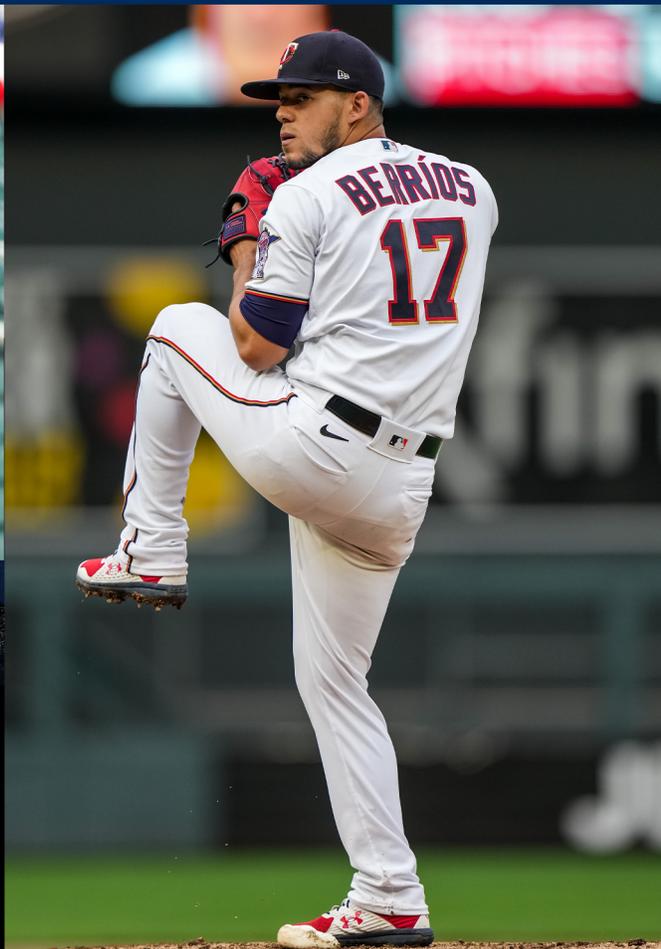




# MINNESOTA TWINS COACHING MANUAL – 8U



# MINNESOTA TWINS RBI 8U COACHING MANUAL



## Introduction

Thank you for volunteering to coach in the Minnesota Twins' RBI program! Your drive to have a positive impact on the lives of young ball players is commendable and greatly appreciated!

This manual is meant to serve as a resource for you with regard to skill development, practice planning, and game management. It is designed to help you develop age-appropriate skills using drills and games to keep practices fun and engaging.

Each section in this manual is broken down into four categories:

**Goals:** This section highlights those things we believe to be the most important priorities for this stage of development. Try to keep the goals in mind whenever you are working on a particular skill.

**Coaching Notes:** Here we outline tips and strategies for teaching each specific skill, as well as common challenges you may encounter, and how to work through them.

**Drills:** For each skill we have compiled a number of drills that can be done with common baseball equipment. Many of these drills include options for you to increase or decrease the level of difficulty based on the needs of the athlete.

**Games:** Lastly, we provide games to incorporate into practice to help create a fun and competitive environment. These games can be used in addition to, or in place of, drills and many of them can be played individually or with groups split into teams.

# COACHING PHILOSOPHY



Our number one priority is for kids to enjoy playing the game of baseball with their friends. This is the guiding principle for everything within this manual. If we can develop a love for the game of baseball while they are young, we will be able to develop the necessary skills for them to be successful as they mature. The best way to help them develop a love for the game is by creating a fun and positive environment with memorable experiences, leaving them looking forward to the next practice, game, or season.

The ability to create positive memories and experiences will have an immense impact on their lives, far greater than our ability to teach them any specific skill. Remember, these young ball players are not likely to remember wins, losses, or drills, but they will remember how they felt while they were playing the game of baseball!

In addition to providing a fun and positive experience, we want to allow these developing athletes to explore movement and learn how their bodies work. To do this, we have to allow them to try, and fail at, a variety of different movements. Encouraging them to experiment, move fast, and have fun will pay dividends in their long term athletic development.

With regard to development, it is important to limit the amount of information we give young athletes. We do not want them to slow down their movements because they are processing all of the different things their body should be doing. To prevent this, most of our drill recommendations use constraints, or pre-set starting positions, to encourage certain movements. In these drills, all of the coaching goes into the setup and athletes are given a task to complete. This allows them to move freely and explosively during the movement.

# STRENGTH & MOVEMENT

## Goals

- 1) Provide opportunities for kids to explore different movements.
- 2) Help them prepare physically for baseball specific activities.

## Coaching Notes

- The best way to include a wide variety of movements in practice is through a properly designed warm-up.
- The goal during this portion of practice is to allow exploration, not necessarily to develop specific movement patterns.
- Coaches should demonstrate each movement, then allow athletes to mirror them as best as possible.
- Encourage them to experiment and move fast, while allowing them space to struggle and fail at times.
- Coaches should include movements requiring players to move forward, backward, side-to-side, and to jump.

## Drills

### • Dynamic Warm-Up

- Utilize a variety of movements each day.
- Examples: skipping, hopping, jumping, high-knees, shuffling, crawling, back-pedaling, and sprinting, among others.
- Be creative and ask for suggestions from the players.

## Games

### • Follow the Leader

- Players move around the bases in a single file line, copying the movement of the leader.
- Encourage players to be creative and explore a variety of movements
- Rotate the leader at each base.
- This game allows for movement exploration and reinforced the correct direction to round the bases.

### • Relay Races

- Divide the team into smaller groups.
- Compete in relay races using the movements suggested above.
- This game encourages them to move fast and introduces competition into practice.

### • Sharks and Minnows

- Use cones or markers to create a rectangular playing field.
- The players assigned to be minnows should stand on one end of the playing field.
- Two players assigned to be sharks begin the game in the middle of the field.
- When the round begins, all of the minnows attempt to reach the other side of the field without being tagged by a shark.
- Tagged minnows become sharks for the next round.
- The game is over when no minnows remain.
- This game provides an opportunity for top-end speed, agility, and decision making.
- This game is best used as the final part of the warm-up.

# HITTING

## Goals

- 1) Teach the proper setup, including the batting stance and grip.
- 2) Develop fast and explosive swings.

## Coaching Notes

- Coaches should allow athletes to experiment with different movements as they attempt to swing fast and hit the ball hard in the air.
- An easy way to determine an athletic batting stance is to begin with a jumping stance.
  - Ask players to jump as high as they can and observe their setup.
  - This stance is a great starting point for their batting stance.
- A players' batting stance should promote movement rather than constrain it.
- Coaches should teach the keys to a proper grip.
  - The dominant hand is placed above the non-dominant hand.
  - The knuckles can be lined up in one of two ways:
    - The door-knocking knuckles lined up straight.
    - The boxing knuckles lined up to create a box.
- After teaching the setup, coaches should try to provide external cues to the hitters rather than internal cues.
  - External cues help the athlete focus on what they are trying to accomplish, rather than what their body is doing.
  - Examples:
    - “Hit it as far as you can.”
    - “Hit it over the shortstop.”
    - “Make the bat go ‘whoosh.’”
- Encourage players to swing hard and fast by praising their output more than specific outcomes.
  - Young players will often reduce swing speed to optimize for making contact unless they are encouraged to, and praised for, swinging hard.
- Coaches should resist the urge to reduce large movements at this stage. Allow players to learn how to move their bodies.
  - In order to develop mature athletes who can move explosively, we must provide the opportunity to develop that skill.

## Drills

### • Dry Swings

- Can be done with or without a bat.
- Ensure players are in an athletic stance with the proper grip.
- Players should be encouraged to swing faster as they become more comfortable with their stance.
- This drill is good with minimal space or large groups, as it allows many repetitions in a short time.
- This drill allows players to swing fast without the risk of missing a ball.

### • Tee Work

- Ensure players are in an athletic stance with the proper grip.
- The player's goal should be to hit the ball as far as they can.
- Provide positive feedback for fast, athletic swings regardless of outcome.
- To make the drill easier, use a larger ball or adjust the height of the tee.
- To make the drill more difficult, adjust the height of the tee after each swing.

### • Front Toss

- This drill is more challenging than tee work.
- Ensure players are in an athletic stance with the proper grip.
- The coach stands behind a screen or net and tosses the ball underhand to the batter.
- The player's goal should be to hit the ball as far as they can.
- Provide positive feedback for fast, athletic swings regardless of outcome.
- To make the drill easier, use a larger ball or toss the ball more slowly.
- To make the drill more difficult, toss the ball more quickly or vary the speed of each toss.

### • Hook 'Em

- This is an advanced constraint drill for this age group.
- The constraint can be used during tee work or front toss.
- The batter should set up:
  - Balancing on their rear leg.
  - Hooking the heel of their front foot on the pinky toe of their rear foot.
  - With their legs crossed and their hips and shoulders turned slightly away from the pitcher.
- The batter strides and swings from this position.
- The players' goal should be to hit the ball as far as they can.
- Provide positive feedback for fast, athletic swings regardless of outcome.
- This constraint encourages players to stride aggressively, using their hips to power the swing.

## Games

### • Long Drive

- Place markers in the field progressively farther away from home plate.
- Award points for each marker a batted ball passes.
- This game can be played with a tee or front toss.
- The score can be kept on a team or individual basis.
- Compare progress over time to show growth.

### • Last Batter Standing

- Place a target marker on the field within striking distance for all hitters.
- Allow hitters one swing to hit a ball past the marker.
- Players who fail to hit the ball past the marker are eliminated.
- Each round, move the marker further away.
- This game can be played individually or with two teams alternating at-bats.
- If the game is played individually, provide an activity for players who have been eliminated.

### • Hot Bat

- Place a target marker in the field at a distance that is somewhat challenging for hitters to reach.
- Allow batters a certain number of practice swings before beginning the game.
- Players attempt to hit the ball past the marker as many times as they can, in a row.
- When a batted ball does not reach the marker the round is over.
- The batter with the most balls hit past the marker in a row is the winner.

### • Home Run Derby

- Provide a temporary home plate in the outfield to make it easier to hit home runs.
  - Choose a distance that is achievable, but challenging.
- Players take a predetermined number of swings, counting the homeruns in their round.
- The score can be kept individually, in small teams, or as one team trying to beat a previous score.
- Compare progress over time to show growth.

# THROWING

## Goals

- 1) Build healthy habits for arm care by warming up to throw.
- 2) Develop fast and explosive throwing motions.

## Coaching Notes

- It is important to develop the habit of warming up to throw rather than throwing to warm-up.
- Throwing should always follow the strength and movement portion of practice, as well as a shoulder strengthening routine.
- Because throwing skills develop faster than hand-eye coordination, it is not always appropriate to play catch.
  - Throw into a fence or open field allows players to throw the ball hard without the fear of hurting a teammate.
- Coaches should demonstrate a proper setup that includes:
  - Beginning in an athletic stance.
  - Standing with their shoulders perpendicular to the target.
- After teaching the setup, coaches should try to provide external cues to the players rather than internal cues.
  - External cues help the athlete focus on what they are trying to accomplish, rather than what their body is doing.
  - Examples:
    - “Throw it as far as you can.”
    - “Throw it through their glove.”
    - “Move fast towards your target.”

## Drills

- **Shoulder Strength**
  - This exercise should be used as a shoulder warm-up prior to throwing.
  - Use a variety of these movements for 20-30 seconds each for a total of 3-5 minutes.
    - Small to large arm circles forward and backward with straight arms and palms up
    - Small to large arm circles forward and backward with straight arms and palms down
    - Small to large arm circles forward and backward with straight arms and thumbs down
    - Press hands together in front of the chest as hard as possible for five seconds
    - Lock hands together in front of the chest and pull apart as hard as possible for five seconds. Repeat with the opposite hand position.
- **Ten Toes**
  - Athletes should stand with their chest and all ten toes pointed at their target.
  - Without moving their feet, the players turn their upper body and throw the ball.
  - This constraint drill is designed to help them dissociate their upper and lower body.

- **Hook 'Em**

- The player should set up:
- Balancing on their rear leg.
- Hooking the heel of their front foot on the pinky toe of their rear foot.
- With their legs crossed and their hips and shoulders turned slightly away from the target.
- The player strides and throws from this position.
- This constraint encourages players to stride aggressively, using their hips to power the throw.

- **Long Toss**

- Coaches should use this drill most often.
- The player should set up in an athletic stance with their shoulders perpendicular to their target.
- The players' goal should be to throw the ball as far as they can towards a target.
- Provide positive feedback for fast, explosive throws regardless of outcome.
- Encourage players to move their feet in a variety of ways.
- Challenge players by altering their starting position.
  - Players begin with their backs to the target before turning to throw.
  - Players run towards their target before throwing.
  - Players shuffle towards their target before throwing.
  - Players jump to throw the ball.

## Games

- **Sharp Shooter**

- Hang a target from a fence.
- Players throw at the target a predetermined number of times.
- Award points for each time they hit the target.
- Progressively increase the distance and points awarded.
  - 1 point at 15
  - 3 points at 30 feet
  - 5 points at 45 feet
- Adjust the difficulty of the game by altering target size and throwing distance.

- **Baseball Bocce**

- The coach throws a target ball into the outfield.
- Players throw their ball towards the target.
- Award points to the players whose throws land closest to the target ball.
  - 5 points for the closest throw
  - 3 points for the second closest throw
  - 1 points for the third closest throw
- The player who landed closest to the target throws the target ball to begin the next round.
- Play a predetermined number of rounds.

- **Longest Toss**

- Place markers in the field progressively farther away from the throwing line.
- Players throw 3-5 times, attempting to throw as far as they can.
- Award points for each marker a thrown ball passes.
- The score can be kept on a team or individual basis.
- Compare progress over time to show growth.

# FIELDING

## Goals

- 1) Develop hand-eye coordination.
- 2) Teach glove awareness and positioning.

## Coaching Notes

- It may be best for players to practice fielding the ball bare-handed, as it can be difficult for players to open and close their gloves at this age.
- Coaches should provide low-risk opportunities for players to learn how to use their glove by:
  - Gently rolling or tossing balls.
  - Using tennis balls or a soft alternative when possible.
  - Varying the difficulty based on the needs of the individual athlete.
- Coaches should demonstrate a proper technique that includes:
  - Beginning in an athletic stance.
  - Bending at the waist to field a ground ball.
  - Presenting the glove with the fingertips pointed at the ground.
  - High-fiving balls that will be caught about the stomach and low-fiving balls that will be caught below it.
- It is important to remember that playing catch may not be appropriate based on the different timelines for developing hand-eye coordination and throwing.

## Drills

- **Knees Down Fundamentals**
  - This drill can be done with or without a glove.
  - Players kneel 10-15 feet apart from a partner, rolling the ball back and forth.
  - Kneeling simplifies the movement by removing the footwork.
  - Encourage players to point the fingers of their glove at the ground when fielding and use their other hand to secure the ball.
  - To make the drill more difficult, partners can roll the ball to the side of their partner in addition to straight at them.
- **Wide Stance Fundamentals**
  - This drill can be done with or without a glove.
  - Players stand 15-20 feet apart from a partner with their feet slightly wider than in their athletic stance.
  - The players roll the ball back and forth.
  - The wide stance eliminates footwork and encourages players to bend at the hips and knees when fielding.
  - Encourage players to point the fingers of their glove at the ground when fielding and use their other hand to secure the ball.
  - To make the drill more difficult, partners can roll the ball to the side of their partner in addition to straight at them.

- **Ground Balls**

- This drill is more challenging than kneeling and wide stance fundamentals.
- Only progress to this drill when players are comfortable with kneeling and wide-stance fundamentals.
- Players line up at a position and a coach hits soft ground balls to them.
- This is a challenging, but important, progression.

- **Fly Balls**

- Use a soft alternative when practicing fly balls.
- Throw fly balls that are appropriate for the individual.
- Teach athletes to high-five the ball when catching it above their waist and low-five the ball when they are not.
- Toss the ball gently to begin and gradually increase difficulty as players improve.

## **Games**

- **Four Corners**

- Make a square using four markers 15-20 feet apart.
- Divide the players into even lines at each corner.
- Players toss the ball clockwise or counterclockwise around the square, moving to the next line after each toss.
- The score is kept by counting the number times the ball is successfully tossed and caught in a row.
- The game can be played as one big team or split into groups to compare scores.
- Compare progress over time to show growth.

- **Hot Hands**

- Players line up in the infield behind a marker.
- The coach hits or rolls ground balls to the players one at a time.
- The score is kept by counting how many ground balls the team fields in a row.
- The game can be played in teams or as individuals.
- Compare progress over time to show growth.

- **Flip**

- Players stand in a circle facing each other without their gloves.
- Players toss one ball randomly around the circle until the ball is dropped or a bad toss is made.
- The player who dropped the ball or made an uncatchable toss is given a strike.
- Players are eliminated after they have three strikes.
- To increase difficulty, require that catches be made with one hand.
- Provide an activity for players who have been eliminated.

# BASE RUNNING

## Goals

- 1) Teach the basic rules of base running.
- 2) Develop speed.

## Coaching Notes

- Coaches should begin by teaching the most basic baseball rules and concepts.
  - Which direction to run.
  - How to overrun first base.
  - When runners must advance and when they can decide on their own.
  - What it means to tag up on a fly ball.
- Deliver small amounts of information at a time, covering only one or two base running rules each practice.
- To overrun first base, players should run straight through the base. They do not need to turn to the right after touching first base.
- Coaches should use a stopwatch as often as possible to time the players as they run.
  - Using a stopwatch will lead to higher effort levels and develop speed.

## Drills

- **Home-to-First**
  - Players hit a ball from a tee and run as fast as they can through first base.
  - Coaches use a stopwatch to time players from contact to first base.
  - Without a stopwatch, two players can race to first base after taking dry swings.
- **Station-to-Station**
  - Set up with one batter and a baserunner on each base.
  - The batter hits the ball from a tee and runs fast through first base.
  - The other baserunners advance one base.
    - If the ball is caught in the air, runners should not advance until the ball is caught.
  - If possible, use a stopwatch to time the batter running to first base.

## Games

- **Race to Home**

- Two players line up at third base.
- The coach throws a ball to simulate a fly ball.
- When the ball hits the ground—or is caught by another coach—the players race to home plate.
- This game reinforces tagging up and develops speed simultaneously.

- **Modified Baseball**

- This game provides an opportunity to learn in game-like situations.
- Modifying the game increases the amount of repetitions each inning.
- Divide into two teams, one on defense and one on offense.
- The offensive team runs the bases after hitting the ball from a tee, or after a coach simulates a hit by rolling a ground ball.
- The defense attempts to make a play on the ball.
- To increase the number of players in action, start each inning with the bases loaded.
- Complete a predetermined number of at-bats before switching sides.

# PRACTICE PLANNING

## Goals

- 1) Provide a fun and positive practice environment.
- 2) Keep players active and engaged throughout practice.
- 3) Develop athleticism and baseball skills that will help players long term.

## Coaching Notes

- Coaches should focus primarily on players having fun and enjoying the game, rather than perfecting any certain skill.
- Throughout practice, make an effort to provide each player with something to be proud of or excited about.
- Keep the players engaged by limiting individual portions of practice to 10-15 minutes.
- Design practices with multiple stations for the players to rotate through.
- Use small groups with many active participants to limit periods of inactivity.
- Practice plans should always include hitting and throwing.
  - Inclusion of other skills can rotate from day-to-day.

**Strength and Movement Exercises: 10 minutes**

Players play **Follow the Leader** around the bases using a variety of different movements that include moving forward, backward, side-to-side, and jumping. Finish with one or two games of **Sharks and Minnows**.

Team	Players	1st Station
Twins		1
Saints		2
Wind Surge		3

Station Length: 15 minutes	Drills	Game
Station 1: <b>Hitting</b>	<b>Dry Reps</b>	<b>Long Drive</b>
Station 2: <b>Fielding</b>	<b>Knees Down, Wide Stance</b>	<b>Hot Hands</b>
Station 3: <b>Arm Care</b>	<b>Shoulder Work, Dry Reps</b>	
Station 4: <b>Throwing</b>	<b>Hook 'Em</b>	<b>Long Toss, Baseball Bocce</b>

**Team Activity: 15 minutes**

Tee ball with the bases loaded. The Twins bat first, then the Saints, then the Wind Surge. The two teams not batting play defense. Each team bats once, with each player hitting once regardless of outs.

**Notes:**

Strength and Movement Exercises:

Team	Players	1st Station
Twins		
Saints		
Wind Surge		

Station Length:	Drills	Game
Station 1:		
Station 2:		
Station 3:		
Station 4:		

Team Activity:

Notes:

# GAME MANAGEMENT

## Goals

- 1) Maintain a fun and positive environment throughout the game.
- 2) Provide equal opportunities for all players with regard to hitting and playing all of the positions.
- 3) Teach the basic rules and strategies of baseball using in-game examples and situations.

## Coaching Notes

- Use a rotation that includes each position, as well as time spent on the bench, to ensure players get equal opportunities at each position.
- Use a continuous batting order—beginning the next game where the previous game finished—to ensure at-bats are distributed as equally as possible.
- During the game, make an effort to provide each player with something to be proud of or excited about.
- Coaches should celebrate small wins throughout the game. Players will repeat what is praised.
  - Positive things to encourage and praise include:
    - Hitting the ball hard
    - Swinging fast
    - Fielding the ball
    - Throwing the ball hard to their target
    - Hustling through first base
- Keep notes of basic rules or ideas that need to be revisited and reinforced in practice.

## Sample Position Rotation

Each inning, the players will shift down one position on the list. Maintain the list throughout the season, adding or subtracting “Bench” spots as needed, to ensure equal opportunities at each position.

<b>Position</b>	<b>Inning 1</b>	<b>Inning 2</b>	<b>Inning 3</b>	<b>Inning 4</b>
<b>Pitcher</b>	Player 1	Player 15	Player 14	Player 13
<b>Bench</b>	Player 2	Player 1	Player 15	Player 14
<b>Catcher</b>	Player 3	Player 2	Player 1	Player 15
<b>Bench</b>	Player 4	Player 3	Player 2	Player 1
<b>First Base</b>	Player 5	Player 4	Player 3	Player 2
<b>Bench</b>	Player 6	Player 5	Player 4	Player 3
<b>Second Base</b>	Player 7	Player 6	Player 5	Player 4
<b>Short Stop</b>	Player 8	Player 7	Player 6	Player 5
<b>Bench</b>	Player 9	Player 8	Player 7	Player 6
<b>Third Base</b>	Player 10	Player 9	Player 8	Player 7
<b>Bench</b>	Player 11	Player 10	Player 9	Player 8
<b>Left Field</b>	Player 12	Player 11	Player 10	Player 9
<b>Center Field</b>	Player 13	Player 12	Player 11	Player 10
<b>Bench</b>	Player 14	Player 13	Player 12	Player 11
<b>Right Field</b>	Player 15	Player 14	Player 13	Player 12

### Position Rotation Template

<b>Position</b>	<b>Inning 1</b>	<b>Inning 2</b>	<b>Inning 3</b>	<b>Inning 4</b>
<b>Pitcher</b>				
<b>Bench</b>				
<b>Catcher</b>				
<b>Bench</b>				
<b>First Base</b>				
<b>Bench</b>				
<b>Second Base</b>				
<b>Short Stop</b>				
<b>Bench</b>				
<b>Third Base</b>				
<b>Bench</b>				
<b>Left Field</b>				
<b>Center Field</b>				
<b>Bench</b>				
<b>Right Field</b>				



**Pitch Smart Guidelines for Youth and Adolescent Pitchers**

Age	Daily Max (Pitches in Game)	REST DAYS PER PITCHES THROWN IN A DAY					
		0 Days	1 Day	2 Days	3 Days	4 Days	5 Days
7-8	50	1-20	21-35	36-50	N/A	N/A	N/A
9-10	75	1-20	21-35	36-50	51-65	66+	N/A
11-12	85	1-20	21-35	36-50	51-65	66+	N/A
13-14	95	1-20	21-35	36-50	51-65	66+	N/A
15-16	95	1-30	31-45	46-60	61-75	76+	N/A
17-18	105	1-30	31-45	46-60	61-75	81+	N/A
19-22	120	1-30	31-45	46-60	61-75	81-105	106+