

FUN DRILLS

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Keeping in mind the them of Make It Fun, we would like to present a list of fun drills covering all aspects of the game that are appropriate for various age groups. Enjoy them.

FUN HITTING DRILLS

FREE HITTING

This is what we call regular batting practice or live hitting in the cage. Let players hit and have fun. Resist the urge to coach. Coaching and tinkering are for drill work. As players get older it's okay to have them work on bunting, hit-and-runs and moving runners over during free hitting or batting practice. Hitting is supposed to be fun, so let the kids have it. Notice corrections needed and work on them during drill sessions. Age appropriate: all ages.

GOALIE GAME

Set up a hockey or lacrosse goal as a backstop with a home plate in front of the net. Use a Jugs Lite Flite machine or a tennis ball machine to pitch. Batter must keep balls from going into the goal. Players work on hitting the ball where it's itched, bat control and developing a short swing to make contact. Coach can throw harder than normal if machine snot available. Age appropriate: ages 4 – 9.

HITTING CONTESTS

Almost any hitting drill can be turned into a contest using a point system. Award a point for a hard ground ball up the middle, two points for a line drive up the middle and five points for a line drive up the middle that reaches the back wall of a cage or the outfield grass (depending upon where you are hitting). Develop your own point systems for whatever concepts you are teaching. Make sure proper hitting mechanics are stressed at all times. Age appropriate: all ages.

KNOCK OUT THE CATCHER

Coach dresses in full catcher's gear and sits on a chair 10 – 15 feet from home plate. He tosses the ball and tells the hitter to knock him off the chair. Players work on hitting the ball hard up the middle without even knowing it. Age appropriate: ages 4 – 9.

LINE DRIVE HOME RUN DERBY

Use Lite Flite balls and set up in the outfield, hitting toward the fence. Pitch overhand or toss balls underhand to players and give points for hard ground balls and line drives. Home runs count five points if they are line drives. Swings and misses, pop-ups and foul balls are outs. Give each player three outs and see who can score the most points. This can be done with Jugs pitching machine as well. Age appropriate: ages 4 – 12.

TEE HITTING FOR DISTANCE

Players use proper fundamentals to see how far they can hit a ball off of a tee from home plate. Use wight shift, winding up almost like a pitcher to take the weight to the back side before exploding forward. Head should stay on ball and front shoulder and stride should be directly toward the pitcher until contact. Batters who drop their shoulder and try to hit the ball high intentionally are eliminated. Line drives are best, but hard ground balls count. Have players runs out and stand next to their best hit or mark them with stakes. Age appropriate: all ages.

FUN BASERUNNING DRILLS

Have groups of two or four players compete by running the bases to see who can finish with the fastest combined time. You will find that the groups that run the bases best fundamentally can and will beat the groups with the faster players. Cones can be used to show path for the proper turns at each base.

BIG LEAGUE BASERUNNING

Players line up at home plate and run home to first – all the way through the bag. Then they shuffle off of first, take a crossover step and run first to third. Jog to home plate. Players line up at home plate again and run out a double. Then they can simulate scoring from second on a hit. Then you can have them run out a triple and home run if you wish. Emphasis should be on making a proper turn at each base as well as stepping on the inside of the base and using it to push off like a starting block toward the next base. Age appropriate: all ages.

HEAD TO HEAD

One player starts at second and the other starts at home. Coach stands on pitcher's mound and yells, "Go!" Player from second is simulating scoring on a hit. Player at home simulates running out a double. Whoever gets to their destination first wins. Point out players who run the bases well fundamentally. Age appropriate: all ages.

SLIP AND SLIDE

Use a slip and slide on a soft, grassy surface to illustrate the proper sliding techniques. This is a fun way to show players how to slide without risking cuts and bruises. Place a base at the end of the slip and slide. A great way to end a hot practice. Age appropriate: Ages 4 – 12.

FUN THROWING DRILLS

CUTOFF RELAY RACE

Create groups of three, four or five players to race. All groups go at the same time. Outfielder picks up the ball laying on the warning track next to the fence and throws to first teammate. That teammate turns his body, catches, generates momentum and throws to the next teammate. This continues until the ball reaches the last player. Team that finishes first wins. Age appropriate: all ages.

LONG-TOSS GOLF

Place a cone or some other target in the outfield, far enough away to challenge the players' arm strength. Draw, paint or tape a circle around the target, representing a green. Each player tosses a ball toward the target. Points are awarded for landing on the green, hitting the pin, etc. Closest to the pin each round can be awarded bonus points. The same target can be used over and over, new targets can be set up each time, or a "course" can be set up. Limit drill to between 25 and 50 tosses per player and once per week for younger players. Age appropriate: 4 – 12.

SHOOT AND SCORE!

After players warm their arms up, two goals are set up across from each other. One player stands to the side of each goal. Players take turns trying to throw a ball into "opponents" goal. One point is awarded for each ball that rolls into a goal and two for a ball that enters a goal in the air. Another variation is to hang, tape or paint a target on the goal. One point is awarded for scoring a goal and two points for hitting the target. Targets can also be hung on fences, soccer goals, walls, etc. and a team competition can be held to see who throws the most accurately. Age appropriate: 4 – 12.

THROW FOR DISTANCE

If you practice near a football field, have players line up at the goal line one at a time. Stress proper mechanics and have each player throw a ball (or several balls) to see who can set the "world record." After a few rounds, have players shuffle their feet and follow their throws so they can see the results of generating momentum toward their target. You can disqualify players who don't use proper mechanics. Celebrate world records as well as throws made using proper mechanics. A fun way to build arm strength through long-tossing and to emphasize the importance of mechanics and footwork. The drill should only be done once per week. For the youngest age groups have players line up on a line (foul line, goal line, etc.) and throw at the same time. They call run to their ball, see whose ball went the farthest, pick it up and run back. Age appropriate: 4 – 9.

TWENTY-ONE

A game played by baseball players of all levels. Players play catch. One point is awarded to the thrower for a ball caught at chest level. Two points are awarded for a ball caught at head level. First player to 21 wins. Coaches should stress proper mechanics while drill is going on. Set up a team competition where winners move on and losers are eliminated. Play to 15 instead of 21 to speed things up. Age appropriate: all ages.

OTHER THROWING GAMES

Just about any throwing drill can be turned into a contest by adding a target. Players can throw at a painted, taped or drawn target on a fence, wall or screen. Or they can try to knock a ball off of a batting tee. Anything that makes a player concentrate and try to throw accurately works. Don't forget to stress proper mechanics at all times: four-seam grip; get the ball down and up; elbow above shoulder; point front shoulder; step toward target; follow and follow through. Age appropriate: all ages.

FUN OUTFIELD DRILLS

LITE FLITE ELIMINATION

Use Jugs Lite Flite balls. Each player is thrown a fly ball or fed a fly ball through a machine. Younger players can use their gloves. Balls are so light that they have to catch with two hands over the head. Older players and more advanced younger players can use bare hands. If player catches the ball he stays in, but if he misses it he's out. This also can be done utilizing the pass pattern drill described above or with real baseballs (when appropriate). When not using gloves, players should attempt to catch ball with one hand over the head. This makes them focus on proper hand positioning and watching the ball into the hand. Age appropriate: all ages.

PASS PATTERNS

A coach or player (this can be long toss for pitchers) serves as quarterback. Player tosses ball to QB and then uses crossover or drop step in appropriate direction before running a "pass Pattern." QB throws the ball high enough so that they player can run under the ball and make a one-handed, over-the-shoulder catch. Have player start over if initial step is not executed correctly. Age appropriate: all ages.

FUN INFIELD DRILLS

HIGH FIVE DRILL (UNDERHAND FLIP)

The underhand flip is utilized by virtually all infielders at some point, so it should be introduced at a young age and practiced. Players line up opposite coach, about 10 feet away from him. Assume basic ground ball position (wide base, butt down, hands in front). Ball is rolled to player. Player catches ball first, generates momentum toward target, uses an underhand flip and finishes by following the flip toward the coach with the hand held high at head level. When the player gets to the coach he gives him a high five (hand should not drop below head level until high five is completed). Use body's momentum to carry toss to the target. Wrist remains stiff and arm does not swing. Also avoid letting ball roll off of the fingers. Age appropriate: 7 – 15+.

BOX DRILL – (UNDERHAND FLIP) SHORT TO SECOND

Create a box with four players standing about 8 – 10 feet apart from each other. Fifth player stands behind any player at any corner. First toss comes from corner where there are two players. Do not use gloves – increases concentration. Each player faces corner to his right. Tosser shuffles feet or crosses over, flips the ball to player at corner to his left, leaves hand high and follows flip to that corner. After arriving at next corner, turn to face corner to the right and have two hands out in front ready to receive toss as it comes around. Catch the ball first, generate momentum, toss and follow to next corner. Stress stiff wrist, no extra arm motion, leaving hand high and following flip. This can be done with players of any age. For youngest players you may want to use gloves and count to see which group of five can catch the most in a row without missing one. Age appropriate: 7 – 15+.

BOX DRILL – (UNDERHAND FLIP) SECOND TO SHORT

Create a box with four players standing about 8 – 10 feet apart from each other. Fifth player stands behind any player at any one of the corners. The first toss comes from the corner where there are two players. Don not use gloves – increases concentration. Each player faces corner to his left. Tosser shuffles feet or crosses over, keep hand with the ball in front of the body, flips the ball to player at corner to his right without turning the body or swinging the arm, leaves hand high and follows flip to that corner. After arriving at the next corner, turn to face corner to the left and have two hands out in front ready to receive toss as it comes around. Catch the ball first, generate momentum, flip and follow to the next corner. This is more awkward because the hand stays in front of the body at all times. It is important to keep the wrist stiff and avoid turning body completely toward target so that hand is no longer in front. For youngest players you may want to use gloves and count to see which group of five can catch the most in a row without missing one. Age appropriate: 7 – 15+.