



TEACHING for TOMORROW

Pitfalls to Avoid as a Coach

Article by Al Herback

Little League Baseball Canada's National Coach

For the February and March newsletters, I will be using an excellent article that was written by Rick Johnston. Rick and Mike McCarthy are the co-founders of The Baseball Zone located in Mississauga, Ontario. So much of what is mentioned in the article is the foundation of the Teaching for Tomorrow education program of Little League Canada.

His article, ***20 Common Pitfalls You Need to Avoid as a Baseball Coach*** will be divided into the two newsletters. Here are the first 10 with an opening statement by Rick.

A coach can do himself a lot of good in the eyes of many if he is able to avoid certain coaching pitfalls throughout the season...and stay out of the crosshairs of the know-it-alls. These pitfalls are part of coaching and unfortunately sometimes are not so apparent to see - something like missing the forest for the trees kind of thing. And best of all is that avoiding them should help result in a more fulfilling and fun experience for the players that we are serving.

1. **Operating the same practice the same way all the time.** Routine is good. Essential. But doing the same thing every practice is a bit overboard. Plus, there is no way that you, or anyone else, has the ultimate practice plan that covers each and every detail of team preparation such that you never need to alter things. Effective practice organization takes time, prudent thought processing, and attention to detail but, to be a coach, you must make that time happen. Plus, it keeps it fresh and can be fun if done well.
2. **Line up and everyone take ground balls.** There is nothing more disconcerting than to see 12 players line up at SS and one coach hits ground ball after ground ball at each player. Just think, it may take 2-3 minutes between ground balls that each player gets and this drill is done for 20 minutes. Hmm, how many ground balls are each player receiving in the time line? I need not tell you.
3. **Rocket ground balls.** Hey Coach, are you trying to make the team? There is really no need to see how many base hits you can get. Learn to hit ground balls right at each player so each player can work on the routine play, read hops, and decide on the movements they will need to use when fielding the ball.
4. **Cancelling practice because numbers are low.** What a great time to work with the players! Less players, more coaching, more individual work, more development. Don't let the no-shows dictate what goes on. Their loss, big gain for others.

5. **“You’re my closer”.** So the team is a group of 13-year olds (for argument’s sake) and you’ve decided that so and so is going to be the closer. The closer? Geez, I didn’t know closers started out that young - and they don’t. Let ‘em pitch, mix up the roles, give them all work, and maybe ... just maybe ... at the end of the year have a bit more definition of roles. Remember, it is a kid’s game for only so many years. Let them be kids to enjoy the game. No one is getting a job with the Blue Jays based on the makeup of the pitching staff.
6. **Controlling base-runner movements.** Only letting players run when you direct them to run otherwise they have to mimic some Roman statue. I am sorry, but this does not permit players to develop their own thought processing or base-running instinct. Next time you are at a youth league game, watch how much coaches control when and where players should run to and from.
7. **The prestigious positions.** Oh boy, this one may have hit a sour note. Giving partiality to certain players at this age, such as the same SS for every game. This should not happen until later in their teens when players’ bodies have changed and skills have developed. They are kids. Kids!! It is not your fantasy anymore ... if it is anyone’s, it is theirs.
8. **Over-coaching hitters while in the 3B box.** Throwing out oodles of information (sometimes not correct information as well) to a hitter while at the plate. “Get a good pitch”, “Stay back”, “See the ball”, “Use your hands”, “Keep your head down”, “Short stride”, “Rotate the body”, etc. Come on! MLB coach Dwayne Murphy had a great quote at a Blue Jays clinic last year. To paraphrase: “Coaches, be quiet. It is hard enough to hit a baseball as it is.” Well said.
9. **Asking the hitter to shorten up with two strikes.** Did you work with each hitter and actually practice this two strike approach? If you haven’t, then how do you expect any player to make the adjustment in a game? Again, please review the Coach Murphy quote.
10. **MLB versus Amateur.** Hey coaches, it is like comparing apples to oranges. Clearly it is not the same or fair trying to compare how big leaguers play versus amateur players. Major leaguers are bigger, stronger and, of course, much more skilled, so don’t try to compare. It isn’t remotely logical or productive. Amateur players should be compared to themselves - hey, did you get better today or not? How a 12-year old compares to Derek Jeter is irrelevant for the most part. Only on a passing comment on a great play might you compare a young player to that of a major leaguer.

These are some fine tips to remember if you are already in the coaching fraternity as well as for anyone thinking of entering for the upcoming 2014 season. Always remember, do anything possible if it benefits the children playing the game. If not, rethink. These are the first 10 written for everyone by Rick to add to your ever growing resource library on how to be the best coach possible. I will pass on the next 10 for your March newsletter.

If you wish to get a copy, please visit <http://blog.thebaseballzone.ca>