

Practice Drills – Examples

Situational Drills

Runners to First

To instruct young players on proper mechanics and fundamentals of three basic components –

1. Base running,
2. Fielding/throwing to first,
3. Player positioning.

Divide players evenly into three groups mentioned above: Baserunners (they start at the plate in their batting stance), Fielders (they are positioned at the fielding location that you wish to develop (i.e., Pitcher, 2B, 3B, etc.), and Outfielders (Right Field Position only). First basemen remain at first for the duration of the drill. Rotate through all of your first baseman so that each player participates in this drill at all areas as well. Set up the first base area by placing 2 Orange Safety Cones 6' beyond the first base, with one cone on the foul line and the other cone 4 ft away from the first on the inside of the foul line. Here, you are simply creating a "Finish Line" for the players to run through and curl around on the inside of the foul line.

Three Coaches are recommended for this drill; however, it can easily be run with two. The Lead Coach (Homeplate) has a whistle and blows the whistle signaling the Batter to initiate a swing, drop the bat properly and begin their sprint to first base. While initiating the whistle, the Lead Coach either throws the ball or hits the ball to the fielder (hitting is usually preferred in order to simulate actual game conditions). In this phase, the players learn how to get a good jump out of the box and move sharply to first after contact of the ball against the bat.

The Fielding Coach observes the fielder and ensures proper fielding techniques are utilized to move to the ball, receive it, and deliver a quick release of the ball and accurate throw to the first baseman. Here, players get the feel of "timeliness" and learn the importance of getting to the ball quickly (shuffling or "Charge it"), receiving it properly (fielding mechanics), releasing it quickly (throwing mechanics) and accurately in order to beat the runner with the throw.

The First Base Coach observes three actions - the baserunner's mechanics and speed in attempting to beat the throw (running fast through the base to the "Finish Line"); the first baseman's mechanics of getting to the bag quickly, getting a target (glove) up for the throwing fielder, getting as outstretched as possible as well as learning to field errant throws; and lastly, ensuring that the Right Fielder has moved quickly into a correctly angled position to back up the throw.

The players rotate through the drill in this rotation: Right Fielders go to the baserunning line. The baserunners pick-up their gloves and move to the fielding line. The fielders move with glove to the right field backup line. This drill works well with at least 7 players (2 at each station and 1 first baseman) and should probably not exceed 10 players (3 at each station and 1 first baseman) due to inactivity time. Emphasize running through the base and returning properly, proper fielding and throwing mechanics, and player positioning.

Situational Thinking

To teach proper responses to game situations. Place a player in all of the defensive positions including pitcher. Use the rest of the players to run the bases. All baserunners will start the drill at home plate, as if they were the batter. A coach at home plate calls out the situation – example, one out, nobody on base, top of the first, score 0-0. He then hits a ball anywhere he chooses, and one of the runners takes off from home as if he had hit the ball. The defensive players (hopefully) make the appropriate play and the drill continues. If the batter is thrown out as he runs to first, he may or may not stay, depending on the next situation. The drill continues with the remaining base runners. Done correctly, the baserunners will get very tired within 10 minutes after starting this drill. Rotate the players both through new defensive positions and as baserunners. Use extra coaches out in the field to raise awareness of defensive options and proper baserunning. Emphasize situation recognition, options awareness, and game speed.