

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.