

THE  
**ONLY**  
DRILLS  
YOU'LL EVER NEED  
(HINT: THERE ARE ONLY 4)

by **ROB TONG**



YOUTH  
BASEBALL  
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# INTRODUCTION

Every youth baseball coach loves drills. I think this is because it gives the appearance that the team is doing stuff. In fact, the more drills we “show off” in practice, the more baseball knowledge the coach is perceived to have. There are entire books devoted to drills. I should know because I bought some of them.

But legendary basketball coach John Wooden put it this way:

**“Never mistake activity for accomplishment.”**

The truth is that most drills are completely useless. There is a lot of activity but not much accomplishment. Explaining why most drills are useless is beyond the scope of this ebook but if you're curious, I've written an extensive blog post explaining why:

<http://www.youthbaseballedge.com/why-drills-are-an-utter-waste-of-time/>

Now, there **are** some drills not listed here that provide some utility. As I mentioned, **most** drills are useless, but **not all**. For example, a fly ball double play drill, where you hit pop flies to your infielders and they try to turn two, is a useful drill though it is not listed here. There are plenty of other such useful drills like that.

But I believe [the 80/20 rule applies to youth baseball](#). The 80/20 rule, also known as the [Pareto Principle](#), states that 80% of the output come from 20% of the input. Applied to youth baseball, it goes like this:

**“80% of youth baseball results come from 20% of practices.”**

The four drills listed below are the ones that will impact those 80% of baseball outcomes. On other hand, the ground ball double play is not a common outcome in youth baseball (until you get to the higher ages, like 13U). It's still ok to work on the other 20% of outcomes but make sure you are spending much more of your time focusing on those 80% of outcomes!

These four drills are the ones that focus on that 80% of baseball outcomes. Yes, just four (with one caveat at the end of this ebook). But don't be deceived. Even though I listed only four drills, they can be upscaled in complexity as your players' skill increases.

I use some variation of these four drills for my own teams in every practice. Let's get started.

**Note:** I refer to players as “he”, “him”, etc. in this ebook. This is not to discriminate against girls who play baseball but simply to make it easier for you to read (and me to write) than the clumsier “he/she”, “him/her”, etc.

# 1

## Simple Hitting Drill

This drill can be used for any age or skill level hitter. Here's how to tweak it perfectly for your team's particular league:

### How it works

1. Set up a tee in front of home plate ([not on top of home plate](#)).
2. Practice the first phase of the swing progression (listed below).
3. For each phase, the player starts performing reps in super slow motion.
4. If player demonstrates mastery in super slow motion, have player do the reps a **little** faster than before. If player does not do the rep properly when done a little faster, then rewind back to a slower rep speed and try again.
5. Rinse and repeat. Use your smartphone to record the reps if the speed of the reps make it difficult to see whether they are being done properly.
6. When player has graduated to full speed reps and still demonstrates mastery, then move on to the next phase of the swing progression.
7. Go back to step 3 above and repeat. Make sure the previously mastered phases are still performed properly when adding the reps for the new phase.

For example, when practicing the stride and load, have the player start in his batting stance and then, on your cue, the player does his stride and load in **super slow motion**. Kids' definition of "super slow motion" may be different from an adult's definition, so you may want to physically demonstrate what **super slow motion** means.

The reason for super slow motion is that:

1. The player gets the feel for what the area of focus is and should be.
2. You as the parent or coach can see whether he's doing it right. It's difficult to see pieces of a swing at full speed.
3. Learning—or understanding—comes fastest when you learn slowly.

### Progression using this same drill in other practices

- Stride (or heel-up-and-heel-down) and load
- Wide feet setup after stride
- Hip rotation (initially with "closed" shoulders)
- Bent elbow(s) at point of contact
- Chest forward at point of contact
- Stiff front leg at point of contact
- Swinging slightly up

- Not slinging the bat after swinging

### **Why it's effective**

This incrementally builds the mechanically sound high-level swing. Believe it or not, I've been able to teach this to kids as young as 7 & 8. In fact, even with 5 year olds, I've been able to teach most of these phases of the high-level swing.

### **Caveat for house/rec league teams**

For house leagues, the season is so short and practices so few that your kids likely won't have enough time to complete the progression. And changing your kids' mechanics in a short season could ruin their confidence in the meantime.

As a workaround for house or rec team coaches, at the beginning of the season, instead of having your players try to develop the **complete** high-level swing, analyze each player's swing from smartphone video and pick **one** phase that needs the most work. Then just work on that one phase all season.

This has the added bonus of keeping your players' confidence up: instead of telling them you're re-building their swing, you'll tell them you are merely enhancing their swing by adding one thing to work on.

### **Additional drill variation for tee ball teams**

In addition to teaching the high-level swing, there's an additional variation you should teach your tee ball players: to avoid hitting the ball back to the pitcher, shortstop or first baseman. Those defensive positions are normally played by the best defenders on an opposing tee-ball team.

The swing is the same, but by merely positioning oneself differently in the batter's box, your batter can hit the ball strategically so that it gives him the best chance for getting on base.

You are also teaching your kids that there is strategy in baseball so they can appreciate the depth of the game.

Here's how to teach this variation:

Using two small groups, set up two tees—one to the left of home plate and one to the right. One group of players will hit from the left tee; the other small group hits from the right tee.

Then:

**Tee #1**

Position oneself in the batter's box to hit the ball into left field.

**AND**

**Tee #2**

Position oneself in the batter's box to hit the ball into right-center field.

If you do not have two tees, you can alternate practices where one day, your kids hit to left field, and on your next practice, they hit to right-center field.

**Live pitching**

Ideally, you would not introduce live pitching (coach pitch or kid pitch) for that player until he has demonstrated mastery of most or all phases of the high-level swing. (That would also serve as motivation for the player to get the swing right.)

The reason for withholding live pitching until mastery is that a poor swing never improves under live pitching. The player may learn how to time the live pitching a little better but it will be with a poor swing that will usually lead to poor results—especially as the player moves up to the higher levels. The best way for your players to improve against live pitching is by molding a fundamentally sound swing.

**Additional drill variations for coach/kid pitch teams**

- Avoiding a pitch coming at you (duck/scoot back/jump, + pull bat down)
- Recognizing strikes so hitters learn to swing at strikes only

**Note on kid pitch**

Some coaches prefer to do all the pitching in practice even though their league is kid pitch, not coach pitch. The rationale is that they can control the pitches, throw more strikes than kids, and not wear out their kids' arms in practice. However, it is safe to allow your kids to throw 20 pitches every day (after warming up) and it would benefit both the pitchers (strengthening their arms) and your hitters (facing kid pitchers is different than facing coach pitchers).

**BONUS TIP**

Whether in tee, coach pitch or kid pitch, you can easily add a “distance competition” to the drill to make players more engaged—like a Home Run Derby of sorts. Give Big League Chew gum or a baseball card as a prize to the winner.



## 2

# Simple Infield Drill

You can do this drill whether your team plays tee ball, coach pitch or kid pitch. You can also use it either as a small group station or a team-wide drill. And you can use either players or a coach as the first baseman.

### How it works

1. Have your players line up at shortstop.
2. Your assistant coach is about five feet away, directly in front of the line, with a bucket of balls.
3. The coach rolls a ball (see levels of difficulty below) to the kid at the front of the line.
4. If the player does well, he goes to the end of the line; if not, then the player goes **back to the front of the line and tries again**.

### Why it's effective

These reps start **slow and close** so kids can focus on the mechanics and not so much on fielding cleanly. Emphasize that fact to the players. Once they have mastered the mechanics, then you can start to gradually make it **fast and far**.

The problem with most infield drills is that coaches line their players at the normal infield positions and hit grounders to them, which starts off players with fast and far instead of slow and close. Fast and far might be okay for your more advanced players but you'd be surprised how many advanced players lack the proper fundamentals and get by merely with athletic ability.

By the time your players have graduated to fast and far, then the reps are very game-like. And when your players encounter similar situations in a game, they won't panic since they've done it before in your practices.

### Levels of difficulty

#### ■ Coach places stationary ball on field.

Players take their right foot and take a short, quick step up & out to the side. Using "gentle feet" (running on the balls of their feet), they then come to the baseball, show "gator jaw" fielding form with hand over glove before picking up the ball, and should have some momentum to first base for the throw.

#### ■ Coach throws slow speed grounder directly at fielder.

Same as above except ball is now slowly in motion.

- **Coach throws medium speed grounder directly at fielder.**  
No need to step out with the right foot since the ball will get to the fielder quicker. Fielder uses “gentle feet” to charge the ball slowly, using “gator jaw” fielding form when time to field the ball.
- **Coach rolls slow rolling ball straight at the fielder.**  
Fielder charges in hard while still using “gentle feet”, coming straight towards the ball instead of taking a step to the right. Then the fielder picks up the ball bare-handed and makes an off-balance throw to first base. Coming straight at the ball and fielding the ball bare-handed are both necessary in this case since it is critical to save as much time as possible in trying to get the batter out at first.
- **Coach rolls slow rolling ball to the fielder’s forehand side.**  
Rolling (as opposed to throwing) allows the fielder to focus on proper form instead of worrying about the bounce.
- **Coach rolls slow rolling ball to the fielder’s backhand side.**  
Save as above.
- **Coach hits grounders directly at the fielder.**
- **Coach hits grounders at the fielder’s forehand side.**
- **Coach hits grounders at the fielder’s backhand side.**

**BONUS TIP**

This drill also helps prepare your players for high school tryouts.

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## Simple Pitching/Throwing Drill

This Simple Pitching Drill for your kid pitch team can be converted to a throwing drill if you have a tee ball or coach pitch team.

### How the Simple Pitching Drill works

1. Pair up your players so that one is a catcher and the other is a pitcher.  
(Catcher’s should wear batting helmets with face mask.)
2. Mark off the appropriate pitching distance. If you have home plates for each pair, great; if not, no big deal since the pitcher should be focusing on the catcher’s mitt, not home plate.
3. Have the pitcher go through his windup/delivery and pitch to the catcher while focusing solely on the first phase of the pitching progression. As with hitting, use your smartphone to record the reps to see whether your pitcher is accomplishing that goal or not.

**Bonus tip:** I talk about the power of using your smartphone for giving instant feedback to your players in a blog post:

<http://www.youthbaseballedge.com/harness-the-power-of-your-smartphone-in-practices>

4. If the player demonstrates mastery, move on to the next phase of the progression. If the player is not demonstrating mastery, have the player perform the rep in **super slow motion**, gradually increasing the speed of the rep until performed properly at full speed.
5. Go back to step 3 above and repeat with the next phase of the progression. Make sure the previously mastered phases are still performed properly when adding the reps for the new phase.

### **Why it's effective**

Like the Simple Hitting Drill, this Simple Pitching Drill simulates game situations because your pitcher is doing a full pitching delivery. Yet you can focus on just one aspect of that delivery in a particular practice.

For example, if working on leaning forward during the delivery, instead of doing a fence drill where pitchers lift their stride leg and then lean forward into a fence, have your pitcher go through the entire delivery but analyze only the forward motion part of the delivery. This way, your pitcher can instantly and seamlessly incorporate the work into the whole delivery instead of a piecemeal drill. My experience has been that many kids who learn in a piecemeal fashion revert back to their old habits during the pressure of a game—or even at the first opportunity to do a full rep.

### **Progression**

Here is the progression you and your pitcher can focus on.

- Windup mechanics or set delivery setup
- Delayed hand break
- Circular stride leg path
- Circular glove-side arm path
- Pitching arm in high cock position at stride leg foot plant
- Hip rotation
- Arm slot analysis with shoulder alignment at release point
- Follow through (“pick up the money”)
- Fielding your position
- Experimenting with different grips to find the 2-3 most favorite
- Working strictly on pitch location (low outside, high inside)
- Pitch location with pitcher’s 2-3 favorite grips



### **Caveat for house/rec league teams**

As with the Simple Hitting Drill, for house leagues, there may not be enough time in the short season to go through this entire progression. So again, for rec leagues, record your pitchers at the beginning of the season, determine what their biggest weakness is and just focus on strengthening that.

### **Using this drill as a Simple Throwing Drill**

If you are coaching a tee ball team or a coach pitch team, you can easily modify this as a throwing drill to help your young players quickly get a feel for the throwing motion. Here's how it works.

For tee ball players, I recommend you have your players throw to assistant coaches because having players throw to their teammates is likely to result in a lot of wasted time retrieving balls since the throws will often be wild (at least initially) and the teammates attempting to catch the throws will often miss.

### **How to use this drill for teaching Throwing**

For coach pitch-level players, I recommend having your players throw to teammates if teammates can catch; otherwise, I would again have the players throw to assistant coaches.

1. Have the player start in the high cock position, standing sideways to their target, with their glove out and pointed towards their target, and the ball in the high cock position. This is the starting point of the drill.
2. When you say "Throw!", the player
  - a. takes a small step forward with his front foot
  - b. turns his hips & shoulders simultaneously
  - c. snaps his arm forward across his body
  - d. pulls his glove toward his chest ("Love your glove")

The key to this drill is demonstrating it multiple times to the kids first. Do **not** verbally explain the four steps in #2 above too much. Imagine teaching your kid how to ride a bike by verbally explaining all the steps involved ("First, you have to push off with the right pedal; then you have to pedal. Third, stay balanced and upright. Fourth, adjust your handlebars so you can maneuver around potholes and not go into the grass."). You don't do that; you just have the kid actually ride a bike a lot and give reminders here and there. It's much easier for kids to copy what they **see** than to copy what their **hear**.

Now, this drill could initially be a disaster with kids who don't know how to throw but do not lose heart! **Be persistent and keep having the kids do it**—eventually it will start to look good.

### **Why the Simple Throwing Drill is effective**

This is similar to the pitching drill except we are starting them already in the high cock position to simplify the process. Starting in this position also subliminally tells the kids that this is the proper throwing position to get to after fielding or catching a ball.

### **Levels of difficulty for the Throwing Drill**

- During the throw, the glove is pulled towards the chest (“Love your glove”), rather than dangling down on the side—or even worse, flung behind the player’s back.
- Increase the distance to make throws.
- Have the kids’ chest face his throwing partner, then turn sideways into the high cock position of the Throwing Drill and freeze there. If it looks good, they can then finish the throw.
- Field a grounder and then get into the high cock position of the Throwing Drill and freeze there. If it looks good, they can then finish the throw.

#### **BONUS TIP**

For the Pitching Drill, have the catcher practice pitch framing as the pitcher is practicing pitching. The catcher can also use this time to practice blocking pitches in the dirt.

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### **Simple Catcher’s Drill**

Once your team is beyond coach pitch, this drill becomes a staple in your practices. The catcher position is an absolutely critical part of your team’s success (though there are exceptions, which will be discussed in the [Youth Baseball Edge blog](#)).

#### **How it works**

Though you can do this in conjunction with pitchers in the Simple Pitching Drill, I recommend doing this just between coaches and catchers so you can really focus on the catcher rather than divide your attention between your pitcher and your catcher.

With your catcher in full catcher’s gear squatting behind home plate, here are the different variations you can do from this initial setup:

- framing pitches
- blocking pitches in the dirt that are in front of him
- blocking pitches in the dirt that are to his left or right
- minimizing the time spent getting into throwing position
- proper mechanics in making the long throw to second base
- same mechanics in making the throw to third base
- same mechanics in making a pickoff throw to first base
- accuracy of throws to second base and third base
- bunt defense
- catching popups—both fair and foul
- dropped third strike throw to first base
- force plays at home
- blocking the plate on tag plays at home
- first-and-third situations
- making throws to second base/third base/home plate on wild pitches

### **Why it's effective**

The drill simulates many game-like situations. And developing a catcher with both a quick setup and a quick release to throw out stealers, as well as [a catcher who can frame pitches](#), is worth several wins over the course of a season all by himself.

### **BONUS TIP**

If you can afford it, buy extra sets of catcher's gear so you can have multiple players practicing this at the same time rather than waiting for the one catcher to take off all his gear and give to the next catcher. (Better yet, ask your catchers' parents to buy their own gear. It will likely fit better and the catchers will enjoy picking out custom gear styles and colors that they like.)

If your catchers have to share gear, you are either going to waste time in your practices waiting for them to swap gear when it's time for a different catcher to do their work. Avoid wasted time as much as possible; it's your most precious commodity.

The other (also bad) option you may choose to take is to only have one catcher work on their stuff in order to prevent swapping gear between multiple catchers.

That's it. That's all you need. These four drills focus on the 80% of baseball action: pitching, hitting, catching and infield play. And if you are in a tee ball or coach pitch league, then it's even more simplified: just hitting and infield play make up 80% of your team's results.

The beauty of these four drills is that they are all simple enough in their most basic form and yet also flexible enough to increase in complexity to keep challenging players as they increase their skill.

Note what I did NOT include as drills that you need: around the horn throwing drills, fence drill for hitting, [ba-boom drill](#) for hip rotation and any of the other ba-zillion drills out there that involve a lot of activity but not a lot of accomplishment.

If you do these four drills in practice every single time, your team will improve faster than a team that has a rotation of 100 different drills.

As Bruce Lee once said,

**“I fear not the man who has practiced 10,000 kicks once. I fear the man who has practiced one kick 10,000 times.”**

### **Caveat**

Baserunning also should be included in the 80% of youth baseball results. However, there are so many different baserunning situations that can realistically come up in a game, yet there is no one baserunning drill that can cover all the various scenarios. So baserunning drills will be covered separately on the [Youth Baseball Edge blog](#).

### **Bottom line**

Don't fall into the “drills trap,” planning elaborate drills that bear no or little resemblance to the skills that players will need in games. Do not mistake activity for accomplishment. The four drills above are the steak you want to give your team (besides baserunning drills) all season. Anything else is the potatoes (in a steak and potatoes dinner).

If you liked this special ebook and found value in it, there are more helpful tips and resources at <http://www.youthbaseballedge.com>, including my weekly podcast, all of which are free so be sure to check it out. Your responsibility to your team is huge so my goal is to deliver relevant, value-packed content to help you get the EDGE and be a better coach.

Cheers,

Rob Tong