

# H<sub>opkins</sub> A<sub>rea</sub> L<sub>ittle</sub> L<sub>ea</sub>gue

## A Coach's Reference Guide to Baseball Fundamentals



INTRODUCING



DEVELOPING



AND  
REINFORCING

SKILLS AT EVERY LEVEL IN  
THE HOPKINS AREA LITTLE LEAGUE

<b>HITTING</b>	<b>Challenger</b>	<b>T-Ball</b>	<b>Minors B</b>	<b>Minors A</b>	<b>Majors</b>
bat gripped in fingers	X	X	X	X	X
foot position at plate	X	X	X	X	X
stance & hand position	X	X	X	X	X
load, weight shift, & stride	X	X	X	X	X
swing mechanics	X	X	X	X	X
bunt for a hit				X	X
squeeze bunt					X
sacrifice bunt					X

### **BASERUNNING**

home to 1st(through bag)	X	X	X	X	X
home to 1st(round bag)			X	X	X
home to 2nd			X	X	X
tagging up from 1st				X	X
tagging up from 2nd				X	X
tagging up from 3rd				X	X
sliding(feet first)	X	X	X	X	X
straight steal				X	X
delayed steal				X	X
rundowns				X	X

### **THROWING**

4 seam grip	X	X	X	X	X
correct lead foot	X	X	X	X	X
back foot parallel to target	X	X	X	X	X
step at target	X	X	X	X	X
elbow up above shoulder	X	X	X	X	X

### **FIELDING-GROUNDBALLS**

perfect stance	X	X	X	X	X
ready position	X	X	X	X	X
glove up & out		X	X	X	X
head up/balls of feet		X	X	X	X
creep in on pitch		X	X	X	X
footwork left and right		X	X	X	X
charge the ball	X	X	X	X	X
funnel ball with free hand		X	X	X	X
throwing mechanics	X	X	X	X	X

### **TEAM DEFENSE**

hustle to positions	X	X	X	X	X
hustle in after inning	X	X	X	X	X

### **GLOVE WORK/CATCHING THE BALL**

using 2 hands	X	X	X	X	X
ball below waist	X	X	X	X	X
ball above waist	X	X	X	X	X
flyballs	X	X	X	X	X

### INFIELD-DEFENSE

	Challenger	T-Ball	Minors B	Minors A	Majors
ground balls	X	X	X	X	X
pop-ups	X	X	X	X	X
force at 1st	X	X	X	X	X
force at 2nd	X	X	X	X	X
force at 3rd	X	X	X	X	X
force at home	X	X	X	X	X
tag the runner rules			X	X	X
backing up throw from plate			X	X	X
covering bag on steal				X	X
bunt defense				X	X

### OUTFIELD-DEFENSE

flyballs	X	X	X	X	X
groundballs	X	X	X	X	X
flyball communication			X	X	X
coming in on a flyball			X	X	X
flyball over head				X	X
backing up bases			X	X	X
backing up each other			X	X	X
cut-offs		X	X	X	X
throwing to bases	X	X	X	X	X
crow-hop				X	X
shielding the sun with glove				X	X

### PITCHING

set position				X	X
wind-up					X
balance position				X	X
reach back toward 2nd				X	X
fingers on top of ball				X	X
leg drive/stride toward plate				X	X
elbow above shoulder				X	X
2 seam fastball				X	X
4 seam fastball				X	X
change-up					X

## PITCHER

	Challenger	T-Ball	Minors B	Minors A	Majors
back-up play responsibilities			X	X	X
run downs				X	X
bunt defense responsibilities				X	X
fly ball communication	X	X	X	X	X
ground ball communication	X	X	X	X	X
covering 1st base	X	X	X	X	X
feeds to 1st base			X	X	X
covering home on pass ball					X
<b>DOUBLE PLAYS</b>					
pitcher-shortstop-1st				X	X
pitcher-2nd-1st				X	X
pitcher-catcher-1st				X	X

## 1st BASE

position depth	X	X	X	X	X
cut-off responsibilities			X	X	X
run downs				X	X
fielding bunts				X	X
fly ball communication	X	X	X	X	X
ground ball communication	X	X	X	X	X
feeds to pitcher covering 1st	X	X	X	X	X
<b>DOUBLE PLAYS</b>	<b>Challenger</b>	<b>T-Ball</b>	<b>Minors B</b>	<b>Minors A</b>	<b>Majors</b>
1st-shortstop-1st				X	X
1st-catcher-1st				X	X

## 2nd BASE

position depth	X	X	X	X	X
backing up throw from plate	X	X	X	X	X
covering 2nd on steal				X	X
cut-off responsibilities			X	X	X
run downs				X	X
bunt defense responsibilities				X	X
covering 1st			X	X	X
fly ball communication	X	X	X	X	X
<b>DOUBLE PLAYS</b>					
2nd-shortstop-1st				X	X
shortstop-2nd-1st				X	X
3rd-2nd-1st				X	X
pitcher-2nd-1st				X	X
2nd-catcher-1st				X	X



### 3RD BASE

	Challenger	T-Ball	Minors B	Minors A	Majors
position depth	X	X	X	X	X
covering 3rd on steal				X	X
cut-off responsibilities			X	X	X
run downs				X	X
bunt defense responsibilities				X	X
fly ball communication	X	X	X	X	X
<b>DOUBLE PLAYS</b>					
3rd-2nd-1st				X	X
3rd-2nd				X	X
3rd-1st				X	X
3rd-catcher-1st				X	X

### SHORTSTOP

position depth	X	X	X	X	X
backing up throw from plate	X	X	X	X	X
covering 2nd on steal				X	X
cut-off responsibilities			X	X	X
run downs				X	X
bunt defense responsibilities				X	X
fly ball communication	X	X	X	X	X
<b>DOUBLE PLAYS</b>					
2nd-shortstop-1st				X	X
shortstop-2nd-1st				X	X
catcher-shortstop-1st				X	X
1st-shortstop-1st				X	X
pitcher-shortstop-1st				X	X
shortstop-catcher-1st				X	X

### CATCHER

blocking balls in dirt				X	X
pop-ups			X	X	X
calling pitches					X
framing pitches					X
<b>CATCHER cont'd</b>	<b>Challenger</b>	<b>T-Ball</b>	<b>Minors B</b>	<b>Minors A</b>	<b>Majors</b>
target inside/outside					X
trowing to 2nd base				X	X
throwing to 3rd base				X	X
throwing back to pitcher			X	X	X
hustle after pass balls			X	X	X
force outs at home			X	X	X
tag play at home			X	X	X
fielding bunts				X	X
<b>DOUBLE PLAYS</b>					
pitcher-catcher-1st				X	X
1st-catcher-1st				X	X
2nd-catcher-1st				X	X
shortstop-catcher-1st				X	X
3rd-catcher-1st				X	X

# A Collection of Baseball Tips, Drills, and Ideas to Improve Your Season

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**Compiled For  
Hopkins Area Little League**

# SKILLS ARE DEVELOPED IN PRACTICE & DISPLAYED IN GAMES

## HITTING

### THE BATTING GRIP

A proper batting grip is essential. Its purpose is to control the bat while allowing the hitter to generate maximum bat speed with minimum effort.

Much has been said about the lining up of the “knocking” or middle knuckles of the hands. We don’t think it’s enough to just tell a kid to line up his middle knuckles without explaining why. This can be uncomfortable for young players due to their small hands and may need reinforcing. Nevertheless, it should be taught from day one. The knuckles should be slightly ‘misaligned’ with the top hand ‘knocker’ knuckles between the middle and top knuckles of the bottom hand. An easy way to teach this (from Mike Epstein) is to “have the hitter place the bat barrel between his feet and lean it against his body. Have him to pick the bat up by the handle with both hands.” This places his hands in the correct grip: the “knocker” knuckles of the top hand will be aligned perfectly between the “knocker” knuckles and the big knuckles on the bottom hand.”

We teach the hitter to grip the bat at the point where the fingers join the hand. Usually this will align the middle knuckles somewhat but more importantly, it provides flexible or “flippy” wrists. This flexibility is what provides the crucial “late” bat speed that is prevalent in all great hitters and nonexistent in average hitters. Just before and during contact, this allows the hitter to maximize his bat speed by “throwing his hands” into the “palm up/palm down” position where the bottom hand is facing palm down, and the top hand is facing palm up. The wrists do not roll over until well after contact with the ball is made.

It is common for young hitters to grip the bat further back in their palm, especially the top hand. This ‘wrapping’ will cause the hitter to hit with a ‘casting’ motion, (hitting around the ball) reducing his power and bat speed. The bottom wrist should be flexed “in” and not flat.

The grip pressure is also an important factor. The grip must begin extremely light or loose during the stance, load and stride, because it will tighten during the swing. In the contact zone the grip will be extremely tight. If a hitter begins with a tight grip or one that is in the palms of the hands he will actually have to slow his bat speed down in order to maintain control of the bat in the contact area. Instead of accelerating, he will be decelerating through the contact zone.

Another factor that contributes to a poor grip in youth players is the pressure to get a base hit instead of just being encouraged to hit the ball hard each at bat. Kids are often taught to “just make contact” or “don’t kill it, just meet it”. Our ‘teach’ is to “hurt the ball when you hit it.”

Should a coach change an incorrect grip of an 8 year old even if he is by far the best hitter in the park? ABSOLUTELY! You are obligated to teach him skills that will not only make him better now, but 5-10 years down the road as well. Our advice to youth coaches is to make every player grip the bat properly. No matter how unnatural or uncomfortable it feels. Encourage them to ignore the result while they work to develop more bat speed during every tee, soft toss, self toss, and BP station. Their hand eye coordination will be better than you think. Bat speed is teachable by coaches that give their kids the freedom to fail while they learn.

**A DRILL:** A good way to reinforce the correct grip is to have the hitter stand at the plate, stride, swing and literally throw the bat at the pitcher's mound. If the grip is correct the bat will sail directly to the mound. If he has wrapped the bat it will travel toward the third base side of the mound. His hands will not be in the "palm up-palm down" position. The top hand will turn over early.

**Much of hitting is about: TIMING & BALANCE (Strength helps too)**

**A successful swing...**

1. Start with the hands in a power position in close to the body about armpit height.
2. Trigger the hands into the load position
3. Keep your hands inside the ball (meaning hands closer to the body throughout the swing to make for a quick rotation to the ball)
4. Stick with it until your muscle memory acclimates to this new weapon.

Start your swing with your hands (it's your timing mechanism). . . and you can time a jet or a fastball! Call it a trigger, load or hitch, it's all the same. Just get some movement from your hands starting when the pitcher separates his hands from his glove with a movement toward the back shoulder.

Keep your hands 4-6 inches from your body throughout the swing. Think about hitting the inside half of the baseball (the half that's closest to you). This will train you to have a shorter, quicker stroke and will help keep balls straight and not allow them to hook foul...see Barry Bonds!

## Characteristics of a Winning Hitter

(Edited by Robert Patek, M.D.)

- Looks and acts **confident**
- Believes he can **hit any pitch**
- Has an **aggressive approach** at the plate
- Learns by **swinging the bat**
- Loads early and **strides to see**
- **Attacks fastball strikes** early in the count
- Believes every pitch will be a **strike**
- **Thinks fastball** and then reacts to off speed
- **Refuses** to let the fastball get by
- Is mentally and physically **tough**
- Does not **fear** getting hit by a pitch
- Does not **fear** striking out
- Is **not concerned** with statistics
- **Understands failure** is part of the game
- **Remains positive** at all times
- Never questions or **begs** the umpire
- Reacts in a **mature way** when not successful
- Has a **consistent routine** each at bat
- **Adjusts mentally** to game situations
- While aggressive, **remains relaxed**
- Clears his mind and **focuses** only on the pitch

**The Eyes Have It-** the ability to concentrate on the pitcher's release point (arm slot) will give the hitter the confidence he needs to stand in the batter's box and hit. Many young hitters are fearful because they don't see the ball at release point. You will often see this manifested into a flinch or "step in the bucket." The eye is like a camera in that it must focus on an object or clarity will be lost. It would be premature to concentrate on the pitcher's arm slot too early. The hitter would be looking at a nothing tangible. Our suggestion is to focus on the letter of the pitcher's cap as he starts his delivery until his front foot lands. At that point switch your gaze to just above the pitcher's throwing shoulder. The ball is going to come out of that area and with practice and concentration the hitter will be able to see the ball at release point.

## **Youth Hitting Technique**

Stepping out seems to be a major problem with young players, and it prevents the bat from being in the hitting zone long enough to make consistent contact or inhibits proper plate coverage. The technique that has been successful in my teachings is to have the young hitter raise the back heel so only the balls of the feet and toes are in contact with ground. It is really difficult mechanically to step out when the hitter's back foot is raised. In addition to being virtually impossible to step out, this technique allows the hitter to accomplish several other necessary hitting musts:

1. Makes pivoting the back foot much easier, thus allowing the hips to explode on the ball.
2. Weight transfer tends to remain in center of the stance instead of overcompensating one way or the other.
3. Shortens the stride
4. The hitter focuses on pivoting and rotating on the center of gravity axis, instead of lunging.

Another important factor in teaching the young hitter making the transition from T-Ball to Minor league is teach that the swing begins in the downward plane before leveling off and ending high. T-Ball creates a swing that makes a young hitter begin swing in the upward plane. Kids want to see the ball fly off the tee; so therefore, they naturally swing up to get the desired results. Kids must be taught to start down, because the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, and most hittable pitches are down in the zone.

## **DON'T CRANK UP THAT PITCHING MACHINE**

People think that by adding velocity to BP pitches you are helping your players become better hitters.

- Batting practice on the field helps develop and solidify a hitter's stroke, the stroke he works on using the hitting Tee. If the machine is cranked up too high, the tendency is for the hitter's mechanics to break down.
- We spend weeks, months and years developing our hitter's stroke and swing path; do we really want to tear it down by presenting them with unhittable pitches?

Professional teams throw Batting practice at 60-65 mph. Don't you think that if throwing faster pitches worked, professional teams would do it?

- All good hitters are confident. An important element in any batting practice is the instilling of confidence. Why run the risk of destroying that confidence with pitches that blow by your hitters?
- Consistent pitches during BP helps the hitters get "locked in" both physically and mentally. Remember - confidence and relaxation.

The development of hitters takes years. Years of a sound routine and good coaching. Your kids will blossom within that routine but it will not happen overnight. Give it time. Remember, use that Hitting Tee and live batting practice.

## **OPPOSITE FIELD HITTING**

Hitting the baseball hard to the opposite field is so important. To be a complete hitter, players must learn to be proficient at this skill. From the day pitchers throw their first pitch they are taught the skill of throwing a fastball knee high on the outside corner. Why? It's the furthest strike from the hitter's vision. It is the most difficult pitch for him to hit solidly and drive. This is where they get you out. This is the pitch that is swung at and missed or popped up or grounded to the shortstop. This is Double Play Central.

So if pitchers learn this skill why don't we see more coaches drilling their hitters to defeat this tactic? Maybe they do. But they must do it in secret. We don't see a lot of opposite field hitting drills going on at batting practices. Opposite field hitting should be drilled every day. It is not a weakness. It is strength.

Tee work is very good for hitting to all fields. Short toss is a good drill. Hitting in the cage is also very good. But live hitting to the opposite field on a baseball diamond is the best method. It gives the hitter a good perspective of where his ball was hit on the field and it clearly makes evident to him the distance each batted ball travels.

### **The Drill**

We feel this particular drill is a very good opposite field hitting drill. As we have said our hitters progress take batting practice in stages; tee, side flips, short toss, opposite field and live hitting. Here's the setup for right handed batters: One coach sets up a screen about 10-12 feet in front of home plate with a bucket of baseballs. Another screen is placed on the right side of the infield about 20 feet away from home plate and about 10-12 feet off the foul line. The hitting coach stands behind this second screen and instructs the hitters. He has the best view and does not have to worry about getting hit with a ball. He can concentrate on his hitters. The idea is for the hitter to hit the second screen, hard. Because of the placement of this screen any ball hit there will result in a ball hit to the opposite field.

The coach who tosses the balls does so in an underhand fashion. He tosses them just off the outside corner of the plate. By delivering them underhand he has good control and the hitter must provide the power. He can also put spin on the ball that simulates a slider or curve ball. Each hitter receives 10-15 swings. His goal is to hit every one of them into the screen.

Young hitters will not do this drill well at first. They will hit balls up the middle or they will hit the wrong screen or they will pop balls up and to the right or they will swing and miss. It takes a great amount of concentration and practice. It is not a drill that the player just hops in there and takes his hacks and jumps out.

The coach must constantly give instruction and reinforcement. This kind of concentration and effort for the player is difficult at first but soon becomes second nature. A coach should demand full effort from his players.

### **The Technique**

Have your hitters stand in the batter's box the same way, with the front foot even with the middle corner of the plate. (No matter where the pitch is thrown, inside, outside or down the middle the hitter approaches the ball from the same stance, stride and position.) It is where he makes contact with the ball in relation to the plate that makes the difference. The outside pitch should be contacted back further on the plate, somewhere near the back corner angle.

To hit to the opposite field the hitter has to hit 'inside' the baseball, by hitting the ball as it travels further back. We tell players that are struggling with this drill to "swing when you feel the ball is almost by you."

“Hitting is timing.” That truism was never more evident than when you begin teaching this drill. It is not an easy concept to grasp and a difficult drill to do. That is why it should be done everyday.

If you have players with certain hitting faults such as stepping away from the plate (stepping in the bucket) this will really become evident when you use this drill. Therefore, using this drill has an added benefit of helping players with this fault.

### **Hit the Inside of the Ball**

By throwing the balls at a reduced speed it is easier for the hitters to see where they should hit the baseball. They should hit inside the ball and not around it. As a hitter becomes proficient, he can even begin to aim at the top half of the inside of the ball. This will increase his odds of hitting hard line drives and ground balls the other way, consistently.

The hitters should swing the bat hard, not try to coax the ball into right field. The first few times you run this drill it will be frustrating. There will be a lot of failure. Weak pop-ups, swings and misses and a lot of balls pulled back to the coach who is tossing the balls. There will be a lot of players who break down their hitting mechanics and there will be a lot of players who contact the ball “early.”

Don’t give up and don’t give in. Keep at it every day. Don’t let your power hitters blow this off. They are the ones that will need it the most as the pitching gets better. There will be great rewards.

Youth and high school hitters can improve their season batting averages by learning to hit outside strikes hard the other way. Teach them to “hit the ball where it’s pitched” and “use the entire field”. Ask any major league player what this did for their careers.

Next time you take your family to a Minor or Major League baseball game, go 2-3 hours early and watch “field batting practice”. Even though the pitches are medium fast balls you will notice that hitters will hit the ball to the opposite fields as much or more than they will pull the ball. Now you know why.

Likewise, most MLB hitting instructors will tell you that this is one of the first things they will focus on with a player when he enters a batting slump. Later, when the player is interviewed, he will often attribute “patience”, “waiting longer”, and “going the other way”, as reasons for why he is now seeing and hitting the ball well again.

#### **Tips:**

- Run this drill just before field batting practice in groups of 4 or 5.
- Put all left-hand hitters in 1 group.
- Have a bag in right and left fields to collect balls.
- Because of the degree of difficulty of this drill, it is necessary for the coach to provide constant reinforcement and encouragement.
- Make sure the players aren’t ‘cheating’ by sticking their bats out and guiding the ball into right field, or diving into the pitch. They have to maintain their normal hitting mechanics and their normal stride, back at the pitcher.
- Do not use the phrase “swing inside out”. Simply remind them that nothing in the swing (or stride) changes except WHEN the ball is hit.
- Occasionally the coach may miss and throw the ball over the middle of the plate. For the purpose of this drill, instruct your players not to swing at these pitches. This adds a little ‘plate discipline.’
- When your players become proficient at this drill you may remove the second screen to let them see how far their balls go.
- Once again, the key is to let the ball travel back on the plate.

Drill opposite field hitting on a daily basis. This will be one of the most important drills you do for your players now, and in the years to come.

## HITTING WITH TWO STRIKES

To be productive, hitters must take a slightly different approach with two strikes. Indeed, hitting with two strikes should be considered a **situational hitting skill**.

Two Strike hitting requires an attitude of not 'giving in' to the pitcher. The hitter should 'shorten' his swing; i.e. less inertia movement with his hands. (In the development of hitters a short and compact swing is desirable anyway. Two strike hitting is a good way to approach the teaching of the compact swing.)

We recommend coaches spend time with their players distinguishing between the two swings. Reassure them that you want them to hit the ball hard but with two strikes trying to pull the ball can be counter-productive. With less than two strikes a hitter may look for a pitch in his "comfort zone"- one which he knows he can drive. With two strikes he does not have that luxury and he must be prepared to hit in all areas of the strike zone.

Hitters should practice these during tee, soft toss, batting cage and field BP sessions. Simply tell them to show you their two strike swing, and then throw the pitch. Praise or correct them not based on whether or not they get a base hit but rather on their mechanics and contact with the ball. During games when they get two strikes you should calmly prompt them to be "short and quick" when they have two strikes and switch to their two strike swing. In time they will not need to be reminded. They will understand that it's no longer a time to think home run, but a time to think put the ball in play.

Because hitters do not have the luxury of looking for their pitch with two strikes, they must react to what the pitcher throws. We like our hitters to look for pitches middle-away. Look away and react and fight off inside pitches.

Another advantage of the two strike swing is that it will be easier for them to hold up on bad pitches and off-speed or breaking stuff.

The following are the mechanics of the two strike swing:

- Shorten stride. To shorten the stride, widen the stance. Some hitters have a no-stride approach or they simply have an up and down 'stride'.
- Choke up an inch.
- Expand the strike zone; do not take anything close that's low.
- Look middle -away (lay off of high heat).
- Shorten swing.
- Spread the hands an inch
- Battle.

Anything that is close and LOW should at the very least be fouled off. With two strikes expand your strike zone to a ball-width on either side of the plate.



# THROWING / CATCHING

**THROWER'S CHECKLIST** -Proper throwing mechanics throughout the long toss workout is very important. Throw the ball with a limited arc. Do not throw as if you are throwing "uphill." If the distance becomes challenging, use a crow hop. If you can't reach a certain distance, one-hop the ball. Poor mechanics add stress to the arm. Good mechanics strengthen it. Start the season by teaching your players good throwing mechanics.

- Grip- check to see if the grip is a 4- seam fastball grip and the ball is not choked back into the palm. From the time the player catches the ball to the time his arm is in the cocked position, he should have the ball in a 4-seam grip. (He should practice that every time he plays catch until it becomes second nature.)
- Feet- throwing starts with the feet. Usually when a player makes a throwing error it is because he didn't have his feet set properly. The anklebone of his throwing-side foot should be pointed at the target (closed). The lead foot should land slightly closed and pointing at the target.
- Arm alignment- both arms should be aligned with the head and shoulders. (If he were a pitcher, his arms would be aligned with second base.)
- Elbow shoulder high- whether he has the arm action of a pitcher or outfielder or catcher or infielder, his elbow should be at shoulder height the instant before he brings his arm forward.
- Lead arm- the lead arm should be shoulder high also and aligned properly. The lead arm elbow should be pointed at the target. (This is unique to the player. The main point is that the lead arm is shoulder high and closed to the target.)
- Extension- the ball is released out in front of the head and not beside the head. Get the chest out over the front leg. The fingers remain on top of the ball and do not flop off to the side. The arm snaps to full extension.
- Smooth follow through- finish the throw with a smooth fluid motion and the head out over the landing foot.

**Catching the Baseball-** Here are some random rules of thumb on teaching young players to catch the ball.

1. If the ball is above the waist, catch it in the glove with the fingers up.
2. Below the waist, catch it with fingers pointing down.
3. A common fault among youth players is that they reach for the ball if it is not thrown directly at them. Instruct a young player to "Move your feet".
4. Look to see if the glove is open when they are fielding ground balls or catching a fly ball.
5. It's okay, quite often, to catch the ball with one hand rather than two. You have more "reach" with one hand than with two. (First basemen should always catch the ball with one hand.)
6. Teach players to concentrate on the ball out of the thrower's hand. (Young players don't always see the ball all the way.)
7. Make sure they "look" the ball into the glove.
8. Teach players that are running to their right (RH) to backhand a fly ball
9. If the ball is over their head & they are running back & to the left they must backhand the ball.
10. Catch routine fly balls with both hands above the head.

**Lay Out Drill-** the front of a baseball player's uniform should be dirty at the end of a game. This drill is great for teaching players how to lay out for a fly ball. They must learn to use one hand and they should not use their throwing hand to stop their fall. The player has more extension if he doesn't use his off-hand to block his fall. Have the player kneel facing the coach. Coach tosses a ball left or right causing the player to "layout" to make the catch.

**"Catch the Ball with Two Hands?"** Since we were little kids we had that axiom drilled into us. But the reality is that it is not an effective coaching phrase. There are many baseball plays that require fielding the ball with one hand instead of two. In many instances it's better to say, "Catch the ball with one hand!"

When you catch the ball with one hand you have more 'reach.' Try it. Hold both your arms straight out in front of your body and reach. Now put one arm out and reach. See how much more range you have?

The plays better made with one hand are:

- All catches at first base- better reach.
- Ground balls going to your left.
- The backhand.
- Receiving a thrown ball in a rundown.
- Slow roller.
- Any fly ball where you have to run down left or right.
- Fly balls where you have to 'lay out' or dive for.
- Tag plays.

Two hand plays are:

- Routine ground balls in front of you.
- Receiving a throw as the pivot on a double play.\*
- A routine fly ball in front of you.
- Receiving a thrown ball as the cutoff or relay man.\*

\*The reason for having both hands close together on these plays is so that you will be quicker taking the ball out of your glove

# PITCHING

## TEACH PITCHING FROM THE STRETCH FIRST

The stretch position is the core movement of the full wind-up. Both the stretch and the wind-up get the pitcher to the balance point. In the wind-up, a pitcher goes through the baby-step, lift and pivot, and leg lift to get to the balance point. From the stretch, all the athlete needs to do is lift his leg to get to the balance point. There are less variables in play, and therefore less potential difficulties. An athlete can focus on the importance of waiting back and moving to the throwing position, before adding the extra variables of the wind up. The bottom line: The stretch position is easier to learn for beginning pitchers.

### *Where To Stand*

Most right-handers will start on the right side of the rubber & most lefties on the left side of the rubber. As the mechanically sound pitcher begins the stretch his focus is on getting to a good balanced position.

### *Getting To A Good Balanced Position*

They lift their leg up to their balance point. Many youth pitchers on the other hand will swing their lift leg up & get out of balance. It is best to keep the lift foot under the knee. At the balance point the weight should be on the ball of the foot & the chin should be slightly forward so the chin is out over the pitcher's belt.

### *Proper Body Alignment*

Once the pitcher reaches his balance point his shoulders should be lined up between home and second base. The upper body should not be over-rotated. In other words a right-hander should not turn his front shoulder over toward third base. If he does, he will have to make an adjustment to get back on line.

### *Hand Break And Arm Action*

As the lift leg starts down out of the balanced position, the hands should break in the middle of the body somewhere between the belly-button and the chest, fairly close but not up against the body. The throwing arm goes down out of the glove with the fingers on top of the ball and the thumb underneath. It should swing down and back but should not go to full extension straight back.

### *It's About Proper Timing - "Leg Down - Arm Up"*

It's important to understand something that can really simplify the delivery and that's the importance of proper timing. So remember this, as the lift leg starts down and out, the throwing arm is going down, back and up. So it's "leg down - arm up." If you work on timing those two things properly, your delivery will happen in the proper sequence.

After going down and back, the arm should stay slightly flexed so that it can immediately go up into the high-cocked or L-position. Many youth pitchers go to full extension when they take the ball out of their glove and because they flex their throwing elbows too late they end up in a bad throwing position at foot plant. So if the elbow is below shoulder height at foot plant, the pitcher will end up throwing the ball high. This also adds stress to the arm.

### ***The Importance Of Arm Alignment***

Besides good body alignment, the arm should stay aligned with the shoulders so the route getting up into the high cocked position is efficient. Many youth pitchers will try to get velocity at the rubber by raring back and therefore pulling their throwing arms behind them. Or they will break their hands out away from their body. From the catcher's view you will notice, for example, that the right-hander will take the ball down out of the glove and then pull it over toward the second baseman. This slows the arm from getting up since it has to take a longer route. Again the pitcher ends up throwing from a low-cocked position. The effect is less velocity, poor control and more stress to the arm.

### ***Lead Arm Action***

What happens with the lead arm or glove arm as the pitcher breaks his hands? Well, the lead arm and the throwing arm should go almost in sync in opposite directions. It's almost as if a pitcher is doing a jumping jack. Hands break with fingers on top and thumbs down. Pitchers will either lead with their glove or their elbow. The important thing is for the pitcher to use his elbow almost as a sight so that when his lead foot lands his elbow and shoulder are lined up with home plate. If the pitcher's shoulder opens up too early, he loses power and puts additional stress on the arm.

### ***Weight Shift , Lead Leg Action And Moving Forward To Landing***

When the pitcher begins moving forward out of this balance position, his lead leg starts down and out. As the lead leg starts down, his back leg or posting leg should slightly flex. This flexing of the posting leg allows the pitcher to maintain balance while at the same time keeping his weight back so he can lead with his front hip and lower body. Most youth pitchers don't know when to flex their back leg. Some flex them too much or too soon while others simply stay too tall and never get their weight back..

### ***What about lead leg action?***

Many youth pitchers don't understand the importance of lead leg action. The lead leg must get down and out so that the pitcher is leading with the side of his shoe. This will help him land in a closed position. Youth pitchers will many times swing their leg out or get too aggressive with it rather than drifting out to a flat footed landing position. This can create many problems.

### ***One Way To Add Velocity***

Most youth pitchers rush their motion because they don't know how to keep their weight back. This is one of the biggest sources of power loss. Fixing this can many times add 3-7 mph to a pitcher's fastball at the high school and college levels rather quickly.

### ***Landing Position***

If the pitcher comes out of a good balanced position, keeps his weight back, and drifts forward, he should land in a closed position. What that means is the front shoulder will be closed (shoulders lined up between home and second), and the lead foot will land on or slightly across the mid-line 2-3 inches. The mid-line being a line you would draw from the ball of the pitcher's posting foot toward home plate. If a right-hander lands too far to the left of this line, he has opened up too early which is a loss of power and stressful on the arm. On the other hand, if the pitcher lands too far to the right of the mid-line he is throwing across his body. This is very stressful on the shoulder and also causes a power loss since the pitcher isn't able to rotate his hips in time to help his arm.

### ***Set Up A Firm Base To Throw Against***

The other important thing that must happen, once the lead foot lands, is that the pitcher must stop his lower body from moving forward before his upper body begins rotating as it squares off going toward release. He does this by firming up his lead knee so he doesn't drift forward. Many youth pitchers let their knee continue to drift forward so the body has nothing to throw against. This causes more loss of power.

### ***The Power Triangle***

Besides landing closed, the pitcher's upper body must form a triangle with both of the pitcher's both feet as the base. So from the side view, you will see that the pitcher's nose is in-line with the pitcher's belt buckle. If the head is too far forward or closer to the lead leg, the pitcher has rushed his motion and has lost power.

So again, if the right-handed pitcher has done everything properly before he gets to landing, he will be in a powerful throwing position. Here's what that looks like. The lead or glove arm is up at shoulder height and the shoulder is closed. The lead foot has landed on or slightly across the mid-line, the throwing arm is in the high cocked or L-position with the ball facing back toward the shortstop and the head is level and in the top center of the triangle formed by the two feet. One more thing. In this final landing position the pitcher's back foot has rolled over so his shoe laces are tuned down to the ground and his heel is almost facing back toward second base.

### ***Finally, the pitcher is ready to produce power.***

Up to this point we have not begun to produce power. Everything has been about getting to the right landing position. To this point it's all been about set-up - nothing more. So if we don't do everything properly we then can get our landing out of sync and therefore lose velocity and affect control, while putting additional stress on the arm. Most youth pitchers want to throw the ball before they land. So they lose power.

### ***Ball Release***

Getting to ball release from landing requires that the pitcher squares his trunk to the plate before he flexes forward too quickly. Many youth pitchers will get this part of the delivery out of sequence. You will notice because of poor balance or rushing their motion that they actually flex forward before their trunk squares itself.

Again, they lose power and get the body out ahead of the arm. This is also stressful. Again, with major league power pitchers, notice how their back knee, just before ball release, is pulled forward and slightly inward toward the front leg. You will notice that many youth pitchers (right-handers for example) will swing their back leg out and around toward third base as they are going to finish. This stops hip rotation.

### ***A Strong And Long Finish - Protecting The Shoulder***

At ball release, the eyes should be fairly level. Once the pitcher releases the ball, the trunk flexes forward, the pitcher's front leg begins to straighten as his head and front shoulder get up and over the landing knee. The throwing hand will finish between the front ankle and knee while the trunk is flexing forward into a "flat back" position. The pitcher finishes by decelerating his arm so that he shows the back of his shoulder to the hitter. This "flat back" finish helps take the stress from the throwing shoulder and helps protect the arm from injury.

## **TOO MANY BREAKING PITCHES**

So many players want to know how to throw a curve ball, a slider, a splitter, a knuckle ball, or a cutter. We don't teach specialty pitches to young pitchers. It is difficult enough for them to learn two types of fastballs and a change up.

There is no quick fix on the road to pitching excellence. It is a step by step journey that entails vigorous conditioning, mental toughness, a throwing program and pitch command. Let us state our position on this subject.

Many Little League pitchers throw breaking pitches and are having success as we speak. Many fathers and coaches don't want them to stop throwing those pitches because of the glory of it all. Let's face it. It is a lot sexier to strike out a young hitter than getting an out by having him put the ball in play and take the chance of a teammate booting the ball.

The art of pitching is a learning process that requires years of diligent and dedicated work. Becoming a successful pitcher requires a whole lot more than just throwing a curve ball to strike out a Little League hitter.

## **WAIT UNTIL 14**

Let a young body develop. Let the soft tissues, muscles and bones grow before you subject them to the stress of the curve ball. Why 14? Many kids reach puberty at 13.

## **WHO TAUGHT YOUR SON THAT CURVE BALL ANYWAY?**

Did another player show your son how to turn his wrist in order to get spin on the ball? Did you read in a book somewhere how to extend the arm and make a karate chop motion? The curve ball is a difficult pitch to throw correctly and requires a lot of time to learn.

A mistake in the mechanics of the pitch can put undue stress on the arm and elbow of your pitcher. When it does become time for your son to learn the pitch, find a qualified instructor to show him. It is very difficult to read about it and put it into practice.

You also want him to learn to throw the ball effectively. As your son goes up the ladder the hitters are better. You want him to learn a curve ball that the hitters can't pick up too soon.

## **FASTBALL COMMAND**

They have to learn fastball command. That is the number one pitch. All others are thrown off the fastball. You can't develop your fastball if you are spending too much time learning a breaking pitch.

There are only so many practice hours in a day and only so many pitches a pitcher can throw in a given bullpen session. The time would be better spent teaching fastball command and different grips on the fastball. Many throw only one, either the 4-seam or the 2-seam. Very few throw both. Command of the 2-seam fastball is a formidable weapon. It gives the hitter a different look. There is a slight change of speed and the pitch has more movement, usually down. Can you think of a better pitch with a runner on first base? Many a double play has been induced by a fastball that moves down. A pitcher's bullpen time would be more productive by learning the 2 fastballs instead of working on a breaking pitch.

## HOW TO USE THE CHANGE UP

Understanding how to use this pitch gives any pitcher an extremely potent weapon. It doesn't matter what grip is used as long as it can be thrown in the strike zone with consistency. The most advantageous use of the change up is to throw it when the pitcher is **behind in the count**. We want to throw it for a strike. In fact, we need to throw it for a strike. By developing the ability to throw the change up for a strike in the fastball counts (2-0, 2-1, 1-0 and sometimes 3-2) the pitcher will record many a ground and fly ball out and keep his game's pitch count down.

A pitcher who has command of his change up can throw it at any time in the count but nothing beats an effective change up when a pitcher is behind. It is a great "get-out-of-trouble" pitch. By throwing the change up on the middle of the plate in these counts the hitter will more than likely swing at the pitch.

To "make" the hitter offer at the change up gives the pitcher a real advantage. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the brain registers location, movement first and **velocity last**. So a change up thrown with fastball arm speed will cause the hitter to offer at the pitch just as if a fastball were approaching. And he will be early with his swing and often hit the ball out on his front foot, taking much of his power away. The result will be a weakly hit ground ball or a routine fly ball.

Another advantage of a change up is that it makes a pitcher's fastball appear even faster. By throwing strikes and changing speeds the hitter's timing will be disrupted. He can't "sit" on any of your pitches.

**DRILLS:** The change up is a developmental pitch and must be thrown often in order to get the 'feel' of "throwing hard and delivering soft." Two good ways to develop the change up are:

1. Throwing change ups to the bagman during batting practice. When pitchers are in the outfield shagging balls have them throw to the bagman using their change up grips. Throwing the pitch for distance makes pitchers use fastball arm speed.
2. During a bullpen session when it's time to work on the change up (throw fastball-change, fastball-change) in that order. This helps the pitcher recognize the importance of keeping the same fastball arm speed and it gives the coach a good way to monitor the difference in speeds between the two pitches as well as judging his arm speed.

The difference in speed between the fastball and change up should be between 10-15 MPH depending on age and pitching distance. The most important component in throwing the change up is **fastball arm speed**. All of your pitches should be thrown from the same arm slot and release point. The hitter is going to swing at what he sees, not at what you throw. If he "sees" a fastball approaching he will speed up his bat to offer at it.

Teaching the change up to young pitchers will deliver positive results this season & for seasons to come. The change up is easy on a young arm. Develop this pitch & postpone the curve until after puberty.

### How Does a pitcher get better?

The first thing any pitcher should do is to evaluate his current situation. If a pitcher is just starting out as a 9-12 year old, then developing good throwing mechanics is the most important thing along with a graduated program of throwing to build up arm strength. If a pitcher has been pitching for a few years then it's important that he evaluates his mechanics. If the pitcher has a strong arm but is having control problems or finds his velocity is below average or is not increasing over time, then more than likely, it's a mechanical problem. The most important things for pitchers to do are: get on a regular routine of working on and constantly evaluating mechanics, get on a weekly throwing program and get into top condition.

#### **A Weekly Throwing Routine ... "HIT THE GLOVE"**

Most pitchers really don't understand how to throw a bullpen, or develop a regular throwing routine. A bullpen really is - **TARGET PRACTICE!** It's about hitting the glove with consistency.

Have pitchers throw two bullpens a week. This keeps a pitcher tuned up by throwing from a mound while allowing him to work on pitch command & mechanics. One bullpen is thrown from regular distance while the other is thrown from a shorter distance. This shorter bullpen doesn't put as much stress on the arm & yet anything that needs work can be accomplished at the shorter distances (even from flat ground). The purpose of a bullpen is to get comfortable with your mechanics, your release point, the feel of your pitches & your mental approach. Every time a pitcher goes into a bullpen, he should do it with a specific goal, like working his fastball on the outside of the plate, keeping the ball down, getting to a good balance position, or getting to a consistent landing position.

Throw Bullpen Pitches In Sets: Throw pitches in sets of 8 (A 3 set bullpen will have 24 pitches). Work hard on keeping everything down. Don't overthrow. Work on mechanics.

### **Tempo**

Based on strength, balance & rhythm, pitching is an art. It takes proper timing, a mechanically sound motion, & strong mental makeup. Tempo refers to the pace at which a pitcher executes this craft using all of the skills mentioned above. An aggressive & consistent tempo helps to maintain the pitcher's focus. It also helps keep the defense on their toes, the catcher fresh, & the fans interested. A pitcher's tempo should be balanced & steady. That helps establish rhythm & keeps the game moving.

When a pitcher's tempo is too slow or deliberate, it affects an entire team's concentration. Fielders are lulled to sleep, falling back on their heels, making them prone to errors. Catchers grow frustrated, outfielders pick grass & managers pace nervously. More importantly, a pitcher's slow tempo causes them to lose focus & rhythm, to think too much. Many pitchers who constantly labor on the mound can benefit from establishing a consistent tempo. For those that can never seem to find a rhythm, remind them to maintain focus on the task at hand. Encourage infielders & even the catcher to execute quick, crisp throws, in an effort to assist the pitcher with his pace.

There are times when breaking tempo is appropriate. During difficult innings, the tendency is to speed up tempo, to the point of being out of control. Mechanics are sacrificed, accuracy falters & bad situations are made worse. These are situations where a pitcher needs to step off of the rubber, take a deep breath & make a conscious effort to get back into a rhythm. Tempo is one of the many intangible ingredients of the pitching motion. While difficult to explain & teach, a steady and aggressive tempo can be the missing link between terrific mechanics in the bullpen & terrific outings in the game.

### **Pitching Mechanics**

Pitching mechanics are considered to be the foundation of pitching. Without solid mechanics pitchers struggle with their control, add additional stress to their arms & never maximize their velocity. Mechanics are simply about moving the body through space using proper timing in a well balanced and controlled manner so that the pitcher lands & gets into a consistent throwing position. Getting to the proper throwing position will be the determining factor in how much power he will be able to generate.

The consistent throwing position is what controls the release point. When you change mechanics you also change a pitcher's release point. Without good mechanics, a pitcher will always struggle with control, never quite understanding why, no matter how many bullpens he throws, he is unable to hit the glove consistently. Remember, just because a pitcher has good control doesn't mean his mechanics are good. Even with poor mechanics, many pitchers are able to locate the ball. However, they sacrifice velocity. With good mechanics, pitchers can maximize their velocity and still locate the ball with consistency.



# BUNTING

## **Teaching The Mentality Of The Sacrifice Bunt-**

From the Little Leagues to the Major Leagues all championship teams bunt, and bunt well. The sacrifice bunt is a great weapon in certain situations & when called upon every player should be able to execute it.

First, teach the mindset of the sacrifice bunt: the player should understand that he is up there to give himself up and not to try for a base hit. It is up to the coach to instill that philosophy in his players. Many young players aren't enthusiastic about the sacrifice bunt because it takes the bat out of their hands and doesn't give them a chance to hit. The coach should explain to his players the concept that baseball is a team game and personal statistics don't come first. It is good ideas to have all the players congratulate the hitter who executes a successful sacrifice bunt. This reinforces team play and demonstrates the importance of the sacrifice.

## **WHY KIDS CAN'T BUNT**

Why do **you** think today's youth players don't seem to bunt? I believe coaches don't see it often enough & maybe assume bunting isn't important enough to teach! Why do I believe this? Because ESPN seldom shows it... evidently thinking the bunt isn't worthy of letting us see it executed properly. Another reason it may not get much TV time is that it is hard to see the devastating effects bunting can have on the defense in a 30 second film clip.

## **The Bigger The Game...The Bigger The Short Game**

Make the 3<sup>rd</sup> baseman handle a bunt in a tight game and watch him throw one over the 1<sup>st</sup> baseman's head and over the fence. Remember, he doesn't have that many opportunities to field bunts... because nobody seems to bunt! Watch what it then does to the pitcher, his coaches and his defense! It's powerful stuff!

## **You've Got to Commit the Flanks**

If the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> basemen play back...why not bunt for a hit! When they move forward, drive the ball past them. Why not take what they give you & take it to their defense!

## **Bunting for a Base Hit**

The team that has a reputation of being able to bunt for a base hit creates more situations for the defense to contend with. This weapon does not have to be an exclusive of the speedsters on the team. Everyone should be able to bunt for a base hit. The judicious use of this skill forces teams to play "in" thereby decreasing their range and increasing the offense's chances for success.

- Consider this bunt when the third baseman is playing back.
- Bunt the ball close to the foul line. If the ball rolls foul there will be another chance to hit.
- Do not bunt back to the pitcher.
- Placement is the most important factor; bunt first and then run.
- Bunting for a base hit should be attempted against pitchers who throw strikes.

Common faults are:

- Running before the ball is bunted.
- Placement of the bat is in foul territory.
- "Showing" bunt too early.
- Improper bat angle.
- Feet in poor position to leave the box.

**Technique for Bunting for a Base Hit (RH Batter bunting down the third base line).**

- The positioning of the hands and bat angle are the same as for a sacrifice bunt.
- As the pitcher releases the ball move the right foot back away from home plate. In the same motion bring the hands forward into the bunting position.
- The bat must be in fair territory.
- The top of the bat should be pointing at the first baseman.
- Bunt the ball down the third base line.
- At contact the hitter should be able to see the ball, the bat and the top hand.
- See the ball in flight and then run.

**Technique for Bunting for a Base Hit (LH Batter bunting down the third base line).**

- As the pitcher releases the ball the weight should be transferred to the front foot. Balance on the right leg. This prevents the back leg from stepping toward first base and pulling off the ball.
- At contact the left foot crosses over.
- The hands come out in front of home plate at the same time weight is transferred to the front leg.
- The knob of the bat should be pointing at the first baseman.
- See the ball in flight, then run.

The Push Bunt- Bunting for a base hit to the right side of the infield. To be successful with this bunt it is imperative to bunt the ball past the pitcher. Situations in which to use the push bunt:

- When the first baseman is playing back.
- A left handed pitcher who falls off towards third base.
- A pitcher who is slow getting off the mound.
- The second baseman playing in the deep position.
- To advance a runner from second to third base.

Technique RH Hitter push bunting to first- When the ball is released the hitter should slide the top hand just below the trademark and try to bunt the ball on the sweet spot. The hands should be kept in close to the body so that at contact, the hitter can push the bat at the ball in the direction of second base. The feet should be in stride and the bat should have the proper bunting angle.

Technique LH Hitter push bunting to first- When the ball is released the hitter slides the top hand just below the trademark. The weight transfers to the front foot. The hitter should try to bunt the ball on the sweet spot. The hands should be kept in close to the body so that at contact, the hitter can push the bat at the ball in the direction of second base. The bat should have the proper bunting angle.

**When To “Show” Bunt when executing a sacrifice bunt.** We see many youth teams (and high school age) as well; reveal their bunt intentions too late. This prevents the batter from controlling the placement of the bunt or making the attempt unsuccessful altogether. Teams should strive toward making a successful bunt attempt on the first try at least 85% of the time. When a coach calls for a sacrifice bunt he wants it done, right then. (Bunt strikes only) He doesn't want a foul ball or missed attempt. The sacrifice bunt is not a secret. It does no harm to reveal your intentions to the defense.

When to show bunt? The batter should assume his bunting stance after the pitcher gets his sign and when he comes set. This allows plenty of time to execute a controlled sacrifice bunt. By controlled we mean down one of the lines and not at the pitcher.

## **The Little League Contact Play**

Youth league teams that cannot lead off, such as LL, cannot squeeze bunt. But they can execute a “Contact Play” that can be very effective.

The situation: usually in the later innings with the game close, tied or your team up by a run. Your team has a runner on third base and less than two outs. This play is a low-risk play designed to consistently score that runner. (It works best against a defense that does not crash its first baseman and with a RH pitcher on the mound.) The play is a bunt along the first base line, hard enough so that it reaches, or goes past the mound area, relatively close to the foul line.

Bunt early in the count, first pitch if the pitcher consistently throws a first pitch strike. When the pitch is bunted, the base runner at third “reads” the ball off the bat. If the angle is down, he sprints home; no waiting for the coach to yell “go, go.” It is the base runner’s responsibility to execute the play correctly. There should be no hesitation if the ball is bunted “down” off the bat and in the proper area of the infield.

The batter should not show bunt too early. He must not bunt along the third base line because the third baseman will be crashing. He must not bunt the ball directly back at the pitcher, and ideally you want the pitcher to field the ball near the first base line. A RH pitcher cannot stop, field the ball, turn all the way back around toward the plate and make a good throw to retire the runner. (To bunt down the first base line, hold the bat level and point the knob at third base. Bunt the top half of the ball. Move up in the box to cut down on foul balls.)

To be successful, teams must practice this play. Include this in Situational Offensive Batting Practice

# BASE RUNNING

**Base Running Tips** - Good base running is just for fast guys, right? Wrong. You do not have to possess great speed to be a good base runner. Good base running comes under the category of paying attention to details. Many games are won and lost on the base paths. Speed is nice but not a mandatory talent for competent base running. A good base runner should know his limitations and should be aggressive within those limits. He should exercise good judgment and keep foolish mistakes to minimum. Base runners should know the game situation and what their run represents. They should not be satisfied with one base and should always think a base ahead. A base runner should be aware while he is on base, of game-related details:

- How many outs?
- Is there a runner ahead of me?
- Where are the outfielders? (Cue: "Find the outfielders.")
- Where are the infielders? (Playing in, double play depth, standard positioning.)
- What is the score?
- What kind of move does the pitcher have?
- Is the infield dirt hard or soft?
- Does the pitcher have a tendency to throw his curve in the dirt? (Cue: "Read the ball in the dirt.")
- Does this team use special or trick defensive plays?
- Did the coach give me a sign?
- Does their catcher have a good arm and is he accurate?

Practice your leads, sliding, rounding bases, taking the extra base, hit and runs, stealing, 2 out leads, breaking up a double play and diving back to bases. Don't underestimate the importance of good base running.

**Bobble Drill:** Line up your players at home and hit balls to the outfield. They should glance at the ball 2-3 times and banana out to take their turn. If the ball bounces off or gets by an out fielder they should never break stride as they take 2b.

## **TAGGING UP (WHICH WAY TO FACE)**

Not only should the tagging base runner watch the ball hit the outfielders glove, but coaches should teach them the proper way to face depending on which outfielder makes the catch.

**At third base** the runner should have his left foot on the bag, his right foot on the line and face the catch. In this manner he will not get turned around. He will have the entire play in front of him.

**At second base** the runner should tag up facing the left field fence on fly balls to left and center. He should face the 1b dugout on fly balls to right field. (Remind your players that they must really "bust it" to get back to their base when a fly ball is hit.)

The runner at **first base** should rarely tag. Instead he should advance as far as he can and still be able to get back after the ball is caught. The only situation might be an obvious foul ball deep down the right field line.

All tagging base runners should watch the ball be caught, turn and start toward the next base. If the 3b coach wants him to stay he should throw up both hands and yell, "back", "stop", "freeze" or any word that doesn't end in "o".

**Tips for the Runner at First Base-** A few Advanced Tips for the base runner at first.

- Shuffle to your secondary lead. Make your first two steps back to the base **HARD**. Don't hang in the baseline and give the catcher a chance to pick you off.  
When returning to first keep your eyes on the catcher and your ears on the coach.
- Break up the double play- With less than two outs go **directly** into the base. Low and hard. You must slide feet first & directly into the base.
- Read the ball in the dirt- Follow the ball out of the pitcher's hand and read the "down" pitch. If you have an aggressive secondary lead you will be able to advance on many balls in the dirt that are not directly in front of the catcher.
- Ground ball in the hole at Short Stop- As you approach the bag do not start your turn (arc) in front of second base too early. Go hard and straight into the bag until you see the ball go into the outfield. If you begin your arc too early and the SS fields the ball you will be an easy out at second.

**The Base Runner at Second Base** The runner at second is in scoring position and has the responsibility of maintaining a high level of concentration at all times and must know the situations.

- **Check the positioning** of the outfielders.
- **When the ball is at the catcher** take your secondary lead and keep your shoulders squared to the infield. Read the location of the pitch. Read the ball in the dirt. If the ball is bunted, don't assume a good bunt; read the down angle off the bat. (Don't make the first or third out at third base.)
- **When the ball is hit on the ground** -ground ball to the runner's left, go to third base. (Make sure the ball gets by the pitcher.)
- **Slow roller** in front of him, go to third.
- **Ground ball at Shortstop** or to his right, stay at second base.
- **If the ball is hit to the third baseman** as a slow roller or bunt on the grass, go to third.
- **Ground ball in the baseline** between second and third, stay at second.
- **Ground ball behind the base** that will take the third baseman away from the base, go to third.
- **With two outs** Go at the crack of the bat. (don't run into the out at third-make him throw the ball.)
- **With two outs and two strikes** Make your break once the hitter starts his bat **downward** into the contact zone. Three things will happen on the pitch; 1. The ball will be put into play. 2. The hitter will foul it off. 3. Hitter will swing through the pitch for strike three and the third out.

## **RUNDOWNS**

This infield defensive skill may not occur in every game but it happens enough so that your team should become proficient at it. Your defense should take on the attitude that they will get the out every time a runner is caught in a rundown. The offense made a mistake & you will record an out every time.

### **DON'TS:**

- Don't make faking motions with the ball. You may fake out your teammate.
- Don't jog toward the runner. Run at him at controlled speed. Make him commit to the next base.
- Don't circle back after a throw. Step out of the baseline on your right hand side.
- Don't hang around in the baseline after a throw. If a runner runs into you without the ball you may be called for obstruction and the runner will be awarded the next base.
- Don't throw over the runner. Throw to your teammate's glove side.
- Don't take too many throws to execute the rundown. The more throws; the more chance for error. The ideal rundown occurs with only one throw.

**RUNDOWNS - HOW:** The basics for a successful rundown are:

- Run full speed (under control) at the runner. Don't hesitate. Get the runner going full speed at a base. You want the runner to commit.
- The off infielder **MUST** close on the advancing runner. **This is the key to a successful rundown.** By closing, both infielders will cut down on the runner's distance and limit his ability to maneuver. The idea is for the closing infielder to receive the ball at the opportune time and make the tag. If the infielder does not close the runner will be able to maneuver and multiple throws will occur, increasing the chances for error.
- The ball is held shoulder-high in an 'L' and tossed from that position.
- The ball must be thrown at the right time. By closing on the runner the infielder puts himself in an optimum position. He then (and this timing is the part that should be concentrated on at practice) calls, "BALL, BALL!" He receives the ball from his teammate and makes the tag on the runner. He should call for the ball when the runner is very close to him. He may even make the tag as the runner is going by him, trying to get to the base. The timing is crucial. Do it over and over until everyone is comfortable with it.
- The thrower must peel off to his **right** and back up the player he just threw the ball to.
- The infielder makes a one-hand catch and tags with one hand. No 'two hands' here. (We have always reminded you there are many plays that a defensive player must make by catching the ball with the glove only. This is another one. Why not do away with, "Catch the ball with two hands!" That is not effective coaching.)

If the runner is hung up he will hesitate, waiting for the defense to make a move.

- The infielder with the ball runs at the runner, forcing him toward the next base. It does not matter which base that is. Do not think that it is always correct to run the runner back toward the base he came from. The rundown does not always happen that way.
- The off infielder(s) "closes" toward the advancing runner, receives the ball at the right time and makes the tag.

It is important for the pitchers to get involved in rundowns as well. So you can practice 'comebackers' to the pitcher with a runner at third base. The runner goes halfway on contact and freezes in the baseline. Again you have two skills; comebackers and rundowns.

- The pitcher fields the ball and sees the runner stopped in the third base line.
- He runs full speed (under control) directly at the runner, forcing him to make a decision about which direction to run. Sometimes the runner will hesitate too long and the pitcher may get close enough to the runner to make the tag himself, without a throw.
- Once the runner commits to a base and the pitcher cannot tag him he throws to the base and follows his throw to cover.
- Then the rundown becomes routine. The off infielder closes, receives the ball and makes the tag.

# INFIELD

## SET AND READY POSITIONS

This skill is often not taught correctly at the youth level. The most common mistake is that the infielders assume the Ready position too early.

**Set and Ready Positions-** There are 2 positions an infielder assumes prior to every pitch; the “Set” and “Ready” positions. The Set position is a pre-pitch position. The fielder takes this time to prepare his mind and body to anticipate the next pitch. The fielder assumes the Ready position just as the ball is pitched. That is a position of total focus as the ball enters the strike zone and it is held for only an instant. It is important to note that he must carry out these movements before every pitch, not just once in a while. The game of baseball is played “One pitch at a time”, not one out at a time and not one inning at a time.” One pitch at a time.”

In the ‘Set’ position the fielder stands with feet slightly wider than shoulder-width apart so that he is balanced. He turns his toes out slightly so that he may be quicker if he must make a lateral move. He drops his right foot back slightly to make it easier to move to his backhand side. (You can teach right toe even with left heel.) His weight is on the balls of his feet with the knees bent, his back is straight and his head is up analyzing the situation on the field and his glove is out in front of his chest, opened, with the arm slightly bent.

When the pitcher releases the pitch the fielder assumes the ‘Ready’ position. The differences are small but important to gently put the fielder in motion and “ready” him for a ball hit near him. By gently putting his body in motion, he transfers his weight slightly forward as he bends his knees more and brings his glove out front and below stomach level. (Positioning the glove out in front of the body helps the infielder lower his center of gravity.) The fielder needs to keep this motion “quiet”. He does not want to exaggerate this (to show everyone he is ready). This creates unnecessary tension/restrictive body movement and slows “first step quickness”.

Our ‘teach’ for the Ready position is **“One step and down.”** (Right foot left foot-the left foot lands as the ball is entering the hitting zone.) Take the first step with the right foot as the pitcher’s arm starts forward. It is common for young infielders to assume the ready position too early. Another common mistake is to straighten up as the ball is hit to them. They must learn to stay low.

**The Mental Side:** (Baseball is a game of inches) As the fielder assumes the ‘set’ position he must concentrate on the situation. He must be aware of how to play every type of ball and what to do with it if it is hit to him. His mind acts like a computer as he quickly evaluates the circumstances: how many runners on base, how many outs, who is the fastest runner, is my pitcher throwing hard, is he tired, what is the inning and the score, is the grass wet or dry (The ball will act in a different way. It will skid on wet grass.), is the infield fast or slow, where do I go if the ball is not hit to me?

Initially this appears to be an overwhelming task, but the more a player plays the game the easier it becomes. The middle infielders are able to see the catcher’s pitch selection and location. This information allows them to “cheat” or shade slightly in one direction or the other. (Not too much- a step or 2 only.) As the pitch is delivered he assumes the “ready” position. His thinking process should be: “The ball is going to be hit to me. I want the ball to be hit to me.” He must play this little game in his head before every pitch. (Between 75 and 100 times a game) If he does not, Murphy’s Baseball Law will be evoked. “If you are not “ready” or if you are not paying attention, the ball will be hit to you.”

## PITCHERS-BACK UP BASES

Teach your pitchers to back up a base on all plays. There is no play in baseball where players should be standing around after a base hit. You have to reinforce this because sometimes a pitcher will hang his head when he gives up a hit and he won't hustle to the spot where he should be.

The proper position for a play at home plate is behind the plate, as deep as possible and directly in line with the throw. Use the third and first basemen for cutoffs on throws to the plate. Their position is on the infield grass in line with the throw and the catcher. If a ball is hit to the left field, the third baseman is the cutoff man. The first baseman is the cutoff on all other throws to the plate.

The exception is when there is a runner on first base and a ball is hit deep in the left/right-centerfield gap. The middle infielders go out to form a double relay and the third baseman must stay at home to cover his base. The first baseman becomes the cutoff.

Here are a pitcher's responsibilities for backing up bases:

- Single to left or center field with no one on base- backs up second base in direct line with outfield throw.
- Single to right field with no one on base- a pitcher's first reaction should be to hustle to first base in case of a play there.
- Single to the outfield with a runner on first base- backs up third base in line with the throw from the outfield, as deeply as possible. The SS is the cutoff man in this situation. He will be stationed approximately 60 feet from third base in line with the throw.
- Single to the outfield with a runner on second base and trying to score- backs up home in direct line with the throw.
- All extra base hits with no one on base backs up the base where ball will be thrown.
- Extra base hit with a runner on first base- becomes a floater. The pitcher should hustle to a spot halfway between third and home and then hustles to back up the base where the ball will be thrown. This play should be drilled in practice. It takes some timing and skill.

Pitchers should always hustle with controlled speed to their backup positions (Being under control helps you to react at the proper time.) They should get as deep behind the base as they can and still be in line with the throw. If they are too close to the base, the overthrow will get by them too. Remember on the big fields the dugouts are open (no fence) and when a ball goes into it, the runner(s) get an extra base. The pitcher must do everything in his power to prevent this.

Pitchers should get out of the infield on all possible plays at the plate. Otherwise they are clogging things up. Teach them to go where they are supposed to go. Proper back ups by the pitching staff will save you a run or two in the course of a season. These are some more of the 'little things' that win close games.

Several years ago, the Little League World Series ended when the pitcher cut a throw to the plate from the left fielder while standing 10 feet IN FRONT OF THE CATCHER. Under pressure, a pitcher (and all players) will instinctively do what they have practiced.

Little League coaches, have your pitchers go the correct position after a base hit with a runner on second. I know many coaches use their pitchers as the cut-off, but that's not the correct way to teach the game. Forget the fact that most Little League pitchers are the best athletes on the field. Teach them the game the way it is supposed to be played and get your other players involved. These skills are just as important as proper throwing mechanics and pick off moves. They define a total pitcher.



## 1ST BASE PLAY

PITCHER COVERING 1<sup>ST</sup>-The first baseman should try for all balls hit to his right. The instant the ball is hit in that area the pitcher breaks for the bag. Here are some points for the first baseman to keep in mind:

- If the first baseman determines he can beat the runner he should make the unassisted putout.
- He should put the ball in his bare hand because the ball is ready to be tossed to the pitcher.
- Make the underhand shovel toss: keep your body low, elbow in and palm up, wrist stiff, ball in full view for the pitcher, don't stand up when you toss the ball, walk behind the ball after release and time the throw so the pitcher catches the ball chest high before reaching the bag.
- If you field the ball too far away from the bag, pivot and make a strong  $\frac{3}{4}$  throw to the pitcher.
- Communicate with the pitcher and practice, practice, practice.

## FIELDING BUNTS (1<sup>ST</sup> BASE)

The 'read' for the fielders is the hitter's bat. If the bat comes off his shoulder, he will be bunting. He sure can't hit that way. The first baseman should take a banana route in order to gain momentum for the throw. If the ball is rolling, scoop it up with two hands. If it has stopped, pick it up with one hand. Keep your chest over the ball, 'squish it into the ground' and pick it up. There are two common mistakes here. The first baseman looks at the runner and fumbles the ball. Also when he picks it up barehanded there is a tendency to put the ball back in the glove before throwing it. NO. NO. NO. As a matter of philosophy, we teach our players to get the out at first in almost all situations. We feel the other team has given us an out and we will take it. This eliminates bad throws to second and third base, which can have disastrous consequences. This is especially a good idea in youth baseball where bad throws and decisions and a lack of communication are common.

## DOUBLE PLAY THROWS TO SECOND (1<sup>ST</sup> BASE)

This is a very difficult play for the first baseman. He must field the ball cleanly, make a good throw to the shortstop covering second & retreat to the bag to receive the return throw. If the first baseman is a left-hander the play is easier. If he is right handed, he makes a quick jump pivot to get his shoulder closed to second. We practice the backhand play a lot with our right hand first basemen. If he backhands the ball, the throw is quicker. If the runner is in line with your throw you will have to move away from the base path. The middle infielder can help you here by positioning himself on the proper side of the base.

## CUTOFFS (1<sup>ST</sup> BASE)

With a runner on second base and a base hit to the outfield the first baseman is the cutoff on all balls hit to the left of the shortstop. He should quickly position himself in line between the catcher and outfielder about 60' from the plate. Here is another idea that is not mainstream. Our teams don't use a lot of 'cut this cut that' stuff. Cut 2, cut 3, cut 4, and cut-hold. We allow our first baseman to let most balls go through to the catcher unless the ball is off line. Then if the catcher has a play at the plate he calls "relay, relay."

## EXTRA BASE HITS (1<sup>ST</sup> BASE)

On balls hit deep to the outfield where the middle infielders execute a double relay, the first baseman 'trails' the batter/runner. He follows him into second base and is ready to take a throw if the runner strays too far off the bag. Another one of those little things: on all extra base hits the first baseman looks to make sure the batter/runner touches first base as he rounds the bag.

**Pitchers Fielding their Position. "Get Over There!"** On all ground balls to the right side of the infield, pitchers should get to the bag in order to take the throw at first base. LL or regulation field, this should be practiced until it becomes second nature.

After the pitch and immediately after a ground ball is hit to the pitcher's left he should sprint with controlled speed directly to the first base bag. He takes the throw (catch the ball with one hand), steps on the inside of the bag, immediately bounces off and looks into the infield (for a runner that may be trying to advance.) He does not run through the bag and into foul territory because that will leave him vulnerable to injury from the runner. (The runner will be running full speed through the bag. You don't want him running up his back.) If the pitcher beats the throw to the bag, he should then await the throw and play it like a first baseman.

The pitcher covering first base allows the first baseman to extend his range to his right. This allows him to play back and off the line thus covering more territory. In turn, this allows the second baseman to play more to his right. More ground ball outs are recorded this way. On all ground balls to the right side, the catcher should yell, "Get over there!" a reminder to the pitcher.

**Infielder's Shovel Toss** - There are several instances where the underhand shovel toss is the proper throw for an infielder. The first baseman shovels the ball to the pitcher covering first base. The middle infielders use the underhand toss for close plays around second base.

- As the fielder fields the ball he doesn't stand straight up but keeps his knees bent.
- His palm is up and his wrist is firm with his elbow in.
- His glove hand is by his side so as not "hide" the ball from the player who will catch it. He "shows" the ball to his partner to give him time to track the ball.
- He steps with his left foot and releases the ball with a firm throw at the teammate's chest. He keeps his knees bent as he releases the ball and "walks behind" the ball to insure accuracy.
- He should not stand up because the ball will have a tendency to sail. Stay low.

You can drill this play by lining up the infielders at shortstop and hitting sharp ground balls to them. They field the ball and shovel toss the ball to a player at second base. For first basemen this is also a part of Pitchers Fielding Practice. If this skill is not taught, the tendency is for the players to stand up as they underhand the ball. Drill it several times.

**The Shortstop's Feed on the Double Play**- there are two ways the shortstop feeds the second baseman on routine ground balls.

1. If the ball is at him or slightly to his right, he assumes a normal fielding position with the exception he opens up his hips by dropping his left leg back further. As he fields the ball, he transfers it to his throwing hand without standing up. He makes a  $\frac{3}{4}$  throw from that crouched position, chest-high over the bag.

2. If the ball is hit to the shortstop's left, he fields the ball on the move and makes an underhand shovel toss to the second baseman. Again, he does not stand up because the ball will have a tendency to sail. He makes the shovel toss with a firm wrist and "walks behind the ball" after release. The shortstop should make sure he does not "hide the ball" from his pivot man. (Clear the glove out of the way.) By fielding these two types of ground balls the same way every time, the second baseman knows where the ball is coming from, every time- no surprises.

**The Second Baseman's Feed on the Double Play**-there are two feeds your second baseman should be able to execute routinely.

1. Ground balls hit at him or slightly to his left- If the ball is at him or slightly to his left, he assumes his fielding position and opens up his right side by dropping his right foot back slightly. This opens his hips to the base. (This is a slightly exaggerated normal fielding position and it is an easier move than the shortstop must make.) By opening up before the ball arrives he makes one less move, taking less time with his feed. As he quickly fields the ball he stays low and makes a  $\frac{3}{4}$ , (not side-arm or underhand-elbow up please) throw to the shortstop coming across the bag. (He must not stand up- wasted time.) He makes every attempt to feed the ball chest high and over the bag. (To the outfield side of the bag)

2. Ground balls hit to his right- This is a move that must be practiced often as it is difficult at first. For ground balls hit to the second baseman's right, he smoothly moves to the ball, staying low, fields it and feeds the shortstop with an underhand toss. This toss is different than the shortstop's feed. The second baseman moves, under control, fields the ball and feeds the shortstop with his thumb down and his palm facing the shortstop. He then, with a stiff wrist, extends his arm and allows the ball to travel to the bag. He must continue to stay low (He cannot stand up) and he must follow the ball for a step or two. This is smooth with no herky-jerky movements. The second baseman also wants to "show the ball to the shortstop". In other words don't hide it, get the glove out of the way. This feed produces an easy-to-handle ball.

**"Roll a Pair." Common Double Play Mistakes**- There are a few common mistakes young players make on ground balls with a runner on first base. For the purpose of this Tip, we'll stick to routine ground balls.

1. The middle infielders play too far away from the bag with a runner on first base. Double play positioning is based on the fact that in order to gain something (the double play) you have to give up something. (Range) Double play depth is usually 2 steps in and 2 steps over from your normal position.

2. They often play too shallow. Especially on youth fields you see the middle infielders play even with the bag or amazingly, sometimes on the grass. That will effectively take them out of position to turn the double play. (Youth field play 4 steps over and 4-5 back.)

3. They charge a routine ground ball. This is usually due to not knowing the speed of the game. By charging a routine ground ball they take themselves out of the play, past the bag. Many try to rush things instead of letting the play unfold.

4. The pivot man holds his hands too far apart to receive the ball. The hands should be chest-high and close together, thumb-to-thumb. Every millisecond counts and having to catch with one hand, reach across the body with the other and take the ball out of the glove and back to the throwing position takes too much time.

5. Poor footwork. This often involves a crow-hop. There is no time for a crow hop. For every extra step the infielder takes, the sprinting base runner has taken several.

6. Hiding the ball- the middle infielder that feeds the pivot man holds his glove in such a position that it blocks the view of the ball, making an ordinary catch difficult. Defensive players have to learn that the speed of the game dictates how a play develops- what they can and cannot do on any given play. The way to learn this is to play and lot of baseball games and have a coach that understands and teaches good technique.

**STAY DOWN!** - This is an advanced Tip for infielders. Whenever a ground ball is hit to an infielder it is the responsibility of another infielder to tell him to **STAY DOWN!** The third baseman communicates to the SS, second baseman and first baseman. The second baseman communicates to the third baseman. Immediately upon a ground ball being hit, the designated infielder says, “STAY DOWN!”

## ONE-HAND CHARGING PLAYS

There are two charging plays. One is “gloved” and the other is “bare handed”. Both are “one handed” plays that add an extra dimension to a fielder and a team. Both are considered “do or die” plays, in that the fielder could not get the runner out at 1b if he waits on the ball. He must charge it and throw on the run to help his team. Both plays can be taught to youth players.

The Slow Roller is performed on slow ground balls that get past the pitcher. This skill is necessary because infielders set up deeper to increase their “side to side” & “short outfield” range. The 5 steps are:

1. Run full speed directly through the ball Take a banana route if the ball is hit at you or to your right. Pump arms and run on balls of feet in order to keep eyes level.
2. Get under control when approaching the ball. Infielders catch the ball directly in front of the LEFT toes by attacking the ball with an open glove in an upward and outward fashion.
3. Transfer ball from glove to throwing hand and get a 4 seam grip (while continuing through the ball).
4. Throw hard, coming from underneath and off of the RIGHT foot. Do not be concerned by high arc. (Because of the timing you do not have the time to throw from a high  $\frac{3}{4}$  arm slot. You field the ball off your left toes, transfer it to your throwing hand and when the right foot plants you must throw.)
5. Continue through the ball (do not follow the throw).

The barehanded charging play is used on slow rollers or on balls that have stopped. The 6 steps are:

1. Run full speed directly through the ball.
2. Pump arms and run on balls of feet to keep eyes level.
3. Slow or brake down when approaching the ball. RH fielders scoop ball from outside the RIGHT foot. This is made easier by bending at waist and tilting shoulders.
4. There is no time to gain a 4 seam grip.
5. The throw is made off of the right foot from “underneath”. The arm slot should be at a low  $\frac{3}{4}$  angle. The arm action is lift the ball WHILE the throwing elbow bends and points directly away from the throwing target, and then quickly points to the target, then throw.
6. Continue through the ball (do not follow throw).

Note: The right fielder (and 2b when available) should be breaking to back up 1b as soon as the infielder begins charging the ball.

We teach our infielders to “get to it and get rid of it” as fast as they can because no one can out run the thrown ball. As a result, we work equally as hard teaching our infielders to stretch and pick, block and/or leave the bag to field bad throws. Likewise we teach our outfielders to anticipate these at every base.

One handed charging plays are skills that will help separate infielders from outfielders in the future. They help players with other skills from double play feeds to run downs. At the highest level players that make these plays fluidly are referred to as acrobatic or being able to dominate a game with his glove.

Drills for gloved charging play: Set up 3 cones (or baseballs) along the edge of the infield grass (one near 2b, one at SS, and the other between 3b and SS). Put everyone at deep short (edge of grass) and hand them a ball. Have them take a 4 seam grip and begin running full speed to a cone. When they pass it they should throw to 1b with a low  $\frac{3}{4}$  arm slot and off of their right foot (on the dead run).

Then repeat the process having them run with the ball in the pocket of their glove. When they pass the cone they reach in and gains a 4 seam grip, then throw properly. Then repeat the process by tossing them a ball before they arrive at the cone. Finally, repeat the process by hitting soft fungoes from home plate.

Drills for the bare hand charging play: Lay 3 balls in the grass between the mound and the 3b foul line. Have each player line up and trot half speed (using proper running technique) directly to the ball. As they bend their waist they should tilt their shoulders, pick up ball off the outside of the right foot, throw and continue coming through the ball (toward home plate). Then they should repeat the process at  $\frac{3}{4}$  speed and finally at full speed. Reward players that do it right by allowing them an extra turn.

Do not rush them to learning the entire play during one afternoon. Take it in steps. Thoroughly teach what, how and why! Get them comfortable with the throws first and the entire play will become easier. After a while they will think "I can do this". They will notice their favorite MLB player making the same plays on television. Every time your team meets you should fungo these to your player along with routine plays and back hands.

Note: do not hit slow rollers during Batting Practice. You do not want players charging into the batter.

**Tips for Coaching Infielders-**Here are a few tips for coaches as they move forward into the season.

- Count The Hops- When hitting fungoes have your infielders count the hops as the ball approaches. This forces them to concentrate on the ball. Count the hops silently & yell the number to the coach
- Hit ground balls during Batting Practice. A wonderful time saver and you will find your infielders get many more ground balls this way.
- When you hit ground balls to your players hit routine fungoes, not hard smashes. It is important they work on technique and not have to develop fear of ground ball fungoes.
- Look at the brim of their cap as they field the ball. It should be pointing at the ground as the ball enters their glove. If not, they can easily lose sight of the ball.

**Defensive Tips With A Runner On Base- (When there is a base hit) Keep it simple!**

1. As long as the outfielder keeps the ball in front of him, it is considered and played as a single.
2. If the outfielder has to turn his back to get the ball, you have an extra base hit and the relay man should run toward him until the outfielder picks the ball up; usually 20 feet or so into the outfield.
3. It is vital that when a ball is thrown to a base that the infielder keep the ball from traveling any further. Do whatever it takes to prevent this. Block the ball like a catcher; block it with his body, whatever it takes if the ball short hops him.
4. Throw through the cutoff man, head-high.
5. When balls are hit deep to the gaps, use the two middle infielders as tandem relay men.

Relay men are middle infielders that go into the outfield to catch balls thrown by an outfielder. Relay men are not needed on singles. Cutoff men are the two corners, first and third base that set up approximately 60 feet from home or the SS who sets up 60 feet from third base on a throw from the outfield.

*Fielding Comebackers* - With a runner on first base and less than two outs there is a specific technique for fielding ground balls hit back to the pitcher. Before the pitch, the pitcher should designate which infielder will take the throw; usually the SS. Have the pitcher, before he toes the rubber, point to the SS and say "Got you on the comebacker." This eliminates any potential confusion. The middle infielders are at double-play depth. On a ground ball hit directly to the pitcher, he should drop his glove-side foot and field the ball with his glove-side shoulder closed to second base. This will significantly cut down on the time needed to make a good strong throw to second base. As he fields the ball he will be in a position to make a chest high throw over the middle of the bag.

# OUTFIELD

**OUTFIELD COMMUNICATION** is a vital part of the game. Constant talk between outfielders will keep them in the game individually and collectively. It is essential for sound fundamental defensive play. Outfielders should let each other know:

- if they are going to shift.
- the depth they are going to play.
- The area where the hitter is most likely to hit.
- Where to throw the ball if it comes to the outfield.
- They should remind each other: the inning, the number of outs, the score and the speed of the base runner.

They should help each other by talking. They should call for the ball loud and clear “mine, mine” or “ball, ball.” They should call for the ball at the apex of its flight. Calling off too soon is just as bad as not calling at all. We don’t have the off- outfielder say, “take it.” We feel that may cause the player catching the ball to lose concentration. Just a simple, “mine, mine” is all that is necessary.

The off fielder should be his “eyes” as he is making the catch. See what the runners are doing and tell him- “half way or tagging up.” Remind him to hit the cutoff. Tell him where to throw after the catch, second, third or home.

Outfielders should understand that the centerfielder has priority over the other two outfielders. If he calls, let him take it.

**Outfielders Fielding Ground Balls-** there is a specific technique for outfielders fielding ground balls on the run. This technique is necessary when there is a do-or-die play or the outfielder is attempting to prevent the base runner from advancing.

The outfielder should field the ball on the outside of his left foot (Right Hand Player) The ball should enter his glove and his left foot should hit the ground at the same time.

Using this method he will not have to break stride. And fielding the ball on the outside of his foot allows his arm to come through a full throwing arc.

Be patient with young players. This is a very athletic play but it should be taught and practiced. This is another one of those great coaching opportunities where a player may take a month or two or even a year or more to perfect a skill. The satisfaction comes when the look in his eyes says, “I can do this, coach.”

**Outfield Tips-** When playing at an unfamiliar diamond for the first time it is a good idea to walk the entire outfield looking for things that might affect ground balls, holes or other potential surprises. Arrive early and do this before your stretch, form run and throw routine.

**Outfield Mentality-** Instill in your outfielders the mentality that everything hit into the air will be caught. Teach them how to read the ball off the bat and work hard on instilling a desire to succeed and giving 100% effort.

**TRACKING FLY BALLS** -Good outfield play is essential for a winning team. A team should develop the mentality that every ball hit in the air is going to be caught. At the youth & occasionally high school levels good outfield play is often sporadic because of lack of teaching, repetitions, & motivation.

One of the most important skills an outfielder must possess is tracking a fly ball. *Tracking the ball simply means taking the most direct route to where the ball will land.* It is very common for inexperienced outfielders to take the wrong route to a fly ball. This may be one of the reasons youth players don't like to play the outfield. They are out there all alone and not only are any mistakes very conspicuous; they are often costly as well. Every "zig-zagged" step (route) an outfielder takes to the ball is equal to the "direct" steps a base runner(s) takes to the next base. That's a lot of pressure.

Most teams do not hit enough fly ball fungoes to their outfielders and this is one of the essential ingredients for gaining 'tracking' experience. The following are some extra tips and drills for you to use to help players develop this critical skill.

- Make sure your outfielders are running on the balls of their feet. If they run on their heels the ball will appear to "bounce" and they will not track it well. Daily Form Running helps players with their running technique.
- Teach them that the glove is considered as part of their hand. They pump their arms and do not hold the glove out in front of them as they run. (This restricts the body and slows you down) Put the glove up the last three steps only.
- Getting a good 'jump' on the ball- this is where a player must concentrate. To get a good jump he must be moving at the swing of the bat. Look for a late reaction from a player. Many times they don't move toward the ball until it is already in the air and sometimes by them. Kids must learn to concentrate on the strike zone. Have them play a game in their heads. They should pretend that the hitter is a fungo coach and every pitched ball is a fungo that is going to be hit at them. ("The game is played one pitch at a time.")
- Teach them to watch the action of the hitter's bat. This is a good teaching tool. Have your players stand in front of home plate on the infield. Take a position in the RH batter's box.
  1. 'Hit' an imaginary ball up the middle. Have your kids concentrate on the action of the bat. Ask them where the 'ball' went. They will tell you, up the middle.
  2. Next pull an imaginary pitch. Your kids will tell you that you hit the ball to left field.
  3. Lastly, hit an outside pitch to the opposite field. Your players will know where the ball went.

By watching the action of the bat & reading the hitter's body, players can learn to get a good jump on the ball.

- Do not allow backpedaling. Teach the drop step, instead. Have your players drop the leg closest to the side the ball is on. If the ball is hit to their left, drop step with the left leg, turn & go to the ball.
- Hit deep and high fly balls. Have the outfielders turn and run to the spot where they think the ball will land. Don't look up until they get there; just turn and run to the spot.
- Teach your players shagging in the outfield during Batting Practice to "Break" on all fly balls. They should concentrate on the hitting zone, watch the ball off the bat and "break" two or three steps in the direction of the flight of the ball. Establishing this routine during your daily BP will begin to develop your players' ability to track the ball.
- On the big fields, it is also important for the outfielder to understand and read the spin (or slice/hook) of the ball. Example: A center fielder needs to know that a line drive directly between him and the right fielder will be slicing toward the right fielder off the bat of a right handed batter, and toward him off the bat of a left handed batter.

**THROWING THE BALL TO THE INFIELD**-Here are the details an outfielder should keep in mind when he throws the baseball back to the infield.

- Needs the ability to get rid of the ball as soon as possible. Don't hold the ball for any reason.
- Should throw the ball overhand. Slinging the ball causes accuracy problems. No side arming.
- Hold the ball across the seams when throwing, fingers spread slightly apart and thumb underneath. This provides increased accuracy and carry. (4-seam grip.)
- When throwing to a base or home, the backspin created by the overhand grip will put good "skip" on the ball if it hits the ground.
- Keep the throws down. All throws should be chest or head high.
- Hit the cut-off man. (Actually through hard enough to throw through the cutoff man.)
- Develop arm strength by throwing long in practice.
- Practice good arm care.

**THE BASICS- OUTFIELD SKILLS** -If a coach is going to have a team that can compete he needs outfielders who can play their positions. There are nine skills they need to learn & practice.

1. **Track the ball.** This is the number one skill and it is a difficult one. There are some players who just can't become proficient at this skill. Always look for tracking ability when evaluating outfielders. Teach them to run to the point where the ball will come down. Don't go straight across and then in or back. This is what we mean when we say "Track" the ball. All good outfielders have this ability. If you turn the wrong way going back on a ball, don't turn back toward the ball to make an adjustment. Turn your back on the ball and without breaking stride make the adjustment (turn your head the other way) and pick the ball up again. When this type of play occurs, you will have to catch the fly ball backhanded.

2. **The Grip.** Hold the ball across the seams when throwing, fingers spread slightly apart & thumb underneath. This provides increased accuracy & carry. Always use a 4-seam grip. When throwing to a base or home, backspin created by the overhand grip will put good "skip" on the ball if it hits the ground.

3. **Running Technique-** Good running technique will help your outfielders become better at chasing down fly balls. You see many young outfielders running after a fly ball with their glove up in a premature catch position. That will slow him down. Consider that the glove should be thought of as a part of the hand and run with a natural pumping motion of the arms. Put the glove up to catch the ball the Last Three Steps only. Run on the balls of the feet. If a player runs on his heels the ball will appear to bounce up and down as he runs.

4. **Fielding Ground Balls on the Run-** there is a specific technique for fielding ground balls on the run. This technique is necessary when there is a do-or-die play or the outfielder is attempting to prevent the base runner from advancing. The outfielder should field the ball on the outside of his left foot (Right Hand Player) The ball should enter his glove and his left foot should hit the ground at the same time. Using this method he will not have to break stride. Be patient with young players. This is a very athletic play but it should be taught.

5. **Catch every fly ball above the eyes.** Once the ball falls below the head it is harder to catch.

6. **Never drift to a fly ball.** It's a bad habit and young players should be reminded when they do it. Run hard and try to catch every ball standing still.

7. **Communicate** with the other outfielders and infielders. Learn to communicate without taking your eyes off the ball. Use your voice loud and clear.

8. **Outfield Mentality-** try to instill in your outfielders the mentality that everything hit into the air will be caught. Teach them how to read the ball off the bat and work hard on instilling a desire to succeed and giving 100% effort.



9. **Hit the Cutoff man.** This skill is often misunderstood. The outfielder should throw the ball low and hard every time, trying to hit the cutoff man in the head or chest. By throwing hard he will be able to throw **THROUGH** the cutoff. All throws should be thrown hard enough to throw **THROUGH** the cutoff so that it can travel to the desired base if necessary.

**Drills for Outfielders-** Besides outfield communication, the nine-skill drill, hitting fly balls and breaking on balls in BP, these are other drills you can use for your outfielders.

- Charging ground balls drill- The Coach fungoes ground balls directly in front of the outfielders. Have them deep enough so they have to sprint in to make the play. They should field the ball outside their glove side foot. They throw hard to the cutoff man, hitting him chest high.
- Line drive communication drill- for two lines one hundred feet apart. Coach throws or fungoes line drives between the two outfielders.
- Sun drill- Line outfielders up facing the sun. Hit fly balls and line drives. Practice use of glove to shield eyes from the sun.
- Lob fly balls so players can practice setting up to throw.
- Lay out drill- players line up and kneel in front of coach who throws balls left and right so player must lay out to catch it.
- One-hop drill- outfielders 150-200 feet apart and make one-hop throws to each other. Check for 4-seam grip and the way the ball bounces after it contacts the ground. It should bounce straight ahead and not move left or right. Consider this a throwing accuracy drill.
- Fence drill. Throw balls over the outfielders' heads so they must get to the fence to make the play. Keep looking at the ball and feel for the fence with the throwing hand.
- Quarterback-have players form a line on the left side of a coach. Each player must have their own ball. Each player hands the ball to the coach and starts running at a 60 degree angle to the coach. The coach throws a soft liner over the right shoulder, leading the runner and expecting them to make a "Willie Mays" type catch. After several repetitions, switch to the left shoulder and eventually straight over their heads.

**Tips for Outfielders-** Outfield is arguably the most neglected position in baseball. In youth leagues it is often a 'throw-away' position. Here are a few outfield pointers.

- Set up your defense by shading toward the alleys. More balls are hit in gaps than down the lines.
- Anticipate that every pitch will be hit to you.
- Back up the bases.
- Back up infielders when the ball is HIT, not after it is missed. Anticipate the infielder missing it.
- When throwing to bases always keep the ball low. Hit the cutoff man.
- The centerfielder has priority on fly balls.
- Be aware of where infielders are playing as well as the other outfielders.
- If an outfielder has trouble judging a line drive right at him, his first move should be to turn sideways, glove side forward. This puts him in a position to move back or forward more rapidly.
- On every ball hit, one outfielder should back up the outfielder making the play. This takes some effort and the coach should remind any outfielder that doesn't do this.
- Most young outfielders play too deep because of the fear of the ball going over their head. Keep a close eye on them during the game and correct them.
- With two outs in the late innings have the outfielders play deeper to prevent the ball getting by them. The signal for this is "No Doubles!"

- Tracking the ball is a very important skill and one that many young outfielders lack. They must learn to run directly to the point where the ball will come down. Many outfielders on balls hit to their left or right will run straight across and then in or back. Emphasize a straight line from the starting point to where the ball will hit the ground.
- Don't let outfielders stand with their hands on their knees. That is not the correct ready position.
- Outfielders must never stand and hold the ball. Get it back into the infield in a hurry.
- Don't lob the ball back into the infield. Throw it with something on it, on a line.
- In a double relay situation it is better to throw too high than too low. The trailer is there to back him up. A low ball will be more difficult to field and get rid of quickly.
- In a cut-off situation it is better to throw too low than too high(the ball can be cut off if necessary).

# CATCHERS

**Help young catchers overcome their fear behind the plate.** The fear of getting hit by a foul ball is a real one for young and novice catchers. The tendency is to flinch or worse yet, turn their head exposing their one vulnerable area, the side of the neck. This action also has the unfortunate effect of causing them to lose sight of the ball.

There is a way to immediately help catchers with this difficulty. Have them dress in full gear and get in a receiving stance. Have them put both hands behind their back. From 10 feet away kneel and throw baseballs at their facemask. Their challenge is not to move or even blink.

I haven't seen anyone yet who could keep from blinking but they get the idea, which is to keep their eyes on the baseball. Throw the balls underhand and sharply. Force your catchers to remain still while you go through a bucket of balls. You should not have to do this drill but once. It has a tendency to make young catchers uncomfortable but we have always found the results to be positive. We use this "trial by fire" drill with all young catchers.

**Catchers Are Special** The catcher is unique in baseball. The only one that sees the entire field, he is the leader, the quarterback. It is arguably the toughest position in the game. He is in on every play & has more responsibilities than any other player. A team cannot win without a competent, effective & skilled catcher.

What qualities should you look for in a catcher? Look for a slow shortstop-great hands and feet and a strong arm. It is also important for him to have leadership qualities and he should want to play that position. Don't force a player to play there. It takes a lot of "want to." A Catcher's Commandments:

- The catcher will never show negative emotion or 'show up' his pitcher or teammates. Instead he will offer constant encouragement. He will exhibit the positive traits of a leader.
- He will constantly be aware of all defensive situations and verbalize or signal them to his team on the field.
- He knows that how he receives the pitch has a direct bearing on how the umpire calls the game so he works constantly on improvement in that area.
- He works every day at practice or even at home on improving technique- blocking balls in the dirt, tagging out runners, throwing to bases and fielding.
- He hustles and shows positive body language in all game circumstances. The fact his team is winning or losing is irrelevant.
- He never questions umpires calls or decisions.
- He takes conditioning and strength and agility drills seriously at practice.
- He understands the importance of his position and the responsibilities it entails.

**Bullpens are not Just for Pitchers** - Think of bullpens as not just a time for developing pitchers. Catchers should practice skills as well. They can use this time to work on their game.

- They can work on the 3 stances (sign giving, no runner on base, runner on base).
- They can work on blocking balls in the dirt.
- They can work on framing pitches.
- They can practice throwing to bases (footwork only.)
- They can increase the skill of throwing the ball back to the pitcher on a line.
- They can simulate game conditions by setting up for the pitch 'late'.

**WHAT EVERY COACH SHOULD ASK ABOUT HIS CATCHER** - Catching is such a difficult position & is so important that a teams' catcher must possess certain attributes of leadership & mental toughness. The question is simple but the answer is involved. **Can I trust the game to him?**

If the answer to that is yes then you have a good starting catcher. You have something.

- Does he have the skill and techniques he needs to make your pitching staff look good?
  1. Blocks balls in the dirt.
  2. Keeps strikes in the strike zone.
  3. Awareness of how to receive certain pitches-“stick” the low strike, catch the high strike close to his body, catch the high fastball without letting it tick off the top of his glove.
  4. Throws every ball back to the pitcher briskly and hits him in the chest.
- Does he have the awareness to control the tempo of the pitchers and thus the game?
  1. Works fast when the team is ahead.
  2. Aware of how to slow things down when the opposing team is mounting a rally.
  3. Aware of critical times during the game.
  4. Does he know how to talk to each pitcher when they get in trouble?
- Is he tough enough to stay in the game with small hurts? It breaks up the tempo of a game for a coach to have to go out there every time he takes a foul tip.
- Is he still and quiet back there?
- Is he soft back there?
- Can he receive the ball?
- Can he quarterback the defense?
  1. Directs players on bunted balls.
  2. Reminds players of outs and the various situations.
  3. Displays leadership qualities.
- Does he work hard in practice on his throwing and footwork?
- Does he display toughness and courage on plays at the plate?
- Does he display confidence to the rest of the team?
- Does he always hustle after foul pop ups even if they appear to be out of play?
- Does he always hustle after wild pitches even if they are meaningless or late in the game when he is exhausted?

**A Catcher’s Conditioning Drill-** It is very important that catchers develop good leg strength. This is a great drill. In full gear the catcher jumps from side to side maintaining a good stance. The coach challenges him to make the jumps as quickly as possible. Keep your hands in place. Don’t use them to provide impetus. Perform 3 sets of 10, 3 times a week in the pre-season. Give them a days rest after each time. Their legs will be sore. It is best to do this at the end of practice.

**CATCHER THROWS TO THIRD BASE** -Excluding the RH batter, the catcher’s throw to 3B is the simplest of the catcher’s throws. The catcher is in a position where his directional (left) side is already turned toward 3B as opposed to having to turn all the way around to throw to 1B. This is also one of the most under-taught catcher’s skills yet one that routinely comes into play. However, if the catcher does not know, or has not mastered the mechanics of throwing to 3B, the percentage of bad throws is high. The actual throw is easy, but getting to the proper throwing position can be tricky.

### **Technique**

- The Catcher must receive (catch it cleanly) the ball on balance. He must not reach out for it. He must let the ball travel and keep his butt under his shoulders.
- The catcher must clear the hitter as he executes his footwork. #1 Problem: either no footwork or insufficient footwork. He should never try to throw over the hitter.
- The footwork is a sideways jump-shift in which the right foot replaces the left. For most catchers, they can actually step into their left footprint with their right foot. It is a simple “right-left” that is a shuffle, not two distinct steps. Teach that the feet land almost simultaneously.
- The catcher needs to move diagonally left and forward to clear hitter, but not backward.
- He should keep the feet apart on the jump shift.
- On any pitch, the catcher should move behind the RH batter – even on a pitch slightly outside of the catcher’s right shoulder (you can’t cheat much on this pitch.)
- Throwing from in front of the batter should be done only as a last resort. It is slower and more awkward. Seldom, if ever does one see throwing in front succeed in good levels of baseball (unless the batter makes the mistake of getting out of the way). If a pitch does catch you outside, step forward with your right foot, load and throw.
- With a LH batter, the catcher can simply “jab step” and throw, or take a quick shuffle. It is such a short-quick throw that footwork is not that necessary in terms of momentum – footwork is primarily for clearing a RH batter.
- The catcher “snap-throws” to 3B. Prioritizing accuracy and quickness over power and velocity. It is like the throw to the second baseman’s double play pivot, in terms of rhythm and quickness.
- As the catcher clears the hitter with footwork & gets the ball to the throwing position, his sights turn to throwing the ball down the 3B line. Use the baseline as a guide for throwing the ball.
- The catcher obtains his 4-seam grip during his foot work
- The catcher does not remove his mask to throw.
- The catcher does not try to frame or (stick) the pitch.
- The catcher should not aim for the base. He should visualize a string, or a vapor trail (if you like) running knee-high through the inside corner of 3B, to the outfield.

### COACHING POINTS:

1. The most common footwork problem is when the catcher moves too much toward the 3B dugout – his weight gets on his heels and he drifts left – the ball tends to sail high- right. Once his right foot lands, all momentum is directly toward 3B (stand behind him to watch.)
2. The catcher only needs to clear the hitter enough to get off his throw; he does not need to clear him by a wide margin.
3. Square off the corner, don’t round it.
4. The catcher must get sufficient repetition to form the footwork habit. Otherwise, he will likely catch the ball flat-footed and just stand up – hoping that he can throw over the batter. This is normally a recipe for failure or injury to the batter.
5. Whenever your catchers practice throws to third base put a batter in the RH box and have a pitcher throw to them.

### Catcher's pre-game routine

These series of quick, pre-game drills can be done before or after infield. Total time of all these drills should be five minutes or less. Make sure you teach the drills in practice before you throw it on the catcher before the game.

**1. Spots:** From a short distance, throw to the catcher in all locations. Corners, low pitches, inside and outside pitches. Get him to concentrate on receiving the ball and keeping the mitt in the strike zone. (Eight to 10 throws; use two baseballs to speed this up)

**2. Sways:** Get the catcher's legs loose by throwing pitches outside of the strike zone. Work on the swaying technique (opposite knee to the ground). This improves receiving range. (Two or three throws each way)

**3. Dead ball block:** Put a ball on the ground where a ball would be if he was blocking a ball. Work on technique. Check body position for "holes": Glove, elbows, shoulders. Move the ball around, work on going to his left and right. (Three to five blocks)

**4. Block:** Throw balls in dirt or grass. Tell the catcher what pitch is coming and have him work on the actual technique of blocking the ball. Again, this is an area of teaching and 'building confidence' in the catcher's blocking ability. (Four to six balls)

**5. Live block and attack:** Throw live fastballs and breaking. Have the catcher make the decision on "catch or block". This gets him to focus on watching the ball. After blocking, have the catcher attack the ball as if a runner is on first or second. (Four to six balls) *Note: don't beat him up before a game.*

**6. Hard crosses:** This is the pitch that's near the outside edge of the batter's box. The catcher throws his opposite leg or "crosses" his leg over to get the mitt to the spot to knock down the ball. This is an extreme block -- just get a piece of the ball to keep a run from scoring. (Two each side)

**7. Quarter eagles:** This is foot work in throwing. Quarter turn of the body with ball loaded in mitt ... quarter eagle. Work on pitches all over the strike zone. Mix in a pitch-out on both sides of the plate. Catcher can throw to additional player. This drill will allow catcher to work on proper foot work on all pitches. Work on the jab-step and no-step techniques. (Four to six balls; if no infield, throw more)

**8. Plays at the plate:** Throw 70'-90' throws to catcher ... Two or three bounces to simulate a play at the plate. Have the catcher to turn to his left or right to simulate throws from left field, center field and right field. Extra catcher can put "pressure" on catcher. End with a good throw to "nail the runner" at the plate.

**9. Remind catcher to "have fun!"**

# PRACTICE

## Practice and Beginning the Season

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As the season starts, we want to get off to a good start with our team and what is expected of them. Of course, youth baseball is unlike a school team sport and you cannot force a player to practice or even force them to be on time. However, there are certain things you can do as a coach to ensure your team develops good habits. My own personal pet peeve was having the players arrive late for practices. My practices usually run no longer than one hour and if a player is fifteen minutes late, he misses a full quarter of a practice. I have tried a number different tactics. One is to give each player a number as they arrive at practice and they keep that number throughout the practice. Whoever arrives first is number one and when it comes to batting practice he or she goes first. The players remember this and after a couple of practices, you will notice the difference with players arriving early to get a good number.

Don't overuse your players early in the season. Break in their arms gradually and be alert for any arm complaints. Look especially close at your players that have poor throwing mechanics. Make it a priority to help those players improve. Symptoms of pain in the elbow or shoulder should not be regarded lightly. Although the way to improve arm strength is by throwing, use common sense early in the season. There are a lot of skills and drills you can incorporate into your practices that are necessary and also rest the arms: rundowns, pitchers fielding practice, double plays (footwork only) at second base, shovel toss, teaching base running, Quarterbacks & other conditioning drills, slow roller footwork, outfield priorities, pitching shadow drills, pick off moves, teaching sliding, bunting, batting practice, & situational hitting.

When there is no field available our practices are usually in a parking lot. There are certain things you can and cannot do, such as sliding. Regular batting practice, even when done with soft covered balls, can be a difficult task in a parking lot. One great exercise that can be done outside of a playing field is a bunting competition. First, divide the team in half. Set up two cones which will be used as "bunt posts". Then have each team line up and goes through the batting order attempting to bunt between the cones.

The most important thing is to be creative. You can have a lot of different base running drills and throwing drills. Some of my best practices have taken place in parking lots and backyards. Don't call off practice just because someone is using the field. Show up prepared and have a few extra props available.

An old college professor of mine was fond of saying, "Don't confuse activity with accomplishment." Jump forward about eight years and imagine me observing a coach running practice for his little League team. At the start of practice most of the 10, 11, and 12 year olds are very enthusiastic. As the practice progresses I notice only two activities taking place. One has the head coach throwing batting practice, with each hitter getting 10 to 15 swings while each pitcher takes a turn throwing to the assistant coach as the others stand & watch. I, too, stand, watch, & don't know who is more bored- the players or me.

When I saw a member of the board of directors, I commented on how poorly I thought the practice had been run. The board member responded, "If you think you can do a better job, then volunteer to coach." So I did just that. My first practice, though planned differently, ended up being two tedious hours of batting practice and pitchers throwing on the sidelines. Exactly what I had been so critical of myself!

After that first practice I told my wife that there must be a better way. I observed a variety of teams during practice ranging from 7 year olds to college level players. I noticed that the best practices were not necessarily the longest and that the most organized coaches wasted little time. On most of the drills every player was involved. It was amazing the way some coaches integrated fun and learning and how creative some of the drills and games were.

I began to use some of these techniques with my team. After a little trial and error I was actually able to run a more effective practice. To run a practice like this does take preparation - mostly at the beginning of the season. But coaches need not look at this as a chore. It can be as much fun for you as it is for the players. The youth baseball coach should make a list of drills at the beginning of the year that they are interested in trying. The idea is to be creative.

When my oldest son was 8, I began a practice with a simple relay race, consisting of two lines of six players each. To put a baseball theme into the race, I had each player wear their glove and hold two baseballs in it. The learning benefit of this relay race was to teach kids the importance of squeezing the glove. Another year I was teaching players how to bunt. When the team took batting practice, I put one cone 10 feet directly in front of home plate and another cone 10 feet to the the left of the plate. Each player gets two bunts before his regular swings. For each bunt that goes between the cones , the player earns two extra swings. This motivated the players to focus when they bunted. And, it worked!

If a coach plans five to seven drills of ten to twelve minutes in length for each practice, the players will be more attentive and less bored. Don't worry about players not liking certain drills. About a third through the season they will let you know which ones to weed out. As parents and coaches, we should make practices more interesting and fun because during a typical little league season, players should spend as much or more time practicing than in actual games. So, be creative and have a great baseball season.

**Practice Coaching Tips-Games are won at practice.** Set up practices so your players benefit the most.

- Use stations. This allows you to get in a lot of skills at one practice and keeps everyone busy. In batting practice players go from the tee station to the soft toss station to bunting to opposite field hitting to live hitting. Divide the players into groups.
- Hit ground ball fungoes during Batting Practice.
- Run most of your conditioning drills at the end of practice. You don't want your players fatigued when they are practicing skills. Do your skills work immediately after your stretching and throwing.
- Sit your players down after every practice and talk to them, even if just for 5 minutes.
- Keep practices fast-paced and fun; don't let players stand around.
- After practice is over (or before practice), choose a player who needs extra help on a certain skill. Work with him for 10 or 15 minutes & help him improve. This is when real teaching can get done.
- Reflect on your weaknesses and become determined to improve your coaching knowledge and skills just as you expect your players to improve their skills.
- Spend enough time so that you can teach all defensive positions. Don't neglect any position or player.
- Let your players hit every day. It is fun for them and gives them something to look forward to. Besides, they need to hit every day.
- We like to run a practice, most of the time, in this sequence: Stretch, run, throw- defensive drills-batting practice-conditioning drills-talk with the players.
- Be aware of how your players act and conduct themselves. They are a reflection of you. Be aware of your own actions during practice and games. You never know who is watching.

**Get Your Team in "Baseball Shape."** Make sure you are doing the necessary things to get your players in "Baseball Shape."(Play an entire game at full speed without a breakdown in technique)! Coaches, don't think that just because your players are active it means they're getting in shape. Questions to ask: Do the infielders get enough groundballs? (30 ground balls without fatigue) Do you emphasize Form Running? Is there some kind of sprint work after every practice? Are your pitchers throwing regular bullpens & improving their mechanics? Are your hitters getting enough swings? Are your catchers' legs in shape?

**Are You Using Batting Practice Time Wisely?** - To get more out of your team in terms of development get more out of your Batting Practices. BP is not just to get some swings in; you can use this time advantageously to practice multiple skills. Here are some suggestions:



Use hitting stations. If you have 12 players, divide them into 3 or 4 groups. (Let your pitchers and catchers hit first so they are available for side work. Group your left hand hitters together to save time.)

Recommended hitting stations and their order are; dry swings, tee work, soft or short toss, opposite field hitting drill, live hitting on the field.

Hit ground ball fungoes during BP. The fungo coach on the third base line hits ground balls to the SS and first basemen. The coach on the first base foul line hits to the third baseman and the second baseman. This is to assure the players practice the correct angles off the bats. If you have screens you can practice double plays as well. (Time the fungo immediately after the batter hits the ball. Teach the infielders to let all hit balls go by them except the fungo. This also teaches concentration skills.)

Use a bagman. Have a player set up in center field with a bag and have your outfielders throw all balls to him. This not only saves valuable time the outfielders can work on their throwing skills as well.

Teach the outfielders to react and break on every ball hit during BP. They should concentrate on the hitting zone and break (just a step or two) on every ball. This is a valuable tool to teach outfielders how to track the ball.

# COACHES TIPS

**“It takes no talent to hustle.”** This is a favorite phrases. The demeanor and attitude a team displays on the field goes a long way toward developing a winning style and contributing to the growth of its players.

Your team should always jog on and off the field during games and practices. In addition they should always jog back to their positions after a play. Kids don't get to see this on TV because commercials usually get in the way. Coaches must reinforce this until it becomes second nature. Show respect for the game and always hustle.

**Player Dugout Responsibilities-** Baseball, the most cerebral of games is played and influenced off the field as well as on. Good teams delegate certain responsibilities to players in the dugout. They contribute to a winning attitude and they help the team play at a higher level.

- All the players in the dugout should watch the opposing pitcher as he warms up between innings, paying close attention to his arm slot and release point. This information will be beneficial when they get their turn at bat.
- Players should also pay close attention to the pitcher & catcher when their team has a runner on base and quickly communicate any pick-off attempts. (BACK!!!)
- The batter returning to the dugout discusses with the coach and the next hitter the type of pitches the pitcher is throwing, location and movement. (From the dugout you can only see high and low; you cannot determine inside or outside locations.)
- One player is usually assigned to watch opposing runners to see if they touch the bases on extra base hits.
- One player counts his pitcher's pitches with a clicker. Pitch counts are a very important part of keeping the pitching staff healthy.
- Some teams assign a player to count the opposing pitcher's pitches.
- One player is assigned to throw to his dugout-side outfielder between innings.
- The designated hitter is usually assigned to pick up helmets and bats at the end of each half-inning.
- Sometimes at a higher level a player keeps the scorebook.
- You can also have a player chart pitches.

**Pick Up Your Teammate-** At the end of an offensive inning you may have a runner or two left on base. Do they have to run back into the dugout to get their gloves and cap; wasting valuable time? Or do you have a plan? Here is a way to do it.

The third baseman and Shortstop put their gloves and caps together (in the same place every time) in the dugout. The first and second basemen put theirs together. The outfielders all put their gloves together. As an example, if the SS is left on base the third baseman brings him his glove. If the right fielder is left on base the center fielder brings him his glove.

Of course if the catcher is left on base, the bullpen catcher comes out to receive between-inning pitches. The base coaches retrieve the helmets from the runners and bring them back to the dugout. The first base coach picks up the bat at home plate.

Find a specific place in the dugout for the gloves, teach them early in the season and reinforce it a few times to make it a habit.

## **COACHING TIPS FOR DEVELOPING PLAYERS- PART I**

- Always stretch, run and throw before every practice and game. Do not skip this step, ever. If a player is late, make him stretch and throw on the side before he is allowed to practice. It takes about 15 minutes to do this. Make the time.
- Start your practices on time. Don't wait for late players.
- Recruit good coaches to help you. You can't do the job by yourself.
- Use drills that also offer "baseball specific" conditioning (base running drills, Quarterbacks, etc.)
- You can never hit enough ground ball fungoes. Hit them before batting practice and during batting practice. It is important to use coaches who are good fungo hitters.
- Hit fungoes from the correct angle so the infielder can react to batted balls as they will look in a game. That is why those fungo circles are placed where they are. The third base fungo coach hits balls to the shortstop and first baseman. The coach on the first base line hits ground balls to the third baseman and the second baseman.
- Realize that the biggest enemy of a successful baseball practice is time.
- Use rain days for teaching the mental side of the game.
- Teach. A good coach is a good teacher. (Have you heard us say that one before?)
- Get your team in condition. Just because they are active does not mean they are in baseball shape.
- If you don't have a baseball field available, find a patch of grass and work on something. (How about rundowns?)
- Players must hustle at all times. It takes no talent to hustle.
- Pitching is 70% of the game. Do you spend enough time on pitching?

## **COACHING TIPS FOR DEVELOPING PLAYERS (Practice Tips) Part II**

- Use stations. This allows you to get in a lot of skills at one practice and keeps everyone busy. In batting practice players go from the tee station to the soft toss station to bunting to live hitting. Divide the players into groups.
- Run most of your conditioning drills at the end of practice. You don't want your players fatigued when they are practicing skills.
- Sit your players down after every practice and talk to them, even if just for 5 minutes.
- Keep practices fast-paced and fun; don't let players stand around.
- After practice is over, choose a player who needs extra help on a certain skill. Work with him for 10 or 15 minutes and help him improve. This is when some real teaching can get done.
- Reflect on your weaknesses and become determined to improve your coaching knowledge and skills just as you expect your players to improve their skills.
- Spend enough time so that you can teach all defensive positions. Every one is important; don't neglect any position or player.
- Let your players hit every day. It is fun for them and gives them something to look forward to. Besides, they need to hit every day anyway.
- We like to run a practice, most of the time, in this sequence: Stretch, run, throw- defensive drills-batting practice-conditioning drills-talk with the players.
- Be aware of how your players act and conduct themselves. They are a reflection of you. Be aware of your own actions during practice and games.

### **Characteristics of an Outstanding Coach – Part 1**

- Understand and believe that what you are doing gives you the power to support the continuation of this great game. You can make a difference.
- Have a plan for each and every practice.
- NGI-Never give in. A coach must continue to teach, even when some of the players look like they aren't 'getting it.' Teach right up to the last out of the last game of the season.
- Stop watching baseball games on TV just as a fan. Watch them as a coach and a student. Use these professional and college games as learning experiences.

- Spend extra time, after practice, with those players who need it the most.
- Don't be influenced by what parents and other coaches say to you or about you. Believe in what you are doing. If you are doing a really good job you will not be popular. You will be respected, but not popular. 'If you try to please everyone, you will wind up pleasing no one.'
- You must have control and you must use a certain amount of discipline.
- Be yourself. Coach within your own personality. Don't try to copy someone else. Use other methods from coaches that you admire but ultimately you have to be yourself.
- Have integrity. Keep teaching the important values even when they are not fashionable. Stand by what you say.
- Don't set arbitrary rules to enforce them at your whim.

### • **Characteristics of an Outstanding Coach - Part 2**

- Understand that you can make a difference in a young life. That is your reward. That is why you coach-not just to win.
- Have a goal of making your players just a little better than they were the day before. Develop the attitude that if they are not improving, they are getting worse.
- Teach your players to respect the game. How they act on that field is a direct reflection of you, the coach.
- Take coaching seriously and give it your best effort.
- If you want your players to take you seriously, take the game seriously.
- Become a student of the game. Players can use the off-season to get better. Coaches can too.
- Teach your players appropriate behavior during games. Don't let them question umpires' calls or cheer against the other team. Teach them how to stay focused in the dugout. Give each player some responsibility.
- Demand respect from your players. You will find you'll have to earn it.
- Become a positive role model around your players.
- 'Knowledge is power.'

**An Effective Practice Routine-** Baseball practice should be structured to provide the greatest benefit to the players. 50% or more of practice should be devoted to hitting. Other skills can be reinforced during BP; outfielders breaking on fly balls, working on throwing accuracy by throwing all balls to the bagman, infielders can take ground ball fungoes and pitchers can throw bullpens. An average practice would look like this:

1. Warm up run, stretching, form running, and throwing short to long toss.
2. Defensive skill work (break into stations)
3. Batting Practice (set up stations and break into groups) Include bunting in every BP.
4. Base running and/or conditioning drills. (Conditioning last so players won't be too fatigued)
5. Short talk to discuss the completed practice and upcoming events.

## TECHNIQUES FOR COACHING SUCCESS

Teach your players to **focus only on the things they can control**. When an athlete focuses on “uncontrollables” he is more likely to tighten up and “choke.” The chart below lists things beyond a player’s control and subsequently he should block them out and focus only on things he can control.

### NO CONTROL:

1. Winning the game.
2. Hitters’ hits.
3. Teammate’ errors.
4. Umpire’s Calls.
5. Crowd noise.
6. Weather.
7. Playing conditions.
8. The play of the opponents.

### CAN CONTROL:

1. Work Ethic.
2. Practice Habits.
3. Attitude.
4. Developing mental toughness.
5. Ability to focus developed through sound practices.
6. Desire.

**Do not coach the outcome-** When a baseball player focuses on the importance of the game, winning and losing, or anything to do with the outcome, he will not be as effective. This distracts the player from his performance and inhibits his ability to relax. Get your athletes to focus on specifically what they have to do to compete, not on winning. Any sign from a coach to his players that the outcome of a game is vitally important to him or winning is more important than anything in the world, will have a tendency to “tighten up” his players. Just as a coach can read his players’ body language, the players read their coach.

**Teach your players HOW to relax-** Don’t just tell them to relax. Show them how. Spend some time in the preseason going over relaxation techniques; breathing exercises, visualization techniques, muscle relaxation. Again, establishing and teaching routines to each player and position will help them relax.

Examples are:

- Teaching infielders the proper “set” and “ready” positions.
- Teaching pitchers how to relax when on the mound.
- Teaching hitters a good on-deck routine and teaching them to focus on the situation and what they need to do.
- Teaching catchers a pre-pitch glove relaxation technique.

-A confident player is a more relaxed player. If a coach will focus on his players’ improvement rather than the results they achieve, it will have a tendency to instill confidence. Approached correctly a coach can instill confidence in his players during his post-game and post-practice talks.

**Teach your players how adversity can work for them, not against them.**

Teach your players to try to find an advantage in a disadvantage.

(To his hitters) “The umpire’s strike zone is low, so be ready to be aggressive low in the strike zone.”

(To his pitchers) “The umpire is calling a low strike zone. Keep the ball down and you are going to have a great day.”

-There is always adversity in competition; be ready for it and prepare your players to “play above” it. A large part of this is to not allow excuses to creep into the players’ conversation. To be effective through adversity players must not make an excuse for their performance. This is an on-going challenge for a coach.

**Keep games and competition in perspective-** If you make the game “bigger than life” your players’ performances will not be their best. If the game is hyped too much, or if that “must win” situation becomes too vital, then chances are good you will not get a winning performance from your team. A baseball player that chokes may have lost his perspective and made the game too important. Helping him handle a pressure situation is an important aspect of a coach’s job. I have always felt that a coach should make his practices vital and important. “Skills are developed in practice. They are displayed in games.” Intensity must be tempered with respect for the game.

**Challenge your players; avoid threatening them-** “One more error and I’m going to bring in Tommy to play your position.” Threats will surely distract a player from a solid performance. In a “You can do it” atmosphere the players will perform better. Challenge them to do better; in practice as well as games. Coaches should develop an open understanding (connection -bond) with his players and a part of that understanding is that he will accept no excuses from his players. (That in my opinion is one of baseball’s great life lessons.)

**Put your players under pressure at practice-** That is where the pressure should be; practice and not games. Constantly challenge your players to practice at 100% effort. Teach and “Never Give In.”

**Separate self-worth from performance-** “I didn’t play well so I am not a good person.” Do not make the mistake of equating their performance with how you feel about them as people. And do not let them fall into that trap on their own. If your practice routines are sound and if you teach the game, your players will give you everything they have. They will know you care about them. And they will respond to you.

**Allow your players to fail-** Baseball is designed around failure. No one gets a hit every time and no team wins every game. Failure is inevitable so teach your players how to deal with this fact. Encourage your players to let their mistakes go immediately and to focus on what they want to have happen, not what they are afraid will happen. You want your players to “go for it” and not be afraid of failure. Praise good swings at a pitch even if it’s missed. Praise a great fielding attempt. Praise a player’s effort, not the result.

**Evaluate your players on their progress, not their statistics.** -If your players can put the idea of failure aside and focus on the effort they produce, they will be able to learn and gain positive feedback from failure itself. When athletes are not concerned about making mistakes they perform their best. Players who react negatively to failure exhibit the worst kind of immaturity on the baseball diamond. It is a coach’s job to help his players put this distraction behind them.

**Use Humor-** Humor is a wonderful tool for putting things in perspective, helping players relax and taking their mind away from failure. Nothing is more boring than a coach who takes himself too seriously. This kind of coach will have his players taking the game too seriously as well.

-A quick wit and a wry outlook can be effective if it is not used to ridicule the players. It can break up a stern demeanor and make the coach more accessible and human. It can make the players more comfortable. And it can ease tension. A light touch of humor can drive home a point to a player. If you are a good coach your kids will be really playing hard for you. Since the game often includes failure a little humor can ease a player’s misery sometimes. Humor is a stress reliever. You have to be relaxed to play baseball effectively. Don’t be afraid to use it. A laugh once in a while can lighten things up.

**If this game was only about physical skills and ability, then every 1st round pick would end up in the Big Leagues. The reality is that only a small percentage does.**

Look at every Big League roster and you'll find guys who are too small, too slow, who don't fill out a uniform very well, guys with ugly throwing arms... etc. In short...players of lesser skills.

### **Great Ballplayers Are Built...Seldom Born**

The answer lies in the making of a ballplayer and this goes back to their days as youth baseball players. They probably were one of the best players on their youth teams, but they made themselves even better and overcame their shortcomings as best as they could. Many focused on what they were poorest at, instead of just refining their best skills.

### **The Big 5**

1. Hit For Average
2. Hit For Power
3. Arm Strength
4. Fielding Ability
5. Running & Foot Speed

Few do it all well. Even Bonds and Sheffield have sub-par arms.

The vast majority of the best college and pro players have weaknesses. These are the guys who understand that to continue to compete at a “next-level” they must continue to work on their weak points...while working on what they do best... (the skills that got them looked at in the first place).

### **LEARN FROM YOUR FAILURES**

The game of baseball is based on failure and anyone who plays it experiences failure many times. Rod Carew is in the hall of fame and he made 7000 outs. Coaches who teach kids should understand that fact and learn not to be so “results” oriented. Instead, teach them how to learn and improve from those times when immediate success eludes them. Tell them they are not going to win every game and they are not going to get a hit every time and the umpire is not going to make a call that goes their way every time.

We have all seen coaches who go “bananas” when a player strikes out. I have seen coaches give the “take” sign on a 3-1 or even a 3-2 pitch to a young player in the bottom of the order. I wonder if those coaches are helping players develop and go on to the next level.

Wouldn't it be better if the coach let the players swing the bat? In fact, wouldn't it be better if the coach instilled in his players to be aggressive at the plate?

We feel one of the best learning experiences is during a game when a player lets a fastball go by that was a good pitch to hit. He quite often will swing at a bad pitch in that at-bat, usually on the next pitch. If he fails, we use that as a teaching opportunity. We ask him at what pitch he **should** have swung and he thinks about it and usually comes up with the right answer. He has learned something from his failed attempt.

Keep in mind that many of the players' mishaps are because of something you hadn't got around to teaching them. Treat a failure as an opportunity, not a disaster. Have patience and keep an even temperament when your players are not successful. There is usually a teaching opportunity on almost every pitch.

# Dealing with Parents

Dealing with parents might be the most difficult part of being a coach. Research suggests that it's the single biggest reason that coaches quit. It's a common problem, but one that can be difficult to solve. In my experience as both a coach and a parent I have found some common mistakes that coaches make that can bring on the wrath of a parent along with some ways to deal with a parent that is causing you grief.

## Communication - Parent Meeting

I believe that communication is the single biggest reason behind coach/parent problems. Many coaches don't take the time at the beginning of the season to hold a parent meeting and discuss with the parents how he/she is going to run the team. Hold a parent meeting right away. This will give you a chance to communicate your philosophy with your parents. The topics should include the importance of winning; how you are going to distribute playing time; how are you going to determine who plays where; what skills and values you are going to emphasize. Try to hit all the areas that are important. If for example you don't start a player if he is late or missed a practice, let the parents know that. It's important that they are aware of team rules and expectations. By holding this meeting right away, you have the opportunity to try and move players to a different team if you don't think it will work out. Let parents know that if they don't agree with how you are going to run the team, then this is the time to try and get the child moved.

## Be Consistent

Stating your philosophy is one thing; implementing it consistently is another. Make sure you make rules for your team that you can follow up with. It is very frustrating for a parent to be told one thing and then see something else happen. I went through this myself last year with the team my son was on. We were told by the coach that all players would get a chance to play many different positions and playing time would be distributed equally. The coach said that the emphasis would be on building skill not winning. Well, after 3 losses to start the season, the coach abandoned his philosophy and had the best players play more and play the most important positions. He would simply rotate those players around those positions. You can imagine the grumbling in the stands as parents began to realize that their child was going to play outfield all year and hit near the bottom of the order. There were complaints and it ended up being a frustrating season for many parents and the coach.

The lesson here is making sure you can live with the guidelines you set down. By sticking to what you told the parents at the beginning of the season, you will alleviate several parent problems.

## Get Parents Involved

Getting parents involved can really help in avoiding potential parent problems. If you think that a parent is going to be a problem, try to get that parent involved in some way. If that parent only shows up to games, have him/her keep the score book, chart the hitters, or warm-up the next pitcher. If they feel like they are part of the team, they will often be less likely to complain. They also will have less time to focus on how their child is being "treated unfairly"

If the parent makes it to practices, have them help by working with some of the kids. They may soon find out that coaching is more difficult than it looks from the bleachers.

## Listen to Parent Concerns

I've seen many coaches with the "I'm the coach, don't question me" type of attitude. With some parents it can be difficult to not get irritated and show this type of attitude. Many parents won't say anything unless they are angry about something. When they finally do, they often are worked up and at that point can be difficult to deal with. I've found that when dealing with difficult parents, it's important that you listen to their concerns and take a real interest in what they are saying. Don't feel like you have to defend yourself right away. Sometimes listening to the concern & telling the parent that you will think about the situation & get back to them is enough to diffuse the situation. Just by doing that you validate the concern & show that you're open to suggestions. Parents want to feel like their input is taken seriously and that they have a say in what's happening with their child. You then can take the time to analyze the comments and see if there's any validity to the concerns.



When you call the parent or talk to them at the next practice they will most likely be much calmer. It will also give you a chance to calm down. Parent complaints at the end of a game can be infuriating. Remember that you are a role model to the kids. If you can't handle the situation without getting upset, then it's best to tell the parent that you have to go and you will call them later.

If the parent is complaining and you don't like the attitude they have towards you, take them away from the crowd and the kids and let them know that you don't like the way they are talking to you. Let them know that you want to work out any concerns that they may have, but if they can't do so in a calm manner than maybe you should discuss it at another time.

### **Document and Inform the League**

If you think you're going to have a situation with a parent that you may not be able to resolve, document all the conversations that you have with that parent. What's their complaint; were they insulting or angry; what was your response. This way if you have to go to league administrators about the parent, you can accurately describe exactly what has gone on. This will help the administrators in not having to take sides over a he said, she said type of argument.

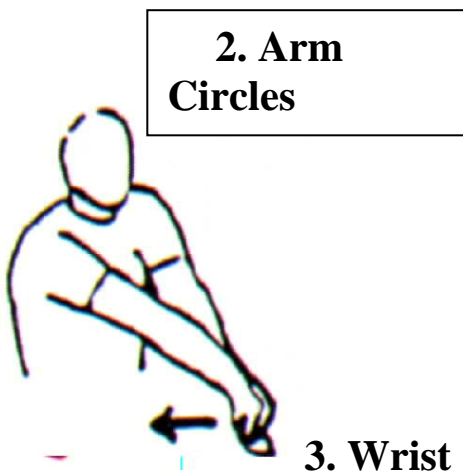
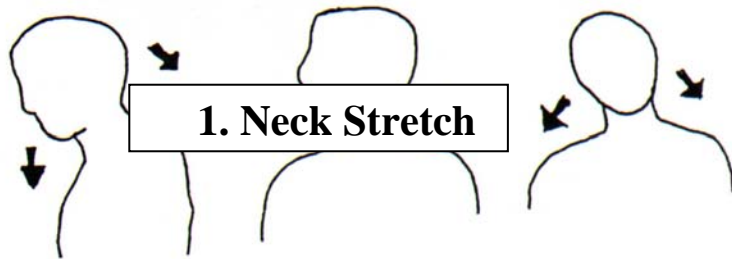
**A COLLECTION OF DRILLS  
ASSEMBLED FOR THE COACHES  
OF  
HOPKINS AREA LITTLE LEAGUE**



# Baseball Stretching

The goal of this stretching program is to increase your flexibility, to help you warm-up & prepare your body before baseball. Stretches should be done slowly and should NOT BE PAINFUL.

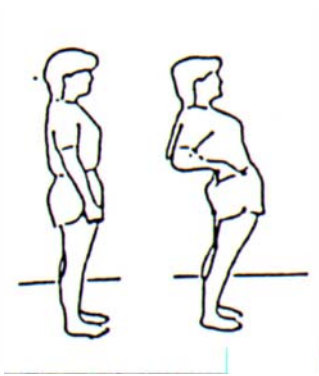
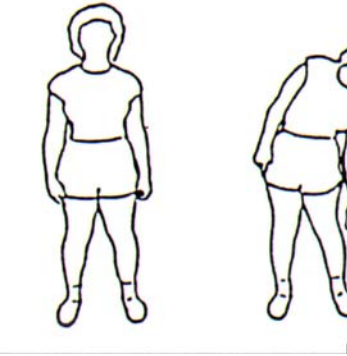
**Maximal:** Hold 30 seconds & repeat 5 times    **Minimal:** Hold 10 seconds & repeat 3 times



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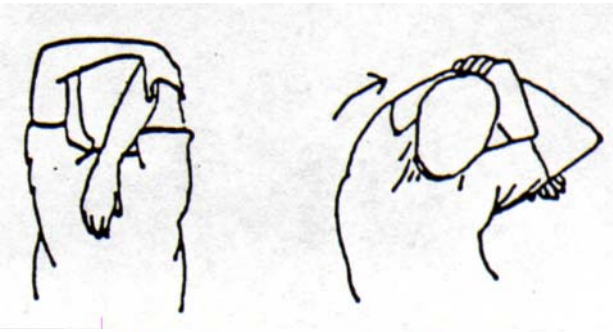
**4. Shoulder Stretch**



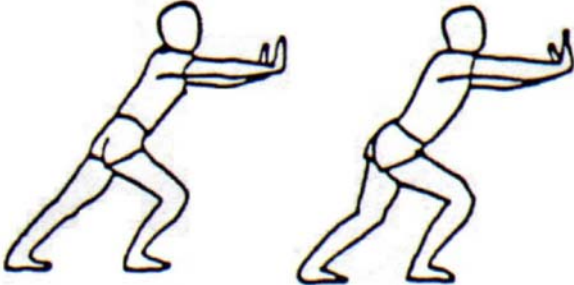
**5. Standing Side Bends**



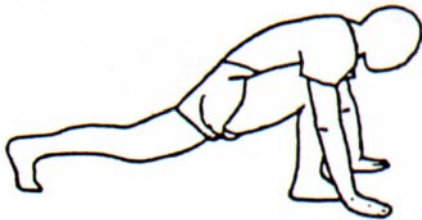
**6. Cross-Arm Stretch**



**7. Triceps Stretch**



**8. Calf Muscle Stretch**



**9. Quadriceps Stretch**

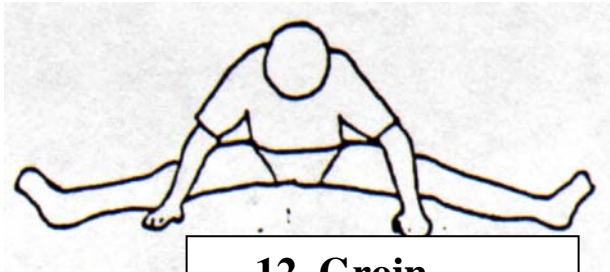


**10. Seated Trunk Rotations**





**11. Hamstring Stretch**



**12. Groin Stretch**



**13. Lower Back Stretch**

**14. When finished, take a slow jog along the warning track and back.**

# Hitting Drills

## **HIP TURNER**

Place a bat behind the waist, horizontal to the ground, & use a glove as home plate. While holding the ends of the bat in the hands, assume a normal batting stance & watch an imaginary pitch being delivered. Execute a stride & quick turn using the bat to help turn the hips faster. Finish in the proper contact point position. Knees & belly button should then be facing the "pitcher." Doing this 10- 20 times programs young hitters to get that lower body working correctly without conscious thought (Muscle Memory). For a variation, try having them hit off of a T using this method.

## **CHAIR DRILL: (Good drill for Uppercutters.)**

Place a batting tee on home plate, with a folding chair behind the tee, with the seat part closest to the tee. Make sure that the tee is just slightly lower than the back of the chair so that the hitter must swing with a slightly downward angle through the ball. If the hitter uppercuts, they will hit the back of the chair (providing instant feedback). Metal chairs are very effective in teaching the proper bat angle during the swing. This drill is excellent for developing the "line drive" stroke.

## **FENCE DRILL: (For hitters who extend their arms & hands too early in their swing {casting})**

Have hitter take batting stance a bat's length away from a fence (place a bat between their belly button and the fence). The object is to have the hitter take a normal swing without making contact with the fence. An improper swing will provide immediate negative feedback. The key here is to keep the barrel above the shoulder at the proper bat angle (good launch position) & swing through the ball. If a hitter does this with hands in close to the body (inside the ball), they will complete the drill properly. Full arm extension should not take place until immediately after contact.

## **ARM ISOLATION DRILL: (Used to develop equal strength in top & bottom arms.)**

Have batter, using only one arm at a time, take stance, inward turn, stride & full cut at balls off of a tee. Emphasize "staying back" on the ball. Batter will need to choke up a lot, & initially need to place the unused hand under the armpit of the swinging arm for additional support. Take about 20 cuts at a time with each arm, keeping the barrel higher than the hands, & follow through. Most players will find their top arm to be stronger, requiring more reps with the bottom arm. The objective is to reduce the gap between the ability of each arm, ideally becoming equally adept with both. (Many players suffer from a weak lead hand!) You can soft toss to older players.

## **WIFFLE GOLF BALL SOFT TOSS**

In groups of 3 or 4, with the coach tossing, one player batting, & the rest fielding balls & returning them to the bucket. Have the hitter take their normal stance, inward turn, & stride, & then hit wiffle golf balls as you toss them. You can make it more challenging by having your hitters use a 1.5 foot broom handle instead of a bat. This forces the hitter to really "SEE" the ball, by keeping their head (both eyes) down on the ball, in order to make contact. Really emphasize the "head down" aspect by making them keep their heads down, even after completion of a proper follow-through.

## **LOW OUTSIDE TEE**

This drill will make players aware of the club-head's position and the importance of keeping your eyes on the ball. Simply use a tee and a bat. Set the tee like a low outside pitch and have the players hit a ball off it. At first players may swing wildly in the air. After a while they learn to aim the club-head at the ball instead of merely swinging the bat through the strike zone.



# Infield

## **HAT IN MOUTH**

To help prevent players from holding their arms too close to the body, have your athlete take their hat off and put the bill of the cap in their mouth. This should be done so that the back half of the hat is pointing away from their body, and the flat bill is held in the player's mouth. Then, as a coach feeds them ground balls, have the player field the ball with proper footwork and fundamentals. Be conscious to notice if the player is reaching well out in front of them to field the ball. Having the bill of the hat in a player's mouth causes a vision block on the ground directly in front of them. This will force the player's hands in front of their body position, so they can see themselves field the ball.

## **CROSSING MIDLINE**

This drill will develop the technique of making catches above & below the waist. Position players 5 feet apart on their knees with a coach kneeling 6 feet in front of them. Toss a ball to the glove side of the first player. The player catches the ball & returns it to the coach. Repeat for all of the players. The coach then throws the ball to the throwing side of each player. After that, alternate between throws above & below the waist as well as to the left or right of each player. Kneeling will allow the players to concentrate on their gloves instead of their lower bodies.

## **PARTNER SHORT HOP / LONG HOP**

This drill is used to prepare the fielder for short hops and longer hops. Two athletes will get on both knees about 15 to 20 feet apart facing each other. They will then play catch by throwing hops at one another, varying between short and longer hops. The key to the athlete fielding the ball is to understand where their hands need to be. What is most critical is that the throwing hand is on top of the glove to prevent the ball from popping out, as well as keeping the glove out in front. This can be done in correlation with the Hat in Mouth drill, which stresses keeping the glove out front. Make sure that the athlete who is throwing the ball doesn't just lob balls in; make him throw them hard. If they just lob it, you aren't helping the fielder at all.

## **GLOVED CHARGING PLAYS**

Set up 3 cones (or baseballs) along the edge of the infield grass (one near 2b, one at SS, & the other between 3b and SS). Put everyone at deep short (edge of grass) with a ball. Have them take a 4 seam grip & begin running full speed to a cone. When they pass it they should throw to 1b with a low  $\frac{3}{4}$  arm slot & off of their right foot (on the dead run). Then repeat the process having them run with the ball in the pocket of their glove. When they pass the cone they reach in, gain a 4 seam grip, then throw properly. Then repeat the process by tossing them a ball before they arrive at the cone. Finally, repeat the process by hitting soft fungoes from home plate.

## **BARE HAND CHARGING PLAYS**

Lay 3 balls in the grass between the mound & the 3b foul line. Have each player line up & trot half speed (using proper running technique) directly to the ball. As they bend their waist they should tilt their shoulders, pick up ball off the outside of the right foot, throw & continue coming through the ball (toward home plate). Then they should repeat the process at  $\frac{3}{4}$  speed and finally at full speed. Reward players that do it right by allowing them an extra turn.



# Base Running

## **RUNDOWNS**

Run full speed (under control) at the runner. Don't hesitate. Get the runner going full speed at a base. You want the runner to commit.

The off infielder **MUST** close on the advancing runner. **This is the key to a successful rundown.** By closing, both infielders will cut down on the runner's distance and limit his ability to maneuver. The idea is for the closing infielder to receive the ball at the opportune time and make the tag. If the infielder does not close the runner will be able to maneuver and multiple throws will occur, increasing the chances for error.

The ball is held shoulder-high in an 'L' and tossed from that position. The ball must be thrown at the right time. By closing on the runner the infielder puts himself in an optimum position. (this timing is the part that should be concentrated on at practice) He receives the ball from his teammate and makes the tag on the runner. He should call for the ball when the runner is close to him. He may even make the tag as the runner is going by. Timing is crucial. Do it over & over & over.

The thrower must peel off to his **right** and back up the player he just threw the ball to. The infielder makes a one-hand catch and tags with one hand. No 'two hands' here.

## **BETWEEN HOME AND FIRST**

Players line up at home plate. One at a time swing a bat and drop the bat safely. They then become a runner and runner to first base watching the coach. If signaled to second they round the turn and go to second. The coach may stop them, have them slide back into first, send them to slide into second, or have them overrun. The coach should alternate his calls to keep the players guessing & watching.

A great tool to teach:

- 1) Running through the base
- 2) Rounding a base
- 3) Tagging the base with the left foot on the left corner of the bag, and
- 4) Watching and listening to the base coach.

## **RELAY RACES**

Split the team in half, with one group of kids behind home plate and other half behind second base. Give the first kid of each group a ball (this will be the "baton" for the relay race). At "GO!" the first kid from each team begins running the bases, ball in hand. After making a complete lap around the bases (back to each kid's starting point), that kid hands the ball off to the next kid in line, who continues the relay race. First group of kids to finish the race wins.

## **THE GLOVE**

We split up the players in groups of 4 or 5 and they line up and put their gloves in the outfield at about 25 foot intervals apart, away from them. They start the drill with a ball in their hand and run to the first glove and set the ball on it and come back to the line and go back and get the ball and come back to the line and go to the second glove and set the ball down and go back to the line and so on and so forth, until all the players have gone through.

# Fielding

## **21 OUTS DRILL**

Put out a defensive team, grab a bat, & have base runners ready to go on contact. Hit the ball, the base runner will react to the hit, & the defense must make the play correctly & flawlessly. The object is to get 21 outs in a row **WITHOUT** mishandling the ball!!! Start at zero & when the ball goes from the bat, to the defense, gets thrown for an out, & then relayed back to the catcher, there can be no mistakes. All throws must be hard, accurate & handled with preciseness. If the ball is bobbled, misplayed, or thrown awry, start again at zero. When the ball hits the catcher's glove, everyone on the team yells the number of outs. If someone doesn't hustle or run out a fly ball, start over. If you don't run the bases correctly, or the pitcher doesn't back up a specific throw, start over. Look for and expect perfection.

## **OUTFIELD COMMUNICATION**

Make two lines about 100 feet apart. Then throw a ball in the air. Make the players call ball by yelling ball, ball, ball, or mine, mine, mine & have the other player acknowledge by saying you, you, you. This does a few things. First, it reduces injury & makes sure the ball is going to be caught. Secondly, it gives the athlete confidence to catch the ball with the acknowledgement of the other player. Both of the players go hard to the ball at all times until one finally calls for it & the other acknowledges. This communications is essential for confidence & reduction of injury. Tell the players to never acknowledge until the ball is called. In other words, do not say you, you, you until someone calls for the ball. We don't want a player making a decision for another.

## **OVER THE SHOULDER CATCH**

A coach stands on the left side of the player. The player hands the ball to the coach, runs out, & the coach leads with a fly ball so that the player has to reach to catch the ball over the left shoulder. After catching or retrieving the ball, the player turns to the left, and jogs back to the end of the line.

## **FOOTBALL**

Split the players into 2 teams & line them up about 10 feet apart with a coach in the middle, & a coach on the outside of each line. Have each line alternate having a player back-peddle about 25-30 feet, then throw a pop up to either side of the player. If they catch the ball, they get 2 points. As soon as they catch the ball, they have to set themselves & make a perfect throw to the coach on their side. If the throw is good, they get an additional point. Run them through this 3 times each, alternating the lines. Then have them run back on an angle (instead of back-peddling), & throw the ball to either side of, forcing them to adjust. Use the same point system.

## **QUARTERBACK DRILL**

Give each kid a ball. Have them (one at a time) run up to you and have them flip you the ball. They then run approximately 50 feet & you lob a ball up for them to catch. As ability increases, increase the length and height of the throws. (Encourage the kids to run

on the balls of their feet. Kids who run on their heels have a tendency to bounce & it makes it difficult for them to track the ball.)

### **LAY OUT DRILL**

This drill is great for teaching players how to lay out for a fly ball. They must learn to use one hand and they should not use their throwing hand to stop their fall. Have the player kneel facing the coach. Coach tosses a ball left or right causing the player to “layout” to make the catch.

### **LINE DRILL**

Set up your fielders in rows. Have 2, 3 or 4 stations to keep the lines short. Hit or roll the 1st player on a line 5 ground balls and have them throw the ball back to you. When he is done he rotates to the back of the line and the next kid jumps up. Check to see that your fielders are staying low. Have them work on staying "under the ball." Knees should be flexed, rear ends down, hands out in front of their body in receiving the grounder. The feet should be slightly wider than the player's shoulders. Watch that the player doesn't turn his head away when fielding the grounder. With young and unskilled players, you may find that using tennis balls & then gradually working up to regulation balls. This drill is good in that it can be done indoors and out, on a field, parking lot or driveway. It does not require much space but can provide dozens of repetitions in a short amount of time. You can isolate stance and fielding flaws and build confidence in fielders who might be frightened of the ball. Start easy and work your way up to harder-hit balls. There is no surer way to lose a young player than to hit grounders too hard, too soon and they get hit with it.

### **INFIELD PRACTICE**

Set the players up on the infield at 1st, 2nd, SS and 3rd. Have a catcher behind the plate & a pitcher at the mound. Hit ground balls from home plate to all of the positions. Have the kids field & make regulation throws. Keep rotating kids in & out of positions until they have all played every position. This drill will show you what kids are capable of the longer throws and will get them used to the routines of infield play. Keep backups at all positions as you can expect misplays & overthrows. Keep the kids involved by rotating often. Don't lock them into only one spot on the field. You may also choose to include base runners. This introduces the element of situational play to your players. Bunts, force plays, double plays and run downs can all be simulated for the players to recognize and react to. Using runners makes the drill more competitive and forces the fielders to respond to game-like pressure. It also provides valuable base-running practice and is fun. With younger players it is expected that runners will be safe most of the time as the throwing and fielding skills of the defensive players are not yet fully developed.

### **FLY BALLS**

Exercise great caution when teaching young kids how to catch fly balls. Start by using tennis balls or Rag Balls and toss, don't hit, them at your players. Catching fly balls is an art that takes a long time to acquire. Realize that many kids have a fear of the baseball, particularly those up over their head. Teach them to keep their glove fingers up and their arms extended in front of them.

# Throwing

## COUNTDOWN (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Graders)

Develop good hands, quick release, and hustle to a loose ball. I have the players line up across from a partner about 20 feet apart. They are to make good throws back and forth as many times as they can while I count down from 30 to zero. The player who does not have the ball at zero wins. You should see the kids scramble for a dropped, or passed ball.

## Long Toss

Purpose: This drill helps build arm strength for all players.

Setup: Two lines of players paired up.

Execution: Make sure all players have properly warmed up their arms. Players will start out a certain distance away. Players throw the ball back and forth, 1 throw each. If the ball doesn't hit the ground, one player moves back one giant step. Players continue to move back, throwing the ball on a line. If they cannot make the throw in the air, they should one hop it to their partner. Once the players get to a "maximum distance" for their arms (120 – 150 feet), they should slowly move back in.



## Wrist Flips (Throwing Series - Part 1)

Purpose: Develops players' use of wrist & elbow along with emphasizing the correct grip.

Setup: Players pair up with gloves and 1 baseball for each pair.

Execution: Players get on one knee about 6 feet from their partner. Have each player place their glove on the ground in front of them. Show the players the proper 4 seam grip. The player will get the proper grip & will bend his elbow & hold his forearm with his other hand. The player will then bend his wrist back & flick the ball to his partner using only the wrist to throw the ball. Emphasize that the wrist will be used during all throws. Have players aim for the others player's glove. After 5 minutes have the players back up to 15 feet. This time the thrower will place his other hand under his arm holding his triceps. The player will throw the ball using just his elbow and wrist.



### **One Knee (Throwing Series - Part 2)**

**Purpose:** Develops players' upper body throwing mechanics.

**Setup:** Players pair up with gloves and 1 baseball for each pair.

**Execution:** Players get on one knee (throwing arm side) 15 feet from their partner. The player with the ball will rotate his shoulder toward the target, bring his arm back with his hand on top, use a good circular motion & throw the ball. Build on the wrist & elbow drill, making sure the player bends his elbow & uses his wrist.



### **Stride Throw (Throwing Series - Part 3)**

**Purpose:** Players learn how to line up their body and follow through when throwing the baseball.

**Setup:** Players pair up with gloves & 1 baseball for each pair.

**Execution:** One player will get in the proper position to catch the ball & give a target. Player with the ball will place his back foot facing perpendicular to the target. Make sure he has pointed his stride foot at the target. He will then get into the stride position & throw to the other player.

This drill shows them how to place their back foot & close their front side before making the throw. Check the position of the back foot & whether they are pointing their front shoulder & hip toward the target. Their throwing arm should go down & back (toward 2<sup>nd</sup> base) with the fingers on top of the ball as long as possible. Check to make sure they are following through on their throw. The throwing hand should end up down by the knee of the front leg.

#### **Step and Throw (Throwing Series - Part 4)**

**Purpose:** Players learn how to catch the baseball, step, and line up to throw in a single movement.

**Setup:** Players pair up with gloves & 1 baseball for each pair.

**Execution:** Both players get in the proper position to catch the ball. Player with the ball will step forward with his throwing side leg in front of him perpendicular to the target. As he places his foot down he bring his back leg forward, swiveling his body as he does this, to get lined up in the correct throwing position. As he completes the step with his back leg, he will throw the ball. This added step may result in younger players not getting their back foot perpendicular to the target.

#### **Shuffle (Throwing Series - Part 5)**

**Purpose:** Players learn to shuffle, get their body ready to throw, & gain momentum toward target.

**Setup:** Players pair up with gloves & 1 baseball per pair.

**Execution:** Have the player with the ball place it on the ground in front of him. He will then simulate fielding a ground ball. Once he has fielded the ball he will take a couple shuffle steps toward the target getting his body in good throwing position as he does so. After a couple shuffle steps he will step & throw. Make sure the player is getting his body lined up as he performs the shuffle steps. His lead shoulder and hip should be pointing towards the target. As he gets lined up his back foot should land perpendicular to the target.

# Pitching

## ONE KNEE DRILL

Pair your pitchers off, facing each other about 20 feet apart. The pitchers are to rest on one knee & point their lead foot directly towards their partner. Play catch. Emphasize proper grip on the ball. Work on getting the pitchers to get their arms up above the shoulder so that they're not pushing or slinging the ball. Release ball out in front of the face & get the pitcher's chest over the front leg, finishing with the throwing hand down by the lead foot. Concentrate on throwing strikes to your partner, even from this position. Create a mindset for throwing strikes.

## FREEZE THE 3 STEPS

This drill can be done with or without a ball. Have the pitchers stand on a rubber or a line drawn on the ground and take them through each of the 3 steps. Do the steps one at a time, in progression. Make the pitcher stop at each step for a second, then let them do the motion continuously. This drill can be done by the kids at home and is especially effective in front of a full-length mirror. In this way, the pitcher can actually see his motion and get a sense of pace and balance.



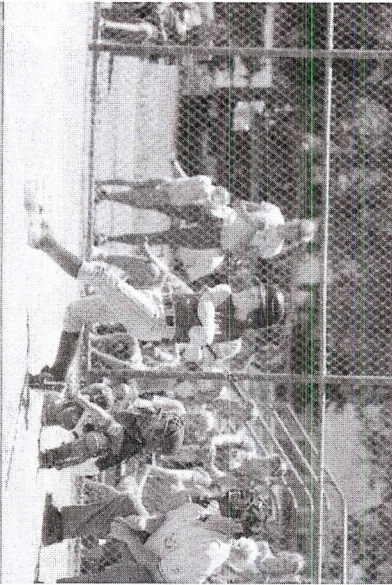
### **THE THREE MAN DRILL**

This drill allows a coach to work with three players at a time as they each work on different skills. It involves a hitter, catcher & pitcher (a 'live' drill). The hitter tries to hit, the pitcher tries to get him out, & the catcher works on his game. Three players are in the infield playing a simulated game. A coach sets up behind the mound. The coach can spend as much as 1 or 2 simulated innings with each trio. (Keep a pitch count.) He can give his entire pitching staff game-like conditions in one practice session & give his hitters a great workout. In these sessions, hitters will not be as successful as in batting practice. They should understand that the pitcher is trying to get them out.

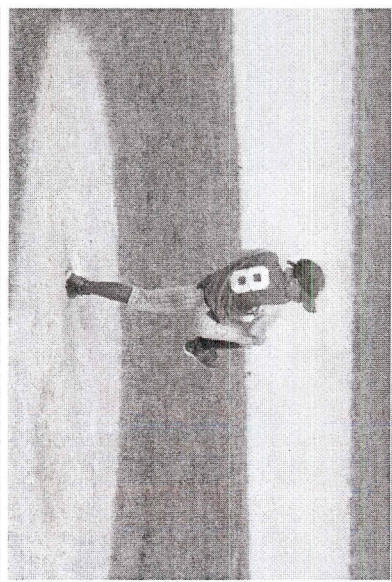
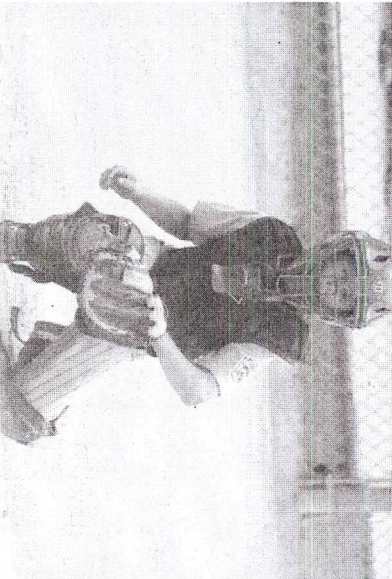
### **CHAIR DRILL**

Pair pitchers together about 20 feet apart. Put the pitcher's back leg up on a chair or bucket. Point the front foot directly at the target. Put hands together at the waist and pitch to your partner. Again, emphasize grip and "getting the arm up." Release the ball out in front of the face and bring the back leg around to get into fielding position. This drill is especially effective for pitchers who are wild high, that stand too vertical as they throw and don't follow through. Have the pitcher reach for the plate and finish low.





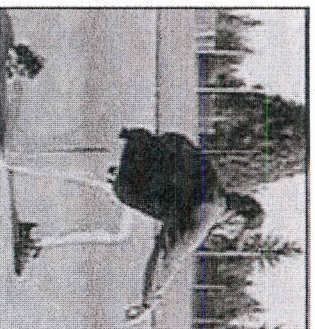
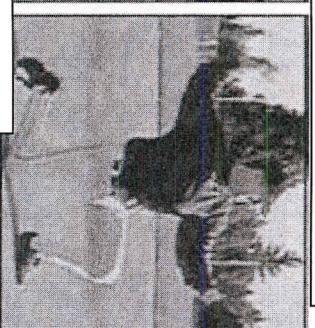
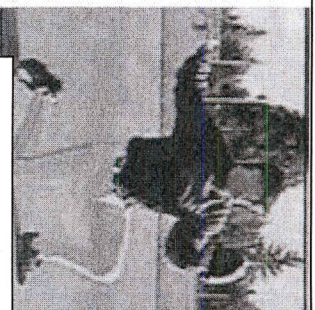
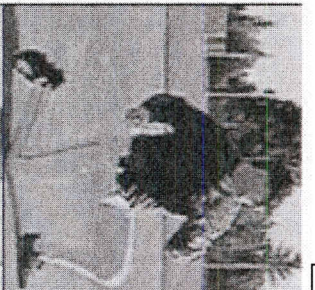
AN ILLUSTRATED SUMMARY  
OF  
THE SKILLS & DRILLS  
TAUGHT DURING THE  
2009  
HOPKINS AREA LITTLE LEAGUE  
SPRING CLINICS.



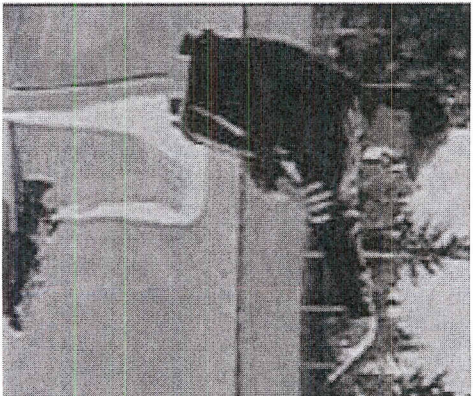
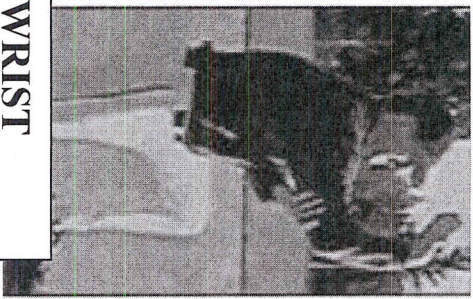
Images of Hopkins Area Little League  
9-10 Year MN State Champions  
Patti Fluegge Nelsen - Photographer



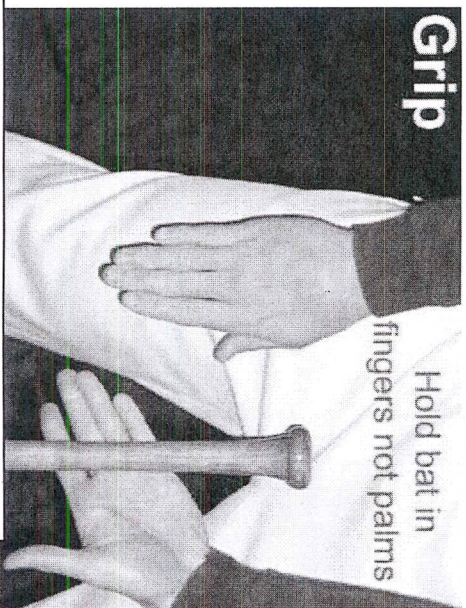
**BASEBALL DRILLS**



**ONE KNEE**

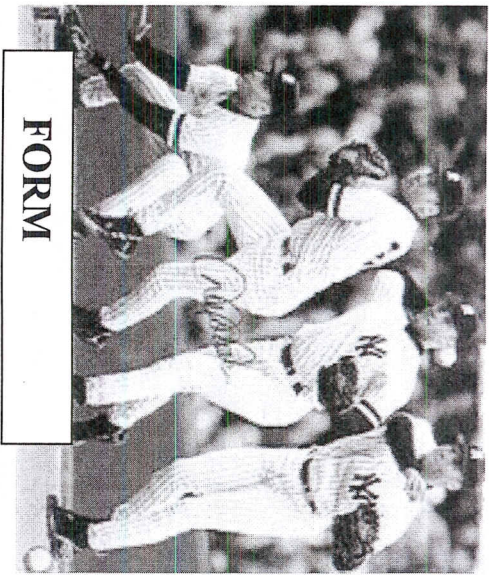


**WRIST**

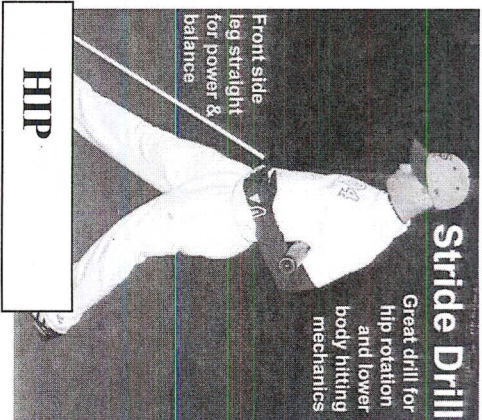


**GET THE CORRECT**





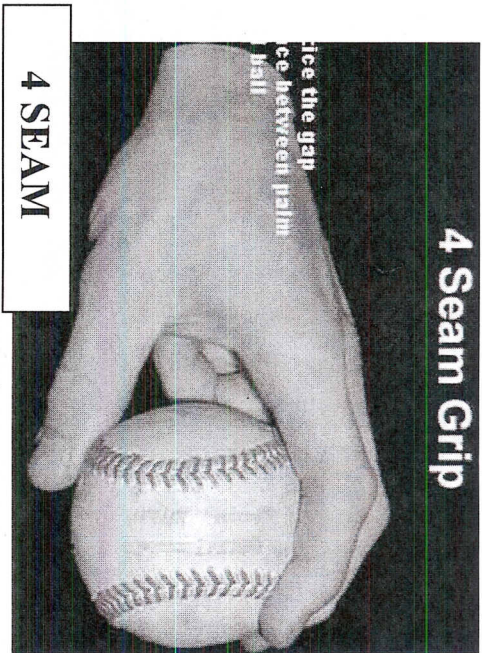
**FORM**



**HIP**

Front side leg straight for power & balance

**Stride Drill**  
Great drill for hip rotation and lower body hitting mechanics



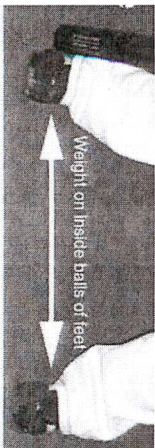
**4 SEAM**

Place the gap between palm and ball

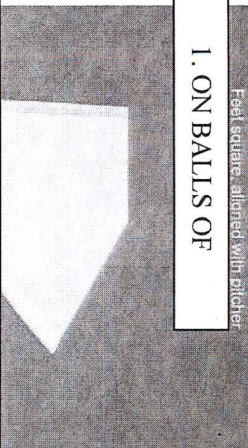
**4 Seam Grip**



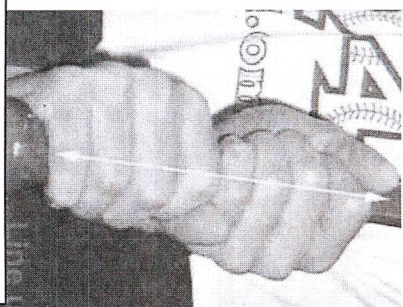
# HITTING



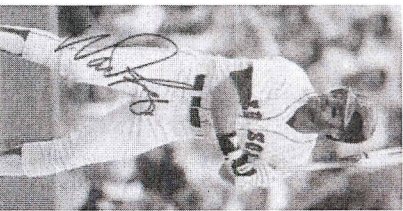
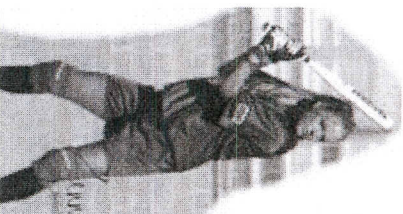
1. ON BALLS OF



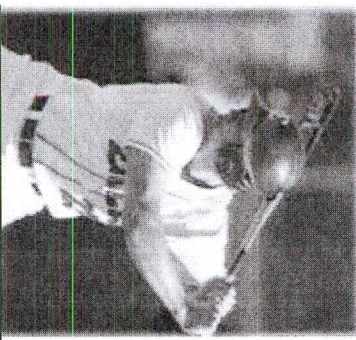
1. FEET SHOULDER WIDTH APART



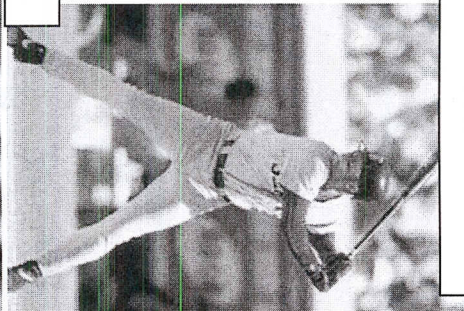
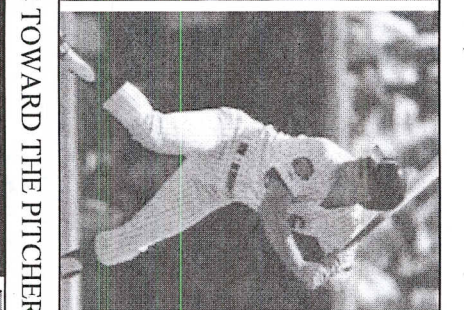
2. HOLD BAT IN FINGERS (KNOCKING KNUCKLES)



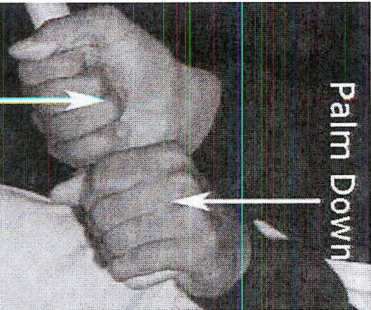
3. KEEP HANDS CLOSE TO BODY AT CHEST LEVEL, ELBOWS DOWN, & STAY RELAXED



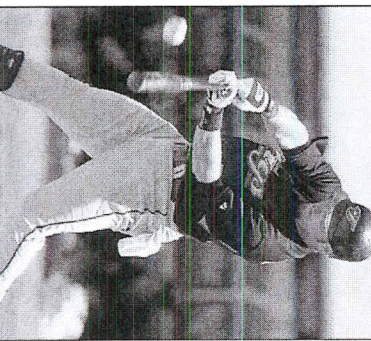
4. MOVE OR LOAD HANDS BACK WHEN THE PITCHER'S ARM STARTS FORWARD



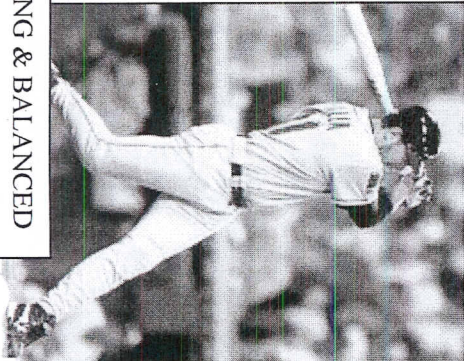
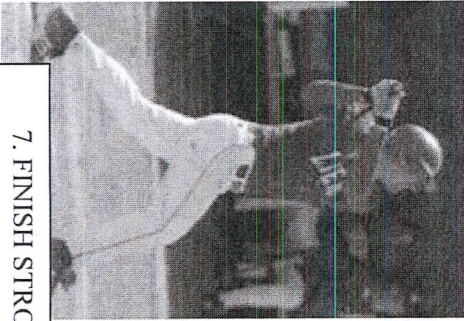
5. STRIDE TOWARD THE PITCHER



Palm Down



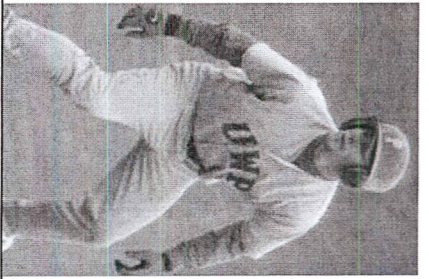
6. KEEP HANDS CLOSE TO BODY & SWING WITH PALM UP & PALM DOWN



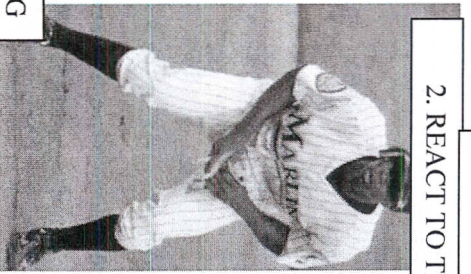
7. FINISH STRONG & BALANCED



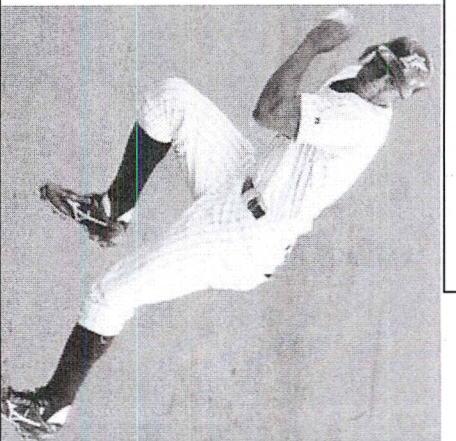
# BASERUNNING TECHNIQUE



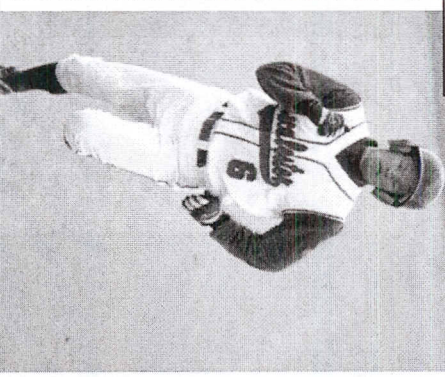
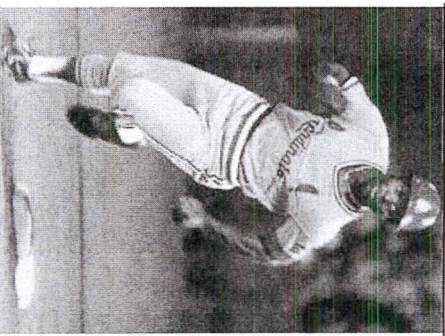
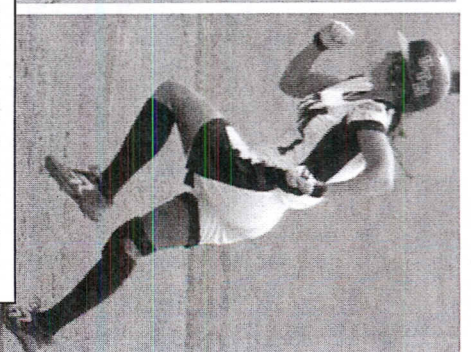
1. SHUFFLE OFF THE BAG



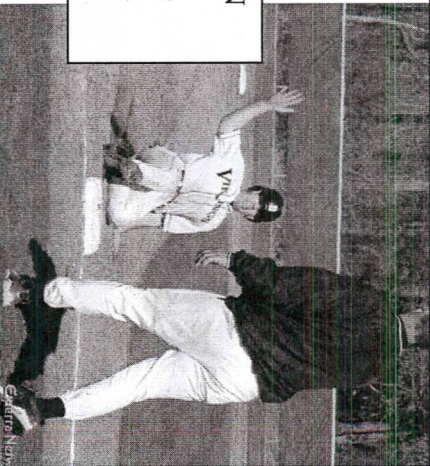
2. REACT TO THE PITCH-STAY LOW



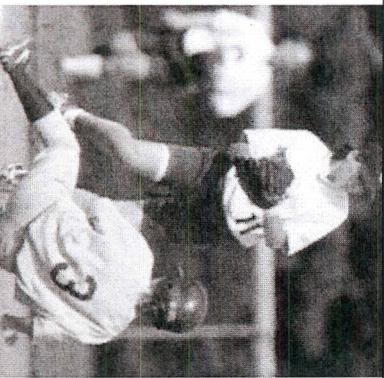
3. TAKE SHORT, CHOPPY STEPS TO GET STARTED



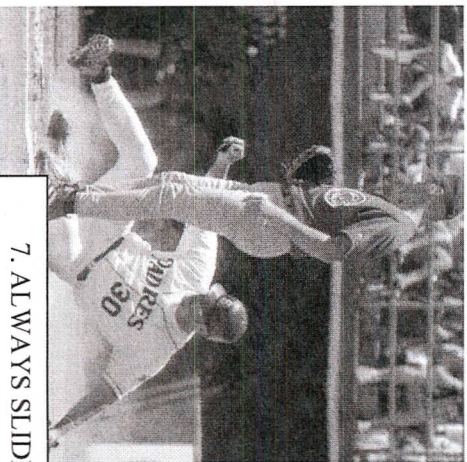
5. LISTEN TO YOUR COACH AND WATCH FOR SIGNS



4. RUN WITH HEAD UP, ON BALLS OF FEET & PUMP YOUR ARMS



6. SLIDE ON ANY CLOSE PLAY



7. ALWAYS SLIDE FEET





# FIELDING TECHNIQUE



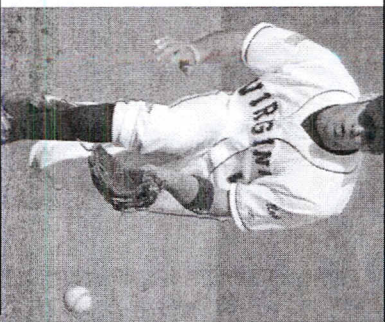
1. RELAX BETWEEN PITCHES



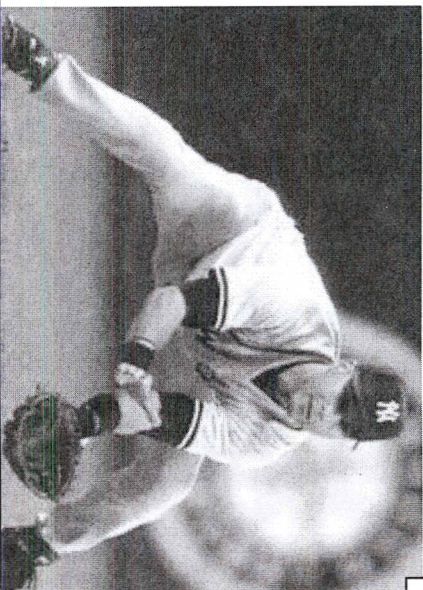
2. CREEP IN 2 STEPS DURING THE PITCH



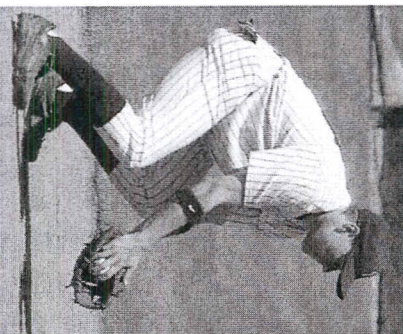
3. READY POSITION AS BALL GETS TO PLATE



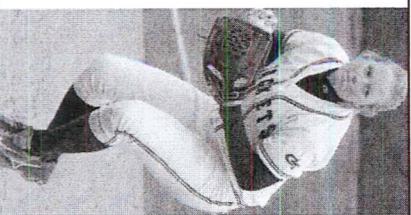
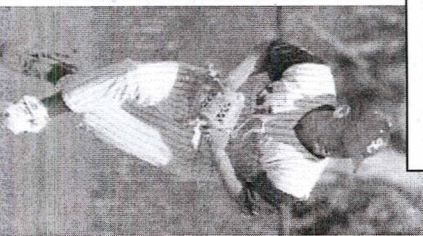
4. CHARGE THE



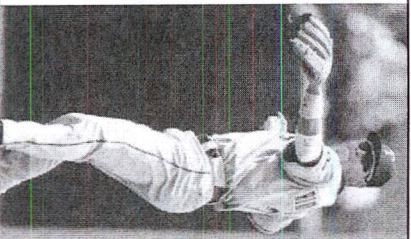
5. FIELD THE BALL OUT IN FRONT OF YOU



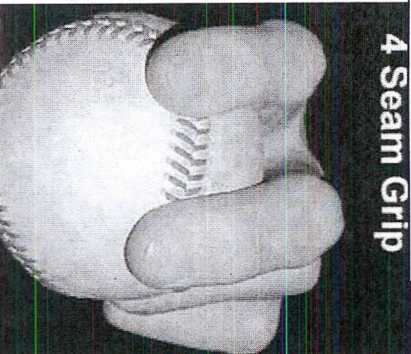
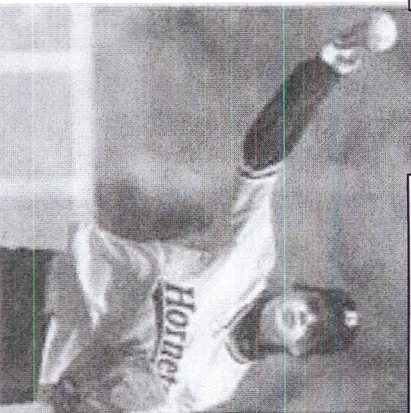
6. FUNNEL THE BALL INTO BODY



7. PIVOT BACK FOOT & STEP TO TARGET



8. MAKE A GOOD THROW & USE A 4 SEAM GRIP

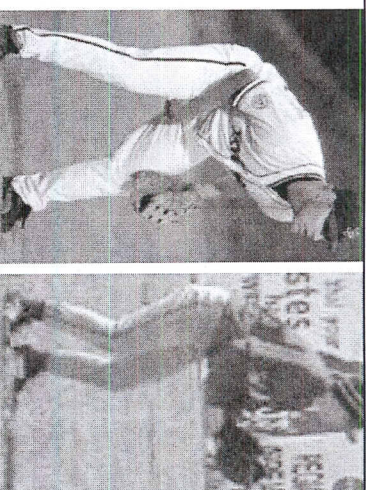


4 Seam Grip

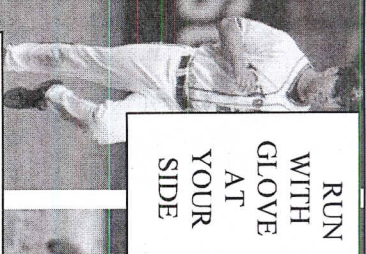


# OUTFIELD TECHNIQUE

1. KNOW WHAT YOUR JOB IS, WITH OR WITHOUT THE BALL, BEFORE EACH PITCH



2. READY POSITION DURING PITCH



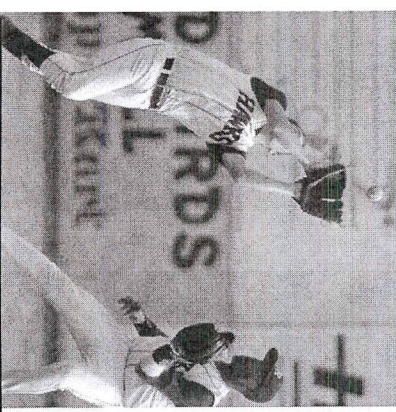
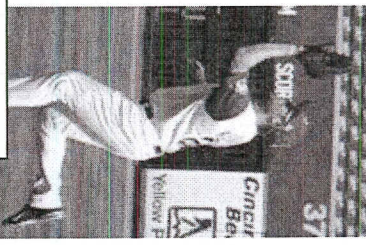
RUN WITH GLOVE AT YOUR SIDE



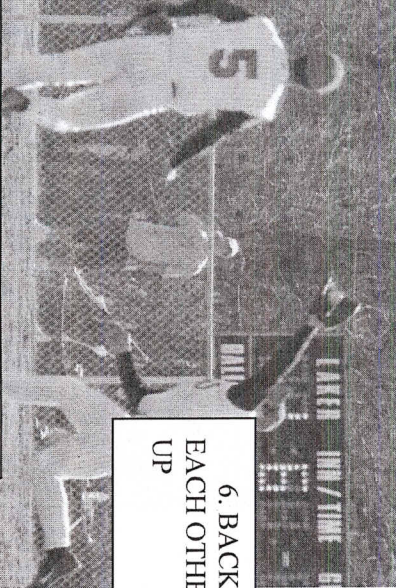
3. RUN ON BALLS OF FEET



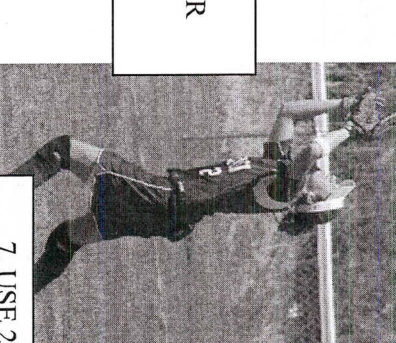
4. PUT GLOVE UP LAST 3 STEPS



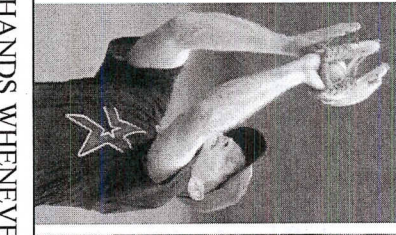
5. COMMUNICATE WITH TEAMMATES-MINE, MINE, MINE



6. BACK EACH OTHER UP



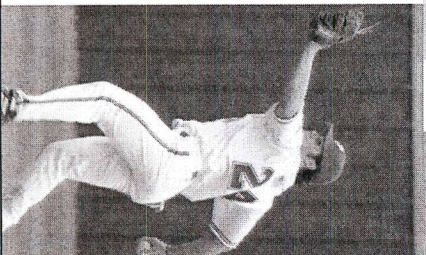
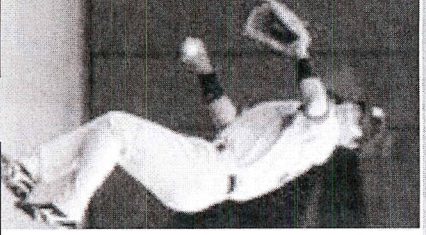
7. USE 2 HANDS WHENEVER POSSIBLE AND CATCH THE BALL ABOVE EYES



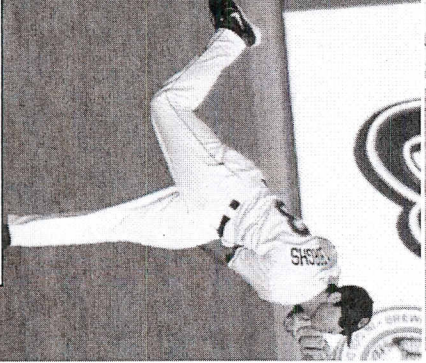
9. GET INTO THROWING POSITION



10. CROW



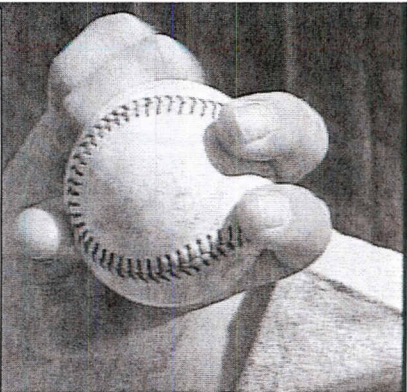
11. MAKE A CHEST-HIGH, OVERHAND THROW TO CORRECT BASE



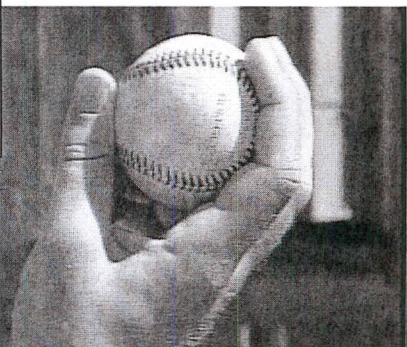
8. GET A 4 SEAM



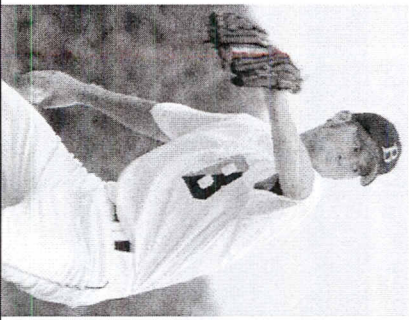
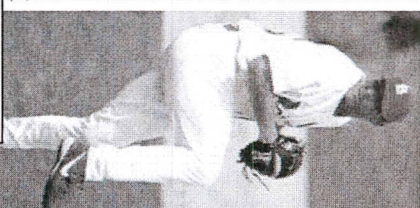
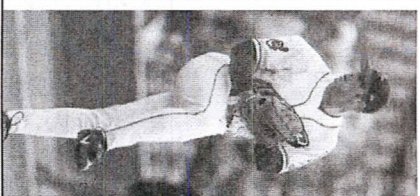
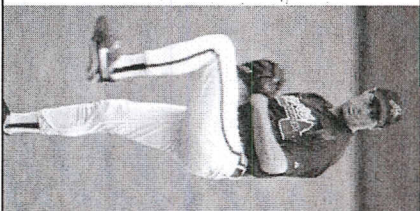
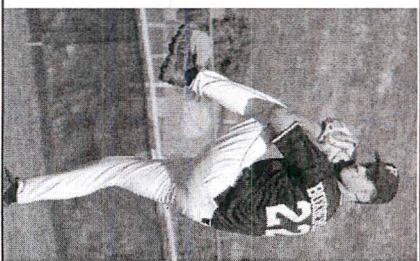
# PITCHING MECHANICS – THE



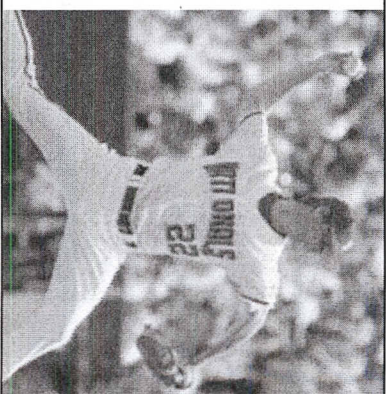
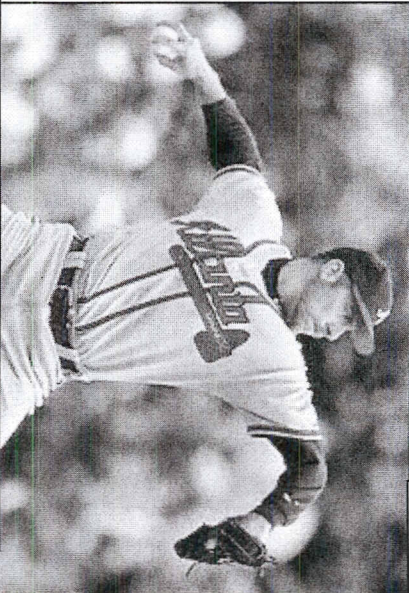
1. GET A LOOSE, TWO SEAM GRIP



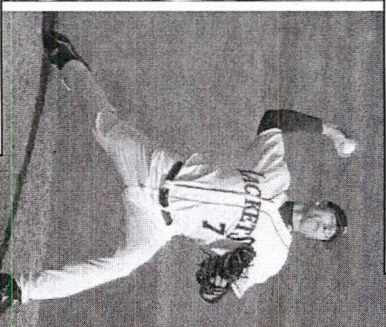
2. LIFT LEG TO BALANCE POINT WITH SLIGHTLY BENT BACK LEG



3. REACH BACK WITH YOUR THUMB DOWN & FINGERS UP



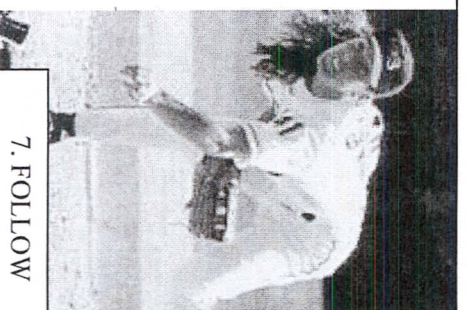
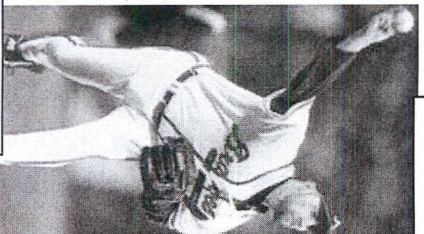
4. GET TO THE "L" POSITION & STEP DIRECTLY TOWARD HOME PLATE



5. KEEP ELBOW ABOVE SHOULDER



6. STAY ON TOP OF THE BALL



7. FOLLOW



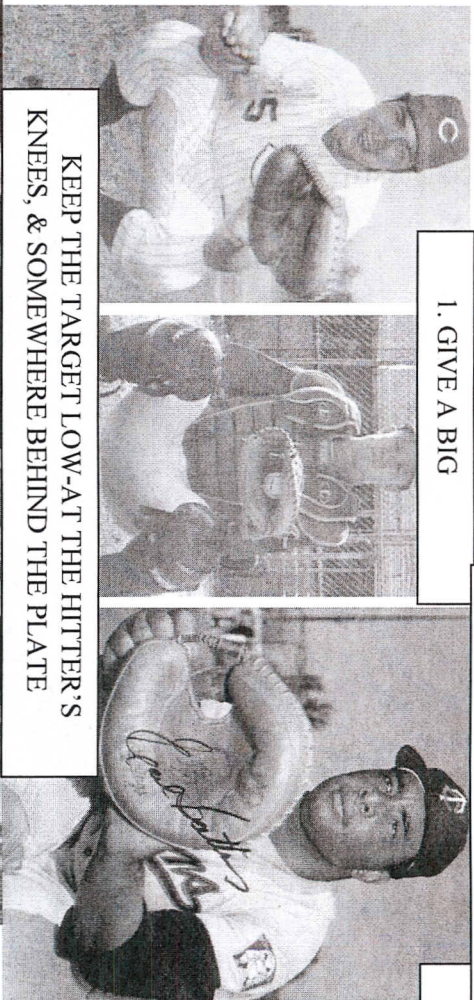






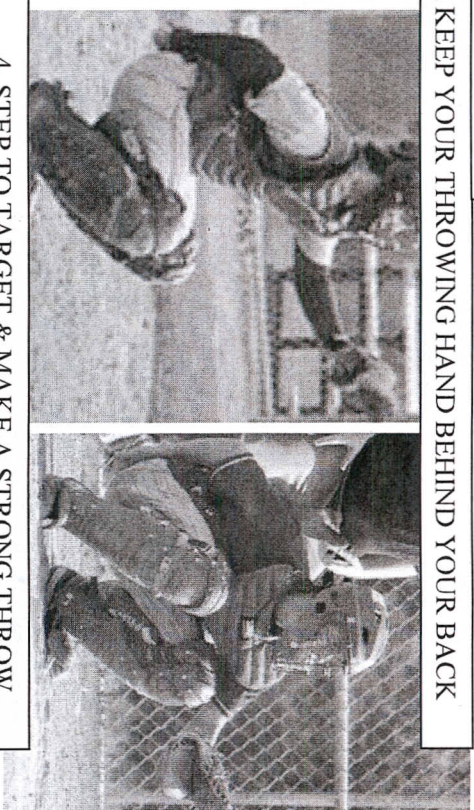
# CATCHING TECHNIQUE

1. GIVE A BIG

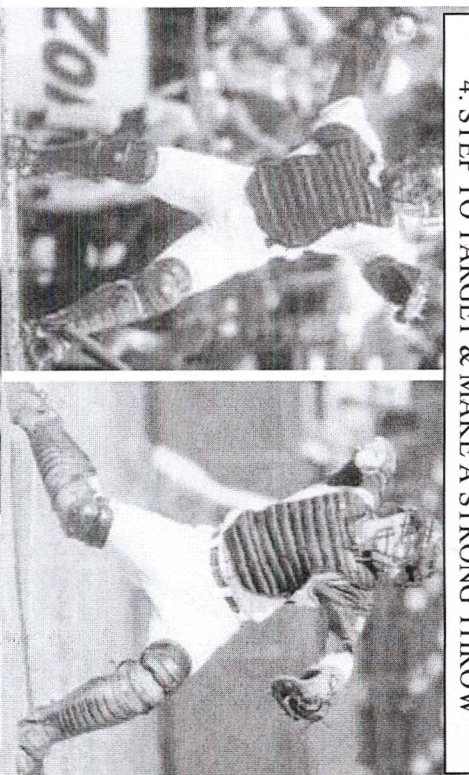


KEEP THE TARGET LOW-AT THE HITTER'S KNEES, & SOMEWHERE BEHIND THE PLATE

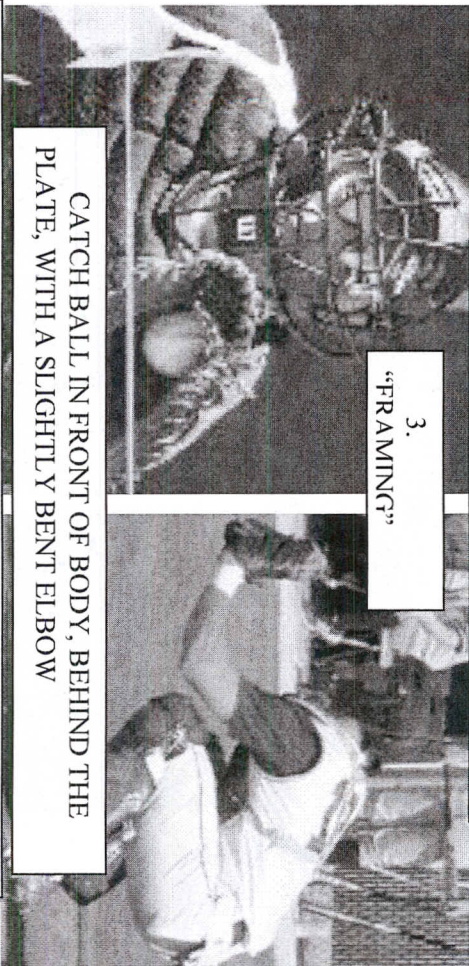
2. KEEP YOUR THROWING HAND BEHIND YOUR BACK



4. STEP TO TARGET & MAKE A STRONG THROW



3. "FRAMING"



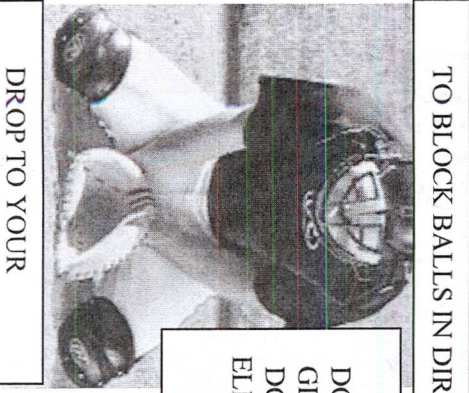
CATCH BALL IN FRONT OF BODY, BEHIND THE PLATE, WITH A SLIGHTLY BENT ELBOW

TO BLOCK BALLS IN DIRT, MOVE YOUR CHEST FORWARD

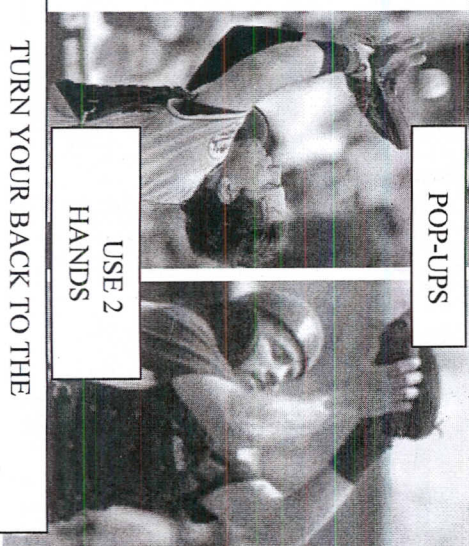
HEAD DOWN, GLOVE DOWN, ELBOWS IN



DROP TO YOUR KNEES



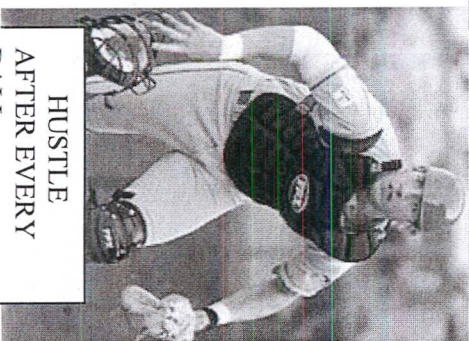
POP-UPS



USE 2 HANDS

TURN YOUR BACK TO THE INFIELD

HUSTLE AFTER EVERY BALL





## BASERUNNING TECHNIQUE

[www.uwplatt.edu](http://www.uwplatt.edu)  
[www.baseball-photos.com](http://www.baseball-photos.com)  
[www.roarlions.com](http://www.roarlions.com)  
[www.cnni.com](http://www.cnni.com)  
[pacer.utm.edu](http://pacer.utm.edu)  
[www.loubrock.com](http://www.loubrock.com)  
[www.macsportsphotos.net](http://www.macsportsphotos.net)  
[www.ipfw.edu](http://www.ipfw.edu)  
[www.exterret.net.com](http://www.exterret.net.com)  
[www.ecsd.k12.ca.us](http://www.ecsd.k12.ca.us)  
[yellowjackets.cedarville.edu](http://yellowjackets.cedarville.edu)  
[members.tripod.com](http://members.tripod.com)  
[www.tireball.com](http://www.tireball.com)

## DRILL ILLUSTRATIONS

[www.authenticportscollections.com](http://www.authenticportscollections.com)  
[www.qcbaseball.com](http://www.qcbaseball.com)  
[www.hq4baseball.com](http://www.hq4baseball.com)  
[www.portapitch.com](http://www.portapitch.com)

## CATCHER ILLUSTRATIONS

[members.aol.com](http://members.aol.com)  
[www.answers.com](http://www.answers.com)  
[www.ccc.cc.kc.us](http://www.ccc.cc.kc.us)  
[www.texassports.com](http://www.texassports.com)  
[www.illinimedia.com](http://www.illinimedia.com)  
[th05acc0206.swissswebaward.ch](http://th05acc0206.swissswebaward.ch)  
[www.amherst.edu](http://www.amherst.edu)  
[www.bates.edu](http://www.bates.edu)  
[www.chch.org](http://www.chch.org)  
[www.humboldt.k12.nv.us](http://www.humboldt.k12.nv.us)  
[www.javelinaathletics.com](http://www.javelinaathletics.com)  
[www.gojaspers.com](http://www.gojaspers.com)  
[mx.sports.yahoo.com](http://mx.sports.yahoo.com)  
[www.tigerscentral.com](http://www.tigerscentral.com)

[www.baseballhalloffame.org](http://www.baseballhalloffame.org)

[www.signonsandiego.com](http://www.signonsandiego.com)  
[www.desportsday.com](http://www.desportsday.com)  
[www.roarlions.com](http://www.roarlions.com)  
[www.art.com](http://www.art.com)  
[www.thesabre.com](http://www.thesabre.com)  
[www.digitalhit.com](http://www.digitalhit.com)  
[w3.yhc.edu](http://w3.yhc.edu)  
[web1.shastacollege.edu](http://web1.shastacollege.edu)  
[www.skphoton.com](http://www.skphoton.com)  
[www.macsportsphotos.net](http://www.macsportsphotos.net)  
[www.avirtualmall.com](http://www.avirtualmall.com)  
[www.thebatt.com](http://www.thebatt.com)  
[www.sunybroome.edu](http://www.sunybroome.edu)  
[www.hq4baseball.com](http://www.hq4baseball.com)

## HITTING TECHNIQUE

[www.hq4baseball.com](http://www.hq4baseball.com)  
[www.mizunoda.com](http://www.mizunoda.com)  
[www.sapc.edu](http://www.sapc.edu)  
[64.33.124.232](http://64.33.124.232)  
[www.ragingcajuns.com](http://www.ragingcajuns.com)  
[www.emich.edu](http://www.emich.edu)  
[gomavs.unomaha.edu](http://gomavs.unomaha.edu)  
[www.baseballhalloffame.org](http://www.baseballhalloffame.org)  
[www.proadvantagebaseball.com](http://www.proadvantagebaseball.com)  
[www.123celebs.net](http://www.123celebs.net)  
[laubitting.com](http://laubitting.com)  
[www.cnni.com](http://www.cnni.com)  
[thesundevils.ocsn.com](http://thesundevils.ocsn.com)  
[www.libertyflames.com](http://www.libertyflames.com)  
[baseballanalysts.com](http://baseballanalysts.com)

## OUTFIELD ILLUSTRATION

[www.albuquerquebaseball.com](http://www.albuquerquebaseball.com)  
[sports.snumn.edu](http://sports.snumn.edu)  
[fellowship.languier.net](http://fellowship.languier.net)  
[www.huskershooter.com](http://www.huskershooter.com)  
[en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)  
[community.theolympian.com](http://community.theolympian.com)  
[www.bakeru.edu](http://www.bakeru.edu)  
[www.lhup.edu](http://www.lhup.edu)  
[www.proteach.net](http://www.proteach.net)  
[pages.prodigy.net](http://pages.prodigy.net)  
[web.stlawu.edu](http://web.stlawu.edu)  
[pennstatebehrend.psu.edu](http://pennstatebehrend.psu.edu)  
[www.taipetimes.com](http://www.taipetimes.com)  
[www.dbu.edu](http://www.dbu.edu)  
[www.thedailyaztec.com](http://www.thedailyaztec.com)  
[www.lachances.com](http://www.lachances.com)

## PITCHING ILLUSTRATION

[www.pitching.com](http://www.pitching.com)  
[www.bradboxberger.com](http://www.bradboxberger.com)  
[www.baseball-photos.com](http://www.baseball-photos.com)  
[www.hq4baseball.com](http://www.hq4baseball.com)  
[www.beatricebaseball.com](http://www.beatricebaseball.com)  
[www.cnni.com](http://www.cnni.com)  
[www.pointedmagazine.com](http://www.pointedmagazine.com)  
[www.skphoton.com](http://www.skphoton.com)  
[www.dartmouth.edu](http://www.dartmouth.edu)  
[www.sportsnetwork.com](http://www.sportsnetwork.com)  
[www.answers.com](http://www.answers.com)  
[www.ftzone.com](http://www.ftzone.com)  
[www.nlfan.com](http://www.nlfan.com)  
[www.nationmaster.com](http://www.nationmaster.com)