

# **BELMONT YOUTH BASEBALL COACHING PHILOSOPHY**

## **MARCH, 2017**

We are excited you have volunteered to assist us in coaching a team this season. We appreciate your willingness to do what is often a thankless job. We would like to set forth some guiding principles to ensure our coaches have the right mindset and philosophy when teaching our children. Below are some principles we would like you all to adhere to. Although some of these ideals are proper subject of debate and discussion, the advice is derived from decades of experience, professional coaching literature and many hours of debate.

- 1) Coaching your son or daughter is difficult: You are likely coaching a team because your son or daughter is a player. Coaching your own child is perhaps the hardest thing to do in all of coaching. You must exercise caution, kindness, and restraint to ensure you do not adversely affect your relationship with your child. You should not be coaching if you are interested only in your own child's success. As a coach, you need to coach every player with the same energy and attention and you must work to provide constructive feedback to every player. Often, you will be focused on what your child is doing. While being there with your child is a great reason to coach, you cannot deprive the other children of the attention they need. In dealing with your son or daughter, you must realize that constantly criticizing or "coaching" can make playing a dreadful experience. Your child's teammates will well know your child's "daddy" is the coach. Try to ensure you do not treat your son or daughter any differently than the other children. You may see your child through rose-colored glasses or you may have higher expectations and act more negatively with your own child. You must resist the temptation to be harsher with your own child and equally resist excessive adoration of your baby boy or girl.
- 2) Coaches are teachers: proper coaching requires preparation, evaluation, and innovation. Some coaches have never played beyond youth sports themselves and there is nothing wrong with that. However, if you have not played at higher levels, you likely need to learn what is appropriate to teach while coaching. Conversely, even if you played at the college or professional level, you need to learn how to teach the skills you may have mastered. Teaching a skill differs vastly from performing the skill. No matter how well you played, you must learn how to teach a young person to perform the skill in simple and clear terms. You must learn new ideas and be receptive to suggestions on how to coach. You must recognize that just because you watch every Red Sox game does not mean you can coach the skills of the game. You must read books, attend clinics, and search for resources to learn how properly to teach a skill. Coaches should set goals before each season that set out what skills and fundamentals he or she hopes to pass on to the players. "A leader may be the most knowledgeable person in the world, but if the players on his team cannot translate that knowledge into action, it means nothing." (Mike Krzyzewski)
- 3) Children who have fun will develop faster and stay with the game longer: The philosophy at all levels of Belmont Youth Baseball must focus on combining developing individual skills and learning how to work together as a team in a positive and fun environment. Our children must be taught skills of throwing, fielding, hitting and base running through fun practices. Making practices and games fun will ensure children want to practice, want to take extra fungos, and want to come back.

- 4) Correct performance or errors through encouragement (as opposed to discipline): Yelling and screaming has no place in coaching a player's performance. Yelling and screaming at players is a sign you have lost control. Yelling will not improve performance and will more than likely cause your players to resent being coached. While you cannot and should not "let the inmates run the asylum," you should be able to run the asylum in a way that is fun and encourages players to want to return for the next practice. Times will exist when stern language and serious talks will be needed to ensure proper focus and behavior. However, the coaches must always recognize we are coaching children and not professional athletes. "A coach is someone who can give correction without causing resentment." (John Wooden)
- 5) Excessive negative criticism is wrong: When providing individual or team feedback, strive to give at least two compliments about a player's performance for every correction or criticism you make. Rather than focus on negative aspects of a player's performance, surround your teaching point with two positive comments. For example: "Johnny, you're doing a great job hustling around the bases. You can put that same effort into the field and you will be a dynamite player." This is much better than "start working on your infield or I'm going to have to move you to the outfield."
- 6) Coaches must understand that in baseball Failure happens a lot: It is easy for young players to become frustrated when they fail to perform in game situations. Striking out to end an inning or a game can feel devastating to many children. There is no place to hide; some are brought to tears, others throw helmets in anger. Your role will be to provide proper perspective and grounding in those instances. Hint: Major League players who retire with career batting averages of .300 are enshrined in the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. Translation: even the best who ever played the game failed 70% of the time! Your job as a coach is to show you understand failure happens and help a young player deal with failure in the right way by maintaining control of their emotions and using the failure as motivation for self-improvement. Coaches should treat failure as an opportunity to learn and improve. Rather than yelling at a player for errors or bad swings, help the player figure out why the error happened and focus on ways the player can work to avoid or minimize the frequency of the errors again. Do not allow players to be afraid of failure. Encourage every player to recognize that failure happens and that players must work harder in areas of weakness.
- 7) Errors will happen: You should never yell at a player for a physical error. A player yelled at for a physical error will make more errors because of fear of failure. Errors will happen. You must learn to control your emotions and focus on what is the best way to minimize errors from happening. Encourage the player who just booted the ball to forget about it, and to go get the next one. Have them pick up a pebble, toss it aside, and forget about their mistake. Focus your efforts to work with them before or after games and in practice to improve so the errors happen less frequently.
- 8) Coaches should work to eliminate mental errors: Mental errors generally are caused by lack of attention or concentration. Remember these are children and that they will have moments of losing concentration. You will work with some children who have less attention than others. Work on ways to eliminate the lapses in concentration by talking to your team in the field and encouraging them before each play where they should be and what they should do when the ball is hit to them.

No matter how frustrating a player's errors or actions may be, avoid embarrassing your players in front of his or her peers or people in the stands. With mental errors or errors caused by lack of effort, realize that yelling at him or her in open public will embarrass the child in front of their family

or friends. You may do more harm than good. The better approach is usually to pull the child aside and talk with them privately and set out expectations. You should not tolerate lack of effort or concentration. Be productive in getting the best effort out of your players.

- 9) Reacting negatively to losing or mistakes misses the point: The reaction should be focused on the effort and execution in the game. Praising a team that played terribly but won is wrong. Equally, getting upset about a loss when the team played well but came up short is not the way to coach and lead. A batter who swings aggressively but chases a ball out of the strike zone shouldn't be chastised or scolded to the point he or she loses the aggressiveness needed to hit well. Equally, a player that makes an aggressive play in the field that results in an error should be praised for the effort and not discouraged from trying to make a great play. Too often coaches scream at players for swinging at balls. If your screaming results in the player losing aggressiveness, your "coaching," has undermined what we are ultimately trying to do, i.e., create good ball players. A player who looks to walk every time because he's afraid of swinging at a ball is never going to improve as a hitter. Conversely, the hitter who is not afraid and goes to the plate with an intention to crush the baseball is likely going to be a much better hitter over time.
  
- 10) This is a marathon and not a sprint: The best players at age nine may not be your best players at age 18. Chances are fair that the players who developed early won't be the best players at 18. Therefore, catering to the superstar is wrong. Ignoring the average player or below average player is equally wrong. All players of all abilities should receive equal attention. Make the game fun for everyone and foster the passion for playing the game. The best players will ultimately be the ones who have the most fun and deepest passion for the game.
  
- 11) Organization in practices is key to a successful practice: Practices must be planned out to be fun and productive. Having batting practice with one player hitting and ten players shagging is not a well-run practice. Children cannot be sitting for long and coaches must recognize baseball is a slow game that can get boring if not worked properly. Practices also should not be excessively long. Emphasize quality drills over long and drawn out practices.
  
- 12) Repetition of solid fundamentals makes good ball players: Practices should work on the repetition of individual and team skill development. Coaches should plan practices that divide players into smaller groups where they can work on different skills. Coaches must recognize that players will become proficient at a skill at different times. Some children are more developed or advanced at earlier ages and can perform a skill with more ease. Others may require extra practice to perform a task properly. Coaches need to be cognizant of a players' weaknesses and develop practices that enhance each players' areas of weakness.
  
- 13) Developing pitchers is a priority: Pitching is the key to every good ball club. As the saying goes, "you can never have enough good pitching." To get to that point, our program must strive to develop many pitchers. All players should be given opportunities to pitch and should be allowed and encouraged to practice pitching. We should look to develop as many pitchers as possible. If a player can throw strikes, he or she should be given opportunities to pitch in games, even if they may cause you to lose the game because they will get hit around. It makes little sense to pitch only three players when five or six show interest and have the ability to become pitchers. Ultimately, the fifth or sixth player may develop into our front line pitchers.

Admittedly, winning is fun for everyone and having a pitcher who cannot throw strikes is tough to watch. Remember, as coaches, our responsibility is to help develop our children as people and as players - not to win games. Be willing to sacrifice an easy win for future development of pitchers and players. Don't take the easy way out by sticking with just one or two good pitchers. Spend time before and after practices to develop pitchers who can ultimately develop into our pitchers of the future. Find opportunities to work inexperienced pitchers into games so they develop the confidence and experience to ultimately become good pitchers. There will be times when coaches can experiment and pitch an inexperienced pitcher when the other team is using a similarly inexperienced pitcher.

- 14) Proper focus is on development over results: Winning is fun, but winning cannot take priority over skill development of all the children and over having fun. Every decision you make should consider whether this is best for the development of a player's skills. Intentionally walking batters, pinch hitting or running, pitching only the top three older pitchers, or playing the best player at short stop every inning will not develop all of your players. Telling a catcher to never throw to second base so he does not throw the ball away is not a way to develop a catcher's skills. Encouraging a player to not swing at all so he will walk will not make him a better hitter. Using the same two pitchers every game is not the way to enhance your team's development. Use common sense and recognize your desire to win games cannot come at the expense of even a single child's potential development.
- 15) Playing time for players must be fair: At the younger levels (ages 12 and under), if we have 12 players on a team, 12 players should play evenly, no matter what the league or season we play in. Your job is to develop every player on your team. Playing a bottom-tiered player less than others will not help that player develop as much as you are helping the better player. Pinch hitting for that bottom-tiered player will not help that bottom-tiered player learn to hit. Playing that player three innings every game when everyone else plays five will not help all players to the same degree.

Consistently playing a ten year old less than his teammates is not a way to make that player better. This is youth baseball and you are not coaching a high school or a college team. No youth coach will be judged on his wins and loss record. Any youth coach who wins by playing only his best players is not doing his job as a youth coach. Winning can occur by playing all of your players. As a youth, town program, we must insist every child is treated equally.

Some factors may and should legitimately result in less playing time for a player: a player who consistently skips practice; a player who does not hustle; a player who misbehaves. These factors can rightly affect a player's playing time. However, in punishing a player for behavior or commitment, you must be consistent and punish the super star player to the same degree as the lower-tiered player.

Plainly, playing a player more or less so your team can win is wrong in youth sports. In all of our programs, winning is secondary to developing every player on your team. Again, you can and should try to win, but you must do so while treating equally every player on your team.

Even in summer baseball, when leagues encourage coaches to play to win, playing children evenly is appropriate at the little league level. Players selected for travel teams are all committed and talented players. Although some players are always better than others, you will not cause your team to suffer by playing any one player. Coaches - you can play to win while playing all of your

players evenly. Playing certain players less than another does not meet the goal of developing all of the players on your team.

- 16) Give considerations to playing children in certain key positions: We should strive to place players in positions where they can succeed and where they can grow confidence. Booting the ball every time it is hit to them is embarrassing and frustrating to teammates. Children will love the game when they have success and when they can make plays. Therefore, as coaches, we want to place children at appropriate levels and in appropriate positions where they can have success. Playing a child at first who cannot yet catch is not good for anyone. Pitching a child who cannot get the ball over the plate is not only painful to watch, but embarrassing for the pitcher.

We need to recognize that a child who is never allowed to play in the infield is going to feel badly and may lose confidence when coach plays the same player at short every game. The player who never gets a chance to play a position will not get the opportunity to learn to play the position. Trying to have children in a position to succeed yet allowing them opportunities to learn new positions is a difficult challenge. Just because a player asks to play catcher doesn't mean the coach should play them there. Some children cannot throw strikes; some may not make the throws from short; some may likely get hurt if they played catcher or first base.

But, coaches should work with players to understand what the player must do to be given a fair opportunity to play a key position. If the player works hard at practice, coaches should look for opportunities to play a player at a position - perhaps during a blow out or after a player has had a great practice playing a position. Once a player works at his or her skills so they can play a position, they should be given that opportunity even if they may not be the best choice to play that position. Again, remember we are here for development of all players above winning games.

- 17) All children are deserving of our attention: Above winning, we need to remember we are here to develop ball players. We need to make sure player 13 on our teams is given every opportunity to improve as player number 1. That may not mean we play player 13 at short, but we should work to help player 13 as much as we look to help player 1.
- 18) When is it okay to play to win? We all prefer winning over losing. But we cannot play to win at the expense of developing all of our players. At some age level, and the precise age is up for debate, coaches can be expected to play to win. Playing everyone evenly will properly take a back seat to playing to win when our children are in high school. As a youth program, however, we should look to delay that day late without negatively turning off children. In our little league regular season and summer season levels, playing to win should never take priority over player development. A good coach can both win and develop skills of all players through hard work, strategy and motivation. Coaches can win and simultaneously play all children evenly - the two results are not mutually exclusive.
- 19) Practice time is far more important than games: Games are fun, but practices should be too. A player may get three ground balls in a game and get three swings. In practices you can get each player hundreds of ground balls and hundreds of swings in the same time as you would play a game. It makes sense that the best way to develop is through practice, not games.
- 20) Organize practices so players play with players of like ability: Practices should break players into groups of like ability. Having your best player throw to a beginner is dangerous and not productive

for either player. By keeping players of like ability together, everyone will progress. As players improve, they can move to different groups, which is a nice incentive. Having enough help at the assistant coach level will help you get the most out of practices.

- 21) Practices should emulate game speed: Practice should strive to work drills at game speed, so that a player is forced to practice at full speed.
- 22) Practices should not last forever: You must strive to have players leaving the field hating that practice is over. Two or three hour practices at half speed are detrimental, not productive. Practices should be full speed workouts focusing on fun, game condition and speed drills.
- 23) Safety is paramount: Teach players how to communicate to avoid collisions; how to play catch safely while all facing same direction; avoid swinging carelessly on deck and in the hole; wearing helmets when coaching the bases; teaching them to field with the sun.
- 24) We are teaching life lessons: Sports is about keeping children healthy, teaching them life skills, and developing friendships for life. You must act under control and with the mindset that kids will emulate your behavior.
- 25) Hustle must be Mandatory: Hustle and sacrifice are life lessons our children must learn and our coaches need to reinforce. Hustling is required. Walking on or off the field should be forbidden. Giving half-hearted efforts on fielding balls is wrong.
- 26) All helping clean-up is a must: There is no I in team. There is in selfish. Don't let children think they are any more important than anyone else on the team.
- 27) You must look like a ball player: Wearing your uniform correctly is important. Hats should be worn properly on the field; jerseys tucked in; game socks worn.
- 28) Lying down in the field is wrong: It is wrong and shows lack of respect to the game, the team, and the opponents.
- 29) Talking back to a coach or umpire is wrong: As role models, your players will mimic your behaviors. Umpires, like all coaches and players, will make mistakes. Get over it and deal with it. Even if a bad call costs you a game, the message you send by blaming the umpire promotes poor sportsmanship your players will likely emulate. A better message to send is that through hustle and effort you can win despite a mistake or bad call by an umpire. Yelling at umpires serves no useful purpose to you, your players, or the quality of our program.
- 30) We must teach our players to win graciously: Running around and showing up another team is wrong and children must think before they act to embarrass another player or team.
- 31) We must teach our players to lose graciously: Getting upset about losing is natural. But allowing a child to cry or act out in response to a strikeout or loss is not something we should condone. Teach children that life will be filled with disappointment. Learn to deal with it now by correcting mistakes and striving to avoid the cause of the loss or strikeout.
- 32) Parents who do not coach should not be allowed to be around the bench: Parents mean well, but may not realize the discomfort and annoyance they cause by hanging around the bench. Parents

should be supportive from the sidelines and should not be telling a player what do in the midst of the game. Parents have no business yelling at the umps, the other team, or any player and such behavior ought to be addressed early before the season starts. Parents should not be yelling “balk” or “there he goes” to fool another team into making a mistake. Parents should not be permitted to yell at the umpires and coaches have a responsibility to address a parents’ inappropriate behavior.

- 33) Keep things simple: Getting too complex is counterproductive. Learn the skills of throwing, batting, fielding, catching, and pitching so you can teach four or five basic points and reinforce the points. Resist the temptation to micro manage. The time for coaching is during practices. When the children are playing, they should receive positive encouragement, not micro-managing coaching. Coaches should limit “coaching” during the game to constructive positive reinforcement of simple ideals and goals. Remind players about the outs, where to throw the ball ahead of the play, where to position themselves or be aggressive. Yelling at a player to throw strikes is useless and not the solution. Rather, tell a player to stay balanced, or take your time, or keep your hands still are better ways to coach. “Over-coaching is the worst thing you can do to a player.” (Dean Smith)

We appreciate your efforts. You have a very important job as a youth baseball coach. Our children will remember their baseball experiences throughout the rest of their lives. In agreeing to coach, you are agreeing to be a role model for approximately 12 children. Keep these guidelines in mind as you work with your teams. Good luck and enjoy the time with your players!