



# **WEST AKRON BASEBALL LEAGUE**

## **T-BALL HANDBOOK**

## **Foreword**

Coaching youth baseball is an exciting and rewarding way to be involved with youth sports. It is not always easy though. A majority of the coaches at t-ball level are coaching for the first time and sometimes 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 the rules regarding t-ball. It will give you coaches' tips regarding baseball and administrative tips to facilitate your coaching responsibilities. The manual will also give suggestions on drills to assist your players on skills development.

The WABL Board appreciates your support and involvement and thanks you for your time.

T-Ball is a baseball game for young boys and girls. It is a way to have fun while learning how to play.

## WABL T-Ball League Rules

### **Participants**

1. Limited to boys and girls age 5, 6 and 7.
2. All players are assigned to teams by the league commissioner. Drafting of players is not permitted.
3. Returning players will remain on the same team if possible.
4. Players will be placed on teams with their siblings.
5. Special player/team requests, made at time of registration, will try to be honored.
6. All players have equal amounts of playing time.

### **Equipment**

1. A regulation "rag" type ball will be used during practices and games.
2. Batting helmets are not required.
3. The catcher must wear a mask.
4. The adjustable height tee provided by the league must be used during the games.
5. Players must provide their own mitts.
6. Aluminum bats are **not permitted** to be used during games.

### **Games**

1. Games are to start at scheduled times and are limited to three innings or one hour of play.
2. Games are not to be scored. The winner of the game is not to be announced by the coaches or any spectator.

### **Fields**

1. Fields will be prepared by WABL staff.
2. Bases will be set at 60 feet.
3. A six-foot circle will be drawn around the existing pitcher's mound.
4. An arc foul line is drawn ten feet from home plate.

## **Positions**

1. Teams will consist of no less than 11 players: first base, second base, short stop, third base, catcher, pitcher and five outfielders. Any additional players are to be positioned in the outfield.
2. The pitcher must stay within the six-foot radius of the pitching mound.
3. The catcher will keep an assured clear distance behind the batter until the batter runs to first base.
4. Player positions are rotated every inning. A player shall not play the same position for more than one inning.

## **Batting/Pitching**

1. The batter will hit until a fair ball is hit off the tee. There are no strikeouts.
2. Every team will go through a continuous batting rotation every inning.
3. A ball that is hit short of the ten-foot line is considered foul.
4. Bunting and intentional easy swings are not allowed.

## **Base Running**

1. Stealing, leading off and sliding are not permitted.
2. Runners advance only one base on an infield hit.
3. Runners may be advanced more than one base on an outfield hit. Once the ball is thrown into the infield, runners must remain on the last base taken.
4. Runners may not advance on an overthrow.
5. If a runner is hit by a ball, he/she is not out.

## **Coaching**

1. Coaches should be on the playing field to explain to the players what they are doing wrong and to show them proper procedure or play.
  - a. The batting team is allowed a batting coach and a coach for each base.
  - b. The fielding team is allowed two fielding coaches and one catching coach. The catching coach will be responsible for removing the bats and tee from the area of play.
2. The head coach is responsible for maintaining order on the sidelines, keeping equipment and players in the dugout area, and cleaning up trash after the game.
3. Although outs are not counted, the batting coach will call the batters and runners safe or out. If a player is out, they will return to the bench.
4. The home team will provide the batting tee and game ball. The home team coach shall check the field before play begins.

## **Coaches Introduction**

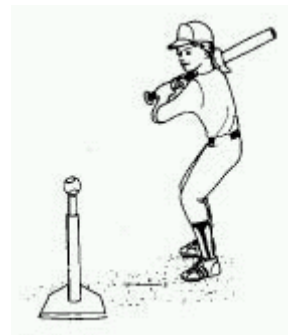
The ball is not pitched. It is hit off a batting tee. Every player bats and plays in the field. There are no strikeouts or walks (bases on balls). When the ball is hit, don't throw the bat. Runners must stay on base until the ball is hit. There is no stealing. The inning is over when all players have batted once. Player must hit off a tee and no keeping score.

### **Here is a list of ten points to keep in mind:**

1. Keep things simple.
2. Avoid technical information.
3. Apply basic fundamentals.
4. Use easy to understand terminology and use it consistently.
5. Adopt the kids' slang and apply it to your baseball teaching.
6. Celebrate the individual talents and differences ... no cloning.
7. Work in small groups, we call them stations.
8. Keep things interactive and fast moving. This will deal with their attention span.
9. Involve parents as your helpers. This is absolutely important.
10. Whenever possible, make things into a game.

## T-Ball Tips for Coaches

1. As a coach, get organized; develop a plan before for your practices and game situations. Learn as much about t-ball and baseball as you can.
2. Remember to present your material in kids' terms. Successful coaches know their audience and use analogies and common visual imagery for their coaching tools. For t-ball players, these images are best when they are a bit dramatic.
3. Don't assume anything. Go over all the basics: Where all the bases are and the defensive positions, which way to run to first, when to start and stop running, how to hold a bat and glove, number of outs, innings, fouls etc.
4. One of the most difficult things a coach has to do is see the twelve players on the field who are not related to him or her. Remember to be a coach on the field and a parent off the field. If possible have your assistants instruct your son or daughter to avoid conflicts
5. Coaches need the assistance 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.
6. On the field, you have to be a teacher as well as a coach. Teach them what they need to know, show them what you taught them, practice the things you taught them over and over, then be prepared to do it all over again
7. To make the most of your practice time, break the team up into two or three groups, depending on the number of coaches. This will enable you to keep more kids occupied and less bored. Remember the attention span of a 5-6 year old is measured in minutes.
8. The game: Sit the players on the bench in the batting order. No one should have a bat in their hands. Horsing around on the bench will translate into foolish behavior in the field. Place batting tee directly on top of plate. Position batter slightly back of tee. See illustration:
9. 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 try to insist that parents call if their child will not be at a game.



## **Coaches Checklist**

### **First base**

- Show where 1st baseman is to stand when no runner is on base and when one is on the base.
- Practice fielding plays; ball thrown to 1B by infielders.

### **Second base**

- Position player in place, anticipating action.
- Practice fielding plays; such as, tagging a runner out at 2nd base and if running in the base line to the base.

### **Shortstops**

- Show positions: one between 2B and 3B.
- Practice fielding balls and throwing to 1B or 2B for an out.
- Remind them they can tag a runner.

### **Third base**

- Show position, anticipating action.
- Practice action such as knocking down ball and fielding pop-ups in foul territory.

### **Pitcher**

- Stands in pitcher's area but acts as an infielder.
- Practice fielding ball and throwing to 1B.
- This position sees a lot of action and the player must pay attention.

### **Catcher**

- Stands behind and away from home plate until ball is hit.
- Demonstrate: after ball is hit, adult removes tee and bat; catcher moves up to cover plate.
- Practice actions: catcher tagging base runner out, catcher throwing to 1B.

### **General infield activity**

- Catching short fly balls.
- Field balls and throwing to a base or to home plate. (Do not run with ball)
- Tagging runners on the base path.
- Relaying a ball from an outfielder to a base; to the catcher at home plate.

### **Outfielders**

- Position players.
- Practice catching fly balls in a crowd. "I've got it"
- Practice catching ground balls and throwing to infield.
- Have one outfielder receive relay from another and throwing to an infielder.

**Batter**

- Give basic hitting instructions.
- Practice hitting ball, then dropping bat properly and running to first.
- Don't watch the ball when running to first base.

**Base Runners**

- Instruct runners to look for 1B Coach signals to run past base or to turn and go on to 2B.
- Instruct that forced runner on base must advance.
- Non-forced runner can hold position on base.
- Player on base watch what next batter does; where the ball goes.

**Bench**

- Team sits in batting order, encouraging the batter.
- Coach talks to team: Listen for instructions. Play fair; follow the rules. Have fun.

**Coach**

- Talking to team, after the game:
- Summarize team's activity. Be specific and recognize progress. Note any humorous thing that happened.
- No public criticism; as necessary, take player aside.
- What's next: i.e., practice at home, next team practice and game schedule; tell parents.



## **T-Ball Skills Checklist**

### **Throwing**

Throwing is one of the most important skills in baseball. Stress to your players that accuracy is more important than speed. Teach them to throw over the top and not side arm. This creates bad habits that are hard to change later. Thumb under the ball.

#### *Windup*

Bring the throwing arm back and up, turn your front shoulder so it is pointing at the target. The glove hand points toward the target. The arm extends behind the body with wrist cocked and elbow bent:

#### *Delivery*

As you start your delivery you pick up the lead foot and stride toward the target. As the lead foot touches the ground, the hips rotate toward the target. Release the ball in front of the body and follow-through. Always look at the target throughout the throw.

#### *Follow- Through*

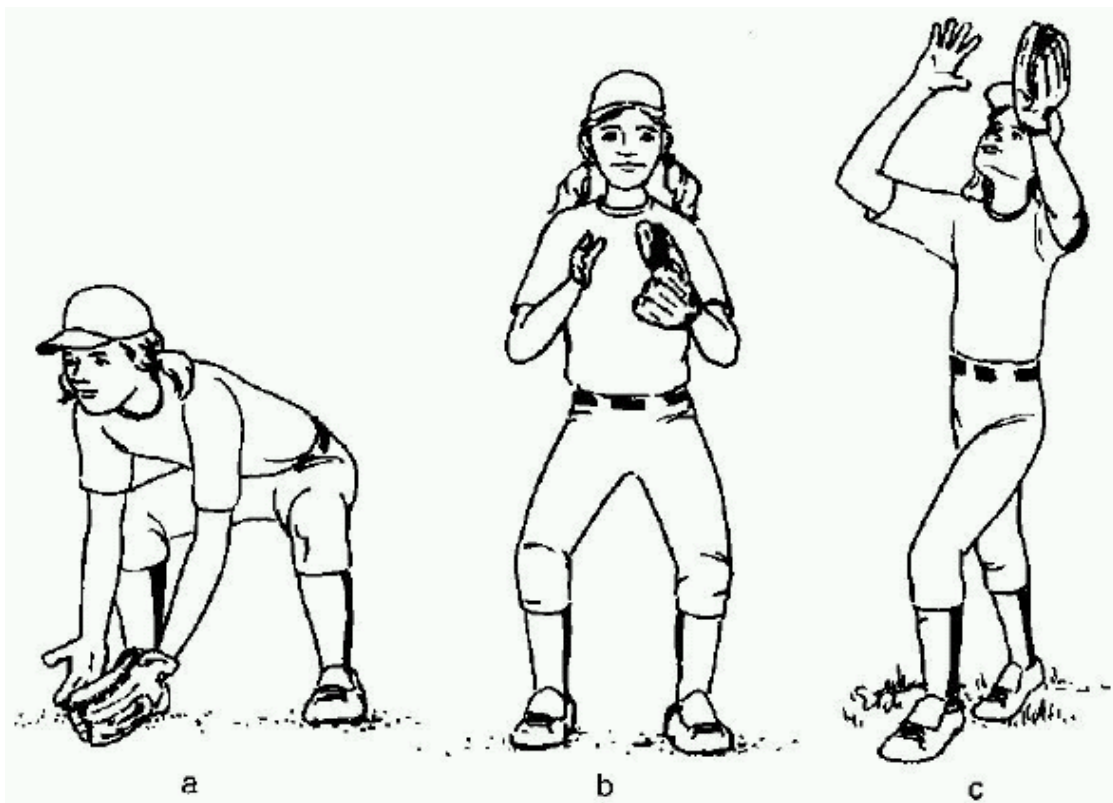
The follow-through ends with the throwing arm down in the front of the body and the feet almost parallel, in a balance ready position.

### **Catching**

A major defensive skill is catching. Initially, some players will be afraid of catching a baseball. That fear will make them flinch right before the ball reaches their glove. This will cause them to drop the ball instead of catching it, or worse, the ball may hit them. This can create a fear that can eventually cause players to quit. Teaching players the correct catching technique is not easy. You must first overcome their fear of getting hit with the ball. Demonstrate that the ball is softer than a standard hard ball. You might want to work with some of your players with a tennis ball for the first couple weeks.

#### *Catching the baseball*

- keep your eyes on the ball
- have both hands ready, with arms relaxed and extended toward the ball
- bend the elbows to absorb the force of the throw
- watch the ball into the glove and squeeze it



## Hitting

Hitting a baseball is probably the most difficult skill to master in baseball. Five separate hitting components should be taught to young players: grip, stance, stride, swing and finish.

### *Grip*

Grip the bat firmly (don't squeeze) hands together above the knob with the middle knuckles lined up. The player at this level should be encouraged to hold onto the bat until contact is made and then to drop the bat vs. throwing it.

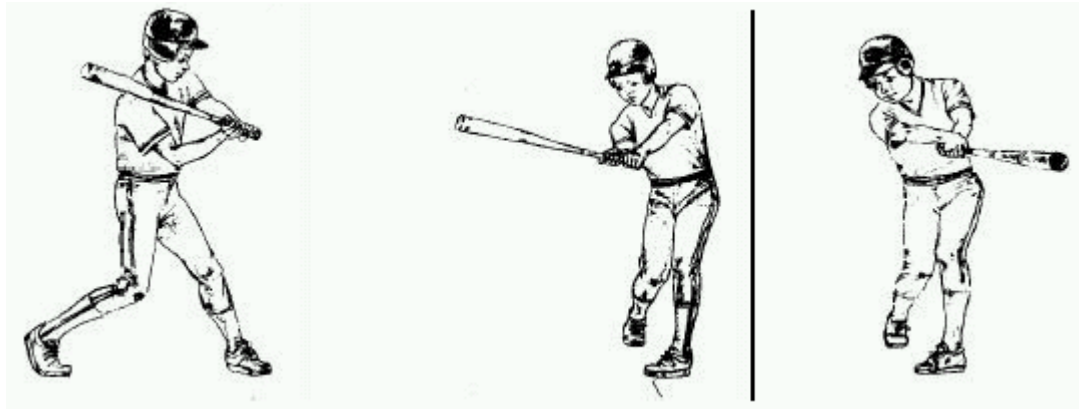


### *Stance*

Players should be comfortable in the batter's box. Don't try to make every batter assume the same stance, but do stress these basics:

- feet comfortably wider than shoulders, set in a square stance
- toes pointing towards the tee/plate
- knees slightly bent with weight centered on the balls of the feet
- upper body bent slightly at the waist, eyes focused on the ball
- bat at a 45 deg angle to the hands

- elbows out from the body and flexed, point towards the ground



### *Stride*

The stride is a triggering motion to begin the motion of the shoulders hips and, knees as the pitcher releases the ball. This will become a more useful tool as the players develop but for now a small stride of the front foot toward the mound will be a good start to force some weight distributions and begin their swing sequence.

### *Swing*

Adjust the tee with the ball set even to the hitter's waist. The legs and hips initiate the swing. Eyes on the ball, shoulders level, bat and head steady. The swing should be level to slightly downward bring the bat through the center of the ball. Watch the bat hit the ball; keep your head down. Extend arms and follow through. Focus on making contact and not swing too hard.

### *Finish*

Keep a balanced position when the swing is over. Do not watch the ball. Drop the bat and run hard to first base.

### **Base Running**

Run on the balls of the feet. Look at the base you are running to, not where the ball went. Run out side the foul line. Teach the players to run straight through 1st base; don't jump on it or slow down. Watch and listen for coach's instructions. Keep one foot on base leaning forward until the batter hits the ball and use the base to push off. Know where the ball is. When running the bases, touch the inside corner. Make sure you touch every base.

## **Practice Tips**

**Batting:** Practice, Practice, Practice. Work with small groups using a tee and go over the five components of hitting.

**Bounce to the bucket:** Use a large basket or bucket and place it on the base. Outfielders try to throw it into the container. Can be done as a game with 10 points for in the bucket and 5 for hitting the bucket and 1 point for two feet either side of bucket.

**Catch:** Two or more players catch. Keep track of the number of successful catches. See how many you can catch in a row.

**Catching Flies:** Hit or throw fly balls to fielders. Throw ball right to the player to develop confidence and then toss ball to right or left. During this drill you can introduce someone coming over to backup the play. Make sure to instruct the use of two hands.

**Coach in the Middle:** Circle the kids with the coach centered rolling the ball or tossing to each player. For practice have the kids field the grounders without a glove, to reinforce the use of two hands.

**Crab Drill:** Player is in basic fielding set position stance, crouched forward with glove open and down. Player takes three or four steps as the coach rolls the ball.

**Track meet:** Player stands at home plate with bat in hand. Coach claps hands and player drops bat and runs hard to first base. Time how long it takes to get to first and record it. Run drill later in season and see if there is any improvement.

### ***Remember:***

*You should be satisfied if the kids have fun, learn the basics of baseball and are enthused to play again next year.*