

Batting Cage Station Ideas for Youth Baseball Practice

8U-12U

Practice Plans

Coach Nick & the YSC Coaching Team

Last spring I was three weeks into the season with a 10U travel team — 16 players, one cage, and 75 minutes blocked for hitting practice. The first Tuesday, we ran a traditional "everyone takes three cuts and rotates" session. By the time our eighth kid stepped in, the other fourteen were throwing rocks, swapping helmets, and just generally not doing baseball. Two players left practice having taken 9 swings each. I've coached long enough to know that's a session that makes kids slower, not faster.

The fix is station-based cage work: four simultaneous stations, two players in the cage at a time, everyone else at an active companion drill. Done right, every player on a 16-kid roster gets 25–30 quality swings in a 90-minute practice — without a single minute of standing in line.

Why Station-Based Cage Work Beats "Take Turns" Hitting

The math alone makes the case. A traditional batting cage rotation with 12 players, each taking 8–10 swings, takes roughly 50–60 minutes. During that time, each player hits for about 4–5 minutes and stands around for 45. Station work collapses the waiting time to zero because every player is active simultaneously.

The less obvious benefit: players step into the cage ready to hit instead of mentally somewhere else. When a kid is at soft toss for 10 minutes before getting in the cage, his timing is warm, his hands are loose, and he knows what he's working on. Compare that to a player who just watched eleven teammates hit while absentmindedly spinning his batting helmet.

Equipment You Actually Need

You don't need a fully stocked facility. Here's what we use to run four stations with one standard cage:

- **An adjustable batting tee** — height adjustment is non-negotiable for teaching inside/outside pitch contact points. We picked up an adjustable youth batting tee from theranchsports.com — 10% off and no sales tax.
- **A portable pitching net or L-screen** for soft toss away from the cage
- **Foam or reduced-impact balls** for the one-hand isolation station (saves your net and won't hurt anyone)
- **A bucket of at least 30 baseballs** in the cage — fewer than that and you'll spend half the rotation chasing balls

The 4-Station Setup (10–12 Minutes Per Rotation)

This system works for 8U through 12U. The in-cage equipment changes by age group (details below); the three companion stations stay the same regardless of level.

Station 1 — Tee Work in the Cage (2 players) One player hits, one feeds the tee and retrieves. 5-rep sets: start with an inside pitch location (ball positioned off the front hip), move to middle (belt), then outside (back hip). Don't mix locations within a set — isolate one contact point per set. Coaching cue: "If you're reaching back for the ball, the tee is too far behind your stance. Adjust the tee, not your swing."

Station 2 — Soft Toss at the Portable Net (2 players) Tosser kneels at a 45-degree angle, 4–5 feet away, lobbing the ball into the hitting zone at belly-button height. 5 reps per set, 3 sets, then switch roles. Coaching cue: "Short stride, quiet hands — your hands load back while your front foot goes forward. Don't let your hands drift out with your stride." This builds the load-and-stride timing that tee work alone can't replicate.

Station 3 — One-Hand Isolation Drill (2 players) Use foam balls or whiffle balls at a second net or fence. Bottom hand only: 5 reps. Top hand only: 5 reps. Full grip: 5 reps. Bottom hand coaching cue: "Pull the knob to the ball — your elbow stays tight and drives down." Top hand coaching cue: "Palm up at contact — if your knuckles are pointing at the ground, you rolled over early." Isolating each hand separately produces faster mechanical improvement than full swings because each hand has one job and can't compensate for the other. Most batting cage guides completely skip this drill.

Station 4 — Short Hops and Reaction Ground Balls (remaining players) No bat needed. Players work in pairs on short-hop picks or reaction grounders using a fence or rebounder. For 8U–9U, substitute "wall ball" — throwing against a concrete wall and fielding the rebound — to build glove-to-throwing-hand transfer speed. This slot keeps athleticism and fielding reps active while players wait. In a game week, run baserunning cue cards here instead: have your station captain quiz players on first-to-third reads and rundown scenarios.

Matching the In-Cage Station to Age Group

7U–8U (Tee ball through early coach pitch): Keep all cage work on the batting tee. No pitching machine and no live BP in the cage at this age — they're building contact point recognition, not tracking velocity. Limit to 8–10 swings per rotation before mechanics break down from attention and fatigue. Our 8U baseball practice plan has a simplified two-station cage block designed specifically for this age group's attention span.

9U–10U (Coach pitch and machine transition): Add front soft toss at 20–25 feet as a second in-cage option, or run a machine at 35–40 mph if your facility has one. A live coach-pitch arm works just as well at this age and lets you read timing in real time. See our 10U baseball practice plan for a full 90-minute schedule with the cage block already built in.

11U–12U (Machine and live BP): Machine at 45–55 mph or live BP from an assistant coach or capable parent. The three companion stations stay identical — you're only raising the difficulty inside the cage. I had a 12U shortstop last season who was pulling off his front shoulder against machine speed. One rotation at Station 3 (one-hand drill) was all it took for him to feel his hands staying inside the ball. He went 3-for-4 that Saturday. Our 12U baseball practice plan has a full layout for sequencing the cage into a competitive-level practice.

Common Mistakes That Slow Down the Rotation

Balls running out mid-station. Coaches undercount their bucket and burn four minutes picking up balls during an active rotation. Bring at least 30 in the cage — more if you have two players hitting simultaneously.

Stations without clear end conditions. Players don't know when they're done. Use rep counts (5-rep sets with a verbal signal from the station captain) rather than time. Kids can count reps; they lose track of minutes.

Machine warm-up eating into rotation time. If you're running a pitching machine, have it set and warmed up before the first rotation. A cold machine dialing in its speed costs you five minutes of the session.

Over-coaching inside individual stations. The whole point of the rotation is throughput. If you stop Station 1 for three minutes to fix one player's mechanics, the other three stations are running uncoached. Take notes, pull that player after practice for a focused two-minute drill.

The Between-Rep Reset Routine (What Most Cage Articles Miss)

Here's the gap that makes the biggest real-world difference: what players do between sets. At most programs, a player swings five times, steps out of the box, and immediately starts chatting while the partner resets the tee. That 45-second gap produces nothing.

We teach a three-step reset: (1) step out of the box and take one slow breath, (2) take a single dry swing with eyes closed and picture the contact point from the last rep — was it solid? (3) step back in, set your stance, and signal ready to your partner. It sounds small. After two seasons of doing this consistently with our 10U group, they run this routine automatically during games

without being prompted. That is habit forming, and it's the difference between players who grind reps and players who build real game mechanics.

Running It Solo

If you're coaching alone, assign a **station captain** at each companion station — an older, more experienced player whose job is to run the drill and keep count. Brief them for 60 seconds before practice. Put yourself at the cage station where your technical eye does the most work. Use a visible timer (your phone propped on a cone) so players self-rotate without you calling it every 10 minutes.

Parent volunteers work best at soft toss — the technique is easy to brief in 30 seconds and hard to mess up. The one-hand drill (Station 3) runs itself once players understand the cue.

For the fielding side of your practice, our youth baseball infield drills runs the same quality-reps-first philosophy through ground ball work — a natural complement to what you're building at Station 4. More batting and practice-plan resources live on the baseball coaching hub.