

Playing the Infield – First Base

Positioning:

- ✓ The basic positioning of a first baseman depends on the batter, on the inning, and on how many outs there are.
- ✓ The standard position is five steps off the line and five steps back toward the right-field wall on a diamond with 60-foot bases. (For regulation diamonds with 90-foot base paths, seven steps off the line and seven steps back is standard.)
- ✓ The first baseman should try for as much depth as possible without giving up the chance to field a routine ground ball and beat the runner in a race to first - yet still be able to cover a bunt.
- ✓ Double-play depth depends on whether the batter bats right- or left-handed.
- ✓ For a right-handed hitter, the first baseman should hold the runner close and then drop back.
- ✓ For a lefty he should stay closer, then, when the pitch is released, shuffle off the bag.
- ✓ With runners on first and second, play in front of the runner and the bag, but keep an eye on the runner so he doesn't get too big a lead. With good hitters or with those who hit to the right side of the infield, play behind the runner, then jab-step toward the bag to hold the runner.
- ✓ In the late innings in a close game, play closer to first base to guard against doubles hit down the right-field line. (Tom Emanski, <http://members.aol.com/baseparent/defense.html>)

Fielding

- ✓ First base technique revolves around the stretch and the scoop; the stretch is used for close plays at first, and the scoop is used for low throws.
- ✓ The stretch makes catching the ball with two hands impossible, so at younger levels it should not be employed. At those lower levels, the first baseman should settle for catching the ball with one foot on the edge (not on top of) of the base.
- ✓ The stretch involves the player getting to first base as quickly as possible to receive the throw. He should have one foot on the base (either is fine, but left foot is preferred), with his shoulders square to the direction the throw is coming from.
- ✓ The player should avoid committing too early to the throw; instead he should wait until the throw is in the air before start his stride towards the ball.
- ✓ The scoop play requires the first baseman to stay low and keep his hands soft. He squares his body to the throw, stretches as far as he can to reach the ball, and keeps his glove hand ready to react and play the hop in the case he can't catch the throw in the air. If the event that the ball can't be caught, the first baseman should attempt to block the ball so that it doesn't get past him.
- ✓ When fielding ground balls that require throwing to the pitcher covering, the first baseman should employ an underhand toss. He throws to the pitcher as early as possible to give the pitcher time to catch the ball before having to find the base. He leads the pitcher with the toss so the pitcher doesn't have to break stride to catch it, but the throw should not be timed to coincide with the pitcher's arrival at first base
- ✓ On bunts with a runner on first the first baseman must assume he is going to throw to second base. If the play is to be made at first he is usually better off letting the catcher or pitcher make the throw.
- ✓ The most important thing to remember for a first baseman is to catch the ball, even if it means taking his foot off the bag.
He should also be aware of other runners attempting to advance after a play at first, and he should help his catcher out in steal situations by calling out when his runner takes off for second.

Backing Up Plays

- ✓ If the bases are empty, first baseman back up throws to second from the left side of the outfield.
- ✓ He backs up the pitcher covering home plate on throws from the catcher on passed balls or overthrows, and he should also cover second base in the event a short pop fly to the outfield has both the short stop and second baseman leaving the infield.
- ✓ On plays where the batter has a sure double and both middle infielders are out of the infield for a double cutoff, the first baseman can trail the runner to second in case the runner takes too big a turn. (Skip Bertman, Coaching and Playing)

Double plays:

- ✓ First basemen have two primary options in double play situations: if the ball is fielded close to the base, they can step on the base and throw to second for the tag put out.
- ✓ If the ball is fielded away from the base, they can deliver a strong, accurate chest high throw to the shortstop covering second base, and then either quickly goes to the base for the return throw or give way to the pitcher or second baseman covering.