D'Or, Quebec

Divisionals:

Atlantic: TBD

Quebec: TBD

Ontario: Pembroke D8

Prairies: TBD

British Columbia: TBD

Junior:

World Series: August 16-22 Taylor, Michigan

Canadian Championship: August 6-13 Langley, British

Columbia

Divisionals:

Atlantic: TBD

Quebec: TBD

Ontario: South Ottawa D6

Prairies: TBD

British Columbia: TBD

Senior:

World Series: August 16-22 Bangor, Maine

Canadian Championship: August 6-13 Saint John, New

Brunswick

Divisionals:

Atlantic: TBD

Quebec: TBD

Ontario: Orleans D6

Prairies: TBD

British Columbia: TBD

Big League:

World Series: July 29 -August 5 Easley, South Carolina

Canadian Championship: July 22-26 Location TBD

Divisionals:

Atlantic: TBD

Quebec: TBD

Ontario: Windsor D5

Prairies: TBD

British Columbia: TBD

Softball

Major (Little League):

World Series: August 13-19 Portland, Oregon

Canadian Championship: TBD

Divisionals:

Atlantic: TBD

Ontario: TBD

British Columbia: TBD

Junior:

World Series: August 16-22 Kirkland, Washington

Canadian Championship: TBD

Divisionals:

Atlantic: TBD

Ontario: TBD

British Columbia: TBD

Senior:

World Series: August 9-15 Lower Sussex, Delaware

Canadian Championship: TBD

Divisionals:

Atlantic: TBD

Ontario: TBD

British Columbia: TBD

Big League:

World Series: August 6-12 Kalamazoo, Michigan

Canadian Championship: TBD

Divisionals:

Atlantic: TBD

Ontario: TBD

British Columbia: TBD

If anyone has information that can help to fill in the blanks...dates, District or League hosts, for any of the above, please email me with the details so I can update this page...thestretch@littleleague.ca