

# Chapter 1

## Baseball Coaching Philosophy

### General Coaching Philosophy

#### Coaches

Whether you are coaching 8 year old players or high school age, you will be a very influential role model that your players have throughout the season as well as in the off-season. Players are going to look to you not only for guidance and instruction, but they will be watching and listening to how you act in every situation.....EVERY SITUATION! We believe that a coach can be one of the most impactful people in a young person's life. Many players and former players attribute a portion of their success in life to the things they learned on the field from a great coach or coaches. We are not just talking about fielding ground balls, pitching mechanics, or how to hit; we're talking about; general knowledge, self-control, sacrifice, effort, integrity, modesty, teamwork, perseverance, work ethic, having a positive attitude, the will to compete, as well as understanding the process of improvement. We must strive to help them develop these virtues and skills that will not only help them on the baseball field but will aid them throughout their life.

#### **FOCUS ON THE PROCESS NOT RESULTS**

When coaching your players you should teach them, as well as yourself, to focus on the process rather than the results. Can a player really control whether he gets a hit or if he catches the ball.....no, the player can only control three things; 1) His Attitude 2) His Effort and 3) His Preparation. It is a must that we develop a coaching style that fits this model as well as instill this thought into the minds of our players. If the players truly focus on the process of playing and not results, you will see a big difference in the way the players, as well as the team as a whole, develops and grows.

#### **STAY POSITIVE....BUT DO NOT PATRONIZE**

Players need a patient, supportive coach that can teach and motivate in a positive way. Developing a coaching style that is positive as well as having the ability to communicate with your players is of great importance in becoming a successful baseball coach. A coach should NEVER belittle or personally degrade a player for any reason. This does not mean you can't raise your voice, it just simply means that you should never, ever, personally attack a player verbally.

We want to see all coaches stay positive, but a great coach knows when to discipline or correct his players. All too many times unsuccessful coaches in this society today fall into two categories; either

they are negative and all they care about is winning, or they fall to the exact opposite end of the spectrum and they constantly cripple the players by enabling them as they patronize them or coddle them too much. The negative coaches damage the player as they are result oriented only and degrading to the psyche. On the flip side, the “Cotton Candy and Lollipop” coaches damage their players by telling the player that he is doing right, when actually the player needs to learn, or has more work to do in a certain area. The process of saying “it’s OK” when in fact it “is *not* OK” is the act of disabling youth by the process of enabling youth!

### **SHOW THEM WE CARE**

As coaches we need to let our players know that we care. They need to know we care about them as an individual. They need to know that we care about them off the field as a young man and we also care about their development as a baseball player. We need to talk to each individual on a regular basis in a one on one chat just to see how they are doing in school, life, and what they think about their play on the field. We must strive to challenge them to be better young men as well as players and they need to know that the reason we challenge them is because we truly care about their development.

### **ORGANIZATION AND DISCIPLINE**

Players quickly pick up on a coach that is unorganized and doesn't communicate his expectations. If you don't establish the rules from the beginning and don't follow up with an appropriate recourse if the rules are broken, you will quickly lose control of your team. In the Fury program we will either evaluate and/or help each coach develop the rules for their team. When it comes to organization of practice, the Fury Baseball - Coaches Playbook will have several different practice plans to follow in order to develop the appropriate skills in the players effectively.

### **ATTITUDE AND SPORTSMANSHIP**

The attitude that we want our players to display is an even keel emotional state. In other words, do not get to high or too low. Keep in mind that players need to have personality and play with emotion. We want to display an even demeanor as coaches as much as we teach our players to do so. As a good coach you should give the players the message of not getting to high when things go well as well as not get too low when things go badly. If you have been around this game long enough you know that the game has ebb and flow, meaning that momentum is not a controlled object but rather it is a wave like energy. The problem a team or player runs into is when the wave is at the lowest or highest they fall off the “surfboard”. How to control this emotional “wave” is to go back to the basics and really focus on the coaching point of controlling the effort, attitude and concentrating on the process of playing and not the results!

The idea of sportsmanship today is at times lost with many youth players. The truth is, sportsmanship is not a genetic trait, rather sportsmanship must be taught. If our players watch certain athletes on TV then their idea of sportsmanship may be to trash talk, taunt their opponents, or to mimic some other visual statement that demonstrates their superiority. As their coach, it is vitally important

that you teach the value of sportsmanship. We demand that our teams show joy when they make an exciting play, but not at the expense of the player on the opposing team at any time.

## **RELATIONSHIP WITH PARENTS**

Each coach should start the season with a parent's meeting. The teams in the organization need to have an annual overall organizational meeting with parents of all our teams involved in the program.

The first step to have a good relationship throughout the season with the parents is to let them in on the rules and goals. The parents should receive a hard copy of the player conduct rules as well as a summarized coaching philosophy for your team at the parents meeting. If the parents know your philosophy and rules up front that will not guarantee complete absence of problems with parents, but it will help in the process.

The second step in the process is to let the parents know where you stand when it comes to playing time. This will be different depending on what level you are coaching.

We recommend an "open door" policy to parents for all issues. But you must be clear that there will be no discussions outside of a private conversation when it comes to any coaching issues. The parents must know that you will not talk about playing time or other issues during a practice or game as well as in front of other players or parents. The Fury policy on parent complaints or issues will be that the parent will allow 24 hours to cool down and then set up a meeting with the head coach through the team coordinator.

Make sure parents understand that you expect them to act a certain way on game days. This means positive cheering, not putting down other players, no yelling at the umpires, as well as no criticizing you or other coaches. We must convey that there should be no "bleacher coaching" from parents. This only confuses their child.

The parents need to know about our coaching philosophy. They do not need a complete handbook but they need to know what we set as goals. Emphasize that the lessons you'll be teaching them will not only develop them as players, but as young men. Bringing this up will help them remember that the biggest benefit of the sport isn't about winning or even playing time, it's about personal development both as a teammate and an overall human being.

Parents need to know that we are aware of their child's goals are for being a part of a baseball team and in turn we are going to do what is best to meet that goal. We must get the parents re-focused on the concept of competition, that is to say, is the player a better player today than yesterday and is he a better person....once again not wins, losses, and playing time. What are we teaching our youth if this is what we focus on?

A great way to combat the question of playing time, and let's face it playing time is the question that quite often parents comes back too, is to implement a value point system and a practical statistical evaluation. The VPS should be established for each age group within the organization and should be used each pre-season to determine skill levels. Along with the VPS you should use a Practical Statistical

Evaluation. A PSE is the gathering of statistics outside of the normal statistics such as batting average, earned run average and such. A PSE will track such performances as: For Hitters - solid contact, taken strikes, and productive outs; For Pitchers – strike %, first pitch strikes %, and solid contact against.

No matter how hard you work to prevent it, there is a good chance that there is going to be some upset or overzealous parents to handle. It just comes with the territory of being a coach. So how can you handle the situation when it arises? First, *listen*. Let the parent have their say and don't interrupt them. When it's your turn to speak, then explain your point of view slowly and clearly. And, keep your focus on their child. Do not draw comparisons between their child and another player. If the parent starts raising their voice, then resist the urge to match their tone. Continue the conversation in a calm voice at normal volume. Also attempt to keep your comments on the positive end. You can even offer to allow the parent to come to practice so they can see what is actually happening and/or take a look at the VPS and the PSE. Upon the conclusion of the interaction, be sure to thank the parent for voicing their concerns with you, and let them know you will take their concerns under consideration.

## **Baseball Organizational GOALS**

The goals for players within a quality organization revolve around one basic focus and that focus is to allow each player the opportunity to play at the college level or beyond. Player development being the primary goal and all other goals after said end point or goal must aid in bringing this to life.

Here is the list of goals for the Cincinnati Fury Baseball Operations Team:

1. Player Development
2. Professional Public Perception
3. Coaching Development
4. Winning

## **Baseball Coaching Philosophy**

The first priority for ever coach should be to keep the coaching as simple as possible. This does not mean however that you should not challenge your players, it just simply means do not confuse or complicate your teaching. In fact, we contend that you should coach the players beyond what is expected of their age group....not by five years....but keep them advancing at all times! For example a team that is 11u should be challenged to learn things they have never heard of before, such as; double cutoffs, how to stop the running game, more complicated signs, and so on. I know what you must be thinking “you said to keep it simple”....what we mean more precisely is that you want to keep the teaching of these aspects along with the basics of the game as simple in form as possible and by using your time as wisely as one can.

### **Don't try to re-invent the Game**

When coaching this great sport some coaches feel as if they need to come up with this “new” way to teach different aspects of the game. Coaches will develop new drills and some scientific way to teach a kid how to learn to field the ball or hit the ball. Don't get us wrong, we like drills too and we will do several. What we want is to do drills that make practical sense and not just because we read it in a book somewhere....that this is how to make your kid a better hitter, fielder, or pitcher! Have you ever been to a practice and seen a team being talked to about how to field a ball and then the coach will have them do a drill that you've never seen before and you think “that makes a little sense”. The team will then do the drill and will promptly move into another drill on how to hit or maybe even a different drill on how to catch that ground ball. But if you notice the team never actual catches a ground ball hit off of a bat and never throws across the diamond to complete the practice out. SERIOUSLY.....are they not going to let the team actually practice the act of completing the process of a ground ball out!! Most drills are good and can be very beneficial but the act of repetition of the skill is more important than anything.

### **Don't waste time**

In the previous section we discussed a practice that is drill oriented. These drill oriented practices is usually put together to maximize reps and time. That is to good side to them, but as we discussed they are not getting the actual practical practice they need. In this section we will discuss the other end of the spectrum and quite frankly a waste of time and worse than the “re-inventor's” practices. How many times have you been to a practice and watched a youth team get warmed up, go take a round of long infield for 30 minutes or so and then take a 1 hour batting practice and then run a few laps around the outfield and call it a day? This is the biggest waste of time for the players, the coaches and the parents. During this 2 hour practice, each player has taken a total of maybe 10 ground balls or fly balls, taken about 10-15 swings of the bat and then stood around the remainder of practice. Think about this in depth, each player getting a maximum of 20-25 reps of baseball skills each practice!!!

### **Be practical and productive**

A practice plan should be practical and productive. We looked at both ends of the spectrum when it comes to practice and we noticed that the two ways are right in concept but wrong in execution. A practice should have some drills to it, but there has to be great repetition of the simple tasks. Practice should have something as simple as taking a ground ball and getting one with the throw but should be quicker paced and have more reps. When we take a look at our drills you will notice that we have a variety of drills that fit both molds and a

practice must be integrated to be a successful practice. A practical and productive drill for example is the 4-corners drill. This drill is when each infielder will get 30-40 ground balls each if not more.....and will make 10 throws across the diamond to first base. We will get more in detail when we get to the drills section of this book, but just remember to keep it simple, practical and productive.

### **Playing Time and Positions**

When discussing playing time of players there are many aspects to cover. First, playing time depends on the age group you are coaching. The non-baseball factors we speak of are; showing up to practice, showing up to games, and discipline issues. No matter the age, the players and parents need to understand that you must show up and you must follow the rules or their will be repercussions. Players must follow non-baseball rules and as they progressively get older playing time will be determined more and more each year by ability and projection. Just as a note, you must always consider all factors in playing time and document skills by using PSE and VPS as well as other statistical and evaluation tools.

Positions that players will play also is determined by age to a certain degree. Players 10 and under should be playing as many positions as possible. Players 10 and up should begin to start finding a position or positions for the present and projecting on to the future. That being said, you should still try to keep in mind they will still be changing physically and skill wise over the next several years and thus you should give them opportunities to play as many positions that they are capable of and/or possibly show some projection.

No matter what the level no teams should play left handed players at non-left handed positions. Those positions are 3B, Shortstop, 2B, and catcher. All left handed players should be playing outfield, pitcher, and 1B. This goes back to the concept that we are preparing these players for their future.....as men and as baseball players. No left handed players at the high school level and beyond play these non-left handed positions.

### **No Favoritism**

When entrusted with the title of head coach you are expected to be fair to all players. If you are a head coach of then you must not show favoritism to any player for any reason. If you have a relative on the team or there is a relative of the assistants on the team, you must not show favoritism to that player. With that said, I have seen coaches that are solid coaches and solid people treat their son or relative in the opposite direction. As a coach you must treat each player as and equal individual.....period!!! That does not mean if your relative is the best player that he has to set the bench more than some others.....this would not be FAIR!! Be fair to all.....it's that simple!

# **Game Coaching**

## **Aggressive Reputation**

Being a team in our organization means that other teams know when they play us that we will play fast and aggressive. We will teach our guys to be aggressive and make aggressive mistakes. We will also be aggressive in our coaching. On offense we will steal, double steal, bunt, squeeze bunt, hit and run....the other team will know us by this reputation before the game even begins. In turn this will cause our opponents to play on edge and make many more mistakes! On defense we will be aggressive on the mound, always preaching to our pitchers to attack the strike zone. Our defenders will be aggressive to the point of reckless. As coaches we will not say it is OK to dive for balls and miss them.....we will say....we expect you to dive for balls and miss some!! These concepts go back to the main coaching theme of the process over results; we need to play the game hard at all times with no thought of failure or success. Think of it this way, if you think about the successful execution of the play rather than just the effort, doesn't that lend the mind to think of the failure of the task rather than the effort as well??

## **Play the Game**

We always tell our players to "play the game....not the score"! Obviously we need to play the score as coaches....that is our job as a game coach. I contend the catcher, pitcher, and shortstop need to know the score to determine the way to approach hitters or where throws need to go on cutoffs and issues such as that, but in general we don't want the players thinking of the score or most certainly dwelling upon it.

Another addition to the phrase...."play the game" is "play the game....not your opponent". As coaches we need to know and scout an opponent but the players do not need to hear "how good this team is" or how "we should beat this team if we do this or that" all our players need to hear is we need to play our game and we need to execute what we do!

Always keep in mind that winning is not number one on our list. In fact, winning is down the list at number 4 or lower. With that said we want to try to win as coaches because frankly....winning will help in the other organizational goals. Just remember, coach at a fast pace and coach the fundamentals and if you are doing those things, along with coaching aggressively then winning will occur as well!

### **Don't run it up**

Teams in our organization will not “run up the score”. There is no set number of runs ahead that you need to stop stealing or bunting....you just have to know as a coach when to stop....and when to sub in players that don't normally play as much. I don't want you to “call off the dogs”, so to speak, and then lose the game, so you need to have a feel for when you have a team beaten and they are overmatched. That is one side of the running it up story...if you feel that another team is doing the same to your team....do not lose your temper....but you may calmly tell the other coach how you feel...one time!!! If the team continues to run up the score and/or ignores your feeling on the subject just use the game as an example of how not to play the game for your team!

### **Don't create Robots**

When we coach our teams we should not be creating robots or puppets! What we mean by this is the players need to act upon the play and not re-act or constantly follow directions. This takes a great deal of patience from the coaches and parents as well. What has to happen is you have to prepare your players and then allow them to make some mistakes. This philosophy holds more and more of a heavy importance the older the players get.....but it must start young! An example is that you should possibly talk to an 8 year before the play on what he should do, but once the ball is in play you need to let him and his teammates take over. If they rely on you (or the parents in the stands) to tell them what to do with the ball then they will always have that reliance. You should let them act upon the ball and learn to talk to each other to make the play. Your coaching is most needed before and after the fact. A good coach is big into preparation and constructive criticism. A player that has to wait for instruction when the ball is in play is not acting upon the ball....he is re-acting!! The older a player gets the less you should have to say to him pre-play as well, the older the players get the more they need you in practice and post-play. Your job in the game is to handle the lineup, prepare them for warm-ups, organization, position players, work with the assistant coaches, substitutions, discipline, motivation, strategy, handling the pitching staff, and overall support.....not to “pull the strings of puppets”!!