

Coaching T-Ball:

1. Unfortunately, a late start in a game like tee ball or baseball typically means players won't make up the difference until the following season when he can get a better start. Get organized, develop a plan, and prepare to work hard. Learn as much about tee ball and baseball as you can. Prepare to learn enough about baseball to be able to present the material in "kid terms."
2. Kids don't know what it means to "step in the bucket" or "take an extra base" or "turn two" until you teach them and show them. Successful coaches know their audience and use analogies and common visual imagery to establish an intellectual and cognitive connection with their players. For tee ball players, these images are best when they are a bit dramatic: point the belly button toward the part of the field where you want to hit the ball (get your hips rotated), make your arm like an elephant's trunk when throwing (don't launch the ball like a catapult, THROW it), and point the button on your cap in the direction the ball came from when fielding a ground ball (keep your head down), for instance.
3. Whether your league keeps score or not, or whether you have a team that can win games or not, don't ever fail to take your responsibilities as a coach seriously. Being a serious coach means that you'll try to teach them something about baseball, basic skills, and sportsmanship, it means that you're attentive to player safety, and it means that while you're asking your players to put their best foot forward, so are you.
4. Having been a good player is no assurance that you will be a good coach any more than being a good student necessarily means you will be a good teacher. A coach must possess certain qualities – many coaches are satisfied with merely having characteristics. A coach has to be a good teacher, he has to be patient, he has to be confident and decisive, he has to be nurturing when his players get hurt or make mistakes, and he has to be able to get as much as he can out of his players without going too far.
5. Tell players' parents not to assume that the game of tee ball is just like the game of baseball; try to tell them the difference because it might spare you an untimely laugh and then the humiliation of asking a silly question later.
6. The most difficult thing a coach has to do is see the twelve players on the field who are not related to him. If you can do it, try to be a coach on the field and a parent off the field, and get your fellow coaches to do the same. Impartiality (and avoiding excessive impartiality) is essential to success.
7. Coaches need the assistance of their players' parents. I found that parents are normally willing to help out if they aren't too busy and they tend to learn that the more they participate in the operation of the team, the more they also stay in touch with the challenges coaches encounter as they try to build the team. (Getting parents' assistance does not mean losing control of the team to them.)
8. There can be three hundred people in the stands and three coaches shouting during a game, but the one voice a player hears is his own mother's. This isn't a problem until the coach tells the player to stop and she yells for him to go. The only thing a coach can do about this is tell the parents how tough it is to communicate with the players when there are conflicting instructions on the field. At times, it can be a safety issue.
9. Parents bring their own expectations into the season and it's safe to assume that coaches and managers do the same. The best way to ensure there are no surprises as the season develops is for the manager to hold a meeting and set the tone early. He should let the parents know that he knows what he is doing and help them develop confidence in him during this first team meeting.
10. The only way to build a good team out of a group of individuals is through effective practice. On the field, you have to be a teacher as well as a coach. Teach them what they need to know, show them what you taught them, practice the things you taught them over and over, then be prepared to do it all over again.
11. Practice, by definition, presumes repetition. Repetition is the keystone of successful game preparation. However, repetition soon turns into monotony with players, particularly tee ball players, unless you: (1) PLAN every aspect of every practice right down to the minute, (2) Maintain a distinct sense of MOTION to your practices and a coherent FLOW to them, and (3) Make a GAME out of as many things as you can.
12. Remember that players will not perform effectively in games unless they have practiced that way. If you don't practice base running, you will get base running outs in games. If you don't drill the players on catching the ball and making a good, smart throw, they won't do it in the game. Attention to the basics is essential.

13. To make the most of your practice time, break the team up into two or three groups, depending on the number of coaches, space, and equipment you have available for the workout. This will enable you to accomplish two or three times as much work without making players stand around with nothing to do.

14. Proper dugout behavior is essential to good order on the ballfield during the game. As with all other elements of the practice, if you don't achieve it in practice, you won't achieve it in the game. A dugout full of monkeys is very distracting to the team and the coaches. It also sets the tone for what will happen between the baselines.

15. As you're working with your tee ball players, try to avoid letting hitters stand nearly motionless in one position in the batter's box too long. When a hitter stands in one place too long, he tends to settle vertically in his stance while he's waiting to swing. This makes it difficult for him to transfer this momentum horizontally into his hitting motion.

16. Whatever the coach does with foot positioning during the hitting sequence, he must ensure the hitter maintains control over his power and balance and can reach the ball with the "sweet" part of the bat. As the stride is begun with the batter's weight and head back over the back foot and weight on the balls of the feet, the hitter transfers his weight in the swing with the head kept back behind the point of contact with the ball. There's a bit more to hitting than that, but the preceding two sentences should make the point that you should pay close attention to where and how your hitter stands in the batter's box. Many coaches simply let their hitters approach the tee and start flailing away at the ball.

17. If you've spent any time around tee ball at all, you've seen coaches who framed their entire offensive strategy around a scheme to have hitters challenge the outfield's ability to catch the ball by hitting pop flies. However, when the level of competition elevates or when players get older, those deep fly balls turn into disappointing outs. My teams scored a lot of runs just by hitting hard grounders and crisp line drives through holes in the defense. Yes, tee ball players can place-hit, if shown how.

18. Teach your players to slide. It makes the game safer, it can help them avoid a high tag, and it keeps them on the base when you don't want them to wander off of it.

19. The hitter's bat should be the heaviest bat he can handle in a fundamentally sound swing. The heavier bat gives the ball more punch as long as the hitter can effectively get it to the ball. However, the heaviest bat in the bag is no good in the hands of the player who can't effectively deliver it to the ball.

20. One of the most common, yet subtle hazards to players involves the handling of bats by players waiting to bat. It was our team policy that players didn't handle a bat unless a coach handed it to him. Once a coach handed a player a bat, he maintained him in his supervision.

21. The most common mistake parents make when they're teaching their kids to catch pop flies is that they don't make sure they get to the ball before they try to catch it. Teach kids to catch pop flies in two steps: run and center up under the ball, then put your glove up and catch the ball. Of course, there are times when the player can't center up, but you need to start with the easy fly first.

22. I had an indoor-safe ball that he threw to my kids in their family room where they could get comfortable catching flies, grounders, and the really tough ones. They soon graduated to the really tough diving plays then they threw from the knees. This exercise was good for developing their confidence around the ball and gave us the needed repetitions it took to help them become fluid in the fielding-throwing sequence.