

## Farm League Practice Tips

Practice once per week for one hour or so. Having multiple coaches at practice and splitting the kids into smaller groups is always helpful; don't be afraid to pull parents off the sidelines at practice to help as well. Basic concepts that a Farm ought to know by the end of the year:

- Positive attitude – have fun, listen to coaches, show positive attitude through hustle.
- Running the bases correctly (and being able to name the bases). I usually have my team run the bases at the beginning and end of almost every practice and I stress running through first base so that they get used to not just stopping and slowing down as they approach the base. Teaching them to “belly out” when running from home plate on an extra base hit so that they are running in a direct line from first to second base.
- Knowing positions in the field, particularly infield positions. Turn it into a conditioning drill (i.e., tell the kids to run to centerfield, when they get there, give them another position to run to, etc.; do it as a group => it makes for some good comedy, but it also gets them working together)
- Teaching “ready position”. Hands out in front, feet shoulder width apart and looking at the batter. Higher levels we'll teach hands out with small steps forward to increase reaction time, but not necessary here.
- Catching grounders using the “alligator” technique (glove on the bottom on the ground and throwing hand above the glove like the top of an alligator's mouth). In terms of glove size, we recommend no more than 10” to 10 ½” glove (usually, the size is on the inside of the pocket and/or on the thumb of the glove). The key is getting something that opens and closes easily and is also a size that encourages them to catch in the pocket and use two hands.
- Moving side to side on a grounder – using the “spider” or “crab” technique; don't cross feet over and move quickly. A good drill for this is to line kids up at 3<sup>rd</sup> base, roll a grounder, have them field and roll it back to you, then “spider” or “crab” a few steps and do the same thing and roll it back once again and then have them spider or crab a few more steps, field the ball and throw to 1<sup>st</sup> base or underhand toss it to 2<sup>nd</sup> base. Try starting without gloves and then work in the glove.
- When throwing, have the kids turn at a 90 degree angle and point their glove hand towards the target. This will get them to step in the right direction when throwing and should also help them reach back to throw with their throwing hand (I always say “turn sideways, point, step and throw”). This isn't perfect mechanics, but it is a good base starting point for when they get older. The key is making sure that they are on balance and keep their shoulders lined up to the target as they initiate the throwing sequence. In terms of gripping the ball, their hands are still small so three or four fingers is strongly recommended with thumb on the bottom. Don't try to teach a two finger grip at this age.
- Throwing the ball to first base to try to get a force out, and later in the year, some kids will figure out force plays at all bases;
- Tagging a runner with two hands (not done in the older leagues all of the time to protect fingers on throwing hand, but that isn't a risk at this level and it teaches the kids' not to drop the ball when tagging or tagging with the glove hand with no ball in the glove); a good drill here is to put half the team as runners at first base and the other half at second

base; roll a grounder, the fielder fields it and tries to tag the runner running by to second base.

- For more skilled kids, catching short pop-ups with the glove at shoulder height; all kids' should learn to catch a short toss underhand (for both grounders and short toss, it is always good to start without gloves so they learn "two hands" catching);
- When batting, line up middle knuckles when gripping bat – this is most important concept in hitting as it allows for a quicker bat speed when the kids get to higher levels; NEVER tell a kid to put their back elbow up – that is advice that many of us used to hear as kids – bad advice as it will lead to bad habits and a slow bat. I usually tell the kids to rest the bat on their back shoulder while holding it and check that their knuckles are lined up. The only way they can see all 8 of their middle knuckles in this position is if they are gripping the bat correctly with their knuckles lined up and their elbows in close to their body. Then, they can simply get in hitting "ready" position by lifting their hands up to about back shoulder to back ear height.
- When doing coach pitch if the kid isn't hitting the machine pitch, soft underhand toss from about halfway between mound and plate; and
- Not throwing the bat after hitting the ball