Wooster Youth Baseball

Coaches Handbook for Little League T-Ball

**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 5 and 6 year olds.

T-ball 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 ball 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 coaching t-ball. *The WYB Board of Directors appreciates your support and involvement and thank you for your time.*

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**Wooster Youth Baseball
Tee Ball - League Specific Rules (Ages 5 & 6)**

1. Tee Ball shall be instructional. No scores or standings will be kept.
2. WYB will provide each team with Tee Ball game balls at the beginning of the season. These balls should be used for each game (6 total games).
3. An official game is five (5) innings. No new inning shall begin after 1 ½ hours of the game’s starting time.
4. Opposing managers have the right to call their scheduled games due to inclement weather or field conditions. Games may be re-scheduled with the help of the managers involved and the WYB Baseball President.
5. During a Tee Ball game, the pitcher shall stand on the mound until the ball is hit.
6. Only one (1) base on an overthrow. Bases must be earned by runner. Only one (1) overthrow per time at bat.
7. No stealing of bases allowed.
8. Round robin batting shall be used for each inning, allowing all players to hit. Each new inning should start with a different first batter, so that the final batter in the round robin can clear the bases with a “home run trot”.
9. Each player should bat off a tee. As the season progresses, coaches have the option of throwing up to 3 pitches to a player before switching back to the tee. This can be a player-by-player decision.
10. During Tee Ball games, a hit ball must travel ten (10) feet. Any distance less shall be called foul.
11. There will be no strikeouts, base stealing or base leading allowed.
12. When the ball reaches the infield from a throw from the outfield, the play is dead, and the runners must return to the last obtained base.
13. Once play is dead, the ball is thrown to the catcher and/or a coach assisting with the batting tee.
14. No more than ten (10) players should be used in the field.
15. No bunting or deliberate half swing is allowed.
16. No strikeouts. Every effort should be made to assist the batter make contact.
17. Coaches may stand near their batter or defensive players to give advice, but must not interfere with play. The coach should request “time” before attempting to demonstrate a technique or explain a play to the player during the progress of a game.
18. A coach of the team on offense is responsible for removing the tee from home plate should play involve a base runner attempting to score.
19. No Throwing of bat, or any equipment at any time.
	1. 1st time – verbal warning to player.
	2. 2nd time – player will be restricted to playing defense only.
20. Throws during play shall NOT be rolled to a base.
21. There is NO ON DECK AREA for practice swings. Practice swings may only be taken near the batter’s box.

**T-ball Coaching Mindset**

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

* Safety First
* Keeping It Simple and Fun
* 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, it is encouraged to use whiffle balls, tennis balls, or some other soft-surfaced ball.***
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 and Fun

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 3-4 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 T-ball 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, is a 10-week set of practice plans from the Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA). 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.
2. ***Learn as much about Tee Ball and 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.
3. ***Develop some easy to remember analogies and/or common visual images.*** For T-ball 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.*** An ideal handout will have a schedule of practices and games, the times and location. It is important to include your phone number and email. Ask parents to call if their child cannot be at a game.

**Coaches Checklist**

First base

* Show where 1st base person is to stand when no runner is on base
* Show where they stand when runner is on the base.
* Practice fielding plays where ball is thrown to 1B by infielders.

Second base & Shortstop

* Show where player stands, and the area they are responsible for covering
* Practice fielding plays where throwing to 1st base
* Also show how to tag a runner

Third base

* Show where player stands when no runner is on base
* Show where they stand when runner is on base
* Practice fielding plays where they tag the base, as well as throws to 2nd or 1st base

Pitcher

* Show where player should stand
* Practice fielding and throwing to first
* Also show what to do when bases are loaded (force play at home)

Baseball is a Game of Movement

A best practice is to encourage defensive players to move on every hit of the ball. When the ball is hit, the player should focus on “**Ball** First; **Base** Second; **Backup** Third”. Show them how to know when to field the ball vs. covering a base. Below are the typical movements players should make if they are not playing the ball:

1. First Base covers 1st Base
2. Second Base Backs Up Pitcher
3. Shortstop covers 2nd Base
4. Third Base covers 3rd Base
5. Left Field backs up 3rd Baseman; Right Field backs up 1st Baseman
6. Left Center Fielder backs up Shortshop; Right Center Fielder backs up Second Base
7. Catcher Covers Home Plate

**Skills Checklist**

For details on how to teach these fundamental skills, please refer to the attached Tee Ball 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