



# TEACHING THE GAME

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT AND COACHES' GUIDE

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2016 PLAYER DEVELOPMENT AND COACHES' GUIDE



## PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

- Be a better player
- Be a better teammate
- Have fun



## GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

*These are just a few guiding principles that will keep the focus on the player learning and enjoying the game.*

- Emphasize safety, fun, and learning
- Develop team spirit and unity
- Concentrate on a few skills so that everyone will learn the basics
- Introduce skills beyond the basics after most players seem to have the basics down
- Break the practice down into stations or smaller groups, so focused learning can take place
- Reinforce the basics every practice and every game. Repetition, repetition, repetition
- Understand that the idea of each level is to prepare for the next level
- Teach the principles that will work all the way from t-ball through majors
- Have the players play real positions, not just wandering anywhere
- Let every player play any position they can safely play, then later in the season, focus the players that will be moving to the next level on positions where they seem to be comfortable

## BEST PRACTICES FOR ALL STATE COLLEGE COACHES

If you are like most youth parents or coaches, you have approximately 4-6 weeks to get ready for your season. Conducting three practices a week for 2 hours will give you about 36 hours of instruction.

When you consider how many facets of the game there are to teach, it's not much time to accomplish your goals. You may be able to demonstrate everything, but you won't be able to have enough quality repetitions to benefit your players without using the following keys:

**Write your baseball practice plans down.** Take 15 minutes the night before practice and decide which area of the game you want to work on. List the drills and how long you want to run them. If certain players need specialized work, make a list and determine how to get them the special time.

**Pick your drills carefully and repeat them often.** Work on fundamentals early in the year and add situational baseball as the fundamental improve.

**Ask your players to practice on their own.** Players who fail to practice outside of team practices will never reach their true potential.

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**Ask your players to practice on their own.** Players who fail to practice outside of team practices will never reach their true potential.

**Baseball practice plans should include work on all or part of the following five fundamentals at each practice:**

1. **Dynamic Warm-up.** All baseball practice plans should start with a proper warm-up routine. Please don't underestimate the value of a proper warm-up. It is a fundamental. Every player should know how and be encouraged to warm-up properly to prevent injuries.
2. **Throwing.** Playing catch with proper mechanics is seldom stressed enough by youth coaches and parents. Habits are born with repetition; make sure your player develops good throwing habits. Insist your players focus on those proper mechanics when playing catch to warm-up their arms.
3. **Fielding.** Fielding fundamentals should be stressed in every practice you have. Fielding begins with the feet so stress proper footwork during all drills, including playing catch. Pick drills that stress all of the possible fielding skills needed. Backhand and glove-side drills, fly balls, line drives over each shoulder, and short hops to slow rollers should all be included.
4. **Hitting.** Hitting a baseball is one of the most difficult skills in all of sports. There is no other skill where being successful 4 out of 10 times (on a consistent basis) makes you eligible for the Hall of Fame. I'm sure you've found it to be the most popular part of practice. Unfortunately, there is more to baseball than just hitting, so you need to learn how to manage your practice time effectively.
5. **Base running.** Base running is the one area you can improve on the most with the least amount of athletic ability. Base running is an attitude and your job is to teach players that how they approach base running can determine the fate of the game. Hustling out EVERY ground ball, knowing the strength of opposing players' arms, learning what counts tend to favor breaking balls, and being aggressive on every pitch are all skills which do not require athleticism.

*You'll find that players will be more responsive to your coaching if they enjoy themselves. The easiest way to accomplish that is to let them compete during practice.*

*If you want them to use proper mechanics while warming-up offer a reward of extra batting practice for the pair that uses the best mechanics during warm-up. Allow the two people who show the most hustle during fielding drills to be team captains for the scrimmage.*

*The more game-like you make your practice; the less boredom will set in. Conduct your drills quickly and efficiently without a great deal of lecturing. Players will fall asleep quickly if the coach talks too much.*

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RUNNING A BASEBALL PRACTICE

## Preparation

- Keep total practice time to less than 90 minutes.
- Have a plan before you come to practice.
- Include drills that will work on things that the kids did wrong during the last game.
- Reward the players who show up on time. For example, if you plan to have a hitting practice, have the players hit in the order they showed up. You would be amazed how many players will start beating you to practice.

## Running the practice

- A good routine for starting each practice is to have a dynamic warm up that includes activities like jogging, jumping jacks, or other moderate intensity exercises to get players moving
- Stress throwing and catching the ball properly – every time.
- Games are won at 1B and 2B. Spend more time throwing to those bases.
- Make sure you have assistant coaches so you can break the team up into smaller groups when working on skills.
- Avoid one ball, one batter batting practices and one ball, one fielder fielding practices.
- Instead of a live batting practice, try closing each practice with the live, situational baseball
- If you are not good at hitting an infield practice with a fungo, then don't. You can throw the ball instead of hitting it.
- Pitchers and catchers should work on those skills at each practice.

## Run, run, run

- Tell the players the ball field is a sacred place. No one walks on or off the field.
- All sprinting should be done with fielding glove on to reinforce proper defensive running.
- Bat speed and arm strength will increase with sprint work.

## Ending practice

- Try and end each practice at the same place on the field and depart with a positive confident message. Young players like closure and consistency to their activities.
- Don't be afraid to give the players homework, they should be practicing at home.
- At every practice assign a couple of players to pick up the equipment and bases.
- Respect the field and keep it clean.
- Never under estimate the effect you have on the life of every player that calls you "Coach."

## Practice plan templates

The following pages include two different templates for you to create your own practice plan.

You may not need every box or section on the page to create your plan, but keep in mind the five elements we want to include in every practice:

- Dynamic warm-up
- Throwing program
- Fielding
- Hitting
- Base running

Be sure to talk with the general manager of your league to understand the points of emphasis for coaching at each level, and spend most of your time addressing those skills.

You can use the drills contained in this manual to help teach those skills.

Additional resources to help you complete your practice plan, and help you understand the specific skills we want to teach our players are contained on the companion DVD for this manual.

On the DVD you will find short videos and video series on:

- Throwing programs for position players
- Infield skills
- Outfield skills
- Pitching mechanics
- Catching fundamentals
- Hitting mechanics and techniques



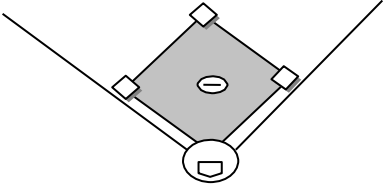
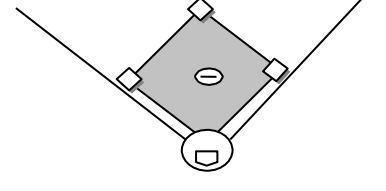
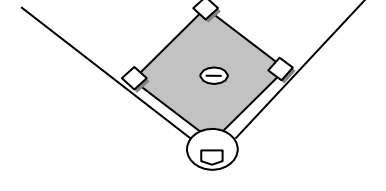
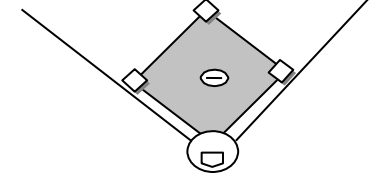
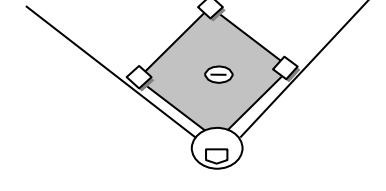
DON'T FORGET – BASEBALL IS SUPPOSED TO BE FUN!

# Practice Plan

Date:

Objective:



Time: Activity: Details:	 A diagram of a baseball field from a top-down perspective. The pitcher's mound is at the bottom, and the bases are arranged in a diamond shape. The pitcher's mound is marked with a circle and a square. The bases are marked with squares. The field is shaded in grey.
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# Practice Plan

Practice goal:



ACT I - 20 minutes

ACT II - 15 minutes

ACT I - 20 minutes		ACT II - 15 minutes	
	Dynamic Warm-up		Stations
1		1	
2		2	
3		3	
4		4	
	3:00		
	Base Running		
1			
2			
3			
4			
	5:00		
	Throwing Program		
1			
2			
3			
4			
	12:00		15:00

ACT III - 40 minutes

Live/Situational Baseball

40:00

Notes/Reminders/Coaches' Instruction

# THROWING



## THE PROPER THROWING MOTION

**Starting position:** The players should position themselves so their shoulders form a straight line to the target with their throwing shoulder in back and their feet facing forward (perpendicular to the target). The hands should start together at the belly button.

**The grip:** Show kids the proper 4-seam grip. A proper grip will allow the ball to be thrown straighter, harder and farther. Stress that the ball is not to be thrown unless they get the proper grip. Watch them throw all the time and make sure to check their grip frequently.



**Starting the throw:** When the throw starts, the front foot is lifted and moved toward the target. At the same time the hands separate. The glove hand is thrown forward toward the target with the thumb pointing down (this forces the front shoulder to turn in). The throwing hand goes down then back with index and middle fingers on top and pointing away from the target.

**Hip rotation and weight shift:** As the front foot lands (on the toe and ball of foot), the back hip and shoulder rotate forward toward the target bring the weight up and over the front foot. This rotation and weight shift is the key to using your body to throw. The throwing arm comes up (so the throwing elbow is at least shoulder height) and then forward with the elbow in front of the ball. As the back shoulder comes forward it should be aimed at the target. The glove arm is bent and pulled back into the body so that it tucks right under the shoulder. This movement with the glove arm is important because it helps the hips to rotate and improves throwing accuracy.

**Release:** The ball is released slightly in front of the body with a downward motion. There should be a snap of the wrists as the ball is released to add velocity to the throw. The ball should just spin off the top pads of the index and middle fingers.

**Follow through:** The motion should be completed naturally. The player should let his throwing arm complete its motion and not force it to stop. The back leg will come forward with the weight shift and the back knee should come toward the front knee.

## DRILL: TWENTY-ONE

### **Objective**

To improve throwing accuracy

### **Setup**

Two players and a baseball

### **Execution**

This is a game played by baseball players at all levels. As players play catch, 1 point is awarded to the thrower for each ball caught at chest level. Two points are awarded for a ball caught at head level. Points can be deducted for uncatchable throws. If a throw is accurate but the receiver misses it, points are still awarded to the thrower. The first player to 21 wins. Stress proper mechanics. Set up a team competition in which winners move on and losers are eliminated. To speed things up, play to 15 instead of 21.

## DIAGNOSING AND FIXING COMMON PROBLEMS WITH THE THROWING MOTION

**Check the starting position:** Make sure the player is starting in the proper place. Check the ball grip and starting position.

**Watch the feet and legs:** If they are starting properly, watch their feet and legs when they throw. Watch the front foot to see if they are over striding, landing on their heel, or not stepping directly toward the target. If they stride too far they end up shifting their weight forward before the hips have started to turn and they don't get their body into the throw. If they land on their heel it can force their weight back and make it difficult to rotate their hips. If they don't step directly at the target it will throw off their aim and hip rotation.

**Check the body rotation and weight shift:** As the front foot lands, the back knee hip and shoulder should rotate and bring the weight forward. If the player's belly button has not turned to face the target at the time of release then the player is not rotating their hips properly. If the back knee does not come toward the front knee then the player is not shifting their weight forward over the front foot.

**Arm position:** If the body rotation and weight shift is correct, watch the arm motion. The arms should separate as the player's strides. Make sure the glove arm is thrown out toward the target and then pulled back under the glove-side shoulder. Check the throwing arm to make sure it goes down, back and up. When the throwing arm is back, the index and middle fingers should be on top. If they are on the bottom the player will end up pushing the ball instead of throwing it. When the throwing arm is up, the elbow must be at least shoulder height. If it is below shoulder height the player ends up short-arming the throw and can injure his arm.

### *DRILL: CUT-OFF RELAY RACE*

#### **Objective**

To work on catching with two hands, making a quick transfer, and proper footwork when receiving and making throws

#### **Setup**

Bucket of balls, small groups of players

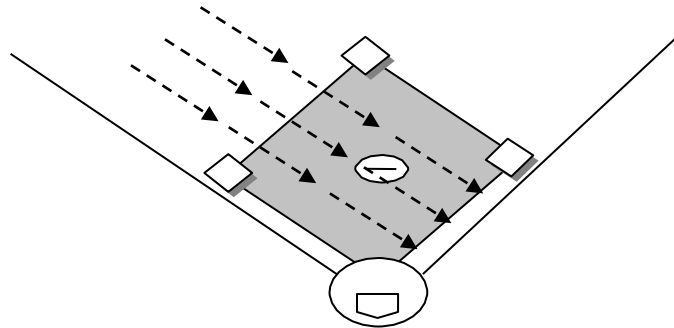
#### **Execution**

Create groups of three, four, or five players to race. Players stand in a straight line with the others in their group, beginning at the spot where the ball is picked up, spaced evenly. All groups go at the same time. An outfielder picks up a ball lying on the warning track next to the fence and throws to his first teammate. That teammate turns his body, catches, generates momentum, and throws to the next teammate. This continues until the ball reaches the last player. The team that finishes first wins.

#### **Coaching Keys**

The most common problems you'll find when executing relay throws are with kids who turn the wrong way before throwing (they turn toward the throwing side instead of the glove side) and kids who catch the ball flat-footed. Remind these players to turn toward the glove side as the ball approaches and to start moving toward the next target as they receive the ball. When they receive the throw,

they'll already be moving in the right direction, so all they'll have to do is throw the ball and follow the throw.



## MORE THROWING DRILLS

### Tee Ball Throw and Go

This drill teaches young players to follow their throws in the right direction. Have two single file lines of players (one behind the other) facing at a comfortable throwing distance.

A1 A2 A3 A4 A5 >> << B1 B2 B3 B4 B5

The player at the head of line one throws to the player at the head of line two. After the throw, player continues a forward motion (as one should) in the direction of the throw by running to the back of the opposite line. The drill is especially effective for Tee Ball players as it encourages players to follow their throws instead of allowing them to 'cheat backward' as they tend to do when going to the back of the same line.

### Wrist Snap

Wrist Drill - Players are on both knees facing each other about 8-10 feet apart. Player 1 will place his throwing elbow in his glove. Raise the throwing elbow so it is even with his throwing shoulder. Concentrate on loading and popping the ball with the wrist to Player 2. There should be very little body movement other than the wrist propelling the ball. Player 2 should give a target and catch the ball with two hands. PURPOSE - focus on the last 10% of the throw/wrist action

### Throwing Drill – Motion: Upper Body Movement

Two Knee Throwing - Players are on both knees facing each other at 15 feet. Player 1 will throw to Player 2.

The emphasis should be on the hand break out of the glove, arm arc (loose and controlled), turning of the shoulders, release, and follow through. Also it is important to preach proper arm action - ball comes out of glove and proceeds down, back, and up. The fingers should remain on top of the ball. The throwing elbow needs to get even with the throwing shoulder.

PURPOSE - To isolate the upper body during the throwing process.

### **Throwing Arm Down and Back, Fingers on Top**

Player 1 is in a throwing position with shoulders lined up facing a target and hands together at chest. Player 2 is on one knee about 8-10 feet directly behind Player 1. Player 1 starts the throwing motion by separating the hands, the glove hand goes forward and the throwing hand goes down and then back in an arc. The fingers are on top of the ball at all times. Player 1 releases the ball as it reaches shoulder level behind their body resulting in a toss to Player 2.

Coaches: watch for proper arm separation, throwing arm going down and then back, and that the fingers remain on top of the ball. If the toss does not go directly to Player 2 then make sure the arm is coming straight back.

# HITTING



## DIAGNOSING AND FIXING COMMON PROBLEMS WITH THE SWING

### **Where's the problem?**

If you have a hitter that is having problems (doesn't make contact, has a slow swing, doesn't hit with power, just looks wrong) try this technique for diagnosing the problem:

First make sure they are starting in the proper position. Check their grip and stance. Once you are sure the grip and stance are fine, watch their feet when they swing. Make sure they are staying balanced, not over-striding and that their back foot is turning when they swing. If the back foot is not turning on every swing then they are not rotating their hips. If the feet are fine then check the hands. The hands should stay close to the body and come straight at the ball as they start to swing. Many hitters will extend their hands away from their body as they start the swing (casting) or they will drop their hands just before they start the swing (hitch). If their hands are fine, then move on to the head. Is it facing the pitcher when they start, does it stay on a level plane or is it bouncing up and down? Are they watching the ball all the way until it hits their bat? Below is a list of the most common problem that kids have when they are hitting and some suggestions for correcting them.

### **The grip**

Most kids will over wrap their knuckles, hold the bat in their palms and/or grip the bat too tight. If their elbows are not pointing down when they are in their stance then they are probably gripping the bat wrong. This slows down the swing and makes it harder to bring it through the hitting zone. Fix the grip before you let them swing. Have them take some practice swings after you fix their grip. They will probably notice how it makes it easier to swing the bat. You will probably need to correct each player's grip a number of times before they do it naturally. Don't let them swing with a bad grip. It will just cause bad habits.

### **Hit with your hips**

Many kids do not rotate their hips when they swing and end up swinging completely with their arms. If the ball does not jump off their bat then they are probably not using their hips. Watch their feet when they swing. If the back foot is not turning when they swing, they are not rotating their hips. Explain that all the power comes from the hips. Usually if you correct this in soft toss they will immediately see how much harder they can hit the ball. If they still don't understand how to use their hips try this Hip Twist drill. Have the player place a bat (stick, broom handle, etc.) behind their back on their waistline. With hands gripping the bat from behind, they should get into their stance. Have them try and hit a few soft toss pitches from this position. The only way they can get the bat head to cross the plate is to rotate their hips.

Repeat this a few times until they get a feel for the movement. Go back to the normal stance and repeat. Doing this drill 10 to 20 times a day programs young hitters to get the lower body working correctly without conscious thought (muscle memory).

## **Over-striding and reaching**

Some hitters will stride too far and end up shifting their weight forward before they swing. They end up reaching at the ball instead of swinging. This action makes it difficult to hit change-ups and off-speed pitches later in life. Have them shorten their stride and focus on keeping their weight back. Put an object, like a batting helmet, in front of their front foot so they can't over-stride.

## **Keep your eye on the ball**

Many kids will turn their head just prior to impact. They don't keep their head down and "watch the ball hit the bat." If you have a player that consistently swings and misses at soft toss, they are probably doing this. There are a couple of ways to correct it. Have a baseball in your bag that you have colored with two different bright colors. When you soft toss to the player, have them yell out the color that they hit. This forces them to watch the ball all the way to the bat. You can also put a batting helmet on the first base line when they are swinging. Tell the player that when they finish the swing they should be looking at the batting helmet.

## **Hitch**

This happens when the player starts the swing by dropping his hands instead of coming straight at the ball from the launch position. This action slows down the swing making it difficult to hit fastballs. To break this habit, have the player get in the launch position and then let the bat rest ON their shoulder. As you soft toss to them the bat must come straight from the shoulder to the ball. You can also try rapid-fire soft toss. Get five soft toss balls ready to pitch. In rapid succession soft toss the balls to the player giving them very little time between pitches. This forces the player to shorten their swing and come straight at the ball.

## **Looping or big swings**

This happens when the player extend his arms too early, usually when the bat is still behind home plate. This slows down the swing and reduces power at impact. Use the Fence Drill to correct this problem. Have the player take a batting stance with the outside of the rear end against a fence or wall. The object is to have the player take a normal swing without making contact with the fence or wall. Start in slow motion, for obvious reasons. Improper swing and bat angle will provide immediate negative feedback. The key here is to keep the barrel above the rear shoulder at the proper bat angle (good launch position) and swing through the ball. If a player does this with hands in close to the body (inside the ball), allowing back foot to begin first, they will complete the drill properly. If the player takes a stride, rotates back foot and hips, keeping the bat head above the hands, hands inside the ball, and opens up away from the fence, they can swing down and through the ball without hitting the fence. Full arm extension should not take place until immediately after contact.

## **Do's and Don'ts**

Don't run your practice with one player hitting while you pitch and everyone else is just standing around. If you are pitching to one player, have another player hitting off a tee, and another player (or two) doing dry swings. Break your team into a couple of groups and have an assistant coach work on throwing or fielding while you are live pitching. Use soft toss and a tee to fix hitters problems. Don't try and fix their swings when they are up at bat in a live game.

## *DRILL: TEE WORK*

### **Objective**

To develop proper weight shift; stride and hip turn

### **Setup**

Batting tee, bucket of balls, net, screen or fence to hit into

### **Execution**

Players adjust the batting tee to waist high. Take the bat and position it behind the players back, but across the top of the pants. Players should stride and turn their hips to bump the ball off the tee. A slight upward movement of the hips is preferred to teach that hips turn and go up at contact.

### **Coaching Keys**

To help keep players from dropping the front shoulder, tell them to focus on hitting the ball into a target directly in front of the tee. If they're pulling the ball weakly, remind them to stride straight forward toward the pitcher. Teach players to "swing up at the top half of the ball."



## *DRILL: TEE HITTING FOR DISTANCE*

### **Objective**

To show how a good weight shift can generate power and that a level or slightly downward swing is best for driving the ball farther

### **Setup**

Batting tee, bucket of balls, players in the field (optional), cones, markers or stakes (optional)

### **Execution**

Players use proper fundamentals to see how far they can hit a ball off of a tee from home plate. Use weight shift (“go back to go forward”), winding up almost like a pitcher to take the weight to the back side before exploding forward. The head should stay on the ball. The front shoulder and stride should go directly toward the pitcher until contact is made. Batters who drop the back shoulder and try to intentionally hit the ball high are eliminated. Line drives are best, but hard ground balls count. Have players run out and stand next to their best hits or mark them with stakes.

### **Coaching Keys**

Anytime young players hit off a tee, especially if you tell them that they’re hitting for distance, they’ll tend to drop the back shoulder and swing with a visible uppercut. If players are hitting under the ball and getting a chunk of the tee with their swings or topping ground balls, the back shoulder dropping is likely the cause. Explain to them that the high fly balls they hit by doing this are really just pop-ups, not homeruns, and that by swinging down and taking that barrel of the bat straight to the ball they will hit harder line drives and fly balls that will turn into home runs as they get bigger and stronger.

## *DRILL: FRONT TOSS*

### **Objective**

To use the big part of the field by keeping the front shoulder in long enough to hit balls tossed to the outside part of the plate up the middle or the opposite way

### **Setup**

L-screen, stool or bucket for coach to sit on, coach to toss, bucket of balls

### **Execution**

This drill stresses using the big part of the field. Coach sits on a bucket or chair behind a screen about 10 to 12 feet out in front of home plate. Coach tosses pitches underhand, but firmly, to outside part of plate. Batter tries to keep the front shoulder in and drive the ball up the middle or the other way. Some batters naturally will pull the pitches, which is okay if that’s their natural swing and they hit line drives. Weakly pulled ground balls are what we’re trying to avoid.

## *DRILL: HITTING CONTESTS*

### **Objective**

To add a competitive angle to regular hitting drills to make them seem less like work

### **Setup**

Depends on the drill; usually a bucket of balls and a coach or pitching machine to feed or pitch

### **Execution**

Almost any hitting drill can be turned into a contest using a point system. Award a point for a hard ground ball up the middle, 2 points for a line drive up the middle, and 5 points for a line drive up the middle that reaches the back wall of a cage or the outfield grass (depending on where you're hitting).

Develop your own point systems for whatever concept you're teaching. Stress proper hitting mechanics at all times.

# INFIELD



## THE BASICS OF FIELDING - INFIELD

### Preparation

The first step in fielding is to be prepared, mentally and physically. Before the pitcher starts to throw the fielder has to know what they are going to do with the ball if it is hit to them. As the pitch is delivered an infielder takes two short hops forward with their knees slightly bent, their feet a little more than shoulder width apart and both hands in front of their body. They time their second hop so they land as the ball crosses the plate. If the ball is hit, they are already moving and will be able to react quickly. An outfielder takes the same two-hop approach but their hands do not need to be in front of their body. Their first reaction will be to run so the arms should be prepared to run.

### Fielding a ground ball

**Approaching the ball:** If the ball is hit directly at an infielder, then they should charge the ball. If the ball is hit to either side they should first move laterally until they are in front of the ball and then they should charge the ball. They should NOT take a direct line to the ball that is hit to their side. A fielder always wants to get to the right side of the baseball. It is easier to read the last hop of the ball from the side, than from directly in front of the ball.

**Catching the ball:** As the ground ball arrives their feet should be slightly more than shoulder width apart with the foot on their glove side slightly in ahead of the other foot. They should position themselves so the line of the ball is just inside the foot on their glove side. Their knees and waist are bent so the back is parallel to the ground. The ball is caught out in front of the body. Their glove hand should be touching the ground in front of their body with the palm facing up. In order to get the glove in this position they will be forced to bend their knees and waist. Their throwing hand should be on top of their glove hand so they form the shape of an open Alligator's mouth. Their head is square to the ground and watching the ball.

**Positioning to throw:** After catching the ball they can make one of three moves to get their bodies in a throwing position that is lined up to the target. If they are making a short throw they can just POP: take a quick hop (staying in a crouched position) with a slight twist so their throwing arm foot lands behind them and is perpendicular to their target. If they are making a medium length throw they can PIVOT: take a short step forward with their throwing foot so it lands perpendicular to their target so that the next step with their opposite throwing foot will cause them to pivot into a position that lines them up with their target. If they are making a long throw they can shuffle their feet towards the target making sure that their throwing foot is perpendicular to the target when they finish the shuffle. Regardless of the move they choose they should end up with their shoulders lined in a direct line to the target with the throwing shoulder in the back.

## *DRILL: THROWING AFTER THE CATCH*

### **Objective**

To understand and apply the concept of using the body's momentum to make a stronger throw

### **Setup**

A bucket of balls, a coach or player to receive throws, a coach or player to roll ground balls (optional), a target (optional), three cones or markers.

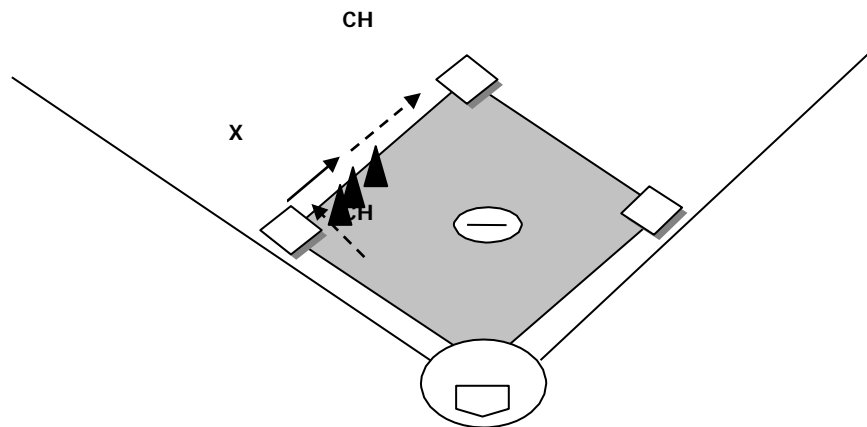
### **Execution**

This drill reinforces the concept of catching the ground ball first, generating momentum toward the target, throwing the ball, and following the throw. Set up three cones several feet apart, placed in a line toward the target to where the throw will be made (easiest to set up as a simulation of the 5-4 force out at second base). Cones should be placed so that the distance is appropriate to accomplish the intended result for the age group involved. A player sets up with the right foot next to first cone and assumes the ground ball fielding position (wide base, butt down, hands in front). A ball is rolled by the coach to the player, who fields it, or the player starts with a ball and simulates the fielding position. The player shuffles the feet to the second cone, releases the ball, and follows the throw past the third cone and toward the target. Emphasize the four-seam grip. Ball can be thrown to a coach or another teammate. The player should stay low and not stand straight up after fielding the ball. This drill can be turned into a contest by placing a chest- or head-high target at second base with a net or screen behind to catch errant throws. Players who hit the target stay alive, and those who miss are eliminated. If there's nobody to roll the balls, players can get a ball out of the bucket, assume the ground ball fielding position, and then execute the drill.

### **Coaching Keys**

Players who aren't throwing the ball accurately are likely dropping the elbow below the shoulder or are peeling off away from the target before following the throw all the way past the third cone. For players making the latter mistake, set up another cone about five feet to the left of the third cone and make them follow the throw all the way through the last two cones before peeling off.

Players who are throwing the ball high or low are likely standing up before shuffling and throwing. Remember: stay low and go low. The first movement upon catching the ball is toward the target. Players should shuffle in that direction, keeping the knees bent in an athletic position instead of standing straight up. This keeps the head, shoulders, and eyes level, which makes it easier to stay focused on the target.



## *DRILL: HIGH FIVES*

### **Objective**

To understand and apply the concept of generating momentum toward the target when executing an underhand flip and to develop the habit of leaving the hand at face level after the flip

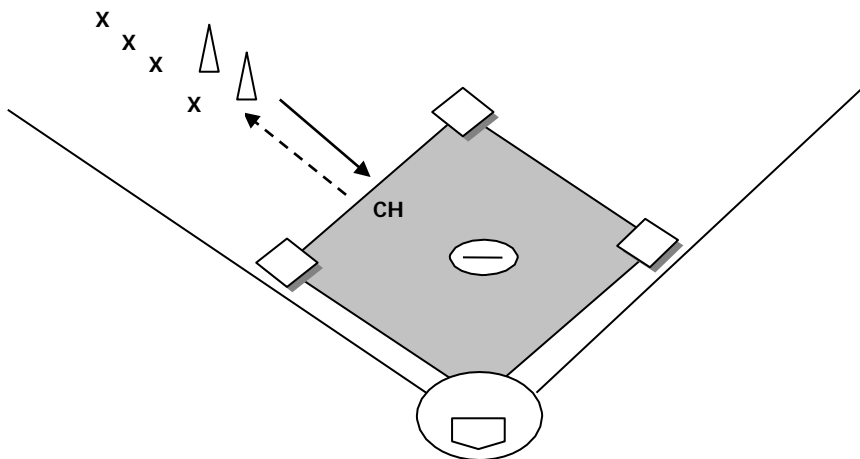
### **Setup**

A bucket of balls, a coach to roll balls, cones or markers (optional)

### **Execution**

The underhand flip is used by virtually all infielders at some point, so it should be introduced at a young age and practiced. Players line up opposite the coach, 10 to 15 feet away. One at a time, players assume basic ground ball position (wide base, butt down, hands in front). The coach rolls balls to the first player.

The player catches the ball first, generates momentum toward target, uses an underhand flip, and finishes by following the flip toward the coach with the hand held high at the head level. When the player gets to the coach, he gives the coach a high five (hand should not drop below head level until high five is completed). Player uses body momentum to carry the toss to the target. Wrist remains stiff. Avoid letting the ball roll off the fingers.



### **Coaching Keys**

This drill reminds players to keep the hand held high after the flip. Failure to keep the hand high is one of the most common mistakes when it comes to executing the underhand flip. Generally, wherever the hand ends up is the direction in which the ball is going to travel, and it's easier for the person receiving the flip to catch the ball if it's at chest or head-level.

## *DRILL: FIRST BASE*

### **Objective**

To develop proper mechanics when receiving throws at first base

### **Setup**

A bucket of balls, a player or coach to throw, first basemen, an empty bucket

### **Execution**

Players line up in foul territory near first base. The coach sets up anywhere in the infield with a bucket of balls. An empty bucket is placed near first base. The first player comes to first base and puts the heel of the throwing-side foot on the base. The coach throws the ball to this player. The player sees the ball coming across the diamond and takes his or her glove and glove-side foot directly toward the ball together. The ball should hit the glove at the same time the foot lands. This prevents stretching too soon. Stress that first basemen get to the bag quickly, stand tall, square shoulders to the infielder making the throw, and take the glove and glove-side foot toward the ball together. Remind them not to stretch prematurely. You can also have players work on receiving errant throws and short hops.

### **Coaching Keys**

If players are stretching too soon, make them exaggerate the step with the glove foot so that the foot lands on the ground at the exact same time the ball enters the glove.

## *HITTING GROUND BALLS*

### **Objective**

To get a more realistic sense of fielding ground balls coming off a bat

### **Setup**

A bucket of baseballs, a fungo (or another type of bat), a coach to hit balls

### **Execution**

At some point it becomes necessary to hit ground balls to your team. Before you do this – at any level –

make sure you have introduced the players to the basic ground ball fundamentals and given them a chance to get comfortable fielding balls the proper way. Use common sense when hitting ground balls. If the field is not in good condition, take it easy. Adapt the speed of the balls to each player's skill level. Players getting beaten up with bad hops in practice are not getting better.

If you have more than one coach who can hit ground balls accurately, here's a way to maximize repetitions: One coach hits to the third basemen and shortstops from the first-base side while the other

hits to second and first from the third-base side. After a few minutes, one coach goes "live," with the players fielding his or her balls throwing to first. The other players just lob the balls back to their coach on one hop or place the balls in a bucket. The first basemen take throws and stop fielding ground balls at this point. Each position gets to go "live" before the drill ends. As players get older, they can hit ground balls to each other if there aren't enough coaches. Having one person hit to each position is ideal but not always possible.

# OUTFIELD



# THE BASICS OF FIELDING - OUTFIELD

## FIELDING A FLY BALL

### **Approaching the ball:**

An outfielder's first step should almost always be back. They should not move forwards until they are SURE the ball is hit in front of them. Tell your outfielders that if they are going to make a mistake it should always be in front of them. A mistake in front of them is a single. A mistake behind them could be a HOME RUN! If the ball is hit to their side their first step should be to move their glove side foot back and towards the ball. This pivot will cause a right-handed player to close (turn their back on) a ball hit to their right, and open up on a ball hit their left or directly at them. Their first step should not be lateral. Outfielders should run under control (the head should not bounce up and down) and their glove should NOT be extended until the ball is about to arrive. If they have time, they should always put themselves in a position so they can face the ball and catch it with their arms extended in front of the body.

### **Catching the ball:**

Just before the ball arrives, they should extend their arms so they catch the ball with two hands away from their body. They should try and position themselves so the glove never blocks their line of sight to the ball.

### **Positioning to throw:**

Most outfield throws will be long, so an outfielder should take a shuffle step. They should shuffle their feet towards the target making sure that their throwing foot is perpendicular to the target when the finish the shuffle. Coaches can teach a crow hop or the pro-step, whichever is appropriate for their age group.

### **Balls hit down the Line:**

Tell your left and right fielders that any ball hit between them and the foul line will tail towards the foul line. It doesn't matter if a lefty or righty is up, it will still tail towards the line.

### **After the ball is hit:**

Teach the players that everyone moves after the ball is hit. Outfielders charge every ground ball and assume that it will get through the infield. They also back up overthrows to the bases. Catchers and second basemen can back up throws to first; the pitcher should be backing up third and home. Players should learn to anticipate throws. If there is a wild throw to first then the left- and centerfielders should move to back up the first baseman's throw to second.

## *DRILL: LITE FLITE ELIMINATION*

### **Objective**

To develop the proper technique for catching fly balls in a fun, competitive setting

### **Setup**

Soft or sponge rubber balls, pitching machine (optional), coach to throw fly balls or to feed machine

### **Execution**

Use soft or sponge rubber balls. Each player is thrown a fly ball (or fed a fly ball through a pitching machine). Younger players can use their gloves. Balls are so light that players have to catch the ball with two hands over the head. Older players and more advanced younger players can use bare hands. If players catch the ball, they stay in, but if they miss, they're out of the drill. This competition can also be done using the pass-pattern drill that follows or with real baseballs (when appropriate). When not using gloves, players should attempt to catch the ball with the glove hand only over the head. This makes them focus on proper hand positioning and watching the ball into the hand.

### **Coaching Keys**

Players who miss fly balls regularly usually aren't using proper technique and are likely taking their eyes off the ball. Make sure they catch the ball above their heads so they can watch the ball travel all the way into the glove or hand.

## *DRILL: PASS PATTERNS*

### **Objective**

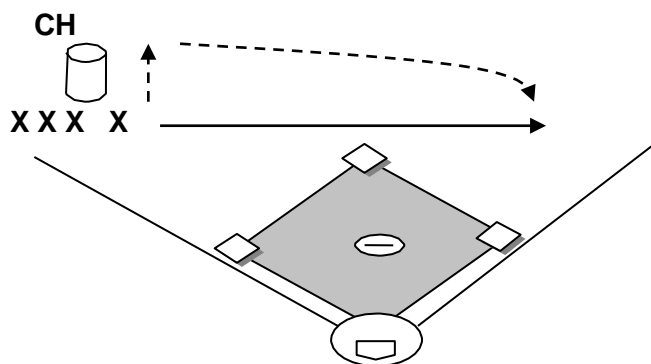
To develop proper crossover steps and drop steps and learn to catch fly balls on the run

### **Setup**

A bucket of balls, a coach to throw "passes"

### **Execution**

A coach or player (this can be long toss for pitchers) serves as quarterback. The fielding player tosses the ball to the quarterback and then uses a crossover or drop step in the appropriate direction before running a "pass pattern". The quarterback throws the ball high enough for the "receiver" to run under the ball and make a one-handed, over-the-shoulder catch. Have the player start over if the initial step is not executed correctly.



### **Coaching Keys**

The crossover step is the most efficient method of moving laterally on a baseball field. The crossover should be used by base runners, infielders, and outfielders. To execute the step, a player pivots the foot nearest to where the ball is traveling while at the same time crossing the other foot over the first foot in the direction of the ball. If players are picking up the foot nearest the ball first and then crossing over, stop them immediately without throwing the pass and start over.

The drop step is a combination of a step back toward the ball hit over a player's head followed by a crossover in the direction of the ball. Again, stop the drill immediately and begin again if a player does not execute the initial step properly.

## *DRILL: THROWN FLY BALLS*

### **Objective**

To learn to catch fly balls with two hands above the head in a controlled environment

### **Setup**

A bucket of balls and a coach to throw balls to players; soft or sponge rubber balls for younger players

### **Execution**

To prevent injury and embarrassment, players must be comfortable catching fly balls properly before fly balls are hit to them. The proper way to catch a fly ball is with two hands above the head so that eyes can follow the ball into the glove. The simplest way to teach proper execution is to throw fly balls to players and force them to do it correctly. Start with short, easy tosses and then adjust the height of throws to the skill and comfort level of players. You can start younger players out with soft baseballs or sponge rubber balls to avoid injury and build confidence. You can turn this drill into an elimination contest for the youngest players. Stress getting to the spot where the ball is coming down and catching with two hands above the head.

### **Coaching Keys**

Players who regularly miss fly balls are most likely not watching the ball and should perform the drill again and again, attempting to catch the ball with two hands above the head so they can see the ball travel all the way into the glove. Many players catch fly balls while backpedaling or moving away from the infield. Try to get them to learn to catch the ball while moving slightly forward when executing this drill.

## *DRILL: DROP STEPS*

### **Objective**

To develop a fundamentally sound drop step

### **Setup**

Bucket of balls and a coach to throw them

### **Execution**

This drill is much like the drill for the crossover step but a bit more advanced. Players line up. The first player steps forward, tosses the ball to the coach, and assumes ready position. The coach says "Go!" and the player performs a drop step (drop one foot back, turn body, and cross the other foot over in the direction of the ball). The coach throws the ball directly over the player's head, high and close enough that he or she can catch it with two hands above the head.

### **Coaching Keys**

Have players take time to get footwork correct before tossing. As with Pass Patterns, stop this drill and start over if players do the drop step incorrectly. The goal of this drill is to force the player to get to the spot quickly and catch the ball with two hands over the head. More difficult over-the-shoulder catches are practiced using pass patterns.

## *DRILL: COMMUNICATION DRILL*

### **Objective**

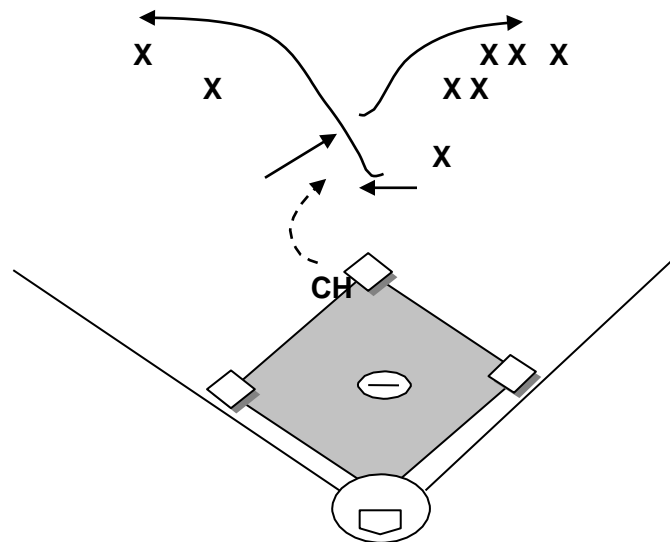
To understand the importance and mechanics of proper communication in the outfield

### **Setup**

A bucket of baseballs, a coach to throw fly balls, soft or sponge rubber balls for younger players (optional), pitching machines (optional), a player to serve as a cutoff for throws (optional)

### **Execution**

Outfielders form two lines at least 20 feet apart. The first players in each line step forward. The coach throws fly balls in between the two fielders, who must communicate and make the play. The player fielding the ball yells, "I got it!" at least 3 times. The other player then backs up the other player. The player who catches the ball should deliver a strong, accurate throw to the coach or cutoff player (a player who rotates out of the drill). For younger players, use soft baseballs, sponge rubber balls, or tennis balls. Use pitching machines to throw higher fly balls to more advanced players, ensuring the ball with reach about the same height and distance each time.



### **Coaching Keys**

The age-old outfield communication problem arises when two players call for the ball at the same time. Teach players that if there's any uncertainty as to who will make the catch, they should continue to call for the ball. If two players call for the ball at the same time and then one continues to call for it, that player should make the play. As players get older, this drill can be done by designating one player as the centerfielder, who has priority over any ball that he or she calls. In this format a third player can be added to simulate a game situation in which there are three outfielders. Again, the centerfielder is the quarterback and should call for any ball that he or she can easily get to.

# PITCHING



## PITCHING CONTROL

The coach cannot expect immediate miracles from their pitchers, as control is the result of practice, which takes time. If the pitchers can develop a good rhythm and a comfortable delivery through practice, the coach should be able to eliminate most of the problems associated with control. The coach's ability to detect and correct bad habits developed by pitchers in their delivery mechanics becomes instrumental in helping pitchers overcome these problems. It is essential that the coach thoroughly understand the mechanical concepts of pitching before attempting to correct perceived faults. Some of the more common problems of control are mentioned below, together with reference to the correct mechanics.

**Lack of Concentration:** The pitcher should pick up their target before winding up and not break that concentration during the delivery. Remind them of this during practices.

**Throwing across the body:** Draw an imaginary line from the push-off foot to the center of home plate. The striding foot should land four to six inches to the first base side of that line (third base side for left-handers).

**Poor Follow-Through:** Check the weight transfer, and see that the throwing hand finishes in the proper position. This may be exaggerated by having the pitcher touch their shoelace to ensure that they finish low.

**Aiming the Ball:** The pitcher must not let up to get the ball over the plate. They should concentrate, reach back and throw hard. Control is only effective with good speed on the ball.

**Rushing the Delivery:** Pushing off the rubber in the old “drop and drive” way will usually result in the arm not coming through in time, and a loss of rhythm. Be sure the throwing arm is extended back before the weight starts forward. Control will come with good mechanics and practice, and confidence will come as a result of using that control successfully.



## PITCHING MECHANICS

Young pitchers need to develop a balanced and consistent delivery in order to maximize their potential and reduce the likelihood of injury.

### **Grip**

Most pitching grips use two fingers on top of the ball, with the thumb underneath. A young pitcher with a small hand may need to use three fingers across the ball. Have a relaxed but firm grip. Avoid choking the baseball.

#### 1. Types of Grips

- Use a four-seam grip for maximum speed and control.  
Place your index and middle fingers across the horseshoe area of the ball.
- Use a two-seam grip for more movement on the ball (sacrificing some speed).  
Place your index and middle fingers along the two seams.

#### 2. Coaching Keys

The side of your thumb pad goes underneath at the mid- point of the ball.

- Relaxed but firm grip.
- Fingers on top of the ball.
- Thumb underneath the ball.

### **Stance**

Pivot Foot the foot on the same side of the body as the player's throwing arm.

Stride Foot the foot on the same side of the body as the glove hand.

- Keep both feet on the rubber (the area of the shoe between the front spikes and the back spikes touches the front edge of the rubber) or move your stride foot off and behind the rubber.
- If you are right-handed, stand on the right side of the rubber; if left- handed, stand on the left side.
- Stand comfortably with your shoulders and hips square to the plate and your weight slightly more on your throwing foot.
- Hold the ball in the glove or in your throwing hand (glove helps disguise pitches; hand allows quicker reactions if somebody moves from a base)

#### 1. Coaching Keys

- Comfortable stance
- No runner on base - square to plate
- Runner on base - stretch position

## Wind-Up

The wind-up gives the pitcher rhythm and momentum necessary for an accurate and powerful pitch.

### 1. Coaching Keys

- Keep your eyes on the plate.
- Take a short step back, transferring weight to your stride foot, while moving your hands into position.
- Your hands may move to the top of your head, remain gathered near your chest or move to a comfortable point between these two extremes.
- Turn your pivot foot 90° (square to home plate) so that the outside of the foot comes to rest in contact with the front edge of the pitching rubber.
- Lift your stride leg straight up, with your thigh and shin forming at least a 90° angle.
- Keep your head centered over the front side of your pivot foot for good balance.



\*\*With runners on base, the pitcher should assume the stretch position. From this position, the pitcher can either deliver the ball to the plate, or pivot to pick off a base runner.

## Stretch Position

- Stand with your back facing first base (right-handers) or third base (left-handers)
- Feet should be parallel and about shoulder width apart
- Outside of pivot foot should touch the front edge of the rubber
- Bring hands together in the area between your chest and belly-button

## Gathered Position

- Maintaining balance over the pivot foot is essential during this brief pause and momentum gathering phase
- Head remains centered over the front side of the pivot foot
- Eyes are level and focused on the plate
- Shoulders are horizontal and square to the plate
- Glove-side hip points toward the plate
- Hands are together in the area between the chest and belly-button
- Elbows relaxed and pointing down towards the ground
- Stride-leg thigh is approximately parallel with the ground
- Stride foot is relaxed with toes pointing to the ground

### 1. Coaching Keys

- Weight back and balanced over the pitching rubber
- Head centered over the front side of the pivot foot (middle of body)

## **Stride**

- As the pitcher strides forward, the hands break and the momentum is transferred toward home plate (slow and controlled lower half of the body).
- A relaxed stride foot leads straight forward, feeling for the ground
- (imagine your foot sliding down a playground slide).
- Both thumbs rotate down as your hands break (break hands thumbs to thighs).
- Ball separates from glove with the palm of the throwing hand facing down and fingers on top of the ball.
- The path of the throwing arm to full extension is down, back, around and up through release.
- Glove-side hip remains closed and pointing toward the plate, until the stride foot is down and the torso begins rotating.

### 1. Coaching Keys

- Slow and controlled lower half positions the body for torso rotation at stride foot landing
- Eyes and head remain level with the plate (don't tilt or pull head off line)
- Balance and body alignment

## **Landing and Release**

A T-Position for throwing is created through the proper positioning of the player's arms, hands and torso. The player's arms and hands form the top crossbar of the T, while the torso forms the base. This is the final position before the throwing hand rotates and starts on a forward path toward the release point.

- Land on a slightly closed front foot with weight centered over the ball of the foot. Stride leg should be flexed and firm.
- Straighten the stride leg by rotating on the ball of the stride leg foot (momentum is transferred up through the body to the throwing arm). Be careful not land on a stiff/locked front leg.
- Head is behind stride leg knee at landing and finishes out over the stride leg knee after release.
- Throwing arm elbow must be at least the height of the throwing shoulder through the release point.
- Ball is released in front of your throwing arm shoulder, in the area of the tip of your cap.
- At release, your throwing arm is slightly bent at the elbow.



### 1. Coaching Keys

- T-position
- Balance
- Body control

## **Follow-Through**

Coaches need to watch young pitchers to be sure they don't drag their pivot foot during the follow-through phase of the delivery.

### 1. Coaching Keys

- Glove arm rotates inward and down, coming back to rest in the area between hip and chest
- Throwing arm completes a smooth arm path to full extension
- Head stays on line with the plate and balance is maintained over the landing foot
- Pivot foot elevates, releasing the back side hip for full hip rotation

## **Warm-Up, Cool-Down Routines & Pitching Drills**

Young pitchers need to understand the importance of arm care. Progressive loosening of the arm must precede all hard throwing activity. The arm should be taken through a cool-down routine at the conclusion of the throwing activity. Coaches must make sure that eager young players never throw when the arm is sore.

## *DRILL: ONE KNEE DRILL*

### **Objective**

To introduce players to proper throwing mechanics, particularly arm action

### **Setup**

Two players (or a player and a coach) and a baseball

### **Execution**

This drill breaks down the player's arm action and works on keeping the elbow at the proper level. Players drop their throwing-side knee to the ground with the opposite knee up and play catch at a short distance using a four-seam grip to throw. Concentrate on taking the ball down, out, and up from the glove and keeping the elbow above the shoulder. The hand is on top of the ball as it's taken out of the glove, shifting to behind the ball as the arm comes forward. Players don't throw hard. Have them check their grip, hand, and elbow position after bringing the ball down, out, and up. Hand should be on top of the ball with fingers pointing away from the target just before the arm comes forward. From there, the player points the front shoulder toward the target, rotates the hips, brings the arm forward, and releases the ball, keeping the elbow above the shoulder. Younger players can use soft baseballs or do this drill with their coaches.

### **Coaching Keys**

Many young players turn their hand so that it's under the ball before they bring the arm forward. Some people call this "pie throwing". Think of how you have to hold a pie to throw it at someone; the palm is facing up so that you don't drop the pie. This is the opposite of how you should throw a baseball. For players who do this, have them stop their motion just before they bring the arm forward and check to see that the hand is on top of the ball and that the ball is pointing straight back. Other players will let their elbows drop below shoulder level at the release point. To fix this problem, try the Tee Drill.

## *DRILL: TEE DRILL*

### **Objective**

To help players learn to keep the elbow above the shoulder when throwing

### **Setup**

Two players (or a player and a coach), batting tee, a baseball

### **Execution**

This drill helps prevent players from dropping their elbow when throwing. Players assume a one-knee position, as described in the One-Knee Drill. A batting tee is placed on the throwing side, close enough so that if the elbow drops it hits the tee. Players take the ball down, out, and up – checking their grip as necessary before rotating forward and releasing the ball. The presence of the tee will force players to consciously think about not dropping the elbow below shoulder level. Over time this will develop muscle memory that leads to proper throwing mechanics.

## *DRILL: POWER POSITION*

### **Objective**

To develop a proper grip and arm action

### **Setup**

Two players (or a player and a coach), baseballs, a pitching mound (optional)

### **Execution**

Variations of this drill can be done at all levels. The drill can be simplified for the youngest age groups to stress which direction to face when throwing; the proper four-seam grip; getting the ball down, out and up; keeping the hand above the ball prior to rotation; keeping the elbow above the shoulder; pointing the front shoulder toward the target; stepping toward the target; and following through. For older and more advanced players, the drill can help troubleshoot mechanical problems often experienced by pitchers. Players create a wide base with their feet and hold the ball with a four-seam grip. Weight shifts to the backside before moving forward. Hands break, and the weight goes back. Power position is assumed (check as necessary): hand above the ball with fingers pointed away from the target. Weight is back; elbow is above the shoulder. Front shoulder points toward the target. Hand shifts from above the ball to behind the ball as the arm moves forward through rotation. Ball is released (does not have to be thrown hard). Follow-through takes place with the trail foot staying in contact with the rubber. Players rotate on the back foot so the hips turn. Front toe points forward.

### **Coaching Keys**

The Power Position Drill can be used to troubleshoot the following mechanical flaws

**Short-arming:** Start in the finish position with the throwing arm extended forward as if following through. Take weight all the way back through the power position before finishing to stretch out the throwing motion.

**Getting pitches up:** Have the catcher shorten up with the pitcher throwing from a mound. To throw downhill from the power position, the pitcher must get the elbow up and stay on top of the ball.

**Long-striders:** Again, have the catcher shorten up with the pitcher throwing from a mound. If the stride is too long the pitcher won't be able to compensate to get downhill in time to throw a strike.

# CATCHING



## THE BASICS OF CATCHING

Like pitching, there is an art to proper catching technique, and an entire book can and has been written on just catching. The following basics of set up and receiving, if properly followed, will make significant improvements in your catcher's ability to receive, which is the primary focus of this manual.

### **Catcher's Stance**

A proper stance is fundamentally important to being a good catcher. There are two basic stances to learn, a relaxed stance and a ready stance.

### **Relaxed Stance**

A general stance most catchers use with the bases empty and less than two strikes is called a "relaxed" stance. The relaxed stance begins by squatting with your feet shoulder-width apart. Your hips and shoulders should be square to the pitcher and your feet straight across or slightly (an inch or two) staggered.



In other words, when looking down at home plate your feet should be parallel with the front edge of the plate (i.e. straight across). Your weight should be on the insides of your feet and you must be balanced. Balance is key. You should not be falling over and it should be difficult for someone to push you over. Get as low as comfortably possible while still being in an athletic position ready to react to anything. The purpose of getting low is to allow the umpire to clearly see and call pitches in the lower half of the zone. Every catcher is different so you should experiment and find a stance that is comfortable and balanced.

Setting a proper arm position and arm angle are important. Your receiving arm (mitt hand) should be relaxed (somewhere near the middle of being completely straight and being completely bent toward your chest) and your palm should be pointed at the pitcher. **DO NOT** set up with your receiving arm straight or you may interfere with the batter's swing (catcher's interference). **DO NOT** have your arm totally bent, as this will slow your ability to react to wild pitches.

Being extended or completely bent will also hamper your ability to receive and frame pitches. Your elbow should be below your mitt. This helps in framing pitches that are low and to the left side of your body (your elbow has less distance to travel to get around the pitch).

For right-handed catchers (most catchers are right handed), your throwing hand should be behind your right shoe to avoid being hit by a fouled pitch.

## **Present a Good Target**

Present the pitcher with a good target. Your mitt should be held just above your knees or the knees of the batter. Your mitt should not obstruct your vision. A good rule of thumb is to provide your pitcher with a target as soon as he begins his windup. If the pitcher is in the stretch position, present a target after you give your sign. You may have to adjust this depending on how quickly the pitcher delivers to the plate. As the pitcher delivers, you can relax your wrist. This is more comfortable and will allow you to react quicker than with a tense wrist. As you catch the ball, firm up your wrist so the ball doesn't drag you mitt backwards. Remember your arm position and set a good target!!!

KEYS: Square to Pitcher, Comfort, Balance, Low Athletic Position, Arm Position, Palm Toward Pitcher, Target, Relaxed Stance

**Advanced Tip:** Drop your left knee slightly to allow for a greater range of motion with your receiving arm. This way your knee does not interfere with the movement of your arm and you can more easily frame a pitch down and in on a right handed hitter.

## **Ready Stance**

The ready stance is used when there are runners on base and/or two strikes on the batter. In both cases you need to be ready to block a wild pitch or quickly throw out a base runner.

The ready stance is simply a raised squat where the weight is now on the balls of your feet instead of the instep and your butt is slightly raised. This allows for quick reactions. Even though you are raised, keep low in your stance. Remember the umpire. Give your pitcher as much help as possible by allowing the umpire to see the entire zone. The distance between your feet will probably increase in a raised squat position. This is fine and expected.

## **Slightly Stagger Your Feet**

One area where I see bad information being passed along is foot alignment. Foot alignment is very important in a ready stance. Your feet should be SLIGHTLY staggered. DO NOT stagger your feet more than a few inches from parallel. Some coaches teach their players to "cheat" with their feet over staggered. This is BAD and here's why. The reason coaches teach their players to over stagger their feet is to help in throwing out runners attempting to steal. This may help them set their feet quicker but it takes away from the catcher's ability to block wild pitches.

**IMPORTANT POINT:** Keep your hips and shoulders square to the pitcher and slightly stagger your feet! Arm position and angle should be the same for both ready and relaxed stances. Arm position should be midway between a fully extended arm and a completely bent arm. The level of your elbow should still be below your mitt level.

## **Throwing Hand Behind Mitt**

The throwing hand in the ready stance is directly behind the mitt in a fist. The throwing hand should not be touching the mitt but very close to it. Your hand will be safe from foul tips in this position. Having your throwing hand behind the mitt and NOT behind your shoe facilitates a quicker transition of the ball from your mitt to your throwing hand. This serves mainly as a method of finding the proper grip on the ball, which aids in throwing out runners attempting to steal.

KEYS: Ready Stance, Hips and Shoulders Square to Pitcher, Weight on Balls of Feet, Low Athletic Position, Arm Position, Palm Toward Pitcher, Target, Fist Behind Glove

### **Catcher's Set Up**

Now that you have a solid stance, you need to learn where to position yourself in the catchers box in relation to the hitter. The catcher's box is 8' long by 43" wide and is located directly behind home plate. The rules of baseball state that the catcher must have both feet inside or on the line of this box at the time of a pitch.

### **Relation to the Hitter**

Where does the catcher set up in relation to the hitter? On many occasions, I have seen catchers set up too far behind the hitter. This is a BAD HABIT.

Ideally, you want to be as far forward toward home plate as possible without your mitt interfering with a batter's swing. The closer you can get toward your pitcher the easier you make it for the pitcher to hit his locations (shorter distance to throw the ball) and also you provide the umpire with a better opportunity to make accurate ball and strike calls.

\*KNOW YOUR HITTER: Certain hitters have a looping swing (especially at the younger ages). You need to set up a little further back than normal for these hitters or they will tip your mitt with their bat during a swing. This is catcher's interference. If you are unsure how close to set up to the batter, play it safe and stay back a little.

### **Receiving - Proper Receiving Techniques for a Catcher**

Receiving is simply catching the ball. A good catcher will make receiving look effortless. You need to have soft hands, but at the same time be firm with your wrist and arm as you catch the ball. Look the pitch all the way into your mitt. Your glove should not move unless you want to move it. Dominate the baseball.

### **Stick the Strike**

If a pitcher throws a pitch that you KNOW is going to be a strike, stick the pitch. A phrase I was taught and use repeatedly with my catchers is, "stick the strike." This means that your glove should not move in any direction (except a little back) after you catch the pitch. Hold the pitch where you caught it, BRIEFLY, then throw it back to the pitcher. For pitches low in the zone or breaking balls, sticking the strike is especially important. Catchers have a tendency to drop their glove in a downward movement after having caught a low or downward moving pitch.

This is a bad habit and could cost your pitcher a called strike. Keep the ball in the strike zone. Stick It!

### **Beat the Pitch to the Spot**

Another phrase I use with my catchers that helps them with their receiving is "beat the pitch." As you are tracking the pitch with your eyes, you should have a good idea where the pitch will cross the plate and where you will catch it. With your mitt, beat the pitch to that spot. This will allow you to "stick" that pitch and the momentum of your glove is stopped. Stopping your downward glove momentum aids your ability to stick the low strike. DO NOT track the pitch with your mitt.

## **High and Low Pitches**

A general rule for catching pitches that are high in the zone and borderline strikes/balls is to catch them as far back into your body as possible. Every pitch has downward movement, even fastballs. By catching a high pitch further back into your body you allow the pitch to drop. This provides the illusion of a strike that the umpire may call in your favor. This trick is especially useful with breaking balls.

For pitches low in the zone, which are borderline strikes/balls, you want to almost attack them. Extend your arm to catch them while they are still in the strike zone. You need to be careful so your mitt does not interfere with the batter's swing. Also, you do not want to fall forward off your base. Remember for these low pitches: beat the pitch to the spot and then stick it. By applying these simple tricks for high and low pitches, you will get more strike calls for your pitcher.

KEYS: Soft Hands, Firm Arm and Wrist, Stick Strikes, Beat the Pitch

# BASE RUNNING



## THE BASICS OF BASE RUNNING

### Home to First

**Always run hard** - The goal is to advance for extra bases on balls hit into the outfield. On balls hit in the infield, we hope to beat the throw to 1st base, but we will at least apply a little pressure on the defense. Run out all pop ups and fly balls. If there is any doubt as to whether a batted ball is fair, players should run hard and let the umpires decide.

**Always find the first base coach** – Players should run with their heads up. It's the coach's job to give the runner the information he needs. Players should not look for the ball, especially when it is in the infield.

**Balls in the infield** - On balls hit in the infield players should hit first base with their left foot, never lunge at the bag, and just run through first base. That is why the rules allow you to overrun that base.



**Balls in the outfield** - On balls hit in the outfield the batter should make an aggressive turn at first base. If a runner can make the outfielders believe he is going to second base, he has done his job. If the outfielders aren't even aware that there is a runner, you have given up a chance to put pressure on the defense. Teach runners to swing out into foul ground, and dip their inside shoulder as they turn for second base.

### First Base:

**When to Run** - If there are two outs then run on everything. If there are less than two outs then the rule is: Groundball - Go, Line drive -Freeze, Fly ball - Halfway and get back. Only tag up if the ball is foul, otherwise we should be "halfway" on popups and fly balls at first base. "Halfway" means as far as you can get toward second base and still get back safely if the ball is caught. That could be 2 feet on a pop up to the first baseman or 59 feet on a fly ball to deep center field. With less than 2 outs, always freeze on a line drive. The reason we need to freeze (or not run) is to make sure the line drive goes through the infield. If it is caught and we have already started our move toward the next base, we will be doubled off.

**Be Aggressive** - You should want players to run to third base. If the ball is hit in front of them (to Left or Center), they will decide if you can make it or not and carry out the appropriate actions. If the ball is hit into right field, they pick up the third base coach before they get to 2nd base (about 20 feet before) and he will tell you to stay or go.

### Second base:

**Get a good jump on every pitch** – Runners need to get off the base on every pitch and watch for the ball in the dirt. If the ball kicks away from the catcher they should go. If the catcher blocks the ball in front of him the base runners should stay.

**When to Run** - Groundballs: If you are forced then go! If there is no runner at first base forcing them to advance on ground balls with less than 2 outs, then should go on ground balls hit at or behind them. Do not hesitate. On balls hit in front of you (to your right), you should wait and read the infielders throw.

Fly balls: Tag up at second base on all foul pops or fly balls. Otherwise, only tag on fly balls that appear to be sure outs but are deep enough that you can beat the outfielder's throw to third base. Most of these fly balls are hit to center and right. It is very rare to tag on a ball hit to left field. Line drives: FREEZE!

**Be Aggressive** - When running from second base, players should advance to third as though they will keep going toward home. The third base coach can only stop you. Avoid station-to-station running. In other words, do not let players go to third and wait to be sent home. They are going home unless the coach stops them. They must advance toward third at full speed with the intention of scoring. Important: with two outs, runners on second are concentrating on scoring on a single.

### **Third base:**

**Get a good jump on every pitch** – Players should always take their lead in foul ground and return back to the bag in fair ground. This is because a batted ball that hits you over fair territory puts you out, but a thrown ball that hits you will probably result in a run. If there are two outs and we have a weak hitter up be aggressive! However, be smart. I encourage taking chances if you get a good jump.

If the ball kicks away from the catcher they should go. If the catcher blocks the ball in front of him the base runners should stay.

If you are not sure then STAY!

When to run – Groundballs: with less than two outs you need to make a decision before the ball is put in play. We may want to make the ball go through the infield before we try to advance or go on anything hit to the right side. Players must be ready to react when running from third base, not waiting for an indication from the coach before running.

Fly balls: All on balls hit to the outfield, runners go back and tag until the ball hits the ground.

## ***DRILL: BASE RUNNING RELAYS***

### **Objective**

To learn how proper turns at each base can help players get to their destination faster

### **Setup**

Field with bases (preferably pegged bases), a stopwatch

### **Execution**

Have groups of two or four players compete by running around the bases to see who can finish with the fastest combined time. One player circles the bases and then as soon as he or she touches home plate, the next player in the group starts. You'll find that the groups that run the bases the best fundamentally can and will beat the groups with the faster players. You can use cones to show the path for the proper turns at each base.

## *DRILL: HEAD TO HEAD*

### **Objective**

To demonstrate that the fastest player isn't always the best base runner; to understand how to make a proper turn when going from home to second and second to home

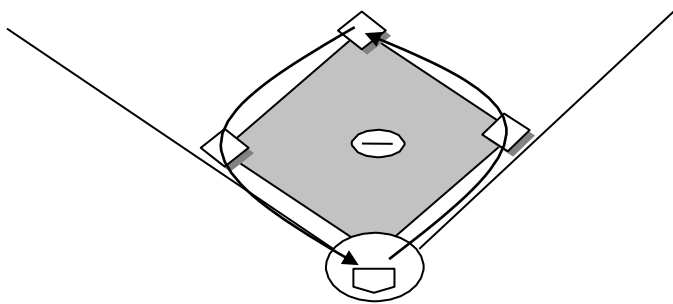
### **Setup**

Field with bases (preferably pegged bases)

### **Execution**

One player starts at second and the other starts at home. The coach stands on pitcher's mound and yells, "Go!" Player from second is simulating scoring on a hit. Player at home simulates running out a double.

Whoever gets to his or her destination first wins. Point out players who adhere to proper fundamentals when running the bases well.



## DRILL: BIG LEAGUE BASE RUNNING

### **Objective**

To work on various base running situations and conditioning

### **Setup**

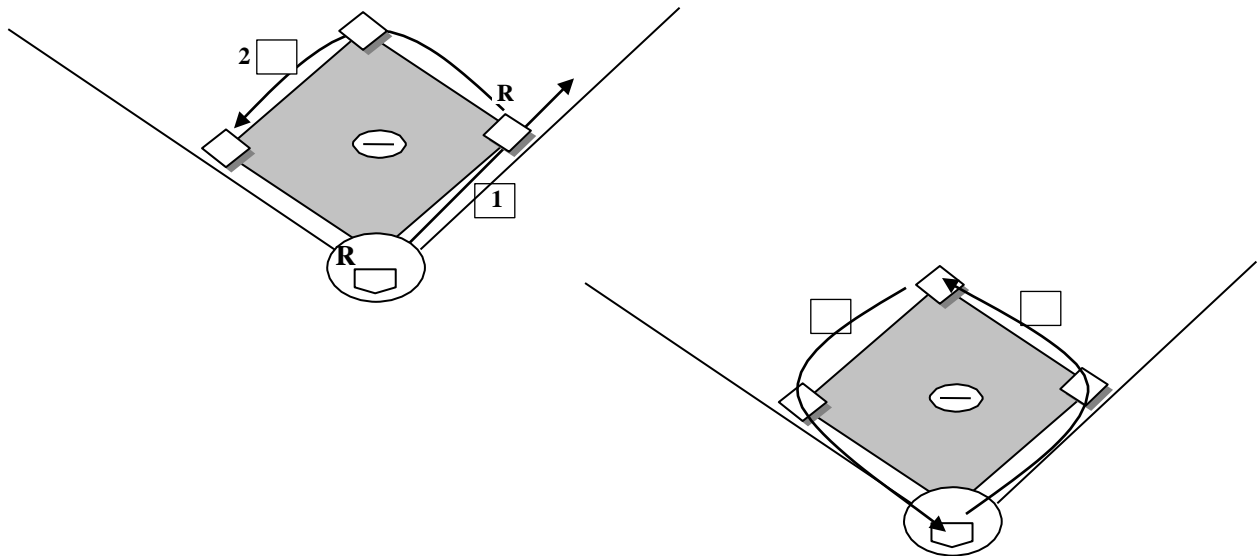
Field with bases (preferably pegged bases)

### **Execution**

Players line up at home plate and run home to first, all the way through the bag. Then they shuffle off of first, take a crossover step and run first to third before jogging to home plate (a). Players line up at home again and run out a double. They then simulate scoring from second on a hit (b). Then have them run out a triple or a home run, if you wish. Emphasis should be on making a proper turn at each base as well as stepping on the inside of the base and using the bag to push off (like a starting block) toward the next base.

### **Coaching Keys**

If players are having trouble making correct turns and taking a proper route to the next base, set up cones to mark the proper path. Players will take a path to the outside of the cones.



# BENCHMARKS



## Age-Specific Player Development Goals

From the book "Coaching Youth Baseball the Ripken Way"



### TEE BALL

- 1. Learning the basic rules**
  - a. the right direction to run when the ball is hit
  - b. runners must touch the bases
  - c. how to record outs (catch the ball in the air, throw to first, or tag the runners)
  - d. running past first base
  - e. scoring a run
  - f. even though everyone bats, three outs constitute an inning in baseball
- 2. Throwing mechanics – Turn/step and throw**
  - a. turn the body so that the front shoulder points toward the target
  - b. keep the elbow above the shoulder
  - c. step toward the target with the non-throwing foot and release the ball
- 3. Tracking (catching fundamentals)**
  - a. follow the ball with the eyes into the glove
  - b. whether on the ground or in the air, use two hands to catch and field
  - c. try to catch the ball out in front of the body
  - d. glove location – grounders versus pop fly
  - e. bare hand location – grounders versus pop fly
  - f. alligator technique
- 4. Hitting**
  - a. how to hold and swing the bat
  - b. batting safety (when not to swing bats, wearing batting helmets)
  - c. hitting off a tee or hitting softly tossed pitches
- 5. Learning positional play**
  - a. if the ball is hit to your buddy, let him or her field it
  - b. backing up the fielder

## Age-Specific Player Development Goals

From the book "Coaching Youth Baseball the Ripken Way"



### ROOKIES (8U)

#### 1. Learning the basic rules

- a. force outs
- b. base running (when you do not have to run)
- c. balls and strikes

#### 2. Throwing mechanics

- a. introduce the four-seam grip
- b. point the front shoulder, step, and throw
- c. introduce the concept of generating momentum toward the target and following the throw

#### 3. Catching and fielding

- a. thrown and hit balls
- b. fingers up versus down
- c. see the glove and ball
- d. use two hands
- f. introduce the underhand flip
- g. first base fundamentals

#### 4. Hitting

- a. choosing the right bat
- b. proper grip
- c. hitting pitched balls – covering the plate, inside versus outside pitches.
- d. introduce drill work (tee, soft toss, short toss)

#### 5. Learning positional play

- a. learn the positions and the areas each player should cover
- b. cover the nearest base when the ball is not hit to you
- c. basics of cutoffs and relays

## Age-Specific Player Development Goals

From the book "Coaching Youth Baseball the Ripken Way"



### MINORS (10U)

#### 1. Learning the basic rules

- a. force outs
- b. tagging up
- c. base running (when you do not have to run)
- d. balls and strikes
- e. passed balls and steals

#### 2. Throwing mechanics

- a. introduce the four-seam grip
- b. point the front shoulder, step, and throw
- c. introduce the concept of generating momentum toward the target and following the throw
- d. introduction of pitching the ladder High low / inside outside
- e. if pitching, throwing from the stretch vs. windup

#### 3. Catching and fielding

- a. thrown and hit balls
- b. fingers up versus down
- c. see the glove and ball
- d. use two hands
- e. introduce forehands and backhands
- f. introduce the underhand flip
- g. first base fundamentals
- h. crossover and drop steps
- i. crow hop technique

#### 4. Hitting

- a. choosing the right bat
- b. proper grip
- c. hitting pitched balls – covering the plate, inside versus outside pitches.
- d. introduce drill work (tee, soft toss, short toss)

#### 5. Learning positional play

- a. learn the positions and the areas each player should cover
- b. cover the nearest base when the ball is not hit to you
- c. cutoffs and relays
- d. double plays
- e. covering on a steal

## Age-Specific Player Development Goals

From the book "Coaching Youth Baseball the Ripken Way"



### MAJORS (12U)

#### 1. Learning the basic rules

- a. infield fly
- b. dead balls and when to call time outs
- c. communicating with umpire

#### 2. Base Running

- a. leads
- b. steals / delayed steals
- c. extra-base hits

#### 3. Pitching and throwing mechanics

- a. reinforce mechanics
- b. wind up versus stretch
- c. four-seam and two-seam grip
- d. shuffle
- e. throwing – mastering of pitching the ladder
- f. follow through of pitching hand and glove placement after pitch
- g. pitcher covering first

#### 4. Catchers

- a. blocking the ball
- b. framing pitches
- c. developing pop-times

#### 5. Hitting

- a. repetitions, drill work (tee, soft toss, short toss, fence drill)
- b. proper way to set up for bunt, position of hands and barrel

#### 6. Learning team fundamentals

- a. cutoff and relays
- b. basic bunt defenses
- c. basic first-and-third situations
- d. underhand flip
- e. double plays
- f. defending the steal
- g. infield and outfield communication and priorities

## Age-Specific Player Development Goals

From the book "Coaching Youth Baseball the Ripken Way"



### COUNTY AND JUNIOR LEGION

- 1. Throwing mechanics and pitching**
  - a. emphasis on generating momentum toward the target and following the throw
  - b. change ups
  - c. limited breaking balls
  - d. pitching mechanics
  - e. flat-work (drills)
  - f. introduction to long toss
- 2. Catchers**
  - a. blocking the ball
  - b. framing pitches
  - c. developing pop-times
- 3. Hitting**
  - a. reinforce mechanics
  - b. introduce situational hitting (hitting behind runners, productive outs)
  - c. sacrifice bunting versus bunting for a hit
  - d. understanding the count
- 4. Base Running**
  - a. first-and-third situations
  - b. steal breaks
  - c. delayed steals
  - d. reading situations and reacting to them
- 5. Fielding**
  - a. generating momentum back toward the target on throws when necessary
  - b. crossover and drop steps
  - c. backhands and when to use them
  - d. double-play depth
  - e. pitcher covering first
  - f. infield communication
- 6. Learning team fundamentals**
  - a. pickoff plays
  - b. full bunt defenses
  - c. full first-and-third defenses
  - d. pop-up and fly ball priorities
  - e. double plays and underhand flip

# CHARTS AND TOOLS



**DUGOUT ORGANIZATION:**

To keep your players focused on baseball, eliminate the distractions that occur every time the team runs on or off the field.

**- Create “in” and “out” doors of the dugout:**

Players should always and only enter dugout from the side closest to home plate (IN)

Players should always and only exit dugout from the outfield end of the dugout (OUT)

**- Use two clipboards for team information:**

Coaches’ information is next to the IN door – i.e. pitch counts, QAB etc.

Player information is next to the OUT door – i.e. positions by inning, jobs, etc.

**- Use closet organizer for gloves, hats, batting gloves, sunglasses etc. on outside of dugout**

Each player should have a “glove buddy” and share a cubby with them

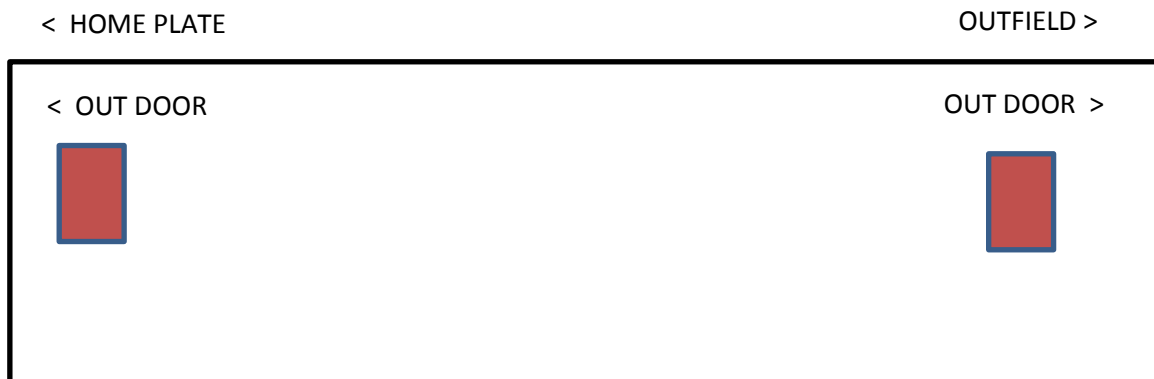
Each player is responsible to see if his glove buddy is on the field when the inning ends

Players should take the contents of the box to their glove buddy to prevent him from having to come back to the dugout

*HOME TEAM DUGOUT – FIRST BASE SIDE – VIEW FROM FIELD*



*HOME TEAM DUGOUT – FIRST BASE SIDE – VIEW FROM INSIDE*



Opponent: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# PANTHERS BASEBALL

DEFENSIVE POSITION BY INNING

	BATTING ORDER	1	2	3	4	5	6
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							
11							

<b>Pitchers:</b>	<b>Catchers:</b>
<b>Relief:</b>	



PANTHERS BASEBALL

Today's Linuep	
1	
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11	



PANTHERS BASEBALL

Today's Linuep	
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9	
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11	



PANTHERS BASEBALL

Today's Linuep	
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6	
7	
8	
9	
10	
11	



PANTHERS BASEBALL

Today's Linuep	
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11	

Opponent: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

QAB Scoresheet



# PANTHERS BASEBALL

	BATTING ORDER	1	2	3	4	5	6
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							
11							

Quality At Bats		Non-Quality At Bats	
Hit	H	Fly Out	FO
Walk	BB	Strikeout Looking	K (back)
Hit By Pitch	HBP	Weak Grounder	GB
Hard Hit Ball	HHB	Failed Bunt	No BUNT
Advance Runner	ADV		
Sacrifice	SAC		
Beat Out Grounder	BEAT		
6+ AB w/o K	6AB		
9+ AB w/ K	9K		



