

STANDARDS

for

YOUTH

BASEBALL

and

SOFTBALL

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COACHING AND AGE PROGRESSION

Skills will change and increase as the age levels increase. The key is to teach fundamentals. All professional athletes go back to the basics when they struggle and these basics are the fundamentals of the game that were instilled in them when they were 5 or 6 yrs of age. Things like bunt overages, ground balls, fly balls, cut off throws, etc. If the big leaguers concentrate on the fundamentals, don't you think we should with our kids?

There will be coaches who are new to the game. The biggest and best asset a person can bring to the table as a coach is patience. If this quality is not at the top of your list, then you should not be coaching. Coaching is another word for teaching, and teaching requires patience.

There are plenty of resources to learn from. The internet is extremely valuable when seeking some videos or written information regarding specific drills. The following is a suggested format in which you as a coach/manager can employ as a guideline. You can add your own concoction to what you feel a child should or could learn based on their absorption of the material being presented and the level of their skills. I have also included a list of different web sites that will help in your quest as a coach/manager to help build upon your knowledge of the game.

Pitchers: should not be taught to throw any pitch but the fastball. Breaking pitches (sliders, curves, knuckleballs, drops, spins, spit balls, forkballs, splitters, etc) should not be used until a child has matured enough with age (15-16) to take on that kind of wear and tear on their elbows and shoulders.

A major issue confronting leagues and parents is the propensity to over use young pitchers. Every coach and parent should strive to reduce the risk of injury to young players and maximize the young player's ability to perform and advance to higher levels of play. Pitch counts pertain to delivers thrown in games only. These limits do not include throws from other positions, instructional pitching during practice sessions, and throwing drills, which are important for the development of technique and strength. However, backyard pitching practice after a pitched game is strongly discouraged.

A 2002 study by the American Sports Medicine Institute (ASMI) showed that youth baseball pitchers who throw curveballs or sliders have an increased risk of elbow and shoulder pain. Therefore, young pitchers should avoid throwing breaking pitches. Pitchers should develop proper mechanics as early as possible and include more year-round physical conditioning as their bodies develop. Muscles, tendons, and ligaments need time to "cool down" after physical activity just like they need to "warm-up" before activity.

Young players must be instructed that if anything hurts, they must tell their parents and coach immediately. Pitchers who complain or show signs of pain should be removed from the mound. In most cases, pain will be alleviated with rest, but continuing to throw or pitch when the arm hurts is going to lead to a more significant injury - and possibly a long-term one. If the pain recurs the next time the player pitches, then the parents should seek medical attention.

To give a pitcher's body time to rest and recover one should not compete in baseball no more than nine months in any given year. For at least three months a year, a pitcher should not play any baseball, participate in throwing drills, or any other stressful overhead activities like football quarterback, softball, competitive swimming, javelin throwing, etc.

Although the amount of pitching in a league is often limited by league rules, individual pitchers sometime exceed such limitations by pitching in more than one league at a time – and this is discouraged by many. The strength and skills required to be a successful pitcher are developed by repetition, however, a pitcher must also give one's body time to rest and recover in order to optimize development. World-renowned orthopedic surgeon and American Baseball Foundation president James Andrews stated, "The best pitchers in the country never make it to the Major Leagues because they're the ones in youth leagues and high schools who are being hurt due to overuse. We're seeing more injuries now because these kids are having more pressure to throw at higher velocities. They're throwing more sliders, more stress pitches."

The following age-progression listing applies to both baseball and softball:

5-6 year olds: throwing mechanics, catching ground balls, proper batting swing mechanics (no uppercut swings), running the bases, which entail teaching the proper way to slide, for instance, the bent leg slide for the little ones and more advanced slides as they get older which includes, but is not limited to (pop-up slide, head first slide, hook slide, and backdoor slide). They should also learn the dynamics of throwing to

the right base, etc. In order to teach them to not be afraid of the ball have them stand at the plate and throw wiffle balls or tennis balls at them to help abate their fear. Teaching them the proper way to turn away from a baseball when it is thrown at them is very important as well. Balance is key to having that child learn to go back and forth and side to side. You may want to implement simple agility drills. Every year the agility drills should become a little more advanced.

7-8 year olds: hitting mechanics become very important. Ground balls, fly balls and expand on everything else. Reinforcing turning away from a ball being thrown at them as well as their fear of just being in the batters box can be averted by throwing wiffle balls and tennis balls at them so to help alleviate the fear.

9-10 year olds: now they need to begin to learn baseball intelligence and expand on all mechanics. Learn base running and stealing, cut off men, positional responsibilities, and other finer aspects of the game. The skill of bunting has been a lost art in the sport of baseball and although you can teach it at an earlier stage, it is here that you should now implement it in your practices and games. Throw tennis balls or waffle balls rather than baseball to help take the fear out of the child.

11 years and older: fundamentals, mechanics, and repetition. Boring repetition is what makes the good ones great, and the great ones exceptional. When you master the repetition of boredom, you become a star. Remember now that 70% of all athletes stop playing sports after the age of 13. A big reason for that is because too much emphasis is put on winning and not just letting them have fun.

Mechanics are the most important thing that a player can learn and should learn from day one. Fundamentals are a necessity and if they are not being taught at a young age that child will not develop as he or she should. The onus is on every coach, but the younger generation is where the basics and foundation begin to grow. A child's mind is much like a sponge at that age, so it is vital that we teach them good habits. It is admirable to be a volunteer, but it requires some needed homework. You have a child's education in your hands and if you don't take the time to do some research on this particular sport, then you are depriving them of a good learning experience.

Children always look up to the coach and listen intently on what he or she has to say, so it is highly beneficial for you to go out and be the best teacher that you can be. You cannot fake mechanics, and repetition will make your team better. Everyone wants to win, but there is a price to pay for that and it is called practice. Poor mechanics show up under pressure. To do it right, kids have to learn it right, so they have to be taught the right way. If you as a coach are having a hard time with a practice or a child, then do not hesitate to ask for advice. There are many coaches with different levels of experience. Someone will have an answer for you. We are all in this together.

Unfortunately, you will have a few people who disregard the important values but that is to be expected not followed. Individuals who do not have the tolerance for teaching and losing will eventually be weeded out. Lending a hand and reaching out is what the Brentwood Youth Activities is all about. Obtain some skill and drill information with internet research, videos or attend a clinic or two in which will increase your knowledge as well. A volunteer may have the best intentions and feel that they are doing something correctly, but end up showing a youngster the wrong way to do something. Remember being a volunteer is a very big responsibility. The youngster may then develop that wrong way and make it work, or not. The problem is that the wrong way is now engrained into them and they develop bad habits. These can be hard to break as a kid ages.

PURPOSE OF THE BRENTWOOD YOUTH ACTIVITIES STANDARDS DOCUMENT

Standards Provide the Framework for a quality sporting program.

What is worth teaching and learning in any sport? Standards define what a child should know and be able to do as result of quality instruction in a sport. They provide a framework for developing realistic and achievable expectations for children's performance at every age or grade level. These expectations are the first step in designing an instructionally aligned program.

Standards Provide Guidance for Development.

States and local school districts across the country have used standards (State & National) to develop frameworks, and curricula to build an understanding of what is expected. They are a solid platform that will help in accordance with any futuristic goals in a program.

Standards Increase the Professional Stature of a program.

The Brentwood Youth Activities standards demonstrate that building a child's' character while teaching them the basics at an early age and progressively building upon their skills at different age levels is what is most important. They describe achievement, show that knowledge and skills matter, and confirm that mere winning is not the most important thing. These standards bring accountability and reward for a child's progression.

Standard 1:

Demonstrate competency in motor skills pertaining to a particular sport being taught and movement patterns needed to perform at different levels in a child's appropriate age group.

Standard 2:

Demonstrate an understanding of movement concepts, principles, strategies, and tactics as they apply to the learning and performance of the sport being taught.

Standard 3:

Have the children to want to participate in sports by making it fun, not by teaching a win at all costs attitude.

Standard 4:

Help the children understand that there are not only learning and playing the activity but are achieving a level of fitness and participation in a sport in which will help them maintains a health-enhancing level of physical fitness.

Standard 5:

Understand that *by focusing on building character we will help a child learn to exhibit responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others in any and all sporting activities or events.*

Standard 6:

Help that child learn to value the sport for its health benefits, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and/or social interaction.

Standard 7:

Teach that when you learn how to lose, you become a better winner. With hard work and determination along with respect for your self and others you could be as good as you want to be.

Find the opportunity to not only teach sport skills – but life skills as well.

The following are web sites that will help you find quality instruction for baseball and other sports:

a) workshops & coaches clinics

1. <http://www.nybaseballacademy.com/?qclid=CNfY08WF3ZACFQFZHgodvSXGQA>
2. http://www.baseball-excellence.com/index.cfm?Method=Instructions_Instructionsdetail&id=17
3. <http://www.baseballtips.com/instruction.html>
4. <http://www.youthsportsny.org>

b) How to communicate with parents

1. <http://www.sportsesteem.com/wordpress/index.php/archives/105>

c) How to run a practice & develop players

1. <http://www.guidetocoachingsports.com/index.html>
2. http://www.baseball-excellence.com/index.cfm?method=Instructions_Instructionsdetail&id=15
3. <http://www.baseball-fever.com/index.php>
4. <http://www.baseballtips.com/instruction.html>
5. <http://www.baseball-practice-plans.com/oi/training-drills.html>
6. <http://www.y-coach.com/60baseball.htm>
7. <http://www.qcbaseball.com/drills/drills1.aspx>
8. http://www.guidetocoachingsports.com/baseball_outfield_play.htm
9. <http://www.pyobaseball.org/DOYLEBASEBALLTERMINOLOGY.pdf>
10. <http://www.qcbaseball.com/newsletter/newsletter0205.aspx>
11. <http://www.baseball-fever.com/showthread.php?p=990776&posted=1#post990776>