



TEACHING FIELDING SKILLS

- OUTFIELD -

A majority of the fielding mistakes young players make are the result of improper fundamentals. Your role as a coach is to teach your players basic fielding techniques. With practice, all outfielders can improve their play. The first lesson to teach a player is to be mentally prepared for each play. All fielders should be thinking, "What do I do if the ball is hit to me?" and "What do I do if the ball isn't hit to me?" before the batter even comes to the plate.

OUTFIELDERS

1. As the pitcher goes into the wind-up, fielders need to be in the proper "ready" position – a well-balanced stance with the feet shoulder-width apart, weight evenly distributed on the balls of the feet, and a slight bend in the knees. The glove and throwing hand should be extended in front of the body at chest level.

2. When fielding a ball, fielders need to always listen to their cut-off for instructions on where to throw the ball.

3. When catching fly balls, fielders should move toward the ball and catch it with two hands at eye level on the throwing side of the body. This will best prepare them to make quick throws to the infield.

4. When pursuing fly balls, fielders should try to keep their eyes on the ball. If a ball is hit to the right, they should turn to the right and look over the left shoulder. If the ball is hit to the left, they should turn to the left and look over the right shoulder.

5. Outfielders represent the last line of defense, so if players are unable to field a ball cleanly, they should be in position to keep it in front of them and thus prevent extra bases.

6. Players should keep throws on a line and aim for the cut-off.

7. On balls hit in the gap, players need to clearly communicate with each other to avoid a collision.

8. All players need to be alert and back up plays that don't directly involve them.

9. A glove with an open web is the preferred outfielder's glove because it provides maximum visibility.

DRILLS

The following drills are designed to develop skills which fielders will perform during the course of a game:

1. DROP-STEP DRILL

The Drop-Step Drill is designed to teach young players how to catch balls hit over their heads. Two players face each other about 30 feet apart. One player acts as the tosser while the other is the fielder. The tosser throws a fly ball in one of three directions: over the fielder's left shoulder, right shoulder, or straight over the fielder's head. The fielder breaks from the fielding stance and runs the ball down. Players must remember the first movement is to open up and step in the direction of the fly ball without back pedaling, and that they must focus on the ball by looking over their shoulders.

2. PROPER CATCH DRILL

The Proper Catch Drill is designed to teach players how to move forward when catching a fly ball. This gives outfielders the momentum required to make quick, strong throws to the infield. Use the same two-player alignment as the drop-step drill. This time, the tosser will throw a short fly ball that the fielder must break in on. The fielder times it so they catch the ball on the move – never flat-footed – and follow with a throw. Players must remember to catch the ball at eye level on the throwing side of the body, thus allowing for a quick release.