

Building a Strong Program

A lot of planning and work goes into developing a program that will be a strong one for years to come. It doesn't matter if you have College players, high school players or grade school age players. If they have not been taught the fundamentals of the game both on and off the field, they will need to be taught those skills.

Nothing replaces practices, games do not replace practices when you are teaching skill fundamentals and even strategy. And if you do not teach the skill fundamentals nor talking strategy, I am not sure how many games will go in your favor. Learning is done in practices with repetition after repetition after repetition. Short explanations and more talk about why, how, when and how it relates to strategy and winning. Multitasking and keeping everyone busy in practices is a must. Having players just sitting helps no one. Work on fielding with the infield while the outfielders are in hitting practice. Then work with the outfield while the infielders are hitting. In early practices, take the time to work on the fundamentals of hitting and especially bunting.

Work on bunting every day. Not only sacrifices bit bunts for a basehit. Bunts can open up the game. If your opponent has a dominant pitcher, the infielders may sleep on the job sometimes. If your team can bunt especially down the lines, you may catch them off guard. Every one of the players should learn to be a bunter just in case. A good drill once they master the bunting technique-keeping the bat as high the strike zone, most of the time keep the bunt as level as possible, bottom hand is a solid base supporting the bat and the top hand is crucial. The hand is behind the bat not under the bat. Under the bat and they have a tendency to roll the bat backwards which will lead to a pop up. Keeping the top hand behind the acts like a brake and doesn't allow the bat to roll under. The bottom hand also has to be behind the bat also to hold it steady. A good drill is to have four players ready to bunt off a pitching machine. The person feeding the machine puts ball after ball into the machine. The players do a bunt for a base hit which means they are running forward to bunt the ball-one after the other and back in line and keep going under machine bucket is out of balls. To make it tougher, use baseballs which obviously are smaller to hit.

In order to keep everyone's attention, do not waste time and do not have players sitting around. The intensity of the practices teaches them how to focus of every hit. Hitting randomly also teaches them to always be on their toes ready to catch if coming their way. No time is wasted when you are the hitter. Tell the catcher you want the ball immediately and hit randomly sometimes so that the players are always watching and ready to field the

ball. Knowing the skill of your players is a must. All players will not have the same skill level. If you try to hit the ball to a very good player the same as a weaker player, you are not helping the better player to improve. Same goes for the hitting the ball to a weaker player the way you would hit is to the strongest player. You cannot do that until you improve your weakest players. And they will improve by knowing how to hit the ball a little farther away each practice, hitting a little harder at them when they can handle it, always mixing it up and challenging a little when you can without putting fear into them by slamming it at them right away. Fine line between making them better by hitting hard at them and putting fear into them. No one said coaching is easy. A coach has to know the skill level of the players, their attitude, their strengths and weaknesses. Then push them a little at a time to improve every day. There will be a point where it will all come together and you have a cohesive team.

Whether it is infield or outfield practice, the balls hit to the players have to be a variety since no one knows what the speed of type ball will be coming off the bat. Hit to every spot by a player, hit and every speed, on the ground, line drives and pop ups.

Building a strong program takes consistency in your tone, your words and your actions. If they can see that you are committed to the sport and the team, they will follow your words and actions.

YOUR ACTIONS AND WORDS SET THE TONE FOR THE ENTIRE SEASON
AND NOTHING REPLACES PRACTICE.