

Coaching Youth Baseball

Ages 8-10: Minors

Quick Start Guide



by David Grossman
and Paul Allen

CoachingYouthBaseball.com

This free guide is taken from parts of
my complete book:

Coaching Youth Baseball 101

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AGES 8-10: Minors

Welcome to the world of coaching the Minors.

The Minors is where most of the attrition in youth baseball leagues occur. Parents say, "Well, my child wasn't really into baseball," or "He doesn't have the attention span for baseball."

We at CoachingYouthBaseball.com think that's complete garbage. We think most attrition occurs because coaches do not have the training they need to make Minors fun and exciting.

What child is going to want to do a thing that they fail at over and over? What child is going to want to stand around and pick at the grass while a pitcher throws a thousand balls over the backstop?

NO ONE.

It's amazing to us that kids last as long as they do with the current environment, where most teams just throw batting practice and coaches just yell, "THROW STRIKES!"

For your quick start, think about these things:

- Teaching pitching (if kids pitch)
- Teaching throwing
- Overcoming fear of the ball
- Teaching catching (if players can steal a base or advance on a wild pitch)

If you do those things, a lot of things will come easy.

Teams in the Minors that make the routine plays and have pitchers that throw 50% strikes are teams that win a LOT of games.

You are probably busy with life with at least one small kid, and odds are that your oldest is 8, or you wouldn't be researching how to coach. This guide will give you a quick overview of what you need to have a great season.

Making the Difficult Easy

I started coaching in 1999 before I had kids, so I skipped Tee-ball and started with 10 year olds, then 11's and then 12's. I think I've always enjoyed the Minors the most. It's where I started. The kids are able to understand instructions well, they want to learn, and they haven't yet learned how to roll their eyes (at least most of them).

My favorite Minors story was when I asked a team why they had just lost a game. One kid clearly raised his hand and when I called on him he said very slowly, "Because we didn't listen to anything you said."

Warmed my heart.

My next favorite story was one practice (after a long series of wind sprints, as it was a season where I had a team that you could just tell was ready to really work) when I said, "Who has the easiest coach?" and one kid said, "You aren't the easiest, but you are the nicest."

Warmed my heart.

Please remember these kids have had (in most cases) at least a year of Tee-ball and sometimes two. They have stuck around. The notion that "baseball

isn't for them" strikes me as foreign as they wouldn't have kept coming back after Tee-ball.

Most leagues go from about 16-18 Tee-ball teams to maybe 8-10 Minors teams. And then from 8-10 Minors teams to maybe 6-8 majors team.

I can see how attrition from Tee-ball to Minors might be because some kids just aren't the right fit for baseball. Attrition from Minors to majors I think is all about coaching and making it so everyone has some success.

A Suggested Goal

While you might have your own goals for your coaching, I'd also like to suggest one: **the player should have so much fun and learn so much that they want to play next year.**

In the Minors this is possible, but it won't happen if the kid ...

- a. never gets a hit
- b. sits around on a team where no one throws a strike
- c. only plays in the outfield

These are things that are often done to players who are less athletic. All it does is make them not play the next year.

Remember that kids develop at different rates. There are kids who are low draft picks in the majors who end up playing when they are 13-15 or even in high school. And there are kids who are first round picks in the majors who quit the moment they turn 13 or they suddenly they stop growing and they aren't the biggest and fastest anymore.

Other kids grow a lot long after they are 12. Don't try to predict long-term success in a given sport for a child at the age of 8.

However, DO try to make it fun for them so that if their body grows into it and they learn the game, they'll still be playing at that point.

As with Tee-ball, there is a lot of standing around, kicking the dirt, and playing with grass. **It's crucial to keep practice fast moving.**

Keeping It Moving

The key to a fast moving practice is to get a LOT of parents to help. To do that you need to be clear in the initial e-mail to parents.

The sample email is below.

Once you send that out, I strongly recommend an opening season pizza party for all players and parents to attend. Ideally you can talk to the parents for about 15 minutes and go through the agenda. The key thing to emphasize is that you want players to return next year and that you need the parents to help out at practice for that to happen.

Minors Initial E-mail

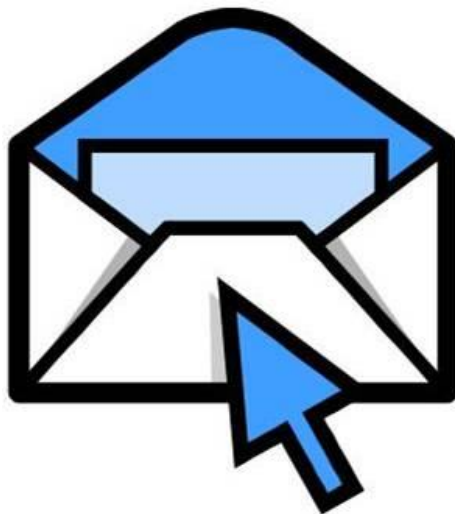
Initial Email to Parents

Here is a sample email that you can use to send out to parents. Obviously modify it as you see fit or as your league requires. In any case, it's a start. I think this e-mail sets the tone for the year so you should work on it.

Once you send the email out, I strongly recommend an opening season pizza party for all players and parents to attend.

Ideally you can talk to the parents for about 15 minutes and go through the agenda. The key thing to emphasize is that you want players to return next year and that you need the parents to help out at practice for that to happen.

Email on the next page.



HERE'S THE EMAIL:

Dear Parents of (Team Name if you have it),

I am the coach of your team. My goal is to make it so your child has a lot of fun, learns a little about baseball, and absolutely plays again next season.

I know they have played baseball for a while now, so if they are signing up for the Minors, I know they have what it takes to keep playing baseball.

Please remind your child that baseball is a game of failure, and the jump to the Minors is not at all easy. It's a LOT harder to hit a ball thrown from 46 feet BY ANOTHER KID (or fill in a machine if you use machine pitch, or fill in a coach if you use coach pitch) then it is to hit one that is resting on a tee.

I would like to invite you to a season opening pizza party at my house where we'll go over all the odds and ends for the season.

We will practice twice a week for ninety minutes and have one or two games a week. I'll make sure we start on time and end on time.

Please come to practice and wear exercise clothing so you can help out with the drills. Baseball really is different from soccer, for example, in that one coach and a ball can do useful things. With baseball we need multiple assistants to have real success.

At the Minors level it's crucial that we have as close to a 3 or at worst 4-1 parent-child ratio as possible so that the kids will get the attention they need. You absolutely do not need any baseball knowledge. We just need to maximize quality repetitions in order to teach the basics of fielding, throwing, and hitting. The more the kids learn the more they are going to want to play next year.

We are going to need the following coordinators, so please be thinking about these when you come to the meeting.

ASSISTANT COACHES — I plan to have several, so please volunteer.

SNACK COORDINATOR — Someone has to be in charge of who brings snacks after the games — for kids this is a very big deal. The most frequent question during the game is usually, "Hey, what are we having for a snack?"

FUNDRAISING COORDINATOR — This person will deal with all the fundraising needs of the league.

TEAM PICTURE COORDINATOR — This person will deal with sharing pictures and with handling the team photo for the league.

RSVP COORDINATOR — This person will make sure I know who is coming to each game and practice. We'll have a web site up and running that allows you to easily click YES or NO if you are coming, but we need someone to make sure people click on YES or click on NO. I'll look forward to meeting all of you....

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME

Minors Meeting Agenda

Below is a basic agenda that you can cover in the Parents' Meeting.

As suggested before, a good way to do this is to have a pizza party for all the players and parents. But of course that's up to you.

Goal for the Season: Want players to return next year.

Coach's Background: Talk about your background and why you are coaching.

Schedule: Talk about where games are, when they will be, practices, etc. If your league has kid's pitch then tell them you'll have a few one hour pitcher/catcher practices to work on pitching mechanics. Tell them these will NOT be done in secret. Also tell them that not everyone will pitch.

Equipment: Talk about equipment players need — i.e. a glove (bats are usually not needed as they're provided by the team). Find out if anyone is left handed and if they might want to play catcher because that'll mean you'll want to see if your league has a left-handed catcher's mitt.

They can use their regular glove if need be, but why not get them a catcher's mitt and most leagues have a few. Talk about bats. Tell them you'll provide bats, but if they get a bat, they need to keep them LIGHT. Heavy bats really harm the chance a hitter will make contact. At the single-A level (age 8) I keep bats around 14-16 oz, at AA I'm at about 15-17 (age 9) and at AAA 16-18 (age 10). Tell them to use those weights as a guide and then go for the longest bat they can afford.

Practice at home: Talk about what parents need to practice at home — usually some whiffle balls are very good and tennis balls. They can do some of the same drills that the kids will learn at practice. Talk about fear of the ball. Talk about pitching and the need for parents to throw some batting practice. Even if they don't have a field nearby they can use whiffle balls.

Volunteers Needed:

- **ASSISTANT COACHES** — I plan to have several, so please volunteer.
- **SNACK COORDINATOR** — Someone has to be in charge of who brings snacks after the games — for kids this is a very big deal. Most questions during the game will be, "HEY, WHAT ARE WE HAVING FOR A SNACK?"
- **FUNDRAISING COORDINATOR** — This person will deal with all the fundraising needs of the league.
- **TEAM PICTURE COORDINATOR** — This person will deal with sharing pictures and with handling the team photo with the league.
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but we need someone to make sure people click on YES or click on NO.

Minors Game Management

There are lots of strategies for game management. Do you play all players in a clump? Do you play them all in the infield? Do you really enforce outs?

Here are my thoughts.

Positions

Make a grid before the game that gives everyone equal time in the infield, in the outfield, and on the bench. Use the kids who have pitched and caught the best in practice at those positions.

Putting a player on the mound because they are begging to do it is a DISASTER if they can't throw a strike. Parents may talk to you and tell you the kid may not be able to pitch well in practice, but they just know that if they were just given a chance they'd be the next Nolan Ryan or Randy Johnson.

Don't believe it. If they can't throw strikes in practice, they won't do it during a game.

Make sure your 1B goes out with a ball to warmup the infield and the CF goes out with a ball the warm up the OF.

Have an assistant dress your catchers quickly and while they are doing this, send a backup out to warmup the pitcher. You don't want a pitcher standing around not taking warmups because the catcher isn't dressed.

Bring a big cooler of water to the games and make it so everyone stays hydrated. During the game make sure the players are ready on every pitch.

If a player isn't throwing strikes, get them off the mound and put in someone who might. If a pitcher begs to stay in just smile and ask for the ball. Tell them that when they are a coach, they can decide these things. For now you are getting the big money and you'll make the call.

Don't be afraid to go out to the mound and calm a kid down. Some kids just get nervous when they first start pitching. Talk them off the ledge, tell them to take a deep breath and SMILE (studies have shown that some facial expressions drive the mental state of people so give it a whirl).

Time of Games

Minors games usually have a time limit, so they are usually done in 2 hours. Avoid the temptation to figure out ties. If the time limit is over and it's tied, declare it a tie.

Batting

While batting, make sure you have 2-3 bench coaches to get kids ready to bat, helmets on, bat selected, and ready to go.

Make sure no kid picks up a bat until it is their turn to bat.

Do not tell players to take a pitch or bunt. They are there to learn how to hit so get them hitting.

Snacks

Finally, make sure there is a really good snack after the game. If you think this matters in Tee-ball, it matters about 10 times more in the Minors.

Youth Baseball Equipment



I'll give you my thoughts on equipment here. No, I do not get a commission from anyone. I did buy all the equipment and uniforms for our league of 600+ players for a few years.

Here's what you'll likely need:

- Bats
- Balls
- Gloves
- Uniforms
- Teaching Aids — Insider Bat
- Teaching Aid - Solo Hitter

Youth Baseball Bats



Make sure the bat weight and size are appropriate.

Remember that bat speed is a key to making the ball actually go somewhere.

Too often, we see bats that are far too heavy. Bat speed is the key to hitting, and that doesn't happen when the player drags a bat through the strike zone.

Batting Tees and Nets

Batting tees are for every level, especially the Minors. There is still no better way to learn hitting mechanics than to work off a tee, and hitting off a tee really should be a station in every practice.

I used to give out equipment, and I'd give a tee to a coach in the Minors and they would say, "Oh no, I'm not in Tee-ball anymore." You need a tee far more in the Minors than you do in Tee-ball. A tee makes it so you can really teach hitting mechanics.

You can have players hit to a fielder to get a fielder used to some live fielding (obviously this requires some space) or just hit into a net. The Rolls Royce of nets is the Jugs net (blue cover). It is around \$100, but once you get one, it'll last you for many years. They are found in all area sports stores. Cheaper nets exist, but they tend not to last as well.

The rubber tees provided by your league are probably OK. The ATEC hard plastic tee is an excellent tee that is extremely durable, and the Tanner Tee (www.tannertees.com) is a great lightweight tee.

Youth Baseball Helmets

Even when hitting off a tee, batters should wear helmets with a full "cage" or facemask. It gets them used to the helmet, and it's safer for them to use when hitting with a real bat.

Whiffle Balls / Pickleballs

Plastic balls are fantastic for batting. They don't take up much space and make it so you can generate a lot of swings in practice.

Instead of one player hitting and nine watching, you can have three or four hitting at the same time.

Whiffle balls have a seam in them that can be broken with an aluminum bat. Pickleballs are just whiffle balls without a seam. The web site tipsfromthecoach.com sells them, but other sports stores have them or can order them.

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