

2-HOUR PRACTICE PLAN EXAMPLE

Notes: In the following example, 5 minutes are allotted for flex-time. Have a written practice plan for every practice. Get good at time management. Wear a watch.

5 minutes: Team Meeting/Intro the schedule for the day/Attendance

10 minutes: Warm-up (see "Warm-up")

10: minutes: Throwing program (see "Throwing Program")

5 minutes: water

10 minutes: Individual defense/by position (see "Drills for Individual Defense")

10 minutes: Team defense (see "Team Defense")

5 minutes: water

20 minutes: Individual offense (Stations. See "Drills for Individual Offense")

20 minutes: Team offense (Live at-bats/hitters vs. pitchers)

5 minutes: water

10 minutes: conditioning (base running, push up, squats, sit-ups)

5 minutes: Team meeting/Review next team function

WARM-UP

Notes: Warm up as a team. There are two kinds of warm-ups, dynamic stretching (in motion), and static stretching (standing still). Warm-up routine should take between 5 and 10 minutes depending on age group.

1) Run: Have the team run a “pole”, from the left field corner to the right field corner, and back.

2) Dynamic (Choose any 5 of the following):

- High-knees
- Lunges
- Side lunges
- Shuffles
- Karaoke
- High Kicks
- Quad pull-backs
- Tea Kettles
- Froggers

3) Static (Mostly for stretching arm. Choose any 5):

- Trunk Twists
- 90s
- Throwing arm across
- Throwing arm back
- Arm Circles forward
- Arm circles back
- Back Slaps
- Up and Down
- Light Blubs
- Forearms

THROWING PROGRAM

Notes: This is the most important thing you will do with the team each practice. “If you can’t play catch, you can’t play baseball!” Throwing program should take between 5 and 10 minutes depending of age group. THROW BY POSITION, meaning have catchers throw with catchers, pitchers with pitchers, infielders with infielders, and so on. If you do not have time for all 5 steps, choose 3.

- 1) Grip, Release, Rotation.
Have players partner up and stand just 5 feet apart, no gloves. Teach them 4-seam grip. Have them work on grip, their “release point”, and getting proper rotation on the ball.
- 2) Chest to Chest.
Have players stand 10 feet apart, chest to chest, feet spread out, knees bent. Without having them move their lower half, have them turn, or coil, their shoulder, then throw. Teaches players to have good “hip to shoulder” separation and torque.
- 3) Power position.
Have players stand 20 feet apart, turned sideways, feet spread out, knees bent. Have them check their “line” making sure their feet and shoulders are on line with their target, and throw. There are variations of this drill. Teaches players good direction, separation, and arm slot.
- 4) Quick catch.
Have players stay 20 feet apart and play catch getting rid of the ball as quickly as they can. Teaches players footwork, rhythm, how to use two hands, transfer from glove to throwing hand, and to be under control.
- 5) Long toss.
Have players spread out and throw the ball as far as they can. Teach players tempo and arm strength.

INDIVIDUAL DEFENSE DRILLS

Infield

- 1) Short hops: Have players get in proper ground ball position, and throw “short hops” to them. Start with short hops right at them, then forehands, and backhands. Teaches players to have soft hands, focus, and to go from “down to up” when fielding ground balls. Players can throw each other short hops in pairs.
- 2) 2-Ball drill: Have 2 baseballs. Roll the balls from one side to the other having players use only their glove hand (no glove) to field the ball and shovel it back to you. Sets of 10. Players can work in pairs as well. Teaches players footwork and hand positioning.
- 3) Knees: Have players take ground balls on their knees. Either hit or roll the ball. Teaches players to stay low, and how to use hands properly.
- 4) 4-ball drill: Put 4 baseballs in a crooked row. Have players approach all 4 balls as if they were going to field them. Teaches players footwork and angles.
- 5) Multiples: Hit players 5 ground balls in a row rapidly.

Outfield

- 1) L patterns: Have players stand next to you and run “L patterns” like a wide receiver. Teaches players good angles and to pursue the ball.
- 2) Crow hop: Roll outfielders ground balls. Have them close ground on the ball, field it on the run, crow hop, and make a good throw.

Catchers

- 1) Bare hand receiving: Underhand the ball to catchers and have them work on receiving the ball with their bare hands. Teaches soft hands, focus, and hand positioning.
- 2) Blocking: Throw short hops to catchers and have them work on blocking the ball.
- 3) Receive, transfer and footwork, throw: Break throwing into 3 stages so catchers can make sure they’re doing the right thing at each stage.
- 4) Fielding bunts and pop-ups.

TEAM DEFENSE

Notes: Team defense includes the following; cuts and relays, bunt defenses, PFPs, 1st and 3rd defenses, steal covers, pop-up communication, run downs, positioning, and situational play. Here are some recommendations for each.

Cuts and Relays: Work out a system for cuts and relays with your team. We will review specifics in person. Regarding language, there are only 3 verbal signals to use. If the cut-off man hears nothing, he lets the ball go. If he hears a base number, he cuts the ball off and relays it to that base, if he hears “cut”, he cuts the ball off and holds it.

PFPs: Pitchers, 1st baseman, and 2nd baseman need to work together on ground balls to the right side and need regular reps at practice.

Steal coverages: Typically, for a right-handed hitter is up, the 2nd baseman covers 2nd base on a steal. If a left-handed hitter is up, the short stop covers. Middle infielders need to work this out between themselves between hitters using the “open mouth” “closed mouth” system. Practice catch and tags at practice.

Pop-ups: You need to work out a priority-based system with your team for pop-ups. Typically, priority goes like this; center fielder, corner outfielders, middle infielders, corner infielders, catcher, and pitcher. Regarding language, players need to communicate by calling “ball”, or “I got it”, and need to call for the ball as it’s reaching the peak of flight, or, if later, when they know they can catch it.

Positioning: You need to have a system to position your players from the dugout. Typically, hand behind the head means move back, hand in front of face means move in, hand over left ear means move left, hand over right ear means move right. Teach the team situational positioning as well such as “infield in”, and “double play depth”.

Situational play: Put all of this together by simulating game situations in practice.

HITTING DRILLS

Tee: Tee work is very important. Young players often don't want to and don't know how to use a tee. Tell them Major League Players use tees every day. The tee is where we don't have to worry about timing or selection and can understand actual swing mechanics. There are lots of variations of tee work and tee progressions.

Soft toss: Feed players underhand tosses from a 45-degree angle and have them hit into a fence or net. It's important not to throw the ball soft, despite this being called soft toss. You do not want hitters swinging at a ball coming down. Feed the ball more or less at the players' belt buckle, or front hip. Teaches players timing.

Front toss: Same thing as soft toss, but from in front, behind an L screen. Teaches same things as soft toss, but from a more realistic angle.

One hand drills: Have players hit with one hand, bottom hand, then top hand. Teaches players to isolate and strengthen pull hand and push hand.

Timing drill: Have players "stride" or approach the ball three times. Throw on the third stride. Teaches players good stride direction and timing.

Rhythm Drill: Have players rock back and forth four times starting forward. Throw on four. Teach players rhythm and how to activate their lower body.

Power Drill: Have the players hit with a big leg kick, like A-Rod. Teaches players balance, timing, and how to use their lower body.

Launch point drill: Have players get to the point in their swing just before they let their hands go, their "launch" point, and get comfortable in that position, then throw the pitch and have them hit from the launch point. Teaches players to land in a strong hitting position and proper positioning.

Contact drill: Have players freeze at the point of contact, get comfortable there, then throw the pitch. Players load back from point of contact and swing. Teaches players proper positioning.

Hip drill: Throw the ball behind player. Have them turn their hips and pull the ball far foul. Teaches players how to use their hips.

Pitch selection Drill: Pitch to hitters. Have them take pitches and tell you as much info about the pitch as they can; location, type of pitch, ball, strike, swing, don't swing....

HITTING MECHANICS

Notes: When you teach hitting, or evaluate hitters, work from the ground up, and go one body part at a time. For now, we are going to break hitting mechanics of hitting in 6 parts.

- 1) Set up and Stance: Players need a pre-pitch routine. They need to take their time and go through their routine between pitches. This includes a check list; making sure their feet are in the right position, their knees are bent, they are in motion, knuckle alignment and hand slot is right, that they are athletic, and focused.
- 2) Load: Hitting is about timing. Hitters need to mirror the rhythm of the pitcher. When the pitcher goes back to throw the ball, hitter go back to. This is called “loading”. If a player’s load timing is off, their contact timing will be off as well.
- 3) Stride: As the pitcher gets to his release point, hitters pick their front foot up, or stride. Stride timing is very important as the swing starts as soon as the front foot lands. This forward motion to the baseball is important for timing, and for power.
- 4) Launch Point: The position the hitter lands in is called their “launch point”. This is the position a hitter swing from. As the hitter’s front foot lands from their stride, their back side releases, and their back hip starts turning towards the baseball. At the same time, the hands are still back.
- 5) Contact: Contact includes the bat path to the ball. Once a player’s lower body positioning is right, they release their hands. The bat should travel down to flat, meaning the hands and bat should travel on a downward plane until the barrel of the bat is flat behind the ball, and then it should stay flat through the zone. There will always be some bat and torso “angle”. Angle is dictated by pitch location. At contact, the hitter’s backside should be through the ball, the front side should be firm and locked into place, and their hands should be inside the ball.
- 6) Finish: After contact, a player should be balanced. Young players should finish with two hands on the bat. Older players should finish with one.

PITCHING MECHANICS

Break pitching mechanics into 7 steps:

1. Step: Have players step back, or sideways, off the pitching rubber to begin wind-up. This is a small, rhythmic movement. It should not throw the pitcher off balance.
2. Turn: The foot that's still on the rubber turns 90 degrees so it's parallel with rubber. This foot angle is important to give pitchers proper direction to their target.
3. Leg Kick: Front leg comes up at least waist-high. At first, have players stop at the top of their leg kick and "balance". Then introduce them to the idea of moving forward as their leg comes up.
4. Separation: At the same time a pitcher starts coming down from the top of their leg kick, their hands separate. This separation timing is important, and is the beginning of their arm path.
5. Strike point: When a pitcher's foot lands, or strikes, it should be directly in line with their target, and their arms should be exactly half-way through their paths. Front side should be "blocked" at 90 degrees. Back arm should be up at roughly 90 degrees. Hand angle on ball should be neutral. Front side is directional. Backside is powerful.
6. Release point: As release, pitchers should sync'd up, front side is firm, back side is clearing through release. Hand angle is on top of ball. Release point is directly in front of eyes.
7. Finish: After release, pitchers back foot release from the pitching rubber and land next to stride foot on a comfortable fielding position.

PITCHING DRILLS

- 1) 1, 2, 3 Drill: Have players stop at the top of their leg kick and balance. Have players stop at the strike point. Have players stop at their release point. Make sure pitchers in in proper position at each of these critical points in their delivery. Teaches players proper isolated positioning.
- 2) Rhythm Drill: Have players spread their feet out wide. A pitcher's stride should be equal to their height. Have them rock back and forth 4 times starting forward, and throw on 4. Teaches players how to activate their lower half and gives them good direction to their target.
- 3) Separation Drill: Have players swing their arms in opposite directions. There should be no tension. And have them throw on 3. Teaches players proper separation tempo and timing. You can add a stride.
- 4) Towel drill: Have players go through their delivery with a towel in the in their throwing hand instead of a ball. Teaches players proper arm action.
- 5) Reverse Drill: Have players begin at their release point, or finishing point, reverse through their wind-up, then deliver the pitch. Teaches players release point and how to "finish" the pitch.
- 6) No release Drill: Have players work on throwing without releasing the ball holding either multiple baseballs or weighted baseballs.

Note: For general arm strength: rubber bands, "no release" drills, and long toss.

BASE RUNNING

Note: Base running is often overlooked. But it is one of the most important things to practice. Work on base running at the end of practice as part of your team conditioning.

Running to 1st base: Have players practice running hard out of the batter's box, and run "through" 1st base properly.

Have players practice "turns" at 1st base on balls hit to the outfield.

Leads and Steals: Have players practice primary and secondary leads.

Have players practice getting good jumps on steals. This a chance for pitchers to work on holding runners and pick-offs. There are slight variations at each base, so use base running stations with a group at each base.

Reads: Have players work on "reads". Reads mean reacting to balls in the dirt, and balls put in play according to situation and defensive positioning. There are large variations at each base, so, again, use stations with a group at each base reacting as if they are the only base runner. For example, if there is a group at each base, the runner from second is not forced, each station runs as if no one else were on base.

Communication: Whenever possible, make base running drills as game-like as possible. Use a 1st baseman, and use base coaches to give verbal and gestural signals.