



Mustang Development Program

Introduction

Welcome coaches and parents to the FRAA Mustang Baseball Program. In efforts to enhance and increase engagement of your baseball experience, the FRAA Baseball Development Coordinators have created a Mustang Development Program for future Commissioners and Coaches.

At the Mustang age group (10 years old and under), studies and experts have all concluded that implementing more skill activities keeps the interest of the young ball player and provides them not only skills to progress to the next level of play but also increased motor skills for human development. The Mustang level builds from the Pinto level, by introducing both player pitching and stolen bases for the first time. These events through Mustang should be fun, encouraging and memorable for all parties involved.

Goals

The goals of this program are simple but important to the development. We ask that each coach, volunteer and parent or guardian understands each of the goals listed below and embraces these on the journey of developing our youth.

- 1) Clear expectations for players, coaches, and parents/ guardians
- 2) Provide a safe and fun environment
- 3) Understanding of Mustang game play and rules
- 4) Develop and increase skill level of our young athletes
- 5) Strong emphasis on encouragement and positive feedback
- 6) Provide the basis of structure and discipline for baseball, school and life.

Communicating Expectations

Prior to the start of the season coaches should communicate the following to the parents/ guardians of their team:

- 1) Introduction of yourself, Asst. Coaches and your roster.
- 2) Mission and goals of the program
- 3) Clear understanding that the Mustang Program is about skills development
- 4) Expectations of parents, guardians and spectators:
 - a) only positive and encouraging words to each player
 - b) encouragement for parents to participate as assistant coaches. (Background checks)
 - c) encourage fans to root for every player on the field, including the opposing team
 - d) encourage parents to interact with all team parents (you may be playing ball with these folks for the next 8-10 years)
 - e) only coaches of the team will provide instruction on the field. The head coach should be the loudest voice on the field (please don't confuse the kids)
 - f) NO adults past the fence gates or field unless head coach permits and background checks are complete
 - g) any and all concerns and questions must be addressed directly with head coach.

Safe and Fun Environment

For our youth to begin to enjoy the game, team and structure they must feel safe in the environment and it is the responsibility of all coaches, parents and spectators to ensure the safety of the children.

We want our kids to continue to develop with baseball or softball as they progress in age. We also recognize this is a sport that may incur some "lumps" such as bad hops, overthrows and general mistakes. As such, safety needs to be explained to the kids and parents alike. All coaches should remain vigilant at all times. Correct any problems or potential issues prior to them becoming a major issue. The following are tips and rules to follow to ensure the safety of the players and coaches during practices and/ or games:

- 1) **Bats** - Only 2 team players should have a bat in their hands at any given time. The batter at the plate and the batter on deck. ALL other bats should be hung on the bat racks in the dugouts or in the players gear bag. 1 coach can be working with each batter when they are in the on-deck circle. This will help with no other players walking in on the on-deck batter and the coach should be working with each batter on hitting mechanics. Absolutely no exceptions to this rule.
- 2) **Engagement** - One of the most challenging elements of this age group is keeping kids engaged while in the field. It is important to recruit as many parents or guardians as

possible. Please encourage all parents to get their clearances so they can help. We recommend that one coach provide direction to no more than four players at once. The notion of creating stations will keep the players engaged and interested in what's being taught, rather than standing in a large group waiting their turn.

- 3) **Throwing** - When throwing a ball to another player it is imperative that every player ensures the receiving player is paying attention. It is a good skill to get each thrower to say the name of the person they are throwing to. This promotes communication, team building and safety.
- 4) **Dugout behavior** - When the team is batting, it is important to encourage the team on the bench to cheer on their teammate batting. Make up chants or use the standard "let's go, Bob" whatever works for you and your team. Kids should NOT be climbing the fence or sticking their fingers through the fence. One assistant coach should be designated as bench coach during these times. This should NOT be the same coach that is helping the on-deck batter. The bench coach should be between the bench and the on-deck circle. No kids should pass unless they are advancing to the on-deck circle.
- 5) **Behavior problems** - If you see a kid behavior poorly and potentially putting themselves or others in harm, let the kid know that this will not be tolerated with a warning. Second offense is bench time and lastly is parental engagement. Zero tolerance!!!
- 6) **Sliding** - No headfirst sliding is allowed. Teach the kids how to slide. Encourage each kid to slide into 2nd and 3rd base when advancing. This prevents collisions at each of these bases.
- 7) **Throwing bats** - Kids may still throw the bat after they hit the ball. Work with the kids to stop this behavior. You can also implement a cone about 10 feet down the first base line that the kids need to drop the bat at this cone or drop into a bucket.
- 8) **Defensive Alignment** - Keep kids playing defense out of the base paths when in the field. Move them forward or backward and encourage them to stay out of the base path. Should kids collide (and they will), please defer to your concussion training and the proper steps to assess and notify.
- 9) **Pitching** – Since this is many player's first introduction to player pitching, this should be a main focus during practices. All players should be given the opportunity to try pitching if they are interested and encouraged to continue practicing at home. Due to the pitching limitations laid out in the [FRAA Baseball Rules of Play](#) document, the more players available and willing to pitch, the better.

- 10) **Catcher's position** – The catcher's position is also a heavy focus at this age group and goes along with the introduction of player pitching. This is the first experience for catchers to be receiving from a fellow teammate (no longer a coach). As with pitching, this position should be practiced as much as possible for anyone who is interested. Not only will catchers be expected to receive pitches thrown, but also attempt to throw out potential base stealers. This position is drastically different than the catching position in Pinto and should not be overlooked.

- 11) **Stealing** – To complete the trifecta of new skills being taught at the Mustang level, stealing also becomes a large factor during games. The act of stealing should be taught with the focus on player safety as the first priority. This goes for the baserunner as well as the player accepting the throw from the catcher. Please stress to the baserunner that sliding is critical and could cause serious injury to both players if not done properly.

Equipment and Tools for Skill Development

The following are helpful and fun items that are appropriate for the Mustang Program to use during practices, pre-game warm-ups or while at home:

- 1) FRAA Supplied Items for Coaches:
 - a. Bucket of baseballs
 - b. Complete set of youth sized catcher's equipment (including a catcher's glove)

- 2) Optional Items for Coaches to Provide:
 - a. Bucket of tennis balls
 - b. 1 pack of low-profile field cones
 - c. Stationary hitting net with tee

The following are required to be purchased by the parents for each player. These items should be purchased and brought to each practice and game:

- 1) Heart guard chest protector ([Amazon link](#))

- 2) Youth athletic supporter

- 3) 1 "USA" stamped and rated baseball bat up to 2 5/8" barrel only

- 4) 1 Baseball Glove of good quality leather and well broken-in **

5) 1 Baseball Batting Helmet (with jaw protection)*

6) Baseball Pants*

7) Baseball Cleats*

* Used equipment that is in good working order is fine and encouraged.

** For this age group 10" - 11.5" leather gloves are best and can be purchased for \$30 - \$40 and less for used gloves. Used gloves are typically already broke-in.

Reference Material

The following websites provide great ideas for skill development and drills to do during practices:

- 1) <https://www.littleleague.org/downloads/baseball-pitching-log/>
- 2) [Practice Plans — Baseball Positive](#)

The following websites provide great tips for field maintenance before/ after practices and games:

- 1) [Municipality of Murrysville Field Maintenance](#) <-Section 2 for Baseball Fields
- 2) [How to Properly Line a Field](#)
- 3) [How to drag a field](#)
- 4) [Field drying tips](#)

The following websites provide great coaching tips for new coaches:

- 1) <https://www.youthbaseballedge.com/> <- Excellent podcast
- 2) <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8rIhLrIPcgN9E3929MaIRQ>
- 3) https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=justin+stone+elite+baseball+training+

Appendix A

Document Last Updated: January 2022

Document Last Updated By: Adam Devett (Baseball Development Coordinator)
Matt Slavonic (VP of Baseball)