

Conejo Valley Little League

Coaching Guide

Introduction

First, thank you for stepping up to share your time with our community's youth. You'll have the opportunity to make a positive impact on many of our children's lives. For some, this may be a daunting task, for others, it may be one of the most rewarding volunteer experiences. As Manager of Coaching Development for Conejo Valley Little League (CVLL), I am here to tell you don't need to be Tommy Lasorda or a baseball expert to be an effective coach. All you need is your common sense. Coaching is primarily about teaching and communicating. CVLL is a volunteer organization. For over 50 years, CVLL has been an asset to our community because of the dedication and efforts of volunteers such as you.

This guide provides information, ideas and strategies (to supplement what you may already know) so you can hold effective practice sessions and be successful in your role as a Manager and Coach. Being organized, prepared and able to communicate clearly are keys to a successful season.

Why kids play sports

You may have played sports when you were younger. Remember what made the experience fun for you? Was it winning, learning a new skill, or just being part of a team? You know the lessons learned from sports go beyond the playing field. You may want those same or new experiences for your child. As a manager/coach, you have an opportunity to make a positive impact on someone's life. Remember kids play sports because its fun. They stop playing when it becomes stressful and no longer fun for them.

Your role as a Manager and Coach

As Manager or coach for your team, you are the leader. You set the tempo and example for your players, parents and volunteers. Communication studies show, messages are conveyed primarily by how you say it, rather than what you say. Your tone and example will have an impact on all those associated with your team. The key to effective coaching is realizing your responsibility and performing your duties with care. Just be your relaxed self and make it fun. As Manager/Coach, your job is to create a safe environment for kids to learn baseball, develop skills, and grow as a team and individuals and most importantly to have fun. It sounds like a lot but it's achievable if you approach the task appropriately. You can do it.

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Your approach matters

As Manager/Coach for your team, you must be mindful of your role and how you impact others on and off the field. The following recommendations will help you plan, manage and coach during the season. These ideas apply to all playing divisions (age groups) in CVLL. Bring your experience to bear, your energy and passion for the game of baseball, the kids will respond to you and appreciate the time you have invested in them:

Keep it fun. Most kids signed up to play baseball to have fun. Your team will have players with varying maturity, skill levels and attention spans, that's all ok. Your job will be to engage all of these players so they learn baseball, develop skills and grow as a team as well as individuals.

Keep it simple. Apply the “KIS” principle as you see fit. When teaching a skill, be creative and find ways to keep it simple. An example of this is teaching hitting, I refer to this as H/H/H, which stands for: Hands (hands up, shoulder height), Hip (weight on back leg), Head (keeping head down, tracking the throw from the pitcher's hand).

Balance. Less is sometimes more. Remember as the season progresses, too much practice time can reduce the kids desire to play. Balance your needs for skill development with time on the field. Make game time special. When the kids have had enough, recognize this. Start and end practices and meetings on time.

Set goals based around learning and fun. One of the lasting benefits of team sports is the connection of continuing improvement through learning and one's effort. Early in the season (recommended at first team meeting), state what you want to accomplish. Observe progress towards goals. Review progress periodically with the team.

Engagement. Involvement leads to commitment and effort toward goals. Be creative engaging players in practice and games. This builds the sense of a team and helps players understand how their role and contribution are important. Delegate tasks to parents and volunteers, this increases everyone's engagement and reduces your time commitment, it's a win/win for everyone.

Treat everyone with respect.

Be positive with your interactions. Greet your players, assistant coaches and volunteers at each practice and game. Remember your time together on the field may be the best part of their day. Enjoy your time together.

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Three “Ps” approach. This works for all aspects of managing and coaching:

- Perspective
 - Be objective, take the long view, and give everyone the benefit of doubt. Remember, that missed call by the umpire or last error, is not the defining moment of your season.
 - Share your perspective early and repeatedly. This helps you manage expectations and defines roles and responsibilities during the season. Your initial team meeting is a good time to communicate this.
 - Be calm. Remember you are the cool head on the field.
- Patience
 - Be patient working with players, parents and volunteers. You will have a wide range of experience and skills on your team. Development and progress takes time. Your parents and volunteers will be forever grateful to you. Enjoy successes as well as the defeats. Remember mistakes are our greatest learning opportunities and everything gets better with practice and time.
 - Skills are developed over time with repetition. Remind players (and parents) to be patient. The difference between success and failure is not giving up. If they don't get it the first time, encourage them to keep practicing on their own, work with family members outside of practice time or if they have the means, to attend clinics. Skills development/mastery improves confidence and fun.
- Planning
 - The more time spent planning and anticipating needs of your players, parents and volunteers, the smoother the season will be. This sets a good example for your players. Your parents will appreciate this.
 - Success is a choice that starts with planning. By creating thoughtful plans, you are proactively creating a safe environment for practice, meetings and games, resulting in a more rewarding experience for all involved.

Use positive instruction methods, also known as the sandwich method, an example follows,

- Positive comment – *great effort going after the ball*
- Instruction comment – *if you keep the ball in front of you, you increase your chances of catching it*
- Positive comment – *you are getting better each play*

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Encourage players to be curious and learn. Use the Benjamin Franklin approach...tell them why, show them how, involve them/let them do it. Let them explore ways to improve their skills. Explaining why to players helps them understand. Focus on understanding and learning. Kids will make the connection why a skill or rule is important when they understand how it helps the team or impacts the game. Understanding context helps kids focus their efforts to improve their skills. This also builds engagement.

Work in small groups. Skill development works well in small groups and helps the players maintain focus. Break up the practice time into various skills stations and rotate the kids through each station. After assessing skill levels on your team, match up kids by skill level. As everyone's skill level increases, mix up the kids within groups. Be creative. Keep the practice moving.

Add competition to drills. Competition adds an element of fun to practice drills. Examples: have a hitting contest, see who can hit the ball the furthest, have a throwing contest, see who can throw the furthest with accuracy or most strikes... Be creative and make up your own fun games. This helps with engagement and learning.

Live games teach situations. Situations come up during games that create learning opportunities, these are hard to duplicate in practice. Encourage your players to take risks and learn from mistakes. Don't dwell on errors. Have a few practice games if schedules permit. Ask another team Manager if they are interested in having a practice game. This is what Fall Ball is all about, limited practice and mostly games and pure fun.

It's the kid's game. Be mindful of over coaching during games. Kids will put pressure on themselves to perform. Pick an opportunity to coach during the game that is effective without embarrassing the player. Let them enjoy it and have fun. Encourage the players to talk to each other during the games. Let them create their own strategy. Encourage players to come up with ways to stay focused on the game. Try to step back more and more with each new game.

Communicate regularly with parents. Update parents weekly on the progress of the team. Share upcoming practice and game schedules. Create an email blog or use a site like shutterfly to help you keep in touch. Parents are interested in the safety and development of their child. Spend time getting to know the parents. They can make you aware of special needs of their child.

Remember baseball is a simple game of catching, throwing, batting and running. The teams that play together the best, learn and have fun.