



AA Handbook

Introduction:

This division is primarily for ages 7 and under; T-ball is the primary mode of play in this division, with practice hitting against live coach-pitching provided outside of game situations; T-ball is an exciting brand of baseball that allows kids to develop a quality swing and the instinct to hit the ball hard, while also providing lots of base running and fielding.

Division objectives and values:

1. At the end of the season, we hope that all of our players will want to play next year and encourage friends to play.
2. We will meet every player where they are and support them in their own development, aiming to have them end the season as better players than when they started
3. We will foster team spirit in which players support their teammates and respect their opponents
4. Baseball is a game of movement. Every play should be moving on every play. On every ball put in play, fielders should either 'go to the ball' or 'go to a base'.
5. Safety is important to us. There is no 'on deck' swinging of bats in this division and only players actively hitting balls should be holding bats. Bats must never be thrown. All batters and base runners must wear helmets.
6. We all help clean up and pitch in at the end of practice/games.

Typical division schedule:

Teams in this division will have two sessions every week. Every team will play games Saturdays from 1045-1215 and will practice on a single weekday afternoon from 515-615.

General thoughts, suggestions, observations and resources:

1. Ask your players to wear their Amherst Baseball shirts to school on weekday practice days.
2. Communication is key. Parents like to know what's going on.
3. Each coach will receive a LL Tee Ball guide (pdf). It is an excellent document and should be used to design practices.
4. Be realistic in your expectations. You probably play catch and wiffle ball with your child and may even watch games on TV. Many of our players have never played

catch before and have never seen a game played. Many of their parents are not 'baseball people' and may be new to our country and sports culture. You can't turn them into ballplayers in a couple hours a week. But you can send them away having had fun and having been active and wanting to keep playing. If they stick with it, they will get there.

5. Encourage your parents to play catch and wiffleball with their kids as much as possible. There is simply not enough time in practices at this level to develop skills significantly.
6. There is some excellent advice at <http://www.baseballpositive.com/tee-ball#realitiestball>. The technical skill advice is a little overwhelming, but the general advice is great.
 - a. Tee-ball is not baseball! Do not expect these games to look like baseball games. If we spend some time ensuring movement and fun the baseball will come.
 - b. Catching is extremely difficult if not developmentally impossible for many kids in this age group. Focus on throwing rather than catching: throw for distance; throw for accuracy, throw into a fence, ...
 - c. We want kids to leave practice and end the season wanting more.
7. By using tennis balls for batting practice multiple kids can be hitting simultaneously in one direction (e.g. spaced out along the foul line) with other kids shagging, without a risk of injury.
8. We should never be pitching batting practice to child with other kids standing around in the field. We work on hitting pitched balls on the side with one or two kids, at most, at a time.
9. It is up to coaches whether to provide (or get a volunteer to provide) a snack time during practices and games. Kids like snack. But the sessions are not long and snack can consume a lot of time.

A sample practice schedule:

0-10	Arrive and do some very simple, fun warmup: jumping jacks, somersaults, toe touching, silly walks, running in place, This is not a high school-style stretching session, but just some fun, dynamic, warmup
10-25	Skill stations (3): typically, a batting station, a throwing station and a fielding station. Five minutes each
25-35	Baserunning stations (2): For example, running to and through first; running from second and rounding third. Five minutes each
35-40	Transition, water, divide into two teams

40-55	Scrimmage: 6 v 6, 5 v 5, 4 v 4, whatever you have; no outfielders. Keep the scrimmage moving. If a child swings and misses three times, roll a ball out into the field and have them run. Bat through the order once. In subsequent innings, reverse or otherwise scramble the order
55-60	Baserunning relay race: Half the team starts at home and half at second. Each child runs one lap with a teammate starting when the runner hits their starting base. Each base should be touched. Use your judgment as to whether to call players back for missed bases. A non-competitive version would have each child running only half a lap before a teammate goes from the opposite starting base.
60	1-2-3 Amherst! Team Cheer.

Coaches should be creative in making fun practice plans. Play kickball once in a while!

Gameday:

1. We will play 'split-squad' games. Two teams will be paired at a site with two fields and will play two games simultaneously, with half of each team facing half of the other. Depending on numbers you may want to divide into three games. 4v4 and 5v5 is ideal.
 - a. There is a wide range of abilities in this division. It will be appropriate, sometimes, to divide your games up by age/ability so that the better players have a chance to play at a higher level. But this should not be done more than about half the time.
2. Everyone bats twice every inning. The order should be reversed or otherwise shuffled each inning.
3. All fielders will play the infield, even when we are 6 v 6—5 infielders and someone on the mound.
4. Coaches can declare the ball 'dead' at any time. Players should be taught to get the ball back to the 'pitcher' by running or throwing to stop play after a hit and attempting to get an out. Coaches should be aggressive in declaring the ball 'dead'. Some players will just keep running, knowing that the likelihood of getting tagged out is very small. This behavior is not sporting and is a bad habit. Some ideas: limit every hit to a single (or double); declare the ball dead when any field controls the ball; declare the ball dead when the ball gets to the pitchers mound; declare the ball dead when the ball gets to first base. Use your judgement, but in general having kids round the bases with the defense struggling to throw and catch is not productive.

5. A swing that strikes only the tee results in a 'foul ball'. Coaches may declare dribblers foul at their discretion. After three foul balls the coach should roll a ball into the field and instruct the batter to run to first as if the ball had been hit.
6. At the end of the game teams should run a relay race around the bases as described in the suggested practice schedule.
7. After the relay the teams should cheer each other, high-five, or otherwise acknowledge one another.
8. Finally, bring all players from both teams together for a 1-2-3 Amherst cheer.

Equipment:

Each team receives the following

1. 24 safety t-balls
2. Some tennis balls
3. At least two tees
4. At least one bat of suitable size and weight
5. 5 helmets
6. 1 set of throw down bases
7. 1 set of colored pinnies for games and scrimmages
8. First aid kit and ice packs

Some children will bring their own bats. Those bats become 'team bats' during practice and games and are to be shared with other players.

Fields:

The AA division will use the Mill River fields as well as other fields around town including Stanley St. and the ARHS softball diamond.

The Town of Amherst provides only minimal field maintenance for youth baseball. In return, by longstanding arrangement, we do not pay fees to the town for field usage. Unfortunately, we are not able to maintain fields other than the two at Mill River using our available volunteer time and equipment and at this point we have not been able to negotiate a fee arrangement that would ensure additional town maintenance. Every AA player will play on the Mill River fields at least half of the Saturdays and can look forward to increased access to those fields as they progress to the minors division.

After playing on the Mill River fields each team must rake/drag the dirt areas and replace the tarps. The kids actually like this. It's like sandbox play for them.

Rainouts and makeups:

Rescheduling practices and games is at the complete discretion of the coaches.

Additional notes:

Game play

- 4v4 is ideal. 5v5 is fine too. 3v3 can work, maybe with a parent helping field.
- Each inning, all kids bat twice.
- Most of the time, no outs (i.e. kids stay on the base no matter what) and only one base at a time.
- For the last batter of the inning, everyone can take more bases if desired.
- Use objective criteria for batting order - youngest to oldest, oldest to youngest next, then birthday date - negotiating batting orders with kids is no fun!
- Enlist other parents to help! Ask parents to be base coaches or get out in the field to help kids stand in the right position (at this age, a 1:2 or even 1:1 ratio is helpful, and lots of parents are willing to help, and just want to be asked what to do)

Practice

- Start each practice in a group and do something to build camaraderie
 - First two+ practices do names (attendance can be inconsistent)
 - Topics can be favorite animal, holiday, food, or character from a movie or book
- Simon-says with batting/throwing/catching positions is good for first few practices
- Pickle is a great warm up and teaches baserunning later in the season
 - Use cones so they don't run too wide
 - If they get tagged, have them do 5 push ups or jumping jacks
 - At the end, do elimination pickle and name a pickle king or queen
- Once warm, split into ~3 stations
 - Set up 2 tees, hit tennis balls, have other kids shag when not batting. Some tips:
 - Before putting the ball on the tee, do a practice swing. Then encourage them to swing faster (not harder). Then hit.
 - Most kids stand too close and too forward. Work on getting them in the right position and feet shoulder width apart.
 - Point to a small word or symbol on the ball and have them focus on it.
 - Throwing stations: knock helmets off buckets, throw balls through a hula hoop zip tied to fence, etc
 - Fielding - roll grounders and throw to 1st, pop ups, etc
 - Don't have the kids try to catch a thrown ball other than a soft pop up
- Relay races are great. Even split on home and second and match kids based on speed.
- Scrimmages can have a small number of coach pitches. Can also do this with a batting station.
- 1 hour is plenty.
- Do a team cheer at the end

- You may need to remind parents to stick around during practice to be available in the case their kid gets injured, or you need some help with behavioral management

Hitting:

- 1. The tee should be placed so that the players hit the ball 'out in front'. This means, paradoxically, that the tee should not be centered on home plate. Rather, it should be placed so that the ball is on top of the front middle of home. The players then take a natural stance and will strike the ball out in front.
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- 2. Many kids, when hitting off the tee, address the ball with the bat, then take a back swing and hitting swing in one motion. Try to gently discourage this. We want the kids to get set in a hitting position, as if there were a pitcher, and then swing through the teed up ball.
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- 3. That said, games are not the time for lots of hitting instruction with other kids waiting around. Give a quick tip and let them swing away.
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- 4. If a kid misses or 'fouls' three times, throw a ball out and tell them to run.
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Fielding:

- There are not going to be a lot of outs made, especially early in the season. Our fielding mantra at this level is 'go to the ball or go to a base'. Everyone should move on every hit ball and we can start to develop some sense of when to want the ball and when to cover a base.