



Continuing the Little League tradition of making it "safer for the kids."

Coaches' Concerns

Why Teach the Teachers?

Don't need training? Read this interview before you decide

(Following is an ASAP interview with Al Herback and Al Price, of the Official Little League Education Program.)

Why should coaches have training on fundamentals?

Coaches and managers are the key individuals in Little League. They are on the field hundreds of hours during the season, during practices and games and are ultimately responsible for providing a safe and supportive environment to learn and play. It is important they know how to organize the practice and drills in a way that provides each player with an effective, safe way to learn and improve.

A simple example: when players first learn how to catch fly balls, coaches should start by teaching technique without a ball in play, then introduce a whiffle or tennis ball and soft toss the ball from a short distance. As the player gains confidence, slowly move them back and toss the ball a little higher.

Many coaches start out by hitting fly balls from an unsafe distance which may cause the players to fear being hit. Baseball, as much as we think of it as a team sport, is also an individual sport. All players are evaluated individually with batting averages, fielding percentages, stolen bases, runs scored, etc. Fundamental skills taught by the manager and coach are essential to prepare players to face a pitcher, field a ground ball, or catch a fly ball.

What skills should be taught? How often should coaches refresh their skills?

Teaching baseball/softball skills is like teaching in school.

You need to plan the curriculum in a logical sequence while focusing on teaching the skills that are appropriate for the age, level and experience of the player.

How will training help their children?

Players have fun when they know they are improving and feel successful. The best way for players to improve is to receive excellent instruction from their coach and then, during practice and at home, work on improving their skills. As you know, an excellent way to get the parents, coaches and players on the same page is to provide them with matching instructional resources.

Do players need yearly refreshers?

Yearly refreshers are a must for all players, whether it be Little League or Major League. Why do you think the Major Leagues have spring training? To work on the basic skills of the game.

Do experienced coaches need training too?

Al and I believe there is always something to learn when it comes to baseball instruction. Sometimes experienced



Train Coaches for a Better League

TRAINING (Continued From The Front Page)

coaches make the mistake of doing things the way they were taught as young players. This isn't always the best approach for teaching skills or running effective practices. Al and I are always impressed when adults that obviously played at an excellent baseball level show up at our clinics. Although they can play the game, they still need help developing the skills needed to coach young players.

Can anyone be a good coach?

Al and I believe that a good coach is kind, caring, fun to be around, conscious about the safety of his players on the field and loves to help players develop their skills. If this is what they bring to Little League as a volunteer coach, they have everything they need to make a difference for the players they work with. We often close our clinics with a little poem to remind coaches about the ideal approach for Little League ... and to keep things in perspective.

*50 years from now it won't matter who struck out,
who dropped the fly ball, who hit the homerun, or how
many wins and losses your Little League team had.
But, the world could be different if you were impor-
tant in a little child's life, your own or someone else's.*

How do you reinforce the Little League philosophy of putting player development and having fun ahead of winning?

If you set your priority for the year to win, chances are you are going to lose. Why? It takes a lot of hard work and skilled players to win a championship. Does that mean if my team finished fourth that we are losers? Not a chance! If you learned, competed, respected each other as individuals and most importantly, realize there is always next year. Always remember that if you have a team that has worked hard on the fundamental skills, along with focusing on fun, you have a good chance of being successful even if you didn't actually win.

Turn-over is a major issue for most leagues. How will training help new coaches return next season and encourage players to continue playing?

If a coach teaches his players the fundamentals, and introduces fun games and competitions at well planned practices, they will get tremendous support from parents, positive feedback from their players and most likely return next season to continue building on the experience. Al and I believe, and research backs up, that if a player has a positive and supportive coach that works hard to improve their skills, win or lose, they will more likely continue playing the game.

How do you suggest coaches relate to players to get them to accept the training and improve their skills?

This is one of the biggest challenges coaches face. Some players seem to initially lack the motivation or may bring behavior problems to practices and games. Every player is unique with unique needs, and there is no one way to get players to come around. Start with the basics of fair and attainable expectations for players and parents and share what they can expect from you as coach. This will give you a solid foundation to work from for the year. Then, be an excellent role model for the players during games and practices. Most players will respond in a kind and acceptable manner. One thing to remember, not all players want to become ball players. Just remember to be fair and to give all the players the opportunity to learn.

Does a player's age determine what you can teach them? How do you approach the behavioral issues?

Every player brings a profile that coaches need to be aware of. Many factors impact their readiness to learn and their ability to improve their skills: experience, confidence, strength, coordination, fear, motivation, etc. Many of these factors determine their attitudes and behaviors. There is a completely different approach needed when working with a group of 5-6 year olds versus a group of 11-12 year olds all-stars. Their one common expectation is to have fun!

Do you think parents would support a budget that provided training and resources to their son's/daughter's coach?

Everywhere we travel we ask this question of parents and volunteer coaches. For parents, having a good coach is their number one concern. Most parents feel training coaches and managers is a must and should be supported with whatever part of the budget is necessary.

Al and Al are the authors of the Little League Official Education Program for Coaches and Managers. The program was implemented three years ago and in the words of Steve Keener, president of Little League Baseball, Inc., "The strength of the Little League program is the adult volunteer and I can remember back when I played Little League. The person that had the most influence on my experience was my coach and it was a very positive experience. That's why I'm really delighted that Little League Baseball has taken the step to create the Education Program for managers and coaches and to welcome Al and Al into the Little League family." For more information about this training, you can contact Nick Caringi at Little League Headquarters at 570-326-1921.

Ethics class for players' parents?

A youth athletic league in West Palm Beach, disgusted by recurring outbreaks of taunts, shouts and scuffles, has arrived at a solution: mandatory enrollment in a class on sportsmanship.

Not for the players. This hourlong "ethics" course is for their parents.

Adults, including some coaches, have been the offenders, according to a story reported by The Associated Press.

After Jan. 1, the Jupiter-Tequesta Athletic Association will admit a child to its sports programs only after an adult in the household takes the training and signs a pledge to uphold an 11-point code of ethics. It begins, "I will encourage good sportsmanship by demonstrating positive support for all players, coaches, and officials at every game, practice or other youth sports event."

It isn't especially fair to people of good conduct to have to endure lectures on the obvious. Yet the alternative of sharing spectator space with the untutored must be even more punitive. We feel assured that it took much insufferable parental behavior to prompt the league officials to impose such a requirement on all 6,000 participants.

Adults ought to know how to act when they're cheering their children from the sidelines. Even those new to the

Gary Burrmann submitted this article as an example of the web sites he recommended recently:

"Recommend Web sites: www.asep.com and www.humankinetics.com. Both sites are great for information on how to coach and how to educate coaches and parents to be responsible in youth sports."

**Gary Burrmann, district safety officer
Florida District IV**

experience could consult the Golden Rule or, in a more contemporary vein, Robert Fulghum's "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten" as their guide.

Nowadays, though, a spectator needn't wonder why a particular youth on the soccer field earns a red

card for hurling oaths and thrusting elbows at his opponent: The culprits' parents in the stands demonstrate the family code by aiming dark threats and expletives at the teenage referee who calls the foul.

A youth sports coach we know has encountered an occasional player he perceives as having a petulant attitude until the coach also comes to know the child's parent, after which he concludes that the better temperament belongs to the youngster. This coach confesses that when he has the option of choosing a team, he'll pass over an able player who's known to be burdened with a troublesome parent.

The sins of the father, quite literally, are visited upon the son. Teachers often lay blame on parents for the rampant misbehavior of their children in school. Youth sports illustrate how much worse the problem might be if those same parents imposed their boorish presence in the classroom as they do at the ballpark.

'How can you protect vulnerable hearts?'

Q: "I saw a program recently about Little League players being vulnerable to chest injuries while playing (especially while up to bat). The program showed a device that can be worn, undetected, under the jersey. It's a small chest protector and only covers the area above the heart. I can't seem to find one anywhere and no one seems to have any idea what I am talking about. Have you heard of this device and if so, could you lead me to where it can be purchased?"

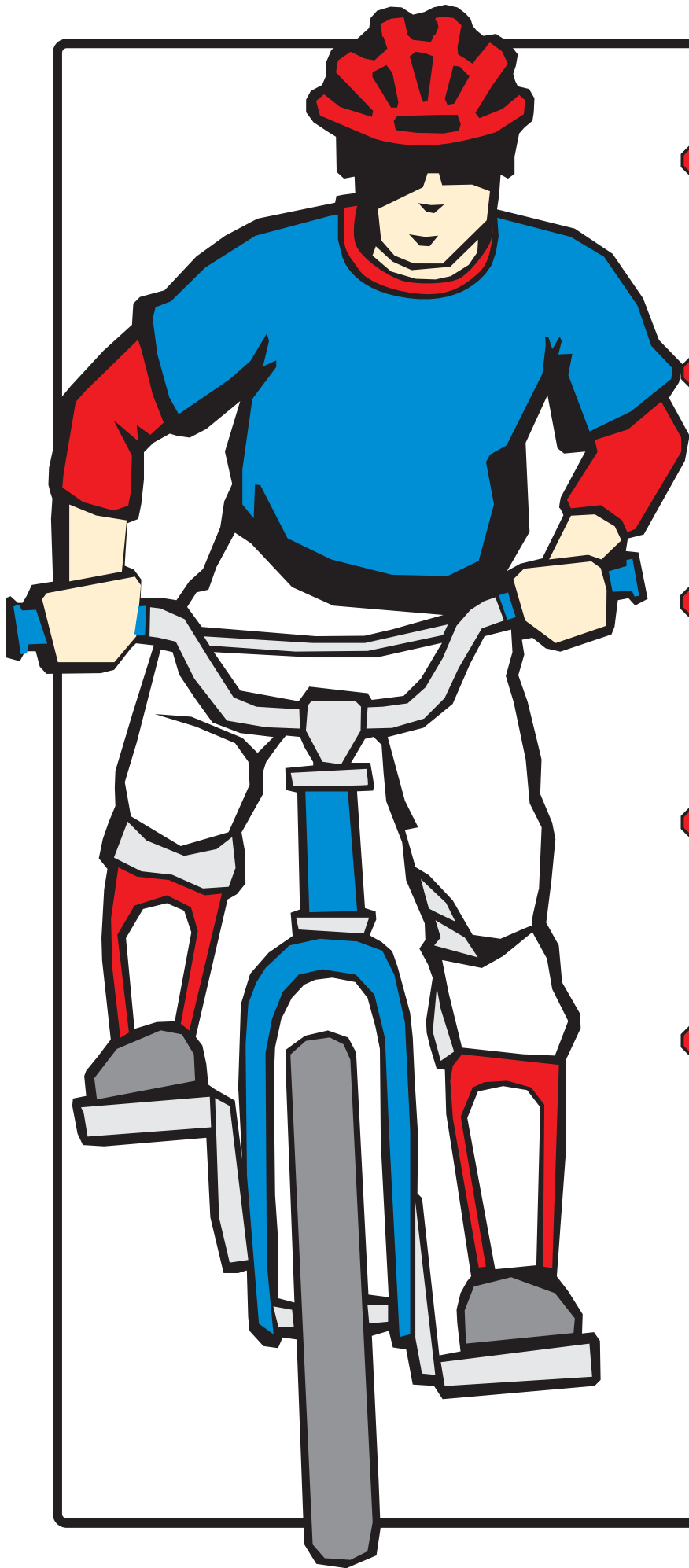
Thanks so much,
Linda Fournier



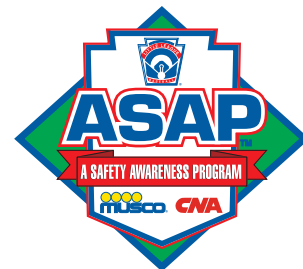
A: "Linda, the attached picture shows the heart protection safety gear that I have found. The vest is from Wilson. I do not know the manufacturer of the Heart-Gard. You can call Grand Slam USA (757) 431-0505. The sales rep's name is Travis. He may be able to help you find what you are looking for. Thanks for making it 'safer for the kids.'"

**Andy Adler, safety officer
Virginia Beach, Va., Little League**

(Editor's Note: Andy's safety plan was judged the best in the nation in 1998.)



- **Wear your helmet**
- **Only one on a bike**
- **Watch for cars**
- **Yield to pedestrians**
- **Ride with traffic**





Check — carefully — for problems

A District Administrator sent ASAP a warning recently, which needs to be shared with all leagues with older lighting systems.

The DA sent in a news story from an accident with near-tragic results. A league experienced an emergency when a six-year-old spectator, who was watching her cousin play on the field, innocently grabbed one of the guy-wires to the field's older lights. The light's wooden poles were stabilized by the wires, but an apparent crossover current in the lighting system allowed a surging current into the metal wire.

The child's distress was quickly seen, with her hands stuck to the wire by the force of the electricity, but those closest to her were unable to free the child from the grip of the current.

If not for an off-duty electrician watching the game, the little girl might have been seriously injured. The electrician quickly yanked off his belt, and jumping down from the bleachers, wrapped the belt under the girl's arms and lifted her off the ground to free her from the electrical circuit. The non-conductive belt kept the electrician from being injured, while he broke the girl's grounding.

The child was transported to a local hospital, where she was treated for electrical burns to her arms, but has no serious injuries.

The problem apparently occurred due to some crossover of current involving a frame ground, the lights and the guy-wire. The league is responsible for maintenance to the lighting system, and the lighting was shut off until necessary repairs were made.

Leagues across the country are urged to have their lighting systems checked, especially those with older systems; look for exposed wiring, loose connects, and check for shorts and other age-related problems before the systems are turned on for the season.

Check the wiring into and out of the service entrance and pole distribution boxes. Also make sure no wire insulation is discolored or worn. For the safety of your equipment and those around it, you should have an electrician make sure you have adequate grounding for each pole and lightning protection for the entire system.

Light readings for the facility are also needed, to ensure any movement of the poles or fixtures themselves hasn't caused the lighting to drop below light standards and uniformity requirements. Check the Little League Operating Manual for minimum lighting standards. A comprehensive checklist is on page 106.

Wooden-pole lighting systems were grandfathered in, allowing them to continue being used despite lighting standards which now call for metal or steel poles. But maintenance to ensure the lights will perform safely up to the minimum standards is necessary. Wood poles for new or upgraded lighting systems have not been approved since Sept. 1, 1994. Extra attention should be paid to the structural integrity of the wooden poles themselves.

Wood is subject to not only twisting, which misaligns fixtures, but can deteriorate from the inside out, with the wooden pole acting like a large wick, drawing moisture up into the interior. Also, insects and woodpeckers can prove a problem larger than their size would seem to warrant. Core testing is a reliable method of determining the soundness of poles.

Steel poles should be examined for rust or corrosion, especially by connections and fasteners. Look at crossarms and their attachments for signs of corrosion or movement. Binoculars are helpful for this. Look at any external conduit for signs of problems.

Checking these things may take time, and require an electrician, but are well worth avoiding injuries.

Have a question or tip to share?

Call the ASAP Hotline:

800-811-7443,

or e-mail: asap@musco.com



Or write to us at:

ASAP

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HOTLINE IDEAS FROM READERS

"It's already a requirement that all equipment be inspected before the season and on an on-going basis. What do leagues do with the equipment which isn't safe? Our league's policy is that it be destroyed, so a child can't pull it out of the garbage to try to use it, and maybe get hurt."

Ed Pryor, safety officer
Blake Little League, San Bernardino, Calif.

"One of the newer things we're doing this year is getting with our local colleges and high school baseball coaches. They're going to perform clinics for our local league on one weekend, teaching fundamental baseball techniques. We're also going to have a professor from a local university who's a physical therapist teach proper stretching exercises and ways to take stress off the throwing arm and so forth. That's one of the unique things we're doing this year, building on the success we've had in the past."

Pete Trevino, safety officer
La Fiera Little League, Riverside, Calif.

These safety officers will receive ASAP caps for calling in safety ideas. What is your league doing to become safer for the kids? Call the ASAP Hotline!

ASAP HOTLINE
24 HOUR TOLL-FREE
800-811-7443

The 2000 Safety Officer Manual
will soon be to you! Didn't get it?
Call the ASAP Hotline!

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