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Baseball and Softball Alignment Training Device for Hitting

Abstract

A method of facilitating in teaching the proper alignment of a ball player for hitting a pitched ball, said method comprising providing a home plate having a front edge and a side edge; providing an alignment training device having a first leg and a second leg interconnected via a hinge mechanism; aligning said first leg of said alignment training device with said side edge of said home plate; and aligning the second leg of said alignment device with said front edge of said home plate by rotating said second leg with respect to said first utilizing said hinge mechanism, wherein said hinge mechanism prevents movement of said second leg when said second leg is at a ninety degree angle with said first leg.

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Background/Summary

PRIORITY FILING [0001] This application is a continuation of and claims priority from U.S. patent application having Ser. No. 17/352,867 filed Jun. 21, 2021 entitled Baseball and Softball Alignment Training Device for hitting.

TECHNOLOGICAL FIELD

[0002] The present invention relates to a training device to assist children in properly aligning themselves with respect to home plate for swinging at a ball as it approaches home plate and more particularly to an alignment device which is easily manufactured, carried, stored and utilized in assisting in the proper alignment.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Thousands of children ages eight and under with some as young as four participate in baseball and softball activities. As these children are learning the game, many features of the game must be taught. These features include catching a ball, throwing a ball, baserunning and hitting. Hitting requires the child to approach home plate in a ready position to swing at a ball as it is pitched or thrown to them. Proper alignment is essential to ensure that the child is in a ready position to swing at the pitch as it approaches them. However, as the children are young, they are easily distracted and positioning themselves in a ready position is not always correctly undertaken. The children may improperly align themselves, for instance, their body may be aligned to either first or third base or they may stand too far up in front of home plate or too far behind home plate. Proper alignment is critical for the child to enjoy the success of hitting a ball. Accordingly, coaches usually attend to the child as they stand in the batter's box and assist in positioning the child's feet, shoulders and hands to place them in a proper alignment. However, as most children are excited to be playing in front of their parents and such, once this alignment is correctly determined, it is soon forgotten at the next pitch. The result is the pace of play of the game is severely slowed down as each child is consistently positioned correctly for each pitch. The slow pace of play is cumbersome to the enjoyment of the game.

[0004] Accordingly, there is a need for a hitting alignment device for youth baseball and softball players which will assist the young child in proper placement for hitting a ball thrown or pitched to them. The hitting alignment device should be easily positioned and maintained in position for each subsequent hitter to ensure that the pace of play is maintained. The alignment device should be of a low enough profile not to impede the movement of the child once the ball is hit and the alignment device should also be easily be carried by a coach and stored in a standard baseball bat bag or the like for transportation to a game site.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] In the preferred embodiment, a baseball or softball alignment training device comprises a first leg having a general length and having a first end at one end of the general length and a second end at the distal end opposite from said first end. A second leg having a general length and having a first end at one end of the general length and a second end at the distal end opposite from said first end. Aa first hinge member carried by the second end of said first leg. The first hinge member having a first abutment edge. The second hinge member carried by the second end of the second leg. The second hinge member having a second abutment edge. The first and second hinge members pivotally interconnected and wherein the first abutment edge of the first hinge member abuts the second abutment edge of the second hinge member at a position wherein the first leg and the second leg are perpendicular to each other forming a right angle.

[0006] Additionally, a method of facilitating in teaching the proper alignment of a ball player for hitting a pitched ball is provided. The method comprises providing a home plate having a front edge and a side edge and providing an alignment training device having a first leg and a second leg interconnected via a hinge mechanism. The first leg of the alignment training device is aligned with the side edge of the home plate; and the second leg of the alignment device is aligned with the front edge of the home plate by rotating the second leg with respect to the first by utilizing the hinge

mechanism, wherein the hinge mechanism prevents movement of the second leg when the second leg is at a ninety degree angle with the first leg.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0007] Implementations of the invention will become more apparent from the detailed description set forth below when taken in conjunction with the drawings, in which like elements bear like reference numerals.

[0008] FIG. **1** illustrates an alignment training device for hitting according to the present invention positioned for use by a batter in a hitting stance in front of a home plate.;

[0009] FIG. **2** illustrates an exploded bottom view of an alignment training device for hitting according to the present invention;

[0010] FIG. **3** illustrates one hinge of an alignment training device for hitting according to the present invention;

[0011] FIG. **4** illustrates an assembled bottom view of an alignment training device for hitting in a partially folded position;

[0012] FIG. **5** illustrates an assembled bottom view of an alignment training device for hitting in a folded position for storage; and

[0013] FIG. **6** illustrates a method of utilizing an alignment training device for hitting.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0014] FIG. **1** illustrate an alignment training device **104** for hitting according to the present invention positioned for use by a batter **102** in a hitting stance in front of a home plate **100**. In particular, the alignment training device **104** is intended for utilization in children's baseball and softball games. The children may range from ages four and up. A primary purpose of these youth sports is to interest the children in the respective games while providing an enjoyable learning experience. As the youths are young, they are easily distracted, so a goal of the invention is to provide a simple easy to replicate training aid which may be easily and readily positioned and utilized for use by the youth without slowing down the game.

[0015] Speed of the game is a critical purpose of the invention. As youth's struggle with understanding the fundamentals of the game, the pace of play is delayed. With the pace of play delayed, children in the field lose focus, children in the dugout get antsy and parents also struggle with the time involved in the actual total time lapse of the game. One of the key areas to expedite the pace of play involves hitting. Hitting in baseball and softball involves a batter with a bat facing the pitcher. A home plate **100** is present as a target for the pitcher to position a ball over the plate in order for the batter to hit the ball. A home plate has a pentagon shaped profile with a horizontal base generally seventeen inches in width facing toward the pitcher, a first and opposite second side extending from the horizontal base at a ninety-degree angle at a length generally eight point five inches. At the end of the respective sides, the first and second side include an extension which is generally twelve inches in length which meet at point aligned with the center of the base, or eight point five inches from the respective edges of the base. The point wherein the first and second side edges meet is the farthest point. Ironically, not known by most people, the entire layout of the baseball diamond, such as the foul lines, the positioning of the bases and pitching mound are all based on the position and placement of home plate. Accordingly, positioning of the batter with respect to home plate is critical to ensure that the batter is in the proper place for interfacing with the pitch thrown by the pitcher. A key aspect of the present invention is to assist the batter in positioning themselves with respect to home plate. The homeplate also has a general height.

[0016] As shown in FIG. **1**, (not to scale) a batter **102** is positioned to one side of the homeplate **100**, in more advanced games a batter's box may be created wherein the batter must stay within the

box during the pitch. However, in young youth games, even when a batter's box is initially created, the lines are generally destroyed by the young children walking through them. Positioning of the batter with respect to the home plate is critical for the young child to develop proper hitting skills. Unfortunately, young children tend to not understand where to stand requiring coaches to consistently reposition the youth during the at bat. The alignment training device **104** is positioned with respect to home plate **100** to assist the batter in understanding where to stand. Alignment training device **104** includes a first leg **105** which is intended to run offset and parallel to one of the sides of the home plate depending on the orientation of the youth with respect to being left-handed or right-handed dominant for hitting. A second leg **106** is perpendicularly oriented with respect to first leg **105** and is intended to be positioned in line with the front of Homeplate **100**. To facilitate the positioning of the alignment training device **104**, the hinge which connects the first and second leg is constructed with abutting surfaces which abut when the first and second legs are at a ninety-degree angle. Positioning the hinge offset from the intersection of the front and side of the Homeplate ensures that the legs are properly positioned for the batter. Utilizing the corner of the home plate as a guide ensures that the alignment training device can consistently be positioned for the respective batters. The alignment training device is preferably no higher than home plate.

[0017] FIG. **2** illustrates an exploded view of the alignment training device **104**. In the preferred embodiment, alignment training device **104** includes a first leg **105**, a second leg **106**, a first hinge member **110** and a second hinge member **112**. In the preferred embodiment, first leg **105** and second leg **106** are of similar construction and style such that they may be utilized interchangeably in defining the alignment training device. Each leg includes a body **125** of a generally length and width having a first end **130** and a second end **135** opposite and distal from the first end. Preferably the length of the respective legs is greater than eight and a half inches to extend past the sides of the home plate. Preferably second end **135** has profile defining a tab **140** which is narrower than the width of first end **130** and smaller than the height of first end **130**. With this configuration, second end **135** includes a periphery which encircles tab **140**. Tab **140** will be utilized for mating with a respective hinge member **110** or **112**. Tab **140** may include indentures **142** or other securing member for establishing a semi-secure connection with a respective hinge member. Preferably the bottom of each leg includes an embossed surface **145** for engaging the dirt associated around a home plate and for securing the respective legs in position with respect to the ground. Preferably, the embossed surface **145** includes a raised serpentine grounding surface for interacting with the dirt. The serpentine configuration resists lateral and longitudinal movement.

[0018] As shown in FIGS. **2** and **3**, a hinge **111** includes first hinge member **110** and second hinge member **112**. Hinge members **110** and **112** are designed for mating attachment. In the preferred embodiment, first hinge member **110** is constructed to be carried by first leg **105** and second hinge member **112** is constructed to be carried by second leg **106**. In the preferred embodiment, first hinge member **110** includes first hinge member recess **150** defined by first hinge member base **152** and first hinge member sidewall **154** which is an integral part of first hinge member attachment leg **156**. As shown in FIG. **3**, first hinge member attachment leg **156** includes a top **158** and an offset bottom **160**. A left sidewall **162** and right sidewall **164** in conjunction with top **158** and bottom **160** define first leg receptacle or channel **166** for receiving first leg **105**. The length of channel **166** is preferably the same length as tab **140** of first leg **105** enabling tab **140** to be fully inserted within channel **166**. When fully inserted, the peripheral portion of second end **135** which encircles tab **140** will abut and engage the top, bottom, left sidewall and right sidewall of first hinge member attachment leg **156** thereby defining a flush junction such that the combined exterior profile of the first leg **105** and first hinge member attachment leg **156** is smooth along its entire length with no noticeable raised surfaces or detents. Also, in the preferred embodiment, bosses **172** are defined within channel **166** for engaging with indentures **142** for maintaining first leg **105** in connection with first hinge member **110**. As shown in FIG. **3**, first hinge member **110** include a central pivot **170**. Central pivot **170** extends upward from first hinge member base **152** having a circular

sidewall **174** which communicates with a central pivot top **176**. In the preferred embodiment, circular sidewall **174** in conjunction with central pivot top **176** define a lip **178** such that preferably the central pivot **170** has a mushroom configuration. Central pivot **170** is offset from first hinge member sidewall **154** defining second hinge receptacle area **179**.

[0019] As shown in FIG. **2**, second hinge member **112** includes pivoting member **180** which is integrally formed as an extension of second hinge member attachment leg **182**. Second hinge member attachment leg **182** has a similar construction as first hinge member attachment leg **156**. Preferably, pivoting member **180** has a circular profile for being received within second hinge receptacle area **179**. Additionally, pivoting member **180** includes a central channel **186** for receiving central pivot **170**. In the preferred embodiment, central channel **186** of pivoting member **180** has an internal circumference slightly smaller than lip **178** such that by the deformation of lip **178** and central channel **186**, central channel **186** may pass over lip **178** and wherein lip **178** retains the second hinge member **112** in pivotal communication with first hinge member **110**.

[0020] A key feature of the invention is the presence of a stop which includes first stop wall **190** formed at the edge of first hinge member sidewall **154** and second stop wall **192** formed at the edge of second hinge attachment leg **182**. In operation when pivoting member **180** is received within second hinge receptacle area **179**, first stop wall **190** and second stop wall **192** are axially aligned such that when pivoting member **180** pivots around central pivot **170** second stop wall **192** abuts first stop wall stopping further rotational movement of second attachment leg with respect to first attachment leg and in this stopped orientation, first attachment leg and second attachment leg are perpendicularly disposed forming a right angle as shown in FIG. **1**. FIG. **4** illustrates the alignment training device in a position intermediary a fully open or closed position. FIG. **5** illustrates the alignment training device in a closed position for ready placement. In operation the alignment training device can be separated into three distinct components, the first attachment leg, the second attachment leg and a completed hinge construction which is readily adaptable for being attached to the respective legs. By being easily separated, the three components can be readily stored in a batting bag or other similar carry device making the alignment training device easily portable to and from the respective games.

[0021] FIG. **6** illustrates a method **600** for training children to hit a baseball or softball utilizing the alignment training device. The method includes providing a home plate **610** which is commonly provided at a field wherein a ball game is undertaken. With the provision of the home plate, one leg of the alignment device is aligned with the side of the home plate at step **620**. The alignment leg will be offset from the side edge of home plate depending on if the batter is left-handed or right-handed. Once the first leg of the alignment training device is positioned, the second leg is rotated with respect to the first leg until the hinge mechanism stops any further rotation of the second leg. When the movement of the second leg is stopped, the second leg is at a ninety-degree angle with the first leg. The second leg is aligned with the front edge of home plate providing a hitting area for the child. It is understood that movement of the second leg can be done prior to positioning of the first leg on the ground. It is preferred that that hinge be positioned offset from where the front of home plate meets the side of home plate as shown in FIG. **1**.

[0022] Accordingly, it may be seen that an advantageous alignment device may be had according to the present invention to facilitate in teaching young children where to position themselves with respect to an on coming pitch by providing a simple to use device which is lightweight and portable for easy maneuverability to ball fields while being sturdy and weighted enough to stay in position on the ground once placed. It is presumed that the young children using the device will routinely step on the device, kick the device, etc., hence the weight of the device is important to ensure that it stays on the ground. A contoured bottom surface also facilitates in maintaining the alignment device on the ground. The device consists of three separate components which preferably are detachably attached enabling the alignment device to be constructed on site will maintaining a smaller footprint for being carried in a bat bag. The hinge mechanism enables the alignment device

to easily obtain a ninety-degree perpendicular configuration for positioning with respect to a home plate providing an instructional alignment training guide. The use of the guide is intended to facilitate the increase in speed of play of the game as the device removes the continued engagement of a coach and young child in how to position themselves for receiving a pitch. The alignment device is easy to use, easy to maneuver and easy to understand by a child.

Claims

1. A method of facilitating in teaching the proper alignment of a ball player for hitting a pitched ball, said method comprising: providing a home plate having a front edge and a side edge; providing an alignment training device having a first leg and a second leg interconnected via a hinge mechanism; aligning said first leg of said alignment training device with said side edge of said home plate; and aligning the second leg of said alignment device with said front edge of said home plate by rotating said second leg with respect to said first utilizing said hinge mechanism, wherein said hinge mechanism prevents movement of said second leg when said second leg is at a ninety degree angle with said first leg.
2. The method of claim **18** further including securing said alignment training device to the ground when aligned with said home plate.