

# Chesterfield Little League

## Skills and Drills

### Minor/Major Divisions

Updated: Spring 2008

#### **LITTLE LEAGUE PLEDGE**

I trust in God  
I love my country  
And will respect its laws  
I will play fair  
And strive to win  
But win or lose  
I will always do my best

#### **VOLUNTEER PLEDGE**

I will teach all children to play fair  
and do their best.  
I will positively support all managers,  
coaches and players.  
I will respect the decisions of the umpires.  
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## How to Use This Guide

The purpose of the skills and corresponding drills in this document are meant to help standardize the instruction the players receive season to season, regardless of which teams they play on during their CLL experience.

Each of the skills listed in this document are the basic baseball skills that CLL requires its Managers and Coaches to teach their players throughout the course of the season. The skills are taken directly from the CLL Skills Map and are tailored to each Division.

The list of skills is not exhaustive however, and Managers and Coaches are encouraged to introduce additional advanced skills as appropriate based on player abilities, and in accordance with official Little League rules.

Although the specific drills for each skill are strongly recommended by CLL, they are not mandated. As long as Managers and Coaches teach the respective skills with their players, they will not be penalized if the specific drill techniques differ from what is outlined in this document.

If you have specific questions about a skill or drill, please do not hesitate to contact your Division Director and/or CLL's Director of Coach/Player Development.

**Minor Division Baseball** – This is the age where most managers starting playing baseball as a child and when the players start getting a taste of the 'real' game. This is the first year kids pitch, stealing is allowed and the competitive juices really start to flow.

For kids coming up from Rookie however, they may meet more disappointment than the previous year since there is so much more to learn and master. Don't let the kids get discouraged and keep games and practices very positive. Make sure they understand it is just as important to learn at this age, as it is to be the best.

**Major Division Baseball** - This is the age at which previous years skills should be brought together into a cohesive approach to the game of baseball. Don't forget the fundamentals.

Emphasize the finer points thereby extending the knowledge and enhancing the ability of each and every player. Competition is a tool to enhance the enjoyment of baseball. Do not let it be an obstacle that can squelch enthusiasm.

Sportsmanship must be a priority. Winning only enhances us if it does not degrade the opponent. Don't forget to make it FUN.

Note: More players leave baseball after 12 than any other age!!! Make it a great year for your players.

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## Throwing

**It is the single most important defensive skill.**

1. Throwing errors are two base or more errors.
2. If an infielder doesn't field the ball cleanly the runner gets one base - but, if the infielder fields the ball and then overthrows any base the runner usually gets two bases.
3. Failure to throw the ball accurately to the relay man or cutoff man results in the runners advancing an extra base.
4. Inaccurate throws result in a breakdown of the team alignment system.
5. There is no known method of giving a player a great arm; but, if your players have an understanding of the mechanics of throwing and drills are practiced daily to implement these mechanics, a coach should come close to developing each player to his fullest throwing potential.
6. Successful coaching of throwing uses a variety of word pictures.

## Warm-up

Match infielders to infielders and outfielders to outfielders

### "Crossed leg" drill

1. Sit crossed legged
2. Point throwing elbow and forearm towards partner and rest in glove
3. Push the forearm forward, flip the wrist and roll the baseball off the end of the fingers to partner
4. Always a two hand catch by partner

### "One Knee" drill

1. Glove knee at 90 degree angle, throwing knee on the ground, back straight
2. Drag ball on ground, swing up to goal post
3. Pause and look back at ball to ensure throwing elbow above shoulder and correct hand position (ball and palm facing away from player)
4. Rotate, release, follow through

### Box Drill

Purpose:

- To develop quick, accurate throws.
- To emphasize proper throwing mechanics and throwing rhythm.

Procedure:

1. Four players form a box - 60 feet apart for older players - 45 feet apart for little leaguers.
2. Use throw-down bases to simulate a diamond, if needed.
3. Throw the ball around the box/bases clockwise for 30 seconds then switch groups.
4. Have groups throw in counterclockwise direction for variety.
5. For competition, count the number of times each group throws the ball around the box in 30 seconds.

### Line Relay Drill

Purpose:

- To simulate throwing under game conditions.
- To force the players to throw quickly and accurately while under pressure.
- To emphasize the proper execution of throwing and relay mechanics.
- To teach players to turn correctly while making the relay throw.

Procedure:

1. Divide the team into groups of four - (groups of three are okay if necessary, but not ideal.)
2. Place members of each group about 60-90 feet apart. This will approximate the throwing distance between bases and is about the distance the relay man is from outfielder.

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3. Place first man on foul line and place balance of players in the group equal distance apart toward the outfield fence.
  4. Individual groups should be as far apart as practical for safety's sake.
  5. Infielders should be in middle positions (2 & 3) of lines so as to practice relay moves and throws.
  6. Outfielders and catchers should be at end positions (1 & 4).
  7. Players at beginning of line have the balls.
  8. Begin drill on coach's command.
  9. Throw the ball down and back a pre-determined number of times.
- If an overthrow occurs or relay man is missed, the ball must be returned and throw made accurately to overthrown player before ball can be advanced.
  - Winning group is the one that can throw the ball to the end of the line and back (prescribed number of times) the fastest.
  - Relay man should turn to his "glove hand side" on accurate throws to him, when making his throw to next player.
  - Do not put all best arms in one line. It destroys competition.

### **Full throw technique (Grip, Shoulders, Footwork, Delivery, Follow through)**

1. Hold the ball softly like an egg, at the end of the fingers, not back in the palm, not a tight grip; 2 seam grip for infielders, 4 seam grip for outfielders
2. Keep on balls of feet, knees bent, not flat footed
3. When coming to goal post position, ensure shoulders are in a straight line to partner
4. Ensure elbow is slightly higher than shoulder and ball is facing away from player
5. Deliver with throwing elbow above shoulder, step glove foot toward target, just slightly to the left of center of the target (for RHT, opposite for LHT)
6. As player delivers, glove should pull in towards body to help rotate the body/shoulders
7. Thumb should be down and fingers at the top of the ball
8. Release and 'pick the pocket' by slapping the glove side hip on follow through
9. Bring throwing foot around to square with the glove foot, square shoulders towards the target/partner ready to field the ball

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# Hitting

## Swing Technique

Starts with proper mechanics...grip, stance, head position, hitting position, swing

### Grip and Stance

- Must be relaxed...grip with fingers, not the palm of the hand. The top hand is lying on the bat TENSION FREE!
- Weight is on the balls of the feet...not the heels. Bend the knees...player in athletic position with feet. Bat is placed on shoulder [relaxed] then raised. Hands are next to shoulder and cheek. Keep elbows down. Raising elbow creates tension.

### Head Position

- Eyes must be level, not slanted. Do NOT let player slant their head.
- Start of swing - Chin should be close to front shoulder
- End of swing – Chin should be close to back shoulder with eyes looking down at the point of contact

### Hitting Position [LOAD]

- When the pitcher “loads” his hip, the batter “loads” his hip. Load up the back side...meaning the weight now shifts about 20% to the back side/foot. The hands go back and load also (backwards ‘C’).
- The front foot may come up [or lightly tap] and then back down. Now player is ready to swing. Any movement in loading should be done BEFORE the pitcher releases ball.

### Swing

- The swing should be a short powerful swing. Arms should not be extended over the plate.
  - The swing starts with front heel pressure and the hips...hips lead the hands.
  - As your weight moves forward from your back leg to your front leg, your back foot will pivot towards the pitcher and your knee will turn in. The front foot will not pivot and you will want to keep that leg stiff. It's not necessary to keep it completely straight, but you don't want to flex it as you transfer your weight. (This can cause your head to drop as you tracking the ball.)
  - While you pivot on your back foot, you also will open up your hips. The degree to which you open your hips depends on the location of the pitch. On inside pitches, you need to completely open the hips to get your hands through right next to your body. On outside pitches, you have to keep your hips more closed to get your hands out and drive the ball the other direction.
  - An important point on feel for the player: It should feel as if the back hip is driving the hips open, not the front hip pulling the hips open. It may seem like a subtle difference, but a player that is pulling open will often start by pulling his front shoulder open. This can cause all types of problems.
  - Your legs and hips are going to drive your swing and provide power. Work hard on both of these and you will see a difference in the batting cage and on the field.
  - Swing should be a short powerful swing, thus a “short” swing. Also known as ‘staying inside the ball’.
- Example:
- When the hands are in the “load” position that is “A” position.
    - If the hands extend out over the plate, that is known as “B” position.
    - When the hands are just in front of body and lower, that is the “C” position.
    - Ideally: Hands should go from A to C!! Thus a short, fast, powerful swing.
    - If the hands go A to B to C it is a long slower swing.

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### Short Swing Drill

- Place player against a fence. Put one end of bat on player's chest and the other on the fence. Have him swing...if he hits fence he has long swing. Work on taking hands from load position to hitting position and stay inside. He will not hit fence. Hands go from A to C!

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### Tee drills

- Using real baseballs or waffles, hit into a screen for reinforcing hitting fundamentals
- The tee should be placed in front of the base, not on top...the ball is always hit in front of the plate!

### Soft toss drill

- To move toward hitting a thrown ball; Want player to drive ball, not hit pop ups

Note: Throwing soft toss correctly is important. Throw the ball in front of the player, not at him! A player never hits the ball on top of plate. Also allow player to "load" before tossing.

### Use a pitching machine to establish timing

## **Batting Grip / Where to Stand in the Batters Box**

- Bat held in the fingers, loose in the hands
- Bat Holding Pressure: Top Hand – top finger between large knuckles; Bottom Hand – bottom three fingers
- Relaxed hands and arms
- Bat must be able to 'travel', must be able to 'chop wood'
- Take stance, lay end of bat on plate, place hands on bat (like grabbing a golf club but with a baseball grip, pick straight up into baseball stance
- It is important that you are relaxed and tension-free as possible
- Feet shoulder width apart, Foot closest pitcher lined up near front of home plate
- Should be able to tap outside of plate with end of bat, feet parallel, feet pointing toward home plate, knees slightly bent, waist slightly bent, handle of bat near back shoulder, barrel of bat above and behind head

## **Batting Stance and Watching the Ball**

- Draw an imaginary box around the delivery area (pitcher's release point). Focus on the box rather than the pitching motion and pick up the ball as it enters the box.
- Pick a spot on the pitcher's body and focus on the location of the delivery of the ball. For some pitchers, this location may be the bill of the cap. Focus on that spot until the pitcher's hand comes into the imaginary box discussed above and then switch your eyes over to the ball.
- This method allows you to keep your eyes focused at the same distance as the mound.

## **Strike Zone and Avoiding Being Hit**

- The zone is an imaginary rectangular box that typically runs the width of the plate(excluding the black edge) and from the hitter's chest to his knees.
- All players at this age should know the strike zone, they instead should start learning their own strike zone (the area where they make the best contact) and focus on that until the count dictates

## **Bunting (and taking signs)**

- An important part of baseball. Teach players to hold bat with top hand slid up bat to balance point of bat. Turn body toward pitcher
- Drag Bunt – 1st look for the right pitch, (RHT)pull your right foot back and move your right hand up the bat. Place the bat in front of the body and the barrel pointed towards first base. This provides the proper angle to bunt the ball down the third base line. By placing the bat in front of your body, you increase the chances of bunting it fair. A common mistake in drag bunting is attempting to deaden the ball. With a drag bunt, it's much more important to be accurate by bunting the ball down the line.
- Once in position to bunt, make sure you have a good pitch to bunt, otherwise pull back. Do not bunt any pitch inside of your current bat position. That pitch forces you to lean back and prevents you from getting a good jump. Take any pitch that is higher than your current bat position. The best pitch for a drag bunt is from the middle to the outside part of the plate.

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- Push Bunt - The purpose of the push bunt, like the drag bunt, is to get a base hit. For right-handed hitters, look for the same situation that left-handed hitters look for when performing a drag bunt. Look to push the bunt past the pitcher toward the second baseman.
- For left-handed hitters, look for the same situation right-handed hitters look for when laying down a drag bunt. Push the bunt down the third base line.
- Drills: Put circles on the field down 3<sup>rd</sup> base and 1<sup>st</sup> base. Ask players to try and bunt the ball into the circles. When having batting practice, have players bunt at least 2-4 balls every time. Have competitions or rewards for good bunting...
- Players need to understand and practice the signs through-out the season not just games. They need to understand a start and an end of the signs
- Players should look for signs consistently even when they know it is a hit situation versus only looking on special situations so as to not tip off players/coaches when there is a special sign being given.

### **Hitting off-speed pitches (All Stars only)**

- Early recognition is the first and most important part of hitting off speed pitches. You must keep your hands and body back; your weight should stay back at least 70%. If you commit your hands early, you will have no chance to have success with this pitch. That is why early recognition is so important.
- Breaking balls - Note that the better a pitcher's curveball is, the tougher it is to recognize. The harder a curveball is, the less you'll see the trajectory of the ball pop up out of the hand. The harder a pitcher throws a curveball, the more difficult it is for him to control.
- Get a good one to hit.
- Look for the 12/6 rotation of the seams just after release.
- A pitcher will slow his arm down on a poor curveball and his delivery will change

### Underhand Recognition Drill

This drill is designed to help differentiate between the speeds of a fastball and an off-speed pitch. I like this drill very much because it will help you recognize where the weight of your body needs to be. To do this drill:

- Coach tosses underhand from behind a screen sitting about 15ft. in front of home plate.
- Coach mixes change of speeds and locations. Changing the speeds allows the hitter to feel the hesitation.
- Hitter drives the ball right back up the middle.

### Bounce Drill

This drill reinforces the hesitation that needs to take place when hitting a breaking ball. For example if you are looking fastball, and the pitcher throws a hittable breaking ball, if you continue on as if it were a fastball, you will be way out front. That is why it is so important to recognize early and hesitate until the ball gets to you.

To do this drill seated:

- The tosser sits behind a screen 15ft. in front of the hitter.
- The tosser bounces the ball 4-5ft. in front of home plate, allowing the ball to bounce into the strike zone.

To do this drill standing:

- The tosser stands behind a screen 25ft. in front of the hitter.
- Tosses the ball overhand, bouncing the ball 3-4 ft. in front of home plate, allowing the ball to bounce up into the strike zone.

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## Underhand Lob Drill

Since a major key to hitting the curveball is to allowing it to come down to you, this drill is designed to practice waiting for the ball to come down to you. To do this drill:

- The tosser positions himself behind a screen 10-15ft. in front of the hitter, lobbing the ball over the screen.
- The hitter must wait for the ball to come down to him. Stay inside the ball and drive it up the middle.

## **Knowing pitch count (All Stars only)**

- If you are ahead in the count 1-0, 2-0, 2-1, or 3-1, you should be looking for that "good pitch to hit." Something in your favorite area of the plate that you usually hit hard. Knowing your strong spot is crucial in this situation. If you have no idea where in the strike zone you hit best, then you cannot take advantage of the "hitter's count" situations. These are the times when you can really look for a pitch and when you get it, really take a strong cut at it
- If you are even in the count 1-1, or down 0-1, you must adopt a different mind-set to be a successful hitter. Approach these counts with the idea that you are going to hit the ball "the other way." One reason for this approach is that you will naturally track the ball a fraction of a second longer, giving you more time to decide if the pitch is going to be a strike.
- Additionally, this approach gives you the ability to hit pitches away from you, or on the "outside corner" of the plate. Pitchers like to nibble with borderline pitches to see if batters will chase them. If they do, the pitcher is in control. If not, he has to adjust. Pitchers generally like to nibble on the outside of the plate as that is the most difficult pitch to learn to hit. At higher levels of play the pitcher will "come inside" to set up something "outside" on the next pitch
- When you have two strikes on you it is imperative that you take a "battling" mind-set with you to the plate. This is "war" between you and the pitcher. Cut down on your swing, keep your head still, and intensely track the ball the moment it leaves the pitcher's hand. Your goal is to "get a piece of it" if it is anywhere close to the strike zone. If you hit it fair. . . fine. If it's a real tough pitch in a tough location. . . foul it off. The more pitches you make the pitcher throw in these situations, the greater your advantage. First, the pitcher cannot remain perfect. Sooner or later he is going to make a mistake and throw you a good ball to hit. Second, the more pitches you make him throw, the more fatigued he becomes, which may lead to more mistakes

## **Hitting the Ball Where It's Pitched (All Stars only)**

- Inside pitch – Hit the ball earlier (out in front of the plate)
- Middle - Hit the ball normally
- Outside - Hit the ball later (future back on the plate)
- To hit the ball to the opposite field:
  - Get a pitch on the outside part of the plate
  - Hit the ball deeper in the contact zone
  - Keep the barrel of the bat above your hands
  - Stay inside the ball
- Key Point - A point to remember is that you can look outside and still have a chance to hit the inside pitch, but if you look inside, you will have virtually no chance to hit the outside pitch

## **Slash hitting (MAJOR ALL STARS ONLY)**

- Slash hitting is a technique that draws the infield in by showing a bunt and then turning back to hit as the pitcher is in his windup and ideally using a  $\frac{3}{4}$  swing to hit the ball just over the infield. This can be used during hit and run situations or to catch the defense off guard during an obvious bunt situation.
- You should limit this to your best placement hitters, but be sure to practice it ahead of time. Also make sure your runners are looking for the slash signal so they are prepared for the possibility of a pop up.
- When showing the bunt, make sure your batter pivots on the balls of his feet versus jumping/stepping into position, so as to allow for an easy return to the swinging position

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## Fielding

### Glove Positions and Watching the Ball

- Explain the "ready position"....every player should be in that position before ball is thrown
- Every player is moving when the ball is pitched. If the ball is hit NO player should be standing still

### Know Your Situation, Calling for the Ball and Backing Up

- As a coach you want your team prepared for every situation.
- If you can't throw out a runner stealing bases, then the opposing team will steal all day long. If your team can't field a bunt then you won't feel very comfortable in close games.
- Good team defensive involves having a good strategy, practicing the plays that are part of that strategy, and then calling those plays in the game.
- If you're team is well prepared then you will feel confident calling plays during the game, and you may actually look to take advantage of other team's offensive weaknesses with your defensive strength.
- It's impossible to put every situation here, however this is something every player needs to work on and work on often. Consider creating a play book similar to football to send home with the players.

### Calling for the Ball, Plays, Relays, Backups, Where to Throw, Calling Outs

#### Calling for the ball

- Should be three different calls; one for the infielders, one for outfielders and an acknowledgment call from all others. The reason for this they all sound different and hard to mis-understand
- Infielders- ball – ball – ball
- Outfields - mine – mine – mine
- Acknowledgment - take it – take it- take it

#### Relays/Throws/Backups (No rainbows throw from the outfield. Throw on a line...keep the ball in front at all costs)

- RF to 3rd = Rf>SS>3b (SS should move to an area in line with 3b between 2nd and P)
- RF to Home = Rf>1B>H ( 1b should align between RF'er and home, between 1b and P, need to adjust for deep
- Cf to 3b = Cf>SS>3B (SS should move inline between 3b and CF'er, grass dirt area)
- Cf to Home = CF>1b>Home (1b should move just off the back side of P mound, cut here allows for throw to 3b)
- Lf to Home = LF>3b>home ( 3b should move to an area that lines Lf'er to home and still see runners on bases)
- Outfield - Call for the ball, backup your partner.
- Second base, shortstop and centerfield - backup every throw back to the pitcher
- Pitchers - Cover Home plate on past balls

All of these should be adjusted for depth of ball, fielders arm and situation.

#### Calling Outs

- After each put out and before each batter - catcher calls outs to pitcher and infield; infield calls to the outfield

### Team Defense/ ball control/ controlling the running game

- The key to effective team defense is getting the players to know position priority per situation and getting your players to constantly communicate. Your catcher should be your leader and help players position themselves based on where the batter last hit, calling for shifts based on left/right batters, calming the pitcher etc.
- Ball control on defense is extremely important. More bases have been stolen, more unearned runs have scored and more games have been lost on failed 'heroic' plays/throws than due to clutch hits.
- You must stress the importance of accurate throws, keeping the ball in front at all costs, backing up throws and not forcing throws (particularly with runners on base).

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## Playing Infield (including ready position; aardvark, alligator, belly button, position number and priority)

### Ground balls basics

- Ready position with weight on toes, knees bent, step forward
- As ball approaches – Aardvark (glove in front and out), Alligator (throwing hand covers ball in glove), Belly Button (glove and throwing hand raise to waist to establish grip and prepare for throw)
- Drill – Two players 20' apart, one rolls a grounder, other performs A, A, BB, with a crow-hop throw back to partner, then switch after 5 mins

### Ground ball details

#### Ready

- Guess where the ball is going. (Your first guesses may be way off, but keep doing it. Over time you'll develop good fielding instincts.)
- Call for the ball - before the hit. You want the ball to come to you. Be positive - confident.
- Take two short steps in. Forward movement keeps you on the inside balls of your feet. You want to be loose and fluid.
- Stay low on a wide base - feet apart, knees bent, butt down, arms hanging relaxed between knees.
- Play as deep as your arm will allow you to still make an out!

#### React

- Move to the ball.
- For best lateral move to right: Drive across with left shoulder. Turn right foot out. As upper body leans right - step with right leg, then left leg. (Don't start with a cross-over step - open the body to the ball side first.)
- For lateral to left, lead with right shoulder and step with left foot.
- Keep head down, sneak up on the ball - soft strides.
- Try to get there early, to face the hit (on all but the most out-of-reach hits.)

#### Catch

- Establish triangle - wide leg base, arms out in front, maintain balance. (Check with heel tap.)
- Stay soft - light feet, relaxed hands, loose shoulders.
- Glove out and below the ball - arms can pull up easier than push down. [AARDVARK]
- Cradle ball on heel of glove for quick grab by throwing hand (on top). [ALLIGATOR]
- On out-of-reach shots - drop to knee with throwing hand for balance, glove arm stretch. (Flat-out dives seldom work.)
- Come up with feet under you, ready to throw. [BELLY BUTTON]

#### 2 line drill

- 1st Line - half the kids behind 1st and one covering the bag
- 2nd Line - the half behind SS with one at short
- Coach throws the ball to SS who fields then throws to first, immediately following the throw and lining up at 1st, the 1st baseman throws to the next guy at SS and follows his throw to SS
- Coaches stand about half way watching for correct fundamentals.
- After each player fields the ball five times or 5 minutes, switch to short hops then fly balls
- In 10 to 15 minutes you get them loose and a lot of fielding completed

#### 3 Fungo drill

- Have fielders at all position plus a deep 1B play a second 1b
- All fungos are in a straight line just in front of home and all hitting at the same time;
- 5minutes each ( If more then one at a position have them rotate)
- First rotation
  - Left Coach – hits to 3b who throw to 1b ( normal position)
  - Right coach – hits to 2nd who works turning 2 with SS who throws to deep 1b(second 1b)
- Second Rotation
  - Left coach Bunts to 3b who's throws to 1b(normal position)
  - Right coach hits to SS who works turning 2 with 2b who throws to deep 1st base(second 1b)

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- Third Rotation
  - Left coach to SS who throws to normal 1b
  - Right coach hits to 3b who works turning 2 with 2b who throws to deep 1b
- Fourth rotation
  - Left coach hits to 1b normal position who works turning 2 with SS who throws back to 1b( normal position)
  - Right coach hits to 2b who throws to deep 1b
- 3rd Fungo works with outfielders and catchers on fly balls, grounders, relays to home the entire time ( in outfield only)

## Double Plays, Underhand Toss and Cut-offs

### Double plays

- Re-inforce force play, focus on getting the lead runner
- 2b covers second from left side: SS covers second from right side

### Covering a base and underhand toss

- Toss ball the ball firmly but with a slight arc...lead the cover man to the base, don't toss it to where he is at that moment
- Get glove out of the way.
- Step through with right foot
- Stiff-wrist toss
- Don't let hand go above shoulder
- Receiver touches corner of base and removes foot/crow hop as soon as ball is caught!

### Cut-offs

- 2B to RF/CF and RF and SS to LF/CF and LF
- Player to call for the ball and give target with glove and hand up.

## Playing First Base

- The defensive skills of the first baseman are often taken for granted. This position is the most under-rated defensive position on a team. The defensive skills of a good first baseman can often make the difference in winning a championship.
- Set & Ready Position - With No Runners On Base
  - The First baseman positions himself approximately 15 to 20 feet behind first base and about 10 feet from the line. This is the normal positioning when a bunt is not anticipated and there are no runners on base.
  - Weight slightly forward, left foot in front three or four inches, knees slightly bent and weight up on the balls of the feet.
  - Glove held waist high, open, facing toward the batter.
  - Always check with the second baseman to make sure there is no mix up on ground balls hit to the right side of the infield.
  - Always focus your eyes into the strike zone, assuming that the ball will be hit in your direction.
- Set & Ready Position - Holding The Runner On
  - The purpose of this position is to receive the pitcher's pick-off throw and apply a quick tag. Secondly, if the pitcher throws to home, moving into position to field the ball.
  - Touch the inside of the bag with your right foot and stretch out with your glove hand, making an inviting target for the pitcher to throw to.
  - When the pitcher throws over, catch the ball and apply a tag with a sweeping motion.
  - If the pitcher throws towards the plate, move quickly into a position to field the ball.
- Fielding Balls Hit To The Left Of The Pitcher
  - It is the pitcher's responsibility to cover first base when the first baseman has to field the ball. Always make an unassisted putout when you can. When relaying the ball to the pitcher, the following tips will help avoid errors.

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- Wave the pitcher off before making an unassisted putout.
- When sprinting to the bag, hold onto the ball in your bare hand. You will have better control and the ball will not fall out of your glove, since you do not have to apply a tag.
- You can toss the ball to the pitcher quicker if you have to.
- When relaying the ball to the pitcher, use the underhand shovel type release.
- Throw the ball at the bag so the pitcher can catch the ball chest-high as he crosses the bag.
- After releasing the ball to the pitcher, you must give him directions if there are other runners on base.
- When fielding balls that are hit to right, plant your pivot foot and make an overhand throw to the pitcher.
- Communicate with your pitcher. It is his responsibility to field all ground balls that he can get to. Make sure you cover the bag if he fields any balls. Remind him constantly to let you know what his intentions are before it is too late. On critical plays he must yell loud when he is fielding the ball.

## Rundowns, Infield In and Bunt Defenses

- Rundowns

You should expect that every rundown ends with an out when on defense. Often the offense will sacrifice a trailing runner to a rundown in order to score the lead runner, so concentrate on preventing the run. If our opponent scores because we are suckered into chasing one of them around, then we lose that battle - if not the game. In those situations we would rather let the trailing runner advance than give up a run.

### Between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>

- 2nd and/or SS covers second, 3rd and CF back them up.
- 1st moves up the line behind her, Pitcher, Catcher and RF back him up.
- LF comes in to cover third

### Between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>

- 3rd covers third, LF and Pitcher backs up 3rd
- SS takes second, 2nd backs up SS, CF and RF back up 2nd
- Catcher moves up the line to 3rd, and 1st covers home.

### Between 3<sup>rd</sup> and home

- SS covers third, Lf and CF back him up.
- 3rd moves up behind the runner.
- Catcher protects the plate, Pitcher and 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> back him up.

### Key points for all rundown situations

- Run right at the runner if he stops in his tracks or back peddles.
- Never hesitate throwing - make sure he doesn't advance. Remember, if we get an out, it's most likely going to be a few feet before he reaches the previous bag.
- Keep the ball in view. When you try to hide it from the runner, you hide it from your teammates too, and it's critical he knows when you are truly throwing.
- Keep your targets and throws to the side of the runner. Never line up with the runner or across him.
- Hold your arm steady - hand up by your head, lots of white showing, no fakes. (Minimum ball movement will actually make the runner less certain of your intentions.)
- Make a short-arm, snap throw. - a wrist shot straight to the glove.
- Don't block the base path unless you have the ball. As soon as you throw the ball, take a banana route to back up your teammate who catches it.
- Throw only as a last resort. After the ball gets ahead of the runner, usually only one more throw is necessary to get him out.

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- Bunt defense

Player Position	Bunt Defense 1	Bunt Defense 2	Bunt Defense 3
<b>1B</b>	Cover at First Base	Cover First Base	Charge Batter
<b>2B</b>	Secondary cover at First Base	Cover Second Base	Cover First Base
<b>3B</b>	Charge Batter	Charge Batter	Charge Batter
<b>SS</b>	Cover Second or Third Base	Cover Third Base	Cover Third or Second Base
<b>Keyword</b>	<b>Push</b>	<b>Wheel</b>	<b>Crash</b>

### Covering Steals

- When a RH batter the 2b covers: LH batter SS covers.
- When runner goes, yell to catcher [communication], player catches ball, covers bag, and places glove next to bag.
- NOTE: Teach on any tag play to put glove down and let opposing player slide into glove. Do not tag a runner in the body...remember he has to tag the bag!

### Playing Outfield (including set/ready position; crosswalk and crow hop, position number and priority)

#### Outfield Basics

- The mechanics of catching a pop up...use both hands
- Catch ball, crow hop...and throw. No side arm. Show how overhand techniques from the throwing section are better.
- Keep the ball in front of you at all costs (grounder or pop-up)
- Throw practice flies, do not hit practice flies. This allows better control, more repetitions per player. (Anything a kid does a thousand times he will become proficient at.
- Teach player to look for cut-off man. Throw to the cut-off man's chest...

#### Outfield details

- Be patient, be ready, be explosive
- Before the pitch...
  - Check the base runners.
  - Check your position. Don't hug the lines unless the situation calls for it.
- On the windup...
  - Lean in, balls of your feet, square to the plate
- On contact...
  - Take time to read the ball (work on Drop Step technique)
  - Rock back on the first step. (It's better to get burned in front of you than Behind.)
  - Hustle to the ball - get there early.
  - Over your head, turn and sprint, glove down
- The Catch...
  - Line yourself up for the throw BEFORE the catch, not after.
  - Runner on, take roller off your glove foot
  - Ball in air, flip glasses down at top of arc, or find ball through webbing.
  - Call it... Mine-Mine-Mine!
  - Catch it above your head and never cradle (unless a full stretch run-in)
  - As you catch it, move through the ball.

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- To throw...
  - Line up your glove-side shoulder to the target.
  - Elbow up, fingers on top of the ball.
  - Make it a line-drive or one-bounce throw (no rainbows) and Follow the throw.
  - Hit your Cut-Offs!
  
- Last Major Note for the OF - All throws need to be thrown as if the game is on the line! Regardless of the situation! This means when throwing in a ball on a POP Fly, throw the ball to the Cut-Off as if a play is going to be made even if no one is on base whether 1st out or last out of the game!

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## Pitching and Catching

### Signs - Giving (catcher) and Receiving (pitcher)

- Goal is for our players to get the sign and the other team does not.
- Feet close together, heels nearly clicking, toes pointed out.
- Should be close enough to hitter to reach out and touch his back elbow.
- Knees pointed at SS and 2B, 1B and 3B should not see signs (ask them!!).
- Left arm down left leg, wrist bends at knee to use glove to hide signs from 3B coach
- Run right hand down inseam to directly in front of cup
- Don't drag sign out, put hand into glove, be careful of shadows
- Come out the same every time, on every type of pitch (be aware of both and feet action)
- Pitcher must be on the rubber before taking the signs
- Pitcher should make subtle head motions to accept or deny the pitch...for most divisions, the pitcher should agree to the first sign, since the catcher usually gets the sign from the manager
- If the pitcher is confused, don't make a scene...step off the rubber and call timeout for a quick meeting with your catcher

### Catching - Glove Positions and Stance

#### General

- Weight on inside of feet
- Elbow flexed, over left knee, glove not too far out or too close to body, must be able to give slightly with the pitch
- Bare hand either behind back or protected behind glove

#### With runners on

- Feet slightly more than shoulder width, flat footed, weight
- On balls of feet, toes pointed out, feet staggered (right foot slightly back)
- Elbows outside knees
- Back somewhat straight (not slouched), rear end up, keep head higher than shoulders

### Catching - Blocking Balls, Throwing to Bases, Pitch Count and Framing

#### General

- Must have a comfortable stance
- Be a leader of the team
- Gives signals to the pitcher
- When throwing out a runner, throw the ball to the base, your fielder should be there.
- Always give your pitcher a good, still target
- When blocking, don't just use your glove...drop to your knees and keep the ball in front of you
- Step into the field and throw to the pitcher's chest on every pitch
- Backup throws to first from the infield...hustle and follow the base runner to first

#### Framing and pitch count

- Frame only close (marginal pitches)
- Keep body movement to minimum (slight movement to outside pitch is okay)
- Hold long enough to give the umpire a good look, not show him up
- Catch the low strike with the glove up
- Catch the high strike with the glove down
- Get fingers "around" the pitch (cup the ball)
- Outside pitch elbow up, twist wrist inward, don't pull back in
- Goal : don't lose an actual strike, umpire is usually guessing on outside pitch; let the close pitch sit
- Don't pull pitch into strike zone, the umpire will not give it to you and may stop calling the close ones
- Always know the count, frequently confirm with umpire and keep the pitcher well aware of the count

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### Blocking

- Block all the time: bullpen, batting practice, no one on
- Do some grounds keeping: keep the area around plate smooth and be sure there is not an edge to home plate that is going to make bad bounces
- Goal is to block ball on to plate
- Attempt to cut distance from where ball hits ground and you
- Block all pitches in the dirt, do not attempt to catch
- Jab with foot closest to ball, drive off opposite leg and drop to both knees, knees out, feet out (make hole small)
- Use hip flexors to get to ball, keep butt down è “cut-off and surround”
- Stay square to the ball, catch ball with chest
- Round shoulders, soft body, relax on impact
- Chin down, look ball in; thumbs out, -fork- glove into ground, block hole between legs
- On ball to outside: attempt to get hips around the ball and block back towards plate, get both knees down, try to get closer to bounce, be more aggressive than pitch straight on

### Throwing

- Catch ball close to body, don't reach out for ball
- Catch ball with two hands
- Take ball out of glove with four fingers, then adjust to grip the ball across the seams
- Break hands out in front of chest (“take ball out of shirt pocket”)
- Goal is to step (with left foot), catch, throw
- With pitch around the plate use “right, left, throw” method towards second; “click” heels with right foot replacing left, almost squared off to 2nd, almost bringing target shoulder on line
- Throw from within the catchers box, short arm swing to goal-post (lead shoulder, elbow, and hip targeting 2nd base), elbow up
- Throw: keep head still, come out low, arm goes forward when front foot hits; use good throwing mechanics!!
- With ball well out of strike zone must use step-catch-throw method, outside pitch get head on 1b side of ball
- Ball in dirt ==> rake it (only hope to throw out runner)
- Throw through hitters who are in the way (do not try to avoid contact)
- Throwing to third: pitch location and batter stance will determine (generally pitch on inside half throw behind, outside half over or in front)

## **Pitching - 4 seam/2 seam, Change up, Balance Point/Alignment/Delivery, Follow Through**

### 4 seam grip

- index and middle finger crossing over the left to right horseshoe (‘C’) seams
- thumb directly underneath
- ring finger on side with tip touching outside of thumb
- ball at the tip of the fingers/thumb, not deep in the palm.

### 2 seam grip

- index and middle finger on top of the railroad (‘skinny’) seams
- thumb directly underneath
- ring finger on side with tip touching outside of thumb
- ball at the tip of the fingers/thumb, not deep in the palm.

### Change up grip

- index, middle and ring fingers crossing over the left to right horseshoe seams
- thumb directly underneath
- ring finger on side with tip touching outside of thumb
- ball is deep in the palm.

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### General guidelines

- Learn to pitch from the stretch and hold a runner on base.
- The difference is that the pitcher takes his signal from his catcher with his foot parallel to the rubber [foot in hole!], then goes into a stretch position. He looks in the direction of runner leading off, then proceeds to throw to catcher or to the base for pickoff attempt. Fake throws are allowed to second only.
- A pitcher can move his foot from the pitching rubber and does not have to throw the ball.
- Teach relaxed pitching...don't complicate the position. No unnecessary leg or arm movements.
- Teach the full windup...not beginning in the stretch
- Composure from the player is important to be a pitcher...a lively arm is great but if he has a bad head, he will not be a good pitcher.
- Pitchers are made, not born. Pitching requires repetition to foster comfort, feel and proficiency.
- Off speed pitches and location of pitches should be emphasized over breaking pitches. This approach is better for your pitchers physically and provides a more rounded approach to pitching.
- The pitcher's responsibility is to have the ball put in play in a manner by which the defense may achieve an out.
- The pitchers job is NOT to strike out every batter
- Pitchers should be instructed on how to cover first base.
- Teach your pitchers to backup defensive plays.

### Steps to pitching

#### Wind-up (for a RHP, simply reverse right and left references for a LHP)

1. Jab step – small step with left foot backward or to the side. This will take the weight of the right foot.
2. Pivot - Now take right foot and place it in front of rubber [in the hole]
3. Balance - Pick up the left leg and bring that left knee waist high. Balance the hip, shoulder, and raised leg (toe relaxed, pointing down). Remember no tension...
4. Stride/Throw - Now drop and extend left leg toward your target. The body falls in that direction. At the same time the ball has parted the glove with "thumbs down" motion... The arm has extended and has followed the body in a powerful throw (hand/wrist, elbow, shoulder and follow through movements same as throwing section above)
5. Follow through - Left foot pointed to target, arm and right leg follow...arm across body to glove side hip [pick the pocket] and leg following through to almost a "ready" position. End in fielding position...

#### Stretch (for a RHP, simply reverse right and left references for a LHP)

1. Ready – right foot to the rubber, left foot extended toward home with side of foot facing catcher
2. Set – Draw hands together while also pulling left leg towards right leg, then pause (use head/eyes ONLY to check runner if applicable)
3. Balance - Pick up the left leg and bring that left knee waist high. Balance the hip, shoulder, and raised leg (toe relaxed, pointing down). Remember no tension...
4. Stride/Throw - Now drop and extend left leg toward your target. The body falls in that direction. At the same time the ball has parted the glove with "thumbs down" motion... The arm has extended and has followed the body in a powerful throw (hand/wrist, elbow, shoulder and follow through movements same as throwing section above)
5. Follow through - Left foot pointed to target, arm and right leg follow...arm across body to glove side hip [pick the pocket] and leg following through to almost a "ready" position. End in fielding position...

### Key things to remember

- Jab step on wind-up should be small enough to allow pivot foot to clear cleanly (prefer a step to the side rather than back)
- Balance – Knee should be waist high or higher, toe should be pointing down, not out/flexed
- Stride – Front knee needs to come down then forward, front foot closed until landing (keeps hips closed) then should be pointed to hitter (some might land at 45 degrees)
- Stride – the longer the better

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## Pitching - Knowing Pitch Counts and Covering First

### Two simple tips

- Always know your count...between the catcher and the umpire you should never have trouble getting the count. This is essential to knowing how and what to throw to the batter
- Any hit to your left should cause you to hustle towards first until it is clear the first baseman can make the play. If you have to cover, gauge your distance to the bag and run as parallel to the baseline as possible. Watch the ball to your glove and then pick up the bag for the force.

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## Base Running

### Run the Bases

- Be aggressive! Make them make errors!
- Always look at the base and look at/listen to your base coaches, do not watch the ball
- For a run through first, hit the front third of the base with your toes/ball of feet, run through and curl off to the left. Check over your right shoulder to see if the ball has passed...listen for your coach
- For extra base hits, approach the base by swinging out to the right (like a banana, not a backwards C) and touch the base with your right foot (if possible, but do not change your stride to do so) so that you create a straight line to the next base.

### Sliding

#### When to Slide

1. To avoid a tag.
2. To stop at the base.
3. To break up a double play.
4. To get back to base.
5. Always when play is close.

#### Length of Slide

15' or two body lengths from base.

#### Direction of Slide

1. Sliding to right side, usually use right foot as takeoff foot.
2. Going to left side, use left foot as takeoff.
3. As takeoff occurs, the arms are thrown up, the upper body is extended backwards and the feet forward, all somewhat close to parallel to the ground.

#### Landing

On buttocks, head up, arms out for balance and toes upward

#### Bent-Leg Slide

1. In addition to above, tuck left leg or right leg in a bent position and place under other leg.
2. Use the bent-leg position to teach the beginner to insure that the boy will slide and injury will be avoided. Thus, he develops confidence and aggressive baserunning techniques.

#### Grass Sliding Drills

Remove shoe and have a throw down base in the outfield or level grassy area

1. All players sit on the grass and alternate placing one leg straight and the other in the bent-leg tucked position (Caution: remember, have them remove shoes and have pads on over pants).
  - a. By putting hands behind themselves while in the sitting position, they push their body forward on floor or grass.
  - b. Here they are getting used to the position and finding out which side is comfortable. Sliders can be left or right so far as which side is more comfortable in the sliding position.
2. All players from a standing position practice the fall into the bent-leg slide (Caution: We use no steps, as yet). Player should concentrate on his landing and direction and getting the bent-leg tucked in underneath.
3. All players practice from a standing position with three walking steps. Players that are comfortable on either side should practice both; however, others should perfect their best side first.
4. All players practice drill from a standing position with a running four-to-five step start.
5. During drills, coaches can correct faults by checking landing position, hands out, body extended with head up, bent leg and tucked underneath and toes up. Buttocks and calf of bent leg should show the wear of absorbing the force of the slide; otherwise, the person is landing incorrectly.

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### **When to Run and Taking Extra Bases**

- Very simple...know the situation, but always listen to your coaches

### **Avoiding Rundowns, how to handle when caught in one**

- Be smart, always watch for signals, always watch the pitcher, 'head on a swivel'
- Once you're given the steal sign, commit to it, don't pull up
- When you're in a run down, again be aggressive, watch the ball and don't retreat too soon... make them chase and throw, as there is a better chance for a bad throw if they're moving
- If runners are on base your job is to stay in it long enough for the runner in front of you to advance safely.

### **Stealing (and taking signs)**

- Always look for a sign every pitch from your third base coach, even if you don't anticipate getting one
- Acknowledge you picked up the sign with a specific motion (i.e. hand to the top of the helmet)
- Once you commit to steal, stay committed, do not pull up, do not look at the catcher/ball
- Always slide to the outside/center field side of the bag, but be ready to adjust for an awkward throw
- Always look over your right shoulder to see if there's an over throw...listen to your base coaches

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## Teamwork & Conditioning

### Supporting your Teammates, Staying Alert and Hustling

- Always be positive to your teammates...you'll need that same support from them at least once a game
- Baseball is as much mental as physical, if not more so. Some of the best plays are not necessarily the most athletic plays, but those that required heads up, quick thinking and reaction and situation knowledge. Being alert to your role on every play/situation is key to being ready to perform
- No team wins and no player achieves success without hustle. Assume nothing is routine, nothing is simple, nothing is over until the ump calls time or the game is over. Every time you choose not to hustle you are giving the other team a chance to make a play against your team...don't give them that gift.

### Handling Failure (Strike Outs, Errors and Losing)

- Always remember it is just a game, no matter what the outcome...maintain the perspective
- Get into the habit of 'flushing' mental and physical errors and shaking them off...focus on the next play, not the last play
- For hitting, remember the best major league hitters in history only hit safely 4 out of 10 times...most millionaire players are ecstatic with 3 of 10. Everyone has slumps through the season...you're no different and should not let it bother you.
- For physical errors, as long as you know what you should have done, the physical perfection will come over time. Use the error as a motivator for what you'll focus on in your next practice (technique and repetition). Again, the best players in history have never had an error free season...
- For mental errors, just be sure to figure out what you should have done instead and move on...you cannot change the last play

### Conditioning and developing balance

- Warm and cool down is essential for baseball players. Because it is not a constant motion sport, but rather a burst after many minutes of waiting, players must be well conditioned, and take care of their bodies after the games and practices
- 10-15 minutes of warm up of all parts of the body is very important. Any number of calisthenics will suffice, but the key is to develop a light sweat prior to throwing, infield, batting, etc.
- Consider mini-competitions for jumping jacks, foot races, one foot balances, etc. with a reward of leading warm-ups next time
- So many baseball motions rely on balance that developing balance is very important to the players being able to execute properly. Hopping down the line, hopping side to side of the line, one foot crane stands, etc. are great for building balance

## General Baseball Knowledge

### History and How It's Played

- Read as much as you can about the game and encourage the kids to read as well
- Encourage them to watch a meaningless game on TV (so as to not root for any one team) and tell them to pay attention to how each player approaches their defensive and offensive opportunities
- Encourage them to watch high school games and watch for the strategy, make mental notes of what was done correctly and incorrectly
- Talk to your players before and after practices and games about the finer points, the joy of the game and the experiences you've had
- Baseball cards are a great way to get the kids engaged, showing technique (varies by player) and impressing them with stats
- Make sure they know that not every MLB player's form is the best for young developing players, and that focusing on basic fundamentals are more important than flare and flash

#### LITTLE LEAGUE PLEDGE

I trust in God  
I love my country  
And will respect its laws  
I will play fair  
And strive to win  
But win or lose  
I will always do my best  
game.

#### VOLUNTEER PLEDGE

I will teach all children to play fair  
and do their best.  
I will positively support all managers,  
coaches and players.  
I will respect the decisions of the umpires.  
I will praise a good effort  
despite the outcome of the