

MARTINGROVE BASEBALL COACHING MANUAL 2019

The Martingrove Baseball League would never be celebrating its 61st anniversary this year if it were not for coaches like you! As a not-for-profit organization, the MBL owes its success and longevity to all those individuals who have given back to the community by volunteering their time and their teaching. So before we go any further...thank you.

This MBL Coaching Manual has been developed to help you and every one of your team's players have a fun and rewarding summer of baseball. Here are the points we will cover:

The MBL Coaching Objectives

The Coaching Staff

Pre-Season Activities

Practices

Game Days

Code of Conduct

Player Safety

I. MBL COACHING OBJECTIVES

The Green Bay Packer's legendary coach, Vince Lombardi, once declared that "winning isn't everything — it's the only thing". Well, that philosophy may hold true for the NFL, the NHL, and the NBA but it certainly does not apply to the MBL House League Division. On the contrary, the MBL believes that there are far more important objectives for your team's season than how many games they can win by the end of it. Year-end achievements should be measured not by batting averages or championship trophies but rather by each individual's:

- Increased self-confidence and self-esteem
- Improved social and communication skills
- Better appreciation of fair play and sportsmanlike conduct
- Learning how to win with grace and lose with dignity
- Development of new friends
- Personal growth within a team environment
- Improvement in his/her baseball skills and having a better understanding of the game
- Having had a fun-tastic summer
- Desire to come back to the MBL next year

Young people normally become more competitive as they grow so let their desire to win occur naturally. Putting too much emphasis on winning at this level detracts from the MBL's overall objectives and creates unnecessary stress for the players.

As you instruct and supervise the players, it is paramount that your actions are always positive and encouraging and that you preserve the natural enthusiasm and excitement these kids have in playing on a baseball team. Congratulate the good hustle as much as the clutch hit, applaud the great try as much as the big catch.

All of us have probably had that one teacher or that one coach in our youth that we will always remember for the positive influence he or she has had on our lives: that teacher or coach who challenged us, motivated us, rewarded us and made learning fun. MBL coaches should always strive to be that person for these young boys and girls.

II. THE COACHING STAFF

Each team has a head coach who will be responsible for the total operation of his/her team: teaching the skills and strategies of baseball; being the primary parental and league contact; ensuring player safety; organizing practices and much more. Each manager should have at least 2 assistant coaches. These individuals are invaluable for practices (enabling the team to split into smaller, supervised groups), games (as a base or bench coach), or substituting for the manager if he or she is not available on game day. Before the season begins you should have an in-depth meeting with your coaches to ensure that you are all in agreement with regards to the coaching philosophy and methods of instruction for the team. Discrepancies in coaching styles and attitudes can be very confusing to young players and disruptive to your team.

III. PRE-SEASON ACTIVITIES

I. Draft Day

'Draft Day' is a critical event for the coaching staff. It is on this day each spring that all registered players will arrive at a pre-determined ball diamond or gym and be evaluated on their baseball skills. Based on the results of these player assessments, the managers will meet and form the teams for the forthcoming season. In fairness to everyone involved with the MBL and to best ensure a competitive league, our objective of team parity will be strictly enforced as teams are developed.

2. Initial Player/Parent Contact

As soon as your team's players have been determined you should make an introductory phone call to each of them and their parents and welcome them to your team. It's a good idea at this time to request the parents' e-mail address for future personal communication and distribution of team and league information.

3. Introductory Letter

It is highly recommended that you prepare and distribute an introductory letter to all players and their parents. This document should cover topics such as:

- Your baseball and coaching background (and those of your coaches)
- Your coaching philosophy
- Your objectives for the season
- Your expectations of the players
- The Code of Conduct for players and parents

In 2019 all coaches are now using the **TeamSnap** sports management app. This is a great tool for each coach, player and parent to see the dates, times and locations for all games and practices for the year, indicate their availability for each, communicate with each other via team emails, view maps of all locations, and more. The martingrove.ca website is also a great place to find schedules, maps, rules, etc. Our site also has a 'How to Use TeamSnap' section that will help everyone get started with the system.

4. Meeting the Parents

One of the most beneficial of pre-season activities is to set up a group meeting with the parents of your players. At this informal get-together you can review the topics of your introductory letter and have a Q & A period. This is a great time for the parents to get to know you and each other. It is also a good time to find out which parents may be able to assist in the coaching (when necessary) or keep score of the games.

This meeting will go a long way in establishing a positive relationship with the parents and is far more effective than having individual drop-and-dash conversations at the first practice. You can invite the parents to your home or talk with an MBL administrator for an alternate venue.

5. Team Uniforms, Equipment and First Aid Kits

Before your first practice, the MBL will provide you with your team's uniforms, bats, balls, catcher's gear and first aid kits. Players are responsible for their own gloves and batting helmets. Note that metal-cleated shoes are not permitted at this level.

6. First Practice

Your first practice sets the tone for the entire season so give a lot of time and thought in preparing the agenda. More on this next.

IV. PRACTICES

More than the scheduled games practices are where the players really learn the game. These are where skills are developed and the fundamentals and strategies of baseball are explained. Practices are also where the kids should really have fun, in some ways even more fun than actual games! Why? Because, as we all know, there are times during every baseball game that a player has to wait — wait for his or her turn to bat, wait for a ball to be hit to them or wait for their pitcher to finally throw a strike! And we all know that kids don't like to wait for anything! So a properly planned and executed practice can be a time when they don't (and shouldn't!) have to wait too long to learn and have fun!

Here are some of the fundamentals for a successful practice:

The First Practice

As many young players are nervous about performing at his or her first practice and/or meeting so many new people at one time, you should put them at ease as soon as they reach the diamond. Coaches should immediately introduce themselves and thank them for joining the team. We strongly recommend that all players (and coaches!) wear large name tags (a black marker on masking tape will do) for the first few practices. It is not easy to remember every player's name and it doesn't exactly boost a player's self-confidence if a coach keeps asking, "I'm sorry, what was your name again?"

Next, you might want to re-enforce some of the most important parts of your pre-season letter: what the team's objectives are for the season, the player's expected code of conduct, safety measures to be obeyed, and what you expect of the players over the season. Make this speech as short and as impactful as possible because the sooner you get the kids playing together the better. Next, inform them of the agenda for the rest of the day's practice and get started.

Pre-Plan Your Practices and Stay on Schedule

Your practices should always be pre-planned, divided by periods of time and followed as closely as possible. Your team has only one practice per week so every minute counts (and it's amazing how fast that practice time goes!). Your coaching staff should all be aware of the agenda and objectives for each practice in advance of the practice day. A few samples of a practice session are included in this manual.

Announce the Practice Agenda to the Players

As soon as all the players have arrived for a practice, let the team know what they will be learning and practicing that day. This will immediately give your practice structure and further establish you as an organized leader.

Warming up (and Cooling Down)

Pre-practice (and game) warm ups are essential in reducing the chances of injuries as well as increasing a player's performance. Before all practices (and games), players should:

-Warm up their arms with gradually increased throwing intensity and distance. This can be done as players arrive and pair off. -Perform supervised stretching exercises

-Build from easy to more intense exercises and sprints

Cool downs after exercise are key to promote physical recovery, returning the body to the pre-activity level. Have the players perform 10 minutes of easy stretching and a light jog after a practice session (and a game).

Break the Team into Smaller Groups

It is important that you keep the kids active and involved so your practice plan should have as many sub-groups as possible. For example, one coach can work on infield play with four players,

another coach can work with a small group in the outfield and another coach can spend time with the pitchers or individuals on a batting tee. If you need additional help at practices you can always try to enlist a parent or two from time to time! Even during batting practice you don't need 12 players scattered around the field waiting for a ball to be hit to them. Instead, have enough players in the field - 6 will do - and the remainder of the team can be working with the coaches on other things on the sidelines or bullpen. Remember to rotate the players on the field during batting practice with each new batter.

Minimize Instruction.. .Maximize Fun!

All talk and no action will tax the attention span of many young players. As well, the chances are that too much information in a short period of time may not be retained. We all know that it is impossible to teach any young person everything they need to know about baseball in one summer (or even 10 summers!). This is why pre-planning your practice sessions is so critical. Based on their collective level of play, consider exactly what your team needs to practice and learn each week. Then determine how much time you should allow for each area. Keep your instructions short and concise and limit the subject matter that you are going to cover at any given practice and then.../let them practice! Remember: "You hear, you forget. You see, you remember. You do, you understand"

Keep Practicing the Important Things

As is true of all levels of baseball, it is important that the players spend most of their time practicing the essential fundamentals of the game: fielding ground balls, making accurate throws, catching fly balls and batting. Introduce new elements of the game each week but have them keep practicing the basics every week.

Players Need to Learn All the Positions

In the MBL House Leagues each player rotates to a different position each inning during a game (except for the pitching and catching positions). Therefore, your early practices should cover the basic fundamentals of all the outfield and infield positions.

Individual Attention

All young players want to get better and gain new skills so be sure to challenge all your players at an appropriate level to foster individual improvement. This will require having some players focus on different skills than others during a practice.

Wrap-Up

After the cool down, gather the players for a positive recap of the practice and remind them of future games, practices or other team events coming up.

Clean-up

After every practice (and game) ensure your players have cleaned up any litter left in the dugout or field area.

V. Game Day

All players should arrive at the park 30 minutes before game time to ensure that everyone has warmed up properly and you have had your pre-game chat with the team. This pre-game meeting should simply be to encourage your team to work hard, hustle, try their best and support each other. End the meeting with a team cheer (e.g. "1-2-3-MARLINS!").

After a game starts it is always best for the coaches (and parents!) to refrain from making too many demands on a player's performance. Hearing shouts of advice from the coach or from the stands like "C'mon, Johnny, swing earlier!", or "You gotta throw strikes, Frankie!" will seldom help a young player play better. While instructions may have to be given to individuals during the game, it is best to let the kids just play the game. You can review mistakes and further develop a player's abilities at practices.

Other things you should remember for game day are:

- The home team manager/coach is responsible for chalking the base paths, securing the bases and preparing the pitcher's mound. The bags and chalking machine can be found in the lock boxes at all fields. Make sure, too, that all litter on the field or in the dugouts is discarded

- The home team will supply 2 new baseballs to the home plate umpire

- It's best to prepare the team's batting order and fielding rotation plans before the game and display them in the dugout. This will allow the players to always know 'who's up next' and what position they will play the next inning. This will help avoid confusion on the bench and keep the game moving. Make sure that your batting order changes each game and is fair to all players (e.g. if a player batted last in this game, bat him or her first in the next). While it may not be to your team's advantage, what a boost it will be to your poorest hitter's self-confidence when you put him or her in the clean-up slot!

- Hopefully by this time you have enlisted a parent or two to score the games. Not all parents are available for all games so it's best to have a few volunteers. Scoring can be kept very simple: just ask them to account for the number of outs per inning and the number of runs scored (for both teams).

- Always encourage your players throughout the game and make sure to give praise whenever it's due — whether it's the game-tying triple or just great hustle on a routine ground ball. Urge your players to support and cheer on their teammates during the game as well.

- As a coach, the attention of the players and parents will often be on you during a game. Therefore, be aware of your actions and keep any frustrations in check. Shaking you head after an error or kicking the dirt after a strike out will not endear you to the parents nor exemplify the role model for the kids that you want to be. Keep as positive and supportive as possible no matter the situation.

- Have a post-game re-cap away from the dugout! You won't get the team's attention if they're roaming around collecting their gear from the bench and talking to their parents through the fence. Take them out to the short outfield, get them in a circle and take a few minutes (and only a few!) to congratulate them on their game (win or lose). You should mention a few things that the team did well, remind them of next week's practice or photo day or of anything else they

need to know, and send them on their way with a team cheer. Be sure to let the parents know before the first game of the season that these post-game meetings are important and will be short.

VI. CODE OF CONDUCT

Our Code of Conduct represents the MBL's demand for good sportsmanship and should be strictly enforced by the coaching staff. More often than not good sportsmanship must be taught as many young players pick up bad habits from pro sports where trash talking, ball spiking and other self-indulgent actions have become the norm. Set the example by applauding an opponent's good play.

The players' Code of Conduct, also included in the MBL Rules Manual, is as follows:

- Players will not, in anger or frustration, throw their bat, helmet or glove
- Players will not use foul language at any time
- Players will not protest or ridicule an umpire's decision
- Players will not make any negative comments about the opposing team or its players
- Players will not intentionally run into an opponent to avoid being out. On any close plays on the bases or at the plate, a runner must slide or will be deemed automatically out by the umpire

Make sure that the code of conduct is included in your initial letter or document to the parents and players, and that you review this again at your first practice and game.

VII. PLAYER SAFETY

Needless to say that when it comes to any player in the MBL, safety comes first. Complete first aid kits should be readily available at all practices and games. All coaches must review the MBL's 'First Aid on the Field' document which provides information on immediate treatments to the most frequent types of baseball injuries. Be sure to instruct (and remind as necessary) the players on when and where to swing bats and throw balls during pre-game warm ups and at practices.

Also please refer to our player health section of our website for good tips on injury prevention and treatment.