

SECTION

NOTES TO COACHES

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INTRODUCTION

This section contains many useful resources/suggestions for the Coach of the **LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM** to utilize during the course of a Softball season. The **LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM** design is outlined for a typical Softball season. Tips for Coaches are provided for the Coach to keep in mind for the entire season. Sample behaviour expectations are described that a Coach may wish to implement for their team. Suggestions on how to organize players into groups is provided. As well organization signals are included to assist in communicating what the Coach wishes the players to do. A list is provided that outlines all the required equipment for the **LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM** for the entire season. And finally, a sample letter is provided that the Coach may wish to give to the parents of the players describing the program and what it involves. Armed with these resources, the Coach is sure to have a successful Softball season!!

PROGRAM DESIGN – LEVEL 1 (5-6 YEAR OLDS)

Note: The following points are guidelines only. Please feel free to modify these guidelines or to develop your own as dictated by the needs of your Association.

① LENGTH OF A SEASON

- ▶ Typically the Softball season for 5-6 year olds is two months (May and June) with 2 sessions a week.

② LENGTH OF A SESSION

- ▶ 1 hour (maximum) per session.
- ▶ If your association requires that two groups are scheduled per night because of a large number of participants, schedule two sessions with one starting at 6:00 pm and the second starting at 7:15 pm.

③ NUMBER OF PLAYERS

- ▶ No more than 12 players on each team. It is recommended to have 10 players or less.

④ NUMER OF ADULT HELPERS

- ▶ 6 adult helpers (parents or family members) are required for each session.
- ▶ Should have one adult for every two players.

5 FACILITIES

- ▶ While the use of a Softball diamond is suggested, an open field can also be used.
- ▶ The number of diamonds used will depend on the resources of the Association and the number of participants registered.
- ▶ If there are a large number of participants, a softball diamond can be divided into different regions for each team to participate on at the same time (i.e. on an adult sized field, the diamond can be divided into 3 regions in the outfield and two regions on the infield). Using this set-up, 5 teams can safely use one diamond. If more than one team is sharing a diamond, it is suggested to rotate the teams into the infield so all players get a chance to play on the dirt infield.

6 LESSON PLANS

- ▶ The coach is provided with 18 lesson plans to take them through a typical Softball season (i.e. a nine week season with 2 sessions per week).
- ▶ Each lesson plan involves activities that will teach the players the basic skills of Softball.
- ▶ Coaches are offered suggestions on how to modify an activity to suit the players' ability level.
- ▶ Each lesson plan ends with a Lead Up Game which simulates aspects of the game of Softball.
- ▶ The coach has great flexibility in following or changing the lesson plans to ensure the most **FUN** and **ACTIVITY** for their players.
- ▶ After Lesson 12, the Lesson Plans change to involve the team being divided into two groups that perform different activities at the same time and then switch and do the activities the other group was performing. The sessions still ends with a Lead Up Game.

7 END OF SEASON

- ▶ It is strongly recommended that the Association organize a “**FUN Day**” at the end of the season for the participants of the **LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM**. (Note: Some Associations will also start the season off with a “**FUN Day**”).

TIPS FOR COACHES

- ① If you are using the program for the first time, ask for assistance from your Minor Softball Association or Provincial/Territorial Softball Association. They may be able to provide you with a trained person to review the lesson plans and skill progressions, should you require it.
- ② Explain to the players what is appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and the consequences of such. This will set the tone for the season.
- ③ Attempt to stay within the prescribed times for the activities in the Lesson Plans. Because of the players' short attention spans, there is a need for change and variety, even if they have not mastered the particular skill. Expectations for correct techniques should be low with this age group.
- ④ Always include a Lead Up Game at the end. They are **FUN** and provide players a gradual introduction to the game of Softball with an element of competition.
- ⑤ Be flexible in implementing the Lesson Plans by adding or subtracting any activities listed in this manual. Use the players' favorite activities more often to ensure they are having **FUN** but don't over use them.
- ⑥ Ensure you stay on time by keeping instructions brief. Players must be kept **ACTIVE**.
- ⑦ Be flexible with the time spent on pitching. Pitching is a very complicated skill that may take a while for the players to understand. However, you may be surprised at how quickly your players will learn this skill. Be creative with the pitching activities (i.e. use targets on the backstop, stepping (striding) on a marked line, etc). If the players are confused switching back and forth from underhand (pitching) to overhand throwing, wait until later in the season to introduce pitching. This way overhand throwing will be well established. Remember the emphasis of the **LEARN TO PLAY** program is the players having **FUN!**
- ⑧ Many of the activities can include some kind of competition (i.e. see who can make the most consecutive catches). You decide when the players are ready and responsive to be introduced to a competitive situation.
- ⑨ Promote the "philosophy" of **LEARN TO PLAY** to the parents as some may be skeptical at first. It will help to refer to the activities as legitimately playing Softball and to avoid the phrase "we just practice" in Level I.
- ⑩ Maintain a **FUN** atmosphere. The activities provide the opportunity for **FUN** to occur. Be enthusiastic, encouraging, and organized and the season will be successful.

IDEAS FOR ESTABLISHING POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR

The Coach should develop a list of behaviour expectations for the players. These behaviour expectations must be established at the start of the season and communicated clearly to the players and parents. The coach must monitor the players' behaviours and follow through on any consequences decided upon at the beginning of the season.

Possible behaviour expectations that a Coach may wish to establish are:

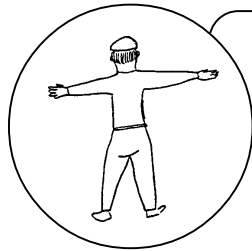
- ▶ After the coach's explanation, wait for the **"GO"** signal from the coach before starting any activity. An idea to encourage children to listen more carefully is to vary the word that means **"GO"** (i.e. don't start until the coach says **"DYNAMITE"**, **"BARNEY"**, **"AWESOME"**).
- ▶ Use the word **"FREEZE"** for stop. Expect players to stop immediately. If you get in the habit of repeating the stop signal 3 or 4 times, the players will also accept that as standard.
- ▶ Establish rules for setting up and putting away the equipment. This can teach children responsibility. Insist that the players **PLACE** equipment and not throw it when putting it away.
- ▶ To avoid players playing with the ball while the coach is talking establish a routing for when the coach is talking (i.e. place the ball on the ground between feet or in hand behind back, etc.)
- ▶ Never swing a bat without checking behind to see if someone is there.
- ▶ Never walk up behind someone holding a bat without letting them know you are there.

GROUP SELECTION

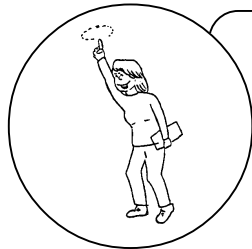
- ▶ Always avoid assigning captians to pick a team, as was often done in the past and which could do irreparable damage to the self-esteem of the child chosen last.
- ▶ Children can not be allowed to hurt the feelings of others in the group selection process. This can be emphasized by letting the players know it is **NOT** acceptable to say no to a teammate who wants them to be a partner.
- ▶ Number players 1-12 at the beginning of the year. This will make it easy to assign groups by calling out their number when the coach wants to assign groups.
- ▶ To get even numbered groups start by selecting a partner, then each pair joins with another pair to get 4, or with 2 other pairs to get 6.
- ▶ To select 2 teams, have the players choose a partner (without telling them you are choosing teams). Have one partner stand on 1 line and the other partner on another line. You automatically have 2 teams selected.

ORGANIZATIONAL SIGNALS

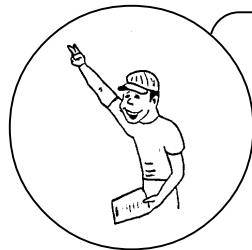
The use of hand signals can be used to make your practices run more smoothly and efficiently. If used consistently, the players will learn to react quickly, with less confusion and it will be easier for the coach to maintain control. Start by using both verbal and hand signals. Eventually only hand signals will be required once the players' attention is gained.



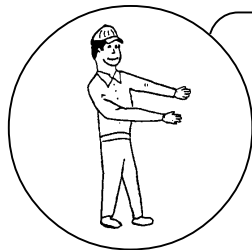
Form a Line: Run quickly to form a line in front of the Coach. Stand evenly spaced shoulder to shoulder.



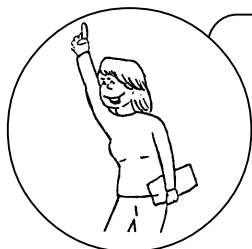
Listening Circle: Run quickly to stand in a group in front of the Coach to listen to the coach's instructions.



Groups: Quickly form a group with the number of people indicated by the Coach.



Files: Quickly form a single file line with one player behind the other.



Quiet/Listening: Immediately stop what you are doing, hold a hand in the air and listen to the Coach.

EQUIPMENT REQUIRED

Keep the following equipment in a common storage place so each team has access to it on arrival at the diamond. If all teams use the same equipment, the Association may be able to save money in implementing the **LEARN TO PLAY** program. It would save tremendously in the cost of implementing the program.

It is advised that the coach review each lesson plan prior to arrival at the diamond to see what equipment is required. All equipment is not needed for every lesson (i.e. Hitting is not included in every Lesson Plan).

- ③ Whiffle balls
- ① Dozen safety balls (i.e. indoor softballs)
- ④ Batting T's (home made T's work well. Traffic pylons may also be used.)
- ⑫ Carpet Home plates
- ② Sets of bases (carpet bases will do for 1 set)
- ⑫ Bats (preferred for maximum repetitions. Minimum requirement for each team is 1 bat for every 2 players on the team.)
- ① Set of catcher's equipment
- ⑥ Markers (i.e. pylons, pucks, old tennis balls cut in half)
- ⑥ Sticks with hanging attachment on the end (whiffle ball, shoelace, rope, rubber tubing). Old cut off hockey sticks or broomsticks work well.
- ② Targets (approximately 3' x 3')
- ④ Helmets

LETTER TO PARENTS

Welcome to the **LEARN TO PLAY** – Level I softball program. It is a **FUN, ACTION PACKED** introduction to the game of Softball. Although, we won't be playing the adult version of softball, we **WILL** be participating in a variety of activities and lead-up games that will give your child more opportunities to touch the ball and develop the necessary basic skills to enjoy the game.

The activities are **FUN** and short in duration and will prepare your child for more advanced competition later in life.

The **LEARN TO PLAY** program is designed to address the common characteristics of children. These include:

- Love of **FUN**
- Love of Action
- Need for approval & praise
- Short attention span
- Different maturing rates
- Low ability to think abstractly
- Low ability to anticipate
- Low ability to do complex tasks
- Low ability to cope with stress
- Low level of fine motor skills
- Low ability to make decisions quickly

The success of the **LEARN TO PLAY** program will depend on your help and support. In each session we will require at least 6 parents or adults to help run activities and provide feedback to ensure a 1:2 adult to child ratio. You are welcome to help every session, but we will be **SCHEDULING** every family at least once. If you can't make your scheduled time, please arrange a replacement. It is **NOT** necessary to be knowledgeable about Softball. All you need is a **SMILE** and **ENTHUSIASM**.

Softball is an **ACTIVE** game, played in the dirt, where players are likely to get dirty. Please ensure your child is wearing **OLD** pants and T-Shirts to each session. Players should also bring their own **WATER BOTTLE** with them.

Here's to a FUN and POSITIVE season!

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