

Playing the Outfield – Outfielders

Outfield: beginners –

- ✓ Ninety percent of the battle for a young outfielder is to pay attention to the game.
- ✓ The remaining 10% is controlling fear, so technique is secondary.
- ✓ Nonetheless, players should start in a balanced stance, and should move in a quick but controlled fashion to the ball.
- ✓ Balls should be caught above the head, ‘fingers up.’ Once they have possession of the ball, players should then move to quickly throw the ball into second base, utilizing proper throwing mechanics.

Jump –

- ✓ It takes an experienced player to judge fly balls, particularly hard hit ones that are right at the outfielder
- ✓ Coaches should emphasize to their outfielders that their first step on all fly balls is to take a step back with the foot that is closest to the ball. In the case of balls hit right at the outfielder, they should drop the foot on the glove side. Then, once the player has made the correct read on the ball, they can begin to close on it.

Tracking –

- ✓ Outfielders should strive to get to where the ball is coming down before it gets there – don’t drift with a ball. Instead, close rapidly and adopt a stationary stance under the ball if possible.
- ✓ They should not extend their glove while running until they are ready to catch the ball.
- ✓ They should also run on the balls of their feet; running on heels will cause the head to bounce and make tracking the ball more difficult.
- ✓ Do not back pedal after balls; instead, take a back step with the foot closest to the ball to align the torso parallel to the flight of the ball.

Fielding –

- ✓ Use two hands on all catches if possible.
- ✓ The ball should be caught above the head, fingers up/thumbs together on the throwing side of the body in order to speed the return throw to the infield.
- ✓ On balls below the belt the fingers down/pinkies together technique should be used.
- ✓ On ground balls the outfielder must be careful to anticipate bad hops. He should charge the ground ball until he is within five or six steps, and then slow down to make sure he is properly balanced to field the ball in front of him like an infielder.

Throwing –

- ✓ When there is no fear of runners advancing, outfielders should focus on making accurate, easy throws.
- ✓ If runners are advancing, it is more important that throws are accurate rather than strong – hitting cutoff men is an imperative.
- ✓ The easiest throws for infielders to field are low-arc, waist-high one-hoppers.
- ✓ The throwing motion is similar to a pitcher’s: arm fully extended on the backswing, overhand delivery with the elbow leading the wrist, strong wrist snap, and good follow through.
- ✓ The ball should be gripped across the seams in order to avoid a slicing throw.

Communication –

- ✓ It is the outfielder’s responsibility to call the ball once they know they can catch it.
- ✓ The call has to be strong and clear – all other players should yield immediately once they hear it.
- ✓ Outfielders also have to know which base to throw to; it is incumbent on their fellow outfielders to tell them this while they focus on fielding the ball.
- ✓ For upper levels, as a rule, they should always throw one base ahead of the runner. At lower levels, it is better to make all throws to second base in order to keep runners on first base and keep a force play alive.
- ✓ Outfielders have to back up their adjacent outfielders, and the infielders behind which they play. It is not enough that they be properly positioned behind their fellow fielders – they should expect to get the ball. This means charging in on infield grounders and having their feet ready to adjust direction on outfield balls.
(Skip Bertman, Coaching and Playing)