

First Practice: Evaluation & Foundations

Outdoor	2 hours	Week 1
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OBJECTIVE

Learn names, set routines, evaluate every player's throwing/catching/swing baseline, and send them home smiling. You're collecting information today, not fixing anything.

BENCHMARKS THIS PLAN FEEDS

- B1 — Catch confidently
- B2 — Throw with a step
- B8 — Play at game tempo

PREP — BEFORE PLAYERS ARRIVE

Equipment	12 soft-core (safety) baseballs, 12 tennis balls, 4 cones, 3 tees, bucket of wiffle balls, 2 portable nets (or fence space), painter's tape or chalk for foul-line targets, name tape for helmets.
Field setup	Cone off three zones in the outfield grass — Zone 1 (catch/throw), Zone 2 (tee + net), Zone 3 (ground balls). Keep all three at least 30 ft apart, all players throwing the same direction (never toward each other).
Coach prep	Print roster; you'll score each player 1–3 on catch, throw, swing during rotations. Assign each assistant a zone before practice.

PRACTICE TIMELINE

0:00-0:10	Welcome circle + names (10 min) Whole team. Everyone in a circle, coach included. Each kid: name, favorite team or player, one thing they want to learn. Set the three team rules: hustle everywhere, listen when a coach talks, be ready when the ball comes to you. Practice the "eyes on me" signal (coach raises fist, players freeze and look) — rehearse it twice now; it will save you 10 minutes at every future practice.
0:10-0:15	Dynamic warm-up (5 min) Run the routine, all 12 movements, down and back on each. Card's on its own sheet. — Two cone lines 20 feet apart. First time through, walk them movement by movement before they run it.
0:15-0:25	Throwing progression (10 min) Pairs, 15 ft apart to start. Run Point & Throw : "T" position check → point glove-shoulder at partner → step and throw. Coaches roam and score each player 1–3. After 5 min, confident pairs step back to 25 ft. — Key points: Elbow above shoulder. Step with the correct (glove-side) foot. Follow through across the body. — Common mistake: Facing the target square-on. Fix with "show them your pocket" (glove-side hip). — Watch for: Players catching with one hand or turning their face away — note them; they need the tennis-ball station next week.
0:25-0:55	Evaluation stations (30 min · 3 × 10 min rotations) Groups A/B/C. — Station 1 — Catch (Coach 1): Underhand Partner Toss & Catch with tennis balls, then real soft-core if ready. Score B1. Cue: "two hands, thumbs together above your waist, pinkies together below." — Station 2 — Tee swings (Coach 2): Stance & Balance Check then 8–10 swings each into net. Score B4. One cue only: "hold your finish like a statue." — Station 3 — Ground balls (Coach 3): Alligator Ground Balls — coach rolls slow grounders, player fields with "alligator chomp" (glove down, top hand traps). Score B3. Cue: "butt down, glove out front where you can see it." — Minimum staffing (2 adults): run Station 2 as self-serve tee work beside Station 1's coach.
0:55-1:00	Water break (5 min)

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1:00-1:15

Team defense walk-through: where do I stand? (15 min)

Whole team, everyone on the infield dirt. Put a player at every position, including two extra outfielders if your roster runs long. Walk the field and name each spot out loud, then have the whole team point to it. Now play "go to your position": call a position, every player runs to it, freezes, and you check. Rotate everyone through the infield at least once — at 8U nobody owns a position yet, and you're collecting information about who is comfortable where.

- Teach the one answer: "If the ball comes to you on the ground, you throw it to first base." That single sentence is 80% of 8U defense. Say it, have them say it back, and point at first base together.
- Key points: Face the hitter. Glove out, knees bent, ready before the pitch. Nobody sits down in the grass.
- Watch for: Players who can't find their position without a coach walking them there — those are your Week-2 walk-through group.

1:15-1:40

Live situations: ball on the ground, throw to first (25 min)

Full defense on the field, coach at the plate with a bat and a bucket. Everyone in a position. Coach hits or rolls a soft-core ball to one fielder at a time and the entire defense reacts. The fielder makes the play to first; everyone else moves — infielders back up, outfielders come in behind the play. Slow it down and reset after every rep. This is the first time most of these kids have moved as a defense, so the pace should be deliberate, not frantic.

- Progression: Start with rolled balls to the infield only. Once they're finding first base consistently, add a batted ball to the outfield — outfielder's job is to catch it, turn, and throw to the nearest infielder, not to first.
- Add a runner: Last 8 minutes, put one runner at home who runs to first on contact. The defense now has a reason to hurry. Don't keep score.
- Rotate positions every 5 minutes so everyone gets an infield rep and an outfield rep.
- Common mistake: All 11 players chasing the ball. Reset the play and re-run it — "only one person fields it, everybody else has a job."

1:40-1:55

Game: "Home Run Derby" (15 min)

Whole team. Wiffle balls, short field with cones as fences. Each player gets 5 swings off slow coach toss (or the machine if it's already set); everyone else fields (this is secret catching practice). Count every ball past the cones loudly. No outs, no losers.

1:55-2:00

Wrap-up (5 min)

Recap the three rules and the throwing cue (point, step, throw). Talk to parents while gear is packed: practice days, what to bring, and that kids should bring water and a glove every time.

COACH'S NOTES

Fill in your 1–3 scores. Your Week-2 station groupings come from this: cluster the 1s on catching into the tennis-ball progression. Note any player who threw side-arm or "pushed" the ball — they get the throwing-mechanics station next week.