



## **Berlin Youth Baseball – Drills for First Baseman**

**Goal of this document:** Provide coaches, parents, and players with drills that can help start young youth down the path of learning the fundamentals of being a first baseman, and being effective and catching the ball and getting force-outs.

### **Who should play 1B?**

At the young youth age, you will need to place one of your best players at first base because the best chance your team will have at getting outs, and the most common way that young players will get out, is a groundball to the infield which ends in a throw to first base. The throws from the infielders are not always going to be on target, so your first baseman needs to be able to catch a diverse array of throws and be smart enough to keep their foot on the base while doing so.

### **Where to stand with no runner on 1<sup>st</sup>**

For younger players, you want to keep it simple, so a decent rule of thumb is when there is no runner on 1<sup>st</sup> base, take 3 big strides off first base towards 2<sup>nd</sup> base, then back up a step behind the baseline. The important thing, is that many young players will want to stand directly on first base, but you need to teach them to get several feet away from the base (far enough to fill in the gap between 1<sup>st</sup> base and the 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman, but close enough to grab a ball down the line and to get back to first for a throw).



### **Where to stand with a runner on 1<sup>st</sup> (young players that can't steal)**

For very young players, standing in ready position behind a runner can be very distracting, and cause your 1<sup>st</sup> baseman to lose focus of the batter or even of the hit ball, so you may choose to tell your very young 1<sup>st</sup> baseman to stand in front of the baseline.



### **Where to stand with a runner on 1<sup>st</sup> (if you can steal but not leadoff)**

In the first few younger years that allow youth to steal (but not lead off), you may choose to place your 1<sup>st</sup> baseman behind the baseline (like we did above with no runners on), in order to be able to see if the runner is stealing and yell “he’s going!”. Once you are at the older youth age, where runners can leadoff, you will need to be on the base and ready for the pick-off play, then as soon as the pitch is delivered hustle over into your normal fielding ready position.

### **Advanced: Where to stand with a runner on 1<sup>st</sup> (leadoff)**

If you are in the older youth league where a runner can lead-off, then the 1<sup>st</sup> baseman should stand in front of the bag (towards home plate), with their glove foot slightly towards the pitcher, and your throwing arm foot near the pitcher’s corner of 1<sup>st</sup> base. You want that glove foot to be open (towards home), not closed (towards 2<sup>nd</sup> base) because you need flexibility in your upper body to move quickly if there is a bad pick-off throw. Once you receive the ball, you are putting the tag down out on the 2<sup>nd</sup> base side of 1<sup>st</sup> base in order to get a tag on that runner before they get back to the base. As soon as the pitcher makes movement towards home (thus no pick-off play) then the first baseman moves their throwing arm foot towards 2<sup>nd</sup> base and make a big shuffle over into ready position.



### **How to stand when the ball is pitched**

A first baseman is just like any other infielder, so they should be down in their ready position, ready for a groundball at any moment.



### **Which foot goes on the base during a throw**

It is critical to teach youth players that their throwing arm’s foot is always the one on the base, and the glove arm’s foot is the one reaching out towards the teammate throwing the ball.



### **Where to put your foot**

Make sure to teach your youth that throwing arm's foot doesn't actually stand on first base, but instead the side of their foot touches the side of 1<sup>st</sup> base (home plate side). It's important that the foot is NOT standing across the middle of the base or on the back side as this will lead to the foot getting stepped on your tripping up the runner.



### **Double bases (one for the fielder, one for the runner)**

Occasionally your team may play on a diamond that has a double first base. From the first baseman's perspective, white is for the fielder, orange if for the runner. Therefore it's important to teach the first baseman in those situations to use the white base and pretend the orange one doesn't exist. The orange base typically only comes in play when a batter is running to first base, the orange base is no longer in play for any additional situations like a runner leading off or tagging up.



### **Type of Glove**

First basemen are the recipient of the majority of defensive plays during a game, and they will require a large glove. It's important to consider that whatever youth player you put at first base does not have a tiny glove, but instead has a larger one giving them more reach and chance at catching the ball. There are special first baseman gloves that older players may want to consider purchasing that are thick like a catcher's glove and protect the 1<sup>st</sup> baseman's hands from repeated hard throws.

### **The reach/splits/stretching out**

When receiving a throw from an infielder, the first baseman should have a solid stance, one that is not un-balanced. The stretch or splits should only really be used during close plays at first base, as the stretch or splits can sometimes make a first baseman tip over a little, pull their foot off the bag, or put themselves in a situation where they can't adjust for a bad throw.

Fielders should be taught to only get into a stretch/splits after they see the ball coming, see the runner running, and realize that the stretch/splits is necessary. If you see a player doing the splits/stretch each time you want to consider breaking them of that habit.



### **A ball in the dirt (Hockey Goalie: Knock ball down)**

It is critical that in youth games a ball does not get past the first baseman as this means a minimum of 1 extra base for the runner. For the young youth players, most of them are not going to be able to pick a ball out of the dirt with just the glove, so in the younger ages it's best to teach the first baseman that they must turn into a catcher or "hockey goalie" anytime they see the ball going into the dirt. This means, they will pull their foot off the base, turn their body into the fielding "ready position", and do whatever it takes to knock the ball down in front of them. Then if time permits, after they knock the ball down, then quickly pick the ball up and touch their foot on 1<sup>st</sup>.



Now for older youth players, you don't want their foot to leave the base, so you need to teach them how to pick balls out of the dirt with just their glove. The best way to teach this is with lots of repetition. Take a bucket of balls and throw them repeatedly in the dirt, one-hops to the first baseman for practice.



### **Tag the runner that turns the wrong way?**

One critical thing to teach youth first baseman, is to watch if a runner that beat out the throw & is safe decides to turn left or makes a motion towards 2<sup>nd</sup> base. If they do so, the first baseman should immediately run over and tag the runner and the umpire will call them out. Baserunners who make a turn right, are no longer in play and thus cannot be tagged, but if they turn left they are fair game to be tagged. This is especially important to teach at a very young age, because young baserunners many times don't understand this rule and your smart 1<sup>st</sup> baseman could get your team an out.



### **Yell “going” when stealing**

For any youth players in a league that allows stealing, the first baseman becomes responsible for that runner on 1<sup>st</sup>, and therefore as soon as the first baseman sees the runner leaving for 2<sup>nd</sup> base for a steal, the first baseman needs to yell at the top of their lungs “going” so that the catcher and middle infielders hear it and can get into their proper defensive positions.

### **Flip to the pitcher**

One play, commonly taught under “pitcher’s defense” actually is important for a first baseman to understand. If the ball is hit to the 2<sup>nd</sup> base side, and the first baseman has to move far away from 1<sup>st</sup> in order to get the ball, the pitcher should be running over to cover first base and the first baseman will need to know to flip the ball to the pitcher instead of trying to make the run back to first in time to beat the runner.



### **Double Play or take the sure out (tag first base)**

When there is a runner on 1<sup>st</sup> base and less than two outs, and the ball is hit to the first baseman, older youth players are taught to turn the double play by having the first baseman first throw to the shortstop (at second base), then hustle back to first in time for the shortstop to return the ball to first (Note: If the ball is far enough off first base, it may be expected for the 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman to actually cover 1<sup>st</sup> base for the return throw).

With younger players however, any throw from the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> baseman to 2<sup>nd</sup> base is an extremely risky play that, at a young age, many times ends up in the ball sailing over second base into the outfield, and the runners advancing. Therefore with young players it is important to be realistic and realize that you’d rather settle for a single out than having all runners safe and the ball sailing into the outfield. Thus, with young players, if there is a runner on 1<sup>st</sup> and a ball hit to the first baseman, if they are anywhere near first base it is usually advisable to just teach the young player to get the sure out and touch first base. They should only throw to 2<sup>nd</sup> in that situation if the ball is fielded far away from first base and there is no chance of getting the runner out at first.

### **Advanced: Cutoff**

In most situations, the first baseman will stay around first base the whole play. During a deep extra base hit to left or center, where the batter is already to 2<sup>nd</sup> base (thus no runner can be on first anymore), then the first baseman becomes the backup to 2<sup>nd</sup> base. The 1<sup>st</sup> baseman can do this by shifting over between the pitcher’s mound and 2<sup>nd</sup> base in case a throw from the outfield is errant or missed and they can back it up.