



Four County Little League

...inspiring a stronger community through Little League baseball.

FCLL PLAYER DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES



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Introduction

The Four County Little League (FCLL) has developed these guidelines as a plan for player development and to ensure consistent coaching practices throughout the entire league. This document has two primary focuses: player development goals and consistent coaching practices across all levels. The player development goals have been laid out for each level to create goals for individual player in each division of Little League. The coaching strategies have been shaped to get constant coaching practices/philosophy across the league. The goal is to ensure that players are coached the same set of fundamentals and skills in consistent ways from year to year regardless of which team and which coach the kids are playing from one year to the next. These guidelines represent the league's long-term vision for player development for the players' Little League lifespan to maximize their potential.

Skills Development Philosophy

The FCLL will provide an environment where our players are encouraged to improve their skills and thus, more thoroughly enjoy the game. Our teams and coaches will be supplied with the training and support necessary to help our kids become better baseball players, competitors, and people.

Our league's goal is to provide consistent coaching across the league structured to build and further develop the player's skills each year that they are in the league. The more repetitions our players receive, the better players they will become.

Parental support is critical. Our parents provide the means and encouragement to have their children attend practices, games, and workouts, so the kids will have an opportunity to improve their skills.

In games, our players will be aggressive and competitive. They will compete no matter the situation or the score. Our pitchers will work quickly and aggressively in the strike zone with the intent of forcing contact. Our hitters will be aggressive at the plate. Our fielders will be ready, with a "want the ball" attitude. Our players will do all of this while maintaining the proper respect for their teammates, coaches, umpires, the opposition, and the game.

FCLL Guidelines

Equipment

1. Ideal practices make full use of all resources available. Equipment including, but not limited to, tees, baseballs, tennis balls, and pickle balls will be used by the coaches. Such equipment will be provided by the FCLL and made available in storage at the various fields.
2. Glove and bat size recommendations will be provided to ensure players are utilizing proper equipment for both safety and skills development reasons.
3. The importance of personal protective equipment such as athletic supporters, cups will be emphasized.

Practices: Required Structure and Areas of Focus

1. Coaches will hold regular practices at least once per week.
2. Efficient practices will require some measure of discipline. Our coaches will have the full support of the league. They need not tolerate disruptive players at games and practices. The disruptions of a few affect the entire team in a negative fashion.



3. Practices will be structures to instill a sense of focus, good habits, and desire to get better every day.
4. Required Structure
 - a. Warm up and stretch – Must be done 1st, before all practices, games, and workouts.
 - b. Throwing Program (following stretch, organized in outfield, working on 1-2 concepts each time)
 - c. Practice then becomes subject to coach's discretion with respect to Required Areas of Focus below.
1. Required Areas of Focus: Coaches must have their teams work each of the areas of hitting, INF/OF, base running, and pitching every other practice. Teams should not go two practices in a row without working each of these. Practices should combine skills development with baseball knowledge to maximize the players' understanding of the game.

Game Philosophy

1. Overview
 - a. We will do everything possible in our approach to keep the games moving.
 - b. Players will run on and off field.
 - c. Pitchers will throw 6 pitches or less between innings.
 - d. Catchers shall be in gear and ready to go on defense.
2. Pitching Approach
 - a. Pitchers will work quickly.
 - b. We will be aggressive in pounding the strike zone...FORCE CONTACT.
3. Hitting Approach
 - a. Stress aggressiveness to our hitters.
 - b. Our hitters, in nearly all cases, are there to swing the bat and hit the ball, not to take pitches.

Core Competencies – Benchmarks of Player Capabilities for Success at Next Level

Upon Completing T-Ball (age 4-6)

- Players will understand the structure of practices...run to warm up, stretch, throwing program in the outfield, then into drills.
- Fielding:
 - Our fielders will possess knowledge of the positions.
 - Catching Wheel. Players will understand glove position when on defense. They will know how to present the glove in front of the middle of their body, with palm up, back of hand on ground, and open web to field ground ball. They will also understand how to position the glove to catch balls in the air: Above the waist, their palm will be above the wrist. Below the waist, their palm will be below the wrist.
 - Our players will understand how to grip the baseball when throwing. They will use a four-seam grip across the horseshoe shaped threads of the baseball. (Note: the



younger players with smaller hands may need to use three fingers in order to control the baseball.)

- When throwing:
 - Players will understand how to square back foot (throwing arm side foot), perpendicular to target
 - Players will step with front foot (opposite side of throwing arm) directly to target.
- Hitting:
 - They will wear a helmet at all times.
 - Understand bat safety - never swinging the bat unless at the plate.
 - Only one player holds a bat at a time.
 - Hitters will understand how to take a proper stance and swing.

T-ball Practice Suggestions

- Have a plan to keep practice moving along with short durations for each activity.
- Establish stations and keep consistent throughout the year.
- Focus on safety and having fun (it is all about getting them interested in baseball at this level)

Upon Completing Rookies A Coach Pitch (age 7-8)

- Fielding:
 - Players will be able to catch ball consistently from multiple positions.
 - Players will be able to execute the three-step (power step) throw with a full arm swing.
 - Fielders will have the ability to get into a solid and athletic, ready position. They will be on the balls of their feet with knees flexed, watching the batter, hands in front, glove foot slightly forward, giving them the ability to react and move to the baseball.
 - Beginning knowledge of force outs versus tag outs.
 - Catchers will understand the proper catching position with throwing hand held behind the back while receiving the pitch.
 - Catchers will understand the importance and safety of maintaining proper position/relationship to the batter and home plate.
- Hitting:
 - Players will be able to take the proper hitting stance, bat grip and execute a balanced swing.
 - Hitters will understand how to run to 1st base properly after contacting baseball, running through bag on INF ground ball, breaking down and looking right for an over throw, and rounding the base on a hit.
 - Baserunners will always be looking to the base coaches for guidance on running the bases. Most importantly, they will learn to pick up the 3rd base coach when approaching and rounding second base. They will understand the signs for stopping and progressing to the next base.

Rookies A Practice Suggestions

- Have a plan to keep practice moving along with short durations for each activity.
- Establish a practice routine of warm ups and drills with high repetition.
- Drills should be limited to 3-4 drills per skill area for the entire season.



Upon Completing Minors AA (ages 7 - 11)

- Fielding:
 - The ability to be in ready position when ball leaves pitcher's hand. (Ready Position Team Drill is a priority at AA Level).
 - Knowledge of force plays and understanding of where to throw the baseball in basic situations. How to apply a tag.
 - The understanding of how to maneuver and position on and around the bags when on defense for a force play. Our 1st basemen will set up with their throwing foot (non-glove foot) on the bag. They will use only the inner portion of 1st base, leaving most of the bag to the runner for safety. They will then react to the throw by stretching to the where the ball is thrown with their glove foot. At other bases, infielders will stretch to ball on force plays leaving access to the bag for baserunners.
 - Pitchers will only throw from the stretch position and will only throw a four-seam fastball.
 - The understanding of how to position on and around the bags for a tag play. Catchers will position themselves in front of home plate, in fair territory, to allow the runner access to the plate, while maintaining the ability to make a tag in front of the plate.
 - An elementary understanding of cutoffs when a ball is hit to the outfield. 2nd baseman goes out when ball is to right side of outfield. SS goes out when ball is to left side of outfield. Outfielders make effort to throw to or through cutoff man.
 - Proper footwork in transition from fielding through throwing.
 - All fielders will understand positioning before each play, all backup positions and the concept that every player has a responsibility on each play.
 - Catchers will understand the proper catching mitt position and how to drop to their knees to block pitches in the dirt. They will understand how to shift for inside and outside pitches.
 - Catchers will learn how to field a bunt and throw to first base. They will also learn to read a bunt and provide direction to the fielders charging the ball.
 - Catchers will have a general understanding of primary vs secondary catching positions.
- Hitting:
 - A knowledge of plate coverage as a hitter. Their stance in the box will allow them to get to pitches on the inner and outer halves of the plate.
 - A general knowledge of the strike zone, with an aggressive hitting approach in mind (swinging at hittable pitches).
 - The ability as a baserunner to take the extra base (i.e. 1st to 3rd on a 1B, score from 2nd on a 1B, score from 1st on a 2B) at the appropriate times with help of 3rd base coach. Taking an aggressive secondary lead.
 - Simple understanding of situational base running. Run on contact with 2 outs. Hold on balls in the air with less than 2 outs.
 - Our players will understand the fundamentals of sliding. They will always slide feet first with hands up.
 - How to round the bags hitting the inside corner of each bag with the inside foot.
 - How to start run from secondary lead low cross over step with a forward lean.
 - Baserunners will be aggressive on taking the next base on a passed ball or wild pitch.



- Pregame routine: understanding the sequence of events from warmups to game start.

AA Practice Suggestions

- Have a plan to keep practice moving along with short durations for each activity.
- Establish a practice routine of warm ups and drills with high repetition.
- Drills should be limited to 3-4 drills per skill area for the entire season.
- Utilize drills that cover multiple skill sets and game situations such as situational practice with coach hitting balls to cover defense and base running situations.
- Establish a pitching and catching rotation for each practice with players participating every other practice.
- Practices should start ingraining aggressive hitting and base running mentalities, anticipatory alert defensive mind set.

Upon Completing Minors AAA (ages 7 – 11)

- Players will have the ability to run, stretch, and throw, as a group, prior to practices and games.
- Fielding:
 - Fielders will fully understand force outs versus tag plays.
 - Infielders will have the understanding of when and how to turn double plays, first and third situations, bunts, and plays at home plate.
 - Fielders will understand the importance of the use of the power feed in routine plays. This is the play where fielders are too close to one another for an overhand throw. They will make an underhand toss with force and good footwork
 - Outfielders will learn drop steps to track the baseball. They will have the ability to use the drop step to track left, right, and the ball straight over their head.
 - Pitchers will possess a basic knowledge of a balanced, aligned delivery, finishing in a good fielding position, ready for the ball to be hit to them.
 - Pitchers will emphasize the four-seam FB, but will know and use the two-seam FB, as well.
 - Pitchers will begin to experiment with a change up as a second pitch once they demonstrate consistent accuracy delivery their first pitch.
 - Pitchers – covering bases 1st, home and backing up bases on throws from the outfield.
 - Pitchers must have the ability to make plays at their position. These include 1-3, 3-1, 1-4/1-6, 3-6-1.
 - Infielders will understand and communicate proper bag coverage on wild pitches and passed balls.
 - Catchers will be able to block pitches in the dirt, inside and outside.
 - Catchers will understand how to receive pitches and begin to frame pitches.
 - Catchers will understand the proper foot work for making throws to second and third base.
 - Catchers will understand how to pursue passed balls at the backstop and set up their footing to deliver quick throws to second and third base.
 - Catchers will understand how to effectively deliver the ball to a pitcher covering home when a runner is attempting to steal home.
 - Catchers will understand game situations and will be able to get into primary and secondary positions at the proper times.



- Hitting:
 - Hitters will have the ability to hit the ball the other way in controlled drills, using the tees and soft toss.
 - Hitters will understand the concept of depth of contact (how far the pitched ball travels in relation to the stance), and maintain the approach to hit the ball to the middle of the field.
 - Hitters will know basic fundamentals of bunting. They will pivot with a proper hand position on the bat, and with the bat out in front of the plate in fair territory.
 - Baserunners will know when and how to tag up, and advance to the next base on a fly ball.
 - Players will learn the head 1st slide when returning to a base, only.
 - Players will learn how to take proper lines to balls hit in the gaps/holes and how to properly dive for balls.

AAA Practice Suggestions

- Have a plan to keep practice moving along with short durations for each activity.
- Establish a practice routine of warm ups and drills with high repetition.
- Drills should be limited to 3-4 drills per skill area for the entire season.
- Utilize drills that cover multiple skill sets and game situations such as situational practice with coach hitting balls to cover defense and base running situations.
- Establish a pitching and catching rotation for each practice with players participating every other practice.
- Practices should focus on aggressive hitting and base running mentalities, anticipatory alert defensive mind set.
- Practices should focus on an understanding of the game situations that should become a second nature for the players.

Upon Completing Majors (ages 9 - 12)

- Players will be able to prepare for games and practices without supervision. This includes team run and team stretch, as well as field and equipment set up.
- Players will be able to execute drills in pairs or small groups, overseen by head coach, when coaching staff is limited.
- Fielding:
 - Infielders will understand positioning per the situation. This includes, infield in, infield back, double play depth, and shading pull or opposite side with respect to pitcher and hitter.
 - Middle infielders will understand where to position themselves based on the called pitch and location.
 - Fielders will be able to execute all single cut plays, including that of 1st and 3rd baseman as cutoff to home.
 - Outfielders will possess a knowledge of where to play in situations. This includes pull side versus opposite field depth, shading pull or opposite with respect to hitter and pitcher, and overall depth through identifying priority runners.
 - Pitchers will start introducing a windup delivery while maintaining proper pitching positions/mechanics.



- Pitchers will be encouraged to further experiment with and utilize their second pitch, changeup, in games.
- Catchers will be proficient at framing all pitch locations.
- Catchers will learn to read hitters positioning and swing timing to adjust behind the plate for pitch locations based on the hitter.
- Catchers will begin working with the coaches on calling pitches and pitch locations by understanding the proper times to call for a changeup.
- Catchers will backup first base on ground balls as long as there is not a runner at third base.
- Hitting:
 - Hitters and baserunners will know the basics of a hit and run.

Majors Practice Suggestions

- Have a plan to keep practice moving along with short durations for each activity.
- Establish a practice routine of warm ups and drills with high repetition.
- Drills should become more advanced covering multiple areas to reinforce the execution of situational baseball.
- Utilize drills that cover multiple skill sets and game situations such as situational practice with coach hitting balls to cover defense and base running situations.
- Establish a pitching and catching rotation for each practice with players participating every other practice.
- Practices should require aggressive hitting and base running mentalities, anticipatory alert defensive mind set.
- Practices should require an understanding of the game situations that should become a second nature for the players

Upon Completing Intermediate, 50/70 (ages 11 - 13)

- Players will be able to set up, prepare, and work various portions of practice on their own when directed to do so.
- Fielding:
 - Fielders will be introduced to double cuts and relays. These are used on sure extra base hits. Both middle infielders go out for relay to ensure the handling of the baseball and to maintain a workable distance for each throw. First basemen will trail the runners on extra base hits for potential plays at second base.
 - Infielders and outfielders will advance their knowledge of positioning. They will move not only according to hitter and pitcher, but will do also with respect to score, count, and number of outs.
 - Pitchers will have the ability to control the running game. They will have experience with picks to 1st and 2nd base. They will understand how to vary their looks, hold the ball for various lengths of time, and pitch out. Pitchers will work to minimize their times to the plate, while keeping command of pitches as the priority.
 - Pitchers will have the ability to properly throw some form of breaking ball.
 - Catchers should be able to call a game.
 - Catchers will understand proper technique for throwing behind runners at first base.
 - Catchers will learn how to receive pitch outs and make quick throws.



- Hitting:
 - Hitters will have advanced their knowledge of situations. They will have had experience with bunt situations, getting a runner to third with less than 2 outs, and getting a runner home from third with less than 2 outs. They will also possess a greater comprehension as to the counts and situations where they need to be more aggressive versus those where they should be more selective.
 - Baserunners will have a greater understanding of how to run the bases and how to utilize the base coaches depending on the situation (ball hit in front of runner versus ball hit behind runner).