

AGE – SPECIFIC GOALS

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In other articles we talked about general goals that all youth baseball coaches should try to achieve each year. We'd like to follow up that article with some suggestions about what coaches should try to accomplish within each specific age group. These age – specific goals are just suggestions. They are a starting point and can be altered, depending on how advanced your team is. Feel free to add your own goals.

For the purposes of teaching baseball effectively, we have broken all players down into the following age groups: 4-6, 7-9 and 10-12. Some kids mature physically much faster than others. Motor skill development varies as well, but for the most part you can teach similar skills to the kids within these separate age breakdowns and see them experience success. If you look at the breakdowns, the 4-6 age group represents the beginners. At ages 7-9, fine motor skill development has progressed to the point that most kids possess the ability to learn to catch and hit a pitched ball. The 10-12 age group is when players begin to decide for themselves that they like baseball and might want to pursue it a little more seriously.

We believe strongly in keeping things simple when teaching the game of baseball. With that in mind we have developed five goal areas for each of these age groups. As coaches we want to keep these five goal areas in mind every time we plan a practice. They represent the fundamental building blocks for success. The goals at one level need to be accomplished before the goals at the next level can be pursued. If this happens, great! Consider yourself an expert coach. But don't feel like you have failed if you don't get beyond the goals of a particular age group. If your team achieves these basic goals, your season should be considered a success. If you don't reach the goals, that is ok, too. Stress all of the positive things that were accomplished and try to figure out how to accomplish all of the goals the next time. Remember, "Look toward the future and learn from the past."

Similarly, if you are coaching a team of 7-year-olds and it is obvious that they have not mastered the concepts and skills set forth in the age-appropriate goals for the 4-6 age group, it is imperative that you go back and work the players until they have achieved those goals before moving on to more advanced teachings.

Remember, these are just suggestions. Feel free to alter these goals as you feel appropriate for your team:

FIVE GOALS FOR THE 4-6 AGE GROUP

- 1) **Basic rules – Which direction to run when the ball is hit; runners must touch the bases; how to record outs (catch the ball in the air; throw to first or tag the runners); running past first base; scoring a run; ball, strikes and outs.**
- 2) **Throwing mechanics – Turn the body so front shoulder points toward the target; keep the elbow above the shoulder; step with the non-throwing foot and release the ball.**
- 3) **Tracking – Follow the ball with the eyes into the glove, whether on the ground or in the air (use softer balls); use two hands to catch and field.**
- 4) **Hitting – How to hold and swing the bat; batting safety (when not to swing bats, wearing batting helmets); hitting off a tee.**
- 5) **Positions/positional play – If the ball is hit to your buddy, let your buddy field it.**

FIVE GOALS FOR THE 7-9 AGE GROUP

- 1) **Basic rules – Force outs; tagging up; base running (when you don't have to run; not running into or past teammates on the base paths).**
- 2) **Throwing mechanics – Introduce the four-seam grip; point the front shoulder; step and throw; introduce the concept of generating momentum toward the target.**
- 3) **Catching/fielding – Thrown and hit balls; finger up vs. fingers down; see the glove and the ball; use two hands; forehand and backhands; introduce the upper hand flip; double plays.**
- 4) **Hitting – Choosing the right bat; proper grip; hitting pitched balls; introduce drill work (tee, soft toss, short toss).**
- 5) **Positions/positional play – Learn the positions and the areas each player should cover.**

FIVE GOALS FOR THE 10-12 AGE GROUP

- 1) **Basic rules – infield-fly rule; balks.**
- 2) **Base running – Leads; steals; extra-base hits (how to make a turn); sliding; crossover step for base running.**
- 3) **Pitching/Throwing mechanics – Wind-up vs stretch; four-seam grip; shuffle, throw, follow; pitcher covering first.**
- 4) **Hitting – Repetitions; drill work (tees, soft toss, short toss, stickball, one-arm drill); bunting.**
- 5) **Team fundamentals – Cutoffs and relays, basic bunt defenses, basic first-and-third situations, underhand flip (box drill) and double plays; defending the steal; infield/outfield communication.**