

Introduction

Father 1: What's the score?

Mom: They don't keep score in tee ball. They play for fun.

Father 2: Our team has had 13 fun times. The other team has had 5 fun times.

If this is your first step into the world of tee ball—or even your third season—you'll walk away from this book a better coach. That, I guarantee. You might not agree with every word. Good. Think, challenge, invent. Carve your own coaching path. Even parents—those joyful, restless souls eager to take their child to the backyard with a ball and bat—will find something here. If you love the game and your child, you're already halfway there.

Depending on the source, over a million kids play tee ball each year. Every spring, SUVs and coffee cups head to ballfields, dreams in tow. Some parents want to spark a lifelong love for baseball. Others just want an hour's quiet. Some stare into phones while coaches try to teach another parent's child how to hold a glove. And yet, beneath the chaos, the goal is noble: teach kids to hit, throw, run, and laugh. The problem? Expectations. They tend to bloom faster than reality can follow. I know—I've been there. I was a father who wanted his kids to know the game before they even knew their letters. I had visions of home runs at age five. I was, of course, completely and utterly wrong.

I've been lucky. My life wandered into youth sports like a river finding its bend. I earned a Master's Degree in Physical Education from Arizona State, and while I never taught in an elementary school, perhaps I should have. Coaching my kids was the spark; writing about it was the fire. For those of you new to this journey, I say this: you are richer than you think. These years vanish. One

moment they're learning to swing, and the next they're walking down the aisle. I've lived through joy, frustration, suspensions, friendships, feuds, championships, heartbreaks—all from the dugout. And I wouldn't change a second of it.

Now, back to tee ball. I've spent 30 years in youth sports and the last decade buried in tee ball. I began as a league commissioner, then authored two books: *T-Ball Skills & Drills* and *T-Ball Drills*. My video of the same title did well on Amazon, and on YouTube, it's topped 200,000 views. Am I the world's foremost authority? Probably not. But I've seen what works—and more importantly, what doesn't. I've seen kids drift away from baseball to soccer and lacrosse, not because they love those more, but because we failed to keep them engaged. That's what I aim to fix.

You'll find references to my other work sprinkled throughout this book. I'm not here to sell, but to share. Resources will be listed at the end—most free. You'll also hear stories. Not because I enjoy hearing myself talk, but because mistakes—mine and others'—are your best teachers. If I wander into a tale from 30 years ago mid-drill, trust that it's there for a reason.

I begin with ten myths that plague tee ball. I challenge them and offer solutions—take them, build on them, or reject them, but always keep the kids in mind. You'll also find drills, tested and true, drawn from my earlier books and field-tested over countless practices.

Above all, know this: I've written this not to bury tee ball, but to raise it up—to make it better, smarter, and more joyful for every child who steps to the tee.

Play ball.

Chapter 1

Myth #1: All Kids Learn Baseball Skills In Tee Ball

Years ago, I remember watching a tee-ball coach divide his team in half for the first activity at his first practice. He gave one side a ball and told the players to have a catch. This was before soft-covered baseballs were plentiful, so it is not entirely the coach's fault. But what happened was two of the kids were hit in the face with a hard ball. Needless to say, neither of those kids stepped on the field ever again to play baseball or softball. And who knows, maybe one of them could have ended up being a star for their high school baseball or softball team. Remember, when you get your tee ball team on the field, don't assume anything about the skill of each player. This is a general rule of thumb. Maybe you coached some of the kids in soccer that Fall or knew their older brother or sister who were great athletes, but in general, if you are meeting a player for the first time, make sure you take baby steps.

When parents decide to become tee ball coaches, they probably have had some background in athletics. Maybe they played baseball or softball as a kid growing up or played on their varsity high school team. Whatever the case, most parents who coach come into the season with high expectations, and they expect the kids on their team to learn most of the baseball skills in a three or four-month period. This is tee ball myth #1. Most kids who are 5 or 6 years-old will be at the same or just slightly better baseball skill level than they were at the start of the season when the season ends. Of course, like I said, there are some kids who 1) are returning from the previous year, and 2) there are some exceptional athletes. Also, keep in mind that kids who have older brothers or sisters, who are very good athletes, will tend to be ahead of the other kids. Am I

saying you won't see any real noticeable progression from the kids on your team? No, what I am saying is that we tend to have much higher expectations than reality. Also, keep in mind that kids will develop differently. I have seen 5 year-olds more physically developed than some 6 year-old kids, which is usually not the norm. I don't want to burst your bubble or take the air out of your enthusiasm if you couldn't wait to coach your son or daughter. I'm not saying the whole tee ball season is a waste. It's not, and we need good coaches like yourself or your neighbor. But you must have realistic expectations of what you are going to accomplish during the 10 or 12 weeks your team is together. I will get into individual skills later, but take throwing, for instance. A five-year-old kid will not show much improvement with any throwing technique throughout a tee ball season.

Tee ball coaches and parents can and will get frustrated with some kids when it is no one's fault. Many times, the coach will instruct a player how to do something, and the players won't get it. Why does this happen? It's a combination of their physical ability and their ability to take instructions. Some kids just cannot absorb or understand the instruction, or physically cannot do the task. For example, when I teach throwing to tee ball players, I emphasize keeping their head steady by focusing on a target they probably won't come close to and bringing their arm all the way back. I've had many players who did not bring their arm back, though they thought they did. What I did was create a drill called the "Bench Throwing Drill." I took a free-standing bench and had the player lie down on it. I stood at the foot of the bench and had them bring their arm all the way back and toss me the ball. The gravity helped bring their arm all the way back so they felt what it was like for the first time.

Sometimes, as the saying goes, there is more than one way to skin a cat. For the moment, let's both agree that it's hard to teach

12 kids who are 5 or 6 to improve their baseball skills in the course of 10 or 12 weeks. Do we just ditch the season and have kids get together and have snacks? No way! The tee ball season can and should be a positive experience with one goal in mind. To get kids to sign up for the next year, with the long-term goal of having the kids develop a lifetime love for baseball or softball. So, what is the solution for the tee ball myth that all kids learn baseball skills in tee ball?

Solution of Tee Ball Myth #1

For this myth, I think the solution lies in how we approach the entire season. Leagues, tee ball commissioners, parents, and coaches should see the coach's role as part tee ball instructor and part physical education teacher. The exact balance may vary—maybe 50/50, maybe even 75/25 leaning toward PE teacher—but what matters is that this mindset gives players a far better chance of staying engaged and excited.

The question now comes into how we carry out this plan for the season? You can take any approach you want, but I can tell you that in my 30 years of coaching youth sports, my first 10 years were a lot of trial and error, and the information I'm sharing with you is a positive approach, but you have to run the team as best you see it. As a coach, my expertise was in drills and running efficient practices. I coached from tee ball up to high school in multiple sports. My practices were very popular, and I developed my own formula where I'd do 2 or 3 skill drills, then run a fun game. I created drills over the years and began to log them. I was asked by my league to run a clinic on how to run an efficient, stimulating practice. Some good things were said about me, and I began doing these clinics around the country with some excellent feedback. The one thing I learned over the years was to be flexible and ABL (Always Be Learning). Some of the best drills I've picked up came

not just from other coaches, but even from players who'd say, "Coach, what if we try it this way?" No matter the sport—tee ball, soccer, anything—you've got to mix in fun drills or games. Think it doesn't work? Let me share a story.

I'm a huge NFL fan and in the summers I like to watch different teams' practices. One sweltering day, the temperature was over 100 degrees. The players had already been grinding in full pads for two and a half hours, and they were clearly spent. Then, at the very end of practice, a Hall of Fame coach set up a quick game of touch football between the offensive and defensive linemen. The twist? Whichever group lost, their position coaches would have to run a lap in the brutal heat. Suddenly, these exhausted players lit up—laughing, shouting, competing like kids again. When the defensive coaches lost and had to run, the players roared with energy, cheering them on like it was the highlight of the day. In an instant, a team that looked completely drained was fully alive again. If a silly little game can recharge professional athletes in their 20s and 30s, imagine what it can do for 12-year-olds—or even tee ball players. Fun works at every level, as long as the coach uses it wisely. In tee ball, the goal is to spark a love for baseball or softball. That's why the season should blend skill-building with fun, familiar activities—especially early on. The trick is to take games kids already know and give them a baseball twist. For example, think about a classic relay race. Normally, two or more teams line up, and on "go," the first runner sprints around a cone, comes back, and tags the next teammate. Simple and familiar. Now, let's add a baseball element: each player runs with a glove on, carrying a ball inside it. To keep the ball from popping out, they have to squeeze their glove or secure it with their other hand. When they return, they pass the ball to the next runner, who repeats the process. It's still a relay race—easy to understand and fun to play—

but now it also reinforces a baseball skill. That's the kind of small adjustment that makes a big impact while keeping kids engaged. There are plenty of classic kids' games that coaches can easily adapt with a baseball theme. A few examples include Red Light, Green Light, Kick the Can, Tag, Freeze Tag, Duck, Duck, Goose, and Simon Says. In each of these, simply having players wear their gloves—and adding a ball when it makes sense—instantly brings the game into the world of baseball while keeping it fun and familiar.

Your tee ball practices shouldn't be taken over by 100% games. We do want to get to some skills, but I want to emphasize, please try to approach the season this way: expose your kids to the skills of the game rather than being intent on having them excel at that particular skill. When you have realistic expectations, you will have realistic results. One last suggestion. If you are coaching tee ball, I'd expect this to be the start of a nice, long youth coaching career for most of you. New coaches tend to copy the way one of their own coaches did it back when. I tell all new coaches to try and develop their own philosophy. Taking inspiration from others is fine, but flexibility, creativity, and adaptability are essential for a long and fulfilling youth sports coaching career.

Chapter Review

1. Have realistic goals for the tee ball season. Expose kids to the sport, have them interact, and make friends.
2. Kids develop physically and emotionally at different paces.
3. Approach tee ball like you are a combination of a physical education teacher and tee ball coach.
4. A good approach to tee ball and coaching youth sports is to do 2 or 3 skill drills followed by a fun activity.
5. Perform kids games that players are familiar with and add a baseball theme to it.

Coaching Tip

Shorter practices in youth sports create an environment that is safer, more fun, and more effective for learning. They support skill development while honoring kids' natural energy levels and keeping the experience enjoyable and sustainable—for players, coaches, and families alike. In a 45-minute tee-ball practice, it's better to have 6 short drills rather than 3 long ones.