

## Pre- Game Structure and Routines

Does this sound like a normal warm up timeline for the youth baseball players today prior to a game?

- Get there barely on time or a little late
- Get to dugout and change shoes into game cleats.
- Quickly find a throwing partner and begin to play catch while skipping stretching.
- Play a little bit of catch while not concentrating and there is a lot of chasing the ball on overthrows.
- Get done with catch and head back to a dugout for a drink.
- Find mom or dad and see if there is a pre-game snack available.
- Check the line-up.
- Game time

Unfortunately, if this is a normal warm up to you or you have seen this plenty before, you are in the norm. This is very common throughout youth baseball across the country. Players barely get stretched, don't pay attention to what they are doing pre-game and certainly don't use this time to get ready or work on anything. This can lead to players getting injured, players not being locked in to the start of the game, and just an overall lack of development for the player. In this article, I am going to break down the different aspects of why having a good pre game structure will benefit the players and the overall team.

### 1). Pre-Game Stretching

Very rarely do players in youth baseball ever go through a detailed stretching routine. They might throw their arms across their chest, arms over their head, bend down and touch their toes, and boom they are ready to start throwing. A couple of things need to be established in the players stretching routine. First, the need to have an exact routine to perform before each game and practice. They need to know what stretches, in what order, and how/why each stretch is important. The stretching itself is important to ensure that every player and their body is ready for the game. But the attention to detail in the routine is even more important. This teaches players not to skip steps, to focus on the tiny details of their stretching routine, and most importantly to act together as a team during their stretching routine. If done correct, this should be something that takes no longer than 10-15 minutes prior to the game. (There is a pre-game stretching routine outlined in a separate document.)

### 2). Throwing Routine

Again, does this sound familiar... Two players start playing catch and maybe work to a distance which is the same as the base path. Throw the ball at that distance for a short amount of time and normally have some errant throws. One asks the other if he is good and they agree and catch is done within 5 minutes. For most this is very normal. What we teach our players is not only a routine (Upper Body Rotation Throw, In Line Throw, Step Into's, Shuffle Throw) but also teaching our players to work at their craft of throwing a baseball at this time. Players need to continuously work on the art of throwing a baseball and pre-game catch is a great opportunity to do so. Have a purpose behind what you are doing while playing

catch. Your purpose for the day could be to work on keeping your body in line with your target as you throw. Maybe it could be to work on your glove arm and how that arm operates when we throw. Or could just be a focus on accuracy during catch by choosing to work at hitting your partner in the chest with every throw. Whichever it is, have a plan. Those repetitions pay off and translate into how the player throws in the game from his position. Plus the most obvious part of this structure is that the player is learning how to properly warm up their arm prior to each game.

### **3). Pre-Game Hitting**

For a lot of youth teams, it is hard to find a cage or space on a field to hit pre-game. But if you do, something we highly recommend is our pre-game hitting structure and BP rounds. Again, most commonly a coach throws to a player about 10-20 baseballs with no goal, nothing to work on, and no situation being taught. Mainly it is done so that the player can see a ball coming at him to work on timing and loosening up his swing. Which sometimes isn't a bad thing to do. But other times, the player could be working on something that he might be called upon to do in the game. Which is why we have BP rounds that we teach our players.

Example:

Round 1: 2 Bunts

Round 2: Middle Away Round (5 Swings)

Round 3: Hit & Run (5 Swings)

Round 4: Get Runner Over (5 Swings)

Round 5: Get Him In (5 Swings)

Round 6: Free

Given time constraints, it will be hard to get all of this done with every player on your team prior to each game. Even if you work on a few of these rounds before each game it will help the player be more prepared when called upon to perform these tasks successfully. Again, most importantly if your players are warming up with bad effortless swings in pre-game that will translate to the game. Same can be said if the player is swinging with purpose and how that will positively transfer to the game.

### **4.) Pre-Game Infield/Outfield**

This again is another opportunity to work at your craft as a defender. Practice these plays like it is the bottom of the last inning and you have to make an important play. Use this as a time to get acclimated to the field and all the different bounces the ball might take. Learn what the wind is doing that day in the outfield and how fast/slow the grass is playing. Work on your footwork, glove work, and throwing accuracy so you feel confidence going into the game. Take this part of the warm up with a lot of pride because this directly translates to how you might perform in the game.

**5.) 5 -15 minutes prior to game time where each player sits on the bench**



Use this time wisely. There are so many things players can be doing at this time to not only mentally prepare for the game but also to work at their craft. Infielders could work on short hops, infield footwork on ground balls, infield footwork on turning a double play, etc. Outfielders could be throwing each other ground balls, pop fly's, etc. Catchers can be working on transfer drills, soft hands, framing. Pitchers can be working on flat ground bullpens, pick off catch, off speed catch. The point is to use this time as an opportunity to work on something and not just sit the bench and wait for the game to start.

Other uses for pre-game could be to work on things covered in practice. Take 10 minutes to work bunt coverages, run downs, PFP's(Pitchers Fielding Practice), shortened field with ground balls to work on getting rid of the ball quicker, base running, etc. Mixing it up before the game always helps as it keeps the players interested and stops them from getting caught up in the monotony of baseball.

As always, hope this finds you well. If you have any questions with this please feel free to reach out. We will continue to provide you with as much information as we possibly can. Hopefully every player and coach who reads this can take even a little portion out of it that they can apply to their game or their team.

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