

## Skill Drills to Use

These are just some of the drills available to coaches that we have reviewed and recommend that coaches become familiar with. Each coach will through experience may have their own variation to these drills. If you find great drills that work for your age group and players share this information and it will be added to the drills section of the manual. More importantly share this information with your peers. **The key is that when you practice you must have:**

1. **A PURPOSE** – WHAT are you going to accomplish?

Today, This Portion, Entire Season...

2. **A PLAN** – HOW are you going to accomplish it? Are you going to accomplish it?

Today, This Portion, Entire Season, Today ...

3. **LAY OUT** the DETAILS

What about EQUIPMENT, SETUP, PEOPLE and TIME?

As a coach you need to be sure you have spent the time at the beginning of each season what are the skills you want your players to develop during the season. Before each practice make sure you are prepared

## Hitting Drills

### **Wall Swing (U-10s and Up players)**

Stand facing a fence gauging the proper distance by placing the knob of the bat against the belly button and the end of the bat against the wall or fence. With a normal stance and stride, and without moving back from the wall or fence, the hitter takes her normal swing. This drill emphasizes that the hitter must rotate her hips ahead of her hands and pulls the knob of the bat through the hitting zone before extending the arms in front of home plate. Hitting the wall or fence with the bat means hitter is sweeping (i.e., extending the arms too soon). **The key to making this successful is that the players do not move away from the fence or line up against a section of the fence that is bent or not straight. It must be explained that the “end game” for this drill is to promote a tight, inside-out swing. We further recommend that 10U’s working on a compact swing try this drill using the sides of a batting cage that uses netting and no chain link fence. That way, if they hit the net, it does little damage to bats or hands/wrists.**

### **Hip Turn- (all age groups)**

Place hands behind the back of the players. Have the hitter take a normal batting stance. Have players swing using the hips swing first to have the player drive through the swing. Upon completion of the swing the players front foot should be at a **90** degree angle and the back foot should have pivoted so that the players shoe laces and belly button are pointed towards the pitcher. Her hips and shoulders should be square to the pitcher.

### **Knob of Bat to Tee**

Place a ball on the tee. Set up properly with stance and hands. Take the knob of the bat to the ball on the tee, hit the ball with the knob, and then follow through with the swing. This emphasizes proper hand movement and a short compact swing. This drill promotes a compact swing best used for linear hitting. OK to keep as a choice for those who prefer this method of hitting.

### **Inside-Outside Double Tee**

Hitter sets up in normal stance in front of double tee. Place ball in center position on tee, waist level. Place second tee on either of the outside positions, raised to a position just above the waist. Take normal stance. Attempt to hit the ball with a level or slightly upward swing without hitting the second tee. If a player “casts” her arms, she will make contact with the outside tee. Objective of drill is to promote an inside-out swing while actually making contact with a ball.

### **Soft Toss**

Coach takes a position in front and to the side of the hitter. Using any of various size whiffle balls, or lite flight softballs ball out in front of the hitter towards the front shoulder waist high, using little arc, and observe mechanics. Soft toss teaches and reinforces the proper mechanics of the swing. Make sure your batters are 1.) pivoting correctly, 2.) rotating their hips with an explosion toward the ball 3.) unlocking their shoulders, elbows and wrists in sequence while throwing their hands straight to the ball (watch for hands dropping and

correct this). 4.) Watching the ball all the way to the "bat" and continuing to watch the "contact point" after the "ball" has been hit. The proper stance is essential. It should be balanced, eyes level, bat in launch position (not rapped behind the head), knees slightly bent, slight bend at the waist and door-knocking knuckles lined up. **Coach should toss toward the player's front shoulder, waist high. (Toss to different parts of the strike zone to advanced players.) Coach should observe proper starting stance (even balance of weight, at least shoulder width apart), proper pivot of back foot and drive of knee toward pitcher, proper position of front leg, observe compactness of swing, especially watching for players who are "casting" their arms. Drill best done with lite flite softballs.**

### **Hands to The Ball**

Have the batter set up approximately 3ft. from a fence in her batting stance just as she would at the plate. With one exception, have her bat resting on her shoulder. The coach then tosses a ball up to her, the batter must then attempt to hit the ball with only the butt (End cap on the handle) of the bat. **NO SWINGING ALLOWED!** Toss the ball in various locations (High, Low, Inside, Outside, etc.). **Coaches, the emphasis on this drill is to promote a compact, inside-out swing.**

### **Balls and Strike Drill**

Have the pitchers throw pitches and the batters stand in the batters box just watching the ball into the glove and call balls and strikes. You'll be amazed at what batters think are balls. The best thing for good eyes are just seeing live pitching...lots of it, even if it is just being a batter while your pitcher is doing a workout. You can learn to read different pitches, and the pitcher gets better practice when there is a batter in the box. **Coaches, the goal of this drill is to have batter watch ball all the way into the catcher's glove. This promotes watching the ball all the way into the hitting and strike zone.**

### **Two Ball Soft Toss (10U and up)**

Get two different color whiffle balls (say red & white) or mark half of the balls with a different color dot. Works better with whiffle baseballs or even golf whiffle balls. Its easier to toss smaller balls plus helps hitters in focus and coordination. Toss the two balls at the same time (from same hand) and ask the player to hit one of them, either red or white. This helps players to coordinate, focus and react to hit the correct color ball. **Coaches, players using this drill should have good rotational hitting skills prior to participation.**

### **Pick a Number**

Take 3 or 4 balls, write a number on each ball. Have the player step in to the batters box and receive the pitches. The player's job is to see the ball well enough to tell you which number is on the pitched ball prior to swinging at the ball.

### **Grasp Bat Drill**

Players assume a ready-to-hit batting stance with bat. Coach stands behind player and grasps barrel of bat and on command, tells the player to swing. Player should attempt to execute a full, normal, hard swing. Coach hangs on to barrel of bat and **does not let go!!!** The barrel of the bat should not ever leave the coach's hands during this drill! If executed

properly, the players' hands will automatically be forced to take an inside out path because the coach, hanging on to the bat, does not allow the bat head to move forward. The player is forced to "pull" the coach and it is this pulling action that forces the players hands and arms into the first portion of an inside-out swing. Player should execute 15 – 20 of these "swings" at each practice. The purpose of this drill is to help players visualize/"feel" an inside out swing.

### **Bat-to-Shoulder Drill**

Players assume a ready-to-hit stance with bat. On command, players trigger, then swing, except instead of executing a full swing, player keeps hands and arms close to the body and tries to stop swing with bat touching outside edge of right shoulder (right handed hitters). When player stops swing, she should have completed a full pivot with back foot; shoelaces should be facing pitcher. Her hips and shoulders should be square to the pitcher and bat should be touching shoulder. The objective of this drill is to promote a compact, inside-out swing.

### **Live Hitting**

Lastly.....NOTHING BEATS LIVE HITTING!! The best hitters do a lot of live hitting (coaches or players pitching to players at game speed.)

## Fielding Drills

### **Grounders**

Position players in two lines: one line at midpoint between 1B and 2B and one line between 2B and 3B. Two coaches hit balls from opposite sides of home plate. One player shags balls for each coach. Hit three balls to first fielder who throws to shagger. After third grounder, fielder moves to shagger (running around other coach/hitter) and shagger moves to the end of the opposite fielding line. Mix in line drives and pop ups as drill progresses.

### **Alligator Hand Drill**

You can use the same set up as above or simply divide players into two or three groups and place in field as in above drill. Coach either hits or throws ground balls to players and instructs the players they must do three things for each ground ball:

1. Players must field the ball using a wide, athletic stance, and “sit down” toward the ball instead of simply bending from the waist.
2. Glove must be “down and dirty.” In other words, the player’s glove must start on the ground as the “sit down” and get in position to field the ball.
3. Immediately after ball enters the glove pocket, player **MUST** trap ball into glove or drill has been done incorrectly. The “alligator hand” is the description used by coach to describe action of the top hand closing on top of ball in glove.

### **Bare Hand/Soft hand Drill**

Same drill as above only players do not use a glove and ball is not thrown or hit as hard. This drill is particularly effective if players simply refuse to get top hand to close over ball and trap ball in glove pocket. Ball must be hit or thrown firmly, but not extremely hard. Bare hands or soft hands can be used for this drill

**We recommend the 8U coaches begin with Bare Hands drill when teaching proper method for fielding ground balls. Also, they can also begin with the use of lite flites if necessary. Move from Bare Hands to Alligator Hands to Ground Ball drill. This is an essential skill all 8U’s should be able to execute before moving to 10U’s. The 10U coaches should ensure that this skill is second nature before the girls move to 12U. The 10U coaches should also work hard on ground ball footwork discussed below so that by the time the players are 12U, the 12U coaches can fine tune the footwork for ground balls and fly balls.**

### **Fly Balls**

Divide players into even lines, 2 or 3 depending on number of coaches available. Have first player in line stand 15 – 20 ft away from coach. Drill is done in two parts:

1. The first 4-5 times through the line, the player turns shoulder, and then runs a short banana route. As player begins to complete turn toward coach the coach throws fly ball to player. Player completes turn and route and runs under fly ball to make catch. Complete 4-5 on each side.

2. The next 4-5 times through the line player is required to run the same route only in this case the coach throws the ball before player begins route. Player must run route and adjust to where coach throws ball (coaches should try to be consistent at first!). Players should complete 4-5 each shoulder. Players first move should be to take one step back and turn shoulder to the proper side. Drills A and B should be completed exactly the same way for ground balls.

Complete the same drill for fly balls hit directly overhead. In this case, the player should turn shoulder to either side, outrun the ball and then catch the ball moving forward.

For 8U or 10U players that are at the beginning stages of catching fly balls we suggest the following:

1. Using lite flite balls, have the player stand 15-20 ft from the coach. Have the coach toss the ball into the air, but not too high, toward player. Have player, without glove, catch ball, above head, with both hands. Repeat lots until player is comfortable catching a fly ball.
2. Repeat above drill, only this time add glove. Begin by explaining purpose of pocket of glove. Explain that is where you want them to catch the ball. Have coach toss ball in same manner to player. Have player camp under ball and try to site ball over top of glove. Have player look ball into pocket of glove. Once ball is in glove, use throwing hand to trap into glove. After player is somewhat comfortable catching lite flites, change to regular softballs.

The goal for new players and those with no confidence in catching fly balls is to just get used to catching the ball. Footwork is NOT the issue at this point! After they are comfortable catching the ball, then add in the foot work drill (speaking here of mostly 10U players and more advanced 8U's)

Additional points of emphasis for teaching the skill is that generally speaking the first step by an outfielder in catching a fly ball is one step backward and that outfielders should attempt to time the catch of the ball such that they are moving forward, toward the infield when they make the catch. They can then use their momentum to help add speed and power to their throw.

### **Lateral Movement #1**

Position 6 to 8 tossers (with a ball each) in a row with each tosser 10 to 15 feet apart. Position a receiver up to 50 feet in front of tosser 1; tosser 1 throws a grounder to receiver who throws the ball back to tosser 1 and gets back into defensive position. Tossers 2 through 8 throw a ground ball to the receiver's right who moves laterally to field the ball and throws back to tosser 2. After last tosser, receiver reverses direction and then takes the last tosser's position. Tossers 1 through 8 become the receiver. Vary by throwing line drives and soft flies.

### **Lateral Pick Up**

Players pair up with each standing about 6 to 10 feet apart. Tossers roll ball about 5 to 6 feet to the right of the fielder who moves laterally to field the ball and throw it underhand back to the tosser. Tossers then roll the ball 5 to 6 feet to the fielder's left and continues in this

manner for 5 to 10 repetitions before players exchange positions. Be sure fielder follows underhand toss before getting back into fielding position. **Coaches, receiver must be “sitting” to field ball rather than simply bending from waist or this drill teaches poor fielding mechanics.**

### **Fungo Hitting/ Fielding**

Position one player 60 feet in front of player/hitter; position shagger to the right of the hitter (or left, if left-handed hitter). Form as many groups of three as desired; have some groups hitting grounders in the infield and others hitting flies in the outfield. Have hitter hit 10 grounders or 10 flies to the fielder, then rotate -- fielder becomes shagger, shagger becomes hitter, hitter becomes fielder. **Emphasis need to be kept on the proper footwork to ground balls and fly balls.**

### **Charging Drill**

Players form lines of 3 or more facing a tosser who is 50 to 70 feet away. Tossers throw a grounder so the player must charge to the midpoint to field the ball before throwing it to the tosser and going to the end of the line. Outfielders can be positioned 90 feet from tosser and perform the drill in the same manner. Players focus should be looking the ball into their glove as well as fielding the ball on the side opposite your throwing hand and come up throwing to the correct base or cutoff person.

### **Fly Ball Pass #1**

Players pair up standing side by side. The receiver runs out about 15 feet and the tosser leads her with a fly ball so that she has to catch the ball over her left shoulder. After quickly getting set and throwing the ball back to the tosser, the receiver runs back to the starting position. Continue with 4 more throws that increase the distance by 15 feet each time. Switch positions. Then switch again to perform the drill with throws over the receiver's right shoulder. **Coaches make sure players run a proper route to the fly ball.** Emphasis should be placed on the banana route more than the over the shoulder path to the ball. The banana routes so players are in the best position possible to make a throw and keep a runner from advancing. This is especially critical for infielders tracking down a fly ball behind first and third or in foul territory.

### **Double Relay**

Put 3 players in a line, evenly spaced, 50 feet apart. Player on one end turns her back to the others, rolls her ball out in front, runs it down, and turns to throw to the player in the middle who relays the throw (turning to the glove side) to the player on the other end. Player receiving the ball turns her back and repeats the drill. After 6 throws, the player in the middle rotates with a player on an end. Drill continues until each player has been in the middle a specified number of times

### **Fence Drill (14U and up)**

Drill has as many tossers as the side fence or wall area allows. Players form up in groups of two or more. Player stands 20 feet from the fence or wall and the tosser throws a pop up close to the fence/wall. Player locates fence/wall using outstretched arm, then comes back

to catch the ball. Players rotate after 5 catches each. Be sure players switch directions so they have to find the fence from both the glove hand side and throwing hand side.

### **Infielder/ Outfielder Jurisdictions**

Put fielders in defensive positions and have two tossers throw fly balls and pop ups between them. Fielder going back should normally go for the ball until called off by a fielder coming in. Fielder going back should only call for the ball when she is certain of the catch. On balls hit between the outfielders, the centerfielder is in charge. On balls hit between the shortstop and second baseman, the shortstop is in charge. Pitcher yields to all infielders. **Coaches, add in soft ground balls and pop ups hit between: a) pitcher, first base and second base; b) pitcher, third base and shortstop.**

### **Clockwork or Line Drill**

Place a player as a cutoff-approx. 50 ft. from the catcher and 5 or 6 outfielders-each spread out from right to left, approx. 50 ft. from cutoff. Coach will hit a ball to the player farthest left, the player throws to cutoff, and cutoff throws home. After throwing to cut off the fielder then runs to take cutoff spot, the cut off after throwing home, runs home to become catcher, and the catcher is to run to the open spot in the outfield. In a short amount of time fielders get to field in all outfield positions, work on throws, and get some conditioning. **Coaches, you need to monitor this drill to be sure that the players do not get sloppy with catches, throws, turns, and relays. Coaches must insist on good execution of technique.**

### **Cones**

Set out some small cones in an arc in the outfield and then hit grounders to the outfielders. They must round the cones before reaching the ball. This teaches them to go to the path of the ball and not directly at the ball. **Coaches, make sure the cones are set in the “banana route” to the ball.**

### **Football Fly’s**

Have players practice catching running fly balls over the shoulder using soft footballs. They run out like a football receiver from the coach. The coach throws the football and they have to catch it over their right shoulder or left shoulder using both hands up and bringing in the ball. They cannot turn around and back up. This helps with hand-eye coordination also. After several successful catches have the players put their gloves on and then they catch the football with the glove on always using both hands. After more successful catches move to the softball. This drill is fun and has really improved out fly ball catches. **Coaches, this drill should be used in conjunction with the proper teaching of the “banana route” to the ball and not run straight line to the ball like a wide receiver.**

### **Outfield Fly**

Place half the team in left field and the rest in center. The coach hit a fly ball in between the first two outfielders. Both center field and left fielders go for the ball with one catching it and the other properly backing up the fielder. If the ball happens to get by both fielders then they will use a relay throw to get the ball back to the coach. This drill helps players in backing up on all balls, and easy to do before games.

## Throwing Drills

### Wrist Snaps

Players pair up and kneel with both knees on ground 5 yards apart. Players support throwing elbow with glove and, using only wrist action, throw to each other for desired period.

### One-Knee Throwing

Players pair up and kneel on ground 10-20 yards apart. Right handed players kneel on right knee with left leg out front. Emphasize proper shoulder turn, hip turn, and **follow through**. Follow through should be the throwing arm crossing over the left leg as player completes throw. Also, the primary objective of this drill is to ensure the player does NOT execute a "leading elbow throw." Coaches must ensure that prior to release, the throwing arm elbow is shoulder high or higher; the forearm is kind of perpendicular to the ground; the palm of the hand throwing the ball is turned 180 degrees away from target. As player throws ball, coach must ensure player does not collapse elbow, hand and ball toward their head.

### Wall Drill –

1. Players stand in one lines all facing in the same direction, without glove (except lefties would face opposite!). Players raise both arms to shoulder level, with lower arm at 90 degree angle, palms of hands facing away from each other. Players act like they are pushing two walls apart while their elbows are at shoulder level. The objective at this point is to have them see the position of their throwing hand;
2. then Instruct player to look over left shoulder toward glove hand. Player drops glove hand until arm is straight. Arm should be pointing at target. Coach or teammate places ball in throwing hand and instructs player to step and throw. 8U's can throw to open space with nobody catching. 10U's and above can throw to teammate. Ensure left hip also points toward target. Coach can have player exaggerate follow thru and have throwing arm go all the way past the left leg. The point is to teach a follow through motion.

8U and 10U coaches may want to strongly consider using tennis balls to conduct the Wall Drill or the One Knee Throwing Drill. The point is that while the players are learning correct throwing technique, it may be easier to grip, lift and control a smaller ball.

### Relay

Three or more players are spaced up to 50 feet apart from each other. Players make relay throws to each other being sure to turn towards the glove side as they throw to the next player in line. Turn this into a game by awarding prizes to the team that performs the fastest.

### Star Throwing

Five players are positioned at normal infield positions. Catcher throws to shortstop. Shortstop throws to first baseman. First baseman throws to third baseman. Third baseman throws to second baseman. Second baseman throws to catcher. Variations: start a runner at home and try to get her into a rundown between home and 3B or between 3B and 2B after making all five throws.

**Around the Horn**

Players are positioned at their bases with both shortstop and second baseman at 2B. Catcher throws to third baseman who throws to second baseman covering 2B; second baseman throws to first baseman who throws to catcher. Then repeat in opposite direction with first baseman throwing to shortstop covering 2B. Each player applies a tag to "runner" before throwing to next player.

**Box Throwing**

Players are positioned at respective bases. Throws are made in the following order: catcher to 1B; 1B to 3B; 3B to 2B with second baseman covering. Second baseman throws to catcher who throws back to 2B with shortstop covering. Shortstop throws to 1B; 1B to 3B; 3B to catcher. Each player applies a tag to "runner" before throwing to next player.

## Pitching Drills

### **Wrist Snap**

Stand with feet apart facing the catcher. Extend the throwing arm straight down with palm forward. Without moving arm, snap the wrist toward the catcher and release the ball. Repeat 15 times. Glove hand can be placed in front of pitching arm to keep it from moving.

**Pull Down** Stand in stride position. Extend throwing arm to rear, parallel to the ground, and glove arm forward, parallel to the ground. Pull down the throwing arm and glove arm and release the ball with a full wrist snap. Do not stride, but shift weight slightly to the stride leg and close hips towards the catcher after release. Allow throwing arm to follow through to bent release position. Repeat 15 to 20 times.

### **"K" Drill**

Stand in stride position but with legs closer together than for Pull Down. Hold ball directly overhead with arm comfortably extended, and extend glove arm towards the catcher. Pull down the throwing arm to the release point while striding forward along the power line towards the catcher. Release the ball with a full wrist snap, pulling glove arm behind the body. Complete a full follow through while dragging the pivot foot forward. Repeat 15 to 20 times.

### **Ball-Knee Drill**

Stand in release position. Raise stride knee off the ground (thigh parallel to the ground and calf perpendicular to the ground). Balance weight on the pivot leg. Extend throwing arm over left thigh and knee, and glove arm over throwing arm. Push glove arm and throwing arm towards catcher while pushing out with stride leg. Perform full arm circle while striding forward. Release ball, complete full follow through. Repeat 15 to 20 times.

### **Wall Drill**

For pitchers who are not maintaining a good arm circle along the power line, position in stride position next to a wall or fence. Perform full arm circle three times before simulating release of the ball.

### **Arm Circle Drill**

For pitchers who are not extending arm properly during arm circle, position in stride position facing catcher. With glove and hand pointed towards catcher, perform three arm circles before releasing ball to catcher and following through. Repeat until proper arm circle is achieved and then return to using full motion.

### **Pitching into Glove**

Stand in stride position with glove open next to left thigh. Wrist Snaps, Pull Downs, "K" Drill, Arm Circle Drill, and full motion can be performed with ball released into the glove. Have pitcher follow through to bent arm position after releasing the ball. Use a sock ball or other soft ball to perform these drills indoors.

**Stride Drill**

For pitchers who can't keep weight back during stride. Set up to pitch in front of wall and perform full motion without releasing ball. Also, coach can hold rubber surgical tubing around the pitcher's waist to help her keep her weight back. Also can have pitcher stride onto inside toe area and not drop heel until after pitch is released.

**Step Back - Arm Circle**

To help a pitcher keep her weight back, have her stand in stride position and perform a full arm circle drill. With glove and hand pointed towards catcher, have her perform one arm circle, driving the back knee in to the front knee at ball release. She should immediately take a step back with the back leg giving her a sense of falling back. She should fall back along the power line or she was off balance at ball release.

Weight Back - Full Motion To help a pitcher keep her weight back, have her deliver a pitch at 75% speed driving her back knee into her front knee and holding that balanced position until the catcher returns the ball.

## Catching Drills

### **Framing**

Catcher 1 throws softballs from 20 to 30 feet to catcher 2. The balls are thrown high, low, inside, and outside. The balls should be thrown close enough to the "plate" so that foot movement is not necessary. Catchers should practice framing the pitch.

### **Quick Feet**

Catcher 1 throws tennis balls, incrediballs, or softballs from 20 to 30 feet to catcher 2. The balls are thrown inside and outside, high and in the dirt. Catcher 2 takes slide steps to the left and right attempting to get the middle of the body in front of the ball. Catchers should be in full gear.

### **Quick Release**

Catcher squats in proper receiving position for runners on base. She should not be sitting on her heels; upper portion of leg should be parallel to the ground (a must position for those who want to be catchers). Coach or pitcher standing 10-15 ft away should "pitch" ball to catcher (not real pitch. Just go through motion and deliver easy pitch to catcher). Catcher receives ball then "jumps" to a good throwing position. While moving into position to throw, catcher should be bringing both ball and glove together (with ball in glove) to a position that is about chin/ear high and even with her shoulder. Catcher should then practice quick releasing/throwing FROM THIS POSITION! Catcher should make every attempt to throw the ball NO HIGHER THAN THE PITCHER'S HEAD toward ANY base, but especially toward 2nd. For younger players, ball should bounce once or twice on its way to second base. THIS IS PREFERABLE TO THE RAINBOW THROW. It gets to the base quicker and gives the covering infielder a chance to make the catch and tag.

Drill should start with covering infielder standing at second base and learning to catch throws that bounce. As skill with throw increases, drill should then include catcher throwing to the second base bag and the covering infielder moving to catch the ball on the run. Catching the ball on the run is a critical skill for middle infielders. This is a MUST HAVE skill for those wanting to play SS and 2nd because the concept will not change no matter what level they play. Catchers throw to the bag! Fielders move to the ball and make the catch! 12U and above coaches should execute this same drill with those who play 3rd base for the same reason.

### **Blocking the Ball**

Two catchers in full equipment stand about 20 to 30 feet apart. Catcher 1 throws balls in the dirt to the left, right and in front of "home." Catcher 2 practices blocking the wild pitches with shin guards, chest protector and hands using proper foot work technique.

**Catcher should be learning to include both hands as part of the blocking process/skill set. They should learn proper glove position i.e. web pointing down and touching the**

dirt, the palm of the glove is above the web when blocking. The non-glove hand should be tucked in behind the glove hand, helping to form a “wall” between the catcher’s legs and prevent a ball from getting through the catchers legs/feet. Catcher should not be “slapping” at the ball or attempting to “pick the ball clean” when the ball is pitched in the dirt. The primary objective is for the catcher to **BLOCK** the ball, keeping it in front of her so she can then pick it up to make a play. The vast majority of runners will **NOT** advance to the next base if they see the ball in front of the catcher.

### **Catchers Fielding Bunts**

Put catchers or other fielders at each base. Put six balls in front of home plate. First catcher pops up, fields "bunt" and throws to 1B, 2B, and 3B, in turn, returning to the defensive position after each throw. Repeat second set to each base and then rotate to next catcher. Steal Attempts Place two or more runners with helmets at 1B and 2B. Put two or more shortstops in position with second basemen as backups optional. Put a pitcher on the mound. On the release of the pitch, runner on 1B tries to steal 2B and catcher 1 tries to throw her out. Everyone returns to positions. On the next pitch, runner on 2B tries to steal 3B and catcher 1 tries to throw her out. Repeat several times and then rotate catchers and shortstops.

### **Tag Play at Home**

Place one or more catchers at home and three to six outfielders spaced evenly around the outfield. Give each outfielder one ball. First outfielder rolls ball a few feet in front, picks it up and makes a strong throw to home with catcher 1 simulating a tag; outfielder should end up at the edge of the outfield grass after throw. Catcher then squats facing outfielder and rises to throw ball simulating a long throw to second base. After each outfielder has thrown one ball, catchers rotate. Drill can also be performed with infielders at their positions.

**Variation on this theme is to hit the ball to the outfielders and has them practice catching a fly ball and throwing out a runner tagging-up at 3rd or charging a ground ball and throwing home. When practicing with infielders, have the players throw to the front corner of the plate, third base side, knee high. Bounce the ball in if necessary. All infielders should practice this throw multiple times from a drawn-in position. The purpose of this throw location is to protect the catcher from risking injury from an incoming runner while fielding a high throw and just as important, put the ball where the catcher executes the least movement in catching the ball then tagging the runner. This is the best chance for success with this play.**

### **Pick Off Play**

Put infielders and pitcher at their positions and 3 or 4 runners at 1B and 3B. Pitcher pitches ball to catcher; on release of pitch, runner on 1B takes aggressive lead while second baseman breaks hard to 1B. Catcher tries to pick off runner. Shortstop covers 2B; runner attempts to dive back to 1B or breaks to 2B and gets into a rundown. Repeat with runner on

3B with shortstop covering. First baseman and third baseman should play well in front of the bag so runners are enticed to take bigger leads. After 4 throws, rotate catchers.

### **Foul Ball Communication**

Put catcher, pitcher, first baseman and third baseman at respective positions. Coach is positioned behind catcher. Coach throws a pop up behind catcher. Infielders call "up 1" if towards 1B, "up 3" if towards 3B, "up" if ball is straight over home, and "back" if ball is straight back. The coach can substitute other calls if desired. Players in infield should point to ball if proper play is for the catcher to make the play.

### **Cut-Off Communication**

Put infielders at their defensive positions. Put three to six outfielders with one ball each, evenly spaced 10 to 20 feet beyond the edge of the outfield grass. Pitcher (or first baseman) moves to cut-off position in front of outfielder 1 who throws ball on a line to home. Catcher yells "cut" and the base number to tell the cut-off to throw to a base (e.g., "cut 2"). Catcher says nothing if she wants the ball to come through. Continue until each outfielder has thrown three balls. Rotate catchers.

### **Catcher Flip to Home**

Put catcher behind plate with six balls evenly spaced at backstop distance. On signal, catcher goes to first ball and flips it to the pitcher or first baseman covering home. Catcher returns to plate and runs down remaining balls in turn. Catcher should retrieve ball with bare hand and flip it in one motion along the ground so the player covering home can apply the tag smoothly. Emphasize pitcher/first baseman's positioning as much as catcher's technique. **Coaches emphasize that if the ball is close to the fence, the catcher should slide on ground to the ball rather than run all the way to the fence.**

## Strategies of the Game

**Listed below are some strategies of the game that coaches can review to get the creative coaches juices flowing. Each coach should have their own ideas of how they like to handle these situations. There are lots of options and opportunities based upon the skills and abilities of your players. Don't be afraid to try new things.**

### **1st and 3rd Situation #1**

Place runners with helmets at 1B and 3B. On pitch release, runner steals 2B. Second baseman moves to a position halfway between 2B and pitcher's rubber. Shortstop covers 2B; third baseman covers 3B. Catcher looks at 3B and throws there or to 2B if runner stays close to 3B. Second baseman watches runner on 3B; if she moves off base enough to get out, second baseman cuts and throws to 3B. Second baseman cuts off-line throws. She fakes catch and throw to 3B if she allows ball to go through.

### **1st and 3rd Situation #2**

Place runners with helmets at 1B and 3B. On pitch, runner steals 2B. Second baseman should move to cut-off position and shortstop covers 2B; third baseman covers 3B. Catcher looks at 3B and throws there or to pitcher if runner stays close to 3B. Pitcher looks at runner on 3B; if she moves back to 3B, pitcher turns to look at runner going to 2B and throws for the out if there is a play. Key is for catcher to make aggressive throw to pitcher to tempt runner on 3B to break to home. If pitcher turns toward 2B, but makes no attempt at play and runner on 3B steps off the base, she is, by rule, out.

### **Defending Against Continuation**

With a runner on third, the batter draws a walk, trots to first and then continues to second. If the ball gets thrown to second, the runner from third breaks for home and usually scores. There are many ways to handle this situation. Listed below are two ways. The key to stopping this event is practice, practice, practice.

#### **Method #1**

**The catcher must catch ball four and immediately throw the ball back to the pitcher in the circle.** If she misses it, she should run it down like any passed ball and immediately throw back to the pitcher unless the runner at third has already broken for home. The pitcher, now with the ball, must take up a position whereby she can make a quick, accurate throw to second. That position should be right behind the rubber, with her back to her catcher, watching both runners

- This invokes the "look back" rule which forces the runner on third back to base, assuming the pitcher does not immediately make a play or fake a play on any of the runners.

**Have the second baseperson step into the baseline from their second base position and your right fielder in a back up position behind 2nd base player.** Every other fielder needs to be ready for the next actions and get into their defensive positions. Third base

player covers 3rd base and left field in back up position behind third base. The Short Stop moves to cover 2nd base with CF in back up behind 2nd base. If the runner going to first clears first base and continues towards 2nd base the pitcher throws to second baseman standing in baseline and tags her out. If necessary makes the play for home if the runner from 3rd attempts the seal of home. 2nd base is closer to home than being on second base. This play needs to be practiced a lot to make sure the throws are crisp and the basemen and pitchers are aware of what needs to be done. On the look back rule, a lot of times the umpire is not watching and won't make the call. But, hopefully after bringing it to their attention they will make the call."

## Method #2

1. The catcher must catch ball four and immediately throw the ball back to the pitcher in the circle. If she misses it, she should run it down like any passed ball and immediately throw back to the pitcher unless the runner at third has already broken for home.
  - a. The idea is to get the ball back to the pitcher as quickly as possible. This invokes the "look back" rule which forces the runner on third back to base, assuming the pitcher does not immediately make a play or fake a play on any of the runners.
  - b. So step one is to force the runner at third's hand - to force her back to base. If the runner on third stays off the base, the ump should call her out for failing to obey the rules concerning runners when the pitcher is in the circle with the ball. Coaches, who witness such an action, should call time out after the play is dead and then speak to the umpire about his or her failure to invoke the look back rule. If the ump says your pitcher was making a play, clarify with the ump what they consider making a play and instruct your pitcher on the results of that conversation so it can be avoided. Generally, a pitcher has to make an affirmative action like raising the ball in her throwing hand in order to turn look back off.
2. The pitcher, now with the ball, must take up a position whereby she can make a quick, accurate throw to second. That position should probably be right behind the rubber, with her back to her catcher, watching both runners. She doesn't really need to watch the runner at third per se since she is required to be back on the bag and because the catcher should be able to tell her if she breaks for home. Her primary focus is the runner rounding first.
  - a. If the runner at first does not immediately continue, the pitcher can turn her back on second base and proceed to the next pitch. If the runner from first suddenly gets religion and begins to run towards second, the ump should call her out. You aren't allowed to run to first, stop, and then start toward second. If this happens and the ump doesn't call the runner at first out, again, you need to have a conversation. This is improper.
3. Every other fielder needs to be ready for the next actions. Your catcher should have her mask off and thrown to the side and be standing in front of the plate, ready to

catch a throw to nail the runner from third. The third baseman should be back ready to catch a throw there should it become necessary. SS takes the bag at second. 2B is backing her up. 1B is at her bag. CF is backing up second. LF is backing up third but looking for a potential throw from SS so all the way over the line and closer to third than usual. RF is backing up first in the unlikely event the runner gets pickled there.

4. The pitcher sees the runner from first turn and head for second. She needn't be in any sort of a rush. The runner from first is going to take several seconds to get to second base. Every moment that the pitcher keeps her cool and does not engage, the runner from third is prevented from leaving the bag. She waits until the runner is close enough for the SS to be able to tag her out quickly when she gets the throw from the pitcher. Then and only then she makes a short, crisp, accurate throw to the SS.
5. At this moment, the runner from third will come off the base and perhaps break for home. The SS needs to make a split-second decision about how quickly she can tag the runner from first out. An experienced runner will slow down, stop, or reverse. An inexperienced runner will just run right into the tag and most likely give the SS time to throw the runner out at home.
6. If the SS sees that the runner from first is experienced enough to make the play difficult and the runner from third is in an all out run to home, she turns and throws to home to prevent the run from scoring. The result is either an out at home or, if the runner returns to third, the defensive team is no worse off than they would have been just letting the runner go through free and clear to second.
7. Alternately, if the runner from third is inexperienced, she may hesitate, perhaps not even proceed to home. If she's far enough off the base to be caught napping, the SS should immediately throw to third to try to nail her. If she's half way and not proceeding to home, rather than take the risk of making a throw, the SS should grab the ball in her throwing hand and run at medium pace at the runner. The runner should break in one direction or the other, but if she does not, the SS should continue to trot at the runner while maintaining good body position to make a throw quickly. The primary object is not to force the runner into breaking for home. At this stage of the game, you want her either out or back on third. You do not want to coax her into running home where anything can and does happen.

As an aside, the "continuation play usually occurs with no or one outs. Offensive teams shouldn't employ this with two outs since the tagged runner at second ends the inning before the run crosses the plate. But you'll probably see this happen anyways either because the offensive team forgets about the outs or, in a close game, the runner from first will attempt to initiate a pickle and, thereby, allow the run to score before the tag out. You must discuss this possibility with your team. You must make sure they know how many outs there are in game situations and that they understand the ramifications of the pickle with two outs. You should employ "inning situational considerations" into your drills so the players understand what is going on come game time.

**The key to both of these strategies is to get the ball immediately back to the**

**pitcher before the batter has time to drop her bat. You do that and the runner at third goes back and has to stand in place, waiting for the play to develop. These are moderately complex plays which can fall apart when players are over adrenalized. This has to be as automatic as the throw back from catcher to pitcher.**

## **Bunting Defense**

There are many ways to handle defending the bunt. It is important as coaches that you select a method that works with the player skill sets available. The most important aspect of the bunt defense is to teach and practice the real critical skills of bunt defense which include bare-handing the ball, communicating with teammates, executing good quick throws under duress, and who is covering which base under which circumstance. What players should ultimately practice is: 1) charging and bare-handing the ball; 2) knowing and throwing to the right base; 3) correct body position for making the throw. This will be different for each position; 4) which infielder covers which base for specific situations. Again, there are lots of choices a coach has. The coach needs to choose and then teach where he/she wants the players and ball to go; 5) making a strong, accurate throw.

## Games to Play

### **Batting**

Players are arranged on the field (just anywhere) and player 1 bats. If the batter hits a fly ball and if someone catches it then that person who caught it gets to bat, BUT if the batter hits a grounder and a player fields it then the batter lays the bat on the ground, the fielder has to stay in the same spot where they fielded the ball and rolls the ball on the ground and tries to hit the bat. If she hits the bat then she gets to bat.

### **3 Team Scrimmage**

Have a scrimmage that is made of 3 teams of 4. One team consists of the outfield, the second, the infield and the third bats. After the 3 outs, the outfield moves to the infield, the infield bats and the batters go to the outfield etc., etc. It has worked our terrifically in building excitement for game situations, letting them experience both outfield and infield and be competitive. We can have ourselves a game without hunting for another team to play against

### **Pickoff Game**

This is a good game for all aspects of stealing. Put players at each of the infield positions. Have the rest of the team put on helmets and line up at 1st base. The base runners will each run the bases in this pattern: lead-off, steal. You may only have one runner on the bases at time. The first runner gets ready on first. The pitcher pitches the ball and the runner takes a lead. The catcher attempts a pick-off at first and the runner tries to get back in time. On the next pitch the runner attempts to steal second and the catcher tries to throw her out. The runner proceeds with a big lead at second, stealing third and big lead off at third. The final pitch for that runner is a deliberate passed ball/wild pitch, which gives the catcher and pitcher a chance to practice this play. To encourage the runners to take big leads and to teach them what they can get away with we will place little pieces of candy in the dirt as a challenge. If they can grab the candy and get back safely, they can keep the candy. After they have done this drill a couple of times, allow the runners to do a "delayed steal" on their lead offs. If the catcher throws to first, the runners can attempt to go to second. This way the catchers learn to recognize the delayed steal and run the base runner back. The drill gives the catcher a lot of practice throwing to the bases, allows the infielders to practice positioning themselves for and putting on the tag, and allows the base runners a chance to practice leading off, sliding.

### **Running Game**

Line up half the team at second base and half the team line up at home. On the signal, one player from each team runs the bases until she reaches the base she started out at. When she gets there, she tags the next runner in line and she runs the bases. This is done until all the runners have run. Whoever reaches their base first wins. The other team has to pick up the bases. This is usually the last thing we do at the end of practice.

### **Pepper**

A coach gathers a small group of players, which are only a few feet from him/her. The coach then hits or bunts the ball to the players in any random order, then the players must use

quick reactions to retrieve the ball and accuracy to pitch, this pitch is only a toss, for the coach to hit again. You do this drill to improve the player's reaction time. You have to do this drill as quickly as possible and the pace will increase as time goes on and the players improve. This can also be used to help players with bunting by having a player bunt the ball in place of the coach.

### **3-2-Run**

At the beginning of our season, we run this drill for checking arm strength, direction, foot position and body awareness. Also checks for the runners' speed and quickness out of the batters box. Split the team up; approximately half and half. Half the team at 3rd base the other half at home plate. Have one player at 2nd base to receive throws from 3rd base. Set three balls down the 3rd base line equal distance apart, covering approximately 3/4 of the distance to home plate. The first player is in the batters box in her batting stance with a helmet on. When the coach says "Go" the batter swings and runs like the wind to reach 2nd base before the player at 3rd base fields each ball and throws to 2nd base. The goal is to make all the throws cleanly from 3rd to 2nd before the runner gets to 2nd. Players rotate after each play, home to 2nd, 2nd to 3rd, and 3rd to home.

### **Perfect Throws**

Start by placing your infielders at their positions (except the pitcher). The ball starts at the catcher, she throws to the second baseman, she throws to the third baseman, she throws to the first baseman, she throws to the shortstop, and she throws back to the catcher. While the field is throwing the ball you have a team of base runners who will start running the bases when the catcher throws the ball. The objective is for the based runners to run the bases prior to the ball being thrown around the in field. Make sure the infield plays back almost to the grass and does not cheat up on the throws. After they get a few steps in the grass the faster runners start making it close. The runners like to see a dropped or missed ball. Keep score of the number of times runners can beat the throws. After 15-20 throws switch runners and fielders

### **Whiffle Ball Games**

Use this drill to teach aggressive base running, hitting, and fielding. The drill uses a whiffle ball and a plastic bat. First set the bases at about 40 feet apart. Divide your team in two. One half of the team fields while the other half of the team bats. Fielders do not use their gloves. We want to teach them that the hands are the real tools in catching the ball. The ball is pitched from about 20 feet away. The batter has only three chances to hit the ball. (There are no balls or walks in this drill.) Once the ball is hit, the batter must run the bases until she reaches home plate or is tagged out. The fielders must always try to tag the runner out at first. You bat the entire line up. Then you change sides. We usually do this drill twice a week for about 20 minutes at a very fast pace. Or you can just play a nice game of whiffle ball.