

# Base Running Mechanics

Much of base running is instinctive – knowing when to run and when to stop, understanding which balls will be caught and which won't, learning how fast a player is – these are all things that can only be learned through playing in games. But much of base running is also about technique and an awareness of options, and these are things that can be taught.

## *Upon Contact –*

- ✓ Getting out of the box quickly is key to beating throws to first.
- ✓ Right-handed hitters should take their first step towards first with their right foot, getting a strong push off their left.
- ✓ Left handers should open to first with their right foot and then drive toward the base with a strong crossover step with their left foot.
- ✓ Speed is built through a forward lean that starts with the legs (don't bend at the hip), and a series of short, powerful choppy steps. As speed is built the stride will lengthen naturally.
- ✓ Arms should be kept close to the body and bent at a 90 degree angle. They drive toward the base in synchronization with the steps – short powerful pumps during the initial steps; longer, more fluid pumps as the stride lengthens.
- ✓ Players should run hard at all times to place pressure on the fielders.

## *Approach to First Base –*

### *Approach to First Base – running through the base*

- ✓ For infield ground balls, runners should run through the base and not break speed until they are past the bag.
- ✓ They should touch the front part of the base, although they shouldn't break stride to do so.
- ✓ They should not leap at the base, and they should only slide to avoid a collision – both cost time. Once they pass the base, they should slow and turn to their right (foul territory) to return to the base – if they make a move toward second base, they will be considered 'live' and can be tagged out.

### *Approach to First Base – rounding the base (Listen to First Base Coach on Direction)*

- ✓ For balls that go through the infield to the outfield, players should never assume the outfielders will make the play. Instead they should assume that every outfield ball will be extra bases, and run hard to first base believing that they will be going for second.
- ✓ Rather than running through the base as they would on an infield ball, players 'round' the bag – they complete most of their turn for second before they reach the base. Runners do this by swinging 3-6 feet to the right of the baseline about 15-20 feet before reaching first base, and then in their final steps coming back to the left to touch the bag and direct their momentum towards second base. This swing to the left should be accompanied by a body lean to the left – players should dip their left shoulder towards the pitchers mound to prevent centrifugal force carrying them too far towards right field.
- ✓ The runner should step on the inside of the base with their left foot, and use it to give a firm push off towards second base. While using the left foot is the fastest way around the base, runners should not break their stride to do so – a full-stride right-foot touch is only marginally slower.
- ✓ Deciding when to stop and return to first base is important.
  - Balls to left field will allow the runner to take a more aggressive turn at first base because the risk of a throw to first is low.
  - Balls to center or right require runners to stay closer to the bag because of the greater potential for a throw behind the runner.
  - Also, runners should be more aggressive with two outs than they can be with no outs.
  - A runner that has aggressively approached first base – ran hard, executed a fast rounding of the bag, and taken an aggressive turn – will be well positioned to go to second base on an outfield miscue, a throw to third base or home plate, or an errant relay throw.

*First to Second – Leading Off (Majors and Babe Ruth Only)*

- ✓ Taking leads seems relatively uncomplicated, but like everything else in baseball there is a technique to it. Base runners should know where the baseball is and be aware of the game situation before they leave the base to take their lead.
- ✓ To lessen the chance of a pickoff, a runner should take his full lead before the pitcher gets into his set position; by doing so he will not be moving away from first when the pitcher is in a position to throw behind him.
- ✓ In order to quickly move to a full lead, the runner's first step off the base is a shuffle step, followed by a crossover step with the left foot going behind the right foot. This positioning facilitates a quicker return to the base if needed.
- ✓ The lead can be extended from there using smaller shuffle steps. The player should come to a stop with the right foot slightly open to second base – 4-6 inches to the right of a straight line between first base, the left foot, and second base.
- ✓ Once the pitcher has committed to his motion, the runner takes a secondary lead – an additional set of shuffle steps that get him closer to second base as well as building momentum for a running start.
- ✓ The final steps of this extended lead should be timed to coincide with the arrival of the ball in the hitting zone. Care must be taken to avoid getting too far off the base in the event the ball is not hit. In this case, the runner should firmly plant his right foot to kill momentum, and then perform a crossover step with the right foot and hustle back to first base.

*First to Second – Ball Put In Play*

- ✓ If the ball is put in play on the ground, the runner sprints to second base in a straight line.
- ✓ He does not take a turn at the base until he knows for sure that they will be no play made there.
- ✓ If the ball is put in play in the air, the runner should listen to the first base coach and decide if the ball is catchable. On routine or short fly balls, the runner advances about halfway to second base; faster runners can go little further, slower runners a little less.
- ✓ Runners do not tag at first unless the ball is clearly in foul territory, is hit deep but remains playable, or if there are runners tagging on second and/or third base. If a base tag is in order, the runner should return to first base before the ball reaches the fielder. In order to ensure unobstructed vision of the catch, the tag is made with the foot closest to the ball on the base. As the fielder touches the ball, the runner explodes off the bag.
- ✓ One strategy base runners can employ is to bluff a tag – to tag and prepare as if they intend to advance without fully committing to doing so. This strategy may draw a hard throw from the outfield and perhaps force an error in which can advance the runner(s) an extra base or two. It is an especially effective play with aggressive, strong-armed outfielders, particularly if they are a little inaccurate or are paired with weaker middle infielders.
- ✓ Once a runner knows he will safely reach second base, he will round the bag and take a turn. The principles and techniques here are the same as at first base – run hard, nearly complete the turn for third base before reaching the bag, and take as an aggressive turn as the situation warrants. For balls hit to right center or right field, the runner should not look over his shoulder himself to see the play; instead he look to the third base coach for instructions on whether to stop at second base. If the runner is held, he should stop immediately, return to the base, and find the ball to see if it has been misplayed.
- ✓ Runners should never make the first or third out of an inning attempting to go from first to third base.

*Second to Third –*

- ✓ Before taking his lead off of second base, a base runner should be aware of the game situation and what his do's and don'ts are.
- ✓ He should check the outfielders' positioning on every pitch – are they playing shallow or deep? Who has the best arm?
- ✓ The runner should not make the third out at third base on a tag play.
- ✓ He should not make the first out at home plate.
- ✓ He should tag if the runner at third base is tagging.
- ✓ On a deep fly with no outs, he should tag; if there is one out, he should come off the base, but return to tag if the ball is caught and try to advance if he can.
- ✓ On ground balls, in non-force situations, runners advance on balls hit at them or to the right side; they don't advance on balls to the pitcher or the left side. One possible exception to these rules is a slow roller hit to the third baseman that draws him off the base.
- ✓ Once a runner knows he will safely reach third base, he will round the bag and take a turn (listening to Third Base Coach).
  - The principles and techniques here are the same as at first and second base – run hard, nearly complete the turn for third base before reaching the bag, and take as an aggressive turn as the situation warrants.
  - Since the play will most often be behind the base runner, it is critical that he watch the third base coach for instruction – stay on the base, take a turn, advance to home when directed by the coach.

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### *Second to Third – Leading Off (Majors and Babe Ruth Only)*

- ✓ The lead from second with less than two outs should be longer than that used at first base
- ✓ A rule of thumb would be two steps and a dive back to the base.
  - The lead should be on a straight line between second and third base. A longer lead is used when a steal of third base is in order, or when the coach wants to create space in the defense by drawing a middle infielder closer to the bag.
  - With two outs, the runner takes a lead to the left field side of the baseline. By taking this position, he will create a faster line to home plate by reducing the angle of the round at third base.
  - As in leading from first base, runners on second base take a secondary lead once the pitcher begins to deliver the ball to the plate.
  - Again, the final steps of this extended lead are timed to coincide with the arrival of the pitch in the hitting zone. Because the catcher's throw to second base is much longer than the throw to first, the base runner can take a larger lead.

### *Third to Home – Listen to Third Base Coach For Direction*

- ✓ Before taking his lead off of third base, a base runner should review the game situation and what the options are. The base runner should know the outs – less than two outs he tags on every fly ball and line drive. Is the infield back? If so the base runner can usually score on any ground ball that is not hit hard or right at the pitcher.
- ✓ If the first and third basemen (the corners) are in, then the runner can usually score from third on ground balls to the middle infielders that are not hit hard. If the infield is in, then the runner should see the ball through the infield before advancing.
- ✓ If there are less than two outs, the runner should be absolutely sure he can score on a passed ball or wild pitch before committing himself to going home.

### *Third to Home – Leading Off (Majors and Babe Ruth Only)*

- ✓ Taking leads from third base are based more on getting momentum directly toward home plate to facilitate a quick start rather than shortening the distance to the plate.
- ✓ While pickoff attempts by the pitcher are rare because third basemen rarely cover the bag and the fact that a botched pickoff will lead directly to a score, the emphasis on shorter leads is the danger of being picked off by a catcher's throw.
- ✓ The base runner takes his lead in foul territory so that he will not be in play in the event of being struck by a hit ball.
- ✓ As the pitch is delivered, he takes his secondary lead taking care to stay in foul territory, but moving closer to the baseline.
- ✓ If the catcher catches the ball, the runner performs a right leg jam, and quickly returns to the base. As he returns, however, he moves into fair territory in order to make the catcher's throw to third base more difficult.

### *Stealing – (Minors, Majors and Babe Ruth Only)*

- ✓ After taking an initial lead and then a secondary lead, the runner planning to steal should be in a balanced position on the balls of his feet.
- ✓ His knees are bent and his right foot is slightly open to second or third base.
- ✓ The steal is initiated by throwing the right hand towards second base and thrusting off of and crossing over with the left foot. This crossover step is short and choppy, in order to keep the upper body low and canted toward second base.
- ✓ The runner does not take a step with his right foot until this crossover step is completed.
- ✓ The first three to four steps towards the base are short and quick, designed to build speed; the upper body stays low to avoid standing too tall and losing momentum towards second.
- ✓ The base runner should glance towards the plate to see if the ball has been hit; this glance should not require the runner to pick his head up, just a quick turn sidewise.

### *Sliding –*

- ✓ The key point about sliding is that it is not a leap or a dive – it is a glide, a gradual, controlled lowering of the body to the ground.
- ✓ Proper sliding technique spreads the friction of the slide over a large area to avoid abrasions.
- ✓ When teaching sliding, players should wear long pants, long sleeves, and sneakers (to avoid catching cleats.) Cardboard boxes (such as refrigerator boxes) are ideal to teach and practice on; they avoid excessive dirtiness on the players and protect the field from getting torn up.

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- ✓ To avoid potential injury, all players should use the bent leg, or '4', slide. This slide features one leg bent under the knee of the other (forming a figure 4). It has the front, or straight, leg reaching for the bag, knee slightly bent to avoid jamming the leg, and heel about 6-10 inches off the ground to avoid catching the cleats. The bent leg should be parallel to the ground to avoid abrasions on either the knee or the ankle.
- ✓ The sole of the bent leg should be facing away from the ground to avoid catching the cleats on the sliding surface. Both buttocks should be in contact with the ground; one-sided slides result in painful strawberries. The upper body leans back until the shoulder blades nearly touch; the head remains up with the chin tucked to maintain view of the play.
- ✓ The arms are up and extended in front to avoid getting caught under the body and causing wrist or hand injuries; holding batting gloves or even a handful of dirt will help counteract the instinct to use hands to break the fall.