

Season Opener: Evaluation & the New Rules

Outdoor	2 hours	Week 1
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OBJECTIVE

Establish routines, evaluate every player against the eight benchmarks, and identify your early pitching and catching pools. You're gathering data today — the season's groupings come out of this practice.

BENCHMARKS THIS PLAN FEEDS

- B1 — Catch at distance
- B2 — Throw with mechanics
- B5 — Hit live pitching

PREP — BEFORE PLAYERS ARRIVE

Equipment	2 buckets of baseballs, 4 tees, 2 nets, L-screen, full catcher's gear (2 sets), 8 cones, stopwatch, clipboard with the benchmark grid (8 benchmarks × roster), radar-free — no velocity talk at 9U.
Field setup	Throwing lane along the right-field line; hitting station with net in foul territory; infield open for ground balls; a flat-ground lane at mound distance with a plate and a coach-catcher for the bullpen look — you don't need the mound today.
Coach prep	Print the benchmark grid. Assign each coach a station and a scoring column. Decide the batting-order rotation you'll use all season.

PRACTICE TIMELINE

0:00-0:05	Team meeting: how 9U baseball works (5 min) Whole team. Three things this level asks of them, stated plainly: you'll face a real pitcher, you'll get to pitch, and you can steal bases. Set the season's two rules: hustle between every station, and take care of your arm. Teach the "eyes on me" signal and rehearse it twice.
0:05-0:10	Dynamic warm-up (5 min) Run the routine, all 12 movements, down and back on each. Card's on its own sheet.
0:10-0:20	Throwing progression + arm care school (10 min) Pairs on the lane. Teach the ladder they'll use all year, and it's the same one every practice from here: 15 ft on one knee → 25 ft standing flat-footed → 35 ft stepping into the throw → work back out to 60 ft → then shuffles from 60 ft back to 90 ft. Score B1/B2 while roaming. — Key points: the knee and flat-footed rungs build the arm on its own, with no feet to hide behind. From 60 ft out it's a shuffle into the throw — shuffle, then throw through the target. Elbow above shoulder. Front shoulder points at the target, then pulls down through. — Common mistake: throwing flat-footed at distance, which makes them push. Cue: "let your feet do the work." — Drills: #214 Knee Drill · #29 Step & Throw Progression (video) · #51 Infield Shuffle & Follow Throw (video)

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0:20-1:05

Evaluation stations (45 min · 3 × 15 min)

Groups A/B/C. Fifteen minutes a station, not ten — a station that only gets a kid four fly balls hasn't evaluated him, it's guessed at him.

- **S1 — Infield/outfield batted balls (Coach 1):** 15 ground balls at an infield spot, then 10 fly balls in the outfield, each one fielded and thrown. Score B3. Cue: "field it out front, work through the ball." Use a feeder with a second bucket so nobody stands in line.
- **S2 — Hitting (Coach 2):** 10 tee swings (score B4), then 15 machine or L-screen coach pitches (score B5). Two lanes running at once. Note who bails out of the box — that's your Week-2 priority.
- **S3 — Flat-ground bullpen & gear look (Coach 3):** every player throws a **15-pitch flat-ground bullpen** at mound distance to a catcher (score raw B8 potential). Put two kids in gear inside each group and rotate them through catching for the others, so the pitchers throw to a real target and you evaluate both pools at once. Everybody pitches today — just off flat ground, not the rubber. The slope changes the delivery, and pitches off a mound a kid has never stood on tell you less about his arm action than the same pitches off flat ground. Fastest way to find your pitching and catching pools, and it belongs on day one.
- Minimum staffing (2 adults): run S1 and S2, and make S3 a self-run pen with a coach floating — the pitchers still throw, you just score fewer of them.
- **Drills:** #75 Alligator Ground Balls (video) · #1 Load & Stride Timing (video) · #67 Triangle Fielding Position (video)

1:05-1:10

Water break (5 min)

1:10-1:40

Live situations: force plays at speed (30 min)

Full defense, coach hitting fungoes, runners placed before each rep. Evaluation stations told you who can field. This block tells you who can think while fielding, which is the real 9U question.

- First, a 2-minute check, not a lesson: "Runner on first, ball on the ground — where's the force?" They know this. Most of them have known it since 7U. Get the answer, confirm it, and move — the thing they don't have yet is doing it at speed with a runner coming.
- Round 1 (7 min): Runner on first, ball to the left side. Shortstop or third fields, second baseman covers. Second base preferred, first acceptable.
- Round 2 (7 min): Runner on first, ball to the right side, shortstop covers. Alternating sides is what makes coverage stick.
- Round 3 (7 min) — vary the picture: Runners on first and second. Now third is a force too, and the lead out is live. Then empty the bases for two reps so they feel the force disappear and the throw goes to first. Then runner on second only — no force anywhere, and the ball has to go to first while the runner takes third.
- Round 4 (7 min): Coach announces nothing. Defense reads the runners before each pitch and calls their own bag out loud. Score the coverage, not the out.
- Evaluation note: Score every player 1–3 on "moved to the right place without being told." That column matters more for your season plan than anything you scored in the stations.
- Common mistake: The covering infielder arriving at the bag at a dead sprint and running past it. Teach "get there early, then stop and give a target."
- Minimum staffing (2 adults): one hits, one stands at second base and coaches coverage on every rep.

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1:40-1:55

Baserunning school (15 min)

Whole team, live on the bases, no bats. Three things, five minutes each. Day one ends on the bases rather than a scrimmage. Fifteen minutes of intrasquad gets a 9-year-old one at-bat and teaches nobody anything — a real game takes ninety minutes, and a sixth of one isn't a sixth of the value. Fifteen minutes here gets every kid twenty reps at the three ways he'll ever leave the box.

- **Run through first (5 min).** Full speed out of the box, finish past the bag, never leap at it. Hit the front of the base and keep running into foul ground. Two lines from the plate, alternating. The only thing you're correcting is kids slowing down before the bag.
- **Rounding first and stopping (5 min).** The turn starts three steps before the bag, not at it — bend out toward the coach's box so you're already moving at second when you touch. Inside corner with either foot, then break down under control and get back to the bag facing the ball. Most 9U runners either turn so wide they add ten feet or run straight through and can't advance. Both cost you the same base.
- **Running a double (5 min).** Same turn, but now he's read it in the gap and he's not stopping. Ball's in the outfield off the coach's fungo — he makes the read out of the box, tightens the turn, and picks up the third-base coach as he comes into second. Nobody watches the ball over his shoulder. Two reps each, then send them one at a time so they can see each other's turns.
- **Drills:** #87 Run Through First Base (video) · #118 Touch Every Base

1:55-2:00

Wrap-up (5 min)

Complete the benchmark grid while it's fresh. Note: (a) the 4–5 names for the pitching pool, (b) the 3–4 catching candidates, (c) anyone who stepped out of the box against live pitching — they open at the confidence station next practice.