

SCBA

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Coach Pitch

Fielding

Toilet, Alligator, Eggs, Dance

Two-Hands for Fly Balls (and Ground Balls)

Everyone moves on the sound of the bat!

COMMUNICATE

“Shading” a batter. (Adjust according to a right or left handed hitter.)

Cutt-off Man

Double Play / Double Play Depth

Hitting

Hold bat in fingers

Short stride (4-6 inches)

Swing Down on ball

Directional Hitting

Base running

Run through First (turn right, unless first base coach instructs otherwise)

Sliding (Bent Knee, sit with legs crossed and extend top leg, front heel off ground, raise hands, slide on bottom – holding dirt in hands will protect fingers)

Fielding

Ground Balls

1. Sit on the Toilet – “Toilet”
 - Good fielding stance, athletic posture
 - Keeps butt down, solid frame
2. Alligator Eats dirt – “Alligator”
 - Two hands, in front of body
 - Keeps glove down, react up
3. Collect Easter Eggs – “Eggs”
 - Soft hands, cradle towards body
 - Centers ball, prepares body for throw
4. Do the Dance – “Dance”
 - Feet always moving, able to react
 - Gets momentum moving towards target

Remember the triangle. Before you begin fielding, line your players up with some space in between them. Have them set up with their feet about shoulder width apart. Now, have them reach their glove out on the ground in front of themselves about the same distance as the width between their feet, as if they are fielding an imaginary grounder. Have them hold the position, and point out that the three things on the ground - each foot, plus the glove - form the points of a triangle. This is the ideal position for fielding a ground ball; feet too close together take away the ability to move laterally, a glove too close to the feet gives no room for error when scooping up a grounder.

Use both hands. This is possibly the most critical aspect of fielding grounders that you can teach, and is oddly enough, the one most often ignored by coaches. When set to field a grounder, the glove should be placed on the ground, and the other hand should be open, above the glove, with the heels of the hand fairly close together (the analogy used for younger players is that of an alligator's mouth).

When the ball enters the glove, the secondary hand should automatically close over the ball and gather it in; not only does this ensure that the ball won't pop out, but it places the fielder into a favorable position to make a throw. The further, and less obvious benefit, is that balls that skip off of the heel of the glove cannot pop up and hit the fielder in the face if this basic fundamental is employed; the top hand will simply deflect the ball back down into the dirt where it can then be recovered.

Start low, then come up high. Teach your kids that, when fielding a grounder, they should always begin with their glove all the way on the ground. If the ball takes a hop, they can bring their glove up to it; even if they misjudge, odds are excellent that their top hand and/or their body will block the ball and keep it from going past.

However, if the player tries to start with their glove high and then go down to the ball, they will invariably let grounder after grounder go between their legs.

Keep soft hands. Ground balls come in with so much velocity that they will frequently bounce out of even a perfectly placed glove. Bringing the second hand in will help this, but sometimes, the ball will still pop out in the time it takes to bring that hand down.

The best way to reduce this effect is by having soft hands. In other words, teach your players to not lock their elbows in, thus presenting a brick wall for the baseball to ricochet off of. Instead, they should "give" ever so slightly - this will reduce the energy of the baseball enough to prevent it from popping out. If you have a player who always seems to get into the right position for fielding, who uses two hands, who gets his glove down, and yet still seems to lose a lot of balls, odds are excellent that he has no idea what soft hands are.

Watch that footwork! The first instinct that many young fielders have when fielding a grounder not right at them is to turn to the side and run towards the ball. Unless the fielder is trying to make a stab at a ball deep in the hole (and even then they should give ground, taking a proper angle), this is the wrong way to do it.

If the player turns his head and runs, he loses track of the ball. Since the first rule of pretty much every phase of baseball is some variation of "keep your eye on the ball," we know that this cannot be correct! Furthermore, even if the fielder can pick up the ball in time, he then must turn his body and reset his feet in an effort to get back to a good "triangle" stance.

Coaches are often tempted to ignore fundamentals in the case of a talented fielder who can make plays, even when doing it the wrong way. The fact of the matter is that you are doing a disservice to your player if you take this path.

Instead of turning and running, players should "slide step" to the side, allowing them to keep the eye on the ball. Further, this allows for a simple stop in motion to place the fielder into proper triangle form. Practice this by lining your players up with several feet in between them, and have them simply "slide" to the left, then to the right. Repeat this for a minute or so, until you have them breathing nice and hard.

The idea is that they should be stepping wide to the side, then following the other foot over until their heels almost click together. In younger players, this will be somewhat of a hopping motion, but as they become more accustomed, it should become second nature and more of a glide.

Throwing

The Bucket Drill – Throwing Accuracy

This is a fun, productive drill, especially for younger kids, though older kids can gain benefit from it, too. It focuses on the importance of getting rid of the ball in a hurry.

Split your squad into two teams. Line the first team up, one behind another, at the shortstop position. Take the second squad and place them behind first base. Next, place a five gallon bucket upside down on first base (a garbage can also works as a suitable target). Make sure that you have plenty of baseballs handy!

A coach rolls or hits a ball to the first person in line at the shortstop position, who then has three seconds to pick up the ball and throw it at the bucket. The coach should loudly count off the seconds; this will initially fluster some of your younger players, but will also help them to cope with pressure better in the long run.

If the bucket is missed, the player behind first base fields the ball and returns it to the coach. Regardless of the outcome, the player who made the throw rotates to the back of the line.

After several passes through the line, switch sides. As an added bonus, keep score between the two teams - it is amazing how much more effort you can get out of a kid if he's competing against his friends.

If you have enough coaching help, you can vary this drill by having both teams throw at the same time; the competition is a big hit with players.

This is a great drill for practice on throwing accuracy, quick release, and for encouraging quick decisions. Make it a part of your drill rotation.

Throwing Relay Race

In baseball, we tend to emphasize - as we should - the need to get rid of the ball quickly. Of course, that doesn't do us any good if the throws aren't good, or the other guy drops it. Use this little drill as a competition to practice good throws and good catches.

Start by splitting your team into two or three squads. If possible, have the same number of players on each squad, and certainly make sure to spread the talent out as equally as possible. Have each squad form a line, with a gap between each player roughly equivalent to the gap between the second baseman and first baseman on your infield. Have the first player pick up one ball, make a good throw to the next guy, then have him turn and throw it to the third player in line, and so on.

After they've done the drill a time or two, place three balls on the ground at the end of each line. When you give the signal, the race begins - the object is to move each ball to the end of the line. If a player misses the ball, due to a bad throw or a muffed catch, he must return to his place in line before throwing it again. Once the first ball reaches the end of the line, the second ball may be put into play. The winning team is obviously the one who finishes first - have the losers do ten jumping jacks.

Vary the competition by allowing the players to have all balls in play at once, but don't let them get carried away and whack one another in the head in a rush to win. For another twist, you could require any dropped balls to be carried back to the beginning of the line - really emphasizing the need for a good throw. Of course, you can always make the drill more challenging by increasing the gaps between the players, but don't let them get so far apart as to make the throws too difficult for your lesser-skilled players; this defeats the purpose entirely.

BATTING DRILLS

In any practice, you will do well to use stations - these "work centers" allow small groups of players to get many more skill repetitions than they ever would standing in line waiting for their turn to bat. Ideally, you will run at least three stations at any given practice; if you can increase this number to four or five, so much the better. If you have a well-run practice, it shouldn't take much more than an hour for each batter to get at least two passes through each station. If you take much longer than this, you run the risk of losing your players' attention spans.

The rest of this article deals with recommended stations and how to run them. For the sake of variety, you may want to change which stations you use from practice to practice. In every station, always emphasize proper technique - have the batters dig in for every swing, have them load up properly, make them swing hard and follow through each time. The idea is to build muscle memory; if they don't practice swings the way they will use them in game situations, the benefit of the drills are decreased or completely lost.

The Tee Drill

An absolute essential - you should use tee drills at almost every practice. Major league baseball players hit off of a batting tee every single day, and your players will reap similar benefits. All you need to run a tee drill is a batting tee and either a net of some sort or a nice section of chain link fence.

Make sure that your hitters do not contact the tee. If the ball pops up, the batter is likely hitching or dipping his swing. Adjust the tee every few swings to work the entire range of pitches the batter might see - inside and outside, high and low. The tee gives you a great opportunity to focus on particular holes in your players' swings.

Soft Toss

This is another excellent drill that allows you to work on fine-tuning the batter's swing without the pressure of live pitching. For the simplest variation, all you need is a net or a small piece of chain link fence. Soft toss should be a regular part of your drills; as an added bonus, any mom or dad can work with their player at home with this drill. Stand in front and to the side of the hitter, no more than six or eight feet away, and lob balls to him. For a variation especially useful for limited space, you can stand four or five feet away, directly at a ninety degree angle to the hitter. This also works for helping emphasize the need of watching the ball.

If you have a pitching screen, you can set up at about half live distance in front of the batter and toss from behind protection.

Live Pitching

All the drills in the world will only do such much good if the batter never sees live pitching. Of course, this station requires the most room of any; you'll need an actual batting cage or lots of open field space behind you. While this station will allow you to see the most in the way of results, it also offers the least amount of opportunity to analyze errors in a player's swing - if at all possible, designate a coach to concentrate on the player only, not the results of any hits.

You should be wary of letting a practice go by without hitting.

Practice Golf Balls

An absolutely outstanding hitting drill. Plastic practice golf balls can develop a hitter's hand-eye coordination like nothing else. This drill does not require a net, since the balls can't go very far, and are non-dangerous. Set up six feet or so in front of the batter at a forty-five degree angle and lob the pitches in. For a more challenging drill, substitute a length of broom handle instead of the normal baseball bat!

The Hitting Stick

This traditional baseball training aid can be found in pretty much any sporting goods store; they start at twenty dollars or so, and go up to around forty dollars. A hitting stick looks like a vinyl-covered ball on the end of, well, a stick.

You get similar benefits from a hitting stick as you do from a batting tee - you can over the ball up or down, in or out, and can even apply some motion to things. Hitting sticks make great additional batting stations or nice changes of pace for practice; young kids seem to particularly enjoy them.

Mix and match, and keep things new and interesting. You can always duplicate stations - have more than one batting tee, for instance - or put variations in them. Do chair drills, fence drills, or multiple tee drills. You might find other training aides, such as the "Hit Away" to be useful, as well. The main thing to remember is to emphasize proper technique on each and every swing. Practice makes perfect!

How to Play First Base (the Right Way)

Requirements for the First Baseman

Your first baseman must have an excellent glove, able to catch anything thrown near him. Speed is not much of a factor at this position, though the fielder still must be quick to move and react. He must be fearless, unafraid to stretch out and make a difficult catch or scoop while keeping his foot on the bag.

Many coaches try, with good reason to put a tall, left-handed player at first base. Tall, because the larger the player, the longer his reach, and the fewer balls he will miss due to a lack of physical size. Left handed, because you gain a tiny bit more reach at first base with a left handed fielder - giving you an extra call or two per year on close plays.

Basic Responsibilities

On any contact, the player should know whether the ball is coming in his general direction or not. If so, he should attempt to make the play, just as should any fielder. If not, he **must** cover the bag, whether or not he believes that there is any hope of a play at first base.

How to Play Second Base (the Right Way)

Requirements for the Second Baseman

Your second baseman must be mobile and quick on his feet. While raw speed is not an absolute requirement, the faster he is, the more range he has; among infielders, only the shortstop has more need of speed. Naturally, your second baseman must have a solid glove, as must all of your infielders. Second basemen are rarely required to make throws anywhere but to first base or to the shortstop; therefore, arm strength is not a concern as it is at third or short. Above all, a second baseman must be able to make decisions and think on his feet, as he has many responsibilities.

Basic Responsibilities

On any contact, the first step should be toward the ball. The player's momentum will carry him either to the ball, or toward his base.

The right side of the infield is the second baseman's domain - anything hit between second base and the right foul line is his responsibility. If he can get to the ball, he should do so. If the ball is hit to the first baseman, it is his job to back up the play. If the ball gets into the outfield, he should sprint out onto the grass and act as a cutoff man.

If the ball is hit between second base and the left foul line, the player should always cover the bag in the event of a throw from short or third. If the ball goes into the outfield, he should be prepared to receive a throw at the bag.

It is vital that the second baseman and the shortstop communicate and clearly understand when each will be covering the base! If they get into one another's way, outs will be lost.

How to Play Shortstop (the Right Way)

Requirements for the Shortstop

Your shortstop must be mobile and quick on his feet. While raw speed is not an absolute requirement, the faster he is, the more range he has; among infielders, the shortstop has the most need of speed. Naturally, your shortstop must have a solid glove - he frequently has the best defensive skill of any player on the team. Shortstops routinely throw to first

base, sometimes from deep in the hole; therefore, arm strength is a big requirement, as only the third baseman has a longer throw in the infield. Above all, a shortstop must be able to make decisions and think on his feet, as he is the captain of the defense, and is responsible for setting the tone on the field.

Basic Responsibilities

On any contact, the first step should be toward the ball. The player's momentum will carry him either to the ball, or toward his base.

The right side of the infield is the shortstop's domain - anything hit between second base and the left foul line is his responsibility. If he can get to the ball, he should do so. If the ball is hit to the third baseman, it is his job to back up the play. If the ball gets into the outfield, he should sprint out onto the grass and act as a cutoff man.

If the ball is hit between second base and the right foul line, the player should always cover the bag in the event of a throw from second or first. If the ball goes into the outfield, he should be prepared to receive a throw at the bag.

It is vital that the second baseman and the shortstop communicate and clearly understand when each will be covering the base! If they get into one another's way, outs will be lost.

How to Play Third Base (the Right Way)

Requirements for the Third Baseman

Your third baseman must be quick on his feet, and possess excellent reflexes. While he can of course benefit from raw speed, it is not an essential requirement for the position. Third base requires a very solid glove - most batters are right handed, and many of them love to pull the baseball. This means that third base gets many hits, and the fielder's position places him very close to the batter, leaving less reaction time than most other positions enjoy. The third baseman must have a strong arm if he is to have any chance of throwing out a runner at first base, so he will frequently possess one of the strongest arms on the team.

Basic Responsibilities

On any contact, the first step should be toward the ball. The player's momentum will carry him either to the ball, or toward his base.

The extreme left side of the infield is the third baseman's responsibility domain - anything hit between the shortstop and the left foul line is his responsibility. If he can get to the ball, he should do so. He should be prepared to cover third base if there is any possibility of a play there.

If the ball is hit between second base and the right foul line, the player should always cover third base, in the event of a throw there. He should be aware of what is going on with the shortstop; if a throw is made to second base front he right side of the outfield, he should back up the play.