



# TEACHING for TOMORROW

## Pitfalls to Avoid as a Coach

*Article by Al Herback*

### Little League Baseball Canada's National Coach

The February newsletter reviewed the first ten common pitfalls to avoid from the excellent article written by Rick Johnson out of **The Baseball Zone** located in Mississauga, Ontario. For March, I will conclude his article with his final message to all coaches working with our children in baseball. Best of all is that avoiding them as much as possible should help result in a more fulfilling and fun experience for the players that we are serving.

In February I covered off these topics which included operating every practice the same way, lining up to take ground balls / fly balls, hitting rocket ground balls, cancelling practice because numbers are low, "you're my closer", controlling base running movements, the prestigious positions, over-coaching hitters during the game, asking the hitter to shorten up with two strikes and finally, MLB versus amateur players.

**11. Don't be a critic.** It is easy to say a kid can't play; it is much tougher to go out on a limb and see what a player CAN BE. Be a coach first. Model your coaching with a positive, growth-oriented position. There are more than enough negatives kids get away from the field.

**12. Keeping the batting order the same.** It doesn't happen in the big leagues, so no need for it to happen at the youth level. Give kids chances to hit in different parts of the order to let them experience the experience. You want to build self esteem not knock it down. You might be surprised with what occurs.

**13. Throw the curve ball.** That's a good one. We need to win, don't worry about getting hurt or developing the fastball ... just throw the deuce! "I saw a video last night and it is actually pretty easy." Ha ha, ok. Keep it simple and productive everyone! Command a fastball, develop a changeup and see what happens.

**14. I like to call pitches.** There is a time and place, but not at the youth level. And really ... how many REAL pitches do your pitchers have in their arsenal? Former MLB pitching coach Brent Strom once said to a teenage group of ours, "Hey guys, big league pitchers OWN on average about one and a half pitches. So how many do you think you OWN? A lot of slouching in chairs ensued.

**15. The trick play.** The only trick play I know is making routine plays, running the bases with intelligence, throwing strikes, and swinging at good hitters' pitches. The trick play? I don't see big leaguers working on trick plays so save yourself valuable time at practices. Work on the 99.9% of the plays that will dominate your games.

**16. Team defence failures.** So a rundown got messed up or there was a breakdown on an infield pop-up? Did you practice these situations? If it has not been practiced, then it is not the team's fault. You can't expect them to be perfect at what they practice, so don't expect a flawless night at the improv either.

**17. Making the 9th hitter bunt.** Teach everyone to swing the bat. Not sure the kid would like to always bunt anyway due to his lack of hitting ability. Fastest way to have a kid quit baseball. Most fun is the chance to try and hit the ball. Hey, if the bunt is needed, it should not matter who the hitter is at the plate.

**18. You missed the sign.** Don't ever assume your players know the signs just because you went over them two months ago. Practice your sign system, test your players prior to every game, and be sure to make the system simple and as few as possible.

**19. Not disciplining your best player(s).** It is a team and all players are equal as team members. All rules / consequences should be the same no matter if it is the number one player or the number twelve player. That is, unless you want to lose members of your squad for one player. Treated equally, the whole team will be better off for equal treatment.

**20. Giving signs to the first hitter.** OK, now WHAT sign could be given to the first hitter of the game?

I hope you have had a chuckle or two with these pitfalls. I have. But on a more serious note, these are all common pitfalls that we can become prey to if we are not aware of these situations. Let them play. Let them fail. Let them learn. Let them grow.

**Sincerely, Rick Johnson.**

I would like to thank Rick for allowing me to pass these great tips on to our Little League association. Many of these are covered in the yearly clinics offered from coast to coast through our **Teaching for Tomorrow** program. These are common pitfalls and will serve as a reminder to all who have chosen the path to teach of kids this challenging but exciting game. Always remember, do anything possible in your program if it benefits the children playing the game. If not, rethink.

If any of you within our association have something you would like to share, please send it along to me. It could be a special parent, coach, umpire or many other topics involved in our baseball program. You can contact me at [al.herback@gmail.com](mailto:al.herback@gmail.com) or phone 403-273-4656.

If you wish to get a copy of Rick's article, please visit <http://blog.thebaseballzone.ca>