

ALL-STAR FIELDING DRILLS

By Mister Baseball

INTRODUCTION

Here in this e-book you will find over 40 of some of the best fielding drills that can be used with your DEFLECTOR GLOVE™ that will help your son or daughter become a much better fielder –and can be used for either baseball or softball.

Many of these fielding drills have been used by countless players from little league through the college level that are proven to be highly effective—and will help anyone who practices them to become a much better player.

The key here, of course, is to have your son or daughter to practice these drills over and over again with much consistency. It is only through much consistent practice that these drills will help anyone – regardless of playing ability- to see dramatic results.

***Also, practicing other effective fielding drills besides the ones included in this book when using the DEFLECTOR GLOVE™ is strongly advised due to the value they can give in helping young players improve their skills.**

We here at Mister Baseball are about helping baseball and softball players from all ages and abilities not only succeed in the basics of the game, but to excel to their highest potential.

Here's to more base hits!

Mister Baseball

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FIELDING DRILLS FOR EVERY POSITION

You're the Back Drill

The instructor stands opposite the player in the outfield. The outfielder reads ball direction as the instructor points to different areas. The fielder is to sprint 3-5 steps in the correct direction, then repeat the process. This drill focuses on getting a good jump. Your first step will often determine if you catch the ball or not at the end of a long run

You're the Reciever Drill

This helps to get fielders running correctly on their route to fly balls. Often younger players experience a fly ball "bouncing" when they look up at a ball while running. This is caused by running in the heels of your feet. Watch David Justice going after a fly ball. He seems to "glide" like deer. This is because he runs on the balls of his feet. It is a graceful technique that is not for show. It makes a difference as to how the ball appears against the sky.

Soft Hands Drill

This drill is great for developing soft hands for your infielders. Get a sheet of 1/2" thick paneling or plywood. Cut out circles approximately 10" in diameter and attach a section of rope with a staple gun that is large enough for a player to slide his hand under and "hold" the wooden glove. We then place the players 20 feet away and roll them ground balls-easy throws to begin with and then progressively turn up the speed. The players must provide a cushion or the baseballs will just bounce off the wooden glove. It also forces them to place the non-catching hand on top of the ball. The players enjoy the drill because of the variety it provides and you can set up competition between your players. The drill emphasizes the use of the top hand, to ensure the ball doesn't become loose and so that the throwing hand is there to throw or flip the ball.

Palm Up and Down Drills

Toss grounder to players from 10 feet or so. Players must keep glove hand palm up and off hand palm down. Catch the ball like your hands are the alligator's mouth. Do 20 or 30

repetitions then let them use a glove? Increase distance and ball speed as player improves.

Palm Up/Down Drill 2

Position player about 5 yards in front of you. Have the player in the fielding position with back flat, head looking forward, and glove down on ground. Throw the ball so that it bounces and forces the player to raise hands from ground to catch ball. Stress the importance of having glove on ground and raising hands up to ball.

The Fielder and Hitter Drill

Drill has one fielder, who stands 40-60 feet in front of the hitter (depending on their age), and one shagger, who stands on the right side of the hitter. (Three person groups.) Drill can have as many groups as desired. The hitter hits 10 ground balls to the fielder. The fielder fields the ground balls and throws them to the shagger. After fielding 10 ground balls, the fielder becomes the shagger, the shagger becomes the hitter, and the hitter becomes the new fielder. The drill continues to proceed in this manner for as long as desired.

Situation Drill

This drill is great. It covers base running, lead offs, fielding, relay throws, pick off moves, rundowns, fly balls, even sliding if you want, etc. You can practice everything except stolen bases. You can even turn it into a completion by seeing which group scores more runs. I would let each group run for three sets of three outs. After the third out each time, remove any runners who are on base and start again.

Position your fielders, including a catcher and pitcher. Take four other boys and they are your first group of runners. A coach who has good bat control stands off to the side of the plate with a bat and ball in his hands. The four runners line up on the other side of the plate, but not so close as to get hit by an errant pitch. Make sure they don't start running until after the ball is hit, and don't let them keep inching their way up the line as they are prone to do! Base runners take their normal lead off, but cannot run until after the ball has been hit. Pitcher can try and pick them off. (Some leagues do not allow lead-offs)

The pitcher makes his delivery to the plate (good pitches as this is also a pitching practice), the coach then hits a ball out of his hand, and the "batter" runs as if he has just hit the pitch. That is all there is to this drill, yet you can see how it opens up countless opportunities for practicing all, or a few select areas you want to work on. Double to the left field fence - is the shortstop lining up the throw with third, or did he just run out there and line it up with second? Did the pitcher cover a base after the hit? Did the runner round first properly? Did the infielders communicate with each other while the ball was in play? Did the throw come to the correct man or base? Did the runner know how many

outs there were? Was the third baseman in the proper position to apply the tag? As I said earlier, you can work on as much or as little as you like. Have a coach at first and third to direct the runners, and the coach hitting the ball can observe the fielders.

Short Field Drill

Position bases and pitchers plate half the normal distance from home plate. Players take positions, including all outfielders, infielders, pitcher and catcher. Coach walks players through situation drills, back ups, who goes where when, etc. Have pitcher "pitch" to catcher. Coach hits fungo as practiced. Everyone moves as instructed. Fantastic drill to teach rotations, back ups, defense with runners on, etc.

Don't Wear Your Glove Drills

The following drills are done with no glove. You should think of your glove as an extension of your arm. So, we first field balls with our bare hands until we master the techniques involving proper form. These techniques involve actually catching the ball, transferring the ball to our throwing hand, and stepping toward our target and delivering an accurate throw.

Ground ball that is hit right at you.

Ground ball that is to your left.

Ground ball that is to your right.

A ball that takes you far to your left and leaves you with a long throw.

High chopped ground ball

Slow rolling ground ball

These drills are then duplicated with your glove on. The pace of the ground balls will be picked up as well. Keep in mind that even the ground ball hit right at you can be bouncing several different ways and with different spins.

Fielding Grounders

This is a set of progression drills for teaching how to field a ground ball. They start from the very basics of footwork, body position, and hands. As we are all aware of practice time, some of the individual drills will be combined.

THE PAIRED DRILL PART 1

- Players paired. First Basemen down first base line with gloves. Fielder's two steps behind second-third baseline and two steps to the right of the third base line without their gloves. Fielders place ball 4 to 5 feet in front of themselves. Fielders assume good infield position.

1-On signal, or individually if preferred, fielder advances toward ball aligning at ball with both hands around ball, head down looking at ball, and feet in the manner in which you have coached them. (Note: I prefer for the glove side foot to be even with the ball and the throwing side foot about 6 inches behind.)

2-On the count of two, player picks up ball, crow hops toward the first baseman and gets into a ready position to throw ball. (Glove side foot should be pointing toward first baseman; weight should be on back foot, both hands at chest.)

3-On three, if desired, throw should be made.

THE PAIRED DRILL PART 2

- Start as in PART 1, but this time, fielder places ball to their right or left. Remainder of drill is the same as PART 1.

These two drills provide opportunity to measure basic fielding fundamentals and emphasize the importance of feet, body and hand position. It also provides the opportunity to check the relationship of the ball to the body when fielded.

THE PAIRED DRILL PART 3

- Start as in PART 1, except fielder keeps ball in hands. On signal fielder rolls ball forward and continues on to field ball. This is reverse motion, but is effective in teaching the fielder not to overrun ball. If fielder over runs ball, he will have to reach between his legs and will inevitably miss the ball as he tries to reach behind him. It is also imperative that the fielder catch the ball the moment he stops. Having the player stop when he catches the ball will also enable a good lesson in the importance of having good body control when stopping to field a ground ball. The remainder of the drill is done as in DRILL #1.

THE PAIRED DRILL PART 4 –

Start as PART 3, except fielder throws ball to right or left. These drills add movement and work on body control and balance.

THE PAIRED DRILL PART 5 –

Start as in **PART 1** except have first basemen keep ball. First baseman throws an easy grounder (Remember fielders do not have gloves.) to fielder. Fielder fields ball and throws back to first baseman.

It is imperative in this drill that attention be paid to how the fielder fields the ball with their hands. Some may be tempted to pick the ball up with one hand on each side. In doing this, they will have a hesitation in their fielding which will be noticeable. Fielders should field the ball with the glove hand coming in contact first and sort of swooping the ball up with the glove hand moving under the ball and almost pushing it into the throwing hand. This is how one fields with a glove. A fielder who waits for the ball with the glove on the ground and the hand in a 6 o'clock position will miss more balls than he catches. When fielding a ground ball, the glove is brought from a natural 9 o'clock position, sweeping under the ball to a 6 o'clock position, and then raising the ball as the throwing hand comes down. When doing progression teaching, you must replicate the task as closely as possible, changing only that which helps teach the part of the skill desired.

These drills give a good take on how well the fielder understands the skill and how well they perform the skill. They can be done fairly quickly with the progression done smoothly. I use **PART 5** as part of my pre-practice/pre-game loosening up drills.

The Quick Racer Drill

Stack two 5 gallon buckets at home plate with helmet on top. Split team into two lines with starting cones about 5 yards behind the pitchers mound. Set two balls equal distance from the bucket on the mound. When coach calls "draw" two players race to the balls, bare hand them and throw at buckets. Quickest hit wins match. Fun drill, everyone loves to knock the buckets down. Distance and targets can be varied for age and abilities. Older kids throw from second base or even center field.

OUTFIELDER DRILLS

COMMUNICATION DRILL. This requires more than one player. Two or more players are separated in the outfield and a fly ball is hit between them. The players are to then communicate and use rules of fly ball priorities to make the catch. The player that is "called off" the fly ball is then responsible for backing up the play and telling the outfielder with the ball where to direct the throw.

FENCE / WALL BALLS. Players stand near a fence or outfield wall. Balls are then hit over their heads. The outfielder must read the flight of the ball to determine the best course of action. Is the ball to be caught, or played off the fence? This drill may be done in conjunction with the gap communication drill to involve more than one player.

SACRIFICE FLY SITUATIONS. The player must work on footwork, form, and momentum to correctly catch and throw a ball with a little wasted time as possible.

OVERALL OTHER SITUATIONS. The player assumes his correct defensive position, whatever that may be. The situation of a hypothetical game is then said allowed. (i.e. The number of outs and where the base runners are.) The coach will then deliver a fly or ground ball and the player must make the correct decision as to what to do with the ball. There are different answers for different game situations.

OUTFIELDER DRILLS THAT WORK

Some other practical ideas that I have put to use:

Face it, at the young ages 5-12, none of better players like playing the OF. They all want to play the Inf. The Dad who says at tryout, "my son's a SS and bats 3rd", may very well be this year, but may also be your best OF in high school in 6 years. So what I suggest it all kids at the youngest of ages train at all the positions.

OutField Drills

1. Elementary Tracking Skills to Judge Fly Balls 2. OF Sitting in the Hot Seat 3. OF Feet work, jab step or Crossover 4. Drifting, the sin of the OF 5. Routine Ground Balls & the OF Do or Die Drill 6. Will OF Throw to the Right Location 7. Stay on Top of Ball when Throwing. Stay Behind Ball.

1. To Judge Fly Balls Drills—Tracking The Right Way

Tracking to Right Line the kids up in the OF in a single line facing the coach. Have the coach say go, the kid runs to his right, coach throws the ball in air. Kid catches ball. Stops transitions ball out of glove to throwing hand. Front side toward direction of throw (& closed). Relays ball to receiver standing near coach.

Tracking to Left Line the kids up in the OF in a single line facing the coach. Have the coach say go, the kid runs to his left, coach throws the ball in air. Kid catches ball. Stops transitions ball out of glove to throwing hand. Front side toward direction of throw (& closed). Relays ball to receiver standing near coach.

2. OF Sitting in the Hot Seat First get a small stool or seat and place in OF. Line the kids up in the CF in a single line facing the machine (or coach). Have the coach 'hit' high fly balls. With the kid in hot seat, instruct the child to yell out In, Left, Back, Right, the moment he sees the flies ball. (The kids will usually determine the

flight of ball at the apex.) After a dozen or so rounds, if the kid in the hot seat sees the ball in front, have him run in to catch it. Progress up to Over Head catches, Line-Drives. Kids Love the HOT SEAT Drill. (for very young use wiffle balls or tennis balls, or RIF balls ...which may get chewed up in machine).. For the older boys we have used 7 1/2 balls with great success. (For those 'wide' eyed enthusiasts, I have found that the LH does this drill more easily than the RH)

3. OF Feet work, Jab step or Crossover, Drop Step

Demonstrate the OF feet work, very similar (when going to right) as crossover when running bases. (Although recent studies have show a jab step could be quicker.) Drop step for OF is easier to teach following Hot Seat Drill just turn in direction of ball. (At the young ages, the hitters are not strong enough for ball to spin off bat!)

4. Drifting, the sin of the OF

Most common flaw for 'new' & old players. Always sprint to location where fly ball will land. Never ever have OF run with baseball.

5. Routine Ground Balls & the OF Do or Die Drill Routine Ground Balls No Runners on base. Teach OF to charge ground ball, breakdown & block, (one knee), keeping ball in front of body, pick, transition and throw ball to Inf.

OF Do or Die Drill Runner in scoring position (2b) ground ball to OF. Teach OF to charge ground ball, retrieve ball on glove hand side, pick, transition and throw ball in almost one motion.

6. OF Throws to a Base Properly & to the R ight Location

With possible two base hit to OF, get to the ball on diagonal, block ball and throw ball in to 2b through relay (SS or 2b) as quickly as possible.

7. Stay on Top of Ball when Throwing. Stay Behind Ball. Look for even rotation. Only teach Pitchers to cut baseball. Advancing Drills for the 10 yr old to Catch the fly Ball behind ball to step up to throw in one motion. (Crow Hop vs other). We work this drill with our long toss.

Teaching Young Players How to Play the Outfield

When teaching young players how to play the outfield it is most important to teach them how to properly catch fly balls and grounders. You can develop a real complex game plan for where you want the ball thrown, but they won't amount to a hill of beans if the ball isn't caught first. Teaching them how to go back on a ball over their heads sideways instead of back pedaling, will take a lot of instruction time. Overcoming their natural urge to come in on a ball hit over their heads before they go back, will also take a lot of effort on your part. Teaching them to catch with two hands won't be easy. They'll need dozens of balls hit to them before they will even begin to realize just what their range is in the field, and calling for the ball needs constant repetition. Getting them to pay attention all the time will take constant harping on your part, especially if they are standing out there watching your pitcher throw six balls for every two strikes! Backing up the bases is absolutely critical. One overthrow past your third baseman, while your outfielder in left is watching a plane fly overhead, is enough to cause permanent hair loss (fortunately for me, I lost mine before I took up coaching!). Your outfielders must be taught to assume that all ground balls hit in the infield are going to get past the infield. This doesn't mean your infielders are bad, but if the outfield doesn't react until after the ball goes through the shortstop's legs, runners on base will probably get an extra base because the center fielder and left fielder weren't in position to stop it. None of these things have to necessarily happen, but it will take up the vast majority of your outfield time in order for them to do these things right.

One real nice drill, not only helps them to learn how to go back while running sideways, is a great endurance booster, but is also easy to repeat over and over. Have two lines form on each side of a coach who is standing next to a bucket of balls. At your command have one boy start running out from the coach while he is watching you. Simply throw him a fly ball and let him run under it and catch it. Once he catches the ball, or picks it up, have him sprint back to the coach and put the ball in the bucket. Then he goes to the end of the other line. Vary your throws as you see fit. The boys will need to learn how to correct their path when a ball they think is going over their left shoulder for instance, actually ends up on their right side, forcing them to change direction and quickly pick up the flight of the ball again. Be sure they run on the balls of their feet not on their heels, because running on their heels will jar their eyes, causing the ball to look like it is bouncing. Also, don't have them sprint after the ball with their glove hand outstretched the whole time, because that will only slow them down. They should try pumping their arms just as if they were running with no glove on, and only reach out with their glove in the last few steps.

A variation of this drill which will help teach them the crossover step when going back on a ball, involves having them turn around so they are facing in the opposite direction you are. Yell left or right, which tells them it is a fly ball to the left or right. They need to crossover with the opposite leg and break back on the ball. Keep emphasizing that they need to watch the ball into their glove.

Just like the infielders always need to be aware of outs, the score, inning, where the runners are, etc., so do your outfielders. If there is a runner on third and your left fielder makes a nice catch of a line drive, and he sees that the runner on third broke for home and hasn't gotten back to third, he has to know that if he gets a good, quick throw to the third baseman, they can double the runner off third. If you have to holler to him to throw the ball to third because he is celebrating his catch, or because he didn't take the time to check where the runners were before the ball was hit, he'll never get the runner out.

The secret of all of this at this age though, is convincing your outfielders that just because they aren't playing shortstop, that they are key members of your defensive scheme. Watch you left fielder's face the first time his backing up of the third baseman prevents a run from scoring on the catcher's overthrow!

Breaking back on a fly ball

This drill will help to teach the outfielder how to take a drop-step and turn, when going back on fly ball to his left or right. The usual way this drill is done is the player's line up facing in the same direction as the coach, he yells, the player runs out and the coach lofts him a ball. The problem with this is that in a game the fielder is facing in, not out; and that drill does not teach him how to turn and go after the ball.

- 1) Players line up along the side of the coach, with the boy first in line moving to a position 5' - 10' in front of the coach and facing him.
- 2) The coach points out to the left or right, and that signals the player that the ball has been hit and in which direction it is going.
- 3) Whichever side the ball has been "hit" to, the player takes a drop-step with that leg (fly to his right side, drop-step with the right leg).
- 4) as he takes his step back, he wants that foot to be beginning to turn in that direction also (if he takes a drop-step back, and plants his foot still pointing toward home, he will waste valuable time rotating that foot as his other leg comes around, and this move will not be completed as smoothly as it should be). In addition to this, the player needs to have most of his weight on the balls of his feet.
- 5) The other leg then is brought around and in front of the other leg as his whole body rotates around.
- 6) As the player is drop-stepping and crossing over with his other leg, it is imperative that he keep his eyes on the ball (the coach should be holding the ball up for him to see).
- 7) After the turn is completed and he begins running out for the ball, the coach throws him a ball to catch. Be sure that the player runs on the balls of his feet and not on his heels. Running on your heels will cause your head and eyes to jerk, making the ball look as if it is jerking.
- 8) To throw a little twist into this, the coach can point left or right, the player break back in that direction, but then throws the ball in the opposite direction. This will simulate a misjudged ball, or a ball that gets caught in the wind.
- 9) After fielding the ball (or picking it up), he needs to make a good throw back to the coach, and then hustle to the back of the line to await his next turn.

INFIELDER DRILLS

Key Infield Drill

This is a drill that can be used inside or outside to give fielders a lot of grounders in a short period of time. Line 1/2 of your players up at 3B and the other 1/2 behind 1B. Have a coach at home with a couple of balls. Have 1 player move to SS and another cover 1B. The coach hits a ball to SS. They field the ball and throw to 1B. The SS rotates to the end of the line behind 1B and the player who caught the ball at 1B runs to the coach, tosses him the ball, then continues behind him and to the end of the line at 3B. The coach should keep 2 balls in play at a time. While the player from 1B is running the ball to him, he should be hitting another to SS. Allow NO walking on the field!

The Great Infield Drill

This drill we used in practice. Have a person on 1b, 2b, 3b, and home all the extra at ss. Hit the ball to the ss, The ss throws the ball to 1b, 1b throws the ball to 2b, 2b throws the ball to 3b, 3b throws the ball home. The ss goes to 1b, 1b goes to 2b, 2b goes to 3b, 3b goes to home, the person at home goes to the line at ss.

Infield relay drill

Have your players stand at 1B, 2B, SS, 3B, with 1B and 3B standing in the base path about 2 feet from the bag. start throwing around the horn, 1B-2B-SS-3B who reaches down and tags the bag with his glove. He comes back up and fires, 3B-SS-2B-1B who tags the bag also, then repeat. Emphasize speed; the players should try to loudly pop the ball into their teammate's glove. The close proximity of the players to each other will take away their fear of throwing wild; combined with emphasis on speed, they will learn not to over think their throw. Count the number of pops in one minute, then bring in another set of players and see if they can top it. Your players will get a great rhythm going and develop confidence in turning and firing the ball. Emphasize a smooth, continuous "catch turn throw" from player to player. If the other team sees you warming up this way, and hears that loud "pop" with each catch, they might be less aggressive on the base path.

The Blind Infield Drill

This drill is designed to work on several infield skills for the whole team.

The drill starts with positioning players at 1st, 2nd, SS, 3rd & home. The remainder of players is off to the side of 3rd to take the SS position in turn.

The coach hits the ball to the SS, the SS throws the ball to 1st and runs to cover first base, the 1st base throws to 2nd (2nd base covers) 2nd puts on a tag, 1st runs to cover 2nd, 2nd base throws to 3rd, 3rd puts on a tag, 2nd base runs to cover 3rd, (coach hits ball to SS and starts the drill over again) 3rd base throws home and runs to cover home, home tosses ball to 3rd as he runs in and the now home player gives or tosses ball to coach.

This drill will work on fielding, throwing, conditioning, catching, tag play team work and hustle. It's also a great pre-game warm-up.

NOTE

Have a coach at first, behind second and third with extra ball for overthrows to keep the drill moving.

All-Player Drill

This drill involves the whole team. This is a game using rotation of players coming into bat. Batter will get 2 at bats then rotate with one of the other players on the field. Whether you get a hit or not you stay on the base you made it to. Then steal on each pitch to the plate. Do not steal home. Come in when you reach 3rd base. This gives your pitcher a chance to work on pick offs, your catcher work on throwing the runner out, batting & fielding practice also.

On Your Feet and Quick Thinking Trill

This drill forces your infielders to think quickly!

Set up your infielders and catcher (include pitcher if you like) as normal. Take a ball, and as you toss it up in the air to hit, call out a situation - i.e. "runner on first, one out." Then hit it to any fielder. They must think quickly think about what you called out and make a play to the appropriate base.

Stay down

Line them up without their gloves. Roll soft grounders from a few feet away and make them field them and toss it back. Without the glove they will get down and use two hands to field the ball.

Simple but it works.

How To Have Soft Hands Drill

Position player about 5 yards in front of you. Have the player in the fielding position with back flat, head looking forward, and glove down on ground. Throw the ball so that it bounces and forces the player to raise hands from ground to catch ball. Stress the importance of having glove on ground and raising hands up to ball.

The Y-Drill

Split team into four even groups. Then have one coach hit ground balls to second and have the players throw the ball to third. Have another coach hit the ball to shortstop and have the players throw to first. Then after about 5 minutes rotate. Rotate the players until they have been to each position.

Glove Made of Wood Drill

This drill is great for developing soft hands for your infielders. Get a sheet of 1/2" thick paneling or plywood. Cut out circles approximately 10" in diameter and attach a section of rope with a staple gun that is large enough for a player to slide his hand under and "hold" the wooden glove. We then place the players 20 feet away and roll them ground balls-easy throws to begin with and then progressively turn up the speed. The players must provide a cushion or the baseballs will just bounce off the wooden glove. It also forces them to place the non-catching hand on top of the ball. The players enjoy the drill because of the variety it provides and you can set up competition between your players.

Timing Throws From Second Drill

This certainly isn't original, but how many coaches base their decisions on middle infielders on who "look good" while fielding balls? The bottom line is simply this, a player may have a rocket arm, but if his mechanics are lacking, the time it takes his throws to reach first may take longer than a less flashy player who happens to have proper mechanics. The bottom line lies in the stop watch, but how many of us take the time to check that out?

A good timing drill which fits in nicely with timing shortstops and their throws to first after fielding ground balls is to time throws from second (ie. turning double plays). Have a boy line up at shortstop or second, and then hit a ball (or simply have a player already have a ball in his glove) to the opposite fielder. Have that fielder toss the ball to second, and from the time the ball touches the player's glove who is taking the throw, till his throw to first touches the first baseman's mitt track it with a stopwatch. Players with good arms who take throws one handed, or who don't get their bodies in front of the throw will

hurt their overall time. A non-flashy player with better mechanics will often times beat the flashier player. Because a player looks good, doesn't necessarily make him good. Prior to timing the players you need to decide if you are only timing good throws to second (obviously a throw in the dirt is not the same as a perfect toss chest high). If a coach makes the tosses, you can intentionally make bad tosses to see how a player does.

Simply put, a stopwatch can be a powerful tool, but too many coaches get caught up in the flashy player, at the expense of good, solid non-flashy kids.

Count The Times The Ball Hops

An easy infield drill my coach taught me. He would hit a ground ball to me and tell me to count the hops it took. This drill helps you to keep your eye on the ball. Most of the time you can see if a ball is going to take a bad hop and adjust. 9 times out of 10 you will field the ball properly with out an error.

THE PAIL DRILL

One of the drills that worked best for me last summer during practice was the bucket drill. The way it works is by putting a bucket in front of the player and throwing balls right at the bucket. The player has to go around the bucket and pick up the balls throw out the runner and maintain balance. It also helps the fielder's rhythm.

Strategy Progression Drills for Infield

This is a set of progression drills for teaching how to field a ground ball. They start from the very basics of footwork, body position, and hands. As we are all aware of practice time, some of the individual drills will be combined.

DRILL #1 - Players paired. First Basemen down first base line with gloves. Fielder's two steps behind second-third baseline and two steps to the right of the right of the first basemen without their gloves. Fielders place ball on baseline. Fielders assume good infield position. On signal, or individually if preferred, fielder advance toward ball aligning at ball with both hands around ball, head down looking at ball, and feet in the manner in which you have coached them. (Note some coaches prefer for the glove side foot to be even with the ball and the throwing side foot about 6 inches behind, others desire the feet to be parallel.) On the count of two, player picks up

Ball, crow hops toward the first baseman and gets into a ready position to throw ball. (Glove side foot should be pointing toward first baseman; weight should be on back foot, both hands at chest.) On three, if desired, throw should be made. (NOTE: Early season it is sometimes not advisable to make throw for obvious reasons.)

DRILL #2 - Start as in DRILL #1, but this time, fielder places ball to their right or left. Remainder of drill is the same as DRILL #1.

These two drills provide opportunity to measure basic fielding fundamentals and emphasize the importance of feet, body and hand position. It also provides the opportunity to check the relationship of the ball to the body when fielded.

DRILL #3 - Start as DRILL #1, except fielder keeps ball in hands. On signal fielder rolls ball forward and continues on to field ball. This is reverse motion, but is effective in teaching the fielder not to overrun ball. If fielder over runs ball, he will have to reach between his legs and will inevitably miss the ball as he tries to reach behind him. It is also imperative that the fielder catch the ball the moment he stops. Having the player stop when he catches the ball will also enable a good lesson in the importance of having good body control when stopping to field a ground ball. The remainder of the drill is done as in DRILL #1.

DRILL #4 - Start as DRILL #3, except fielder throws ball to right or left.

These drills add movement and work on body control and balance.

DRILL #5 - Start as DRILL #1, except have first basemen keep ball. First baseman throws an easy grounder (Remember fielders do not have gloves.) to fielder. Fielder fields ball and throws back to first baseman.

It is imperative in this drill that attention be paid to how the fielder fields the ball with their hands. Some may be tempted to pick the ball up with one hand on each side. In doing this, they will have a hesitation in their fielding which will be noticeable. Fielders should field the ball with the glove hand coming in contact first and sort of swooping the ball up with the glove hand moving under the ball and almost pushing it into the throwing hand. This is how one fields with a glove. A fielder who waits for the ball with the glove on the ground and the hand in a 6 o'clock position will miss more balls than he catches. When fielding a ground ball, the glove is brought from a natural 9 o'clock position, sweeping under the ball to a 6 o'clock position, and then raising the ball as the throwing hand comes down. When doing progression teaching, you must replicate the task as closely as possible, changing only that which helps teach the part of the skill desired.

These drills give a good take on how well the fielder understands the skill and how well they perform the skill. They can be done fairly quickly with the progression done smoothly. I use DRILL #5 as part of my pre-practice/pre-game loosening up drills.

Adding More Pressure To These Infield Drills

We have all heard the phrase "you play the way you practice" or words to that effect. So why is it? We scratch our heads when one of our players blows a play in a tight ball

game? Could the added pressure of the situation cause physical problems? I've seen kids perfectly field grounders all day long in practice but in a 1-0 game in the bottom of the sixth boot one! What happened to change this player who you liken to a Kirby vacuum? Stress and pressure?

We have all been under stress and most of us know we don't react the same as when we are relaxed. Most of us also know that repetition makes a task easier and relaxes the player(s) when they are faced with the same situation in the future. The question becomes how do we create stress during practice in order to help reduce the same during a game? I believe you have to artificially induce the stress through competition or physical demands. Anytime you can devise a drill which pits two players against each other, puts a little more stress in the drill as the players naturally compete against each other. (If they don't they will not be competing long in sports). The other method is to make the drill more physically demanding than it normally would be. It is this in mind that I devised a very simple yet effective infield drill that I use at a majority of my practices.

This drill I call the SS to 1st drill (really creative huh?) and I use it as a warm up into whatever my main infield topic will be for the given day. It only takes 10 minutes. Basically you split up your infielders (or everybody) in lines behind SS and 1B and hit a ball to the SS and he has to field it and throw to 1B. The 1B then throws to a catcher (coach to feed batter) and the next player in each line takes his turn. The stress is induced by making each player run to the opposite line when his turn is over. As the batter, you control the tempo or stress level by the amount of time between ground balls. If you let each player set up and get comfortable and make a play before the next one, little stress is induced, if however you hit the balls one right after another, you should see the boys hustle! (Especially if there are fewer than 8 players). I like to start easy and finish with 3 minutes of me hitting grounders as fast as I can. I also put a penalty for any blown attempts... either an extra minute of fast or an extra wind sprint at the end of practice. After 10 minutes of this exercise every one is usually huffing and puffing and you definitely know who the guys with heart are and who the lazy ones are. You, as coach/batter, can also adjust for different players abilities. You hit wide balls to your slick SS and 2B (sometimes making them dive for the ball) and more directly to your 1b and OFs. One note: Make sure the runners run along the outfield grass and not directly between the positions. At the end the balls really start flying! I also challenged my team last season and told them if they could ever compete the 3 minutes without a single mistake I would treat them to "31 flavors". It took them a while but in the end we all had Ice cream!

Anyway the benefits of this drill are many in my mind. 1) You get practice fielding ground balls 2) you do it in a stressful situation 3) you add endurance and stamina. 4) You really know the kids are warmed up when it's over. 5) Kids can't dog it and hide. (It is very evident who is hustling or not).

Infielders take up their positions, including a pitcher and catcher. A coach acts as the batter, and the pitcher makes a delivery to the catcher. The coach has a ball in his hand, and after the pitch reaches the plate, he tosses the ball where he wants it to go. This is far superior to having a batter attempt to place the ball by actually hitting it.

Set up particular situations, and have the outfielders and other pitchers act as base runners. Coach hits fungos to each player and in each situation (example: no out, runner on first)

Great Pregame Warm Up Ritual Set up infield with extra players lining up behind the positions and rotating in. Two first basemen line up at first base, one on the outfield side of the bag and one on the infield side. Two coaches at home plate. One coach fungos to the third baseman who fields and throws to the first baseman lined up on the infield side of first base. The other coach fungos to second and shortstop who make double plays - second to first - to the first baseman on the outfield side of the bag. The drill moves quickly and gives the players many opportunities. If they miff a play, they'll get another chance very quickly. It helps a lot if you have many balls. The first basemen can drop the balls in a bucket behind them and get ready for the next throw, or throw to a catcher or two beside the coaches.

Throw At 1-2-3

Here's a nice simple infield drill (simple if the boys can count to three). This drill covers all of the throws an infielder will make, and it is so quick paced that the players enjoy it. Position a player at each base and home, give the catcher the ball. The players make three throws around the horn, then on the third catch, that player throws across the diamond to the player diagonally across to him. After four repetitions of this, the players run to the next base and start again.

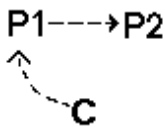
Here's how it works:C-3b-2b-1b-across to 3b; 3b-2b-1b-c-across to 2b; 2b-1b-c-3b-across to 1b; 1b-c-3b-2b-across to c who makes a sweep tag. Players than run to the next base: c-3b, 3b-2b, 2b-1b, 1b-c. Repeat this four times until the original catcher is back at home plate. Whenever a player throws to the wrong person, stop and give the ball back to him so he can get it to the correct boy. You will be amazed at how often the players will forget to throw across after the third throw. Keep working with them and it will begin to run smoothly. Once your fielders are comfortable with this drill, it makes for a nice pre-game drill. It is just sweet enough to impress your opponent!!

Emphasis good, accurate, properly thrown balls; proper catching technique, and quick feet.

Position and Field Drill

The last go round of infielders drills are followed with the Field and Charge Drill. Coach hits fungo to each player in turn - P-3b-2b-1b-C. Player fields grounder hit to him and throws to first. 1st throws home. Catcher throws a grounder back to the same player who charges and fields it bare handed and throws it home. Fielder then exits the field except for 1b, who waits out the catchers turn and the pitcher, who waits for the throw from the catcher.

Triangle Drills - players in groups of three in a triangle. Players take rolls as coach, Short Stop and Second Baseman.



Position players 10 feet apart. Players assume an "athletic position." The "Coach" then underhands the ball to one player, who catches it with their glove. The player takes the ball with throwing hand and flips it to other player. Repeat drill with both players.

Coach starts with easy glove side underhand tosses, then moves toss to center and to throwing hand side. As players progress, move ball into all reachable areas.

DOUBLE PLAY DRILLS

URNS AT SECOND BASE ON A DOUBLE PLAY.

The 1st and 2ndbaseman and the shortstop will be the only players involved with this drill. The out at second base is the first priority. The out at first base should be thought of as icing on the cake. Work on proper footwork and avoiding the sliding base runner.

Avoid The Runner That Slides Drill

Get a hold of a 5 gallon plastic bucket. As the SS or 2B is about to release the ball to first, throwing the bucket at them. If they don't get out of the way they get hit by it, but no one gets hurt. It will take a little practice to get the hang of how and when to toss it, but it will help enforce the need and technique regarding how to get up and out of the way.

PITCHERS DEFENSIVE DRILLS

Always use soft baseballs, incrediballs, tennis balls, etc. when working line drives with pitchers.

Full follow through on the pitch will land a pitcher in athletic position. This will provide the balance to field the ball. This is essential for safety also. A pitcher who cannot field their position puts themselves in danger of injury.

1 - "Dry pitch" the ball (pretend to throw the ball). Follow through to athletic position. Coach tosses grounders. Start soft and center. Progress side to side and then try harder tosses. After working grounders, work soft line drives, bunts and pop ups.

2 - Pitch to catcher. Coach stands to the side. After pitch, coach hits fungos to pitcher with incrediballs, soft t-balls, or tennis balls.

3 - Practice fielding grounders and throwing to 1st, Second, Third, Home. Situational practice. This drill needs a pitcher, fielder on base and catcher. This drill can be done with "dry pitching" or pitch and coach hitting like in #2.

THROWING

Throwing From Not Moving Drill

This is a quick paced drill which gives the players many repetitions in a short period of time, while emphasizing correct fundamentals.

Two players face each other from approximately 20' feet a little less than shoulders width. The players do not move their feet during this drill. They catch, break, than throw without moving their

feet. The purpose of this drill is two fold: catching and breaking out front, and good upper body rotation when throwing. The object here is not to see who can throw harder; rather it is to give each other good, accurate throws at their teammate's chest.

Points to emphasize: catch out front with two hands; keep the glove out front when breaking (don't let the player bring the glove over to his side before he breaks); good, quick rotation of the upper body (glove side shoulder and arm pointed at the target, good extension straight back of the throwing arm); accurate throw.

When I said to catch out front, that isn't quite accurate. What you want the player to do is actually redirect the throw into his throwing hand. If the player "catches" the ball, then reaches in to throw it, he will waste valuable time. The ball should be stopped by the

glove, and his throwing hand right there to take it.

Get The Window For Points Drill

This is a fun drill which emphasizes throwing accuracy and good competition between players. I use a simple three point system, but you set it up any way you like. A throw from the head region around the side and down to the waist is worth three points (break the player's window). A throw that is easy to catch, but requires the player to fully extend his arms is worth two points. A throw which requires the player to step to make the catch is worth one. A non-catchable throw is worth zero. The points are scored based on throwing accuracy; although you could incorporate negative points for dropped throws (I don't use negatives). The boy who throws second gets his last turn in order to ensure equal number of throws. I run this with two players going head-to-head, although you can use more than that if you want. Set a point total (I use 15), and let them go for it! This is fun, but it also requires the players to play under pressure. If you are down 15 to 12, you have to come in with a perfect throw. This helps the boy who is throwing to focus on the chest area of the target he is throwing at. Too often a fielder throws to a too general area, and doesn't pick out a specific target. In this drill, the emphasis is on "breaking the player's window".

The "Bucket Drill"

A fun throwing drill is simply called the "Bucket Drill."

Setup: On its side, place a large garbage pail (33 gallons or larger size) atop home plate so that the opening faces the diamond. Place a ball bag with several baseballs behind 2nd base. Divide your team into two groups. Instruct one group to line up at medium depth in left-center field and the other at the same depth in right-center field.

Execution: Have the first two players in each line break away from their groups and assume a normal ready fielding position. Throw a soft pop fly into the air for the fielders to catch. After the catch, they crow hop and throw the ball at cutoff-height to home plate. Instruct them to throw the ball into the bucket with the ball bouncing once or twice prior to home plate. After each throw the players rotate. Have the fielder run to the end of the line, and the next player at the front of the line run to the start position. Keep track of the number of throws that make it into the bucket. If you don't, the kids will.

Fielding Skills: Fly ball catching skills include: move quickly to the ball; run on the balls of the feet (running on the heels will absorb ground shock and make the ball seem to jump around in mid air); set up beneath the ball with momentum going forward toward plate as the catch is made; catch the ball above the bill of the cap slightly off-center toward the throwing shoulder; glove fingers are pointed to the sky (not turned toward the horizon). Throwing skills include aggressively squaring the body to the target, the crow hop; correct arm extension with fingers atop the ball and pointed straight back; grip the ball across the seams; hip roll and follow through.

Coaches: One coach can operate this drill by alternating throws between each group. With two coaches, one coach can work with each group. With three coaches, one coach can gather balls around the home plate area and refill the ball bag.

Comments: Kids love to practice this drill, and they always want to take another round. When a throw bounces into the bucket, you'll hear excited cheers and the kids high-five each other. When the ball ricochets off the bucket or narrowly misses, you'll hear "ooooohhs" and "aaaaahhs." The competition between the two groups also creates a lot of excitement. The pace of the drill moves fast, and it provides lots of opportunities for observation, instruction, and progressive development.