

MINOR B DRILLS

5:30

- Coaches arrive and prep field and set up pitching machine (please ensure you use the game machine and not the practice machine)
- Coaches set up the 6 drill stations
- Recruit 6-10 coaches/parents (2 per station would be great) and assign them a station
- Recruit a time keeper

5:40

- Line up the kids, explain the drills, and count them off 1-6
- Each station coach takes his/her kids to their station

5:45

- Begin the drills
- After each drill is done, kids move in clockwise direction to next station

6:15 approx

- Once the kids have completed all the stations, put the equipment away and prepare for the game

STATIONS

- 1 At the back stop. .Pitching wiffle balls to 4 kids batting
- 2 Left field line behind third. Wiffle ball throw and catch without gloves. Kids throw to each other coach encourages two handed catches.
- 3 Left field. Grounders from a coach. Alligator catch and step toward target to throw back to coach.
- 4 Centre field. Hot potato with gloves low and in front.
- 5 Centre right. Longer throw with normal ball and glove. (coach insists kids turn sideways to target and stride toward target)
- 6 Right field line. (fly balls with tennis balls and racquet two handed catch)

Head Coach of the Home Team will be in charge of organizing the drills.

If a coach does the same station each time it will be easier.

With both sets of coaches working there is lots of help. A parent can easily do the hot potato drill.

The only equipment involved is: wiffle balls at Stations 1 and 2, and a tennis racquet and tennis balls for Station 6; all other stations just use regular practice balls. A bucket of wiffle balls, and a tennis racquet and tennis balls are in the equipment box.

Game Night Format for Dunbar Minor B.

Objective: To accelerate player development for all players at this critical stage in Dunbar Little League. This format is based on the idea that giving players as many touches with the ball (throw, catch, hit) as is possible. Better skills equate to more fun. We are trying to avoid the experience of kids coming to the ball park for a couple of hours on game night and touching the ball a couple of times. To facilitate player development at this age the ratio of practice to game should be closer to 4:1. We cannot accommodate this ratio at this level in our community league so some practice should be incorporated into game night. (Some teams would also get a lot out of using multiple stations on their practice night by maximizing touches)

Format: Game day has a fixed “start time” of 5:45 when the **whole team** is at the field with glove in hand. This is not the arrival time. A minimum of 30-40 minutes is utilized on the players rotating through different skill stations. Only once all kids go through this pre-game routine will the game begin. If done efficiently this will only delay start time by 15-20 minutes. A player not present for the warm-up segment of game night is considered late. To maximize the use of resources both of the teams and coaches go through this practice together, which will foster a more open and consistent learning environment. Volunteer parents can and should be recruited for some of the easier stations. This importance of this new format should be clearly transmitted to all parents at the beginning of the season both individually and at a team meeting.

Please set up the field before the team arrives. It would be advisable to use cones to delineate the distances in the drills. Players at this level have difficulty knowing distances and this will save a lot of time repeating “back up 5 steps”. The equipment will be in the lockup box at the field.

To make this process understandable to the players and easier on coaches we will use a standard set of drills. With the use of standard drills the process will become smoother as the season proceeds. We can add more complex drills later in the season if necessary.

Pre-game warm-up stations (30-40) minutes.

Set up 6 stations, from the following list, around the field. Remember these drills are intended for Minor-B and there is a range of skill levels but all will be rewarded. A coach arriving 10 minutes earlier should be able to easily layout the stations as there is minimal equipment. Again we go completely through the warm-up before starting the game.

Have all the players run the perimeter of the baseball field and return. Take all the players through 12 forward and 12 backward windmills with their arms.

Quickly form groups of players (4-5) with mixed abilities and teams.

Drill #1 Batting pitched wiffle balls.

Setup:

This drill uses the backstop to contain balls. All 4 players have bats and helmets on and are properly spaced for safety (over spaced cones for plates). Coach has his back against centre of back stop sitting on the Wiffle Ball container if this feels better. Coach throws one ball in turn to a batter (12' away) who tries to hit the ball into the coach. I told you some of these would be fun. The pace should be kept high to get through as many swings as possible and focus attention. Make sure you make the kids put down the bats and pick up their own balls. Coach's points. (Again it is not possible to inculcate lots of fundamentals at this level in a short drill so just slowly encourage better mechanics over time)

1. Safety first so keep spacing. Put cones on the ground where kids stand.
2. You cannot waste time while kids go and find their personal helmets. The drill will be over by the time that happens.
3. The hands holding the bat **MUST** be back behind the back shoulder so they are ready to swing. Physics is ruthless; you cannot swing/accelerate a bat toward the ball effectively if it is already forward (out in front of the body).
4. A small stride forward toward the ball is a good thing. A large stride is **not** better as it moves the head too much and does not add any power.
5. Swing relatively level and avoid the tendency for kids to swing up at the ball in an attempt to launch the ball through the air.
6. The core of the body (chest) rotates throughout the swing toward the pitcher. Use these big muscle groups to accelerate the bat out over the plate and around the body. It should not look like they are just using their arms/wrists to flip at the ball.

Drill #2 Gloveless catch and throw (with wiffle balls)

Setup:

Arrange 4 players in two pairs.

This is a simple exercise to reduce fear of catching objects and to inculcate two handed catches in front of your body. Players are paired up without gloves 15' apart and start the exercise by under-handing the ball back and forth. After each back and forth turn one player takes a step back and they repeat the throws. They can see how far apart they can get and still catch. Any dropped ball and they return to the 15' distance and start over.

Coach's points to players.

1. When catching without a glove kids will almost always catch with two hands, encourage this at all times.
2. Encourage catching in front of body and not to the side.

Drill #3. Quick Ground ball catch and throw.

Setup:

Arrange 4 players side by side in an arc with some room between them. The coach (or parent volunteer) is 20' away with 4 balls. The coach throws bouncing balls to each player in turn and receives the returning throw. Spend very little time between throws. Use additional balls to the next player immediately when a player misses a catch. The pace is important.

Coach's points to players.

1. Feet wider than shoulders to lower centre of gravity but not too wide as to impede lateral movement
2. Bum down and back, and chest relatively erect.
3. Glove already low and in front of body **not** under the body
4. Player catches ball with "alligator hands". See photo. Two hands, glove open and generally pointing down with the free hand above and close but not touching the glove.



Matt's in perfect position to field a grounder

5. Player catches the ball and stands erect while turning the body sideways with throwing arm side back and then steps toward the coach and throws. (You need the 20' separation here).

You should be trying to get the kids to do as many repetitions as possible while correcting minor form issues. Even though the focus of this drill is catching it is extremely important that they turn their body sideways prior to throwing and stride forward when throwing.

Variations: You can make this drill a lot more complex later in the season by rolling the ball to either side of the player to make them move or shuffle their feet to get in front of the ball. Or you can teach back-hand catches

where the player turns more sideways to the ball, glove arm forward, flips the glove hand over exposing the pocket to the path of the ball. Alternatively, you can have two cones or markers defining a goal and have them very quickly take turns defending the goal. Once the players are proficient they can supply grounders to each other with a bit more separation.

Drill #4 Hot potato circle.

Setup:

Players form a small 12' diameter circle.

With gloves on they pass underhand to any one in the circle. Passes must be reasonable and safe. The players should count misses (spell words) so it is a bit competitive. Kids like this drill and it provides a large number of touches and quick hand movement. A bad throw is counted against the thrower.

Coach's points to players.

1. Encourage athletic low stance feet wider than shoulders.
2. Encourage glove hand out in front where the player can see it, low and pocket facing generally up.
3. Catch with two hands (this facilitates quick glove to hand turnover of ball).
4. Use quick underhand passes.

NOTE: Hot potato with chilli: All players have a ball in their throwing hand, once they catch a ball they can toss the one in their hand and quickly transfer the new ball to their hand. This is a noticeably quicker drill. Only one ball should be in the air at a time.

Drill #5 Long throw and catch

This is a very critical drill instilling correct mechanics, strength and accuracy building as well as catching skills. Kids frequently throw and catch when too close to each other in practice making it more difficult to recruit the correct muscles to throw and catch effectively. When too close they unconsciously tend to “baby” the throw so they do not hurt the other person and when too close the reaction time for the catcher is reduced making errant throws more difficult to catch.

Setup:

Arrange the players in pairs. The pairs need to be from 60’ apart (length of base path from second to first) and up to 85’ (approximate distance from third to first). These are meaningful distances. Resist any urge to place players closer that do not yet throw this distance. They will get there and a one bouncer is Ok.

Coach’s points to players.

There are always fundamentals to address with throwing a ball at this age. Not all of these can be discussed during such a short drill session as it would likely lead to confusion and paralysis. Look for the major issues and make progress over time. Do the simple things first i.e. always have the body sideways and stride toward the target. More detailed throwing progression drills should be utilized in your full practice to inculcate proper mechanics that are not intuitive to all.



1. The ball is held out in the fingers with no part touching the palm and with a 4-seam grip.

2. The thrower **must** turn their body sideways relative to the intended path of the ball flight. Thus the throwing arm is back away from the intended target. This is **not** optional, as you do not want players to be throwing the ball starting from a position where their chest is facing the target. Starting sideways will eliminate many faults.



3. The thrower **must** be stepping directly towards the target (catcher) on every throw. One can suggest a half step with the back foot (throwing arm side) followed by a full stride with the lead foot. The back foot should come off the ground with the follow through momentum.

4. Throwing is mostly a circular or rotational motion or **not** a back and forward or linear motion. Starting from a position with the ball and glove above the waist and in front of the body the ball-hand goes down below the waist and past the upper thigh. The glove hand generally points toward the target without completely straightening. The ball-hand circles back and up behind the shoulder, it continues up over the shoulder and toward the target. In this path the throwing elbow should get above the back shoulder (never be below). If a player looks back at this point they will see the back of their throwing hand with the ball facing away from the intended path. This path keeps the ball/hand away from the shoulder or head. The arm is never straight in this process. Less stress--more power.

5. The combination of foot stride, sideways set-up (allowing the back shoulder to naturally drive toward the front which is the source of power to an arm whip) and circular motion will generate plenty of velocity.

NOTE: Simply put. Body Sideways; Stride forward, Circular motion on every throw.

Drill #6 Fly ball catch (preferably with tennis racquet and balls).

Here is a fun drill that uses tennis balls and an old tennis racquet. There are multiple reasons for the choice of equipment. It is much easier for anyone to launch a ball in the air a significant distance to a specific spot with a tennis racquet and ball than a bat and a ball. Thus you have many more chances to catch a ball in a 6-8 minute period. Kids intuitively know the difference between a tennis ball and a dense baseball so they will get under the ball to attempt a catch. A tennis ball is not that easy to catch as it bounces in the glove in impact, only good technique will suffice.

Setup:

Place the group of 4 kids at least 90' away (i.e. the distance equivalent to home to second base) and have them take turns catching a ball launched moderately high in the air with the racquet. You can adjust height and distance as skill varies but too close does not work well as there is too high a premium on initial reaction time. Do not move closer if they are not catching the ball.

Coach's points.

1. Catch ball with glove high and fingers pointing up.
2. Catch ball with second hand supporting: that is with two hands.
3. Catch Ball in front of your body not to the side.
4. Move quickly at first to get under the ball and don't slowly drift under the ball.
5. Throw the ball back properly with the body moving toward the coach.

Some of these concepts are difficult to deal with a full infield while trying to explain and keep many idle hands focused. You will likely not be able to get through all 4 players in all positions but that is ok as they all see what is happening. Avoid the silly tendency of some runners to just bolt to third on all plays just to see what will happen as you want them making correct decisions.

General Issues:

- By fixing the pre-game skill-sessions time, rather than game time, we are making the statement that player development is important. If kids only show up for the game, then they will not get many touches on the ball over a period of several hours.
- By developing a program of rotations and having coaches from different teams work together, we are standardizing the training of baseball fundamentals and assisting the development of everyone. By the end of the season this will have a significant impact on the level of play and the fun factor.
- The incorporation of multiple stations would encourage more parental involvement, which has the benefit of educating parents on the skills their children need to learn and how they can help with their child's development.
- In the first two weeks of play it may be advisable for a small team of coaches to go out and assist with this initial set up.
- It is a short season and we should maximize player development where we can have an impact.