

New Canaan Softball



Coaches Manual Player & Coach Development

Table of Contents

Purpose of the Manual and How to Use

Teaching the Fundamentals “Simply”

- Hitting
- Fielding
- Base Running
- Throwing/Pitching
- Behaviors

Coaching Age Appropriate Skills and Concepts

- Throwing/Pitching
- Hitting
- Fielding
- Base Running
- Behaviors

Coaching Administration

- Safety
- Parent Communications
- Navigating the Website
- Creating Game Line Ups & Practice Plans in Advance
- Practice Plan & Drills

Purpose of the Manual & How to Use

The purpose of this manual is to ensure our coaches have the tools and reference material they need to feel confident in how they should approach the season for any Little League age group they are volunteering to support. The manual will clarify what skills and team concepts are expected to be taught and/or reinforced for each age group/division as well as how they can be taught in very simplistic, easy to understand language.

Along with guiding the our coaches on our approach for teaching the fundamentals of the game, the manual also provides some assistance on how to run an effective practice and maximize the time you have with the team. It explains your role in creating a safe practice and game environment as well as some best practices for how to effectively communicate with your parents during the season.

Teaching the Fundamentals & Coaching Age Appropriate Skills and Concepts

We believe strongly in keeping things simple when teaching the game of softball and have created simple 1-page references for each of the core fundamentals.

Additionally, we've also included an outline of the age appropriate skills and concepts that should be coached at each age group. Once you're clear on what you'll be teaching to your respective age group you can then leverage the drill references and practice plans template to organize your practices. The key is to teach the fundamentals relevant to your age group while keeping practices fresh and effective. Always keep in mind that just as some kids mature faster than others and therefore will master fundamental skills faster than others.

Hitting Fundamentals

BATTING STANCE



- Grip – hands together, knuckles aligned
- Comfortable with feet about shoulder width apart (all can be different)
- Hands about shoulder height
- Balls of feet – “Be Athletic”
- Proper distance from Home plate and same every time
- Balanced



THE SWING



- Be a “PYRAMID” – strongest object, swing happens from bottom up
- Load happens on inside part of back leg
- Stride to balance and when front foot comes down back heel “POPS”
- The hips rotate and bat lag occurs
- Release the bat head after contact and finish high
- Balanced throughout



Fielding & Base Running Fundamentals

FIELDING



- Ready Position – good base, balls of feet, knees bent, palms up
- Catch ball in front of body
- Use two hands
- Easier to have hands come up vs. go down
- Catch with fingers up when ball is above the waist, fingers down when ball is below the waist



BASERUNNING



- Running to proper base
- Which bases and when to run through
- Inside part of bag
- Getting to sprinters position
- Balls of feet – be athletic
- Bent Leg "figure 4" slide



Throwing Fundamentals

GRIP



- The ball can be gripped with 2, 3 or 4 fingers depending on player preference. Thumb underneath the ball
- Holding the ball across the seams gives the best grip and rotation on the ball.
- The ball should be held in the fingers, NOT the palm of the hand, as the wrist needs to flex
- Grip should be firm, NOT rigid



THROWING



- Ankle Bone (knob) and lead elbow pointed to target
- Elbow at or above shoulder height and fingers above the ball
- Hand/Ball behind the ear and head
- Arm looks like an "L"



Pitching Fundamentals & Player Behavior

PITCHING



Simple Motion Explanation – “Superman” and “KTI” position

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxAa5K1wki4>

Jennie Finch

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwxxcVKwi8U>



PLAYERS BEHAVIOR



- Respect the Game
- Be on time (speak to parents)
- Listen to coaches
- Clean dugouts – “cleaner than we found it”
- Look like a ballplayer
- Shakes hands and says “good game”
- TEAM player
- Hustle all times (we do this as a drill)
- Responds to adversity

Coaching Age Appropriate Skills

The following pages outline of the age appropriate skills and concepts that should expect to either introduce and/or reinforce for your particular age group as we want you to feel confident that the concepts you're covering in practices are what makes sense for your team. Additionally, you'll able to determine what concepts are in the next age group should you have players that are ready for the next step.

Once you're clear on what you'll be teaching to your respective age group you can then leverage the drill references and practice plans template to organize your practices. The key is to teach the fundamentals relevant to your age group while keeping practices fresh and effective. Always keep in mind that just as some kids mature faster than others and therefore will master fundamental skills faster than others.

If you're able to effectively cover these age appropriate concepts then can be certain your team will have grown and they will be prepared to progress to the next level.

Target Skills - Throwing / Pitching

	A/AA Coach Pitch <u>6-8 yr olds</u>	AAA/Minors Coach/Player Pitch <u>8-11 yrs</u>	Majors Player Pitch <u>11-12 yrs</u>	Juniors Player Pitch <u>13-14 yrs</u>
Key: Introduction (I), Developmental (D), Competent (C)				
<u>Basic Mechanics</u>				
Front shoulder pointed to target/ankle bone to target	I	D / C	C	
Throwing Motion ("L" shaped arm, elbow at/above shoulder height)	I	D / C	C	
Proper Grip (thumb underneath)	I	D / C	C	
<u>Pitching</u>				
Stance (Feet positioning on rubber)		I	D / C	C
Fundamental Pitching Motion		I	D / C	C
Proper follow and finishing in "fielding" position		I	D / C	C
Pitch control and placement (keeping ball down, not overthrowing)			I	D / C
Understanding counts			I	D / C
<u>Rules and Concepts</u>				
Warm up to throw, not throw to warm up	I	D	D / C	C
-stretch, jog, then all pairs throw in the same direction				
Understand balks (when learning mechanics)		I	I / D	C
Ground rules (balls overthrown, thrown out of play)	I	I / D	D / C	C
Backing up - throws from catcher to pitcher and all bases		I	D	C

Introduction (I) - This indicates that the skill should be introduced at the age group

Developmental (D) – At this stage the player should have already been introduced to this skill and is now working towards mastering the skill

Competent (C) – At this stage the player should have a solid understanding of the skill

Target Skills - Hitting

	A/AA Coach Pitch <u>6-8 yr olds</u>	AAA/Minors Coach/Player Pitch <u>8-11 yrs</u>	Majors Player Pitch <u>11-12 yrs</u>	Juniors Player Pitch <u>13-14 yrs</u>
Key: Introduction (I), Developmental (D), Competent (C)				
<u>Basic Skills</u>				
Always wear helmet & only swing when in/just outside batter's box	I / D	D / C	C	
Grip - hands together/knuckles aligned	I / D	D / C	C	
Position/Distance from plate consistency	I	D	C	
Knob of bat to opposite batter's box & 45 degree angle	I / D	D / C	C	
Hit off a tee and soft toss	I / D	D / C	C	
<u>Hitting Mechanics</u>				
"Pyramid" stance, feet about shoulder width apart	I	D / C	C	
Stride: Small Step	I	D / C	C	
Weight transfer - show the ump the bottom of your back cleat	I	D / C	C	
Swing: From the Ground Up, Balanced Throughout	I	D / C	C	
<u>Rules and Concepts</u>				
Understand the strike zone (balls and strikes)	I	D	D / C	C
How runs are scored	I / D	D / C	C	
Coaches signs (batter/runner picking up on every pitch and executing)		I/D	D	C
Pitch selection and bunt fundamentals reliably		I	D	C
Observe and communicate pitcher's patterns			I	D

Introduction (I) - This indicates that the skill should be introduced at the age group

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Competent (C) – At this stage the player should have a solid understanding of the skill

Target Skills - Fielding

	A/AA Coach Pitch <u>6-8 yr olds</u>	AAA/Minors Coach/Player Pitch <u>8-11 yrs</u>	Majors Player Pitch <u>11-12 yrs</u>	Juniors Player Pitch <u>13-14 yrs</u>
Key: Introduction (I), Developmental (D), Competent (C)				
<u>Basic Mechanics</u>				
Stance/"Ready Position" - good base, knees bent, palms up	I	D / C	C	
Catch ball fingers up (fly ball) and fingers down (grounder)	I	D / C	C	
Catch ball in front of body	I	D / C	C	
Two hands catching and fielding	I	D / C	C	
<u>Intermediate Skills / Strategy</u>				
Understand how to get an out (1st base, tag out, force out, fly ball)	I / D	D / C	C	
Position location (Where do I stand?)	I / D	D	C	
Fly ball above nose and eye level, two hands, glove foot in front	I	D	D / C	C
Throwing to bases, relays/cutoffs	I	D	D / C	C
Basic double play mechanics		I	D	C
1st base mechanics (see the throw, then stretch to the ball)	I	I / D	D / C	C
<u>Team Defense</u>				
Pitcher covering 1st base		I / D	D	C
Outfield (break to the ball)		I	D	C
Catchers (reliably throw to all bases)		I	D	C
Basic Bunt defenses		I	D	C
Run-down techniques		I	D	D / C
Fly ball/Pop-Up priority positions and communication rules		I	D	C
<u>Rules and Concepts</u>				
How outs are made	I / D	D / C	C	
Difference between an out via force play vs. tag play	I	D	C	
Understand role of each position	I	D	D / C	C
Communication (how many outs, where the next out)	I	I / D	D / C	C
Coverage and backup responsibilities (Everyone moves on every play)	I	I / D	D / C	C

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Competent (C) – At this stage the player should have a solid understanding of the skill

Target Skills - Base Running

	A/AA Coach Pitch <u>6-8 yr olds</u>	AAA/Minors Coach/Player Pitch <u>8-11 yrs</u>	Majors Player Pitch <u>11-12 yrs</u>	Juniors Player Pitch <u>13-14 yrs</u>
Key: Introduction (I), Developmental (D), Competent (C)				
<u>Basic Skills</u>				
Run to the proper base when ball is hit	I / D	D / C	C	
Run through first base (exit in foul) vs. when to make a turn	I / D	D / C	C	
Making appropriate turns ("?" turn, "Banana" turn)	I	D	C	
Look at base coaches	I	D	C	
Hitting the inside of the bag with the foot	I	D / C	C	
<u>Intermediate Skills/ Strategy</u>				
Safely execute a bent leg slide		I	D/C	C
Stealing		I / D	C	
How and when to tag up	I	D / C	C	
Effective coach communication--sign pick up and response		I / D	D / C	C
Advancing on ground balls when not forced		I	D	C
Proper lead off all bases		I	I / D	D
Begin to demonstrate self-thinking / decision making on base paths		I	I / D	D / C
<u>Rules and Concepts</u>				
Understand how and when runners advance	I	D	D / C	C
Understand force vs. tag out situations	I	D	D / C	C
Understand the rules and alertness of being a trail runner	I	D	D / C	C

Introduction (I) - This indicates that the skill should be introduced at the age group

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Target Skills - Behaviors

	A/AA Coach Pitch <u>6-8 yr olds</u>	AAA/Minors Coach/Player Pitch <u>8-11 yrs</u>	Majors Player Pitch <u>11-12 yrs</u>	Juniors Player Pitch <u>13-14 yrs</u>
Key: Introduction (I), Developmental (D), Competent (C)				
<u>Respect</u>				
Listens to coach when coach is talking	I	D	C	
Field only the balls that come to you	I	D / C	C	
Dugout clean, uniforms neat	I	D	C	
Arrive at practice/ games at requested times dressed & ready to play	I	D / C	C	
<u>Effort</u>				
Learns with enthusiasm	I	D	C	
Set Season Improvement Goal and strive to achieve	I	D	C	
Hustle--run on and off the field	I	D / C	C	
<u>Leadership / Attitude</u>				
Show support for teammates --positive language	I	D	C	
Greet teammates after scoring / contributing	I	D	C	
Respond positively to adversity--"One pitch at a time"	I	D	C	
Look for opportunity to help teammate		I	D	C

Introduction (I) - This indicates that the skill should be introduced at the age group

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Competent (C) – At this stage the player should have a solid understanding of the skill

Coaching Administration

This section is meant to provide you with some best practices in the following areas:

Safety

Highlighting key items that will help you ensure the field is a safe environment for all players and coaches during games and practices.

Parent Communications

We've provided some basic examples in terms of communicating with the parents in order to set expectations up front as well as the ongoing communications that will keep them informed and involved.

Use of the League Website

The League website (<http://newcanaansb.leag1.com/>) is a great resource for the coaches and the parents. It will make your job as coach much easier in terms of communicating with your team, staying updated with your teams schedule, keeping track of weather related impacts, and contact data for communicating with fellow coaches.

Creating Game and Practice Plans in Advance

Being prepared for both games and practices helps to ensure that pace of play is appropriate, it serves to avoid “in-game” confusion for both players and coaches, and it will allow you to efficiently manage your practice time and minimize down time transitioning from one activity to another.

Sample Practice Plan & Drills

Provides examples of how you might about structuring your practice based on the amount of time you have and the additional coaching/parent resource available to assist.

Safety

Practice and Game Safety Checklist

- Walk the field for debris/foreign objects
- Inspect helmets, bats, and catchers gear
- Make sure First Aid Kit is available (be sure it's replenished accordingly)
- Check conditions of fences, backstops, bases, and warning track
- Make sure a working telephone is available
- Ensure players are warmed up and all are throwing in the same direction

Medical

- First-aid kits are made available to each team and should be in the equipment bag at all times.
- Ensure ice packs are replenished as necessary
- Ensure there is a working cell phone in the event emergency personnel (911) needs to be contacted

Protective Equipment

- Equipment should be inspected regularly, especially for cracked or damaged helmets.
- Batters must wear approved helmets with cages/facemasks during batting practice as well as games.
- Catchers must wear a long chest protector, shin guards, and a catcher's helmet and mask with dangling throat guard.
- Facemasks are mandatory for Pitcher, 3rd base, and 1st base

Bat Safety

- No player other than the at-bat hitter is allowed to have a bat in his\her hands inside or outside of the playing field.
- Designate an "on –deck" circle before every game that is a safe distance from the bench

Field of Play

- Dugout/Bench Safety - One adult must be in the dugout at ALL TIMES
- Representatives from teams scheduled for practice or game shall inspect the entire playing field to ensure it is free of debris and hazards
- Inspect all bases to ensure they are secure and pose no hazard
- If either coach or game coordinator can't conclude that the field is safe for play, the field shall not be used and the practice or game shall be cancelled

Parent Communications

“Welcome” Email

Frequent and informative communications with the parents of the players is very important. An early communication to set the stage in terms of practice times, game schedule, playing time, and general rules and expectations not only provides important information but it also demonstrates you're organized and will help to avoid any confusion and potential misunderstandings later on in the season.

Sample:

Subject: Welcome to Softball and the New Canaan “Red” Majors Team

Hi everyone. I wanted to introduce myself and welcome you to the upcoming softball season. Your daughter will be a member of the **New Canaan “Red”** team, which is part of our Majors division.

My name is Xxxxx Xxxxxx and I'll be the head coach, assisted by Xxxx Xxxxx. In addition to ensuring the girls have fun and enjoy the experience, our goal is to continue to develop their skills and capabilities and instill the importance of good sportsmanship. We'll learn in our wins as well as in our losses. We have 12 players on the roster, which ensures that all there will be ample playing time for all.

The game schedule is still being firmed up, but here's a summary of what I know at this point:

Practice: Thursday nights at Waveny from 6:15 - 7:30pm. We will rotate between both Waveny Orchard and Water Tower fields

Games: Primarily Wednesday evenings and Sunday afternoons. Opening Day game is scheduled to be April 26th and our last game on June 7th (the game schedule will be published shortly on the website).

General Rules: games are a maximum of 6 innings, no inning will begin within 15 minutes of the scheduled end time, up to 9 players can play in the field at a time, an inning ends when either 3 outs are made or the batting team scores 5 runs, unlimited stealing including home, and dropped 3rd strike is live. This division is a "player" pitch division, no coach relief so we must develop some pitchers.

Questions/Requests I have for you the parents:

1) Do I have any additional parent volunteers which can help with the following: "Team Mom(s) or Dad(s)" to help with photos, short/simple game articles for the website, ice cream after the game periodically, game day help on the bench to ensure our on deck batters get appropriate sized helmets/bats, help getting catcher's gear on prior to the inning ending so we keep the game moving, extra hands to help on practice days

2) If there is anything you feel important for me to know about your daughter, please don't hesitate to let me know (allergies, shy, never played, etc.).

I'm looking forward to the season and working with all the girls. If you have any questions feel free to drop me a note or call me at (xxx) xxx-xxxx. Welcome to the New Canaan Red!

Parent Communications (cont.)

Weekly Reminders on Practices and Games

Even though you have sent out the schedule to the parents in advance and they have access to the website, we all know that being a parent can be hectic so there's no harm in sending a simple reminder the night before practices or games to help the parents. You should also solicit for attendance as you'll want to prepare you're line up in advance.

Sample:

Subject: Practice Tomorrow 6:15pm Waveny Orchard

I just wanted to remind everyone that we have practice tomorrow night (Thursday) at 6:15pm at Waveny Orchard.

We also have a game this Sunday afternoon at 3:00pm at Waveny Orchard. Please let me know if your daughter can/cannot attend the game.

Thanks,

Xxxxxxx

Game Recaps

Feedback is important for both the players and the parents. Sending game recaps not only continues to reinforce your commitment as a volunteer but it also can be used to engage the parents in helping to reinforce important messages you want to give to your team.

Sample:

Subject: Tough Loss, Great Effort

While unfortunately our last inning comeback fell one run short, I'm incredibly proud of the way the girls played tonight. Our pitch selection has improved, we're making much better contact, and they're clearly more confident at the plate. We had some base running miscues that we'll review at next practice and see if we can't improve upon that are for our next game.

Please reiterate to the kids what a great job they did today and we'll see you all at practice on Thursday.

Thanks,

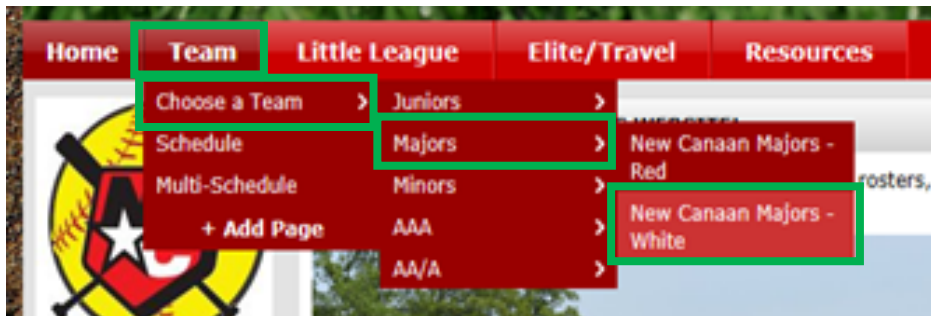
Xxxxxxx

Navigating the Website

You will find that using the website to communicate with your team is simple, easy, and a great resource for making your job more efficient. Simply go onto the website and “Sign in”.




To get your team home page click on “Team”, “Choose a Team”, find your division (i.e. “Majors”), and then select your team (i.e. “New Canaan Majors – White”)



Navigating the Website (cont.)

Once on your Team Home Page you can view and download your game and practice schedule, add/edit a Team Bulletin, post scores/see game results/check league standings

[Home](#) [Team](#) [Little League](#) [Elite/Travel](#) [Resources](#)



Change team: Spring 2015 Majors New Canaan Majors - White

New Canaan Majors - White Options

CHOOSE A TEAM >

- [Contacts](#)
- [Schedule](#)
- [Roster](#)
- [Results](#)**
- [DYBS Standings](#)
- [Multi-Schedule](#)
- [+ Add Page](#)

GAME WEDNESDAY + -

by **Tim Dann** posted 04/21/2015

Hi Team;

We play our second game of the season versus Wilton tomorrow night on Orchard Field. Game time is 6:30, but please arrive by 5:45 to warm up, and don't forget to bring layers in case it gets cold. I have RSVPs from several players but I still need to hear if the following players will be at the game: Sofia, Eleanor, Charlotte, Claudia, and Carolina.




Thanks and we'll see you tomorrow,

Coaches Mike, Rob and Tim

SHARE Facebook Twitter LinkedIn

CONTACTS

Coach

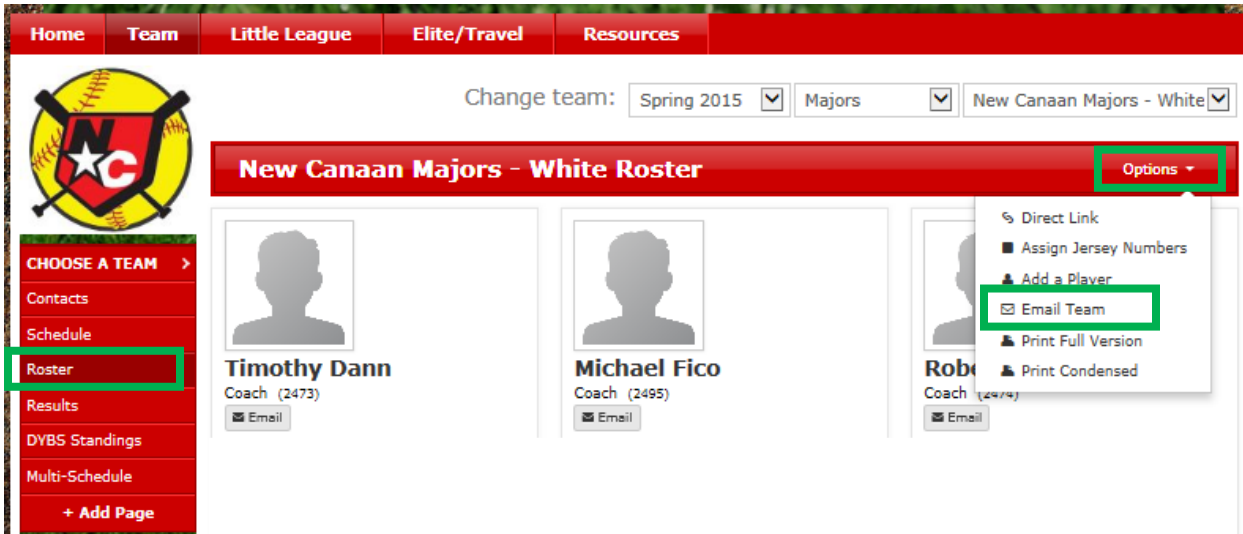
-  **Timothy Dann** Email
-  **Michael Fico** Email
-  **Robert Moore** Email

NEXT 10 EVENTS FULL

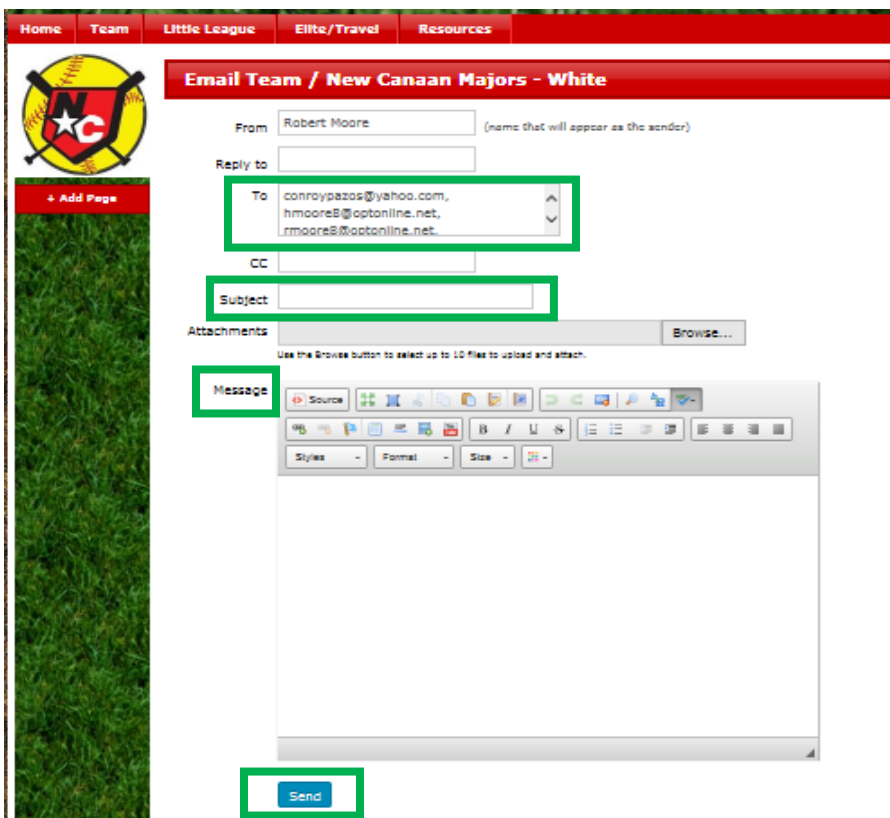
Date	Type	Event / Field
Wed, 4/22 6:30p	Game	vs Wilton Wavemy Orchard
Fri, 4/24 6:30p	Game	(H) * Wavemy Orchard
Sun, 4/26 1:15p	Game	vs New Canaan Majors - Re Wavemy Orchard
Wed, 4/29 5:00p	Practice	w New Canaan Majors - Re Wavemy Water Tower

Navigating the Website (cont.)

An alternative to using the Team Bulletin for emailing your team is to click on the “Roster” link on the left hand side, then click “Options” in the upper right, and then select “Email Team”.



You will then see the following template that is pre-populated with the emails of the parents for your registered players (which you can add to or amend). Simply type in the Subject line and your email message in the body of the template then click “Send”.



Creating Game Plans in Advance

On game days, creating a lineup in advance and posting it in the dugout not only helps the game move faster in between innings (i.e. it allows catcher's to get their gear on in advance, pinch runners for catchers if necessary) but it also enables you to provide clarity for your players and coaches so you can focus on the game itself vs. player rotations. And while you may need to make "in game" adjustments due to pitch counts, injuries, and no shows, having a plan in advance will make that process much easier to manage. Sending an email to the parents the day before to confirm which players will/will not be attending the game is typically a good idea before creating the lineup.

Sample Game Line Up and Positions:

Batting Order		Position Per Inning *						
#	Name	Name	1st Inning	2nd Inning	3rd Inning	4th Inning	5th Inning	6th Inning
1	Haley	Leila	SS	Bench	SS	3rd Base	CF	SS
2	Bridget	Bridget	1st Base	LF	Bench	SS	RF	1st Base
3	Emily	Emma	Catcher	Catcher	Catcher	Bench	SS	LF
4	Sofia	Amanda	LF	CF	Bench	Catcher	Catcher	Catcher
5	Emma	Emily	CF	RF	1st Base	2nd Base	Bench	CF
6	Amanda	Sofia	3rd Base	3rd Base	LF	RF	Bench	2nd Base
7	Hannah	Kara	RF	2nd Base	CF	1st Base	OF	Bench
8	Celia	Celia	Bench	SS	RF	SS	2nd Base	Bench
9	Julia	Julia	2nd Base	Bench	3rd Base	CF	3rd Base	3rd Base
10	Kara	Hannah	Bench	1st Base	2nd Base	Pitcher	Pitcher	CF
11	Leila	Haley	Pitcher	Pitcher	Pitcher	Bench	LF	Pitcher

** All players have 2+ innings in the infield, No player sits 2x before all sit once*

Creating Practice Plans in Advance

Similarly, it's just as important to be prepared to have a plan for practices as well. Depending on the age group you're coaching you will typically have 75-90 minutes a week for practice so it's important you maximize the time.

Sample:

Warm Up (10 mins)

- Jog/Stretch
- Throwing (stress proper form and accuracy)

Stations (45 mins, rotate groups every 15 minutes)

- Station 1 – Hitting (soft toss and/or tees)
- Station 2 – Ground Balls (left, right, charge)
- Station 3 – Outfield (fly balls left, right, back, forward, ground balls)

Situations (15 mins)

- Set up infielders (6 players) and 4 players put on helmets as live runners
- Coach puts balls in play to replicate real game situations, reinforce that the defense is moving appropriately on each play, ask them “where is the next play?”, runners should be working on base running fundamentals

Base running (10 mins)

- Line up at home plate and go through the progressions:
 - Home to First, through the bag, exit in foul territory
 - Home to First, make the turn, find the ball, return to the bag
 - Home to Second, make the “?” turn at first, stop at Second
 - Second to Home, pick up the 3rd base coach
 - Finish with a relay race, ½ the team starts at 2nd, ½ starts at home and the first to have all team members complete the running of 4 bases wins

Close (5 mins)

- Recap we you covered, check for understanding, solicit questions for clarity

Practice Drills – Hitting & Fielding

HITTING DRILLS



- Wall Drill
- Tee work
 - Inside, middle, outside
 - “Walk” into the swing
- Front toss
 - Underhand
- Soft toss
- Batting Practice
 - Machine or coach pitch

FIELDING DRILLS



- Groundball Partner Rolls
 - Straight, backhand, glove hand
 - Glove and no glove to reinforce the use of two hands
- Set Up Game Situations
- Cone Drill
 - Player runs around the cone and then must field the ground ball or fly ball on the move
- Outfield
 - Move them left, right, and center on fly balls and ground balls
 - Insert a “cutoff” man
 - Self toss pop ups or hit tennis balls of a racquet for younger age groups

Practice Drills – Throwing/Pitching & Base Running

THROWING DRILLS

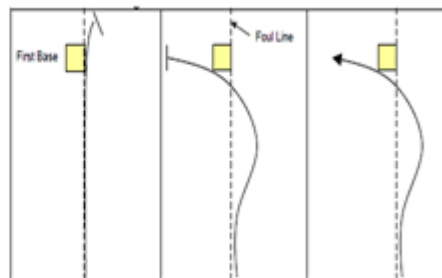


- Towel Drill
- Wrist Snaps
- 4 Corner Throwing Drill
- Simply Play Catch (but focus on technique and accuracy)
- Reinforce during live situational work
- Bullpen sessions for pitchers

BASERUNNING DRILLS



- Use the "slide mat" or cardboard boxes on the grass
- Use live runners in your situational fielding work
- Break out sessions during practice
 - First Base Turns
 - When to leave on steals
 - 2nd to home, pick up base coach



Player, Coach, & Parent Expectations



Avoid information overload!!!!



- Be Positive – this is a game of failure and those who succeed 3 out of every 10 times they are successful. This is SO important to remember
- Hold parents and players accountable – being on time, staying positive and allow them to have fun, good sportsmanship
- Try and get everyone who wants to be involved. Have a sign up sheet and give roles and jobs. Makes all feel part of team.

