

MSBL T-Ball Program Overview

Eligibility

- Program is offered to Mountainside children ages Pre-K through Kindergarten.
- Children must be age 4 by the start of the season, as dictated by league wide insurance policy.

Season Goals

- 1) Introduction of Basic Skills
 - Ensure kids learn the fundamental skills of baseball.
- 2) Develop teamwork
 - Encourage cooperative play and teamwork.
- 3) Foster a love for the game
 - Fun should be the top priority of every gameday.
- 4) Build confidence
 - Help each child build confidence in their abilities.

Roster Construction

- Team rosters should be as small as can be supported by volunteers and field availability.
- Ideally teams of 6-7 are preferred as to limit the number of children who are not playing the infield on defense (in t-ball, 99% of the action is in the infield)
 - If roster sizes are larger than 8, coaches are always encouraged to rotate children from the infield to the outfield during defensive half innings and continue to work on skills/play games in the outfield (i.e., play a pop up catching game with groups of 3 kids at a time with a tennis ball or whiffle ball, count points for the number catches or times it hits their mitt).
- Team Rosters should strive to have an equal number of 4-, 5-, and 6-year-olds. A team filled of only 4-year-olds will be a safety concern and very difficult to keep the clinic/gameplay on track.
- At the t-ball level, it is ok to try to pair up children who are friends on the same team where possible. Many younger children will feel more confident and happier if they have at least 1 friend on the team.

Program Structure (skills, games, gameplay)

- Weekly recommendation is to do 45 minutes of clinic (skills/games) as a team followed by 45 minutes of gameplay with opponent.

Clinic Portion (45 min)

- Each week we will break players into small groups (5 players per station) to work on the following techniques, while also pairing games with the skill acquisition.

Fielding ground balls

Technical:

- alligator, and glove foot forward
- alligator, bring ball to Ear, footwork to first throw to coach/Target

Fun:

- non-elimination fielding 'knockout' (players circle around the coach while he randomly throws ground balls to each player)
- [Defend the castle game](#) – THIS IS A GOOD ONE!

Hitting

Technical:

- Setup, stance, swing mechanics that work for each kid to successfully and consistently make contact.
- If child is advanced, can encourage soft tossing into a net/fence as well.

Fun:

- Tee work, 1 tee others field the whiffle ball (or t-ball) w/ helmets on
 - Batter hits off tee until they get 5 hits or someone catches ball.
- Can advance to front toss or overhand pitch from coach on a knee or sitting on a bucket

Baserunning

Technical:

- Run through first and stop 5 feet past
- Round first, hit inside corner, Round all bases
- Take direction from coach, Round first go to second on command or comeback

Fun:

- Time their baserunning
- Team vs. team relay races (a great way to end the day)
 - One team starts at home, other at second base.
 - Ensure they touch all bases and hand baseball off to their teammate until all have raced.

Catching Pop ups

Technical:

- Self-thrown t-balls w/ helmet on or with whiffle or tennis balls
- Coach thrown t-balls w/helmet on or with whiffle or tennis balls
- "Fingers up" catching technique to avoid being hit in face
- Use 2 hands to secure ball

Fun:

- Catching games where points are given for catches (3) or touches (1)
- Catching games where players line up and for every catch made, player takes 3 steps backward.

Throwing

Technical:

- bring ball to Ear, footwork to first throw to coach/Target

- repeating the aim, step, and throw process

Fun:

- aim for targets on the field, see who can get closest
- who can throw the farthest on the field

Gameplay Portion (45 min)

- each team goes through lineup once and switch sides
- encourage all plays to be made at first base
- every batter advances only to first after each hit, want them to get used to running base to base
- even if batter is out at first, runner stays on base for base running practice
- try to keep the game moving as best as you can
- rotate your defense to all infield positions (no catcher)
- ensure your first baseman is safe/paying attention as every play will end with a t-ball being thrown in their direction

Coaching Tips:

- Positive reinforcement
 - Encourage and praise efforts
- Keep it Fun!
 - Name of the game
- Be Patient
 - Many younger children will have difficulty staying on task, but progress will be made week to week, even if slow.
- Safety First
 - Adequate supervision and safe equipment.
 - Do not let them pick up their bats until it is their turn to hit.
 - A volunteer in the dugout always during gameplay is a good idea.
- Parental involvement
 - Encourage parents to practice with their kids at home
 - Keep open communication with parents about their child's participation and progress.