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I've never been good at games with balls. It's the eye-hand-coordination-thing. Tennis, softball, field hockey and golf, they are all beyond me. Flying through the air or lying on the ground, I am hopeless when it comes to hitting a ball. To make matters worse, if by chance I need to throw a ball, well, I admit it; I throw like a girl.

You can imagine my surprise when I was recruited to coach T-Ball. The recruiter was an old boyfriend who was either oblivious, lacked fundamental common sense or, most likely, was desperate for any warm body to coach the itty-bitties. Anyway, he'd already convinced our friend Leanne to coach. She had played softball in high school and college and was quite enthusiastic.

However, she needed a sidekick and for some unfathomable reason I found myself nominated. Even more mysterious, I accepted the challenge. All of the other teams were coached by a duo of dads. Of course both actually knew how to play baseball; had probably played for years, decades even. Our poor team had to accept the indignity of being the only one with girl coaches. We didn't mention my incompetence. Why add insult to injury?



Boy and girls, our team was a delightful group of first and second graders. Most were Americans. Did I mention that this all happened when I was living in Geneva? Among our would-be sluggers was one young man who was more or less a coach's dream. He'd already played on a T-Ball team, could hold a bat and hit the ball about half the time. He could throw much better than me (although that's not saying much) and liked to run. Before the end of the first practice he knew he was the team star. Since I wasn't good for much else, I took it upon myself to make sure his head did not become too big for his cap. Luckily, his parents were grateful. So much so they attempted to hire me as a personal trainer for their son. Thinking it odd that a seven year old needed his own coach, I respectfully declined.

The second standout on our team was a little redheaded Belgian girl. She was adorable in a redheaded sort of way, spoke no English and knew nothing about baseball. In between our star and our beginner-beginner was your typical motley crew of six and seven year olds.

Wednesday evenings were for practice and Saturday mornings we played a game. There was only one other pee wee group so we played them every week. Under Leanne's guidance and my nervous assistance we held drills and taught the fundamentals of baseball. The children were very agreeable, did a few pushups, ran around and played catch. Batting practice was a challenge. Leanne diligently encouraged them to keep their eye on the ball but most missed it time after time. It did not look good for our first game. And indeed, we lost. I don't remember the score but it wasn't pretty.

That's when I found my calling as the T-Ball whisperer. Most coaches shout a lot, they need to if they have any hope of being heard out on the field. But shouting didn't seem to help our little ones. In spite of our noisy encouragement, they continued to pick up the bat with a mix of confusion and terror.

Squatting down, head-to-head, one at a time, I calmly whispered into each player's ear, "Keep your eye on the ball. Don't look at the bat; don't look at the field or your friends on the bench. Look at the ball and only the ball. Take your time. When you're ready, keep your eye on the ball and just swing the bat. Don't worry you'll hit the ball. It's like magic." Then I stood up, moved away and, like magic, they hit the ball. Every time.

We were undefeated for the rest of the season.

Have fun on and off the field and bon appétit!

T-Ball Photo credit: Flickr /slinky789

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Crunchy Salad with Apples & Grapes

After a ball game or at a beach picnic, try this refreshing salad on a warm spring day or evening! Enjoy!

Serves 6-8



2 hearts of romaine, chopped
 Grated zest of 1 orange
 1 tablespoon roughly chopped fresh tarragon leaves
 1 tablespoon roughly chopped parsley
 1 apple, cut in julienne
 12-16 red seedless grapes, halved
 1-2 ounces gorgonzola, crumbled
 1/4 cup chopped pecans, toasted

Put the romaine in a large bowl, sprinkle with the orange zest and herbs and toss to combine. Add the apple, grapes and enough vinaigrette to lightly coat and toss again.

Transfer the salad to a serving platter or individual plates, sprinkle with crumbled gorgonzola and toasted pecans and serve.

Citrus Vinaigrette

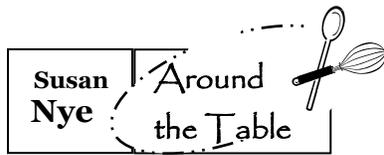
Juice of 1/2 orange
 1-2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
 1-2 tablespoons chopped red onion
 Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
 About 1/2 cup or to taste extra-virgin olive oil

Put the orange juice, vinegar, mustard and onion in a small food processor or blender, season with salt and



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Another recipe from Susan Nye: Spring 2012/Volume 296

pepper and process to combine.

Add the olive oil and process until smooth.

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