

Fundamentally Sound Ball

Make sure to teach your coaches the fundamentals of good play, for everyone's safety.

One of the cornerstones of any safety plan is the training your league provides to its volunteers. Every year, the potential is present for new volunteers with minimal experience to step into an important role.

Coaching is a prime example, and this training should be a focus of your league each spring.

If you don't have a standard fundamentals training clinic for your coaches, start one now. Whether you plan one for next year or implement yet this spring, a fundamentals clinic is key to your league providing an environment that is as safe as possible for everyone.

Don't Be Lulled by History

Some leagues make the mistake of thinking because they have not had injuries, they are a "safe" league, and don't need training. Any league's injury rate can be low, either through good luck or because coaches already have a good foundation of skills. But without a set fundamentals clinic to ensure coaches, and so their players, are receiving quality and appropriate skills development, that league's good fortune can quickly evaporate.

Create an outline for the safety and fundamentals topics to be discussed, and make sure your trainer, whether an outside trainer – like a high school / college coach or professional trainer – or an experienced league coach, goes over all of them. The league safety representative can discuss issues not addressed by the trainer, as necessary.

Ideas for Safer Practices

If you can, break up your training to specific divisions of play. This allows the more skill-specific training that is

appropriate by division (Tee Ball, Minors, Little League, Juniors, Seniors, Big League). Then train your coaches to those appropriate skills for the level of play for the children. An otherwise excellent coach can put players at risk by teaching advanced skills to children who cannot yet correctly perform the skills.

The reverse is also true. If a coach does **not** teach the proper skills, such as sliding or proper catching, players are at risk when they are in game situations and can't perform as they need to, both to play the position/skill and protect themselves. As just one example, facial injuries to defensive players can be reduced by proper hand positions. If a player doesn't have their non-glove hand between the glove and their face, a "bad hop" can do serious damage.

Use Just One Ball

Coaches often get caught up in trying to maximize practice or pre-game infield time to the extent safety is the first casualty. Make sure you emphasize the need to keep safety as a priority, even to the drills the coaches run.

Teach players to focus on the ball, and keep drills at one ball. If a coach introduces two or more balls during a drill, players are put in a situation they never face in a game: having to focus on two balls. If the player watches the wrong ball, it is easy to see after the fact how the player was injured, and unnecessarily so. Make sure coaches understand the danger of multiple balls with any player drill.



Are these players far enough apart that a missed ball won't injure a player involved in a different activity? Proper spacing is an important factor in safe warm-ups for both teams and all players. Don't allow players involved in one drill to be placed too close behind or beside another group, where a hit or throw ball could hit someone not watching that drill.

Use Common Sense

Make sure the drills are age specific and appropriate for the players. Have several coaches watch the players during practice for form, but also safety. If not, when the coach is focused on a specific player, other players are then at risk of unintended actions from unsupervised players (swinging bats, thrown balls, horse-play).

With some planning, your league can provide a high-quality training program that will increase the playing ability of and reduce the injury risk to your players, while providing a safer environment for your players, volunteers, and spectators.

Qualified safety plans must require coaches to attend training once every three years, and for every team to have a representative at each annual fundamentals training. This approach will spread the information out to the coaches, and not just team managers, so all activities are being planned and operated with safety in mind. By spending the time to make your fundamentals training worthwhile for all coaches, and you won't have any difficulty in getting your volunteers to attend.