

Even More! (TEE BALL COACHING TIPS)

12. Remember that players will not perform effectively in games unless they have practiced that way. If you don't practice base running, you will get base running outs in games. If you don't drill the players on catching the ball and making a good, smart throw, they won't do it in the game. Attention to the basics is essential.

13. To make the most of your practice time, break the team up into two or three groups, depending on the number of coaches, space, and equipment you have available for the workout. This will enable you to accomplish two or three times as much work without making players stand around with nothing to do.

14. Proper dugout behavior is essential to good order on the ballfield during the game. As with all other elements of the practice, if you don't achieve it in practice, you won't achieve it in the game. A dugout full of monkeys is very distracting to the team and the coaches. It also sets the tone for what will happen between the baselines.

15. As you're working with your tee ball players, try to avoid letting hitters stand nearly motionless in one position in the batter's box too long. When a hitter stands in one place too long, he tends to settle vertically in his stance while he's waiting to swing. This makes it difficult for him to transfer this momentum horizontally into his hitting motion.

16. Whatever the coach does with foot positioning during the hitting sequence, he must ensure the hitter maintains control over his power and balance and can reach the ball with the "sweet" part of the bat. As the stride is begun with the batter's weight and head back over the back foot and weight on the balls of the feet, the hitter transfers his weight in the swing with the head kept back behind the point of contact with the ball. There's a bit more to hitting than that, but the preceding two sentences should make the point that you should pay close attention to where and how your hitter stands in the batter's box. Many coaches simply let their hitters approach the tee and start flailing away at the ball.

17. If you've spent any time around tee ball at all, you've seen coaches who framed their entire offensive strategy around a scheme to have hitters challenge the outfield's ability to catch the ball by hitting pop flies. However, when the level of competition elevates or when players get older, those deep fly balls turn into disappointing outs. My teams scored a lot of runs just by hitting hard grounders and crisp line drives through holes in the defense. Yes, tee ball players can place-hit, if shown how.

18. Teach your players to slide. It makes the game safer, it can help them avoid a high tag, and it keeps them on the base when you don't want them to wander off of it.

19. The hitter's bat should be the heaviest bat he can handle in a fundamentally sound swing. The heavier bat gives the ball more punch as long as the hitter can effectively get it to the ball. However, the heaviest bat in the bag is no good in the hands of the player who can't effectively deliver it to the ball.

20. One of the most common, yet subtle hazards to players involves the handling of bats by players waiting to bat. It was our team policy that players didn't handle a bat unless a coach handed it to him. Once a coach handed a player a bat, he maintained him in his supervision.

21. The most common mistake parents make when they're teaching their kids to catch pop flies is that they don't make sure they get to the ball before they try to catch it. Teach kids to catch pop flies in two steps: run and center up under the ball, then put your glove up and catch the ball. Of course, there are times when the player can't center up, but you need to start with the easy fly first.

22. I had an indoor-safe ball that he threw to my kids in their family room where they could get comfortable catching flies, grounders, and the really tough ones. They soon graduated to the really tough diving plays then they threw from the knees. This exercise was good for developing their confidence around the ball and gave us the needed repetitions it took to help them become fluid in the fielding-throwing sequence.