

The Tuesday Night Practice

A 60-minute practice we actually ran with our 8 and 9-year-olds. Five games. Kids moving almost the whole time. They asked to play it again the next week.

12	60	7-9	5
PLAYERS	MINUTES	AGES	GAMES

THE HOUR AT A GLANCE

0:00-0:10	Dodgeball Warmup	Opener	10 min
0:10-0:20	Back-Up Catch	Throwing	10 min
0:20-0:35	2-2 Relay Race	Fielding + Throwing	15 min
0:35-0:50	Tennis Ball Fly Game	Fielding	15 min
0:50-1:00	Hat Tag	Closer	10 min

PACK THE BAG

☐ About 12 cones	☐ 4 to 6 soft foam balls
☐ Baseballs or softballs, one per pair	☐ Tennis racket + bucket of tennis balls
☐ Phone stopwatch	☐ Kids wear hats

How to use it. Run it as written the first time. Then use the Easier and Harder lines to fit your group. If most kids are failing, make it easier. If nobody ever fails, make it harder. We ran this with 8 and 9-year-olds; it should fit most 7 to 9 groups.

0:00

to 0:10

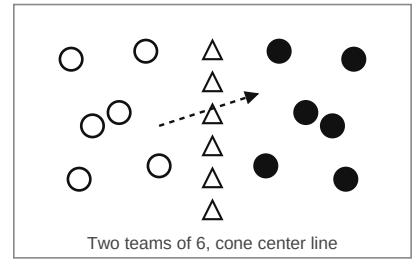
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MIN

OPENER

Dodgeball Warmup

Need: 4 to 6 soft foam balls, cones for a center line



Setup. Split a space about the size of an infield into two halves with cones. Six kids per side.

Run it. Standard dodgeball. Soft balls only, hits count below the shoulders. Caught ball means the thrower is out. Get them moving and loud before you coach anything.

Score it. Last team with players in wins. Play quick rounds and restart fast.

EASIER

Out players go behind the other team and can still throw, so nobody sits for long.

HARDER

A catch brings one teammate back in.

Coach note: Don't skip this thinking it's wasted time. In our experience, the kids who show up tight and quiet have a harder time focusing later. Dodgeball loosens them up.

0:10

to 0:20

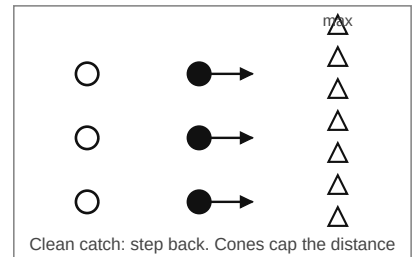
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MIN

THROWING

Back-Up Catch

Need: One ball per pair, cones for a start line and a max-distance line



Setup. Pairs face each other about 15 feet apart. Set a cone line for the farthest they can go at this age.

Run it. Every clean throw-and-catch, both partners take one step back. Miss it, stay. Drop it, step in.

Score it. Pair farthest apart at the whistle wins. A pair that reaches the cone line stays there and counts clean catches in a row instead.

EASIER

Softer or bigger ball. Shorter start distance.

HARDER

Catch and get rid of it within three seconds, or it counts as a miss.

Coach note: The cone line keeps it catch, not a long-throw contest. Every throw counts now, and they're competing.

0:20

to 0:35

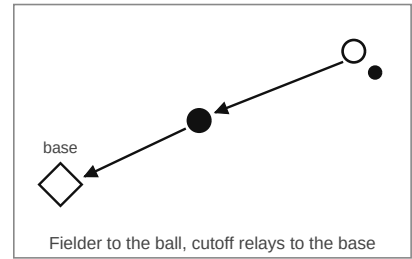
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MIN

FIELDING + THROWING

2-2 Relay Race

Need: Balls set in the outfield (or a coach to roll them), a phone stopwatch



Setup. Pairs start at a base. Balls sit out in the outfield grass.

Run it. On go, both sprint out. One runs to the ball, one stops as the cutoff and lines up. Fielder hits the cutoff. Cutoff listens for the call (a coach or the next pair yells the base) and relays it there.

Score it. Time each pair from go until the ball reaches the base. Beat your own time, then beat the best time.

EASIER	HARDER
Shorter distance. Ball sits still instead of rolling.	Call the base late, right as the ball reaches the cutoff. Two pairs race side by side.

Coach note: For this group, this was the block that mattered most. At this age the ball tends to die in the outfield, and hitting a cutoff fixes a lot of that. Making it a race kept them locked in.

0:35

to 0:50

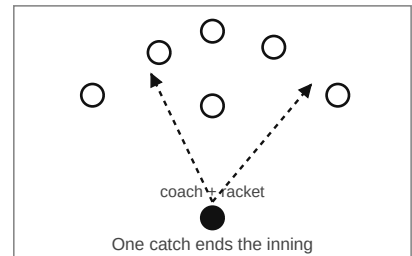
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MIN

FIELDING

Tennis Ball Fly Game

Need: A tennis racket, a bucket of tennis balls. No gloves.



Setup. Two teams of six. One team in the field, one team waiting.

Run it. Coach hits tennis balls with the racket into the field. Bare hands only.

Score it. Every ball that drops is a run for the waiting team. One catch is three outs: inning over, teams flip.

EASIER	HARDER
Hit them shorter and higher. A one-hop catch counts as one out, three outs to flip.	Call it or it doesn't count. A catch without a loud call is a dropped ball.

Coach note: Bare hands give fast feedback: stiff hands and the ball pops out, soft two-handed catches stick. And catch-equals-inning-over means every kid actually goes after the ball.

0:50

to 1:00

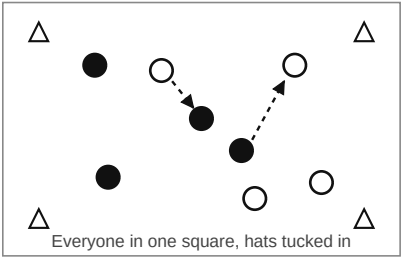
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MIN

CLOSER

Hat Tag

Need: Every kid's hat, four cones for a square



Setup. Cone off a square about the size of the infield dirt. Hats tucked in the back of the waistband, half showing.

Run it. Free-for-all. Grab other hats, protect yours. No holding, no pushing.

Score it. Last one with a hat wins. Two rounds.

EASIER	HARDER
Lost your hat? Grab one back from anyone and you are back in. Nobody is out for long.	Shrink the square.

Coach note: We like closing on a laugh. The kids leave the field smiling. That's the feeling we want them taking home.

WHY IT IS BUILT THIS WAY

There was no tee work and no ground-ball lines on this night. That was a choice for this group, not a rule. Every block had at least one of these going:

[] **Competition.** Stakes that don't matter but feel like they do.

[] **Decisions.** Reading, reacting, choosing.

[] **Lots of kids moving.** Never one kid working while ten stand around.

Brand-new skill? Swap one block for 8 to 10 minutes of straight reps (tee swings, short flips, easy rollers) to get it started, then play a game that uses it. Drill to get it started. Play to make it work in a game.

What the research says, honestly. Games and drills come out about even on technique, with a modest edge for games on decision-making. That evidence is small and mostly from soccer, with no youth baseball studies (Bromilow et al., 2025). The bigger reason we play: kids most often say they quit because it stopped being fun (Project Play, 2019; Crane and Temple, 2015).

GUIDELINES AND SOURCES

Bromilow, L., Milne, N., Woods, C. T., Dowsett, C. K., and Keogh, J. W. L. (2025). Systematic review, *Sports Medicine - Open*, 11, 90. Nine small studies, mostly soccer. No clear difference on technique; modest edge for game-based coaching on tactical skill. No youth baseball studies.

Aspen Institute Project Play and Utah State University (2019). Survey of about 1,000 sports parents. "Not fun anymore" was the top reason kids quit. Parent report, not direct observation.

Crane, J., and Temple, V. (2015). Systematic review of 43 studies on dropout from organized youth sport. Lack of enjoyment was a common reason.

Guadagnoli, M. A., and Lee, T. D. (2004). Challenge point framework. Learning goes best when difficulty fits the learner. The basis for the Easier and Harder lines. Does not specify an exact success rate.

Coach notes are our experience with one team. They illustrate. They do not prove anything.

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