



NORTHWEST WASHINGTON LITTLE LEAGUE

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PLAN

DECEMBER 2010

Skills Development Philosophy

The Northwest Washington Little League 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.

This approach continues a long tradition of The Northwest Washington Little League producing players that have gone on to be successful at the highest levels of competitive baseball. This includes college baseball, the professional ranks, and even the Major Leagues. More importantly, the NWLL has helped its players build confidence in a competitive setting, and aided in strengthening their character, by instilling a work ethic and providing players with a sense of sportsmanship and fair play.

Our coaches are the backbone of our league. Creativity and efficiency on their part is of the utmost importance. We will utilize our practice time wisely. The more reps 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. They will compete no matter what 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 this while maintaining the proper respect for their teammates, coaches, the opposition, and the game.

Northwest Washington Little League Skills Development Programs

	Event	Time Frame
1.	Northwest Washington Little League Annual Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present our philosophies and approach to all NWLL members. • Set guidelines for teams and coaches. • Lay out schedule of programs and events to accomplish goals. 	January
2.	Northwest Washington Little League Winter Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our indoor offseason training program. 	January - February
3.	Coaches Clinics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NWLL will offer at least three opportunities, throughout the calendar year, for baseball experts to assist our coaches in their instruction methods. 	Winter, Spring, and Fall
4.	Summer Clinic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top instructors will conduct a skills clinic for our players following school year. 	June - July
5.	Fall Clinics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two clinics in the fall, led by leading baseball resources. 	October - November
6.	Coach McCarthy's Advanced Skills Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplements our organized practices with additional, focused skills work. 	In Season

NWLL Guidelines

Equipment

1. Ideal Practices make full use of all resources available. Equipment, including, but not limited to tees, baseballs, softballs, tennis balls, and whiffles will be used by the coaches. Such equipment will be provided by the NWLL, and made available, in storage at the various practice and game fields.
2. Please take advantage of the cages and other such resources at our various fields.
 - Will allow for a greater number of reps for the players and greater flexibility for coaches at practice.

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. Required Structure
 - a. Warm up and stretch – Must be done first, before all practices, games, and workouts. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vt8r4ukSbk>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRww5rQkTw&feature=related>
 - 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.
4. 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.

Game Philosophy

1. Overview
 - We will do everything possible in our approach to keep the games moving.
 - Players will run on and off field.
 - Pitchers will throw 6 pitches or less in between innings.
 - 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. If we recognize a pitch we can drive, we need to do so, regardless of the count.
 - b. Our hitters, in nearly all cases, are there to swing the bat, not to take pitches.

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

Upon Completing T-Ball:

- Players will understand the structure of practices...run to warm up, stretch, throwing program in the outfield, then into drills.
- Our fielders will possess knowledge of the positions, and an understanding of where each will play in the field.
- 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, giving them the ability to react and move to the baseball.
- Players will have an understanding of glove position when on defense. They will know how to present the glove out 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.
- When throwing, players will step with front foot (opposite side of throwing arm) directly to target.
- Players will know that when hitting, they will wear a helmet at all times. They will understand bat safety, and will never swing unless clear of all other players.
- Hitters will understand how to take a proper stance. Tee ball will be at comfortable height and distance from body. Depth of contact will be slightly ahead of center of body. The goal is to drive ball through the middle of the diamond.
- Hitters will possess the ability to run to 1st base properly after contacting baseball, running through bag on INF ground ball and making a turn on a hit.
- Baserunners will begin to develop an understanding of when and how to use base coaches. Most importantly, they will learn to pick up the 3rd base coach when approaching 2nd base. And they will read 3rd base coach on whether to stay at 3rd or score, when approaching 3rd base.
- Our players will understand the fundamentals of sliding. They will always slide feet first with hands up.

Upon Completing AA Our Players will Possess:

- The ability to be in ready position when ball leaves pitcher's hand/machine. (Ready Position Team Drill is a priority at AA Level)
- A knowledge of force plays and understanding of where to throw the baseball in some basic situations.
- The understanding of how to maneuver and position on and around the bags, when on defense, for a force play. Our first basemen will square to the throw with both heels 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. At other bases, infielders will stretch to ball on force plays, leaving access to the bag for baserunners.
- The understanding of how to position on and around the bags for a tag play. Infielders will straddle the bag, allowing the baserunner access. They will be in a position where they can make a tag in front of the bag. 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.
- The ability to make a crow hop or shuffle step on long throw, thus using lower body to allow fielder to make such a throw.
- 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 our aggressive hitting approach in mind.
- 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.
- Simple understanding of situational baserunning. Run on contact with 2 outs. Hold on balls in the air with less than 2 outs.

Before Entering the Majors Division, Our AAA:

- Players will have the ability to run, stretch, and throw, as a group, prior to practices, games, workouts, etc.
- Fielders will fully understand force outs versus tag plays.
- Infielders will have the understanding of when and how to turn double plays.
- 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, following throw, thus making execution of these types of plays easier.
- 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.
- Hitters will have the ability to hit the ball the other way in controlled drills, using the tees and soft toss.
- 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 first slide when returning to a base, only.

Before Entering the Prep Division, Our:

- 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.
- Infielders will understand positioning according to the situation. This includes, infield in, infield back, double play depth, and shading pull or opposite side with respect to pitcher and hitter.
- Infielders will understand and communicate proper bag coverage on wild pitches and passed balls.
- 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 be introduced to a basic arm exercise program, for maintenance and injury prevention.
- Pitchers must have the ability to throw from the stretch.
- Pitchers must have the ability to make basic plays at their position. These include 1-3, 3-1, 1-4/1-6, 3-6-1.
- Pitchers will be encouraged to further experiment with and utilize their second pitch, CH, in games.
- 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 and baserunners will know the basics of a hit and run.
- Baserunners will be aggressive on taking the next base on a passed ball or wild pitch.

Upon Leaving the Prep Division, Our:

- Players will be able to set up, prepare, and work various portions of practice on their own when directed to do so.
- Players will have a working knowledge of a proper batting practice. This includes understanding of hitting groups, fungo and live defensive groups, baserunning groups, and pitchers throwing bullpens during BP, if numbers allow.
- Players will know and utilize various strength and conditioning exercises. Some will be used during practices, but these are mostly to be used away from the field to supplement skills training.
- 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.
- 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 and stuff as the priority.
- Pitchers will have the ability to properly throw some form of breaking ball.
- 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 be aggressive, yet smart with their leads
- Baserunners will have a greater understanding of how to run the bases with little help from base coaches.

Age Specific Practices

T-Ball

- Practices must keep moving.
- Solicit parent involvement whenever it can improve productivity.
- Emphasis on basic skills, hitting, fielding, throwing, running.
- Rolling of mass ground balls.
- Use of multiple balls for throwing program.
- Mass tee batting with whiffle balls and whiffle bats.
- Rapid fire baserunning.

AA

- Develop structure to practices.
- Fielders graduate to more challenging drills, some fungoes involved.
- The 'ready position' team fielding drill is a priority at the AA level.
- Have players take throws at bags from various positions in the field. Make these situations both force outs and tag plays.
- Longer throws in drills and/or throwing program to help players learn crow hop.
- Hitting drills progress into front/side toss
- Emphasize our turns at 1st base.

AAA

- Efficient, structured practices.
- Begin to emphasize situational work.
- Situational games with tee and side toss.
- Organized infield/outfield taken in practices and pre game.
- Regular drills with outfielders on drop steps, general footwork, and tracking the baseball.
- Regular side work for pitchers.
- Use more challenging and various hitting drills.
- Sliding as practice work. Introduce head first slide, going back to bags, only.

Majors

- Begin working individual defense in pairs and small groups.
- Team defenses with focus on cuts and bag coverage.
- Regular PFP(Pitchers Fielding Practice) with the involvement of infielders.
- Pitchers' side work should include both wind-up and stretch deliveries.
- Pitchers should be encourage to use their change up.
- Hitting will operate in similar fashion to that of defense, using various stations with work in pairs and small groups.
- Reading passed balls/wild pitches as baserunning drill.

Prep

- Regular team defensive work.
- PFP aimed at controlling the running game.
- Baserunning drills focused upon proper primary and secondary leads. Jumps for steals and hit and runs must also be addressed.
- Use batting practice model for efficiency whenever numbers allow. If numbers of players and staff are sufficient, nearly every aspect of practice can be accomplished during batting practice.

Coaches' References and Resources

Practices

- a. Hitting
 - Use cages when available for more reps and reduced turnover time.
 - Emphasize load and stride.
 - Side toss, front toss, tees, etc, with various types and sizes of balls; tennis, whiffles, golf whiffles, popcorn kernels, etc.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TkYPTgsstnE>
 - We never need live BP with our hitters in Majors and younger.
 - No more than 4-8 swings per player, per round.
- b. INF
 - Use as many coaches to hit/roll ground balls as possible, up to 4. Mass INF, more reps without throws.
 - Roll out as infield drill. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nkosoSKrnQ&feature=related> Roll ground balls to infielders without gloves. Force them to be in a more athletic fielding position, and to watch the ball all the way into their hands.
 - When throwing, work through baseball to make strong throws.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98nYdcKaSsM&feature=fvw>
- c. OF Play
 - Emphasis on footwork, more reps.
 - Fly balls – use out of hand technique. There is seldom a need to take fly balls off bat.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLofxIkY0oQ&feature=related>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6s52Dan1n8&feature=related>
- d. Baserunning
 - Home to 1st on INF ground ball.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G7KQsbDgs1g&feature=fvw>
 - Home to 1st on 1B, with emphasis on angle and turn.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ik91-aE_PEk&feature=related
 - Home to 2nd with emphasis on angle and turn at 1st, and picking up 3rd base coach approaching 2nd.
 - 1st to 3rd on base hit.
 - 2nd to home reading 3rd base coach.
 - Reading INF ground ball going 2nd to 3rd.
 - Tagging up with less than 2 outs.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuZ8RPvG0hI&feature=related>
 - 3rd to home on contact play, read play, sac fly, etc.
- e. Pitching
 - Long Toss and light, flat ground sides at practices. Sample of some basic drills building to long toss:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SC5qoB1PEQI>
 - Emphasize letting ball go.

- Aggressive approach aimed at forcing contact.
 - Stress four-seam FB.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=of9ty2k3juc&feature=related>
 - Discuss two-seam FB (Arm action and throwing motion remain the same as with four-seam FB. Only the grip changes)
<http://us.123rf.com/400wm/400/400/spectruminfo/spectruminfo0905/spectruminfo090500012/4889473-demonstrating-the-two-seam-fastball-grip-on-a-baseball.jpg>
 - Introduce some basic change up grips for experimentation (Hold loose and comfortable. Throw as a FB. The grip changes, not the delivery)
http://www.thecompletepitcher.com/images/grips/wallace_circle_changeup.jpg
<http://static2.bigstockphoto.com/thumbs/4/0/6/large2/6048395.jpg>
<http://cache2.asset-cache.net/xc/81476499.jpg?v=1&c=IWSAsset&k=2&d=77BFBA49EF8789215ABF3343C02EA548FB430F9BA78FD22067CC7D9027D1F648161C245F6037E992>
<http://www.blogcdn.com/mlb.fanhouse.com/media/2010/05/changeup-grip-315aj051210.jpg>
 - Balance and alignment to plate.
http://i.cdn.turner.com/si/2009/writers/ted_keith/03/02/jays.postcard/roy-halladay.jpg
 - Solid, athletic landing. <http://www.trunkbunker.com/gregmaddux.jpg>
 - Full follow through, finishing in athletic fielding position.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cTv-LrzIPw&feature=related>
- f. Catching
- Solid, square set up. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WyBn9oV7i>
 - Low target to emphasize low strikes for pitchers.
 - Elementary blocking fundamentals.(use tennis or other soft ball)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ahP9ephnoI>
- g. Scrimmaging and team drills.
- Ready position Team Fundamental.
 - Use tee or side toss games so that ball is put in play continually to produce more game situations.
- h. Older players above the Majors level graduate to BP practice model.
- Groups of 3-4 hitters, live on field.
 - Group of 3-4 in cage.
 - INF/OF's take balls live off bat.
 - Pitchers throw bullpens to catchers.

Programs as Resources

NWLL members will have the opportunity to observe the drills and methods enumerated above, and their implementation, first hand. The winter programs listed below are opportunities to view the organization of large numbers of players into a practice structure utilizing various drills. All NWLL coaches, players, and parents are invited to observe. Please contact the Skills Director for all details.

1. NWLL and Repetitions Winter Baseball Clinics
2. Diamond Skills All American Camp
3. St. John's High School Winter Camp

Sample Practices

T-Ball and AA

:15 Light run and stretch

- An easy run, lap around the field and a few sprints.
- Simple stretch. Use arm circles.
- Emphasis on warming from the core, out.

:25 Throwing program

- In pairs, if possible. When some struggle to catch, it may be necessary to throw from buckets, into a fence, then, pick up.
- Start with wrist flips, emphasizing 4-seam rotation.

:45 Defense

- Roll mass ground balls.
- Any fly balls, out of hand.
- Slowly work into throws, i.e. infield throws to 1st, outfielders throwing into infield.

:70 Hitting

- Mass tee work. Get as many swings as possible.
- At coach's discretion, those that are able work into more advanced drills

:75 Break

:90- Baserunning and/or Situational Game

- Should be the more fun portion of practice for the kids.
- Creativity allows for competition within practice, timed baserunning, live tee games, live situations, etc.

AAA and Majors

:20 Run and Stretch

:30 Throwing Program

- Buildups are good to isolate throwing mechanics.
- Greater emphasis on longer toss and footwork at end of throwing program.

:60 Defense

- Emphasize drills, mass ground balls and fly balls.

:90 Hitting

- Multi-station approach, using several drills, including tee work.
- Pull individual or paired pitchers (and catchers in necessary) at this time for side work.

:105 Baserunning

:120 Situational Game

Prep and Higher Divisions

:20 Run and Stretch

:30 Throwing Program

:50 Individual and/or Team Defense Fundamentals

:90 Hitting

- Batting Practice model. This should allow for defensive work to continue during BP, whether that be off of fungo, or fielders taking reps, live off the bat.
- If numbers allow, there should be a baserunning group. Station to station, reading balls from bat.
- Pitchers throw their sides at this time, also.

:120 Situational Game or Scrimmage