**Babe Ruth Newsletter**

**TIPS FOR PLAYER SAFETY
March 22, 2004**

Many of our leagues have already had sign-ups, conducted tryouts, filled rosters, started practicing or began playing. Moms and dads are swarming the sporting goods stores to get their children geared up for 2004.

Baseball and softball are some of the safest sports available for today’s youth. However, injuries can occur. I would like to offer the following tips for ensuring that our children enjoy a fun and SAFE baseball and softball season.

Before your child engages in a competitive sport, such as baseball or softball, take him or her to the doctor for a physical exam. The doctor can help assess any special injury risks your child may have. Players should do warm-up stretches before their practice or game to loosen and stretch the muscles. A warm-up can also consist of light calisthenics or a short jog to raise the core body temperature, which prepares all muscles for physical activity.

Do not allow children to “play through pain”. Pain is the warning sign of an injury. Rest is the best remedy for injuries.

Make sure first-aid is available at all practices and games. Ice is the best universal treatment for minor sports injuries. Regular ice packs should be available at all games, as ice controls the pain and swelling caused by common injuries such as fractures, sprains, strains and contusions. There are two basic types of injuries in young athletes – overuse and acute. Children who play on more than one team are more at risk for overuse injuries. Overuse injuries are caused by repetitive stress put on the same part of the body over a period of time. Acute injuries are caused by sudden trauma, such as fractures, sprains, strains and contusions.

 Make sure the players wear all required safety gear, especially a helmet. A player must wear a helmet when batting, waiting to bat or running the bases. Catchers should always wear a helmet, face mask, throat guard, chest protector, protective supporter (baseball) and shin guards when catching batting practice, practicing with the pitcher, coach, or other player, and during games.

Coaches should enforce all the rules of the game, encourage safe play and understand the special injury risks that young players face. Coaches should teach players how to avoid injury when sliding, pitching or dodging wild pitches. We all must work together to protect the young pitcher’s arm. As most youth league programs, Babe Ruth League, Inc. does limit the amount of innings a baseball player, and softball 12U players, can pitch per calendar week. The ideal method for protecting a young player’s arm is counting pitches. But, as is the case with most youth sports programs, there aren’t enough volunteers to enforce a pitch count rule. As parents, we can take the time to count our child’s pitches. While there is no concrete guideline for the number of pitches allowed, a reasonable approach is to use 50-70 pitches as a maximum per game for the 8-12 age group, 70-80 pitches per game for the 13-15 age group, and 80-100 pitches per game for the 16-18 age group (based on a maximum of two games pitched per week). Participation in multiple leagues and improper technique are also factors which must be considered. Babe Ruth League, Inc. discourages pitchers pitching for more than one team in a given season. While the number of pitches should be limited, the young athlete should be encouraged to throw. This includes playing catch, playing other positions besides pitcher and practicing pitching. When symptoms of arm discomfort or fatigue arise, longer periods of rest are recommended.

We all need to be aware of the warning signs of dehydration, which are dry lips and tongue,sunken eyes, apathy or lack of energy and infrequent urination. Children have special fluid needs. Kids are more likely to develop heat illness when exercising in the warm temperatures compared to adults. The progressive effects of dehydration can be serious. Make sure your kids are equipped with sports drinks or water.

Do not be afraid to cancel a practice or a game because of excessive heat or high humidity. Most children love to snack. We need to encourage them to eat snacks where their nutritional needs are being met. Our snack of choice is the David sunflower and pumpkin seeds. Other healthy snacks include things like dried or fresh fruit, raisins, popcorn, pretzels, rice cakes, trail mix, granola bars, breakfast bars, graham crackers, fruit and jello packs, and juice packs.

In summary, many adults do not realize children’s bodies can’t take the same amount of physical stress as adults can. Children are still growing and therefore are more susceptible to injury. Young athletes need proper training for sports. They should be encouraged to always warm up and to train for the sport, rather than expect the sport to get them into shape. Many injuries can be prevented if the players follow a regular conditioning program and safety guidelines.

Above all, remember to keep baseball and softball fun. Putting too much focus on winning can make your child push too hard and risk injury. Kids, coaches and parents should always try to PLAY IT SAFE.

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