



## **Basic Fundamentals of Outfield Play**

Outfield play, especially at the youth levels, often gets overlooked. Even though the outfielder is not directly involved in the majority of plays, coaches need to stress the importance of the position. An outfielder has to be able to maintain concentration throughout the game, because there may only be one or two hit balls that come directly to that player during the course of the contest. Those plays could be the most important ones. There also are many little things an outfielder can do – backing up throws and other outfielders, cutting off balls and keeping runners from taking extra bases, and throwing to the proper cutoffs and bases – that don't show up in a scorebook, but can really help a team play at a high level.

## **Straightaway Positioning**

All outfielders – all fielders for that matter – must understand the concept of straightaway positioning. For an outfielder, the best way to determine straightaway positioning is to reference the bases. By drawing an imaginary line from first base through second base and into left field, the left fielder can determine where straightaway left actually is. The right fielder can do the same by drawing an imaginary line from third base through second base and into the outfield. The center fielder can simply use home plate and second base in a similar fashion. Of course, the actual depth that determines where straightaway is varies from age group to age group. Outfielders will shift their positioning throughout the game depending on the situation, the pitcher and the batter. But, especially at the younger ages, an outfielder who plays too close to the line or too close to another fielder can



create a huge advantage for opposing hitters. This also can be dangerous if the outfielders have not learned to communicate properly.

### **As the Pitcher Begins the Windup**

There are two methods of picking up the baseball after it is delivered by the pitcher. Whichever method is used should be determined by an individual player's comfort level.

The first method is to focus on a spot in front of home plate as the ball leaves the pitcher's hand. This is easier for some players, who find it difficult to follow the ball all the way from the pitcher's hand to the hitting zone and then back out to the field when the ball is hit.

The second method is to watch the ball all the way from the pitcher's release point to the point of contact. Again, each player needs to determine which method is most comfortable.

### **Ready Position**

Before the ball is delivered, the outfielder should assume an athletic "ready position." The weight should be distributed evenly on the balls of the feet and the legs should be a comfortable width apart, creating a solid, balanced foundation.



## **Square to Home Plate**

Young outfielders should be square to the hitting zone as the ball is delivered by the pitcher. This allows the outfielder to break either way after the ball comes off the bat.

## **Catching a Flyball**

The number one job of any outfielder is to catch the flyball and record the out. It doesn't matter if an outfielder catches the ball on the right side, the left side or the center of the body as long as the glove and the other hand are above the eyes. The most important thing is to be able to see the ball AND the glove.

We like to teach younger players to catch flyballs with two hands. As players become more advanced, we may let them catch the ball in the manner that is most comfortable – one hand or two – as long as they can see the ball and the glove.

The outfielder should get to the spot where the ball is going to come down and catch it above the head.

## **Catching a Groundball**

Once a batter gets a base hit, it becomes the outfielder's job to keep the batter at first base. The outfielder should get to the spot where the ball is going as quickly as possible and then get under control. Once at the spot, a wide base is established, with the butt down and the hands out in front. Just as in catching a flyball, it is important for the eyes to be able to see the ball AND the glove. The ball should be fielded out in front of the glove-hand foot. Once the ball is fielded, the outfielder



throws the ball to the proper teammate (base, cutoff or relay). At that point the outfielder's job is done.

### **Crossover Step**

On balls hit to the outfielder's left or right, efficiency of motion is very important. The best way to achieve this is by using a crossover step. On a ball hit to the outfielder's right (no matter if the outfielder is left-handed or right-handed), take the left foot and crossover in the direction of the baseball. There should be no wasted motion. The crossover step should be the first movement after the ball is hit. This movement needs to be practiced over and over until it becomes second nature. This can be accomplished by breaking on balls during batting practice or by a coach tossing balls to a player's left or right until the movement is mastered.

### **Drop Step**

To achieve efficiency of motion on balls hit over the outfielder's head, a drop step must be utilized. The drop step is a diagonal step back used when a ball is hit deep to either side of the outfielder. It is followed by a crossover step toward the spot where the ball is going to come down. Just as with the crossover step, the drop step should be practiced until it becomes second nature.

Backpedaling should be avoided. The outfielder should get to the spot where the ball is going to come down as quickly as possible, catching the ball with the glove above the head if possible. Outfielders should avoid drifting or trying to "time" the catch.



In the game of baseball we cannot get underneath every flyball that is hit to us.

There will be instances when we have to make plays on the run, but the ultimate goal is to hustle and make as many plays as possible look routine.

### **Throwing From the Outfield**

All outfielders should throw over the top using a four-seam grip. Once the ball is fielded, the outfielder should pick a spot on the target's body and focus on it. Ideally this spot should be the chest or head. Throwing over the top with a four-seam grip allows for maximum carry and reduces the chances of the ball tailing away from the intended target. The rotation generated by a four-seam grip also allows for a truer skip when the outfielder makes a one-hop throw to a base.

### **Communication**

The center fielder is the general in the outfield and should catch any ball that he can reach. Naturally, if this catch would be an easy one for the off outfielder, the center fielder should encourage the off outfielder to make the play. Outfielders should constantly talk to one another. When calling for balls, the center fielder should continue to call for a ball, since a one-time call may be at the same time as the off outfielder's call, and the players may not hear each other.



## **Outfielder's Checklist**

In addition to the basic fundamentals discussed throughout this lesson, all outfielders should:

- Constantly check wind and sun conditions. Check playing field conditions.
- Keep in mind the condition of the outfield surface and the distance to all the fences.
- Watch all the actions of the hitter closely, such as stance change for hitting to the opposite field, stance for bunting, a shortening or lengthening of the grip on the bat or any change that might indicate the direction he might attempt to hit.
- Know the opposing hitters and how the pitcher will attempt to pitch to them.
- Back up other outfielders and all throws to bases.
- Call plays whenever a call is necessary.
- Back up infielders on balls hit to them.
- Run on the balls of their feet and make a smooth approach to the ball.
- Know all game situations, such as number of outs, tying and winning runs, etc.
- Be sure to know where to throw the ball before getting to it.
- Attempt to hit all cutoff men with a chest-high throw.
- Refrain from making useless throws where a trailing runner could advance.
- Get to the spot quickly on all groundballs and flyballs. Do not coast or drift.



- Never be caught without sunglasses. One fly ball lost in the sun may really cost the team. If sunglasses are not available, be aware of the sun location and use the glove or off hand as a shield.
- The center fielder has priority on flyballs over all other outfielders. If the center fielder can get to the ball, that player should call off the other outfielder repeatedly so there is no confusion.
- Call loudly, distinctly and confidently on all flyballs and take all flyballs they can handle toward the infield. Never pressure the infielder by forcing him to make the tough play. The infielder goes back until the outfielder calls him off.
- Learn how to play fences. On balls that stop at the bottom of a fence, outfielders should make sure they look at the ball when they pick it up, so that they don't have to reach for it more than once. Pick the ball up the first time.
- Like infielders, anticipate every ball is going to be hit to them. Think, "What am I going to do with the ball when it is hit to my right, my left, in front, over my head, hard, soft..." etc.
- Practice taking balls off the bat during batting practice. Much more can be learned by fielding balls off the bat than by any other method.