

Patriot Athletic League Safety Tips

Lil Sluggers, TBall, and Machine Pitch

Welcome to the world of volunteer coaching! We want this to be as positive an experience for our coaches as it is for our players. We have so many new players, coaches and parents in the City Programs (Lil Sluggers, TBall, and MP) we thought it might be helpful to share some procedures our coaches have found helpful in keeping the game organized and safe. Remember, many of these players and parents may have never played or participated in a baseball league before.

1. Most dangerous to our kids: the batted ball, the thrown ball and the swing of the bat - these can all cause injuries.
2. Field Check: Before, during and after the game or practice, walk the field including the outfield, infield and check the dugouts. While we have good fields it is important to ID hazards such as broken glass, syringes, and other items show up in dugouts and on the field every year - even in DuPont. Look for holes and low spots (especially at Pioneer) along the foul line areas along the third base side. These tripping hazards are where sprinklers are located and should be marked with orange cones.
3. Bats: good protocol is to keep them outside the dugout, on the field side of the fence to preclude an inadvertent swing of a bat causing an injury.
4. T Control and bats: In little sluggers and t-ball, the coach controlling the batting tee should take control of the bat from the batter until the kids are fully trained to drop the bat and run. Avoid having the kids "fling bats" - this can cause injuries.
5. Catchers: In little sluggers and t-ball, don't use a catcher. It's one extra person around the swinging bats and no plays are made at home by infielders.
6. Towels: bring a couple cut up towels to dry bat handles and balls during rainy days.
7. Pitching Machine: coaches need to take great care to align it, and use small sand filled bags to place over the front legs to hold the legs down. In the summer months the ground will be dry and the machine tends to lift and shift where the ball goes. Check the pins on the machine, they tend to shift and move the older they get and can fall out during a game.
8. Pitching Machine: Never leave a ball loaded on a pitching machine and unattended. Never allow a child or an untrained parent or coach use a pitching machine. Always "zero" your pitching machine prior to allowing a batter into the box.
9. Pitching Machine: Be aware of how far your pitching machine balls can travel, use equipment bags or backstops to "catch" them and prevent them from traveling off the field (especially at Chloe Clark or other non-ball field practice sites).
10. Player positioning: never place a child onto the pitcher's mound or at 1st base who is unable to catch the ball or defend against a line drive (especially in machine pitch).
11. When loading a ball onto the batting tee (little sluggers and t-ball), always ensure the "pitcher" on the other team is ready before you allow your batter to swing, and ensure the opposing coach has his players ready (thumbs up).
12. Player positioning: coach who is pitching for machine pitch ensure that you talk with the other teams "pitcher" and that they are not forward of the machine, that they are aware of the positioning of the machine (help them avoid tripping).

13. Players: ask the parents about allergies, or medical issues requiring medications. Later in the year bees can become more prevalent in and around dugouts and practice areas. Ensure you know if one of the kids has issues with allergic reactions and who has meds (mom/dad - EPI pens, benadryl etc). Know if you have any kids who are diabetics or who require meds. Ask your kids about food allergies and ensure your "snack moms" know if you have kids with peanut or other foods can cause allergic reactions.

14. Players: hydration, keep your kids drinking, summer is coming, be aware that you may have players observing fasting due to religious observances and they may be unable to hydrate.

15. Players: ensure a parent escorts the little one to and from the bathroom.

16. Pop-up tents: bring them to games to keep kids dry (little sluggers, T-ball, Pioneer) and later in the season as temps rise to help keep them cool (especially at Pioneer over the dugouts) when it gets brutally hot. Use stakes to hold tent legs onto the ground if its windy.

17. Medical kit: always ensure you have your medical kit present at practice and games.

18. Dug Out Drills: It is a good idea to spend some time at practice discussing dugout drills, so the players have a good understanding of where to be during games. The parents can help enforce this guidance and if they understand it can be a great help to keeping everyone safe. Simple things like home team lines up on 3B line and visitors line up on 1B side of the field. This helps keep gear separated, and when kids flow off the field, they don't run into the kids switching out to go in to play defense. Some teams have baskets or buckets for each kid to keep their mitts, hats, helmets, water, and other treasures in one spot. It is a good idea to teach the players to keep track of their gear in one spot, so things do not get lost or mistakenly taken. At this young age, not many players have gear bags yet, but they can still have a designated spot lined up for their gear. Also, ensure only players are in the "dugout area". Siblings should not be with the players causing congestion and potentially getting hit with a ball or bat.

19. Safety Drills: Spending time at practice working on safety is also a good idea. This includes why we wear helmets, proper times to use a bat, batting order, batting safety zone and following the parameters of the field when a game is in action. Keep parents on the same side as their players, so players do not have to cross the field of play inadvertently and risk getting hit or injured - kids will often make a beeline to their parent if scared, excited, or confused. Keeping each teams parents and their players on separate sides will help kids stay safe and keep the game moving.

20. Coaches Meetings: Ensure you have a good initial meeting with the other coach before starting the game, as well. This is a good time to share techniques and procedures and discuss how you want to conduct the game. You can also reiterate with all your parents that everyone needs to correct an unsafe act if they see it!

These kids are so excited to play baseball, but there are some inherent dangers with balls and bats and moving pieces. Safety is absolutely the most important factor at this age, the fun will be there regardless.

Have a safe and fun season!