Wooster Youth Baseball

Coaches Handbook for Little League Farm League (Coach Pitch)

**The Mission of Little League (in part):** ...Through volunteer coaching, the Little League program assists youth in developing the qualities of citizenship, discipline, teamwork and physical well-being. By espousing the virtues of character, courage and loyalty, the Little League Baseball program is designed to develop superior citizens rather than superior athletes.

**Introduction**

Congratulations! Coaching youth baseball is an exciting and rewarding experience. While many people know the fundamentals of baseball, it is not always easy to teach those skills to 7 and 8 year olds.

Farm League coaches are often coaching for the first time, and can easily become overwhelmed or have reservations regarding their new responsibilities. This is not surprising because coaching youngsters requires more than bringing bats and balls to the field. It involves preparing them physically and mentally to compete fairly and safely in the sport of baseball and to provide them with a positive role model.

We hope this handbook will guide you as a coach and that you will experience the many rewards of coaching youth baseball. This handbook will familiarize you with Wooster Youth Baseball’s (WYB) approach to coach pitch baseball. *The WYB Board of Directors appreciates your support and involvement and thank you for your time.*

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**Wooster Youth Baseball
Farm League Specific Rules (Ages 8 & Under)**

*The following rules supplement the official Little League rule book which is published annually. If a team does not comply with the rules, the board of directors will review and determine appropriate disciplinary action.*

1. A regulation game is 6 innings. Games halted due to weather, darkness, or time limit are considered a regulation game, as long as four (4) or more innings have been completed. (3.5 if the home team is ahead) (LLI 4.10)
2. Coach Pitch Baseball is developmental, focusing on skill development and developing a love for the game. As such, win-loss records shall not be kept. (WYBL Supp)
3. Only one (1) base on an overthrow. Base(s) must be earned. (WYBL Supp)
4. No stealing of bases or lead-offs allowed. (WYBL Supp)
5. Round robin batting shall be used. A player who cannot bat in his assigned position due to illness or any other reason shall be skipped without penalty. (LLI 4.04)
6. Players present at the game’s start will play at least six (6) consecutive outs on defense and bat at least once. If a manager violates this rule, the player plays for the entire next game. Exceptions to this rule, because of injuries or disciplinary reasons, must be mutually agreed upon by both managers prior to start of the game. (LLI Reg IV-i)
7. Ten (10) defensive players shall be used, with the rover player used in the outfield. The outfielders are to be in the outfield grass. (WYBL Supp)
8. When the offense scores five (5) runs, bats everyone on the lineup, or acquires three (3) outs (whichever is first), they shall move to the field - this includes the 6th inning. (LLI 5.07)
9. The coach will pitch overhand, with as little arc as possible, for the entire length of the season. (LLI Reg VIII(d))
10. Bunting or deliberate half swings shall be a foul ball. (WYBL Supp)
11. Two adults may coach bases while on offense. One coach must be in the dugout at all times. (LLI 4.05)
12. No inning shall start after 8:00 p.m. on weekdays or two (2) hours after start time if another game is to follow. (WYBL Supp)
13. One defensive coach is allowed on the field, positioned in the outfield grass. One coach must remain in the dugout at all times. (WYBL Supp)
14. There is NO On-deck area for practice swings. Practice swings may only be taken near the batter’s box. (LLI 1.08)
15. The coach is allowed to pitch anywhere between the mound & half way to the plate. There are no base on balls (walks). The batter will remain until a ball is put into play or the batter is retired via strikeout (five (5) strikes). Coaches are encouraged to use a batting tee after 8-10 pitches.
16. The HOME team shall prepare the field prior to the game, including the lining of the field.
17. The AWAY team shall empty the trash cans on their field (both dugouts). Both teams are responsible for cleaning their dugout and making sure it is ready for the next team.

**Coaching Mindset**

Coaches must remember that young children are physically and cognitively different than their older counterparts. Patience is vital when working with 7-8 year olds. Coaches should focus on three key principles:

* Safety First
* Keeping It Simple
* Work in Small Groups & Short Time Periods

**SAFETY FIRST**

When teaching young children, it is paramount that they feel safe and capable of performing the tasks without injury. Your first responsibility is to make sure there are enough adults to keep an eye on each child. It is encouraged to ask parents to participate at each practice, and even to help during games (when appropriate).

Further, coaches should make sure special attention is given to the following activities:

1. Throwing – make sure the players are paying attention to where they are throwing. If they are throwing with a partner (even an adult), make sure the “catcher” is showing a READY position. In other words, the player must be facing the “thrower” and hands in position to catch.
2. Catching – As mentioned above, players catching a baseball should be in a READY position to catch. They need to have their hands out in front of them and in front of their face. Worst case scenario, the hands should protect the face. ***For the first 3-4 practices, “playing catch” should be heavily supervised with coaches and parents. Consider using tennis balls or soft-sided balls until players gain confidence.***
3. Hitting – Make sure players waiting to hit are not performing warm-up swings. A best practice is to have a “bench coach”, whose job is to direct the players on the bench and to make sure bat safety is maintained. For players up to bat, remind them to not throw the bat.

**KEEPING IT SIMPLE**

When preparing for each practice, try to get players focused on one or two concepts. Practice should begin with concepts from last week’s practice. Come up with easy to understand terminology to explain the new concept.

In many cases, each new concept will need to be covered 3-4 separate times before it takes hold. As such, coaches should take the approach of:

* Tell Them What You Are Going to Tell Them (Talk about the concept; show them how to do it);
* Show Them (Practice the concept through drills and/or game-based activities);
* Tell Them What You Told Them (Review the concept, and have them practice it again the next practice)

**WORK IN SMALL GROUPS & SHORT TIME PERIODS**

Young children have very short attention spans. As such, try to keep things fast moving and interactive. The best way to do this is to run 2-4 stations at the same time. This will require multiple assistant coaches, or parents, to run the stations for 5-8 minutes at a time. Another key to stations is a lot of repetitions for each child. Having 5-6 kids standing around while 1 player learns will not go well for you. Finally, make sure you are celebrating both learning AND effort (not just those who are best at playing; remember trying hard is one of our key tenets).

**Additional Tips for Coaches**

Below is some advice from coaches who have been in your shoes:

1. ***Develop a plan before for your practices and game situations.*** Included with this handbook, you are encouraged to review the Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA)’s 12-week set of practice plans. They include suggested activities and order of fundamentals to cover with the kids. It is your call on how much of the handbook you use, but make sure you come to each practice with a plan for what you are going to do with the players. The PCA plans can be found at <http://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/littleleague/coachpitch2015/> .
2. ***Learn as much about baseball as you can.*** There is an enormous amount of information on the internet about how to coach youth baseball. If you are not familiar with rules, techniques, or activities to use, spend some time researching how to be the best coach you can be. A starting place can be the Coaches Corner on the WYB Website.
3. ***Develop some easy to remember analogies and/or common visual images.*** For young players, it is best when your imagery is dramatic and entertaining. Making practice fun helps the kids stay engaged. Another tip is to teach the concepts in “threes”. Think of the 3 key words players should remember when learning the fundamentals.
4. ***Don’t assume anything. Go over all the basics.*** For children at this age, you will have a wide disparity in their knowledge of the game. For kids with a sports-oriented family, or for kids with older siblings, they may already know a lot of the rules. For others, this is their first introduction to the game. To make sure all understand, make sure you start with basics such as the names of each base, defensive positions on the field, which way to run the bases, how to hold a bat and glove, and other basic rules such as number of outs, innings, fouls etc.
5. ***Prepare your child about the difference between “dad” and “coach”.*** One of the most difficult things a coach has to do is coach their own child. Many coaches find it helpful to sit down with their child and explain the need to be fair to all players. If possible have your assistants instruct your son or daughter to avoid conflicts.
6. ***Ask for help at the very first communication.*** Coaches will need the help of their players' parents. Parents are normally willing to help out but are usually reluctant to come forward unless asked to assist. If you give them specific things to do, they will be more comfortable.
7. ***The game:*** A best practice is to assign a “bench coach”, who organizes the players on the bench and to make sure they aren’t running all over the place. Ask the bench coach to sit the players on the bench in the batting order. No one should have a bat in their hands, until it is their turn to bat.
8. ***Keep the parents informed as much as possible.*** It is helpful to send a welcome message to the parents, which includes a schedule of practices and games, the times and location. Make sure you include your phone number and email. Collect email and cell phone numbers, and create distribution lists so you can either email or text team information. Also, consider sending reminders at the beginning of the week regarding game times and when players should arrive. Ask parents to call if their child cannot be at a game.

**Coaches Guidelines**

**PRACTICE GUIDELINES**

* Practice as much as possible, make it fun, keep it moving, stress fundamentals, have a plan.
* Stretching and other warm-ups are very important at all ages. Include jogging & sprints.
* Establish a supervised throwing routine, ending with long toss with good form.
* In cold weather, focus on activities that keep the players moving.
* Plan each practice with an ultimate goal/skill in mind.

**COACHES GUIDELINES (CONTINUED)**

**FOLLOW THE RULES**

* Read your provided rule book at your leisure so you do not have to use it in a game.
* Read and follow WYB “Supplementary Rules” for your division that are included above, and are published in the coach’s corner of the website.
* Make sure you are following the minimum play rules for each player on your team

**CONDUCT REVIEW PROCESS**

If inappropriate conduct is reported to or witnessed by the Wooster Youth Baseball Board of Directors, a review of the facts and possible next steps will occur with the coach, the division director and someone from the Board. Those involved in the process and the corrective action outlined below is just a guideline and each situation will be reviewed and on an individual bases.

* 1st violation could be up to a two game suspension and probation for the current year and the following year.
* 2nd violation will be immediate removal as coach.
* Any board member who also volunteers as a coach who behaves inappropriately will lose their position on the board at the first infraction.

**COACHES DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILTIES TO YOUR PLAYER**

* As a Little League Coach, your primary responsibility is to teach the players about the game of baseball. Teaching lessons of the “game” involves the teaching of these life-related skills:
* The development of physical skills.
* Mental alertness and thinking skills.
* The emotions of winning and losing.
* Social growth within the team and/or their peer group.
* The “team effort” concept –cooperation and mutual support.
* Respecting other players, umpires, opponents and the GAME.
* Personal growth –learning about their potential and individual talents.
* Another important responsibility of the Coach is to maintain a careful organization of all phases of coaching. Some of the important areas include:
* An organized practice session
* Game management, including playing time and providing broad experiences for each player
* Equipment and Field Management, making sure the game is ready to start and finish on time
* Extra-curricular activities, such as snack schedules, end of year parties, etc.
* A third area of responsibility of the Little League Coach is that of controlling the Little Leaguers behavior. Your ball players must be properly disciplined, or they will miss much of what is to be learned through their Little League experience. Examples include:
* Appropriate dugout behavior. Not climbing on the fences. Paying attention to their teammates.
* Behavior and attentiveness during practices.
* Expected behavior during a game. Staying alert. Focus on Safety.
* Suggested off-field behavior. Good sportsmanship. Positive attitude.
* Remember that your Little League team will typically model your behavior. If you strive to make games and practices positive and encouraging, the kids will follow suit. If you are unorganized or overly critical, the kids will model that behavior as well. Remember, Coach Pitch Baseball is focused on skill development and developing a love for the game. Not winning the World Series. If you keep it fun and organized, everyone should leave with a great experience.

**GOALS FOR LITTLE LEAGUE COACHES**

* Be a mentor. Get to know your kids and help them develop a passion for the game.
* Educate yourself in the art of coaching the game at the level you’re at.
* Practice age appropriate fundamentals and remember, it’s a developmental process.
* Provide an organized practice, keep them moving, and make it as fun as possible, utilize multiple stations at a time, small group drills, and additional parent helpers.
* Build-up, don’t tear down players. You control the experience, make it a good one.
* Develop all the players. Play them at many positions. Make everyone feel they are a part of the team.
* Be a coach of character, a coach that players are proud to have.
* Remember, your success as a coach has everything to do with the experience you provide for the players, not the win-loss record.
* **Teach the philosophy … “Baseball is a Game of Movement”.** Show the kids where to move on defense to avoid standing around. See the Coaches Corner on the WYB website for more tactical details.
* Bottom line … remember baseball is a game, focus on making the experience a fun one.

**POST-GAME SNACKS**

Where possible, assign the role of organizing a post-game snack to one of the team’s parents. Team snacks can be purchased at the Miller Field concession stand. Check with the concession stand Manager for prices and options. Also, parents can bring team snacks when appropriate.

**WEATHER & RE-SCHEDULE POLICY**

The WYB Board of Directors will determine league-wide weather cancellations, and will communicate through the league’s text messaging system. Make sure you are signed up before the season starts. Further, encourage your team’s parents to sign-up as well. Coaches may choose to cancel or suspend a specific game, if conditions create an unsafe environment for the players.

If a game is cancelled, it is the coach’s responsibility to find a time and location to play the game. Consult the league’s website to identify open fields. If the game occurs within 2 weeks of the end of the season, coaches can agree to not re-schedule the game.

**Skills Checklist**

For details on how to teach these fundamental skills, please refer to the Coach Pitch practice plans from Little League and the Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA). Also, you can review additional coaching tips by accessing the league’s website at <http://woosteryouthbaseball.org>.

* Basics of the Game – rules, how the game works, names of bases, etc
* Throwing the Ball – Set, Stride, Follow-through
* Catching the Ball – Catch the Ball with Feet, Hands Ready, Catch in Front of You (not in chest)
* Hitting the Ball – Load, Stride, Swing through the Ball
* Running the Bases – Run through 1st base, Rounding the other bases
* Defense – “Baseball is a Game of Movement”. Emphasize players should be moving on every hit of the ball. Either move to ball, base, or backup.