



## **DEFENSIVE DRILLS**

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### **BUILD THE DEFENSE**

Ideal baseball and softball drills keep your entire team active while working on fundamentals. The key to an effective and efficient baseball and softball practice is eliminating downtime for your team. Here are some essential infield and team defense drills that keep your team active, engaged, and working on fundamentals. Adjusting for younger or older players put these in your program and watch the team progress.

### **INDIVIDUAL DEFENSIVE DRILLS**

#### **Infield**

**1) Short hops:** Have players get in proper ground ball position, and throw “short hops” to them. Start with short hops right at them, then forehands, and backhands. Teaches players to have soft hands, focus, and to go from “down to up” when fielding ground balls. Players can throw each other short hops in pairs.

**2) 2-Ball drill:** Have 2 baseballs/softballs. Roll the balls from one side to the other having players use only their glove hand (no glove) to field the ball and shovel it back to you. Sets of 10. Players can work in pairs as well. Teaches players footwork and hand positioning.

**3) Knees:** Have players take ground balls on their knees. Either hit or roll the ball. Teaches players to stay low, and how to use hands properly.

**4) 4-ball drill:** Put 4 baseballs/softballs in a crooked row. Have players approach all 4 balls as if they were going to field them. Teaches players footwork and angles.

**5) Multiples:** Hit players 5 ground balls in a row rapidly.

#### **Outfield**

**1) L patterns:** Have players stand next to you and run “L patterns” like a wide receiver. Teaches players good angles and to pursue the ball.

**2) Crow hop:** Roll outfielders ground balls. Have them close ground on the ball, field it on the run, crow hop, and make a good throw.



## **DEFENSIVE DRILLS**

### **TEAM DEFENSE DRILLS**

Team defense includes the following; cuts and relays, bunt defenses, PFPs, 1st and 3rd defenses, steal covers, pop-up communication, run downs, positioning, and situational play. Here are some recommendations for each.

**Cuts and Relays:** Work out a system for cuts and relays with your team. Regarding language, there are only 3 verbal signals to use. If the cut-off player hears nothing, he/she lets the ball go. If the player hears a base number, he/she cuts the ball off and relays it to that base, if the player hears "cut", he/she cuts the ball off and holds it.

**PFPs:** Pitchers, 1st baseman, and 2nd baseman need to work together on ground balls to the right side and need regular reps at practice.

**Steal coverages:** Typically, for a right-handed hitter is up, the 2nd baseman covers 2nd base on a steal. If a left-handed hitter is up, the short stop covers. Middle infielders need to work this out between themselves between hitters using the "open mouth" "closed mouth" system. Practice catch and tags at practice.

**Pop-ups:** You need to work out a priority-based system with your team for pop-ups. Typically, priority goes like this; center fielder, corner outfielders, middle infielders, corner infielders, catcher, and pitcher. Regarding language, players need to communicate by calling "ball", or "I got it", and need to call for the ball as it's reaching the peak of flight, or, if later, when they know they can catch it.

**Positioning:** You need to have a system to position your players from the dugout. Typically, hand behind the head means move back, hand in front of face means move in, hand over left ear means move left, hand over right ear means move right. Teach the team situational positioning as well such as "infield in", and "double play depth".

**Situational play:** Put all of this together by simulating game situations in practice



## **THROWING PROGRESSION**

### **Purpose:**

Players practice throwing fundamentals.

### **Setup:**

Divide players into pairs and set each pair up about 6-8 feet apart, facing each other. You will also need cones.



### **Instructions:**

1. Players get down on one knee (the knee on their throwing arm side).
2. They put their throwing elbow in their glove and wrist snap the ball to their partner.
3. Next, the players flex their wrist twice before throwing the ball overhand to their
4. partner.
5. Next, players stand up and move 15-20 feet apart and throw the ball back and forth.
6. Finally, set up two cones about 40 to 60 feet from the coach. The players take a few
7. steps and throw to the coach.

### **Coaching Tips:**

- On the wrist snap, stress that the palm should be finishing down and not off to the side.
- When players are throwing, stress accuracy. To improve accuracy they should have their eyes locked on the target, their head level and still and they should be striding toward the target.
- On the long throws, players should be aiming at the coach's torso. Make sure they are using good fundamentals. It can be easy to break down when throwing from a distance. If the distance is too long for some players, shorten it.



## **GLOVE OUT DRILL**

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### **Purpose:**

Players work on getting their gloves out in front of their bodies to field ground balls.

### **Setup:**

Two players set up about 5-10 feet apart from each other. They are on their knees.



### **Instructions:**

1. The players roll the ball to each other and work on fielding ground balls.
2. As the drill progresses, they also roll the ball to each side so they can work on their forehand and backhand.
3. After rolling the ball, the players throw the ball close to each other so they have to work on fielding it on the short hop.

### **Coaching Tips:**

- Players should be fielding the ball with their glove out away from their body and then bringing the ball and glove into the throwing side of their body after the catch.
- When fielding ground balls, the players' heads should be down and their eyes always on the ball.

### **Tips for Younger Athletes:**

1. Teach them to keep their gaze steady on the ball from the moment it leaves the other player's hand until it's securely in their glove. This helps in developing concentration and tracking skills.
2. Emphasize the importance of keeping the glove fingers down and the palm facing the incoming ball. This helps in creating a wider catching surface and reduces the chance of missing the ball.
3. Guide them to align their shoulders and hips parallel to the direction of the incoming ball. This body alignment aids in more effective and balanced fielding.

### **Tips for Older Athletes:**

1. Train them to anticipate the ball's path and adjust their body positioning accordingly. This enhances their reaction time and ability to handle unpredictable bounces.
2. Focus on the seamless transition from catching to a throwing stance. This includes practicing quick footwork to get up from their knees and align their body for an accurate throw.
3. Challenge them to field balls rolled at varying speeds. This helps in developing their ability to adjust their glove speed and body movements according to the pace of the ball.

## **FOUR SQUARE DRILL**

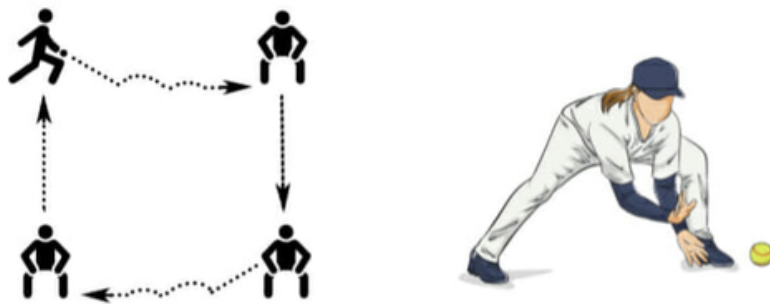
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### **Purpose**

To practice fielding ground balls in a fun, competitive way.

### **Set Up**

- Divide team into groups of four.
- Make a square shape with each foursome.
- One player should be at each corner of the square with about 50 feet separating each player.
- One player in each foursome should have a ball. No gloves are necessary for this drill.



### **Instructions**

1. On the coach's whistle, the player with the ball should roll the ball to the next person in a clockwise direction.
2. Without a glove, player must move to the ball, bend their knees and field the ball with two hands.
3. Players should see how quickly they can roll and field the ball around the square.
4. After they have that down, add a second ball to the mix, so there are two going at once.

### **Coaching Tips**

- This is a good drill to use to identify a player struggling with fielding ground balls. You can always pull a player out of the square to work with them individually while the rest of the players continue the drill as a triangle shape instead of a square.
- **Make it harder:** Increase the size of the square. Allow players to throw the ball in any direction – left, right or diagonally across the square. Throw short-hops, low ground balls and high ground balls.
- **Make it easier:** Add a coach into each group of four to demonstrate, correct and encourage.

## **BACKHAND DRILL**

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### **Purpose:**

Players practice their backhand and forehand when catching ground balls.

### **Setup:**

Two players set up about 6-12 feet apart from each other, standing.



### **Instructions:**

- Players bend over to their forehand side and roll the ball back and forth to each other, fielding it with their forehand.
- Players then reverse and bend over to the backhand side, rolling the ball to each other to field it with their backhand.

### **Coaching Tips:**

- Stress to players the importance of keeping their head down and trusting their gloves. This can be challenging for youth players. If players are particularly sensitive, consider using softer balls at first, then moving to regular softballs as their skills improve.
- Ensure the glove palm is open. Watch for “glove flippers” who flip the glove over to catch the ball. Correct this by telling players to imagine they have a bowl of soup in their glove hand and need to keep it flat to avoid spilling.
- Players should be fielding from the ground up.

### **Tips for Younger Athletes:**

- Teach young players the importance of proper foot positioning. Their feet should be slightly wider than shoulder-width apart for better balance. Encourage small shuffle steps to adjust their position as the ball rolls towards them, ensuring they’re always in the best spot to field the ball.

### **Tips for Older Athletes:**

- Emphasize the importance of transitioning smoothly between backhand and forehand catches. Older players should work on fluidly shifting their weight and rotating their hips as they switch sides, enhancing agility and response time.



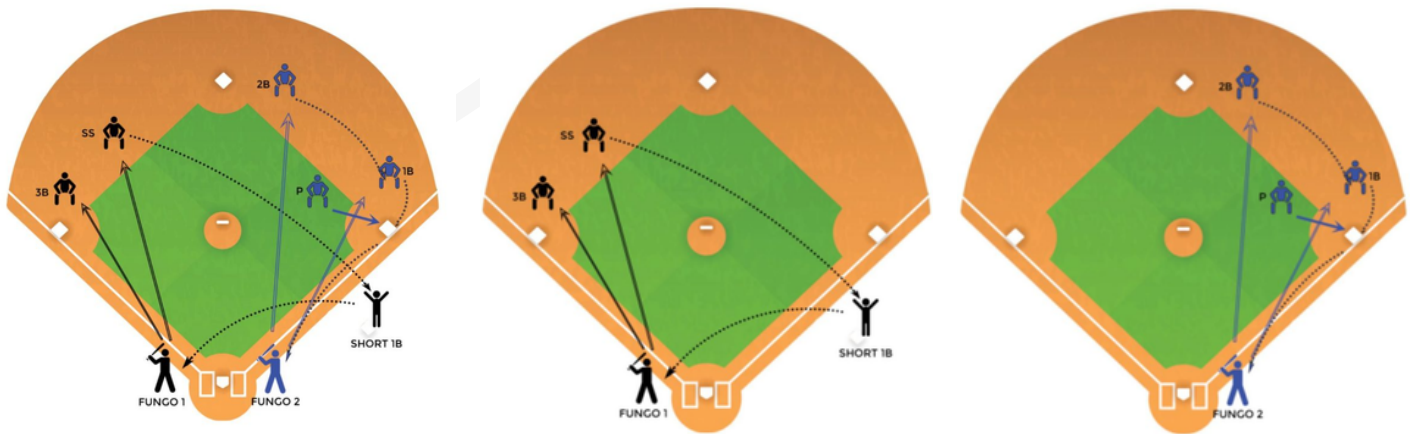
## **MULTIPURPOSE DRILL**

### **Purpose:**

Combines the previous two drills into one multi-phase drill that can be run simultaneously.

### **Setup:**

- 2 coaches with fungo bats on each side of the plate
- Infielders in regular positions
- Extra player at Short 1B



### **Execution:**

Fungo 1 and Fungo 2 alternate ground balls to fielders.

#### **Black Group (Fungo 1, SS, 3B, Short 1B)**

1. Fungo 1 alternates ground balls to 3B and SS.
2. Infielders field grounder and throw to Short 1B.
3. Return ball to Fungo 1. Reset and repeat.

#### **Blue Group (Fungo 2, 1B, P, 2B)**

1. Fungo 2 alternates ground balls to 2B and 1B.
2. On grounder to 2B, he throws to first.
3. On grounder to 1B, he throws to Pitcher covering first.
4. Return ball to Fungo 2. Reset and repeat.



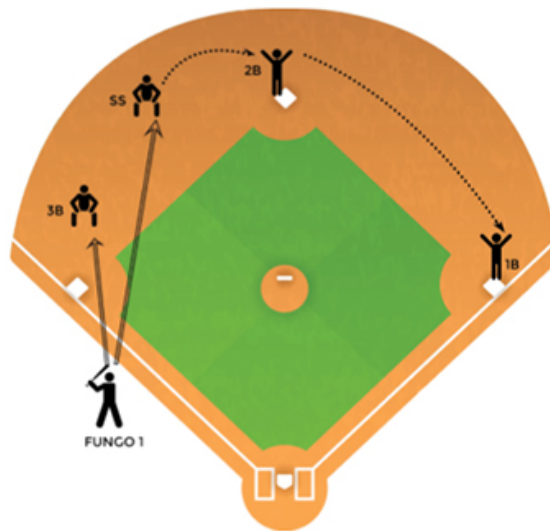
## **ALTERNATING DOUBLES DRILL**

### **Purpose**

Infielders practice turning 5-4-3 and 6-4-3 double plays.

### **Drill Setup**

- Lines of players at Pitcher, Catcher and Short 1B
- Coach with fungo bat up the third baseline



### **How it Works**

1. Fungo 1 alternates ground balls to 3B and SS.
2. On grounder hit to 3B – he/she fields ball and throws to 2B, 2B throws to 1B for 5-4-3 double play.
3. On grounder hit to SS – he/she fields ball and throws to 2B, 2B throws to 1B for 6-4-3 double play.
4. Rotate and repeat.



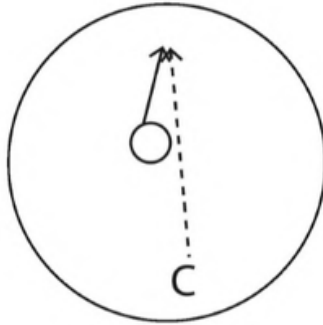
## **BAREHAND TOSS DRILL**

### **Purpose**

Outfielder works on seeing the ball into his or her glove (or glove hand in this case).

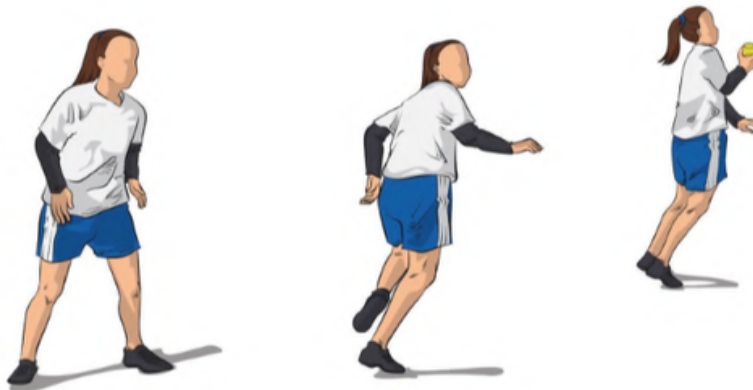
### **Set Up**

- Player and coach stand roughly 10-15 yards apart in an open space.



### **Instructions**

1. Coach throws a ball past the outfielder who must turn and run to catch it.
2. Outfielder catches the ball barehanded with their glove hand and brings it back.
3. Next player goes.



### **Coaching Tips**

- Throw the ball to both sides so the outfielders work on their over-the-shoulder skills in both directions.
- Players should only be using their glove hands to catch.
- Players should be watching the ball all the way into their hands.



## **OUTFIELD CUTOFF DRILL**

### **Purpose**

This drill covers the proper footwork and body rotation needed to perform a fast cutoff and eliminate any unnecessary steps while turning and throwing the ball.

### **Set Up**

- One player or coach starts with the ball in the outfield.
- The other player is at one of the infield positions.
- A teammate or net can be placed at home plate to catch the ball.

### **Instructions**

- The infielder faces the player who is throwing to him/her and raises his/her hands to show a target to the throwing player.
- The outfielder throws the ball. Catch and turn.
- The baseman begins to turn his/her body as the ball approaches.
- Player catches the ball and continues to turn his/her body in one fluid motion so he/she is facing his/her target.



### **Coaching Tips**

- Remind players that if their body is not turned while catching, the base runner will gain two extra steps (six feet) while the baseman is repositioning themselves to make the throw.
- This drill can be performed individually by holding a ball, practicing the turning technique and throwing to a net.