



## Beginners Coaching Manual (U11)

### Preface - The Right Way to play

New Zealand has a long-standing history of producing world class athletes. Baseball is a new sport to this great country, with correct fundamentals and coaching that progress and develop at each respective level from KiwiBall grades to our Premier Teams will ensure that our baseball players enjoy the game of baseball more, have the correct skills to be competitive locally and on an international stage.

The following philosophies are proven and engrained in Baseball cultures around the world in the USA, Japan, Dominican Republic, to name a few. For our coaching to be effective and our players to be competitive we must first embrace the Right Way to play.

#### **'Have Fun!'**

- The most important reason to play the game is to have fun! As coaches we must find a way to make baseball fun for all of our players

#### **'Be Ready!'**

- Pre pitch step must be taken on each pitch when you are playing the infield or outfield
- Be ready to hit every pitch

#### **'Hustle!'**

- While on the field, no player on your team should ever be walking. This means that at practice, during and between drills, they hustle. During games in-between innings, they hustle. If they hit a ground ball to the shortstop, they hustle down to first. etc
- Coaches need to constantly remind players that not hustling, is not acceptable

#### **'Be Aggressive!'**

- When swinging, swing HARD
- When throwing the ball throw it HARD
- Pitchers should try to attack the strike zone at all times, to make the opponent earn their way on base

#### **'Stay Positive!'**

- Baseball is a game of failure, so creating a positive atmosphere within a team is essential to bring out the best in your players
- Positivity must be established by the coach
- Bad body language has a negative effect on a team's positive atmosphere, and should be discouraged
- Encourage your players to 'pick each other up' when someone makes a mistake, or does not perform the way they expected to

## Introduction

Firstly, thank you for taking the time to read this manual. Whether you are looking to help your child improve their game, or you have chosen to take on a role as a coach for a club or school team, thank you for helping push the game of baseball forward, here in New Zealand.

This coaching manual will be split into four sections, part one will look at DEFENSE, part two will look at OFFENCE, part three will be about PITCHING and CATCHING and part four is KNOW THE RULES. Each section will explore the basic fundamentals of the game that we believe your child, or child you are coaching will need to know while in the U11 grade.

This manual has some firm fundamentals that need to be taught a certain way, however Baseball NZ encourages you to bring your own approach and knowledge to your coaching, within the framework of the ideas explored in these manuals.

## Part one - Defense

### Playing Catch

Playing catch refers to throwing and catching the baseball. This fundamental skill is the most important aspect of playing defense, so a strong emphasis should be put into developing each players ability to play catch. Here is a brief introduction below. For a more in depth look at how to run this, refer to the Baseball New Zealand Throwing manual.

### Throwing Programme - How Far, How Often

- Distance –
- 1. \*Training - At this age start at 15 feet and work out to 100 feet (or just beyond the players limit) over 12 minutes. Make sure to throw for at least 1 minute once 100 feet is reached. This is necessary twice a week outside of games.
- 2. \*Home - Play catch as often as you wish. Start close and work your way out slowly, leaving only 5 or so throws at max reachable distance at 80% effort. (at this age we do not need players to be extended beyond their abilities too often as this will later help with injury prevention).
- When throwing, always work on good technique to form good habits – Throw with a Purpose!

### Technique –

When it comes to throwing mechanics and technique there are so many different things to teach and build on.

Because of this, we have developed a 3 tier manual for throwing and pitching on its own designed to dive deeper into developing our youth and beginner players.

The Baseball New Zealand Beginner Throwing and Pitching Manual will cover what you will need to know to begin teaching the right foundation for throwing a baseball the right way.

[\(insert link\)](#)

### Fielding

The ultimate goal of a defense is to prevent runs from scoring. This section will explain fundamental skills that your players must develop to become quality defenders.

### Be Ready! - Prep Step

Every infielder and outfielder must take a preparatory step as the pitch is being delivered to the plate. A good preparatory step will bring the player onto the balls of their feet and their glove out front, so they are ready to react to any ball that is hit. This is known as the players READY POSITION.



Infield ready position



Outfield ready position

## Ground balls

All infielders need to be proficient at fielding ground balls. For our players to have the best chance to field the ball cleanly, they must get into a good fielding position before the ball gets to them. Here is what a good fielding position should look like:

1. Wide Base, (feet at 1.5 time shoulder width)
2. Butt down



(Pay attention to how flat the back is, imagine you have a cup of water on your back that you don't want to spill.)

3. Glove out front



Getting into this position when fielding ground balls will give players the best chance to field the ball cleanly on a consistent basis.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfqSNwFVv1s>

## Fly Balls

Catching balls that are hit in the air is another fundamental defensive skill. For a fielder to have the best chance to catch the ball, they need to position their glove where they can watch the ball all the way into the pocket.

To do this when the ball is high, fielders should have their glove above their eye level with their fingers pointed to the sky, as this gives them the best chance of watching the ball all the way into the pocket.

When the ball is high - glove above eye level, fingers to the sky



To do this when the ball is low, fielders should have their glove out in front of their body, with their fingers pointed down. Again, this allows them to track the ball all the way into the pocket of their glove.

When the ball is low, Waist or below we turn the glove over, 5 fingers down



When a player is catching a ball that is thrown to them by a team mate, the same principles apply. Above the waist fingers up, below the waist fingers down.



## Part Two - Offense

### Hitting

In this section, we will lay the foundation that is necessary to develop our young ball players into quality hitters.

### Physical - Setup

#### Grip

Hitters should grip the bat loosely in their fingers more than in their palms. Having the hands loose allows hitters to maximise bat speed.



#### Feet

Correct distance from the plate is important. To make sure that your hitters can cover the entire plate have them set the tip of their bat on the outside of the plate while setting their feet.

Distance between can vary, but should be wide enough to allow the hitter to shift their weight back during their load. Hitters should be on the balls of their feet, with a slight bend in their knees.

#### Hands

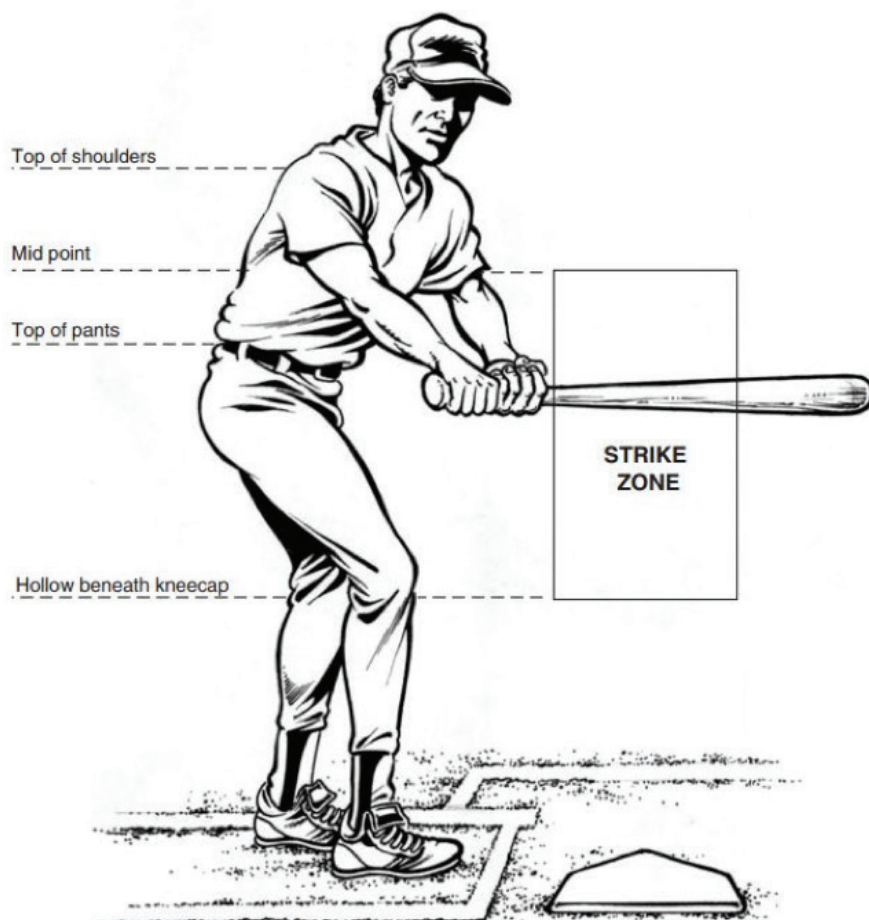
Hands should be together on the bat, and start close to the hitters back shoulder. The knob of the bat should be pointed down and slightly back, towards the catcher. This allows the hitter to keep the barrel high.

We want our young ball players to develop their swings naturally, so once a solid setup up has been created, then all that is left to do is SWING HARD!



## Mental - Know the zone

Another important foundation to becoming a good hitter is knowing the strike zone. Hitters who swing at strikes are more likely to have success than those who chase pitches outside the zone. Therefore knowing the zone is an important skill for young hitters to develop. This diagram illustrates the strike zone:



Rule 2.00 of the MLB rule book states that the strike zone is defined as - 'that area over home plate the upper limit of which is a horizontal line at the midpoint between the top of the shoulders and the top of the uniform pants, and the lower level is a line at the hollow beneath the kneecap'

Remember the strike zone is set at the front of the plate, not where the catcher catches the ball, make sure that your hitters are aware of this. If your hitters recognise a pitch that they believe is in the strike zone then they should SWING HARD!

## Base Running

When a hitter puts the ball in play, how they run to first base will be dictated by whether they have hit a ground ball or a fly ball.

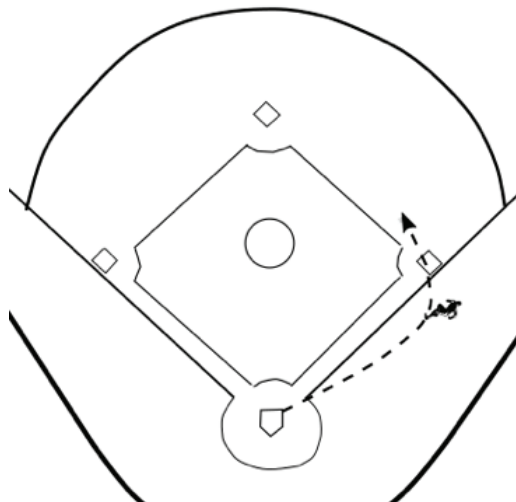
If the hitter has hit the ball on the ground, they need to try and beat out the play. Therefore they will run in a straight line to first base and touch the base at the front middle part of the base (see photo below). The runner can continue through the base before slowing down, because of this, you should encourage all base runners to run at a 100% sprint till after they touch the base.

Straight through:



If the hitter has hit the ball in the air, they should be thinking about rounding first and possibly advancing to second. The runner can do this by running directly to a spot 10-15 feet to the right of first base, when they are around two thirds of the way down the baseline they should turn left towards first base and touch the front inside corner of the base (see photo below). They should then read the play as to whether or not they can continue to second.

Rounding:



**Stopping on second and third** - When running to 2nd and 3rd base you are only safe when you are attached to the respective base. If there is a close play, sliding into the base is the fastest and safest way to stop on the base.



## Part Three - Pitching and Catching

### Pitching

At this age group we encourage coaches to allow every player on their team to have the opportunity to pitch.

Focus on correct throwing technique, at this age pitching is just throwing to the catcher.

Pitchers should be encouraged to throw as many strikes as possible. If a pitcher throws a lot of strikes, then the batters have to hit their way on base. Remember, any ball in play is a chance to make an out. On the other hand if a batter is walked, he gets on base 100% of the time!

For further information on pitching at this level, please refer to the Baseball New Zealand Beginner Throwing and Pitching Manual.



### Catching

Coaches are also encouraged to allow all players who are confident at catching the ball to have the opportunity to catch during games.

The catcher's number one role is to catch the ball as often as possible. They can give themselves the best opportunity to do this by:

- setting up in a comfortable squat position (feet at least shoulder width apart, bringing butt down as close to the ground as possible)
- glove hand in front of chest, elbow bent and arm relaxed when receiving the ball.
- throwing hand behind foot or glove to protect it from foul tips

## Part Four - Know the Rules!

### How to make outs:

- Strike out - if a pitcher gets three strikes on a batter, they are out
- Fly out - if a batted ball is caught by the defense before it hits the ground, the batter is out
- Force out - if a base runner is forced to run to a base and the defence touches the base that they are forced to run to, while in possession of the ball, the base runner is out
- Tag out - if a base runner is not on a base, and he is tagged (touching the base runner with the ball, or with a glove that contains the ball) by a defensive player, the base runner is out

### Force play vs Tag play

The difference between a force play and a tag play is an integral part of baseball knowledge. Here are some scenarios to illustrate the difference:

#### Scenario One:

No outs, runner on first only, batter hits ground ball to the second baseman. Runner takes off toward second, second baseman throws the ball to the shortstop who is covering second base. This is a **force play**, because once the ball is put into play the batter runner is entitled to first base and the runner at first is not longer safe on that base and is forced to run to second. The shortstop only needs to touch the base while in control of the ball, before the runner gets there, to get the out.

#### Scenario Two:

One out, runner on second only, batter hits ground ball to the shortstop. Runner takes off toward third, shortstop throws the ball to the third baseman who is covering third base. This is a **tag play** as first base was unoccupied when the ball was put in play and therefore the runner was not forced to run to third. The third baseman must therefore tag the runner, before the runner reaches the base, to get the out.

#### Scenario Three:

Two down, runners on first and third, batter hits comebacker to the pitcher who fields it cleanly on one bounce. Both runners take off. If the pitcher decides to try to make the play at home, it would be a **tag play**. Instead he wisely chooses to take the **force play** at first base to end the inning.

### Tagging Up

Tagging up is another important rule that ball players need to know.

Any time a batted ball is caught, any base runners must return to touch the base they occupied before the ball was hit, before trying to advance. If a base runner does try to advance after correctly tagging up, this is a tag play. However, The base runner/s may stay at the base they occupied, if they wish.