

R.G.S.A.

SOFTBALL

COACHES CLINIC

THROWING

INFIELD

OUTFIELD

HITTING

COACHING

THROWING

FUNDAMENTALS

LOWER BODY

1. **Pivot foot:** (throwing hand foot) turns out to begin sequence.
2. **Weight Transfer:** Upper body rocks forward.
3. **Stride:** Step forward towards the target with plant foot
4. **Rotation:** The body should turn or rotate sideways as part of the stride.
5. **Follow – thought:** The back leg continues forward at a natural pace.

UPPER BODY

1. **Shoulders:** The shoulders turn as the body starts the weight transfers.
2. **Arm Circle:** The hand goes down and then back as the body rotates, the up and forward into the release area. Long throws the arm circle is complete. Short quick throws; the lower portion of the circle is cut off.
3. **Elbow:** The elbow leads the wrist into the throw. The elbow is at shoulder height. (The arm forms a “L” shape)
4. **Wrist Snap:** The wrist snaps in a downward motion.
5. **Follow – through:** The arm continues through the release point to the opposite knee.

GRIP

1. **Grip the ball across the seams.** (The letter “C”) The thumb under the ball, not in the palm. Use two or three fingers on the “C”.

INFIELD

FUNDAMENTALS

READY POSITION

1. **Feet should be at least shoulder width apart, hands on the knees or out front, weight on the balls of the feet.** (Weight on shoe strings)

MOVING TO THE BALL

1. **Charge towards the ball and lower the approach to the ball.** (Air coming in for a landing)
2. **Line up the body with the ball, spread feet, hips above knees, shoulders above hips, head looking up to the ball.**
3. **Hands in front of the head, glove to the ground, throwing hand up.** (Alligator mouth position) Pull hands into midsection and pop up into throwing position.

OUTFIELD

FUNDAMENTALS

READY POSITION

1. Feet shoulder width apart but more upright than infielders position.
Keep body square to home plate.

MOVEMENT TO THE BALL

1. First step ... backwards to the right or left depending on which side the ball is on.
2. Glove tuck so you can pump your arms while running. (Reach for the ball in the last few steps)
3. Round into the ball if possible. (Helps setup the throw) Never take eyes off the ball
4. Hands above the head (if possible) fingers pointing to the sky.
(Outfielders need plenty of fly balls to see and catch, REPETITION IS CRITICAL !!!)

HITTING

FUNDAMENTALS

SETTING UP

1. Grip. Top hand (power hand) should be loose to allow maximum wrist snap and bat control. Bottom hand is tighter and more into the palm. (Line up the door knocking knuckles)
2. Stance. (Comfort is the key) From the position in the box, the batter needs to reach the outside of the plate and stand towards the back of the plate.
3. Feet. Parallel to the pitcher. (Most consistent) Open stance with front foot pointing to 1st base or the pitcher. (Better view of the ball) Closed stance with front toe turned in toward catcher. (Allows more hip rotation but can cause loss of body control and the pulling out of the front shoulder)
4. Arms. Hands should be towards the top of the strike zone, somewhere by the back shoulder, ear or head. Elbows loose and away from the body.
5. Weight. Should be balanced or 60 – 40 with weight on back foot.
6. Eyes. Both eyes able to see the pitcher and the ball.

SWING MECHANICS

1. Stride. Should be short (8 to 12 inches) and controlled. No stride is ok. Too long of a stride drops the eyes and locks the hips leading to loss of power. Stride is toward the pitcher.
2. Front Foot. Stays parallel or slightly pointed out towards 1st base.
3. Weight Transfer. Weight moves from back of center-to-center or a little forward. (No more than 60 % on forward foot)

PIVOT ROTATION

- 1. Back Foot.** Toe turns toward pitcher, heel towards catcher. (Squish the bug)
- 2. Hips.** Back hip turns toward the pitcher. (Slam the door on the pitcher, belly button turned to the pitcher) A slightly bent back leg supports this powerful move.
- 3. Shoulders.** The turning of the shoulders is in coordination with the movement of the hands to the ball.
- 4. Head and Eyes.** Motionless, body pivots but the head stays still with eyes on the ball at all times. (A good hitter will set the ball hit the bat)
- 5. Hands.** Move forward to the impact point. (In front of hitter) a direct line movement from the shoulder to the ball. (Karate chop of bottom and punch of the top hand) Keep hands inside between the ball and the body. Hands level with the ball creates a line drive, above and down on the ball creates a ground ball and below up to the ball creates a fly ball.
- 6. Wrist Snap.** Top hand rolls over the bottom hand at point of impact. Snap should be level and quick. Arms should be at full extension and swing around and past front shoulder.

PRINCIPLES OF COACHING

TOOLS FOR SUCCESS.

Understand your subject, communicate effectively, see the player's point of view, be positive and have fun.

COMMUNICATION.

1. It dose not matter how much you know its how you communicate it.
2. Say things so kids will here with their hands and feet.
(11 % of what you know you learn through hearing, 83 % of what you know you learned through seeing and doing)
3. Know how to talk and how much to talk. (Get down to there level in both size and words)

LEARNING.

1. How people learn. By hearing, by seeing and by doing.
2. Kids learn better by doing. (TELL ME, I'LL FORGET...SHOW ME, I MAY REMEMBER...INVOLVE ME AND I'LL UNDERSTAND)

BE POSITIVE.

1. Kids are born to win but to many have been conditioned to lose.
2. It takes longer to process a negative statement than a positive one.
3. Words hit as hard as fists " watch what you say "
4. Learn your player's names, it makes a difference.
5. **HAVE FUN. THE BOTTOM LINE IS SOFTBALL IS A GAME, AND GAMES SHOULD BE FUN !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

Positive Coaching: A Behavior Checklist for Youth Sports Coaches

by Darrell J. Burnett, Ph.D.

When the UCLA Sports Laboratory surveyed children for the main reasons why they continue to participate in youth sports, the number one reason given was positive coach support. Research points to the benefits of getting kids to continue to participate in youth sports, noting that kids who stay in sports tend to stay in school, get better grades and have fewer behavioral problems.

It seems obvious that the key to a successful youth sports program where the kids keep coming back is positive support which the kids feel from their coach.

It is extremely important that we, as coaches, remember that a successful youth coach is defined not in terms of a won-loss record, but in terms of how many kids decide to return to play again next year.

As a helpful reminder here's a checklist of some behaviors associated with positive coaching.

I praise my kids just for participating

It's important for us, as coaches, to put youth sports in the proper perspective. Kids have lots of pressures growing up today and it seems silly for adults to add more pressure in an area which is supposed to be "fun and games." The first thing we need to do is to give the child credit for choosing to play a sport rather than hang out during free time. We need to credit each player just for being there. The youngster chooses to sign up, come to practice and come to the games. Even when the child is having a bad day at practice or the game, at least s/he is participating and not dropping out. We need to remind ourselves not to notice and praise kids only when they achieve. It's easy to praise the kids who do well in a sport. We also need to praise the youngsters who don't shine but who stay with a sport day in and day out, showing up for practice and games, even though their playing time is limited.

I look for positives and make a big deal out of them

It is said that a major source of a child's self-view is what they hear about themselves from others, especially from adults. If we want to help promote a positive self view in kids while they play sports we need to concentrate on looking for positives and then noticing them with animated praise.

Research shows that a healthy relationship has a 4 to 1 ratio of positives to negatives. That's a good rule of thumb for coaches. As we arrive for practice or games, we should be thinking of trying to keep a healthy ratio of positives to negatives.

Moreover, if we want kids to hear the positives, we have to be specific. "Nice try" and "good game" are too vague. Kids need something specific so they can visualize it and remember it (i.e., "I like the way you hit the cutoff man," "I like the way you kept hustling until the whistle blew.") Helping a youngster notice his/her specific progress are all ways of noticing positives.

Finally, it's not enough simply to notice a positive. It's equally important to "make a big deal" out of it, to praise with animation. Why? Because kids hear respond to and remember action. The bigger public attention we make as a coach when a kid does something right, the better. In fact, a good motto is: "Praise in public and criticize in private."

I stay calm when kids make mistakes, helping them learn from their mistakes

The key to positive coach support is the art of interacting with a child after a mistake has been made. Ideally, youth sports offer kids great lessons in life: 1) It's OK to make a mistake, 2) mistake are inevitable and 3) mistakes are stepping stones for learning.

When a youngster make a mistake in a sport, one of two things can occur: 1) the youngster can learn from the mistake and try to improve the next time; 2) the youngster can become preoccupied with the fear of making another mistake.

If a coach stays calm and tries to instruct the child, there's a chance that the child will see the mistakes as an opportunity to learn. If the coach stays calm there's a chance that the kid will stay calm, focus on the mistake and learn from it.

Unfortunately, as human beings, we often tend to have more animation in our reactions to negatives than in our reactions to positives. So it takes an extra effort on our part as coaches to remind ourselves to do all in our power to try to stay calm when mistakes occur.

I have reasonable and realistic expectations

A major frustration for kids, in sports or in life, is trying to live up to the expectations of adults in their lives. At times, youngsters have a strong need for adult approval. If they don't get it, due to unrealistic expectations from adults, it can be a major source of low self-worth. Since a coach often plays a major role in the life of a youngster, it is important to keep expectations reasonable. A good coach's skill expectations are based on the knowledge that all youngsters in youth sports 1) vary in their development of physical coordination skills, 2) go through plateaus in their skill development and 3) have growth spurts which can affect their coordination.

A good coach's motivation expectations are based on the awareness that there are three levels of motivation for kids in youth sports: 1) some kids, especially the entry level youngsters, are playing because their parents enrolled them, 2) many youngsters are playing because they are interested in the sport, 3) a few youngsters are playing because they are passionate about the sport and want to be the best.

A good coach's dedication expectations are based on the knowledge that the level of dedication to practice and mastery of skills depends upon the level of motivation in a youngster. A good coach also knows that dedication wanes when playing the sport is no longer fun.

I treat kids with respect, avoiding put-downs, sarcasm or ridicule

When a youngster signs up to play sports, he/she deserves to be treated with respect. This means no put-downs, no sarcasm and no ridiculing by the coach. Dr. Thomas Tutko, renowned author, lecturer and sports psychologist, notes that any youth sports coach who volunteers to take on the job of guiding kids in any given sport needs to be careful of how he/she comes across to the youngsters. He uses the words "potential child abuse" when describing the verbal and emotional harassment that sometimes takes place in the name of "coaching" in youth sports.

I remind kids not to get down on themselves

I once observed a brilliant piece of youth sports coaching at a basketball game. A youngster missed a lay-up on a fast break. The coach substituted for the youngster. He then said to him, "Son, I didn't take you out because of the missed lay-up. I took you out because after you missed the lay-up you hung your head, delayed in getting back on defense and allowed your opponent to score an easy basket. If you get down on yourself after you make a mistake all it does is give your opponent an advantage. Now, get back in there, learn from your mistakes and quit beating yourself up!"

Youth is a time of mixed feelings. Kids can go from "cocky" to "unsure" in seconds. A steady reminder from the coach can help them to keep from falling apart when things aren't going well.

I remember not to take myself too seriously during the game

Cartoons have a way of reminding us about some of our weaknesses. In an obvious parody of the singing fat lady, a cartoon depicts a youngster coming off the playing field after a defeat. The parents are beckoning him to the car. He responds, "Not yet mom and dad, the game's not over 'til the coach cries!" In yet another cartoon, as the scoreboard indicates a loss for the home team, a youngster has his hand on the coach's drooping shoulder, saying, "It's OK coach, it's just a Little League game!"

Although it's a volunteer position, some youth sports coaches seem to have made it their "life." The same person who appears so relaxed and easy going away from practice and the game takes on a whole new persona as "coach." At times, there seems to be entirely too much ownership and identity tied in with the position. In youth sports involving a "draft" there seems to be the danger of a little too much ego involvement. In other words, it's as though the coach was thinking, "I drafted you kids. If you don't produce it makes me look bad."

I maintain a "Fun is #1" attitude,

with lots of laughter and a sense of humor

Fun is the major motivator for kids in sports. In survey after survey, whenever youngsters are asked why they play sports, the number one reason is always the same - to have fun. Winning is on the list but it is last on the list. Kids like to compete, but it's the fun of competing, the excitement of competing, not just the winning.

Research shows that kids learn better when they're having fun. The effective coach is the coach who learns what's fun for the kids by getting into their shoes and seeing the world from their point of view, the world of fun. The effective coach knows that fun, laughter and humor are second nature to kids.

I emphasize teamwork and help kids think "we" instead of "me."

One of the major cornerstones of self esteem is developing a sense of belonging. We're social animals and we need to feel as though we belong to a group. Youth sports offers an automatic sense of belonging (team name, team uniforms, team photos, team picnics, etc.) However, a coach plays a central role in making the "team" concept become a reality. The coach makes sure that all kids on the team get recognized, not just the "stars." The coach does not allow teammates to criticize each other. The coach encourages parents to notice and compliment all the player on the team, not just their own kids, and not just the "stars."

I am a role model of good sportsmanship

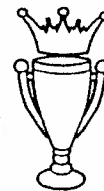
In an age where sportsmanship is struggling to survive in professional, college, and often in high school sports, the youth sports coach is the key role model of good sportsmanship. Youngsters are looking to the coach to show them the way in the three areas of sportsmanship: 1) winning without gloating, 2) losing without complaining and 3) treating opponents and officials with fairness, generosity and courtesy.

The task of the positive coach is to teach youngsters to be in control of their emotions throughout the competitive contest and afterward in their interactions with opponents and officials.

A final note

As a coach we are human beings, not robots. In spite of the best intentions we may all have our bad days. Hopefully, using the items on the behavior checklist as guidelines, we will stay on task throughout the season, working toward our goal of offering positive coach support, doing our part to make each season a success where youngsters decide to come back next year and to stay involved in youth sports during their formative years.

CROWN TROPHY



AMERICAS LARGEST AWARDS SUPPLIER

Buy Direct From The Manufacturer

Guaranteed Lowest Prices!!!
Call For Our Free Color Catalog
Three Convenient Locations

FRIDLEY
1230 E Moore Lake Dr.
612 502-0105

ST PAUL
1148 S. Robert St.
651 552-9501

BLOOMINGTON
9420 Lyndale Ave. S.
612 884-4944

Roger Rosenblatt

A Game of Catch

Tossed back and forth, the ball expresses all that is between them

SUMMER IS THE SEASON FOR IT. I DREAM AND SEE THE children when they were children, one at a time, standing on a lawn or on a playground, waiting for the ball to reach them. Their hug-me arms waver in the hot, wet air, as if they are attempting to embrace something vast and invisible. Their eyes blink in the sunlight. They stagger and stumble.

It's hard to learn to play catch. In the beginning, you use your arms to cradle the ball against your chest; then you use both hands, then one. Soon you're shagging flies like Willie Mays and firing bullets across your body like Derek Jeter, not having to think about the act.

They do not call it a game of throw, though throwing is half the equation. The name of the game puts the burden on the one who receives, but there is really no game to it. Nobody wins or loses. You drop the ball; you pick it up. Once you've got the basics down, it doesn't matter if you bobble a ball or two, or if you can't peg it as far as you once could, or if you have to stare and squint to pick it out of the sky.

Or so I tell myself as I groan out of a chaise in response to my son's "Dad, wanna play catch?" He is our third, the last in a line of catch players, the two before him having grown up and out. We stand about 60 feet apart. He gives me the better glove, and we begin.

I loathe the leaden drag in my arm, the lack of steam in my throw. Live, I look like a slo-mo replay. But I can still reach him.

He, of course, is a picture of careless and fluid engineering. He doesn't even look at the ball (I didn't either at his age). It is just there in his hands, and then it's gone again. We go back and forth in an essential gesture of sports. A ball travels between two people, each seeking a moment of understanding from the other, across the yard and the years. To play a game of catch is not like pitching to a batter. You do not throw to trick, confuse or evade; you want to be understood.

The poet Richard Wilbur once visited a poetry class that I was in, and he told a girl who had figured out a line of his. "It's nice to have someone catch what you're throwing."

A game of catch is an essential gesture of parenthood too, I believe, when families are working well. Everyone tosses to be understood. The best part of the game is the silence.

After the recent heartbreaking shootings in the schools, people on TV said parents ought to talk to their children more, which seems sensible and true. But they should also find situations in which talk is unnecessary and they can tacitly acknowledge the mystery of their connection, and be grateful for it, in silent play. Nietzsche said there is nothing so serious as a child at play. He could have added, "or a grownup either."

I throw. He catches. He throws. I catch. The ball wobbles so slightly in the bright stillness that one can almost count the stitches.

I loved playing baseball as a kid, and then I hated it. Not half bad as a pitcher when I was 13, I threw my arm out, and my idiot coach said, "Pitch through the pain," and I did. I was never able to throw hard after that. Maybe it was a bit of good luck. The advantage in later years, when I became a player of the game of catch, was that I was all motion and no speed—a change-up artist with nothing to change up on—so that the children could study the mechanics of throwing and anticipate making a catch without too much fear.

Once I happened to be on the field at Yankee Stadium before game time when the players were warming up. Wade Boggs and Don Mattingly tossed a ball between them without a trace of effort, bodies rearing up and pivoting gently in a casual parody of a pitcher's full windup toward the plate. Every easy toss was delivered at a speed greater than a good high school fastball pitcher could generate. *Thwack, thwack, thwack* in the leather. And the silence between the men on the field. It was interesting to note that even at their level, this was still a game of catch.

We do what we can as parents, one child at a time. We take what we get in our children, and they take what they get in us, making compromises and adjustments where we are able, making rules and explanations, but for the most part letting things happen, come and go, back and forth. The trick, I think, is to recognize the moments when nothing needs to be said.

The heat and silence of the day fit us both like a glove. I toss the ball in looping arcs. He snaps it up as if waving it away, then tosses it back on a line, with much more on it. So we continue until our faces glow with sweat, and the sun drops, and we are touched by the shadows of the trees. ■

