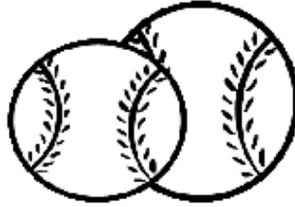


# HOLLISTON



YOUTH BASEBALL / SOFTBALL

## *Small Diamond Baseball Curriculum*

Catch the Excitement...



**HOLLISTON**  
YOUTH BASEBALL / SOFTBALL

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Revision	Date	Description
01	3/31/07	Initial release for use Spring 07

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## A. Introduction

### Objectives

- Provides a road map for coaches to show them what to teach, how and when.
- Provides a baseline of lessons for each league.
- Increases likelihood all players receive comparable lessons.
- Provide drills to keep practices fun.

### Keys to Curriculum's Success

- Coaches learning it.
- Coaches teaching it well...key to that is:
  - Receptive, enthusiastic coaches
  - Having more than one coach on the field... Assistant coaches that show up
- A baseline of skill levels of what players should be taught at end of the season
- Focus on basics
- Making it fun
- Make it progressive (building blocks)
- KISS – not too long

### Implementation

1. Coaches are required to read it.
2. Curriculum Committee member(s) are responsible for teaching curriculum.
3. Curriculum Day – all coaches attend a 90 minute clinic, taught by committee members which will focus on drills to reinforce the curriculum. The clinic will be structured as a practice with stations and players.
4. Practice Clinic – 45 minute session on how to run a practice.
5. Assign each coach a curriculum committee member as a mentor, as needed.
6. Every Farm and Minor and first time HYBSA coach must attend a practice of a curriculum member or board approved coach.

### Coaching/Curriculum Committee

**Chair:** HYBSA Board Member  
**Members:** League Coaching Coordinators

## **B. Skill Expectations by League**

The following section enumerates the skills that the league expects head coaches to teach, and players to understand and possibly master at the completion of the season for each league.

**First and foremost are the following “people skills” followed by skills described in this curriculum.**

### **People skills**

- Be positive
- Build self esteem
- Provide all players with the opportunity to learn and play
- Make every player feel an important part of the team
- Set clear expectations and goals
- Create a safe and caring culture
- Be fair
- Teach good sportsmanship – Be a good role model
- Communicate clearly

### **Farm**

By the end of the farm league season, the player should have a thorough understanding of the following:

- Running through first base
- Rounding the bases properly
- Sliding
- Understanding force outs
- Keeping the ball in front of you (both infield/outfield)
- Swinging through the ball/basic stance/swing
- Proper throwing motion
- Proper catching when ball is below (and above) the waist.

### **Minors**

By the end of the minor league season, the player should have a thorough understanding of the following in addition to the items enumerated for the farm league:

- Pitching Mechanics
- Watching the runner in front of you
- Understanding force outs
- Covering 2nd base when the ball is hit to the left side or right side
- Basic double play with man on first
- Tagging a runner

**Majors-National (MN)**

By the end of the MN league season, the player should have a thorough understanding of the following in addition to the items enumerated for the Farm and Minor league:

- Cut-off throws from the outfield (throwing the ball to the SS or 2nd baseman)
- Double Play Techniques
- Bunting
- Fielding a bunt
- Following base coach signs
- Pitching Mechanics
- Batting Strategies

**Majors-American (MA)**

By the end of the MA league season, the player should have a thorough understanding of the following in addition to the items enumerated for the MN, Minor and Farm league:

- Pitching Mechanics and strategies
- Pitching Fielding
- Batting Strategies
- Outfield play
- Tagging Up
- Fielding backhands

## C. Curriculum

The curriculum is broken out into the following sections:

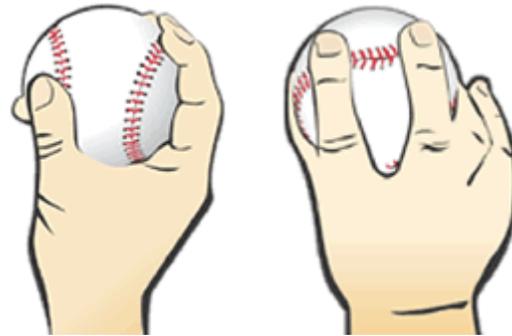
- Defensive Skills
- Offensive Skills
- Situational Baseball
- Intangibles

### Defensive Skills

#### 1. Gripping the ball

One of the most important things to teach players of all positions is how to properly grip a baseball.

Position the baseball so that the seams make a "C" or a backward "C" (also sometimes called a "horseshoe"). Place the middle finger and pointer finger across the "C" with the finger tips on the seams.



The second picture on the right shows the ball out on the fingertips. Gripping the ball in the palm of your hand and not out on your fingers will cost you velocity and accuracy. Younger players may need to grip the ball with three fingers instead of two, but unless their hands are very small they should still try to grip the ball out on the fingers.

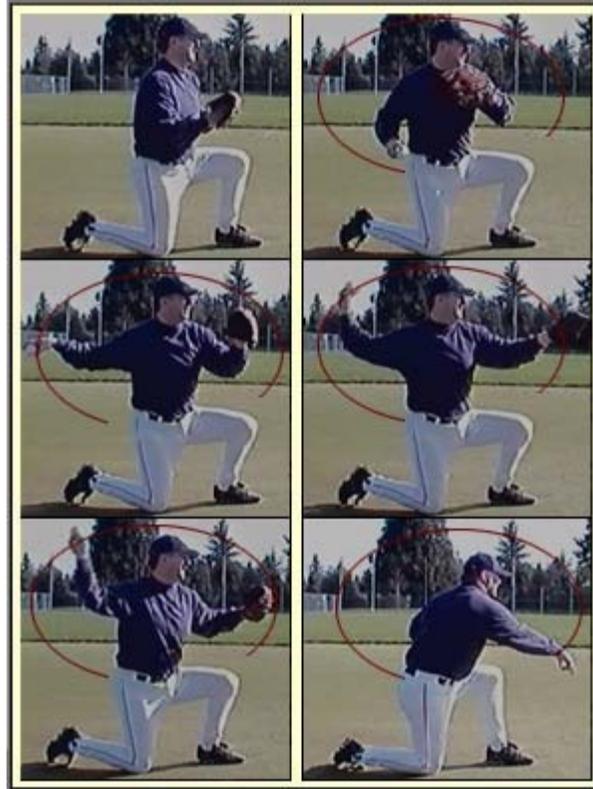
#### 2. Throwing

##### Entire Body

Throwing requires the entire body to work together in order to throw the ball accurately and to put something on it. All positions on the field require the ability to throw the ball accurately.

## Arm Motion

You can think of the motion your arm makes when throwing the ball as a circular motion. If you're throwing a short distance, the circular motion will be smaller than when you are throwing farther, but it's still a circular motion. The circular motion will aid your throw by providing more natural momentum than simply bringing your arm straight back and then forward.



It's important to have your hand on top of the ball as you pull it back and start your throwing motion.

Practice throwing this way all the time and it will soon feel natural and you should see increased accuracy and velocity.

## Front Shoulder

When throwing you want your front shoulder to point in the direction of where you are throwing.

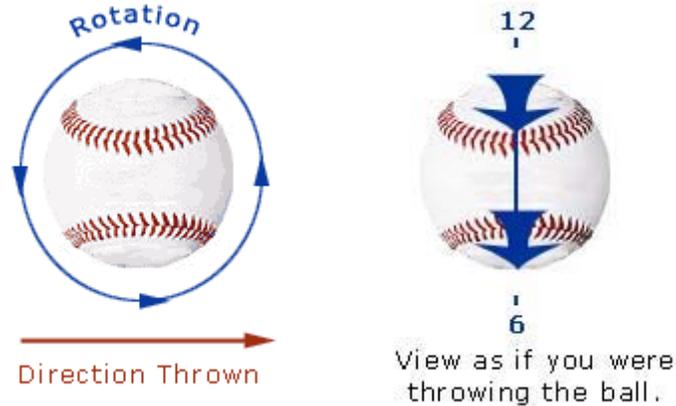
## Lower Body

Line up lower body facing target. Your back foot should be perpendicular to the target and your hips should be closed and also pointing in the direction of the target.

Once you have everything lined up, you'll want to step toward the target with your lead foot, push off your back leg, and throw the ball using your entire body.

## Rotation

In order to throw the ball so it won't tail, you want to make sure you throw it across all four seams with '12-6' rotation. '12-6' rotation refers to a clock. If the ball rotates from 12, straight down to where 6 would be on the clock, this would be considered '12-6' rotation. The next two images show an example of 12-6 rotation.



Unless you throw the ball straight over your head, you won't be able to get '12-6' rotation without moving your wrist. As the ball comes forward during your motion, you will want to twist your wrist to keep your hand as vertical as possible. This is the key to having good '12-6' rotation on the ball.

## 3. Ready Positions

### Ready Position - Infield

When you get in the ready position, you need to be ready to field a hot line drive AND ready to move. Many players forget the second part (ready to move). They crouch down with their feet too wide, their gloves almost on the ground, and their palms facing the hitter.

Just as a hitter needs to stay relaxed to be quick, the same also applies to an infielder. The ready position is an athletic position that allows you to move quickly in any direction.

- Bend your knees and back comfortably
- Place your feet a little wider than shoulder width apart
- Put your weight on the inside balls of your feet so you can push off in either direction easily
- Place your arms out in front of your body but comfortable and not too far away
- Extend your hands naturally; while you don't want the back of your glove facing the pitcher, you also don't need to have it completely open and facing the hitter. Many players have their palms facing each other as the ball crosses the plate.

### Pre-Pitch Routine

Most players devise a pre-pitch routine that puts them in the ready position as the ball crosses the plate. This may be a shuffle of the feet or a little hop. Whatever method you use, make sure you're balanced, comfortable, and ready to move. Gets your momentum moving forward.

Don't sit back on your heels. You want to be aggressive and play the ball rather than have the ball play you. This can only be done if you're moving forward and ready.

### **Ready position - Outfield**

Start in an athletic position. Many times, outfielders stand up or rest their upper body weight on their knees while the pitcher delivers the pitch. These outfielders are not ready to get a good jump on the ball.

### **The Pitch**



As the pitcher throws the ball, get yourself ready to move. To do this, put your weight on the balls of your feet. This allows you to push off quickly in any direction. To get from the athletic to the ready position, use some sort of movement. Take a slight hop to put yourself in this position, or take slight steps forward transferring your weight from side to side. Whatever way you choose, time it so you distribute your weight evenly and are on the balls of your feet when the pitch crosses the plate.

## 4. Fielding Balls

### Fielding Ground Balls



**Figure 1**

Move toward the grounder as you prepare to field it. Notice the word 'charge' wasn't used -- that word implies running towards it as fast as you can. Unless it's a slow roller, you want to approach the ball in a controlled manner that is aggressive but not out of control. This allows you to make adjustments so you're not catching it off a short hop or taking it off the first bounce on the infield dirt. As you get closer to the ball, begin breaking down to get into position to field the ball. To do this, shorten your steps and widen your feet. Bend not only at the knees but also with your back. Put your hands out in front of your body and open your glove toward the ball with your bare hand on top.

### Catching the Ground Ball

There are a few common problems that players make when catching a ground ball:

#### **Not catching the ball out in front**

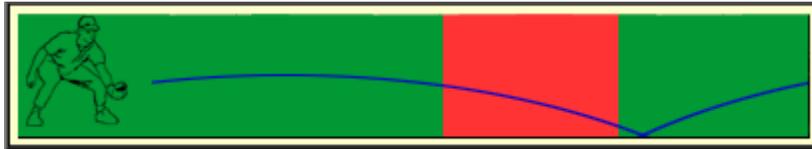
By doing this, you cannot watch the ball all the way into your glove; most likely you are bending either with your knees or back but not both. When you catch the ball under you, you lose the ability to give with your hands. You want 'soft hands', a term used to describe a fielder who catches the ball out front of his body and seems to suck up the ball from that position into a position to throw. With soft hands, you can make last second adjustments to a bounce that was different than expected.

#### **Poorly Positioned Hands**

Your glove must be in a good position to field the ball: open and close to vertical. This gives you the most area to catch the ball.

## Short Hop

In all situations, try to avoid catching the ball on a short hop. In the diagram below, the approximate area of the short hop is shown in red. Catching the ball on a short hop is a difficult play to make. It takes practice for players to get in good position to avoid fielding a short hop.



## Backhand

The backhand play is one of the most difficult to make. Poor technique and lack of practice are two of the biggest reasons why players struggle with the backhand play.

As you approach the ball you will either field it with your left foot forward or right foot forward depending on when you get to it. Many players will practice fielding a backhand only one way, but the fact is you will have to make the play both ways so make sure you practice both ways of fielding a backhand. Either way you want to make sure you keep your glove in front of your face. You want to watch the ball all the way into the glove.

## Fielding Fly Balls

### Jump

When the ball is hit, get a good jump. A good jump depends on your reaction time, which can improve through repetition. Watch the ball all the way to the plate.

### Footwork

It's difficult if not impossible to get a good jump without good footwork.

- When the ball is hit to your side, your first move will be a crossover step.
- When the ball is hit over your head to the side your first step will be a drop step, followed by a crossover.
- When the ball is hit directly over your head, your first step will be a deep drop step with your throwing hand side.
- The reason to drop with your throwing hand is if you need to switch sides as your running back on the ball it's much easier to switch from your throwing hand side to your glove hand side and make the catch then the other way around.
- One of the most difficult fly balls to judge is the ball hit directly at you. If you don't immediately recognize whether the ball is going over your head or going to drop in front of you, freeze. The worst thing you can do is guess. Simply freeze and try to determine where the ball is.

## Run Hard

Once you have determined approximately where the ball is going to land, start running hard to that spot. This will give you time to make adjustments if you misjudged the ball. If you coast

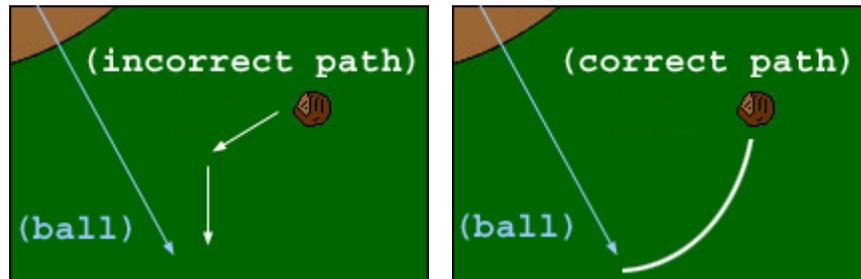
toward the ball and you find out the ball is going to land farther away than anticipated, you may not have time to get to that spot.

### Get Behind the Ball

You will dramatically improve your velocity and the time required to throw the ball if you get behind the ball as it comes down and start moving in the direction of your target as you catch the ball.

### Circle the Ball

One technique that will help you get in position is to circle the ball. With a ball hit to your side it's risky to try and take a direct angle to cut it off. If you miss judge the distance and speed at all, the ball may get by you. By taking an angle that is deeper you can circle behind the ball and catch it moving forward with the ball in front of you. While it might take slightly longer to get to the ball, you will be in a better position to not only catch it but make an accurate throw. The diagrams below show the incorrect angle and proper angle to take when running to the ball.



### Playing the Fly Ball in the Sun

- It's important to get a good jump on the ball and quickly anticipate where you think it will land. Often the ball is lost soon after being hit, which means your first analysis of where the ball is going to land is essential.
- Once you have lost the ball in the sun, continue in the direction of where you believe it will land. Listen for other outfielders to tell you if you're going in the wrong direction.
- When you turn to find the ball, either while running or after reaching the spot you think it will land, use your glove (or throwing hand) to shield the sun from your eyes. It's important that you don't stare into the sun directly.
- Once the ball has dropped into the sun, switch to shielding your eyes with the bottom of your glove. You will be looking under your glove for the ball to drop out of the sun. Many players make the mistake of continuing to look over the top of the glove for the ball. As the ball is coming down it will be visible first below the glove. If you look over the top of the glove, you may never see it.

## **5. Pitching**

### **Warming up**

### **Preparation**

All pitchers have preferences for their starting position. The most important factors are comfort and balance.

### **Footwork**

#### **Stretch**

The stretch position is used whenever there are runners on base. You start with your back foot against and parallel with the rubber. Your feet should be approximately shoulder width apart with most of your weight toward your back leg. You move into the set position by bring your hands together in the center of your body.

From the set position, lift your leg to its highest position and make sure to have your back knee flexed, not locked. A common mistake when trying to deliver the ball quickly to home is falling towards home in one motion from the stretch. If you want to deliver the ball quickly to home you must still remember to bring your leg to its highest position before you go forward. Once you have reached that position you will throw the ball with your normal pitching motion.

It's essential to remember that pitching from the stretch doesn't require a different pitching motion. Once you get to the highest point of your leg kick everything should be exactly the same as when you pitch from the windup.

#### **Wind-up**

The position of the glove and pitching hand changes from pitcher to pitcher. For the majority of pitchers the glove is held somewhere between the waist and the chest.

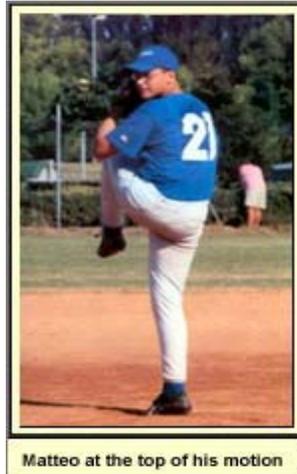
For young pitchers, try to get them comfortable with the least amount of movement. From the stance to the windup, the least amount of movement is to have the hand in the glove gripping the ball at about chest high.

A common problem is taking to large a step back. Again, the more movement the more difficult it will be for the pitcher to be balanced during the windup. Watch most major league pitchers and you will see they take a very small or no step back to start their windup.

As the weight is transferred to the back leg, the front foot will be turned and placed parallel to, in contact with, and in front of the rubber. The feet are now in position to begin the kick.

## Loading Up - Wind Up

At the same time the pitcher takes the step back, the arms will also move. Pitchers will either swing both arms over the top of their heads as they step back and begin pivoting their front foot, or they will keep their hands at waist level and move directly into the top of the kick from that position.



Once the front foot has pivoted and the hands have reached the top of the pump. His body should be sideways to the plate. Make sure your planted leg is not locked at the knee, it should be slightly flexed. The critical element is balance. The pitching motion is a combination of many movements that need to be executed exactly the same way with every pitch. Without balance, consistency in the pitching motion is impossible and with it good control.

When working with pitchers, have them stop when they reach the top of their kick. They should be able to hold this position, if they cannot, correct this balance problem before moving on to the rest of the delivery.

## Transferring Momentum

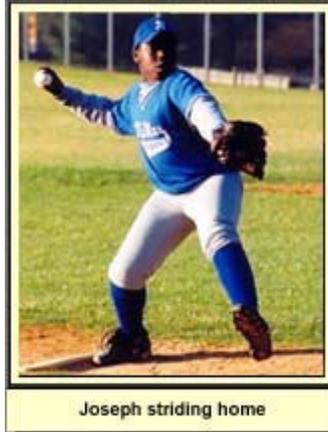
A common mistake with young pitchers is to simply start falling forward from the top of their kick toward the plate. Not only is this going to cause a common problem of the arm falling behind in the windup, it will also cause a loss of velocity. The arm will receive little benefit from the body when this happens.

From the top of the kick position the pitcher needs to do a few things that all must come together in order to gain momentum towards home. As the throwing arm drops the pitcher needs to reach down and back towards 2nd base. The throwing motion is circular and the pitcher wants the largest circle possible when pitching. Balance is still essential at this point. The pitcher is now in a position to stride forward toward the plate.

Both legs play an important role at this point in propelling the pitcher toward the plate. The front leg is lowered and driven forward towards the plate in a circular motion that swivels the hips

open. At the same time the back leg is pushing off the rubber propelling the pitcher forward to the batter.

## The Stride



The stride should be a comfortable distance, not too short that you're not getting the benefit of your lower body in your delivery and not too long that you land on your heel. Your foot goes down as if it's slipping into a slipper. You should land on the ball of your foot with your leg slightly bent. Your foot should land in the same spot on every pitch.

## Release and Follow Through

The arm should follow through naturally across your body and the back leg should come forward and land parallel to your lead foot. This will put you in a good position to field your position.

## Offensive Skills

### 1. Hitting

#### Grip

A good grip is one where the handle of the bat is held primarily in your fingers. Lay the handle of the bat across the lower base of your fingers of each hand. Then, simply close your hands around the handle. Never hold the bat back in the palms of the hands.

Do not squeeze the bat. Hold it lightly in your fingers. Pretend as though you are holding a small bird in your hands. You want to hold the bird firmly enough to prevent it from flying away, yet not so tightly that you harm the bird. A light grip such as this keeps the muscles of the hands, wrists and forearms loose and prepared for action. Loose muscles are fast muscles.

Line up Knock knuckles on both hands.

## **Stance**

When it comes to developing a good stance, there are two very important factors that need to be expressed. The purpose of the stance is to afford you the best opportunity to see the ball and also to have enough balance so that you can take a mighty swing at the ball, giving you the best opportunity to hit the ball hard.

Your feet should be slightly more than shoulder width apart, knees slightly bent and your weight evenly distributed between both feet. You should feel a little more weight toward the balls of your feet and to the inside of your feet. You should feel springy and ready for action.

The best to get into a well balanced athletic position is to have you stand still with your feet about shoulder width apart. Now jump as high as you can straight up in the air. When you land, you will usually land in a very balanced and athletic position.

Assume the basic stance position. Now, gripping the bat properly, raise your hands up so that the top hand on the bat is just above and in front of your rear shoulder. The knob of the bat should be pointed down, toward the plate. The rear shoulder should be raised just slightly higher than the front shoulder. Your head should be turned toward the pitcher and looking out over the front shoulder, putting both eyes to work for you. From here you are balanced, athletic and prepared to adjust to the path of the ball as it comes to the plate.

## **Elbow Myth**

With the back elbow up in the air it changes the hinging of the wrists during the swing. This, in turn, changes the path of the bat, as well as the leverage which affects the speed of the bat. The batter should have back shoulder slightly higher than the front. The forearms should actually be in a reverse "V" and fairly close to the body. This allows the bat to flow freely to the ball.

## **Loading up**

- The weight moves primarily onto the inner portion of the back leg and foot.
- The front shoulder closes slightly, automatically loading the hands and tilting the bat head forward toward the pitcher (knob looks at the catcher).
- The front knee kicks inward (show the pitcher your pocket) this move cocks the hips.
- The player is stacked, meaning from the bottom of the back side to the top everything is aligned. The foot is under the knee, the knee under the hip, shoulder and hands stacked above the hip.
- Front shoulder closes.

## **The Step**

Short is sweet. 6-12" is more than sufficient, some players simply pick the foot up and put it right back down. This depends on the width of your original stance. Land on the pad near the big toe... softly.

Keep the weight primarily to the rear leg. This is the "stay back" you always hear from coaches. Moving the weight forward to the front leg causes the head to move forward as well. This is bad news for a hitter. The head must remain in the same location it was in during the load phase.

Time your step between the release point and about 10 feet from the pitcher. Early is much better than late. Remember, it is step then swing... not, step and swing. They are separate.

The importance of the steady head position cannot be overstated. When the head moves forward, the eyes move as well.

### **Launch Your Hips**

This movement is the cornerstone of the power generated in a baseball swing. The big muscles of the lower body (the hips and legs) are moving one way, while the big muscles of the upper body are ever so slightly moving the other way or remaining stationary. Key points:

- The player fires the rear hip forward toward the pitcher.
- The head does not move forward, everything rotates under the head.
- The hands do not move forward (They will move a little on their own).
- The rear elbow tucks to the hip. This movement directs the knob of the bat toward the ball.
- Most of the player's weight remains on the rear leg with some weight moving to the firming front leg.

### **Launch Hands**

- The knob driving toward the ball begins the sequence.
- The top hand is in a palm up position at the point of contact.
- The bottom hand is in a palm down position at contact.
- The front leg is firm and creates resistance for the body to propel the bat head.
- The head stays steady.

### **Finish the Swing**

- The top hand rolls over.
- The bottom hand rolls over and the wrist collapses.
- The hands finish at the shoulder or just below.
- The bat head wraps around the back of the hitter.
- Don't decelerate the bat head after you hit the ball. Continue powering through the ball and let the bat wrap around your back before it stops.

**The swing** (hit down on ball, squish the bug)  
Head and Eyes

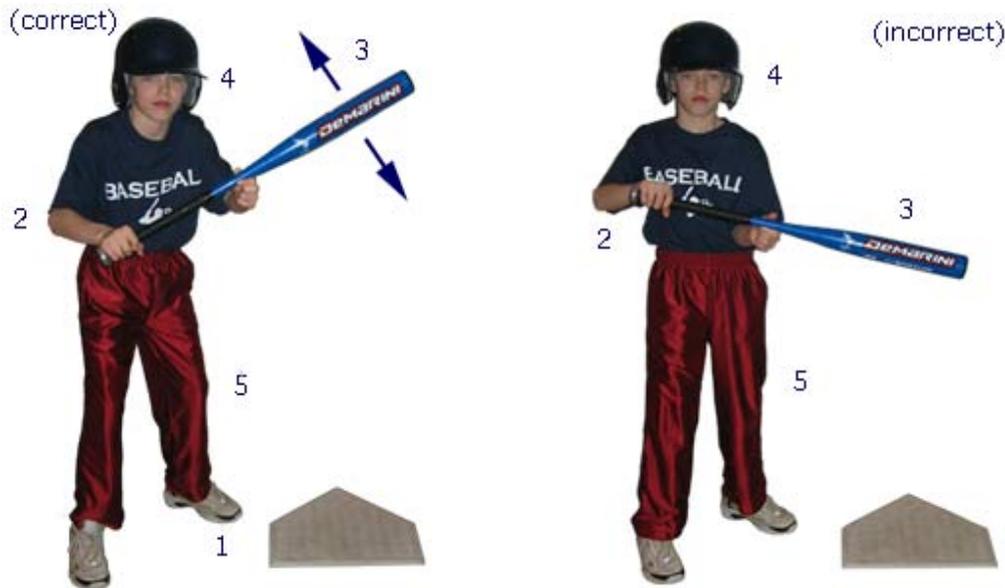
**When to swing** (strike zone)

## 2. Bunting

There are basically two methods of laying down a sacrifice bunt, either pivoting or squaring around towards the mound. The most important thing is balance, comfort, and confidence. No matter which method you use, the way you grip the bat will be the same.

Grip the bat with the upper hand by sliding the hand up the barrel towards the trademark and gripping the bat between the index finger and thumb. This keeps the fingers behind the bat and reduces the chance of the fingers being hit.

With the pivot method, you will pivot on the foot closest to the mound and take a small jab step towards the plate with the back foot. At the same time you must get the bat in the proper position to bunt (Barrel of the bat higher than the grip, top of the strike zone, not too close to the body).



In each image the player has taken a jab step with the back foot towards the plate. Make sure batter doesn't step too far and step out of the batters box or on the plate.

The arms should be out in front of the body and slightly bent at the elbows. In the incorrect image you can see the elbow is right against the body and will not allow easy movement.

The bat should be angled as shown in the correct image above. This will prevent a foul ball from growing straight up and right into the catcher's hands.

The head of the bat should be placed at eye level and at the top of the strike zone. By putting the bat in this position, you can coach the player that any pitch higher than the bat is a ball and they should pull the bat back and take it. It also puts the player in a position where they can adjust down to bunt the ball.

It's critical to being a successful bunter that the player uses his knees to adjust to the height of the pitch. Obviously on a low strike the player will still have to use his arms to adjust to the height of the pitch, but by using his knees he will reduce the amount he will have to drop the bat to bunt the ball. This helps in 3 ways: (1) eyes will be closer to the height of the pitch, (2) batter keeps the bat close to the same angle and drop both hands to bunt the ball, & (3) batter will be able to bunt the low pitch successfully. It's almost impossible to bunt a low strike by only dropping the hands and not using the knees.



After getting in position the player should use his knees, waist, and bottom hand to adjust to the pitch and determine where to place it. In the image above the top hand (1.) is kept in approximately the same position, but notice the position of the bottom hand; to bunt the ball the opposite way, the bottom hand is pushed out (2.) and to bunt the ball down the line the bottom hand is pulled in (3.). In addition to using the bottom hand for determining the direction, player should also rotate the body at the waist.

The player should use his knees to bend down to get to a low pitch. The bat head will still have to drop on a low pitch, but it should be kept to a minimum, as dropping the bat head only to bunt the ball is very difficult to do successfully. When dropping the arms to bunt a low pitch it's important to try and drop both hands in order to keep the bat head above the handle. This will prevent a pop-up directly to the catcher.

### **3. Base running**

#### **To First Base**

Running to first base is the equivalent of the 40-yard dash, just shorter. The running style is similar to track and field; head held high, upper body leaning forward to create momentum, arms pump back and forth with the forward movement and run on the toes or ball of the foot. Players' should focus on the following skills:

- The first step after swinging must be made by the foot at the rear of the batter's box.
- Run through the bag. The runner should not stop, slow down, or even change pace, except to adjust their stride to make contact with the bag, unless the coach signals them otherwise. Their momentum should carry them into foul territory, where they are deemed to be 'safe'. If the player remains in fair territory, they can be tagged out.

- Have the player watch the first base coach after the initial contact, not the ball. The coach should signal the coach to prepare to run 'extra' bases or to continue on to second.

### **To Second Base**

- Explain importance of paying attention to location of the ball. Ready position involves one foot on bag and second foot pointed towards second base.

### **Tagging Up**

This allows a runner to advance to the next base on a fly ball, as soon as it is caught. This will generally be on deep fly balls, away from the runner's next base. For instance, a ball deep to right field is perfect to advance from second to third. However, a ball to left field would probably be disastrous. Any deep ball can advance a runner home. Balls hit to extreme left and right field can advance a runner from first to second.

- To tag up, a runner must return to his last base while the ball is in the air.
- They should prepare to sprint hard, and be prepared to slide into the base.
- As soon as the ball is caught the footrace begins.

### **Sliding**

Once a runner realizes the play at the base will be close, or are instructed to 'get down' the player should begin a slide. This is not necessary if the runner is in a force situation, but it is common to slide into second to force the second baseman to move out of the base path, making a double play more difficult.

- Begin the slide 8 to 12 feet from the base, depending on their speed and size.
- Drop gently to the ground. The right leg should extend towards the base and the left leg should bend under the player, with the left toe pointing backwards.
- Land on your read end. There is much more padding that on the hips and prevents some nasty bruises.
- While sliding on the ground, the front foot should come up 6 inches to allow the foot to go over the bag.
- Keep hands off the ground.

### **Stealing**

There is no substitute for a good jump when stealing base, but any runners lose time with the first few steps they take toward second base.

- Crossover Step

The first move towards second should be a crossover step. Often a base runner will move their right foot first, picking it up and moving it an inch or two. All this does is take time and gets you no closer to second base.

- Stay Low And User Your Arms

Start with your arms to explode. As you pick up your left foot to start your crossover, also use your arms to get your movement toward second started. Take your left hand and throw a punch toward second base. This will get your upper body twisted quickly toward second base and get you moving quickly. Stay low as you start, standing strait up will only slow you down.

- Running / Slide

The main thing to teach is that the quickest way to the base is a strait line and to slide strait into the bag.

## Catching Skills

### 1. Catcher's Role

- The Catcher is one of the most important positions
- Team leader (Quarterback)
- Participates in every play
- Can see everything in front of him
- Good defense starts "up the middle"

### 2. Good Catchers must have strong fundamentals

- Set up and stance
- Target and framing the ball (umpires strengths)
- Blocking the ball
- Throwing to all bases
- Plays at home plate
- Game situation awareness (how many outs, who is on base, where does the play go, bunts, steeling, hit run, run hit etc situations)

**Key to Great Fundamentals is Preparation & Practice!**

### 3. Fundamentals Stations

#### 1) Catcher's set up, stance, giving signs and framing the ball to umpires strength

- **Stance:**
  1. No one on base or w/ less than 2 strikes
    - a. Relaxed
    - b. weight on inside step
    - c. Left foot (for right handed catchers) should be slightly ahead of the right foot
    - d. Balanced weight front to back and side to side
    - e. Throwing hand behind the back or leg.
    - f. Glove arm should be relaxed, fingers facing up

- g. Elbow is aligned under the catching hand slightly angled away just outside the knee.
2. Men on base or a man with 2 strikes- same as above with 2 exceptions.
  - a. Signs should be given in closed a position prior to positioning for the pitch
  - b. Throwing arm/hand comes to behind the glove making a fist for a quicker exchange
  - c. Stance becomes more athletic with weight slightly forward. Better position yourself to block balls or come up throwing.

## 2) Framing a pitch

1. Catch the outer half of the ball
2. Show the umpire the strike side of the ball
3. Only frame strikes or borderline pitches
4. Beat the ball to the ball to the spot

## 3) Blocking and retrieving the ball

3. One of the most important jobs of the catcher
4. Blocking is  $\frac{1}{2}$  the job, retrieving is the  $2^{\text{nd}} \frac{1}{2}$
5. Blocking or not blocking the ball can be the difference of winning or losing the game
6. Give your pitcher confidence that you will block everything!
7. Get to your knees as quick as possible (do not hop!)
8. Your glove hand goes back up against your cup with fingers facing straight down and chest over the ball
9. Do NOT try to catch the ball simply block it in front of you
10. Protect your neck by tucking your chin to your chest; keep your mask facing the ball, DO NOT TURN YOUR HEAD.
11. When getting to extreme outside or inside balls in the dirt push with outside foot to get to the ball
12. Know what kind of pitch is coming
13. Gather/retrieve the ball by rounding the ball putting your self in the position to throw to the appropriate bag.
14. Rake the ball by always using both the glove and the hand working together

## 4) Throwing to all bases (stealing, bunting, pass ball scenarios)

- **When a runner is stealing**
  1. Catch the ball first
  2. Jump pivot or load and throw depends on arm strength and/or location of pitch
  3. Need to know both
  4. Do not stand straight up, stay in athletic position
  5. Square shoulders to base you are throwing to

6. Throws to 3<sup>rd</sup> inside, outside or over the right-handed batter.
7. Make smart plays/decisions, take care of the baseball

- **Fielding bunts**

1. Anticipate the play (what's the situation? Tied game, winning, losing, outs, men on base, speed, condition of the field)
2. Round and rake the ball
3. Square your self to the bag
4. Plant your feet and throw
5. Make smart plays/decisions, take care of the baseball

- **Pass balls**

1. Get the ball before you look for runners
2. Round and rake the ball
3. Square your self to the bag you are throwing to
4. Underhand ball to pitchers at plays at home plate
5. Make smart plays/decisions, take care of the baseball

#### **5) Plays at home plate**

1. Leave your mask on!
2. Left foot should be on the 3<sup>rd</sup> base line, knees facing the runner
3. Anticipate a bad throw
4. Tag the runner with both hands on the ball
5. If you are anticipating a collision, block the plate, low man wins.
6. When the play is over come up ready to throw

#### **6) Pop ups**

1. Understand the direction the ball is spinning
2. Back is always to the playing field
3. Use both hands when possible

### **4. Catching Pre-game**

1. Spots – 10 pitch – all locations
2. Sways – 6 pitches -3 each side
3. Block - 3 each side
4. Catch or block – catcher's decision -8
5. Hard Cross – 2 each side-outside zone
6. Quarter Eagles- receive and set -5/ throw 5

### **5. Blocking**

Can Win or Lose games – knees to the ground quickly, and aggressively  
 Push off towards the ball – Get the ball, Check runner, listen to teammates.  
 Chest over ball – “rake” it in – Don't catch –Block

**Drills:****1) Shadow Blocking (No ball)**

Coach stands behind the catcher. Catcher assumes their stance. The coach tells the catcher what pitch is thrown and where. The coach will give the catcher a few seconds to get ready. When the coach claps their hands, the catcher will assume the blocking position and hold. The coach or other players will check their form to make sure the catcher is in a good position.

**2) Sit and Get Hit**

Coach gets on one knee from a short distance. The catcher assumes the blocking position. The coach will throw the ball in the dirt and off the chest of the catcher. The catcher gets the feeling of balls coming off their body.

**3) Medium Toss**

Coach stands half-way between the mound and home plate. The catcher assumes their stance. Coach will throw balls in the dirt and the catcher will block, retrieve, and get their body in a position to throw.

**4) Up-Downs**

Lay out five balls five feet apart. The catcher will shuffle to each ball, assume the blocked position, get up and shuffle to the next ball. The object is to work on quickness down to the ball and up from the ball. Make sure the catcher's hands are moving in the correct position on the way up. The drill can be varied by having the catcher not only go down all five, but moving to the other side and returning to where they started.

**6. Pass Balls****Drills:**

Slide for play at home—Other bases- chest over ball, set feet

**7. Throwing Footwork**

Jump and pivot – Quick Release- “shift” around a pole  
Load and throw – strong arm, shift weight to back foot and throw

**Drills:****1) Catcher with ball**

The catcher starts out with the ball in their glove. Coach will be in front of the catcher. The coach will instruct the catcher to use either load and throw or jump pivot. The catcher will execute the footwork and throw to a partner

**2) One knee coach toss**

Catcher is at home plate. Coach is a few feet in front on one knee. Coach will toss ball to catcher who is already in their stance. The catcher will catch the ball and execute proper throwing footwork and throw to another partner. Being on one knee and tossing the ball will allow the partner or coach to put the ball exactly where they want to work.

## 8. Fielding Bunts

**3<sup>rd</sup>** - round or spin- **towards mound**- spin – **1<sup>st</sup>** –chest over ball  
Stopped ball-use bare hand - rolling ball – use glove and hand

### Drills:

- 1) **3 Balls in front of the catcher** – coach behind- tells catcher where the bunt went- catcher throws to first.
- 2) **Drop Bunts** – Coach stands behind the catcher and drops the ball in any location  
Catcher must react and throw to first.

## 9. Pop Ups

Infield Drift – Ball floats back -Fly balls on the infield should be automatic outs, not an adventure. Catchers should become proficient at fielding all balls hit up in the air, and in their area. They can also serve as a traffic cop, alerting players to get out of the way of other fielders

### Drill:

Coach stands behind the catcher and tosses balls up- catcher should first turn his back towards the field, locates the ball, and discards the mask. Work hard to insure balls that are outs, remain outs. Don't give a hitter another chance to hit.

## 10. Framing

The most important aspect of framing is to frame strikes and borderline pitches.

- 1) **Don't waste your time, or the umpires, by trying to frame balls that are clearly not strikes.**

Simply catch the ball and return it to the pitcher and get ready for the next pitch. By framing pitches that are not strikes, you make yourself look like a bad catcher, and may make the umpire look bad. If you make the umpire look bad, he will not be anxious to help you on a borderline pitch.

- 2) **One key to framing is to catch the top half, bottom half and side half of the ball.**

When you catch the ball, you should show the umpire half of the baseball. For example, if the pitch is on the inner half of the plate, you should catch the left side of the ball (assuming a right handed batter) and show the umpire the right side of the ball.

**Drill:****1) One Knee Toss**

Coach gets on one knee five to ten feet from the catcher. The coach will toss a ball to the catcher. The catcher will work on body movement and catching the ball in halves.

**Situational Baseball**

Definition of out/safe

Names/locations of positions

Fair / Foul balls

In play / out of bounds

Force out / tag

Back up

Throw to right base

Hit the cut off man

**Intangibles**

Sportsmanship

Where's the play- Thinking ahead

On the ground

In the air

Where to backup

Where to throw

Teamwork

## D. Practices

### Sample Practice

#### HAVE A PLAN FOR THE PRACTICE!

1. Simple game / drill...while waiting for everyone to arrive
2. Coach's talk – what are we going to do and why
3. Warm ups
  - a. Jog
  - b. Shuffle
  - c. Hot Potato
  - d. Stretching
4. Drills
  - a. Hitting
    - i. Off T
    - ii. Soft Toss
    - iii. Live pitching w a few fielders
  - b. Defense
    - i. Throwing
    - ii. Grounders
    - iii. Catching
  - c. Running
    - i. Running to first –don't look at the ball
    - ii. Rounding first
    - iii. Relay races
    - iv. Sliding
  - d. Game Situation
    - i. Understand bases
    - ii. Force out
    - iii. When need to tag
    - iv. Where to throw when runners on
    - v. Tagging up
5. Coaches Talk – what did we learn today?

## E. Drills

### I. Defense

#### Throwing

- ❑ Show players what it looks like...show them the L the arm makes...have them start the throw with arm in correct position. 10 throws to warm up
- ❑ Throw the ball hard into the ground 20 feet in front of receiving player. It's almost impossible NOT to throw with elbow up. This corrects those players throwing with elbow below shoulder.
- ❑ Players should kneel on one knee and throw concentrating on only upper body mechanics
- ❑ Players should throw thinking about release point...try to reach and release and closest point to target.
- ❑ Majors: 5 Star - Place players in five separate groups (Minors/Farm: Same concept as below but have fewer than five groups) forming an upside down pentagon. X2 X5 X4 X3 X1. X1 has the baseball, throws it to X2 and follows his throw. X2 throws the ball to X3 and follows his throw. X3 throws the ball to X4 and follows his throw. X4 throws the ball to X5 and follows his throw. X5 throws the ball to X1 line and follows his throw. This drill can be run inside or out and at any distance. Shorten the distance to work on quick hands and lengthen the distance to provide long throwing for our players.

Teaches: forces the players to follow their throw, which increases likelihood of a correct throwing motion and step directly at their target. This also serves as a good conditioner. One important safety reminder ... after a player throws the ball to another line he should follow his throw to the outside to avoid getting hit by the next thrown ball.

#### Catching

- ❑ Soft toss using a tennis ball. The objective is to get young kids who may be afraid of the ball to practice catching with a ball they perceive is easier to catch and, hence, they will not step away from it as it is thrown to them. Instinctively most kids catch with two hands. Start by having them stand 5 feet from each other and throw the ball back and forth 5 times each. Then move back another 5 feet and do the same. Once they are comfortable catching the ball, substitute the tennis ball for a baseball and repeat the drill again until the kids feel comfortable catching it 10-15 yards from each other.
- ❑ Proper glove position can be taught by first throwing 5 ground balls, then five at the thigh area and then five above the waist. The coach should show them anything above the waist the glove is up (wax on) and continue to throw five balls

at their chest and 5 balls above their head. Anything below the waste the glove is down (wax off).

- ❑ Go out for a pass drill...have the kids run 5-10 yard patterns where they have to locate and catch the ball over a shoulder.
- ❑ Defensive back drill....player faces a coach with the ball and learns how to move his feet to the ball. In this drill the coach fakes a throw left, middle, right and the player moves his feet in the direction of the ball shuffling back and forth. Use 3 kids for the drill, throw to 1, repeat until each has caught 1 ball, but shuffled together for all 3 drills
- ❑ Egg toss...barehanded, starting 3 feet apart with each success moving back a large step...teaches soft hands. Can use water balloons also, everybody loves this.

## **Fly balls**

- ❑ In order to get players to move feet, use this version of old football drill. Player faces Coach, who is holding the ball. Coach waves ball one way, player shuffles that way, back and forth... eventually throws a pop up that player catches.

### **Outfield**

- ❑ Relay Outfield Drill - man in the middle relay...outfielder throws to cutoff man, throws to catcher and then the reverse... outfielder begins the drill with a crop hop and overhand throw to cutoff man hoping to hit him chest high. The cutoff man spins toward the plate with spin beginning glove side first in the body rotation, sets and throws a knee high strike to plate. The relay throw then reverses beginning with the catcher to the cutoff man that still rotates his pivot leading with his glove side. A high quality set of 5 and then rotate until all 3 have a turn in the middle.
- ❑ Four in One - Purpose: To work on scoops, short hops, bloopers, and relays. Procedure: Players stand in a single-file line about 20 feet from a coach.
  1. The first player runs toward the coach and scoops a rolling ground ball. The fielder tosses the ball back and returns on the run to the end of the line. All in line complete drill #1 before the coach starts the next drill (#2).
  2. For drill #2 each player, in turn, fields a short hop, tosses the ball back, and returns to the end of the line.
  3. In drill #3 each player fields a short fly ball. The coach simply tosses the ball up before the charging fielder. The fielder tosses the ball back and returns to the end of the line.
  4. In the last drill players work on the relay throw. The first ball is a grounder that the fielder tosses back to the coach. The fielder then turns to chase a ball thrown over his head. He gets the ball and hits the relay, who is the next person in line. The relay has moved out from the line and is waving his arms and calling for the ball.

## **Ground balls**

### **Farm**

- ❑ Alligator Drill – two teammates stand 6 feet apart, no gloves, roll ball back and forth, top hand over the ball, glove hand under the ball... next, put gloves on, move back to 10-12 feet, and repeat.

- ❑ Slide Step Drill – line team up side by side, more than arms width apart, facing coach. Kids mimic coach shuffling back and forth, in proper fielding position – hands up and in front, bending at waist, knees bent, and butt down. Coach randomly throws players grounders.
- ❑ Backhand – work on players getting the feel of backhanding a ground ball. (Kids might have problems rolling ball where needed, so coach might have to do rolling). Player in ready position, roll ball to backhand side – first, close enough so no steps needed – as players get comfortable, further away so player has to take crossover step in order to reach ball
- ❑ Hockey Drill – working to get kids to keep the ball in front of them. Split squad into two teams and line each team along the inside of the batting cage. Pick one player from team 1 to stand a few feet in front of the back of the cage. Coach stands somewhere in back of the plate in fair territory and rolls ground ball to the player. The “goalie” tries to prevent the ball from hitting the backstop. After player 1 from team 1 has a turn, player 1 from team 2 has a turn, and then alternate teams. Team that allows fewest “goals” wins (first in batting cage, one less lap, etc)
- ❑ Pitcher/1<sup>st</sup> base – split team into 2, half at pitcher’s mound and half at 1<sup>st</sup>. Have kids shuffle feet in preparation for ground ball to either side of them at the mound.

### **Minors/Majors**

- ❑ Alligator drill (see above)
- ❑ Slide step drill (see above)
- ❑ Backhand drill (see above): add emphasis on crossover step, reach over their bodies, bend from knees (not waist), having the glove open and on the ground.
- ❑ Force outs – Split group into thirds - one at short, another at second, and another at first. Roll grounders to shortstop. Have second baseman run to bag, giving shortstop a target. Make sure shortstop squares up and throws strongly. Second baseman makes strong throw to first. Reverse order – grounders to second with shortstop covering. Key for second baseman is pivoting body strongly to the right after fielding, squaring up and throwing to the base. Shortstop throws to first.
- ❑ Blind Mice drill – The drill start with positioning individual players at 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, short, and home. Extra players are in 3<sup>rd</sup> base foul territory, waiting their turns. Coach hits/throws grounder to shortstop, who throws to first. He follows his throw and runs to first. First baseman throws to second baseman, who applies tag at the base (first baseman follows throw and runs to second). Second baseman throws to third, who applies tag (second baseman running to 3<sup>rd</sup>). Third baseman throws home to catcher, and runs home, where he gets the ball back as catcher rolls a “bunt” to him. 3<sup>rd</sup> baseman flips ball back to catcher. Catcher gives ball to coach, goes to end of the line in foul territory and first kid in line runs out to shortstop to start drill all over.
- ❑ Relay Race – line two teams down each baseline. One at plate, 1 or 2 between home and either 1st or 3rd, one on the base, and rest in outfield with same spacing. Teams throw ball up and down the line – team with fewest drops wins, with tie breaker being first to be competed.

- Force outs – have one group of players at short, another at second. Roll grounders to shortstop. Have second baseman run to bag, giving shortstop a target. Make sure shortstop squares up and throws strongly. Reverse drill – grounders to second with shortstop covering. Key for second baseman is pivoting body strongly to the right after fielding, squaring up and throwing to the base.

## II. Offense

### Hitting Mechanics

- Start with a tee. Focus on:
  - a) Position - make sure the player understands the batter's box, even have them draw a line with the bat to place their feet on so that they are properly line-up with the pitcher.
  - b) Turn hips - Teach them to turn their hips, belly button should face pitcher after swing.
  - c) Back foot action - use their back foot as if they are “Squishing a bug”
  - d) Front foot - Make sure their front foot is not bailing out or going forward too far.
  - e) Relax – don’t tightly squeeze the bat.

Take a few swings without a ball on the tee to see their motion and how they set up after the initial swing. After a few swings, put a ball on the tee and have them swing down at the ball to drive it into the ground.

- Using the ball hanging over the backstop hit into the backstop as the ball is moving.
- Using a soccer ball hit the ball to develop power.
- Soft toss the ball a few feet to the right or left of the batter, the batter hits the ball into the backstop. Hitter is not concerned about being hit and focuses on key hitting fundamentals.

### Base Running

- To First Base  
Players line up at home plate. One at a time swing a bat and drop it softly as if a hit. They then become a runner and runner to first base watching the coach.

The coach will either have them run through first base or round the turn and go to second. The coach should alternate his calls to keep the players guessing and watching.

Drill teaches:

- 1) first step is made by the foot at the rear of the batter’s box
- 2) running as fast as you can through the base

- 3) staying in foul territory (if in fair territory, he can be tagged out)
  - 3) rounding a base by tagging first with the left foot on the left corner of the base
  - 5) watching and listening to the base coach
- Runner From First Base (For Minors/Majors)
- Runner on first base in “ready position”.
  - The pitcher will go into a wind-up and deliver a pitch towards home.
  - The coach should encourage the runner to follow the flight of the ball towards home and get off the base when the ball crosses the plate.
  - The runner should be 4 to 8 feet off first base after the ball crosses the plate
  - The coach will now have three options; 1) Have the runner attempt to steal second base because the ball got away from the catcher, 2) Have the runner return to first base because the catcher handled the ball cleanly, or 3) Have the runner attempt a delayed steal of second base.