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Drills to Teach the Skills

Helping children learn and develop a variety of skills to successfully participate in their sport can sometimes be a bit tricky. After all, if the drills aren't fun, become too repetitive, or fail to challenge each team member, then not much is going to be accomplished during practice. The following are some drills that can easily be incorporated into a practice to help bring out the best in your players.

Hitting

Soft Toss Drill - Young hitters frequently make a lot of fundamental mistakes when striding. Have the hitter spread their feet wide as if they have already strided and learn to throw their hands at a softly tossed ball and drive into a net. This improves hand-eye coordination and allows for many repetitions in a short period of time. The hitter learns to trust their hands as they pivot on the back foot and hit the ball out in front of home plate.

Texas Leaguer Drill - Coach tosses the ball over the head of the first player in line. As the player reads which shoulder the ball is over, he drop steps to that side, crosses over, and sprints back to make the catch. Kids enjoy making great plays and develop good judgment in a neglected area of the game. Encourage players to run on the balls of their feet so the ball doesn't "bob" with each step.

Throwing

Twenty-one - This drill is to teach control of a thrown ball. Players play catch at the assigned distance, which should be greater as they get older. Each thrower gets two points for a throw caught within the upper torso by his teammate, one point for a ball caught in front of the face or thigh, and no points for throws caught to the right or left of the body or below the knee level of the teammate. Play until the first player reaches 21 points. With the entire team playing, winners can playoff until only one player remains.

Run and Throw Drill

Kids love this contest. Form two lines of players. Place a cone or draw a line approximately 50 feet away, further for older players and shorter for younger players. The first player in each line sprints with a baseball/softball in hand to the line (or cone), turns around, and throws accurately to the second player in their line. Then they sit down. The second player sprints to the line, turns and throws to the third player. Then they sit down behind the first player. Bad throws must be retrieved. The first line (team) of players to have completed their throws and to be seated in a row is declared the winning team.

Catching

Wild Pitch Drill - Coach rolls the ball toward the backstop. The catcher, in full gear, runs to the ball and slides beside it, picks it up barehanded, and throws a "dart" to the pitcher who covers the plate. A good slide and short, accurate toss is vital. This skill is very useful in preventing runs from scoring on wild pitches in youth baseball/softball.

Blocking Drill - Coach tosses tennis balls to the middle, left, and right of catcher, who goes to his/her knees and smothers the ball with their chest. Catcher must "round" their shoulders and always block the ball toward home plate. Tennis balls eliminate fear.

