As you prepare for the upcoming season we thought it would be a good idea to provide you with some words of wisdom right from the pen of the late Cal Ripken, Sr. This article is an excerpt from Mr. Ripken’s manual for coaches and managers that was used at all levels of the Baltimore Orioles’ organization when it was the most advanced in all of baseball. This is an unedited version.

Frequent meetings of the entire club are strongly recommended. Plays and mistakes should be thoroughly discussed. The big advantage of meetings, however, is to instill the team-play idea in a player and make him realize the fact that a prospective good ballplayer must do more than merely hit, run and throw to reach the higher leagues. In other words, make him more conscious of good baseball. Study and know the rules yourself and be prepared to ask and answer questions on time.

Do not permit your players to squawk continually or alibi on umpires’ decisions. Also curb swearing, violent tempers and abusive language whether on the field or off. You must be the example and leader in these matters. Never bawl out players on the field or make gestures indicating that you are angry at some development. Do your reprimanding in the clubhouse, and unless circumstances warrant, do it with the individual privately.

Do not permit your players to lie around on the bench or ground outside the dugout at any time; they can always find something beneficial to do. Do not allow them to leave the playing field at any time during the game for the purpose of smoking, eating hot dogs, etc. Use judgment in permitting a player to dress, such as a pitcher knocked out of the box; he can learn more on the bench than anywhere else. The few hours a player is required to be in uniform should be all business for his good as well as yours.

We suggest that all signs such as hit-and-run, squeeze, bunt, take, etc., should be strictly up to the manager. You are the one designing your offense and defense and must accept responsibility for success or failure. Too many signs and complicated signs confuse young players and are not necessary. We strongly advise simple, clearly understandable signs and signals that are easily detected by your players. The stealing of signs and signals has been over-emphasized. Some pitchers use this as an alibi. Discourage thinking along these lines. The only signs helpful to you would be the opponent’s hit-and-run, steal, bunt, etc., even though the signs are detectable. You might cross-up the hitter and cause injury. Also, some players might tend to develop into guess hitters.

Conditioning of your club is an important part of getting ready to play the season. However, let’s keep in mind that the longest distance that anyone ever has to run on a baseball field is 360 feet, that being the distance around the bases; and you only have to run that far on an inside-the-park home run. Mile runs and bleacher running really is not necessary. Ten to 15 sprints of 60 yards are perfect, because that is really the way we run in baseball when trying to beat out a base hit. A jog around the baseball field is good to loosen up. Running the bases serves the purpose of conditioning as well as practicing a fundamental. Punishment running should never be used – the only thing it accomplishes is a pulled muscle or twisted ankle, and it can be FATAL. Use good judgment with conditioning, just the same as with other phases of the game.
Really, there are only three things necessary to play the game of baseball – those being bats, balls and people. I know, to be realistic, we need a fourth thing – that being a glove – but we could play without it. But without any one of the other three, we can’t play. You see, it is a simple little game played with a bat, ball and glove and then they put the human being in the game to use those three dumb animals. If that human being becomes a dumb animal, we really have problems. He has to be the smart one and be able to handle the bat, ball, glove and himself. Certain fundamentals and knowledge can allow him to do an excellent job.

Let’s take the ball with its big seams and little seams. Why do we need to throw it across the big seams or with the little seams? First of all, the air in which we play controls what the ball does. Outfielders, infielders and catchers want the ball to go as straight as possible and carry as far as possible. So, by gripping the ball across the big seams we get four seams with backspin cutting through the air, which naturally produces the best carry. Pitchers even sometimes hold the ball in this manner to get the fastball to take off or ride. However, pitchers like to make the ball move and many times hold it with the little seams to make it sink, sail or run, and at times they hold the ball across the seams for the same purpose.

The bat has a trademark, and some think it is just the manufacturer’s label; well, it is, but it is put on the bat to show the grain. We want to have that label up so we are hitting with the grain, not against it.

The glove comes in many sizes, and the outfielders and pitchers like to have one as big as they can get. The outfielder uses it to gain reach for balls hit over his head and in the alleys. The pitcher likes it to hide the ball from the batter, and he also likes it for protection from line drives. The first baseman has a big, long glove that enables him to catch balls far from the bag. The middle infielders usually have a smaller glove, one that they can get the ball out of more quickly to make plays. Really, I think the catcher looks for comfort more than anything else; he has to catch those 95 mph pitches.

Now to the human being; you see, he really has to be smart to use these things. It’s a simple little game played with a bat, a ball and a glove. The bat is round, the ball is round and then someone says, “Hit it square!” Now, when we take that human being who possesses the fastest computer in the world (the brain), we not only can hit that 95 mph fastball square, but we also can catch the line drives that come at us 100 mph. When we allow the two eyes (that are the focus for the brain) to do their job and watch the ball, the brain will have the hands, arms and legs all in the right places at the right times. Everything we do in the game of baseball we do out in front so the eyes can tell the truth to the brain and the computer can get the rest of the body in the right place. We catch the ball out in front, we throw the ball out in front and we hit the ball out in front.

This is the start of the fundamentals, and then when we practice the correct way we can all be better players. PERFECT PRACTICE. The only way to do anything is TO DO IT RIGHT! The game of baseball is made up of so many little things, and if we do all the little things right we will never have a big thing to worry about.