

# Baseball Coaching Drills and Tips

The following has been extracted from the Rawlings web site

<http://www.rawlings.com>. These are very well written papers dealing with the game of baseball. I encourage you read the following notes.

## Practice Schedule Tips

Coaches should make out practice schedules prior to practice. That schedule should allow ample time for warm-up and cool down. The schedule must also reflect an awareness of the attention span level of your players. Baseball and softball practice does not have to be boring. It is up to us as coaches to add spice to it. The best way to improve your team, make your practice more productive and improve your coaching abilities is to schedule and organize your practice into time periods of 3 to 10 minutes. An example of one of my varsity practice schedules is below:

- ✍ 3:00 - 3:20 Stretch, Run and Throwing Warm-up
- ✍ 3:21 - 3:25 Brief Overview of Goals and Expectations of Today's Practice.
- ✍ 3:26 - 3:36 Team Infield - Pre-game and Practice Routine
- ✍ 3:26 - 3:41 Fly Ball and Pop Up Communication Drill
- ✍ 3:41 - 3:45 Defensive 1st and 3rd Calls, Bunt Coverage and Catchers Throwing to bases.
- ✍ 3:45 - 3:50 Coach Overview of Practice thus far.
- ✍ 3:50 - 3:55 Batting Practice Field Preparation
- ✍ 3:55 - 4:15 Group One Hits - 4 players per group
  - ? 1 Player - Bunts 3 and Hits 8
  - ? 2 Player - Warms up on deck
  - ? 3 Player - Chases Foul balls
  - ? 4 Player - Runs Base Running "Circuit"
  - ? Note: The players will switch rolls after each bats. 2 Hits, 3 Warms up, and 4 chases foul balls, 1 is running circuits.
- ✍ 4:10 - 4:30 Group Two Hits
- ✍ 4:30 - 4:50 Group Three Hits
- ✍ 4:50 - 5:10 Group Four Hits
- ✍ 5:10 - 5:15 Field Clearing
- ✍ 5:15 - 5:30 Conditioning
- ✍ Note: While each group is hitting, two coaches are fungoing to our infielders.

## The Drills

- ✍ Catchers
- ✍ Pitchers
- ✍ Hitters

### Catchers

#### Foul Ball Drill:

Improves catchers' abilities to react quickly to pop-ups.

The catcher assumes the crouched position while a coach or player, standing directly behind the catcher, throws a pop fly. The catcher first turns his back to the field, locates the ball, discards the mask and makes the catch with two hands.

NOTE: The catcher should not take off the mask until they have located the foul ball and is in position to catch it. A catcher who takes the mask off too early may trip over it.

### **Catcher Tracking Drill:**

With the coach 10' - 15' in front of the catcher, the coach softly throws balls to either side, in the dirt, etc. The catcher practices "tracking" the pitched ball. That is, staying with the pitch. It is important to emphasize blocking the ball first, keeping shoulders square with the ball, and generally using proper technique. Keeping the ball in front of him is always the most important aspect. Later practice throws to first, second, and third can be incorporated. It is not surprising that with improved tracking, a lot of balls that would have been blocked before, are not only blocked, but now caught. The overall defensive package that is that catcher will be greatly improved.

### **Pitchers**

#### **Tarp Drill:**

Develops ball control.

Tie a large piece of tarp on a section of the backstop. Place a target on the tarp (outline a strike zone) in paint or tape. Place a home plate in front of the strike zone. From two-thirds or regulation distance, a pitcher throws pitches at the strike zone on the tarp. After throwing 20 balls, they collect the balls and start over. Have the pitchers deliver half of the pitches from the stretch. As your pitchers' control improves, divide the strike zone into sections and challenge them to deliver their pitches to the different sections. Pitchers can also work on their pick-off moves into the tarp.

#### **Control Drill:**

Develops awareness of the strike zone.

Pitchers and catchers stand at regulation distance from each other. The catcher stands behind home plate, and a batter stands in the batter's box. The batter should alternate between a left and right-handed batting stance after every five pitches, but not take any swings. The catcher calls balls and strikes. Have the batter wear a helmet in this practice situation. This game-like drill will help your pitchers develop a consistent pitching motion, get a good feel for the strike zone, and get use to pitching with a player in the batter's box.

### **Hitters**

#### **The T-Drill:**

The purpose of this drill is to help hitters gain a level-compact smooth swing.

You will need to pair off your players for this drill. To set up this drill put the batting tee on top of home plate. Using home plate will allow your player to get a comfortable feel for being at the plate and not the tee. One player puts the ball on the tee the other hits it. It is a good idea to move the tee around home plate so that your players get used to hitting the ball from different pitches. This drill helps develop the skill for good contact with the ball. Make sure the hitters are concentrate on contact and watch the ball as they swing.

#### **Strike Recognition Drill:**

I am the coach of the 1998 13 yr. old Dizzy Dean Ala. State Champs. This hitting drill we use a lot is a strike recognition drill. The drill teaches a batter to swing at only the strikes and take pitches out of the strike zone. It is also designed to encourage our hitters to hit hard line drives and hard ground balls. The batter is allowed 5 swings or called strikes in one at bat (fouls don't count). He may take 50 pitches if they are not in the strike zone. When he hits the ball, we give each hit a grade from 5 as the maximum and 1 as the lowest. A score of 5 is a powerful line drive, 4 is a hard ground ball, 3 is a long fly ball, 2 is a slow roller, 1 is a bloop or dribbler. We have a coach pitching, a coach calling balls and strikes and a father keeping score. Each batter usually can have a total of 3 at bats during one of these sessions. His score is tallied for each session and the team is given the results weekly. There should be a batter on deck (hitting soft toss or tee with a concentration on mechanics), when the hitter finishes he goes into a natural rotation by going to right field and shifting to a new defensive position with each batter (as you do in volleyball). In this drill the batter will soon realize that he can hit the strikes harder and more solidly.

The coach that is pitching is mixing fastballs, curves and change ups into the pitches as well. We usually throw from a slightly shorter distance than the 54' the kids have to face in games. I think this makes them concentrate and react with a quicker bat. We will practice this drill usually twice per week. During this drill we are real relaxed and the kids love it, because of the competition. Put a bucket in center field and a bucket at second base to hold the balls that are relayed in when they are hit, this makes the drill go faster.

## Pitching Tips

### ✍ General

### ✍ Basic Pitches

### ✍ Set-up

## General

It has been said that good pitching will usually beat good hitting. The teams that have been the most consistently successful, have been those with good pitching. At the youth level, one of the most important attributes is the ability to throw a good fastball in the location you want to. Establishing a good fastball with good control must precede the development of a off-speed pitch, as generally the off-speed is set up by being ahead in the count and having the batter anticipate a fastball.

## Basic Pitches

- ✍ The basic fastball grips are the two-seam and four-seam fastball.
  - ? The two-seam fastball is gripped along the two short seams. If thrown with the correct motion, this pitch will tend to sink and tail away slightly.
  - ? The four-seam fastball is gripped across seams. This pitch will provide for a harder straighter pitch. The four-seam grip is the grip that ideally should be used by the fielders to generate a hard straight throw.
- ✍ The second recommended pitch to develop is the change-up. Four time NL Cy Young winner Greg Maddux has used this pitch extremely effectively over his career. There are multiple grips that can be used.
  - ? One of them is the circle change (Maddux's ) grip where the pitcher forms a circle with his thumb and pointer finger and places it on the side of the ball and then he places his next 2 fingers on the top of the ball. His pinky finger rests underneath.
  - ? Many young pitchers hands will not be large enough to throw the circle change and may have to throw the 3 finger change where he grips the ball deep into his hand with his 2nd, 3rd and 4th fingers on top of the ball with his thumb and pinky underneath.
  - ? Another is the football change where the ball is gripped and thrown like a football.
- ✍ Once the young pitcher has developed a good fastball and change-up, then he can develop the curve. The curve should be thrown with the same arm slot as the fastball and change, but with a different grip and hand location.
  - ? The curve is gripped with the pointer and the middle finger, with the middle finger along the bottom of the horseshoe shaped seam.
  - ? Instead of releasing the ball with your hand behind the ball like you would with a fastball, you should release it with your hand to the side of the ball, over the top, with a pull down of the ball.

## Set-Up

With no runners on, the pitcher will generally be in the Wind-Up position. The pitcher should place his heels on the rubber about 6-8 inches apart. The pitcher should hold his glove in front of him so that the batter and base coach's will not be able to see what grip he is using.

When receiving the sign, you should be in a comfortable position with your knees slightly bent and your shoulders and hips square to the plate.

- ✍ Your first movement will be a short step back and slightly to the side with your left foot (for Right handed pitcher, for lefty reverse all future left/right references). Try to keep your head and shoulders still during this step back. Your hands may move up towards your chin or eyes. It is important to keep balanced during the remainder of the wind-up as any excess momentum one way or the other will impact the pitcher's control. Once the left foot has stepped back the right foot moves to become flush with the rubber.
- ✍ The pitcher pivots his body so that his body is now facing third base (first base for lefty).
- ✍ While pivoting, the pitcher lifts his front leg, such that his thigh is at least parallel to the ground. This is what is referred to as the 'Balance Point'. The pitcher's weight should be directly over the rubber such that if he stopped in this position he would not fall one way or the other.
- ✍ Once in the balance point the pitcher will want to now bring his front leg down near the surface of the mound and then out towards the plate. As the pitcher begins his movement towards home plate, his hands separate thumbs down. At time of front foot landing with a slightly bent knee and on the balls of the foot and at only a slight angle to the plate, his elbows should be at shoulder height. The throwing arm should be cocked (about 90 degrees) with the fingers on top of the ball facing the shortstop or centerfielder.
- ✍ After the front foot lands, the hips open to the plate, which allows the body to bend forward. The lead arm rotates inward and down, the throwing arm continues smoothly through with the throwing elbow above the shoulder with the hand behind the ball, not under.
- ✍ The throwing arm should follow through all the way around and should finish around the lead foot ankle. The back leg should then come around and land even with the lead leg and the pitcher should now be in a good fielding position.

With runners on base pitchers will use the 'Stretch' position. The stretch is the same as the wind-up, except it skips the small step back and pivot and picks up right before the start of the balance point. All other aspects of the wind-up will apply to the stretch as well.

## Catching Tips

- ✍ **General Characteristics**
- ✍ **Giving Signs**
- ✍ **Proper Distance from the Batter**
- ✍ **The Catcher's Position (No Runners)**
- ✍ **The Catcher's Position (With Runners)**
- ✍ **Framing Pitches**
- ✍ **Blocking Pitches**
- ✍ **Fielding Pop-ups**
- ✍ **Fielding Bunts**
- ✍ **When to Scoop and When to Barehand**
- ✍ **Miscellaneous**

## **General Characteristics**

The Catchers position is the most demanding in baseball. During the course of a game, the catcher is the busiest player on the field-crouching behind the plate, blocking balls, keeping track of the count on each batter, repositioning teammates defensively, and so on. The catcher needs to be one of the team leaders as the catcher is much like the quarterback of the team. The catcher needs to be one of the tougher (both physically and mentally) players on the team due to the demands on the position. The Catcher has to learn the most signs on the team. A very good catcher is always one of the hardest positions to find and/or develop and is said to be the quickest way to advanced play (College or Pro).

## **Giving Signs**

When giving signs to the pitcher remember:

- ✍ Place your glove around your left knee to shield the third base coach from the signs.
- ✍ Point your knees at the pitcher to keep the 1st and 3rd base coach's from stealing your signs.
- ✍ Keep your sign hand deep into your crotch, so no one can see the sign except the pitcher and SS/2B.
- ✍ Don't place your sign so low so that they can be seen by the other team.

Practice giving signs in a mirror at home. (Do it from Pitcher's angle and base coach angle)

## **Proper Distance from the Batter**

You need to be far enough behind the batter so that you don't hit with the bat and called for catcher's interference. You need to be as close to the batter as you can get without getting hit with the bat. When the catcher is close to the batter it allows the umpire to get a good look at the pitch. A good catcher who sets up close to the batter can get those borderline pitches called for strikes instead of balls by framing them for strikes. A general rule is that you should almost be able to touch the batters back elbow if you reached up with your catchers mitt.

## **The Catcher's Position (No Runners)**

With nobody on base, you should catch in the most comfortable position. This is called the primary position. Generally this is when your feet are shoulder width apart, throwing hand behind your back (for protection) Catching hand should be slightly outside your knee, catching arm should be out in front with a slight bend at the elbow to allow for give.

## **The Catcher's Position (With Runners)**

When runners are on base, we have to be in position for a possible steal or bunt. This is called the secondary stance. Your feet should be wider apart, weight up on the balls of your feet. Right toes about even with the left instep. Legs parallel to the ground, your rear end should be higher up. The throwing hand now comes out next to the right side of the mitt (with your thumb tucked into your palm with your fingers wrapped around it). Make sure you make the catch before attempting a throw. It won't do you any good to be in perfect throwing position if you don't catch the ball first.

## **Framing Pitches**

Framing pitches is a very important skill for a catcher. Framing is a short, fluid move back into the middle of the body with the glove after you have caught the ball. It allows the borderline pitch to be called for strikes for often. Don't overdo it, by trying to frame pitches that were way out of the strike zone (10+ inches) as the umpire will pick up on this and may use it against you.

## Blocking Pitches

The catcher is not expected to catch every low pitch, but the catcher is expected to at least keep the pitch in front of him so the runners do not advance. There are different blocking styles for different types of pitches. The first style is for pitches straight in front of you (generally fastballs):

- ✍ Fall to your knees
- ✍ Place you glove to the ground (fingers down)
- ✍ Throwing hand behind the glove
- ✍ Keep your body square to the ball
- ✍ Hunch your shoulders forward and over the ball
- ✍ Keep your chin down, so that you don't get hit in the throat
- ✍ Deflect all balls back towards home plate where you can see it and still make a play if needed

The second style is for pitches in the dirt either inside or outside of you (Quite often Changeups and Curves):

- ✍ Take a quick jab step with foot closest to the ball
- ✍ Drive off the opposite leg and stay low while trying to get around the ball
- ✍ Try to deflect the ball back towards home plate

## Fielding Pop-ups

Most pop-ups will tend to drift back into the field due to the spin of the ball, because of this the following steps should be used when fielding pop-ups from the catchers position:

- ✍ Immediately look up and find the ball, take off mask if needed
- ✍ Turn your back to the infield
- ✍ Throw your mask far enough away so that you don't trip over it
- ✍ Raise you mitt above you chin
- ✍ Catch the ball with two hands above your chin

## Fielding Bunts

There are two methods to use when fielding bunts down the third base line. The first is take a small jab step with your left foot and go out and round the ball (always staying to the left of the ball). Get your right plant foot behind the ball, scoop and throw. The second method is head directly to the ball, get your right foot over the ball. Spin toward first base and make the throw. On bunts directly in front of you, head straight for the ball, round off when you get to the ball. Square up to first base. Make the throw. On bunts towards first base, Head straight for ball, scoop the ball up. Either step into the infield (first choice) to get a better throw angle or step into foul territory to get a better angle. Make sure you don't hit the runner.

## When to Scoop and When to Barehand

Generally, when the ball is moving, it should be scooped using both the glove and hand. When the ball is not moving then you may use the barehand method. When picking up the ball it is important to think of your hand as a corkscrew or pitchfork and either 'screw' or 'fork' the ball into the ground as you pick it up. A common mistake is to take your eyes off the ball to look at the runner before you securely have the ball, Do not take your eyes off the ball until it is securely in your hand.

## Miscellaneous

Always remember the catcher is the only defensive player on the field that can see the entire field and as such 'directs traffic'. Take Charge, Be VOCAL, let your teammates know where the play needs to be, If the ball needs to be thrown to 3B or Home from the outfield, let them know by calling out 3, 3, 3 or 4, 4, 4 . If it should be cut and thrown to 2B, let them know by calling out 'Cut 2, Cut 2. Remind them of the situation, (One out, plays at First, We got White on a Bunt, etc.). Remember, don't be shy, you are already looked up to by your teammates by playing the most demanding position on the field.

# Fielding Tips

- ✍ **General**
- ✍ **Ready Position**
- ✍ **Fielding Ground Balls**
- ✍ **Fielding Pop-ups**
- ✍ **Outfield**

## General

Fielding is a skill that is often overlooked by young players as it is perceived as not as fun as hitting and pitching. Many games are won or lost by fielding, especially the close one's. Nothing frustrates a pitching staff more than having to throw more pitches than necessary due to shabby fielding.

- ✍ One key is to always be ready, alert and aware of the situation.
- ✍ Always know how many outs there are, where the runners are, what is the score, what inning it is, what to do with the ball if it comes to you (both in the air or ground).
- ✍ You must be aggressive defensively. Go after the ball, don't wait for it to come to you.

## Ready Position

As the pitcher goes into his windup, each infielder should get into what is called the ready position. The ready position involves the following:

- ✍ Spread your feet slightly wider than shoulder width, so that you can take off in any direction.
- ✍ Weight should be on the balls of your feet.
- ✍ Bend at the back with your seat down, your hands in front of you, and with the glove facing out.

## Fielding Ground Balls

When fielding groundballs in the infield, go to the ball, don't wait for it to come to you (unless it is a hard line drive). Just prior to arriving to the ball, you'll want to 'breakdown' which means get into the ideal fielding position:

- ✍ Bend the back, with your seat down.
- ✍ Have your glove and throwing hand extended out and down in front of you so that you can see both the ball and the glove.
- ✍ You'll want to field the ball in the center of your body.

Once you gather the ball up, you will bring both your glove and throwing hand to your chest area and begin to align your throw up by turning your front shoulder and hip to the direction to which you will be throwing. Swing your throwing arm straight back and point ball away from target with fingers on top of ball. The throw should come over the top and almost complete a full circle. Try to grip the ball with a four seam grip, as it will go straighter. Follow up your throw with your body towards the target, to ensure accuracy and to preserve the health of your arm and shoulder.

## Fielding Pop-ups

When fielding pop-ups, it is important to remember which positions have priority over other positions. When two or more positions could potentially field the popup and both positions call it, the priorities are as follows:

- ✍ You will want to determine based on the arc of the ball where you think it will come down, and then get there as soon as possible.
- ✍ Run on the balls of your feet, otherwise the ball will have a bobbing effect.
- ✍ Always use two hands when catching a popup.
- ✍ Catch the ball at about eye-level.
- ✍ Most importantly, communicate, communicate, communicate. Don't say, I got it, I got it, You got it. Use the phrase Ball, Ball, Ball, to call it. Don't wait to see if someone else is going for the ball first before attempting to field the ball, go for it, if someone else has priority they should call you off.

## Outfield

The ready position for the outfield is similar to the infield but only about half the crouch and bend. Weight should also be on the balls of your feet. You should be ready to 'take off' at the crack of the bat. Always remember the following:

- ✍ You should try to catch fly balls with two hands at about eye-level, with a slight bend at the elbows.
- ✍ You should cushion the ball as it lands in your glove, don't stab at it.
- ✍ When running after a fly ball, avoid running with your glove extended up into the air until you arrive near the ball, as this will only slow you down which may prevent you from getting to the ball.

On high pop-fly's, you'll want to circle the ball so that you are facing towards the infield, so that you can make the quick throw into the infield. Proper outfield play involves a lot of running. On almost any ball hit, every outfielder should be moving somewhere, either to the ball, backing up another outfielder, backing up an infielder who is fielding the ball, or backing up an infielder who may have the ball thrown to him. On that particular play. Again, you must always be aware of the situation, outs, runners, score, what to do with the ball if it is hit to me. Know before the ball is hit, so that you don't have to think about it as the ball is approaching you.

## Mechanical Analysis of Hitting

- ✍ **Initial Preparation**
  - ? Bat Selection
  - ? Mental Approach
- ✍ **At the Plate**
  - ? Grip
  - ? Stance
  - ? Hands
- ✍ **Positioning**
  - ? Bat Position
  - ? Elbow Position
  - ? Front Shoulder
  - ? Head
- ✍ **Hitting the Ball**
  - ? Preparation Movement
  - ? Swing
  - ? Contact
  - ? Follow Through

### Initial Preparation

#### Bat Selection

- ✍ Find one that you can swing with ease.
- ✍ Singles-hitters tend to look for a thicker handle and choke up.

#### Mental Approach

- ✍ Positive thinking and confidence.
- ✍ Relax and loose but aggressive to attack (every pitch is a strike until you see different).
- ✍ Concentrate on imaginary window of delivery point.
- ✍ Know game situation and what is needed (Ex. Ground ball to right side to move runners).
- ✍ Know the pitcher and what his best pitch is.

### At the Plate

#### Grip

- ✍ Firm with bottom hand and loose with top hand.
- ✍ Top hand middle knuckles should line up somewhere between base and middle knuckles of lower hand.
- ✍ Top hand turned too far counterclockwise can create an upper cut and inhibit wrist action.
- ✍ Hold bat in fingers or as close to this position as possible.

## Stance

- ✍ Closed stance generates more power since power is in the hips, but takes longer to open the hips allowing hands to come through.
- ✍ Backing away and behind the plate gives the hitter more time but can make him susceptible to outside breaking pitches.
- ✍ The swing cannot be made till hips open and are out of the way so each hitter must choose a stance and box position allowing himself to hit ball out front with full arm extension.
- ✍ The feet should be shoulder width apart (A stance too spread inhibits hips and too narrow encourages lunging and head movement).
- ✍ The back foot should be parallel with back line or turned in to encourage better hip rotation.
- ✍ The front foot should be parallel with back line to help keep front side of body closed till the last split second.
- ✍ There should be flexion in the knees for balance and to keep weight on the balls of the feet.
- ✍ Hitter is bent over from the waist for shorter swing and to keep front side from pulling out too soon.
- ✍ The weight should be on the balls of the feet (getting weight on the heels encourages the front shoulder to pull out too soon).
- ✍ Weight should be evenly distributed (too much weight on backside leads to front foot hitting, lunging, head movement, and poor timing).

## Hands

- ✍ Hands are ideally over the back foot at chest level (hitting position 3-8 inches from body).
- ✍ If hands start out of the hitting position, they must get to the hitting position prior to pitcher releasing the ball.
- ✍ If hands are too far from the body, a sweeping swing is possible and if hands are too close, the hitter is tied up and has trouble getting the bat barrel out and extending arms, particularly on the inside pitch.
- ✍ While waiting for the delivery, good hitters maintain looseness by practice swings, swaying the body or fingering the bat.

## Positioning

### Bat Position

- ✍ Most hitters like to hold bat angle halfway between an upright and horizontal position.
- ✍ Horizontal starting position enhances bat control but takes away power.
- ✍ Vertical position lengthens swing and lessens bat control.
- ✍ Longer swing also means longer stride.
- ✍ Do not wrap bat around head and back toward pitcher.

### Elbow Position

- ✍ Back elbow is away from body just enough to allow hands to throw the bat barrel out on inside pitches.
- ✍ Raised back elbow will lengthen swing.
- ✍ Front elbow should be kept down to help keep front shoulder down and in and avoid dragging the barrel of bat (insideout swing).

### Front Shoulder

- ✍ Single most important part of hitting is to keep front shoulder down and in when swing is started.
- ✍ Many other faults are not bad in themselves (Ex. Stepping in the bucket) but they tend to pull front shoulder out too soon.
- ✍ A sweeper usually pulls front shoulder out too soon attempting to get hips out of way and bat through the zone.

### Head

- ✍ Quiet with chin near front shoulder.
- ✍ Avoid tilting the head.
- ✍ Head does not move with the stride.
- ✍ Both eyes focused on delivery window.

## Hitting the Ball

### Preparation Movement

The hitter must generate some movement to get body and bat starting (cocking action).

- ✍ Inward turn of the front hip and front knee.
- ✍ Front shoulder turns down and in.
- ✍ As hips turn in the weight shifts to inside of leg.
- ✍ Shoulder is either parallel to ground or front is down slightly.
- ✍ Lifting the front heel facilitates the cocking action and good hip rotation.
- ✍ The back leg is firm and slightly flexed.
- ✍ The hands move back, but no more than 4-6 inches (farther than 6 inches creates a long swing and possible sweep).
- ✍ Cocking the wrist and moving the barrel of the bat toward the pitcher creates more power but a bigger swing.
- ✍ Other common preparatory movements
  - ? Holding hands outside of hitting area and moving them into hitting position (hands must be in hitting area by the time ball is released).
  - ? Wagging of bat.
  - ? Lifting front foot helps to start bat.
- ✍ Stride
  - ? Short casual (6-8 inches) for balance, better focus, and to keep from lunging (stride at right angle to pitcher for maximum power).
  - ? Weight stays on inside of rear foot as stride is taken.
  - ? Stride foot hits on sole of foot, not on heel (front toe is closed).
  - ? The lead shoulder and hips are still closed.
  - ? The head should not move, hands are now in the hitting position (chest level over back foot).
  - ? Front knee is flexed slightly and batter is poised ready to attack.

### Swing

- ✍ Weight moves forward as hitter pushes off the ball of back foot.
- ✍ Front knee opens, back knee falls in.
- ✍ Hips open as weight transfers to outer edge of front foot so hitter can hit against a firm front side.
- ✍ Hips remain parallel to ground.
- ✍ Back foot is pivoted so toe is pointed straight ahead.
- ✍ Front shoulder opens after leg and hips begin to open.
- ✍ The hops help turn the shoulder when swinging.
- ✍ On inside pitches the hips need to open all the way so the belly button is pointing to left field for a right hander.
- ✍ On outside pitches the belly button points to right as the hips open slightly (R.H. batter).
- ✍ After the hips are out of the way the hands throw the bat.
- ✍ The swing should come down and across the plate leveling out as it meets the ball. All pitches are hit out in front of the lead foot with full arm extension.
- ✍ The hitter should not allow his top hand to drop lower than the bottom, thus avoiding the uppercut.

## Contact

- ✍ Location of pitch determines to some extent the exact body position (EX. Hips open more on inside pitches).
- ✍ Striding leg is firm.
- ✍ Back leg is bent and driving into firm front side.
- ✍ The extent of hip and shoulder rotation depends on location of pitch (inside pitch requires hips and shoulders to be nearly parallel to front edge of plate).
- ✍ Back foot raises up on toe facing the pitcher.
- ✍ Weight shifts over top front side and should be on the outside part of front foot.
- ✍ Weight shifts over top front leg or very close to over the top.
- ✍ Head and eyes are focused down on the ball.
- ✍ Lead arm is straight and back arm is bent at the elbow with palm of backhand facing up and palm of the lead hand facing down.
- ✍ On outside pitches, contact is made at front edge of lead foot and the more inside a pitch; the farther out front contact must be made.
- ✍ Wrist starts breaking at moment of impact.

## Follow through

- ✍ Top hand extends through the ball and finishes at a position near the lead shoulder (releasing top hand from bat after contact tends to create a better arm extension).
- ✍ Wrist continues breaking (snap and roll over).
- ✍ Belly button comes around and faces location of pitch.
- ✍ Back foot may even drag slightly (particularly on an inside pitch where maximum hip rotation takes place).
- ✍ Tension in swing prohibits good arm extension.

## Baserunning Tips

- ✍ **General**
- ✍ **Running to First**
- ✍ **Rounding First Base**
- ✍ **Fly Balls/Tagging Up**
- ✍ **Stealing**
- ✍ **Sliding**

### General

There is a big misconception that you have to be fast to be a good baserunner. While it is true that being fast is a tremendous help in baserunning, you can be a good baserunner, with only 'average' speed. Knowing how to run the bases, including sliding and running them smartly can make a runner with average speed a better baserunner than a 'fast' runner who runs them incorrectly. It is critical to listen and watch your basecoaches, know the situation (outs, other runners, score, etc.)

### Running to First

If the batter is using a good balanced swing and follow-through, he should be able to get out of the box in a smooth, quick manner.

- ✍ For right handed hitters the first step should be with the back foot (right foot), the opposite for the left handed batter.
- ✍ The first three steps should be short and quick.
- ✍ On the third or fourth step you may take a very quick peek to see if the ball is in the infield or not. If so, then run in a straight line to first base inside the running lane.
- ✍ You want to run through first base, not to first base. Do not slow down until you have crossed the bag.
- ✍ You will slow down by chopping your steps and decelerating.
- ✍ You will want to look to the right side immediately after touching the bag to see if the ball has got by the first basemen, so that you can advance to second.

## Rounding First Base

If on your quick peek you see the ball is through the infield, or if you hit a fly ball, you'll want to take what is called a banana curve approach to first.

- ✍ What that means is approximately halfway there you will begin to veer slightly outward and then comeback inward as you approach the bag (like a banana shape).
- ✍ You will want to try to hit the inside corner with your foot as you turn towards second.
- ✍ As soon as you realize that the ball is out of the infield, you should be thinking double. Make the ball determine if you have to stay at first.
- ✍ Most of the time, a double is determined by how the runner goes from home to first instead of first to second.
- ✍ And very importantly, listen to your first base coach.

## Fly Balls/Tagging Up

### ✍ **Runners on First:**

On fly balls to right, you want to go about 1/4 of the way to 2B, on fly balls to center, about 1/3 of the way, on fly balls to left, go about 1/2 of the way. You should be under control and watching the ball so that you can quickly turn and get back in the event the catch is made so that you are not doubled up.

### ✍ **Runners on Second:**

On fly balls that would appear to be catchable, go back to the bag so that you can tag-up. Watch the ball all the way and don't leave too early, or the other team may appeal. On ground balls to the right side, go to third, on ground balls to left side, advance to third on the throw, but make sure he makes the throw first.

### ✍ **Runners on Third:**

On fly balls, go back to the bag so that you can tag-up. Watch the ball all the way and don't leave early. You generally do not want a large primary lead, but you do want a good secondary lead. Your primary and secondary lead should be taken in foul territory, so that if batted ball should hit you, you would not be out and it would merely be a foul ball. Your secondary lead should be a controlled but fast walking lead and should not stop until you see that the catcher has control of the ball. Do not start heading back to the bag until you see that the catcher has control. If the catcher does have control then quickly turn and head back to the bag in FAIR territory. This will prevent the catcher from getting a direct straight throw to the bag, and may result in the ball deflecting off of the runner, allowing him to advance home. If the ball gets by the catcher, your fast walking lead should allow the runner to advance home most of the time.

## Stealing

Upon getting to first, you will quickly want to pick-up your third base coach to see if he is giving you any signs. You will want to listen to your first base coach, and watch your third base coach, while still on the bag. Do not take your lead and then look to the third base coach, or you'll get picked off. Upon getting the steal sign, and the pitcher on the rubber, consider the following:

- ✍ Generally you will take a 3 to 3 1/2 step lead.
- ✍ Stay low with your hands slightly in out and in front of you.
- ✍ If the pitcher quickly throws to first, you'll want to go back to the back corner of the bag, with your face facing outward to protect your face from errant throws as well as to see if the ball were to get by the first basemen.
- ✍ Getting a good jump is critical in the success of a steal attempt.
- ✍ Once the pitcher has committed to delivering the pitch, by a movement towards home plate, take off by pivoting the right foot and crossing over with the left leg.
- ✍ The runner should throw or 'pump' their left arm as they cross over.
- ✍ After a couple of steps quickly glance towards home to help determine if you have to stop and return home due to a linedrive, pop-up or flyball, or to not slide and round second instead.

## Sliding

Improper sliding can result in injury to the young ball player. It is important to not slide too late (you may jam a leg/ankle) or too early (you may not reach the bag). Most slides, and probably the safest slide is the bent leg or figure 4 slide.

- ✍ The key elements to this slide is that one leg is straight and extended to the bag, the other leg is tucked under the straight one, hands up and loosely clenched to avoid injury.
- ✍ You will want to start your slide approximately 7-10 feet in front of the bag (depending on speed and height).
- ✍ Takeoff from either leg. You will initially land on the bent legs' calf and thigh and your rear end.
- ✍ Stay low to the ground and throw your head back slightly to avoid hitting the knees too hard on the ground.
- ✍ As your front leg comes into contact with the bag first with your heel up, both legs should bend or give to cushion the slide. It is very important to teach proper sliding as serious knee, ankle and hand injury can occur due to improper sliding.
- ✍ You may want to practice on wet grass or use a large piece of cardboard with no shoes first before practicing on the field.