



“AFTER SCHOOL” READING/BASEBALL & SOFTBALL PROGRAM CURRICULUM

From Batters Up USA and the American Baseball Foundation

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1. INTRODUCTION

Participation in the bat & ball sports (baseball and softball) has been decreasing over the last 10 years. Also, youngsters have been reading less while spending more time watching television and playing electronic games. The objective of the “AFTER SCHOOL” program is to teach bat & ball skills and improve reading skills while getting kids off the couch and directed toward healthier lifestyles.

The program’s main focus is to have kids learn bat & ball skills while getting excited about reading, specifically through sport-related books. The five activities of throwing, catching, fielding, running, and batting are used to teach basic bat & ball skills. In the reading segments, bat & ball sports books are used to improve reading skills.

The “AFTER SCHOOL” program has been developed as a joint effort with input from David Osinski of the American Baseball Foundation’s BASIC program and Steve Fornadel of Batters Up USA. The curriculum is a product of joint effort.

Mission statements:

- **Batters Up USA:** We help introduce boys and girls to baseball/softball who otherwise would not have the chance! Batters Up USA contributes free equipment to help start up fun, non-competitive ball programs at parks & rec facilities, community centers, and after-school programs. JOIN US!!
- **American Baseball Foundation:** Build confidence in individuals; strengthen communities through sport education; orient coaches, parents and families in nurturing children through recreation, competition and learning.

2. MATERIALS

Book list for reading:

Targeted for Kindergarten through Grade 6

- “We Love Baseball”
- “The Girl Who Struck Out Babe Ruth”
- “Just a Baseball Game”
- “Baseball Ballerina”
- “Cat at Bat”
- “Sister Sluggers”
- “Hooray for the Dandelion Warriors”
- “Play Ball Amelia Bedelia”

Targeted for Grades 7-12

- “Baseball Saved Us”
- “Teammates”
- “Jackie & Me”
- “Curious George Plays Baseball”
- “Kit’s Home Run”
- “Arthur Makes the Team”
- “Jackie Robinson Inside and Strong”
- “Satchel Paige”

Bat & ball items:

The bat & ball materials needed are plastic bats and balls for initial skill activities, a set of rubber “throw-down” bases, a batting tee, and a bag/travel bag with wheels to transport materials. Regulation-size bats and balls are used only if the group shows adequate skills to use them without causing harm (soft training baseballs and softballs, as well as smaller bats, are recommended as starters for lesser-skilled groups). **SAFETY FIRST AT ALL TIMES!**

Bats, balls, and bases are available through equipment grants from Batters Up USA. To obtain equipment grant information, visit BattersUpUSA.org for an application.

3. EXPENSES AND FUNDRAISING

Expenses:

Books (see Section 2) are a one-time purchase with estimated cost between \$400 and \$800 based on number of books selected, their cost, and class size (ideal scenario is one book per child, economical scenario is one book per every two children). Children do NOT keep possession of the books when the session ends due to their need for re-use.

Fundraising:

The program can be funded with a community grant for \$1,000 from a local Wal-Mart. Applications are usually submitted in December, with grant approval in February of the next year for that operational year. This grant covers the cost for two instructors as well as copies of worksheets, materials, and postage. Questions about the Wal-Mart grant process and other successful funding methods can be directed to Steve Fornadel, Batters Up USA “AFTER SCHOOL” Coordinator/Instructor, at:

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4. DESCRIPTION OF SESSIONS

The program is a 10-hour format that can be divided into five two-hour sessions. Each two-hour session is divided into a one-hour session for developing reading skills and a one-hour session for developing bat & ball skills. The five two-hour sessions can be customized into one two-hour session per week for five consecutive weeks. The two-hour session can either be conducted indoors in a gymnasium or outside in an open-field area (a regulation ball diamond is not mandatory).

All books are available at any reputable bookstore.

5. SCHEDULE OF SESSIONS

The curriculum below is divided into training sessions for a group from Kindergarten through Grade 6.

Each two-hour session is divided into two separate one-hour blocks. A class size of 20 to 25 students is divided into two groups, with one group doing bat/ball skills first and the other group doing reading skills first. After an hour, the groups switch. Two instructors are needed as a minimum, one for each group.

SESSION 1

Bat & ball skills: Teach students the placement of their feet in relation to home plate, teach the bat swing sequence, and have students hit from tees. In addition, teach ball grip and release when throwing while playing catch with a partner. (*Note: Use plastic balls and bats.*) **Reading skills:** Read the book “We Love Baseball.” The format is to have students read one page at a time and move around the class, letting anyone read that chooses to read (they may pass if they’re uncomfortable reading) until the book is finished. This format is used for every book that is read in class during the five weeks. If time permits, the instructor may read aloud a second book to the class, or allow some of the students to read the book aloud. The first week extra book is “The Girl Who Struck Out Babe Ruth.”

Worksheets: 1. Connect the Dots, 2. Color Sheet – Baseball Player #1.

SESSION 2

Bat & ball skills: Review batting and throwing skills from the first session. Introduce a “Distance Hit to Line” method to team members and have them practice both here and at home. **Reading skills:** Read the book “Just a Baseball Game” using the week one reading format. The second extra book is “Baseball Ballerina.”

SESSION 3

Bat & ball skills: Teach runners the directions to run the bases (first base, second base, third base, then home). (*Note: Playing a kickball game makes this easier!*) Review batting skills and use tees as needed. **Reading skills:** Read the book “Cat at Bat.” The last extra book for Sessions 3-5 is “Sister Sluggers.”

SESSION 4

Bat & ball skills: Review throwing techniques using targets as a throwing game, play an intrasquad game (pitching to batters and using the tee after three strikes as necessary). **Reading skills:** Read the book “Hooray for the Dandelion Warriors.”

SESSION 5

Bat & ball skills: Review throwing and batting techniques, play a game with Team 1 vs. Team 2 (using the tee after three strikes as necessary). **Reading skills:** Read the book “Play Ball, Amelia Bedelia.”

6. BAT/BALL INSTRUCTION

Following are specific drills that encompass throwing, catching, hitting, footwork, and baserunning.

THROWING:

Ball grip and release

- Place first pads of middle and index fingers on wide seam at backward “C” shaped seams for right-handed thrower and “C” shaped seams for left-handed thrower. For small hands, use first three fingers.
- Place thumb on seam directly beneath space between middle and index fingers, or under middle finger if using three fingers.
- Curl remaining fingers into palm.
- When thrown properly, ball rotates from 6 o’clock to 12 o’clock with four seams.

Grip snap

Grip ball correctly and snap it into glove. Repeat by gripping ball, removing it from glove, and snapping it back into glove. Test grip by closing eyes, gripping ball, and removing it from glove. Teacher judges best grip.

Arm path

- Hands separate at body midline.
- Throwing arm goes back and up, with fingers remaining on top of ball.
- Arm swings loosely as an elephant’s trunk. It may swing down, back, and up, or back and down depending on the thrower’s defensive position.
- From the “cocked” position at which the ball has reached its highest point in its trajectory and the lead foot is forward, the arm rotates inwardly then outwardly, throwing the ball through the letter “L” so that the elbow is at shoulder height.
- Ball is released as the elbow straightens out and the wrist comes forward, propelling the ball from the first two or three fingers.

Partner “L”

Partners stand at 10 meters (33 feet) distance with feet separated beyond shoulders and toes parallel. Place arm in “L” position – elbow in line with throwing shoulder and forearm up as in the top part of an “L” – with wrist flexed backward using correct grip of ball. Without moving feet or trunk, flick ball to partner by snapping the hand, wrist, and forearm forward and out. Increase distance between partners by at least three-foot intervals, taking the same original position. Step toward partner with glove-side foot and snap ball. Start movements with glove tucked into chest. Do not let ball fall in toward the head – rather, keep the elbow stationary. Step and snap wrist from the original position. Try to touch partner with gripping fingers.

Sequence throw

Partners throw to each other from a distance of 12 meters (40 feet). Begin with hands together at chest midline and throwing-side foot side on to target. Place toes of glove foot beside heel of throwing-side foot. Commence drill by only taking ball from glove and allowing the throwing arm to swing, like an elephant’s trunk, back and up so that the fingers remain on top of ball. Once ball is at high point, take short step with glove-side foot toward partner and bring front elbow to line up with shoulders and rear elbow. Hold position with belly button facing side on to partner. Explode belly button and have throwing arm find the “L” position. Release ball and continue arm path.

CATCHING:

Ready position

- Separate feet at shoulder width or less.
- Bend the knees to have weight over the balls of the feet.
- Extend hands in front of the body, with palms facing the ball.

Catching balls above the waist

- Move the center of the body in front of the ball, with thumbs together and palms facing outward.
- Watch the ball enter the glove.
- Wrists and forearms soften ball’s impact by giving slightly with the catch.
- Top the ball with the free hand, searching for the seams at their widest.

Catching balls below the waist

- Move the center of the body in front of the ball, with little fingers together and palms facing out and up.
- Bend at the knees and watch the ball enter the glove.
- Wrists and forearms soften the ball's impact by giving slightly with the catch.
- Top the ball with the free hand, searching for the seams at their widest.

Call catch

Partners throw to each other from a distance of 15 meters (49 feet) using the correct movements to catch the ball. Thrower calls out the side to which the ball is to be thrown (glove or hand) and throws ball 1 meter (3 feet) to the side of receiver, who moves in front of ball and catches it with correct hand and arm movements.

Circle throw

Participants are given a number and form a 15-meter (49-foot) diameter circle. Feeder throws the ball high into the middle of the circle and calls out a number of one of the players, who catches the ball and throws it to the player who is opposite him/her at the moment of the catch. The receiver becomes the feeder, and the game continues.

Catching a ground ball

- Sprint to meet the ball, then shorten steps to take fielding position.
- Position glove-side foot slightly ahead of other foot (relation of heel to toe with feet).
- Imagine hands to be crocodile jaws. Bottom of glove is bottom jaw and top hand "opens" above the glove to form top jaw.
- "Eat" ball, flicking the end of the bottom jaw slightly toward ball as it enters glove.
- Glove is positioned underneath long nose of the crocodile.

Command catch

Divide participants into groups of four or five. Fielders form line at approximately 5 meters (16 feet) from a spotter who, on instructor's first command, places ball on ground and quickly leaves the area. On first command, fielder takes two short steps, bringing feet parallel to take the preparatory position. On second command, fielder runs to ball, taking fielding position as ball is curled into glove and free hand tops ball. On third command, ball is tossed to spotter. Rotate participants as fielders and spotters. Increase difficulty by a) rolling the ball, b) bouncing the ball, c) hitting the ball.

HITTING:

Swing

- Visualize yourself inside a large barrel that only reaches mid-chest.
- Begin swing by making slight movement of front knee or shoulder toward catcher, allowing hands to go back beyond rear shoulder.
- Stride casually so that toes of feet are parallel.
- Wait until the ball is coming through the barrel and – first gently then forcefully – drive the hands downward then to a level plane, throwing the "sweet spot" of the bat through the ball.

Knee sequence drill

Have hitters take positions around infield so that swinging the bat won't prove a danger to others. Coach announces in slow cadence "knee," "toe," or "throw," allowing a period between words to look at players' positions. "Knee" hitter makes "baby" movement (slight inward turn) of front knee toward catcher. "Toe" hitter steps to big toe. (Suggest that the hitter has lost four toes in lawn mower accident to remind him/her of stepping to only big toe.) "Throw" hitter swings the bat, exploding the second-to-last or third-to-last letter of the bat's trademark (depending on the size of the trademark letters) through the ball. Increase cadence speed as hitters become more proficient in the sequence.

Distance hit

Place tees along outfield foul line. Place marker to delineate minimum distance for a hit ball – approximately 20 feet for young hitters. Use plastic balls. Divide students into small groups of two or three. Students take turn representing team by hitting ball for distance. After hit, student stands over ball to show the distance hit. Winning team is standing farthest from tee. If ball is hit within minimum distance, student may not stand over ball (he/she would be too close to the tees).

500

Depending on space, place groups in a corner of the baseball field. Have batter hit from batting tee while others spread out at a distance of at least 50 feet. Fielders try to reach batter by scoring points for each ball caught. Score as follows: 100 points for fly ball, 75 points for ball caught after one bounce, 50 points for grounder of two bounces or more, 25 points of any other catch or pick up after the player or another player has touched the ball.

T-ball rotation

Defenders take normal positions on field and react to batted ball. Hitters hit ball from tee and run bases. If a batter-runner is put out, he/she picks up glove placed along the foul line in right field and takes defensive position in right field. All other defenders rotate to new position – RF to CF, CF to LF, LF to 3B, 3B to SS, SS to 2B, 2B to 1B, 1B to P, P to C, and C to the end of the hitting line. If a hitter makes two runs, he/she goes to right field and all rotate.

Variation: Form a batting line and play rotation kickball. Make two teams and let the batting line bat through before changing teams. For advanced players, change at three outs.

FOOTWORK:

Preparing to throw

- From an initial position with the rear foot slightly behind the lead foot, slide the rear foot underneath the body while having the ankle of the throwing foot move toward the target.
- All major joints beginning with the ankle, hip, and shoulder turn side on to the target, closing the front side of the body.
- Take a short step with the glove-side foot so that one can trace a straight line between both ankles to a throwing partner.

Dance drill

Participants fan out in semicircle and repeat movements to instructor's count. "One" – slide rear foot underneath body. "Two" – take short step toward target with lead foot. After several repetitions, participants repeat as instructor observes. Repeat exercise as dance step – rear foot is lifted from ground and front-foot movement is quickened. Instructor quickens pace of count to have students learn rhythm of movements.

Dynamite "L" drill

Students take ready position with throwing-side foot slightly in back of glove-side foot. Students dance to "statue position" using correct footwork. During dance, ball swings back and up into position beyond body as front elbow moves upward to form line with shoulders. Student executes two-part movement, exploding belly button to turn torso while throwing arm makes the letter "L." Student holds position and checks the form of the "L." From the proper position, student snaps wrist and hand through ball. Once proper sequence is mastered, execute whole movement with stopping.

Team throw

Participants divide into two teams and appoint a leader, who stands on foul line at a distance of 10 to 12 meters (33 to 40 feet) from team members who have formed single-file line. On command, leader uses correct footwork while throwing to teammate. Teammate catches and throws to the leader, then runs to back of line. Play continues until the line returns to its original position. The first team to return to original position wins race. Retrieve all dropped balls and return to throwing distance before throwing the ball. Do not throw from behind throwing distance. Instructor may oblige thrower to repeat throw if incorrect footwork is used. Repeat drill while increasing distance between line and leader.

BASERUNNING:

Basic running form

- Tension-free movement, relaxed jaw and hands.
- Weight on balls of feet with toes pointing straight ahead.
- Arms pumping back and forth, not crossing body.
- Slight forward lean of upper body.

Home plate to first base

- Drop bat from bottom hand and take initial step with back foot.
- Take short steps at first, lengthening as speed increases.
- Run straight through first base to at least one meter beyond.
- Don't slow down or jump to reach base.

Start from base

- Place one foot on base and other foot in line with next base.
- Lean upper body forward and let hands hang loosely in front of body.
- As ball is hit or as ball reaches batter, transfer weight to front foot and begin sprint with rear foot.

Rounding a base

- At approximately two-thirds of the distance between bases, swerve to the right, starting a controlled arc through the approaching base.
- Touch the base with either foot in stride.
- Lean the upper body toward the center of the diamond.

Bases relay

Divide into four equal groups and position players of each group at separate bases. The first runner of each group has a ball. On command, runners circle bases and give the ball to the next runner in the group. The first group to reach its original position wins.

Running technique

For each skill, have students make a line behind the respective starting base and use proper technique to run the ending base. For run from home plate to first base, make sure that the line forms to the right of home as most hitters will be right-handed and could possibly throw the bat behind them instead of placing it between the markers. Put left-handed hitters at the end of the line and switch line position when the left-handed hitters take their turn.

7. CONTACT INFO

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