



LCYO Baseball Coaching Essentials

Welcome to LCYO, and congratulations for being selected to coach one of our baseball teams! Thanks for stepping up. Coaching youth baseball is a special experience that you'll never forget. We want to help you make the most of this opportunity. We also want to equip you to be successful as a coach in our league. Baseball is fairly complicated and one of the hardest sports to coach. This will be your guide through some essentials. Compiled from the collective wisdom and experience of many local coaches and experts, this guide incorporates lessons that we want to pass on to you.

Each division is unique. As the players advance in age and skills, your coaching techniques need to advance too. This is a guide primarily for new coaches in our T-Ball, Pinto, and Mustang divisions.

This guide includes the following sections:

- **Getting Started**
- **Positive Coaching Guidelines**
- **T-Ball, Pinto, and Mustang Divisions**
 - > **Division introduction**
 - > **How to run a practice**
 - > **Key tips by division**
 - > **Age appropriate expectations**
 - > **Understanding key rules by division**
- **Words of Wisdom**
- **Advanced Baseball Skills Resources**

This guide is not intended to cover advanced baseball skills. We run free coaching clinics with our instructional sponsors that cover advanced skills, and we highly recommend you attend these. Plus, there are some very good outside resources and websites available to help you in this area. These are outlined in the last section.

Thanks again for coaching in LCYO!

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Getting Started With Your New Team

You have a lot of responsibilities as the manager. These responsibilities include the following:

- Evaluating players and drafting your team
- Ensuring the safety of your players
- Being prepared for practices
- Picking your assistant coaches
- Communicating practice and game schedules
- Instructing players
- Motivating the team
- Understanding the rules of baseball and your division
- Interacting with the parents
- Handling conflicts and disputes
- Preparing the field for games in some divisions
- Umpiring playoff games (Pinto)
- Providing end-of-season player assessments to the league directors

I know this list looks long. It is a lot to do. The players on your team will remember you, and you have the ability to make a positive impact on their lives so we want you to be prepared. How much are we paying you 😊?

Let's get started ...

T-Ball coaches will be assigned their teams by the league director. Pinto, Mustang, Bronco, and Pony coaches will select their teams during a draft.

Our goal in the draft is to create balanced teams in each division. First, managers and assistant coaches will attend the player evaluations. This is where you will get a chance to watch all the players in your league field, throw, run, and hit. You'll be given a list of players with evaluation numbers before you arrive. Pay close attention and take notes during the evaluations. We will also provide you with independent evaluations. It will take a lot of time to run through all the players, so bring a chair along with some drinks and snacks. Fielding and batting evaluations may occur on different fields at the same time, so having more than representative from your team will aid you in the evaluation process.

Next, you need to prepare for the draft. It's always fun playing General Manager and selecting your teams. You may want to consider ability, hustle, attitude, and friendships when making your selections. Your league director will provide you with player evaluations from the previous seasons and with independent evaluations from the most recent evaluation days. Read these carefully. **Draft order, past coach's evaluations, and other comments on players should remain confidential between the coaches.** Do not share this information with non-coaches. Be prepared on draft night so you are ready to pick when it is your turn.

Once the draft is over and you have selected your team – now what?

First, you'll want to call and email each family and let them know you are the manager, you are looking forward to meeting them, and let them know when the first practice starts. You'll be able to print your roster with phone numbers from the LCYO website. You'll also want to ask for a Team Parent volunteer to help you with team communications. You also may need to recruit assistant coaches.

Next, you'll want to email an introduction to your team. You can automatically generate a team email to your roster from the LCYO website under your team page. Let them know that email is the primary way you'll be communicating with them. (Make sure to tell your families to keep their email profiles updated, or they will not receive your emails. Every year we get asked why parents are not receiving emails, and it is because they either don't have an email set up, or they have an old email address in their LCYO profile)

Take control from the start. It is better to over-communicate your expectations up front than to react after issues arise. It is always better to refer back to your guidelines and expectations rather than communicate them after an issue. Getting all the information to your families' early saves you time later.

Here is a sample introduction email you may use as a template.

Sample LCYO Manager's Letter

Welcome to the _____ baseball team!

I'm Coach _____ and I look forward to a fun and rewarding baseball season. We will establish a fun learning environment for your child, while teaching baseball fundamentals and respect for the game.

Our first practice will be this date from time at field location.

Here is our practice schedule beginning next week:

Weekday Time and Location

Weekend Time and Location

Our games will start in early March. I will send you the schedule when it is finalized.

Here is some information based on my past experience to get us all grounded:

Our LCYO Coaching Philosophy

(please share with your child and we will reinforce at the practices)

1. Have Fun– Always remember that this is a "game".
2. Pay Attention– Listen when coaches or parents are giving instructions, and "be in the game" even when on the bench.
3. Display Good Sportsmanship– Never argue with an umpire or taunt a player on the other team.
4. Practice Hard/Play Hard– I expect players to hustle and give it their best shot.
5. Support Your Teammates– Even major leaguers make errors and strike out. Always encourage your teammates.
6. Be Thankful– Coaches and parents devote a lot of time to this. Recognize this and show appreciation.
7. Be Safe– Horseplay around the bench with bats and other equipment. can result in serious injuries.

Guidelines to Coaches and Parents

1. Remember baseball is a GAME, so let's not put too much pressure on the players.
2. Be role models– They are watching and learning from us.
3. When giving instruction after a mistake, always try to pull the boy aside and do it one-on-one in a calm manner.
4. Umpires in this league are not professionals– Expect them to make mistakes, and the coach will discuss issues in a calm manner.
5. Too much well-meaning advice becomes interference– Let the coaches instruct the players. Don't be the parent right behind the backstop giving advice between each pitch when your boy is at bat!
6. Find the positive– Even on bad plays you can usually pick out something to highlight that a boy did well.
7. Bring up any concerns to the coaches (after the game please). We'll try to give all the players opportunity to play multiple positions, but we may miss some things along the way.
8. Try to be early to practices and games.
9. Let us know if you are going to miss a game. It really helps to know when building the line-up. And don't sweat it if you have a vacation, camping trip, or other vacation plans. We'll make it work.

I need a volunteer to be the Team Parent, so let me know if you are interested. Also, we can always use assistance from parents during practices to help us run drills.

I look forward to meeting all of you.

Coach _____

Getting Ready

You'll receive an email from your League Director instructing you where and when to pick up your team uniforms, equipment, baseballs, and scorebook. You'll also get a "Y" key to unlock the equipment storage bins at each field.

Now you need to prepare for your first practice.

Start with a brief kick-off meeting in your first practice to introduce yourself to the players and parents.

Tip – schedule your first practice 15-30 minutes before you have the field so you can get this out of the way and still have time for a full practice.

Bring a sharpie and some name tags so everyone can learn names. Invite the parents to listen in so they know what to expect. Go around to each player and have them tell the team where they go to school, favorite baseball player, etc. Play the name game where each player has to name all the previous players to help everyone get to know each other.

Tip– Have all the players line up smallest to biggest, and hand out the uniforms. Get a parent to help with this, and make sure they take down names and numbers since you'll need this to make out your first lineup.

Let your players know that you expect them to carry their own bag, to make sure they have all their equipment in it, and that they should bring water to every practice. This should not be their parent's responsibility. Also let them know that if they can not pay attention while you are coaching, they will be running laps or doing push-ups. You are in control, and you will not let one player detract from the rest of the team.

The sooner you establish your expectations, the better.

Tip– Make sure each kid has his name on his hat, glove, bag, batting gloves, etc. This will save you a lot of time later on. And tell them you expect them to always know where their hat and glove is during practice or games.

Make sure you get a parent volunteer to help with the uniform sizing, snack schedule, game reminders, end-of-year party, etc. This will free you to coach.

Always have a practice plan prepared. Leverage your assistants and other parents to help you with drills. You'll want to have multiple stations set up to keep things moving. The worst thing is to see one kid batting and 10 kids just standing around the field looking bored.

You will need some basic coaching aids. Here are some we recommend:

- Tennis balls for T-Ball and new Pinto players for fly ball drills
- Wiffle balls for batting practice (small and regular size balls)
- Hitting Stick for swing work in small spaces (a “must have” for Pinto)
- Hitting Tee for swing practice
- Temporary bases for infield drills
- Hitting net for soft toss drills (optional for younger ages)
- Stopwatch

Positive Coaching Guidelines

Positive coaching is all about creating an environment where each player, no matter the skill level, can be successful. It’s simple.

Tip– Set and reinforce effort goals vs. results goals so every player can feel successful no matter how much natural talent they have.

Effort goals: (Focus on these)

- Sprinting on and off the field every time
- Running all the way through first base on ground balls
- Sliding on close plays
- Outfielders backing up the bases on infield plays
- Knowing where the play is before the ball is hit
- Catchers backing up first on ground balls (with no runners on base of course)
- Paying attention to the coaches

Results goals: (Do NOT focus on these)

- Getting a base hit each time at bat
- Not missing a ball or making an error
- Scoring X runs a game
- Not striking out

Result goals are not always achievable. A player may hit four hard line drives right at the shortstop. He did not get any hits, but made great contact each time at bat.

Focus on setting Effort Goals, not Results Goals.

We expect you to be competitive and teach kids how to play hard and want to win, but you need to do it in a way that allows them to succeed along the way.

Winning vs. “Having Fun”

Many people today think that recreational level sports should be all about having fun. I agree, but having fun does not mean screwing around. Players will not have a fun season unless they are focused and trying their best. And we expect you to instill a desire to win in your players. We expect you to be “dual goal” coaches. Winning should be a goal, but we want to teach life lessons and display good sportsmanship at the same time.

Baseball is hard mentally, and your job as a coach is to teach kids how to handle adversity and still enjoy the game. Your main job is to make sure each player enjoys the experience and wants to play the next season.

Always be positive. It's not just what you say. Your body language may even be more important. The players and parents are watching you. Anticipate mistakes, and look for something positive to say before giving feedback. And it is usually ok to wait until after an inning to correct a mistake. The worst thing is to hear coaches screaming across the field at an eight-year-old after making an error. Do you like to be yelled at? Probably not 😊.

"Baseball is the only field of endeavor where a man can succeed three times out of ten and be considered a good performer." –Ted Williams

Remind your players (and yourself) that even major leaguers make errors and frequently strike out. The Cardinals recently made five errors in one World Series game!

Coaching Your Own Kid

Many coaches' kids are the most advanced and talented players. You were probably a pretty good athlete and you want your kid to succeed. So you may want to drive them harder than the other players. *This is the biggest mistake I see coaches make.* Don't do it. **A fan watching the game should not be able to tell which player is a coach's kid.** This is easier said than done, but try to treat all kids equally on the field. And leave the game on the field. Once you are in your vehicle driving home, discuss only what went well. You can work on the improvement areas in the next practice session.

Dealing with Parents

Let them know you are open to discussions after the game. Listen and try to give kids a chance to play all positions *unless there are safety issues*. If they are yelling at umpires or other coaches, calmly let them know you are the coach. Be proactive and address issues quickly. The longer you let inappropriate behavior go on, the harder it will be to stop it. Escalate to the league director if you have major issues. As the manager, the parents are your responsibility. Be flexible and open to suggestions. This will make things run smoother. Get them to help you run your practices. This makes them feel like they are part of the team.

Being a Good Assistant Coach

Sometimes you'll be an assistant, not the manager. You will need to adjust to this role. This is not as easy as you might think, especially if you really want to be the manager. This can be a major issue in All-Stars too. Basically, a good assistant supports the manager and fills the role that the manager asks him or her to. Be sure to support the manager when things are not going well and when the team loses. It's easy to be supportive when you are winning, but a good assistant is

positive and dependable at all times. Never criticize the manager with players or parents. Take any advice or concerns directly to the manager.

Working with Umpires

Expect bad calls; they are part of baseball. Avoid yelling at umpires or other coaches, and try to calmly discuss any issues that arise. Have an “0-3” rule where you avoid discussing questionable calls with umpires unless they miss three calls in a row against your team. And when that happens, have a direct but respectful discussion with the umpires. Remember, you would rather them feel guilty if they miss a call against your team than become angry at you. Give them a break and remember they are human. And many of our umpires are teenagers, so pretend it is your son umpiring and treat him like you’d like your son to be treated.

Tip– Do not comment on balls and strikes. Strike zones are going to be large and inconsistent. Just go with the flow.

Get to know the umpires by name. What sounds better? “Tom, I thought he fouled that ball off” or “C’mon Blue, wasn’t that was a foul ball!”

Tip– Introduce the Umpires by name to your parents before the game. This will help establish a positive game environment from the start.

Interacting with the Opposing Team

Introduce yourself to the coaches and open up communications with the other team. Avoid yelling. Go have a conversation if you have any issues. And when the other team makes a great play, it’s ok to let the player know and even give them a high five. Recognition from an opposing coach really means a lot to a player at this age. And if a player on the other team gets injured, be sure to walk over and check to see if they are ok. Refrain from making comments directly to the parents on the other team. Sportsmanship is an important life lesson we want to teach, and it all starts with you.

Equipment Pick-Up and Return

Prior to the first practices, managers will pick up a team set of equipment and coaches’ keys. The equipment varies, depending on the division. As this is all property of LCYO, managers will be responsible for returning all equipment and keys following the conclusion of each season.

T-Ball Intro

Your main goal in T-Ball is to instill a lifelong interest in the game of baseball. This means that you will want to do everything you can to ensure that players have a positive initial experience with the game. For many, this will be their first time swinging a bat or using a glove to catch a ball. Some will love it immediately; others will be afraid of the ball. Work with all players to nurture their skills. You will also want to make sure no one gets hurt. The developing minds of 5- and 6-year-olds need to be reminded regularly that bats are only to be used for hitting balls and that they need to take practice swings only when they have checked that no one will be hit by their bats. Lessons of safety must be taught. Be prepared to serve as baby-sitter as well as coach. Your lessons won't likely be grasped by all players the first time you teach them, but with repetition and patience, you can make a huge impact on these young players. It is a fun age to coach, and it goes by fast. At the same time, it can be frustrating due to players' short attention spans. Fasten your seat belt; this time flies by. You'll be coaching Bronco before you know it!

Key Tips for T-Ball

- Safety is your first goal. Separate the advanced from the beginners. Watch the bats carefully, making sure they do not take practice swings on their own, and use tennis balls until they are ready for a harder ball. Be careful which kids you put at 1st base! Only players who can catch should play 1st.
- Keep it fun. Allow them to be silly sometimes.
- Bring simple rewards like gum, candy, or baseball cards. Count things during drills and announce winners to keep their interest.
- Keep it simple. Focus on a few key fundamentals. Triangle position on grounders (each foot, plus glove in front forms a triangle. "T" throwing position (glove pointed to target and throwing hand extended forms the letter T.
- Pick out a kid who is doing something well and acknowledge it. Kids this age thrive on recognition.

Age Appropriate T-Ball Expectations

- In T-Ball, you'll be lucky if your team makes one or two "real outs" by actually throwing a runner out or catching a fly ball. When it happens, celebrate!
- Focus on the basic hitting fundamentals. (Good grip with "door knocking knuckles lined up, load before swinging, and "squish the bug" with back foot.)
- Teach them to run hard through first base on grounders
- Teach them the proper sliding technique
- Toward the end you may want to allow some of your more advanced players to hit pitched balls from the coach, but limit them to three pitches. Have them revert back to the Tee if they miss three to keep the game going.

- Have all kids learn the positions and sprint to their locations by the end of the season.

Understanding Key Rules for T-Ball

Good news: There are not many rules, and you don't even keep score. Focus on sportsmanship and effort goals. Reward "real" outs with a celebration.

T-Ball Practice Plan

Your T-Ball practice should be very basic. An hour is the most you should plan due to shorter attention spans. Once you see their level of ability and confidence, break them into two groups for safety measures. You'll notice a big difference between the advanced players and beginner players even at this age. Keep the practice moving. The kids will get bored if they stand around a lot.

0-10 mins.	Stretching and Wind Sprints (have them race each other to keep up their interest and give a small reward to the winners)
10-20 mins. Water break	Break them into two groups and pair up. Have them throw grounders to each other first, and then play catch to warm up their arms. You will want to use tennis balls for most players until they develop glove skills to catch a real ball.
20-45 mins. Water break	Break into three groups for 1) Batting off the Tee 2) Basic infield practice focusing on "Alligator," the "Triangle" fielding position, and "T" throwing position and 3) Fly ball drills (with tennis balls for most). Rotate the kids between the stations.
45-55 mins.	Finish with base-running and a relay race around the bases, sending half to second base and half to home plate. Give each team a ball that will be handed to the next runner, like a baton. Have them race two or three times, explaining how to round the base and hustle all the time. Kids love this drill and it ends practice on a high note.
55-60 mins.	Summarize what they did well, highlight kids who hustled, answer questions, and let them know when the next practice is.

Pinto Intro

Get ready for a wild ride! Pinto may be the most enjoyable division of all. The advanced kids will amaze you with their ability, and some less advanced kids will defy the laws of physics and actually throw the ball backwards at key times in a game ☺ Some will hit home runs, and some may not even make contact all season. And the parents and grandparents will be loud and out of control at times. It is exciting. And there will be lots of offense and defense. There are a lot of things happening at once so you need to be organized.

Key Tips for Pinto

- You have limited practices to get your team ready, and some early practices usually get rained out. Have an alternate plan. Meet at a local batting cage for hitting, or meet at a pizza place and have a team meeting.
- 30 minutes warm-up before Pinto games is enough. Quick stretching, warm ups, some infield, followed by wiffles and hitting sticks. Be consistent and warm up the same way before each game. (You'll need to tell the parents 45 minutes early since some will always arrive late)
- In Pinto you usually have to prep the field and put up/take down fences. Teach a dad how to prep the field. It will make him feel more useful and free up time for you to coach. And get parents to put up/take down fences.
- You have four outfielders in Pinto. When doing the chalk on the field, go out in the outfield and make four Xs where you want your outfielders positioned. This will save a lot of yelling during the game.
- This is the age where players have to start thinking while in the field and on the bases, so be patient with the widely varying degrees of baseball knowledge that your players will bring, and be prepared to teach "smart baseball" to your players. Remember, baseball is a complex game.
- The force at second is probably the most important play in Pinto. Practice it over and over. Make sure they use an underhand toss when close to the base.
- In your practices, simulate live situations like holding on fly balls with less than two outs, running on contact with two outs, etc. Baseball is complicated for young kids, and they need lots of practice.
- Base coaches need to tell the players the situation before each pitch. Just telling them once is not enough. Instead of telling them how many are out, ask them how many are out. This forces them to think and concentrate.
- Many kids will "cast" the bat at this age. Use the fence drill to help correct this (Bat on belly button against the fence, kid then takes full swing without stepping back until he stops hitting the fence. This naturally helps them shorten their swing by taking the knob toward the ball).
- Many kids will lunge forward at the ball at this age. Pitch wiffles with their back knee on the ground, teaching them to stay back on the ball
- Field a "real" catcher in gear. Get the kids used to catching with the pitching machine.
- Move most players as far back in the batters box as allowed. This extra time will allow beginning players to make more consistent contact.

- Players this age will freeze up if your style is too loud and intense. Remain calm and positive and you'll get a much higher level of play from your team.
- Give them rewards for good plays. They love to be rewarded and recognized. Helmet stickers are good, so are baseball cards..
- Have your defensive lineup made up before the game starts to keep the game moving quickly.
- One way to get parents to the warm-ups on time is to make out your batting order in the order the players arrive at the field. Try to give each kid a chance to be the lead-off hitter at least once during the season.
- After each game, find something positive to say about each player. And forget a lengthy lecture on what they did wrong.
- Pick a "Unity" sign that the team can use after errors or strikeouts to show team support. One example is the Fist. When a player makes a mistake, have the other players all show the Fist to let him or her know the team is behind them. This makes a big difference.
- Don't focus on the score during the game. Or after the games. Instead recognize the effort goals that were met.
- Be very careful with who you play at first base and pitcher. This can be dangerous for lesser skilled players. As a courtesy, when your big hitters come to plate, have the coach who is feeding the pitching machine let the opposing pitcher know to be ready. You may even position him behind the coach for protection.
- Communicate that all positions are important. Many parents and kids think that shortstop and first base are the only positions that matter. Rotate players around the infield during the season.
- Teach your outfielders to back up the player beside them and all infield plays. It will make the game more interesting. A good drill in practice is to hit the ball to an outfielder, have them miss the ball on purpose so the outfielders beside them have to be there to back it up. Great conditioning too!

Age Appropriate Pinto Expectations

Think in terms of the three groups (A,B,C)

- Group A advanced players will be able to throw kids out from third or shortstop, catch most fly balls and line drives, and may even turn double plays. They will hit the ball hard on most at bats. Home runs over the fence are rare, but some will hit a ball out during the season. Most will know the situation and make the right play.
- Group B players will make infield plays from pitcher and second base, but rarely from third or short. They will typically make contact on most at bats. They will catch fly balls or line drive around 30% of the time. You'll need to remind them the situation before every play. If you do, they will probably make the right decision.
- Group C beginning players will rarely make successful infield plays or catch fly balls or line drives. When they do, celebrate! They will frequently

strike out so expect this and keep them motivated. Even if you tell this group the right play, expect them to have a brain freeze when the play happens 😊 Just laugh and move on.

Understanding Key Rules for Pinto

Pinto is not “real baseball” so you’ll need to be prepared for some unique rules.

- A player who is not half way to the next base before an infielder catches the ball has to return to the next base. It is hard to tell sometimes if the runner is past the halfway mark. Expect confusion on this. Avoid sending players to the next base every time in case a fielder may drop the ball. This does not teach good base-running.
- Batters get six swings to hit the ball, assuming the pitches are good from the machine. Look to give the kid who hardly makes contact an extra swing or two. Be generous in waving off bad pitches and allowing the batter an extra pitch. The machines can be erratic.
- Except in the playoffs, you will not have umpires. It usually works out best to have the base coaches be the umpires since many parents do not know the rules. If an assistant makes an obvious bad call, as the manager you should step in and overturn it.
- You’ll have to pay close attention to your lineup since all players must play two innings of infield during the game. Catcher does not count as an infield position. Best positions for the less skilled players are second base and third base. Work them into other infield positions when they are ready.
- Once an infielder controls the ball (on the infield dirt), the play is dead and time is called. Any runners not half way return to the previous base. Fielders do not have to hold the ball up. Not sure who started that myth but it has been passed down to each group of new coaches.
- If you are not fielding a catcher in gear, have your catcher approach the plate once a ball is in play from the third base side. This will avoid runner-catcher collisions caused by more aggressive catchers. Try to field a catcher in full gear every inning, and if you can, have the catcher put on the gear when his team is still batting.

Pinto Practice Plan

You’ll find a wide difference in abilities at this level, especially when the season starts. Once you see their level of ability and confidence, break them into three groups for safety measures (A, B, C). (A) Advanced, (B) Average, and (C) Beginning. Breaking them into groups will allow each to play up to their potential.

For example, with the advanced “A” Pinto players you can hit them fly balls and they will catch them on the run. With the “B” average players you can throw them fly balls. You’ll probably need to throw tennis balls to the very beginners as they learn. You can allow players to advance to the next group as they improve. They will improve quickly at this age.

You'll probably share the field with another team. You'll typically have the infield and pitching machine for 45 minutes, and the outfield area for another 45 minutes. This plan assumes you have the field for the second 45 minutes:

0-10 mins.	Form a circle for stretching (have each lead a stretch), followed by a few wind sprints
10-20 mins. Water break	Warm-ups. Break into A, B, C groups. Pair off and have them throw grounders to each other first, then have them play catch to warm up their arms. You may want to use tennis balls for the C group at first. Have them catch then drop balls and practice picking them up with their bare hands for quick throws. This is an important skill in Pinto to learn. After a ball is thrown away, make sure they run back to the throwing distance before resuming instead of heaving it and hitting another player.
20-45 mins. Water break	Break into three groups for 1) Basic infield practice focusing on the "triangle" fielding position and "T" throwing position. Work the force at second, making sure they do <u>underhand</u> tosses, 2) Fly ball drills, hitting flies to group A, and throwing flies to groups B and C, 3) Batting - pitch waffle balls and have a Hitting Stick station too. Get help from assistants and parents. Rotate the kids between stations. Keep them busy!
45-75 mins. Water break	Take the field. Break them into three new groups. Have the kids in the first group rotate turns hitting the pitching machine. Make sure they stay back in the box, keep their eye on the ball, and stay balanced. Each kid hits ~10 balls and runs the last one out. He then stays on base for live base-running. Have one coach work the Hitting Stick for the on-deck batter. The other two groups are on defense. Have them play situational baseball with live runners on base, especially working the force at second. Have outfielders get the ball into an infielder just like in a game.
75-85 mins.	Baserunning and sliding practice. Practice running through first base. Time each kid to first, and announce the fastest time. Finish with a relay race around the bases, sending half to second base and half to home plate. Give each team a ball that will be handed to the next runner like a baton. Have them race two or three times, explaining how to round the bases tightly and hustle all the time. Kids love this drill and it ends practice on a high note.
85-90 mins.	Summarize what the team did well, call out kids who hustled, answer questions, and let them know when the next practice is.

Mustang Intro

You are now ready to coach “real baseball” ... almost. Mustang features live pitching, real catchers behind the plate– and a big transition for the players to learn. Players learn to lead off, steal, score on passed balls, pitch, and pick off runners. Pinto rules did not prepare them for any of this. So you have your work cut out for you. The mental game becomes even more prominent, so there is a lot to teach.

Key Tips for Mustang

- Allow 45 minutes of warm-up before games. Quick stretching, warm-ups, some infield/outfield, followed by wiffles. Be consistent and warm up the same way before each game. The small golf ball size wiffles work well to keep them focused on watching the ball.
- Practice the passed ball drill over and over. It will happen a lot in Mustang and can save you a lot of runs.
- Spend time with pitchers working from the stretch. Explain the balk rule and have them practice coming set before pitching.
- Many new pitchers will be better off pitching from the stretch even with no runners on base.
- Make sure you have kids pitch to kids in live BP. (You should always have coaches throw in the batting cages). Most new Mustang kids are afraid of live kid pitching and they know a coach will not hit them. Get them lots of reps against kid pitchers during practice.
- Practice pickoffs at first to keep runners close. You’ll never throw a runner out if you can’t keep him close. Even if you throw it away, the runner was probably going to be on second anyway.
- Manage your limited field time to focus on game situation drills with pitchers and catchers rather than hitting traditional infield. Mustang is all about pitching and catching.
- Establish consistency with your assistant coaches. Sometimes you hear teams telling kids the same thing four different ways.
- Get your catchers in gear before your offensive inning ends if possible. This will really speed up the game.

Age Appropriate Mustang Expectations

- Out of 11 or 12 players, you’ll probably have 2-3 good reliable pitchers to start with. You’ll need to develop 2-3 other pitchers during the season.
- Expect a lot of walks. Pitchers at this age are very inconsistent from game to game. Anticipate this and change pitchers early if they are walking a lot of batters. Boys typically don’t want to feel isolated and helpless on the mound while they struggle in front of their friends and families. Although the league has an innings limit, consider imposing pitch-counts for new pitchers. Make this number clear well before the pitcher takes the mound, and then it is less traumatizing to the boy who gets removed mid-inning.

- Look to give each kid a chance to pitch some innings during the season. But make sure they can throw strikes in the bullpen first. Putting a kid on the mound who is not ready can backfire and hurt their confidence.
- Even with a good catcher, you'll throw out few (if any) runners trying to steal second. But you need to train them to throw down, and over time they will get better.
- Set the expectation that on a passed ball you expect your pitchers to cover home. They should beat the runner from third to the plate. It will happen over and over in Mustang.

Understanding Key Rules for Mustang Recreational League Play

Mustang is almost "real baseball" so you'll need to be prepared for some unique rules.

- No dropped third strike rule
 - Batters are not allowed to run to first base after a dropped third strike
- Pitchers are not allowed to throw curve balls
 - Only fastballs and change-ups are allowed
- Umpires call a "Mustang" strike zone which is larger than the typical zone. Umpires are directed to employ a strike zone that is one baseball's width off the plate on either side and from the armpits to the knees. Even so, don't be surprised if you see umpires call a strike at the shoulders or top of the ankles.
- We usually have teenage umpires. So expect some bad calls, confusion, and an inconsistent strike zone. Teach your hitters to swing at anything close, especially when they have two strikes.
- Don't argue balls and strikes. The strike zone should be the same for both teams.
- No leading off second or third
 - Runners are not allowed to leave second or third base before the ball passes home plate.
 - Runners may advance to home from third on a passed ball or wild pitch
 - Runners may not advance to home if the catcher catches the ball cleanly

Mustang Practice Plan

You'll probably share the field with another team. You'll typically have the infield for 45 minutes, and the outfield area for another 45 minutes. This plan assumes you have the infield for the second 45 minutes. Reverse this plan if you have the infield first.

0-10 mins.	Form a circle for stretching (have players take turns leading stretches), followed by a few wind sprints. Warming up shoulders with arm circles, swimmers, etc. is very important before throwing.
10-20 mins.	Warm-ups. Pair off and have players throw grounders to each other, then play catch to warm up their arms. Integrate some variety into the warm-ups. Quick hands, dropped ball drill, short hops, etc. Have them extend into long toss, and work on their throwing mechanics. Make sure they are focused in these drills.
Water break	
20-45 mins.	Break into three groups. 1) Batting– have players pitch wiffles to other players while a coach watches the swing fundamentals. Plus have live hitting in a cage if one is available (only adults should pitch in the cage) 2) Pitching/Catching– get a catcher in gear and have a two pitchers throwing, keeping count of balls/strikes 3.) Infield/Outfield – have a coach hitting grounders and fly balls to the third group. Rotate groups through all stations.
Water break	
45-70 mins.	Take the field. Keep your three groups. Have a pitcher (not a coach) pitching live BP the entire time you have the field. Rotate pitchers every 20 pitches. Have the kids in the first group rotate turns at bat. Keep the count to simulate a real game environment. Keep runners on base for live base-running. Work on your pickoffs and steals during this time. The other two groups are on defense. Have them play situational baseball with live runners on base. Simulate a live game.
Water break	
70-85 mins.	Passed ball drill. Get two catchers in gear, two pitchers on the mound, and live runners at third (helmets on). Teach your pitchers to sprint to the plate after passed balls, teach your catchers to block the ball and how to throw to the pitcher after a passed ball, and have the runners try to score. Rotate players.
85-90 mins.	Summarize what they did well, highlight kids who hustled, answer questions, and let them know what they should be working on between practices.

Bronco and Pony

If you are coaching Bronco or Pony, you can expand this practice plan and work on more advanced skills and drills. You are now coaching “real baseball” so you’ll need to work on dropped third strikes, leading off second and third, pick-off plays, etc. But these all build from the basics we covered in the Mustang section.

Words of Wisdom

Here is a collection of insight and lessons learned from past LCYO coaches to help you.

Coaching Baseball

- For three months you will be one of the most influential people in 10-12 kids' lives. It is an honor to be able to coach. Take it serious and enjoy it.
- Don't go off the deep end on winning. Stay balanced and make the experience positive.
- Coaching is really teaching. If you think of yourself as a teacher, you'll probably be a good coach, regardless of your expertise.
- Teach your players to respect the game. (Example: they show up to games with their jersey tucked in, hat on, socks and belt, cleats, etc.)
- Emphasize what a great game it is, and that playing the game the right way can be really fun and challenging. As they get older, teach them to play "against the game" as I like to say. (Meaning: throw strikes, put the ball in play, make routine plays, move runners over.) Play against the game, not your competition.
- Create an environment at practice and at games that makes them love coming to the field. (Be creative and engaging for practices even if you don't have experience.)
- Spend time coaching all the players. True joy in coaching comes from seeing progress in all players.
- Be patient. No matter how developed or talented some kids are, they are still kids.
- Remember that all kids want to win, and winning is important to them. Teach them that they will win and lose, but coach them to compete. Teaching a youngster the value of competing will be a life lesson they will always remember and value later in life.
- Remember that the game is just a vehicle for us coaches to teach the really important things in life. (Examples: adversity, competition, teamwork, sportsmanship, respect, hard work, etc.)
- You don't have to be an expert on mechanics. Here are some coaching basics. (Step and throw, barrel on the ball, throw the hands, charge the ball, hit your partner in the chest, look it into your glove, head on the ball... simple things go along way.)
- Practice patience and watch your body language.
- Teach them the value of being on a team. What it means to work together and support fellow teammates.
- If they smile most of the time, say they had fun, and sign up next season, consider your season a great success.

Motivating Your Players

- Be enthusiastic, be positive, be passionate
- Celebrate the season. Let them know that the journey during this season is going to be memorable.

- Challenge kids slightly beyond their capabilities to keep them engaged.
- Come up with fun things, like nicknames for players.
- Let kids decide what they want to yell before they take the field.
- Experiment and be creative!

Interacting with Parents

- Very few parents are objective about their child's ability. (Since this is not likely going to change, you're better off just accepting it.)
- Before the season, think about what's really important to you as a coach, and what you want to teach and accomplish, and then write it down.
- Before the season, have a meeting with the parents and share with them your clearly stated goals and expectations for them and their child.
- When on the field for games or practices, try to limit or avoid responding to inquiries and comments from parents about playing time or positioning. Let parents know ahead of time that if they have questions or comments, they may email or call you to discuss them. On the field, however, be clear, honest, and brief, and get back to coaching.

Handling Adversity

- There may be no greater value learned from the game of baseball than dealing with adversity. (Umpire calls, errors, failing more times than succeeding as a hitter, and the list goes on)
- Teach your players to control what they can control. Easy concept, hard to teach to youngsters. (Examples: pitchers, throw strikes... you can't control what the ump calls, where the batter hits it, or if your defense makes the play. All you can control is your delivery. Hitter: Hit the ball hard. Can't control if it's a hit or an out, etc.)
- Teach kids ways to move on after a mistake. (Concepts like flushing the mistake down the toilet, brushing it off your chest, make up one on your own)

All-Star Teams

Selection to an LCYO all-star team is an honor. These players represent the best of LCYO, and they are expected to carry themselves with dignity and humility, remembering to demonstrate good sportsmanship always. Players should be chosen based not only on their pure baseball talent, but also on their enthusiasm, dedication, willingness to play any position, and sense of team.

LCYO fields all-star teams by age, beginning with 7-year-old Pinto players.

Managers will be asked late in the season to nominate 2-3 players from their rec teams for all-stars. All-star nominees must reside within the LCYO boundaries. Nominated players will attend an all-star tryout, where managers will evaluate the players.

Selection of players

- All managers will vote on which players will make the all-star teams. The top 11 vote-getters will make the team. The all-star manager will choose the 12th player. If two all-star teams are being fielded by a given age group, then managers will vote again from the pool of remaining players. Again, the top 11 vote-getters will make the team, with the manager choosing the 12th player.

Selection of manager and coaches

- A manager selection committee consisting of all Baseball Directors, VP of Baseball, and the League President will select the all-star managers. This committee will vote on manager candidates, and will attempt to provide more coaches with the opportunity to manage an LCYO All-Star team. Managers will be selected after players have been voted onto teams. Managers will choose their assistant coaches and business managers.

Commitment of players and parents

- Parents of nominated players must attend a parent meeting, where all-star procedures and expectations will be outlined. This ensures clear communication and cohesiveness.
- Players are guaranteed a minimum of two innings of play in the field per game, though managers are encouraged to try to balance playing time. This is an LCYO rule, not a PONY rule.
- Players must attend all official all-star tournament games. For the other tournaments, scrimmages, and practices, players must attend at least 75% of those.

Advanced Baseball Skills Resources

We will provide you many opportunities to learn baseball and improve as a coach. Each season we offer a series of free coaching clinics that cover hitting, pitching, catching, base-running, how to run a practice, etc. These are taught by local experts. Additionally, here are some specific resources:

Big Fly Baseball School

500 Corporate Drive Escondido, CA 92029

(760) 918-0988

<http://www.bigflyathletics.com>

- Butch Smith and his coaching staff are always eager to help and answer questions. They will arrange a camp for your teams, they have on-site batting cages, and conduct free coaching clinics for LCYO.

Jack Pennock's Baseball Fundamentals

760-471-9880, email: jpbaseball@cox.net

<http://www.baseballnextlevel.com/>

- Jack has been coaching in the area for years and has a local field in San Marcos. He covers all aspects of the game and runs clinics and camps.

Ryan Lehr/Reggie Smith Baseball Academy

619-846-8368, email: rlehrball7@gmail.com

- Ryan is an advanced hitting instructor, and works with many elite players in the county.

Game Face Sports Club

2768 Loker Ave. West

Carlsbad, CA 92010

760-692-2275

<http://www.gamefacesportsclub.com/>

- Former Padre and 11-year Major League Baseball player Damian Jackson and his staff offer one-on-one, as well as full-team, hitting instruction at his facility. Game Face also offers pitching lessons.
- One-hour long hitting clinics are held every Friday evening. Cost is \$10 per player.

Baseball Books

If you read only one book on baseball fundamentals for younger players, we recommend Play Baseball The Ripken Way, The Complete Illustrated Guide to the Fundamentals, Ballantine Books

Baseball Websites

There are hundreds of websites for baseball instruction.

Quality Coaching Baseball is pretty good, especially for younger players:

<http://www.qcbaseball.com/>

Enjoy!

Enjoy your LCYO coaching experience, and let's make it positive!!! We truly appreciate your time and effort!