



Missed flyballs, a dead possum in the outfield and players gasping after just one spin around the bases can leave a little league coach shrugging his shoulders.

A day at baseball practice

By Barry Franklin
special writer

IT ALL started about three weeks ago. I picked up the phone and listened as a deep voice said, "Hello, Mr. Franklin, this is your son's Little League baseball coach. We have a meeting scheduled for all the parents at my home on Tuesday evening, 8:30 sharp. Please be there, if possible."

I arrived at the meeting to find a rather small parent turnout, considering the number of boys on the team. The manager admitted to us that this was his first year of coaching Little League baseball and that he was adjusting to many of the rules and regulations.

"SOME OF these 8- and 9-year-old boys may have a year of play under their belts," he said. "For many others, this will be their initial exposure to organized baseball. I want it to be a positive experience for them."

"In this league, the parents should never criticize the coach, the umpire and, above all, the child. Regardless of how they perform, or what they do, we need to give these boys as much encouragement as we can."

The coach informed us that each player should need a baseball glove



as well as a jockstrap. Each boy was also to bring a baseball to the first practice session to bolster the league's equipment arsenal.

I was unable to attend the first practice session and arrived late at the second. Nevertheless, I was able to gain several impressions of the initial player talent — and the tremendous potential for improvement.

THE COACH hit easy ground balls to several boys in the infield. Two boys continued a conversation during the fielding practice. Needless to say, many balls hit in their direction were missed.

Similarly, pop flies often were dropped. Some boys misjudged them; others were simply not paying attention to the task at hand. One in particular had gathered a handful of dandelions while playing the outfield.

Another outfielder seemed preoccupied with adjusting his newly ac-

quired athletic supporter.

Near the end of practice, the coach suddenly looked up to find almost half the team gathered in a distant obscure corner of the outfield. "Hey, you guys, what are you doing out there?" the coach screamed.

"There's a dead possum on the ground out here," one boy responded. "There's a million flies on it," yelled another boy.

"Forget about the possum and the flies, and let's get back to practice," the coach said.

LATER THE coach had all the boys run bases. Some failed to step on the bases as they ran.

Just once around and many were fatigued, breathing deeply. Clearly they had a great deal of physical conditioning ahead before they would be in shape for the season.

As they boys left the field that evening, the coach told them that, for the most part, they had done a super job.

"You guys just need to concentrate a little more on baseball," he said.

Barry Franklin of Farmington Hills is co-director of cardiac rehabilitation at Sinai Hospital and on the health faculties of two colleges.



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