



EABA 9U  
Recommended Program  
2023

# EABA 9U Recommended Program

## Season Focus

- Participant safety
- Best effort by coaches, parents/guardians and players
- Engaged participants resulting in a desire to return next season
- Continual physical skill development as athletes, not just baseball players
- Life skills development (patience, respect, cooperation, communication, leadership, etc.)

## Volunteer Head Coach and Assistant Coach Roles

Thank you to the individuals that have volunteered to be a coach this season. Each team has a Head Coach and an Assistant Coach that will be responsible for aspects such as participant safety, coordinating skill development activities (practice plan), cancellations due to weather, teaching basic rules, ensuring the participants are engaged and team equipment.

## Parent Helper Role

Parent helpers are essential to the success of the 9U program and are really appreciated by the coaches. This is not considered to be a drop-off program and encourages parents/guardians to be involved on the field to assist the coaches. **Please note that COVID restrictions may impact this.**

**No baseball experience is required.** This assistance may include setting up the bases, organizing/picking up equipment, ensuring a participant gets to a portable toilet and back, helping a participant find their glove/bat/helmet / water bottle, assisting players in rotating positions, and directing base runners, etc. It is not the expectation that parent helpers are responsible for coordinating any of the skill development activities, they are there to just assist the coaches with these activities. It's also an opportunity for parents/guardians to learn along with their players.

## # of Teams & Players / Team, Jerseys & Hats

Ideally, teams will consist of 8 – 9 players per team. Team numbers may be slightly higher due to the total of players registered and how they can be evenly distributed between teams. Each team will have a different jersey colour/style. Participants and coaches will each receive a jersey and a hat that they will wear to each practice/game. These will be provided to each player at, or prior to, the first game/practice. A jersey parent volunteer will need to be allocated to assist with handing out, tracking jerseys and ensuring that they are returned in good condition at the end of the season.

## Participant & Team Equipment

Participants need to have (and label) their own helmet, glove, protective cup and water bottle. Each team's equipment bag will have balls (various types), bats, cones, a batting tee, a set of bases, a set of catcher's gear and a first aid kit.

### **Poor Weather / Canceling a Practice / Game**

Teams will be notified through TeamSnap if games or practices are canceled due to diamond conditions. If weather conditions are questionable prior to an event, cancellations are communicated out to teams by the 9U Director by 5:00pm. If weather conditions worsen after a game or practice has started, it will be up to the coaches' discretion to end for the day. Coaches are required to send a TeamSnap message out to all families confirming that the game/practice has been called due to weather.

### **Games /Practice Format**

Listed below is the format that the coaches are expected to follow for the season. It allows for a balance of skill development and the opportunity to use those skills in a game setting.

**6:15 - 6:25pm:** Players arrive and equipment set up (bases, etc.)

**6:25 - 6:30pm:** Welcome players & parent helpers, introductions, safety rule reminders, etc.

**6:30 - 6:40pm:** Warm-up activities (dynamic warm-up, versions of tag, stretching, etc.)

**6:40 - 7:05pm:** Defensive (throwing, fielding, catching, how to get outs, etc.) and/or  
Offensive (base running, hitting, etc.) skill development

**7:05 - 7:55pm:** Game (set bases 15 - 16 walking steps apart, use cones on the field for position indicators, cones for the on-deck batter and catcher positions, have a batting T near home plate, 5 Easton SoftStitch Incredi-balls)

**7:55 - 8:00pm:** Wrap-up, cool down stretch, team talk, clean up and goodbyes.

For teams that have a practice day, coaches will lead a practice from **6:30 pm – 8:00 pm**. Practices will be held at Weinlos Park (tentative). Coaches will receive practice plan support materials.

### **Blue Jays In 30 Analogy**

EABA is leveraging the success that the LMBA Rookie Division has had in past years by implementing modifications to the “traditional” game format to ensure players are more engaged and having fun. Baseball traditionalists may not agree with the modifications, but the number one reason children stop playing a sport is that it's not fun and/or they're bored. There tends to be a lot of standing around both offensively and defensively in baseball, so for young players, it's necessary to modify the game while still teaching them the fundamentals to ensure they are ready to move up to the 11U division.

There is a show called **Blue Jays in 30** that shows you the highlights/action only from a Blue Jays game earlier that day. To emphasize the amount of downtime in the game of baseball, consider the fact that most Blue Jays games last 3 hours (180 minutes) yet they're able to summarize the actual action from a 3-hour game to just 30 minutes. Now take out the commercial breaks during the 30-minute episode and you'll probably only watch about 20 minutes of action from a 3-hour game. That's 160 minutes (89%) of waiting/downtime. Using this same ratio for a 45 minute 9U ball game **without any modifications**, that means there is only about 5 – 6 minutes of total player engagement as most action lasts 5 – 10 seconds within the game (eg. Player hits a ground ball and runs to first base = approx.. 5 seconds)

## Game Modifications and Rules

### 1. Home / Visitor & Scorekeeping

Home and visitor teams will be determined through the provided schedule.  
Score will not be kept; this is introduced in 11U.

### 2. Defensive Positions

Players will be placed in the following defensive positions LF, CF, RF, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, SS, 3<sup>rd</sup>, catcher and pitcher (5 steps behind the pitching machine/coach that is throwing to the hitters) for a total of 9 positions. If a team prefers, they can play with an additional outfielder instead of having the pitcher position in the rotation. Additional positions can be made between LF-CF and CF-RF, if there are rosters of more than 9 players.

### 3. Rotate Positions

Participants will rotate one defensive position after every 2 batters, with the exception of the catcher. This position will not rotate every 2 batters, the player will be the catcher for the complete half of their defensive inning. Coaches are encouraged to track who has been the catcher and try to have all players have equal turns throughout the season. Coaches also have the option of managing player rotation as they see fit, as long as all players are able to experience each position fairly throughout the season.

### 4. Bases Loaded

The team that is batting will start with the bases loaded (one runner on each base). This will create engagement for 3 extra players beyond just the hitter and on-deck hitter.

### 5. Extra Base Hits

If a player hits the ball far enough and can get a double, triple or home run they are encouraged and allowed to, with the base runners in front of them also advancing. The play stops once the ball enters the infield. Once the play stops, celebrate/acknowledge the great hit by the batter and reload the bases with the batter that just hit going to 1<sup>st</sup> base and the 2 base runners in front of them returning to 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. This will also result in all 3 of them getting additional baserunning experience, physical activity and keeps more players engaged.

### 6. Outs

“Outs” will be called (eg. thrown ball beats the runner to first base, the runner is tagged when not on a base, etc.). The participant that is “out” will just return to their bench and the baserunner position will remain empty.

### 7. Advancing on Overthrows, Ball Returned to the Infield, Stealing and Lead-offs

For balls that are hit or overthrown to the outfield or overthrown into foul territory (e.g. shortstop overthrows 1<sup>st</sup> base), all baserunners may advance **UNTIL the ball reaches the infield (controlled or uncontrolled by an infielder)**. At the end of the play, all baserunners will return to the necessary base to load the bases. Participants are not allowed to steal bases or lead-off.

**8. Everyone Bats:**

The offensive team will bat every player, there are not 3 "outs". Once each participant has hit, the teams will switch.

**9. Helmets:**

Helmets are mandatory for all hitters, on-deck batters and base runners.

**10. Maximum # of Pitches Per Batter:**

In order to keep the game moving along, each batter will receive a maximum of 4-5 quality pitches during each at bat (5 pitches per at bat throughout May and 4 pitches per at bat throughout June) from a pitching machine or their coach. Coaches can throw either underhand or overhand, at the coach's discretion, based on the participant's ability. If the batter has not made contact after the maximum pitches, a ball will be placed on a batting tee for them to hit from to allow success in hitting the ball and provide fielders and base runners live-play experience.

**11. Game Balls:**

A soft stitch indoor ball will be utilized as the game ball. This provides a safety factor for the players and coaches and encourages players to get in front of the ball for fielding. Coaches are to use the orange squishy ball provided with their equipment for batting practice.

**12. Base Distance**

Bases will be pegged into the ground 15 - 16 regular walking steps (approx. 45 - 50 feet) apart.

**13. On-deck & Catcher Circles**

To ensure the on-deck batters and catchers remain a safe distance from the batter, a flat cone can be used to represent the on-deck circle and the catcher's area.

## **Program Odds and Ends**

A couple of aspects that aren't in the package but are discussed at our 9U (Rookie) Division pre-season coaches meeting are:

### **Equipment**

EABA will provide the following for each team: Equipment bag, set of bases & home plate, baseballs (soft stitch and squishy balls), flat cones, team bat, hitting tee, set of catcher's gear and first aid kit.

### **Pitching**

Coaches pitch from being on one knee, essentially throwing darts, as an adult standing and throwing results in too high of an arm angle that the ball comes from to home plate. They

place a regular plastic baseball bucket in front of themselves and use a glove as added protection. They are encouraged to move closer or further away depending on the hitter's ability and if they are throwing overhand or underhand to the hitter.

Coaches are recommended to throw underhand to all of the batters for the first week. However, after the first week, they can continue to throw underhand, progress to overhand dart tosses or to the pitching machine, to match and challenge the player's ability. The goal is to eventually get everyone hitting off the pitching machine by the end of the season. For players that have progressed and have regular success hitting off the pitching machine, coaches are encouraged to do full-arm (non-dart) throws from their knee at the full distance (44') so that the player can better prepare for player pitching at 11U.

### **Catchers**

**The catcher for the next inning should be the first batter so they have time to get the gear on.** Catchers do not throw each ball back to the coach. If they miss it, they leave it and get ready for the next pitch. If they catch it they just roll it behind their back or flip it up to the coach at the home plate area that is helping out (making sure catchers don't get too close to hitters, hitters' stand properly, etc.).

### **Position Cones**

Flat cones are placed at each position for the first week to assist the players with landmarking. It helps to avoid someone rotating to play second base and just standing on the base. It also gives the young players a visual of where to rotate to. In the 2nd week, the cones are removed halfway through the game, players are encouraged to help each other with where they need to rotate to after every 2 batters. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> week, the coaches can continue with the cones for half the game or not use them at all. An email reminder will be sent out at the start of each week to the coaches about the progression.

### **Maximum Swings**

Players get a maximum of 5 swings in May and a maximum of 4 in June. If they don't make contact after receiving the maximum number of pitches, they will hit off the tee. The tee should be placed in a convenient location to allow quick setup in and out of the batting area.

### **Roster Size**

Roster size is ideally 8-9 players per team, but numbers may need to exceed this depending on players registered. The concept behind this is that there is often better quality and experience for teams with smaller player-to-coach ratios. This allows coaches to be able to provide more focus and attention on players. Teams with more players will need to involve more participation from assistant coaches and parent helpers to ensure players are engaged and receive the appropriate guidance.