



Youth baseball and softball coaches must know many terms, rules and procedures. Chapter 7 from the Babe Ruth League Coaching Education and Certification Program offered by ASEP provides information on terminology, equipment, field size and markings, player positions and game procedures.

## CHAPTER 7 - RULES AND EQUIPMENT

### Terms to Know:

Baseball and softball have their own vocabulary. As a coach, you should be familiar with the common terms to make your job easier, such as appeal, balk, base, ball, bunt, error, force play, infield fly, pitch, sacrifice, tag, wild pitch, just to name a few. For a complete definition of terms, please see Official Baseball Rule 2.00.

### Field:

Baseball and softball are played on a diamond-shaped field; home plate and first, second and third bases form the corners. Foul lines run from home to first base and home to third base and extend beyond those bases to the outfield fence. The area inside the foul lines, including the lines, is fair territory; anything outside the lines is foul. Fair territory around the base portion of the field is called the infield. Fair territory beyond the infield cutout is called the outfield.

### Equipment:

You're probably aware of most standard pieces of equipment: bases, balls, bats, gloves, helmets, and other appropriate apparel. But do you know how to tell when this equipment meets proper specifications and is in good repair? Here are some tips:

- **Balls.** The local league must use a baseball stamped as an Official Babe Ruth League baseball. The leagues may select from the following baseballs to be used in their local league games. A softer baseball may be used for Cal Ripken Baseball, Rookie, and T-Ball local league play. The official baseballs include deBeer, Diamond, J.P. Sports, MacGregor, Nike, Pro-Nine, Rawlings, Trump, Wilson and Worth. However, Rawlings is the only official tournament baseball and softball to be used for all district, state, regional and World Series competitions, as well as for the Softball National Invitational Tournaments.
- **Bats.** The bat is divided into three parts: the knob, the handle, and the barrel. Choosing a bat is based on a player's personal preference as long as the bat conforms to the dimensions described in Official Baseball Rule 1.10. For the Cal Ripken and Softball 12U Divisions, note the following exceptions: the bat shall not be more than 33 inches in length, and a bat barrel must not be in excess of 2 ¼ inches.

- **Gloves.** No piece of equipment will become more prized to your players than their gloves. Help your players select properly fitting gloves. It's better to start with a smaller glove than an oversized one. A mitt that has a huge pocket and is much bigger than a youngster's hand will be hard to control and can hinder skill development.
  - The choice of what glove to use is a personal one. However, certain circumstances dictate what class or model of glove a player should consider. Middle infielders generally look for smaller gloves so they can more easily make the transition from catching to throwing. Third basemen, who rely more on reflexes and have to handle balls that are hit hard and travel a short distance, may look for something that is a little larger, but still provides for a relatively easy transition. Pitchers may want the protection of a larger glove or the easy transition provided by a smaller glove. Outfielders generally look for something larger so they can gain a little extra reach when running down a ball in the gap or trying to take away a home run. Catchers and first basemen have gloves specifically designed for their positions.
  - At any level, it is important for a player to find a glove that he or she is comfortable with, regardless of the size. At that point, through trial and error, the player should be able to figure out if he or she can successfully perform all of the skills necessitated by his or her position. If that is not the case, then maybe the player should look for a bigger or smaller glove that is more comfortable.
  - For the younger players, finding a glove that they consistently can catch with is the top priority. Players at the younger ages really should not specialize anyway. They should be learning the game and finding out what positions they like best by trying all of them.
  - For the absolute youngest players - those players looking for their first gloves - many options exist. Whatever the choice, we think that players should stay away from the vinyl or plastic gloves. These gloves don't really give players the feel for catching the ball like leather gloves, and they often are either very hard to squeeze, don't squeeze at all, or squeeze so much that the glove becomes deformed. For the smaller and younger players, look for something that their hand fits snugly in and that they can squeeze.
  - As players get older, many more glove options are available - and the prices seem to rise. If you as a parent want to buy your child a top-grain leather glove and don't have a problem making that financial commitment, we would never tell you not to do that. However, keep in mind that these gloves can be costly and that the players are going to outgrow them.
  - We cannot stress enough that it is important for players to be comfortable with their gloves and to be able to use the gloves effectively.
- **Breaking In a Glove.** Breaking in a glove can be a tedious, time-consuming process.
  - The one cardinal rule to breaking in a glove that should not be compromised is to never let someone else put his or her hand in the glove. As a parent or coach, you might be tempted to take a player's new glove and jam your hand in it to loosen it up and start to alleviate some of the stiffness. Don't do it! Once your handprint is in there and once the palm is stretched out, your little player's hand will never feel absolutely right inside the glove.
  - Once you have oiled the glove thoroughly, it is time to start the real breaking-in process. Playing a simple game of catch is the best way to have the glove start to take shape and fit your hand. The ball should be caught in the pocket, not the webbing. The pocket is really the palm of the glove. Many times kids catch the ball in their webbing. When breaking in a glove, catching the ball in the webbing will not allow the pocket to form. The pocket is the stiffest part of the glove. It needs to be shaped to fit your hand and the ball.
  - Another trick is to oil the glove up and wear it when sitting around the house watching television. Take a ball and pound it into the pocket over and over to help shape that part of the glove.

### **Additional Equipment:**

Your players must wear helmets at practice and in games while on deck, at bat, running the bases, and when in the coach's box. Bat boys and girls must also wear helmets while outside of the dugouts in both local league and tournament play. Such headgear should properly fit the player wearing it. It must cover the top of the head and have extended earflaps that cover both ears.

Shoes with metal cleats or spikes are not permitted to be worn by any player, coach, or manager in the Cal Ripken and all Babe Ruth Softball divisions. Metal cleats are acceptable in the Babe Ruth 13-15 and 16-18 baseball divisions.

Some positions require special equipment. Catchers need a helmet that covers the ears and has a mask strapped to it or a hockey goalie-style mask. The helmet and mask should fit snugly enough so the player can move his or her head up and down and from side to side without having parts of the helmet or mask obstruct vision. The throat area must be protected – either with a throat guard or by a mask that has a throat extension. For younger catchers, the chest protector should have a flap that covers the groin/upper thigh area. Older players usually prefer a shorter chest protector that extends to the waist and provides more mobility. However, this is only safe for experienced catchers who, of course, are wearing a protective cup. All catchers, regardless of which chest protector they prefer, must wear a protective cup. Catchers always wear shin guards that are hooked on the outside of the leg. The shin guards should cover as much of the top part of the foot as possible without restricting movement.

Jewelry is prohibited. Medical alert and religious bracelets or necklaces are not considered jewelry. If worn, they must be taped to the body so as to remain visible.

### **Player Positions:**

Baseball and softball are played with nine players in the field on defense. The busiest of the defensive players are the pitcher and catcher, known as the battery. Infielders, who handle ground balls and pop-ups, include the first baseman, second baseman, shortstop and third baseman. The outfielders are the right fielder, center fielder and left fielder. One of your biggest coaching decisions involves answering the question, *who should play which position?* Here are some tips to help you choose wisely:

- Set your lineup to maximize your players' strengths and interests. At the youngest ages, it is best to expose players to all positions, but never force a player to play a position he or she doesn't want to play. As players get older, it still is in their best interest to learn as many positions as possible, but specialization will naturally begin to occur.
- Play your best defensive players up the middle as catchers, middle infielders (second base and shortstop) and in center field.

The following specific suggestions should help you determine where on the field each player should play:

- **Pitcher.** Arm strength and velocity is an indication that a player may make a successful pitcher. A solid mental and emotional makeup will also make a pitcher effective.
- **Catcher.** Good catchers are rugged individuals. If they are not big and strong, they should be tough. The position requires strength, endurance, and exceptional hand-eye coordination. The catcher must be able to receive pitches, throw effectively, and communicate to the rest of the team, so an overall understanding of the game is essential.
- **First Base.** The ability to catch all types of thrown balls is essential for a first baseman. The first baseman should be able to catch most, if not all, types of thrown balls, be agile enough to perform the footwork necessary to play the position correctly, and be able to field routine ground balls consistently. The first baseman makes more unusual plays than a player in any other position.

- **Second Base.** Whether big or small, a second baseman must have a sure pair of hands to field ground balls, pop flies and thrown balls. In addition, a second baseman must be able to foresee fielding situations and act instantly.
- **Third Base.** The third baseman must possess agility, good hands, and quick reflexes. This player must be able to come in fast on the ball and throw accurately while on the run. He or she must be able to make off-balance throws and bare-handed pickups on bunts and slowly hit balls. Good reflexes and fearlessness are two traits that most good third basemen possess.
- **Shortstop.** A shortstop often is the team's best overall athlete. The player must be alert, be able to start and stop quickly, possess a sure pair of hands and, above all, have the strongest arm of any infielder. The shortstop will be required to make more tough plays than any other player on the field.
- **Left field.** The left fielder can have less speed and a weaker arm than any other outfielder because many of the throws do not cover a great distance. This player must still be alert, have a strong enough arm to get the ball to the plate, and be a good fielder of ground balls.
- **Center fielder.** This player is the fastest of the outfielders. A strong arm helps, but it is now always essential if the player is fast and can get rid of the ball quickly while still making an accurate throw. The center fielder covers more territory than any other player and will make the greatest percentage of outfield put-outs.
- **Right field.** The right fielder should have a strong, accurate throwing arm. This player backs up first base on many plays. The right fielder also backs up second base on all balls hit right at the second baseman and when balls that are hit to the left side of the diamond result in a throw to second.

### **Game Procedures and Rules:**

Knowledge of the basic rules and procedures of Babe Ruth League, Inc. will ensure that the game runs smoothly. The baseball divisions play under rules as close to Official Baseball Rules as possible. However, because of the age of the participants, certain special rules are necessary within each division. Babe Ruth Softball Rules and Regulations provide a framework under which local leagues operate with simplicity and democracy. All rules and regulations of Babe Ruth Softball were determined after much study and research by a committee of a cross section of people. For a complete listing and definition of all rules and procedures, please refer to the 2008 Babe Ruth League, Inc. Baseball Rules and Regulations and the 2008 Babe Ruth Softball Rules and Regulations.

### **Umpires:**

Babe Ruth League, Inc. created the National Umpires Association to assist local leagues affiliated with the program in improving the officiating in their games. We recommend using National Umpires Association members for local Cal Ripken and Babe Ruth league games.

Umpires are officials who enforce the rules of the game. There are usually two umpires - one at home plate and another positioned according to the number of base runners and bases they occupy. Sometimes there will be only a home plate umpire who is responsible for balls and strikes, as well as all calls on the bases. Before the game, the home plate umpire meets with both coaches to exchange their lineups. Umpires decide whether a pitch is a ball or strike, a hit is fair or foul, and a runner is safe or out. The home plate umpire is the ultimate decision maker on any ruling. From time to time an umpire will make a mistake. How you react when you think an umpire has erred is important. Be a good role model for your players. If you think a rule was not properly enforced, calmly call a time out and discuss it with the umpire. Don't mutter about the call in the dugout or interrupt the game by arguing. Remember, you are not allowed to contest judgment calls (ball/strike, safe/out, fair/foul), only rule interpretations.

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](http://www.BabeRuthCoaching.org) to gain your *lifetime certification!*