

WAA 7-8 Baseball Program

First Inning Tee Rule

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Here are some basic things to consider on why the tee rule has merit and is mandatory, and why it should be. I'm not on the WAA board or anything. It goes well beyond the stigma of "it's only for beginners in T-ball"; it's about proper swing motion.

A batting tee is not made just for T-ball league players. Don't spoil a child's understanding of what a tee is for by telling him/her (or giving the impression) that a tee is only for little kids. Tees are for learning how to adjust your swing to hit to a spot. If a player cannot adjust his swing to a spot then he/she will not be fundamentally correct when adjusting to the different locations of a pitched ball. It's all about hand-eye coordination. Visit your local professional/trained hitting instructor and he will explain all this in great detail. (think of golf and going to the driving range to practice hitting over and over again-any similarities on smoothing the swing motion) Players of all ages use tees in practice (7/8 league overall "is" organized practice). Many major/minor league baseball players use tees (changing ball positions) to perfect mechanics every day before games. Hitting a stationary ball, when properly coached, will teach a kid to level his swing through the ball, and then take that motion to swing at a pitched ball coming at him on a plane.

Now what we usually see in T-ball or first inning of 7/8 are kids hacking down on tees. This happens because they have not been coached enough to smooth out the swing motion (some will take much longer than others and some are not born to swing anything-that's the way it is). Someone keeps pitching to them because they can hit a pitched ball. Any poor swing motion will hit a pitched ball if the pitched ball happens to enter the bat zone of the swing. Just because the kid hit the pitch, doesn't mean he hit it correctly and the longer you let a bad swing motion continue, then the harder it will be to correct it when they are older. First, they won't want to and then they'll get frustrated when they can't get around and connect on faster little league and Babe Ruth pitches, or they may get away with poor swings until high school and then not make the team. All the baseball knowledge, heart, and desire in the world will not correct a bad swing without utilizing hitting aids such as a basic tee. Major point to consider: A kid who cannot hit line drives off a tee when he is older will not succeed in competitive baseball.

Teach them now that a basic tee has value. So what if they dribble some to the pitcher. Explain to them that it's because they need work on their swing and hand/eye and then they'll get tired of the dribbles and try to improve by focusing on adjusting their swing, not just how far the ball went.

The major problem in 7/8 is there is not much practice time as a team, let alone with each child to work on swings using the tee. We have about a month of practice, for which most are cancelled due to weather and there is no time before games and there are the coaches who even in those practices

gravitate right to pitching. Kids who get good work at home with tees and nets and have help from someone become excellent hitters in high school and beyond (at least at straight balls). If a kid has desire for competitive ball, teach him the benefits of using a tee and help him with videos, books, and personal instruction.

My main point, before I wander off in some tangent, is that having the tee in the first inning reinforces the purpose of the tee and that it's not just for T-batters and little kids. It's up to the coaches to explain this to the kids and tell them to use one at home and how to use it, if they want to improve their hand/eye and swing motion. It's so easy to get caught up in the kids twist on this that it's no fun and no glamour. Don't just focus on the game situation; we are supposed to be helping these kids learn baseball and "improve through fundamentals" in this league.

If the league finds value in having the 1st inning tee, then all should do it and coach the team on the reasons for using it and what using one can do for your swing (when utilized more than just at the game). The kids who desire improvement in baseball will listen.

I'm not an expert in this, just a baseball player who's been through it. There are many other ways to look at this (recreational play vs player development), and the tee is just one part of the game. Just try to understand why its use has merit.

Tim