



T-BALL
COACHING HANDBOOK

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Introduction

About the league

The Richmond Munster Minor Softball Association (RMMSA) provides an opportunity for children in the community to participate in team sports in a safe and fun atmosphere. It is important to note that RMMSA is run by volunteers, and we do our best to bring quality softball programs to the community.

T-Ball is a non-competitive program focused on having fun, learning foundational softball skills, and learning how to be part of a team.

Working together as a coaching team, we will present a T-Ball program that is designed to provide players with an introduction to the game that is grounded in positive encouragement, learning the fundamentals, and having a lot of fun.

There are three big things to work on this season:

- **HAVE FUN** – When we enjoy what we’re doing, we usually do it better.
- **WORK HARD** – Let’s agree to give our best effort at every practice and game.
- **BE A GOOD SPORT** – Being a good sport means we treat all players, coaches, and officials with respect.

Role of the coach

As a coach or assistant coach, your objective is to ensure that every child on your team (and throughout the league) feels safe, feels welcome, and derives enjoyment and feelings of accomplishment from their participation.

The attitudes you foster toward team sports and cooperation can last a lifetime, and can influence players’ confidence and decisions about participating in the future. Your behaviour should set the standard as a role model, through strong and positive leadership.

A good coach should be:

- **Positive**
- **Understanding**
- **Encouraging**
- **Fair**
- **Patient**

Parents, coaches and players are expected to be respectful. If you encounter any situations or behaviour that do not follow the league’s philosophy, please contact your convenor.

THANK YOU FOR COACHING! Parents, players and the association appreciate the time and effort you give to help the kids learn a sport in an encouraging environment. Remember, if you’re having fun, the kids probably are too!

Preparing for the season

Coaches meeting

The Little League Convenor will schedule a meeting with the coaches and assistant coaches prior to the start of the season. This will include a discussion on coaching, the organization, the rules and the league's philosophy. If possible, a coaching clinic may also be scheduled, which would encompass demonstration and participation in some of the stations that will be used during the season for skills development.

Team lists, first team communication

Team lists will be provided to the coaches by email at least 2 weeks prior to the start of the season. Coaches are responsible for communicating with their team as soon as possible to provide the parents with key information to prepare for the season. A sample email will be provided by the convenor, which can be adapted by the coach. The following information should be included:

- Welcome message and introduction of coaches/assistant coaches
- Date/time/location of first game
- Schedule for the season
- Location of the fields and parking information
- Confirm equipment needed
 - Comfortable clothing to suit the weather
 - Running shoes (no sandals, no spiked metal cleats)
 - Baseball glove
 - Bottle of water
 - Note team shirt will be provided, and should be worn each week
- Advise that parents must remain at the field, and that their participation is encouraged (particularly during the skills development stations)
- Request for volunteers for bringing healthy snacks

Field locations

Field locations may vary from year to year, based on availability. Please refer to the RMMSA website for current field locations and parking information -

http://www.rmmsa.org/little_league_diamond_locations.htm

Equipment

Each team will be provided an equipment bag containing the following:

- Batting helmets (4-6 helmets of various sizes)
- Balls suitable for T-ball (1 for each player + 1 for each coach)
- T-ball bats (3-4 bats)
- Bases (safety base, 2nd base, 3rd base)
- Blastball equipment (1 per every 2 teams – bat, ball, 1 base); only 2 sets available

Additional optional equipment/materials

Coaches may opt to bring additional equipment or materials to assist with skills development stations. This is NOT required, and is at the discretion of the coach. The following are examples of additional equipment/materials that coaches have used in previous years:

- Whistle/bike horn/bike bell – to denote when to change stations
- Pylons/cones
- Length of rope – to create a quick line on the ground
- Bat mat
- Large pails - to create a target to throw the ball towards
- Hula hoop – to create a target to throw the ball through

Weekly Plan

Communication with the team

Coaches should send out a team email the day before a scheduled game to confirm the field location, and the parent who volunteered to bring the healthy snack.

Structure of the weekly session

Each week, coaches should follow the same general plan for the structure of the session. The focus of the skills development can vary from week to week, but maintaining a consistent structure provides some stability for the players, which is important with this age group. The following is the recommended weekly plan:

1. Welcome the players
2. Warm-up
3. Skills development stations (4 stations, 5 minutes at each station)
4. Game
5. Final words, healthy snack

Note that coaches should arrive at least 15 minutes early to set up stations and welcome the players.

Week 1 Plan

Materials to bring:

In the first week, it is recommended that the coaches bring the following (in addition to equipment):

- Name tags for kids and coaches
- Team list
- Healthy snack for after the game
- Snack sign-up sheet

Arrival: (5:45-6:00pm)

Coaches are asked to arrive at least 15 minutes early to set up and greet your players. The home team puts out the bases. Lay out equipment for the skill development stations.

- As players arrive, welcome them and give them a ball to begin practicing with.
- Learn the player's name and hand out a name tag. **It is very important that you learn the players names as soon as possible, as this makes them feel valued.**
- Have parents set up chairs around the outside of active play area.

Introduction: (3 min)

Coaches collect the balls from the kids (if they were given one on arrival to practice with). Have all players and a guardian come and sit/kneel in a circle.

Introduce yourself and welcome them to T-ball.

Explain that the most important thing is to have fun. We'll be making friends and learning about the game of T-ball!

Briefly explain the format of the evening – fun skill development stations for first ½ hour and then a game for the second ½ hour.

Talk quickly to the guardians/parents about the fact that they might be called on to participate in some of the drills but are not needed on the field during the game. They are responsible for getting their child to the field and keeping an eye out during the activities. Finally, that all discipline issues with their child is their responsibility.

We are going to do lots of fun activities, you might see some friends from the neighbourhood or make new ones. This season we will make some great memories, learn about T-ball and have a lot of laughs.

Warm up: (5 mins)

Do an easy series of stretching activities.

Running on the spot, small arm circles, big arm circles, touch toes, jumping jacks

Running from a designated point to another and back again.

Group Lesson - "Ready Position" (3-5 mins)

Instruct players to stand with their feet wider than shoulder width and with their hands (and elbows) held out in front of their body. This is how we stand to be ready to receive a throw.

Stations: (5 mins each) (a coach or assistant coach at each station)

- Stations are used by both teams that are in attendance at the one field.
- Divide team 1 into two groups, Divide team 2 into two groups
- Team 1 starts at stations 1 and 2; Team 2 starts at stations 3 and 4
- Switch stations when signal sounds

Skill development station #1: **Batting (BlastBall)**

Location: on the diamond (home base to first base)

Equipment: Blastball Tee, Blastball Base, Blastballs

Gather all kids at that station and ask them show you how a 'baseball player' stands, get kids to pretend to hold a bat (imaginary bat) and swing to hit an imaginary ball – as everyone swings and hits, run to first base.

Return to the 'home plate'.

Get kids to line up behind the tee (far enough away that they won't get hit).

Then introduce the helmet, bat and ball, keep kids in the line engaged by talking to them about proper batting stance, staying back from the hitter, teach them to watch the ball the whole time they are up to bat, swinging at the ball while watching it, then as soon as the ball is hit, drop bat carefully and run to first base.

Skill development station #2: **Throwing**

Location: in open grassy field area

Sit kids down in circle

Talk to them about proper throwing

Ask them to use their 'favourite hand' - the hand that they hold a pencil or crayon with, it might be most comfortable for them.

Coach demonstrate the proper grip on the ball with fingers on top and the thumb underneath.

Coach demonstrate throwing overhand.

Reminder – Kids must look at their target. It is a good idea to have them say "ready" once they have their eyes on their target as a reminder each time to look at the target first. The next move is to step directly to their target. The ball and hand should move in a circular motion.

Skill development station #3: **Fielding**

With groups of three or four, teach beginners how to field by showing them the proper hand and body position for fielding grounders. With their gloves off, have them hold their hands in front of them and place their pinkies side-by-side, in a cupped position. Next, demonstrate for them how to bend their knees and get their hands near the ground while keeping their pinkies together. Remind the players to keep their backs straight as possible. With their gloves still off, hand roll grounders to them from eight to ten yards away. Roll it as slow as necessary for them to be successful. By starting this drill without gloves, it allows the players to see the correct hand position during fielding. Let them have several turns and then try it with their gloves on, using the same hand positions.

Skill development station #4: **Running**

Remember that beginning players will not know to run to first base when the ball is hit. Try something very simple that teaches base running. At the end of every practice, line up all the players on the first base side of home plate. During their first practice just let them take one turn running to first base, all the way around the bases and back home without stopping. Make sure the players in line at home plate are not blocking the runners path as they finish.

Tee-Ball GAME (2 teams) – (30 Minutes)

Batting (*also refer Game Skills section below*):

- One coach up at the tee to manage players, help with their batting stance and ball placement
- Players stay behind the fence – ask for help from a parent to keep the players orderly (no climbing the back stop or playing with the bats). Encourage them to watch their teammate who is batting, and cheer for them when they hit the ball.
- Explain that each child will get a turn to bat (hit the ball off the tee).
- When the ball is hit, the batter drops the bat safely and runs to first base.
- Coaches might want to call out the kids by name in order to make sure batting order is random (*best practice: use a bungee cord with wooden clothes pins with players' names on it to change the order quickly*).
- Ask players to line-up and listen for when their name is called.
- Call first four players to get them ready wearing batting helmets.
- Ask all players to listen and watch how it works.
- Get them engaged by having them cheering for other players.
- Explain that everyone will get a turn to bat.

Key Points:

- eyes on the ball
- no cross-handed hold
- position of feet
- stride [weight shift]
- rotation
- the swing

Fielding:

- Players stand in their 'Ready Position'
- Coaches remind players to stand in their "Ready Position" throughout the inning.
- Spread players out around the diamond in positions (*Best practice: make a circle in the dirt to show where the player should be positioned. This helps to avoid players running into each other while trying to get the ball*).
- Move kids around with each changing batter, or every 3-4 batters.
- Help define kids 'space' where they action the ball.

Key Points:

- Instruct players to keep eyes on the ball.
- Watch the ball go into the glove.
- Cover the ball with the other hand.

At end of game, both teams come out on the diamond and form lines to shake hands or high-five each other.

Conclusion:

Coaches THANK everyone for trying their best, for being great listeners and for coming have fun at T-ball. Offer a healthy snack.

Skills Development Activities

Batting

1. BlastBall

Location: on the diamond (home base to first base)

Equipment: Blastball Tee, Blastball Base, Blastballs

Gather all kids at that station and ask them show you how a 'baseball player' stands, get kids to pretend to hold a bat (imaginary bat) and swing to hit an imaginary ball – as everyone swings and hits, run to first base. Return to the 'home plate'.

Get kids to line up behind the tee (far enough away that they won't get hit).

Keep kids in the line engaged by talking to them about proper batting stance, staying back from the hitter, teach them to watch the ball the whole time they are up to bat, swinging at the ball while watching it, then as soon as the ball is hit, drop bat carefully and run to first base.

2. Practice Swing

Space the players out, each holding an imaginary bat. On your whistle or call, players should go through the batting sequence (stance, swing, follow-through and dropping the bat). Coaches should watch and correct any bad habits.

3. Coach Says

This game is similar to Simon Says. Coach rapidly calls out one of five commands:

- **Hands:** players grip an imaginary bat
- **Feet:** players jump with feet apart facing an imaginary tee
- **Stance:** players stand in batting position with arms raised toward rear shoulder
- **Squash the bug:** players step, swing and rotate on the ball of their back foot
- **Swing and drop:** players do a full swing, including dropping the "imaginary" bat

Throwing

1. Nose, Toes and Throws

For beginning players, it is helpful to use a rhyme to help the players remember the proper throwing motion. Say "Nose, Toes and Throws" as they practice throwing. "Nose" is for looking at the target before throwing. "Toes" is for stepping toward the target with their glove-side foot and "Throws" is for throwing the ball. It works! Have them begin their throwing motion with their glove-side shoulder facing the target to force them to turn their shoulders as they throw.

2. Accuracy Counts

To develop accuracy, use a fun drill that will make them want to practice. Take a 5-gallon bucket and lay it on the ground with the open end facing the player. Have them practice throwing into the bucket using their throwing technique (Nose, Toes and Throws). You will see a huge difference in their accuracy. The best part is, it's a lot of fun. The kids won't even know their practicing.

3. Ready to Throw

On your whistle, all players quickly get into the throwing position. Have coaches go around to each player and check that they are holding the ball correctly. Also check their throwing stance (legs apart, foot on throwing arm side behind the body, throwing arm back and up and front shoulder toward the target). Repeat.

4. Throw to Me Coach

Line players up on a line facing a coach. Throw to the first player, who catches the ball and throws back. Continue down the line, throwing to each player. After a few practice rounds, have the kids count the number of successful catches.

5. Throwing into a hula hoop/pail

Lay hula hoops on the ground, line kids up 5-10 feet from the hula hoops.

Aim is to work on throwing technique and ability to aim.

Position Coach behind hula hoops (opposite the kids).

One at a time, ask kids try to throw their ball into the hula hoop.

Emphasize the importance of looking where you are throwing.

Kids can get into the practice of saying 'Ready' then stepping in the direction of the hula hoop.

Arm makes a circle movement and a flick of the wrist to send the ball where you are aiming.

Coach collects the ball once they are thrown.

Fielding/catching

1. Starting Right

With groups of three or four, teach beginners how to field by showing them the proper hand and body position for fielding grounders. With their gloves off, have them hold their hands in front of them and place their pinkies side-by-side, in a cupped position. Next, demonstrate for them how to bend their knees and get their hands near the ground while keeping their pinkies together. Remind the players to keep their backs straight as possible. With their gloves still off, hand roll grounders to them from eight to ten yards away. Roll it as slow as necessary for them to be successful. By starting this drill without gloves, it allows the players to see the correct hand position during fielding. Let them have several turns and then try it with their gloves on, using the same hand positions.

2. Speed Ball

To help young players develop quick hands and learn to hustle for a past ball, use a fun drill that encourages speed. Have three or four players line up side-by-side with enough space between them that they can't touch each other with their arms out. From about ten yards away have a coach hand-roll balls to each one, in order, as many times as possible in one minute. Do it again and try to increase the number each time you do it. Have them run for past balls and make it fun.

3. Fielding game

Have players line up behind a cone. Talk about taking turns to "field" balls or collect balls.

Demonstrate using two hands to "scoop up" a ball. Coaches stand across from a line and roll the first player a ball. After they scoop up the ball, they throw it back to the coach, then give the next player a turn. Repeat until players seem to grasp fielding (not collapsing, but bending their knees and picking up the ball quickly). Use cues.

4. Receiving Throws

Coaches review with kids Receiving (catching) a ball has three key action points:

1. “Ready Position” (moving from a standing position to a Ready Position is an action)
2. “Move Your Feet to Catch”
3. “Reach Forward to Catch”

Any child on your team can perform these three fundamental skills every time, though they will not always catch the ball very often. When they perform these actions in their attempt to catch, we can praise those actions and they will remain eager to keep trying ...and will progress faster in their skill development.

5. Basic Fielding

Each player stands in various positions in the fielding stance. A coach slowly rolls or hits a ball to various players. The player closest to the ball takes a few steps to the ball, fields the ball and throws it back to the coach. Rotate player positions throughout the drill.

6. Partner Pickup

Players partner up and stand 10 feet apart from each other. One player rolls the ball for his or her partner to field. Repeat back and forth.

7. Left or Right

Throw or hit the ball to one side of a fielder, who has to run to get in front of the ball.

Running bases

1. Starting Point

Remember that beginning players will not know to run to first base when the ball is hit. Try something very simple that teaches base running. At the end of every practice, line up all the players on the first base side of home plate. During their first practice just let them take one turn running to first base, all the way around the bases and back home without stopping. Make sure the players in line at home plate are not blocking the runners path as they finish. With each practice, add something new like base coaches at first and third stopping the runners randomly at different bases. This will get the players to watch their coaches for instruction and reinforce the need to be on a base when they stop. Later, let them hold a bat before they start and be sure they drop it at the plate when they run. Make them start over if they sling the bat more than three feet from the batters box.

2. Run the Bases

Starting at home plate, everyone jogs to first, second, third and home in a line following the coach, calling out the bases as they go. On round 2, start the line at home plate, on “go” the first player runs to first and stays on first. On the next “go”, the player on first advances to second and the new runner goes to first. Repeat with all players running and all advancing until each player scores at home plate.

Optional: Have a coach on the field with a ball in hand, stressing that the base means SAFE and if they are off the base they can be tagged OUT. One coach needs to be at home plate, letting players leave and keeping them aware (encouraging teammates), while another coach is in the field directing.

3. Run Through First

One sure way to get runners in the habit of running through first base after an infield hit is to have a base coach give the runner a hand signal. The coach should give the signal while the player is running toward first base after a hit. The signal could be something simple like holding one or both arms straight up in the air. Have the base coach stand about four feet past first base and give the runner a "high five" as they pass. Have the player run seven or eight feet past the base.

4. Body and Mind Warm-up

Line your team up on the first base side of home plate for a base-running drill. Before each player runs, ask them where a different base or field position is located. For example, ask the player "where is center field"? After a correct answer, or a simple point of the finger, let the player run the bases. Let each player have one or more turns. This will help them remember where all positions are located and that will make it easier to get them in the right spot during games. They think running bases is fun.

Game Skills

Batting

1. Bat Selection

The starting point for any hitter is finding the right bat size. Have the player grip the bat at the end of the handle and lift it with one arm, fully extended, straight out from their body. They should be able to hold it level with the ground for three seconds without wobbling or shaking. If not, find them a lighter bat.

2. Safety First

Young players don't pay attention to others around them when they swing a bat. For the safety of your players, set a rule during the first practice that no player is to pick up a bat unless instructed to do so by a coach and then enforce the rule. Also remind your players to never go near another player who is holding a bat.

3. Proper Stance

A good training aid at practice can be useful in helping a beginning batter learn the proper stance in the batter's box. Try using a flat piece of rubber approximately 19' long and 5' wide, like the flat pitching rubber that is included with many throw-down practice base sets. Place the aid in relation to the tee where you want the toes of the batter. This will allow the player to assume the proper batting position with minimal assistance.

4. Pivot Foot

Let the batters practice pivoting their back foot by pretending to "squish a bug". By pivoting the back foot during their swing, the batter will generate more power using their hips and have fun learning how.

5. Bat Safety

Many young players get excited and throw their bat after a hit. That can be dangerous for the other players if not corrected. An easy remedy is to place a glove near the tee during practice and have the

batter drop their bat on the glove when starting to first base. After a few repetitions they will do it without being told.

Batting Order

You may want a clipboard for your team list, batting order, rules, etc. However, the best batting organizer is a bunch of clothes pegs. Start with your clipboard or a paint stir stick. Attach a coat hanger wire through the hole at the top and hang the clipboard or stick from the batter's cage. Write the names of each of your players on their own clothes peg. Clip the pegs on the side of the board/stick in that day's batting order, with the first batter at the top. You'll find this tool indispensable, as the kids can now read their batting order without having to ask you. Change the batting order at each game so that all children have a chance to bat first or last. Easy formats include alphabetical from A to Z, from Z to A, or randomly.

Field Positions

It is extremely important for the players that field positions be rotated. This can be slightly more difficult to organize, but not unmanageable. Every player should have a chance to play most positions.

Parental Help

Ask parents to help. There is much to organize with this age group, and you will appreciate any and all help. Particular areas for help are:

Batting & Line-up

You will need a coach to organize the rest of the team when you are at bat. This coach will ensure all team members stay behind the batter's cage and that no one holds onto or climbs the batters cage (thrown bats break fingers). He or she will coordinate the batting order and make sure the next batter is ready with their helmet on, and ensure that the team is quiet and respectful of their teammate currently at bat. This coach should ensure that only the batter in the batter's box has a bat in hand.

Batting demands the most attention, and should be coached by someone who knows:

- A. How the bat is held.
- B. How the feet are positioned
- C. How the swing is made
- D. What to do with the bat after hitting the ball. (Don't throw it!) Ensure everyone, including spectators, are standing clear.

Base/Fielding Coaches

When your team is at bat, you are allowed to have coaches at 1st and 3rd bases. These coaches help the runners to know when to run and when to stop.

When your team is in the field, you are not allowed to have any coaches on the field.

Snacks

One of the highlights for the kids at each game is a snack. Coaches should bring snack for the first game and arrange for different parents to bring snack for each of the season's games (send a

reminder on the day prior). Healthy choices are recommended such as cut-up watermelon, oranges, apples, goldfish crackers, water and juice (in juice boxes). If bringing anything messy, remember face clothes or wet wipes, and garbage bags. Please advise parents not to bring anything with **peanuts**, so as to avoid this allergy issue.

Weather Issues

Any cancellations due to weather will be posted to the RMMSA website and also communicated by the convenor to the coaches by email. It is expected that the coaches contact parents of all players by email or phone to notify of the cancellation. If in doubt, go to the field and make your decision there within 15 minutes after game start time. Safety, however, will not be compromised because of field conditions or possible thunderstorms. If there is any sign of lightening or thunder around game time or during a game, the game must be cancelled.

In case of rain out, make-up games will be on Tuesdays. Details will be provided to the coaches by the convenor to be shared with the teams.

Convenor

If you have questions about teams, scheduling, rules, anything about the league, please call the league convener. They can answer your questions directly. The contact information for the convenor is posted on the website (www.rmmsa.org).

ⁱ Some skills development activities have been copied or adapted from the following websites:
http://www.sport.ca/uploads/documents/1299-4344-practice_plan_rookie_-_tee_ball.pdf;
http://www.hccl.ca/media/leagues/5250/graphics/little_league_t-ball_practice_plan.pdf