



Chapter 3 from the Babe Ruth League Coaching Education and Certification Program offered by ASEP deals with providing for players' safety. Providing for safety and prevention of injuries are among your highest priorities as a coach. You might be a risk-taker in terms of your strategies on the field, but you don't want to be a risk-taker when it comes to providing safety for your players.

CHAPTER 3 - PROVIDING FOR PLAYERS' SAFETY

Game Plan for Safety:

You can't prevent all injuries from happening, but you can take preventive measures that give your players the best possible chance for injury-free participation. To help you create the best possible chance for injury-free participation:

- **Preseason Physical Examinations.** It is recommended that your players have a physical exam before participating to address the most likely areas of medical concern and identify youngsters at a high risk. As a coach, you should have your players' parents or guardians sign a participation agreement/release form to allow their children to be treated in case of emergency.
- **Physical Conditioning.** Players need to be, or get in, shape to play the game at the level expected. As the season progresses, players will attain higher levels of cardio-respiratory fitness (involving the body's ability to store and use oxygen and fuel efficiently to power muscle contractions). However, watch closely for signs of low levels of cardio-respiratory fitness, and don't let your athletes do too much until they're fit.

Muscular fitness encompasses strength, muscle endurance, power, speed, and flexibility. This type of fitness is affected by physical maturity as well as strength training and other types of training. Players who have greater muscular fitness are able to run faster and throw harder. They also sustain fewer muscular injuries.

Two other components of fitness and injury prevention are the warm-up and the cool-down. A dynamic warm-up that incorporates each muscle group and elevates the heart rate in preparation for strenuous activity is recommended. There are three stages of a proper pre-game or pre-practice warm-up:

- **General Warm-up** - can include a very light jog, jumping rope or any other light activity that raises the heart rate and increases blood flow to the muscles.
- **Functional Activities** - multi-joint movements in which the muscles and joints perform in a similar manner to how they will be used later on in the game or practice. Examples: body-weight squatting, lunging, lateral low walking, high-knee drills, power skips, grapevines and shuffles.
- **Sport Specific Movements** - batting and fielding practice, long toss and running the bases.

Equipment and Facilities Inspection:

Ensure that all players are outfitted with approved equipment that is properly fitted and that the venue for the game or practice is safe for players, coaches and spectators.

- **Make Sure Equipment Fits and Is Not Worn Out.** There are many youth baseball programs that have to deal with budget constraints. Not having enough money in the budget to purchase new equipment every year can lead to equipment being used much longer than it is functional. A helmet that is too large can cover a batter's eyes and prevent him or her from reacting to an inside pitch. Catcher's gear that is too large might shift and leave an area of the body exposed that shouldn't be. If the gear is too small, it might not cover all the body parts that it should. Sticking to a budget is important, but not at the expense of anyone's safety. Ask your parents to participate in a fundraising campaign or to make a small donation.
- **Use Appropriate Bats and Balls.** Make it a point to understand which bats and baseballs are appropriate for the age group you are coaching.
- **Introduce the Protective Cup.** A protective cup may be the most important piece of equipment. It protects the player from serious injury and instills a greater sense of confidence.
- **Designate an Area for Warming Up.** If teams are playing catch on the field before the game, they should play catch in the outfield grass with everyone throwing in the same direction. In addition, spectators should be sure not to set up their chairs or blankets directly behind the spot where a team is playing catch. It is imperative to find an open area to hit if there is no batting cage.
- **Pick Out a Safe Rooting Location.** Make sure your supporters pick out a safe area from which to root for the team. If they do not sit in the bleachers, make sure they are in an area that is less likely to be a target for foul balls and that is safe from any potential errant throws.
- **Assign a Coach or Parent to Bench Duty.** This person's responsibility will be to make sure the bench area is safe. The on-deck hitter should be required to wear a helmet and should be the only player other than the batter to have a bat in his or her hands. The next couple of players in the lineup should wear helmets, but they should be sitting on the bench with their teammates.
- **Walk the Field Before the Game.** Get a feel for any areas that might be dangerous. Look for bumpy ground, holes, large rocks, broken glass or anything else that might cause injury.
- **Keep Their Heads in the Game.** By nature, baseball is a game that features a substantial amount of downtime and standing around. It is imperative to impress upon your players the concept of a properly ready position and to keep them focused on the game.
- **Teach the Proper Fundamental Techniques.** Vision is the most important defense mechanism on the field. If the player can see the ball and the glove or can see the pitch with both eyes, he or she is more likely to catch or get out of the way of a ball that takes a bad hop or to get out of the way of an inside pitch.

Player Match-Ups and Inherent Risks:

Whenever possible, match players against opponents of similar size and physical maturity. Warn players of the inherent risks involved in playing baseball.

Proper Supervision and Record Keeping.

To ensure players' safety, you need to provide both general supervision and specific supervision. General supervision involves being immediately accessible to the activity and to be able to oversee the entire activity. You need to be alert to conditions that may be dangerous and ready to take action to protect your players. Specific supervision is direct supervision of an activity at practice. As a general rule, the more dangerous the activity, the more specific the supervision required. For further protection, keep records of your season plans, practice plans, and players' injuries.

Environmental Conditions:

Most problems caused by environmental factors are related to excessive heat or cold, though you should also consider other environmental factors such as severe weather and pollution.

- **Heat.** On hot, humid days, the body has difficulty cooling itself. Because the air is already saturated with water vapor (humidity), sweat doesn't evaporate as easily. To provide for players' safety in hot or humid conditions, take the following preventive measures:
 - Monitor weather conditions and adjust practices accordingly.
 - Acclimatize players to exercising in high heat and humidity.
 - Switch to light clothing.
 - Identify and monitor players who are prone to heat illness.
 - Make sure athletes replace water lost through sweat. Encourage players to drink plenty of water before, during and after practice.
 - Replenish electrolytes lost through sweat.
- **Cold.** To reduce the risk of cold-related illnesses, make sure players wear appropriate protective clothing and keep them active to maintain body heat.
- **Severe Weather.** This refers to a host of potential dangers, including lightning storms, tornadoes, hail and heavy rains. Lightning is of special concern because it can develop quickly and cause great harm or even kill. Safe places to take cover when lightning strikes are fully enclosed metal vehicles with the windows up, enclosed buildings, and low ground (under cover of bushes, if possible). Cancel practices and/or games when under a tornado watch or warning. If for some reason you are practicing and competing when a tornado is nearby, you should get inside a strong building, assuming a position in which you can use your arms to protect your head and neck. The keys to handling severe weather are caution and prudence.
- **Air Pollution** – Poor air quality and smog can present real dangers to your players. Both short- and long-term lung damage are possible from participating in unsafe air.

Responding to Players' Injuries

No matter how good and thorough your prevention program is, injuries may occur. When injuries do arise, chances are that you will be the one in charge.

- **Being Prepared.** Being prepared to provide basic emergency care involves three steps: being trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid, having an appropriated stocked first aid kit on hand at practices and games, and having an emergency plan.
- **CPR and First Aid Training** – It is recommended that all coaches receive CPR and first-aid training from a nationally recognized organization (American Heart Association, American Red Cross or the American Sport Education Program). Each league should have a well-stocked first aid kit.
- **Emergency Plan** – An emergency plan is the final step in preparing to take appropriate action for severe or serious injuries. The plan calls for three steps:
 - Survey the scene to make sure the area is safe for you and the injured athlete. Evaluate the injured player.
 - Call the appropriate medical personnel if appropriate.
 - Provide first aid.

Any coach who successfully passes the Babe Ruth League Coaching Education and Certification Program will receive a certification that is **valid for their entire coaching career with Babe Ruth League, Inc.** If you haven't already done so, please visit www.BabeRuthCoaching.org to gain your **lifetime certification!**