

# Junior Otters



## Overview

The Junior Otters program aims to increase kids' involvement and excitement in baseball by providing active, fun skill development. Each practice includes warm-ups like arm circles, ankle rolls, and freeze tag. Players rotate through drills such as throwing, catching, batting, and base-running, with activities gradually increasing in difficulty. The program emphasizes repetition, teamwork, and game-like scenarios, culminating in full games during the final weeks. Extra volunteers help keep kids engaged and focused, making sure they build skills while having fun.

## Warm-ups

Whether playing a game or practice, it is important to start with warm-ups. An effective warm-up involves forming a wide circle around the coach or leader. Warm-ups can vary from week to week.

### Examples of warm-up activities:

- Small arm circles going forward, starting small then gradually getting bigger.
- Repeat arm circles going backwards.
- Give yourself a big hug to rest the shoulders.
- Legs shoulder-width apart, slowly reach down as far as you can, trying to touch your toes with slightly bent knees.
- Gently roll ankles around the ground on both feet.
- Bum kicks: run in place, trying to kick your buns.
- **Finish:** A coach or parent becomes “IT” and plays a game of freeze tag.

## Practice Structure

- After warm-ups, split into 3 groups.
- Each group runs a drill at a different location on the field.
- Each drill should last 8–10 minutes, with water breaks in between.

**Note:** These are suggested drills. Feel free to create new, engaging drills to teach the skills you want.

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## Weekly Drill Plans

### Week 1

- **Warm-ups**
- **Group 1:** Partner up across from each other (~5 feet apart). No gloves. Gently roll the ball to your partner with two hands. When successful, bring the ball to your chest to “keep it safe.”
- **Group 2:** Line up. Teach the “bow and arrow” throw: start with the ball at the chest, draw back the bow with the throwing hand, elbow points to the target, then throw hard forward, bringing the throwing hand across the chest to slap the hip.
- **Group 3:** Sit on the bench in batting order. Coach helps get players into a good batting stance. When the coach yells “GO,” the player drops the bat and runs to first, going through the grass and turning right. High five from the coach, then return to the bench. Bench players cheer.

### Week 2

- **Warm-ups**
- **Group 1:** Partners in two lines. Roll the ball back and forth, using two hands, bringing it to the chest. This week, begin introducing glove handling once they’re comfortable with the two-handed stop.
- **Group 2:** Single line. Draw back the bow, throw, then after 2–3 throws, add the glove by drawing the ball from it. Run to retrieve the ball after everyone has thrown.
- **Group 3:** Similar to Week 1. After coach yells “GO,” the player swings, drops the bat, and runs through first.

### Week 3

- **Warm-ups**
- **Group 1:** Partners across, gloves on. Roll the ball into the glove with two hands, stopping it at the chest. Start increasing the distance for harder rolls.
- **Group 2:** Partners, adding catching. Use two hands to catch and throw back, matching players with similar ability.
- **Group 3:** Run through the line after a good swing. Set a ball on the tee. Assistants or parents may help shag balls.

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## Week 4

- **Warm-ups**
- **Group 1:** After warm-ups, partner up and play catch, similar to Week 2.
- **Divide into 2 groups:**
  - **Group 1:** Touch tag! Some players put on gloves with balls inside. They try to catch others. When tagged, players freeze. After 2–4 minutes, frozen players unfreeze others by running around.
  - **Group 2:** Relay race: run out to a ball, pick it up, run back, and pass to the next person in line.

## Week 5

- **Warm-ups**
- **Group 1:** Partners do soft toss back and forth, starting close for success and confidence.
- **Divide into 2 groups:**
  - **Group 1:** Coach hits gentle ground balls. Players field with two hands, bring to chest, and throw back. Keep groups small to maximize activity.
  - **Group 2:** Practice batting stance and swing, hit off the tee, then run to first. Use third base for additional groups if needed.

## Week 6

- **Warm-ups**
- **Group 1:** Teach players the names of different positions. Play “Coach Says,” e.g., “Run to \_\_\_\_\_,” where the blank is a position.
- **Group 2:** “Hit the bucket”: in a circle, throw a ball at a bucket in the middle. If hit, the team gets an out; if it lands in, they get 3 outs. Cheer for hits!

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## Weeks 7 & 8

These weeks focus on game-like scenarios. These may be tougher for kids to stay focused, so extra volunteers can help encourage attentiveness and engagement.

- **Warm-ups**
- **Group 1:** Practice game situations. Split the group: one half at fielding positions, others hitting 4 balls off the tee, then running after the last hit.
- **Group 2:** “Red light / Green light” in the outfield, followed by long throws. Pair players about 10 feet apart for catch practice.

## Weeks 9 & 10

- **Warm-ups**
- These weeks are dedicated to actual games.
- Play 2–3 innings (about 1 hour).
- No outs; players in the infield, batting through the order.
- Players hit off the tee, advancing one base per hit.
- On the last batter, the coach announces “Last batter!” and remaining players on bases round the bases until finished.