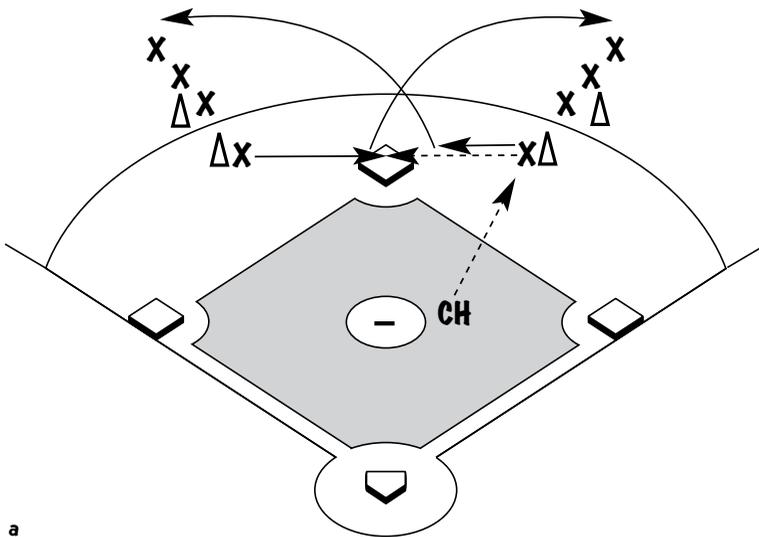


## Force Play Drill; 6-4/4-6 Drill

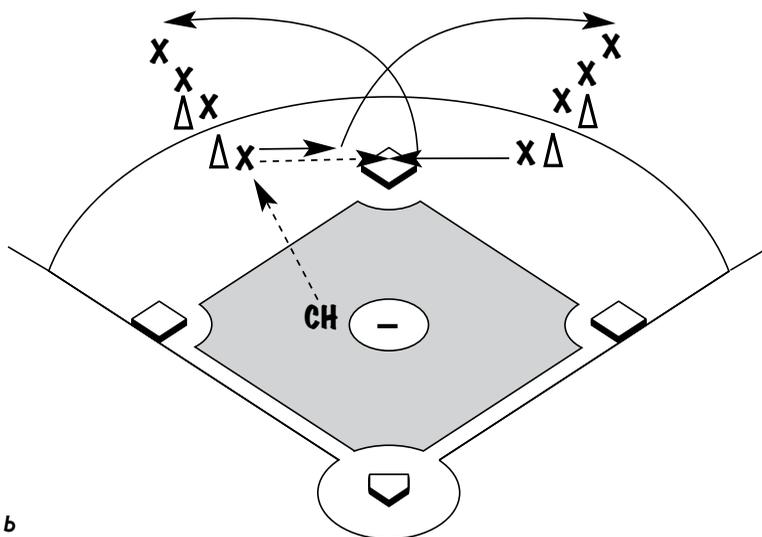
**Goal:** To work on using the underhand flip to get force outs at second base.

**Setup:** One group lines up at shortstop. Another group lines up at second.

**Description:** Coach rolls a ground ball to the first player in the shortstop line. First player in the second base line runs to the bag, puts the left foot on the bag and holds up both hands at chest level as a target. Shortstop fields the ball and executes an underhand flip to the second baseman, who takes the right foot toward the ball and catches it. Second baseman returns the ball to the coach and the players go to the end of opposite lines. After each player goes several times, switch and work on the 4-6 double play feed. Drill is reversed. Difference is that the shortstop puts the right foot on the bag and takes the left foot toward ball. As players get comfortable they can throw to a coach or teammates at first base to complete the double play. Stress the underhand flip and that the players covering second base should get there early and be stationary targets for their teammates. Figure 9.26 diagrams the 6-4/4-6 Drill.



**Figure 9.26** The 6-4/4-6 Drill.



**Figure 9.26** (continued)

**Multitasking:** For players 9 years old and up, add the first baseman to the drill and complete the double play. Start with first base at a shortened distance, and then try to move it back as the players get more comfortable.

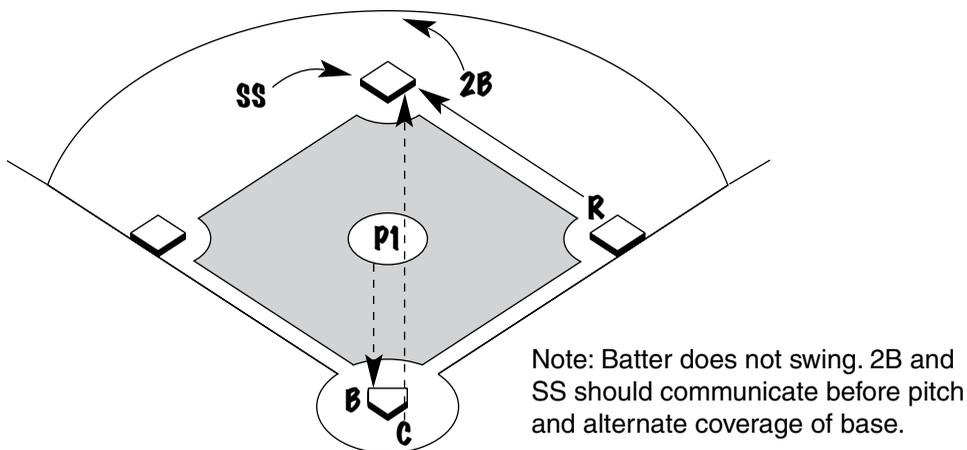
## Offensive Tactics and Strategies

### Fast Feet Drill/Game

**Goal:** To steal a base

**Setup:** The defense has a pitcher, catcher, first baseman, second baseman, and shortstop. The offense has a runner on first and a batter at the plate, but the batter does not swing.

**Description:** When the pitcher pitches, the runner on first takes off for second (adhere to your league rules in terms of taking leadoffs and leaving the bag). The catcher attempts to throw out the runner (see figure 9.1). Rotate runners until each runner gets three steal attempts, then rotate teams. Keep track of points—one point for each stolen base for the offense and one point for each player thrown out on defense. Rotate in groups of baserunners and keep a team score for each group.



**Figure 9.1** Fast Feet Drill/Game.

To make the game easier, do the following:

- Allow the runner a leadoff if none was granted earlier.
- Allow the runner to take off on the pitch if it was not allowed earlier.

To make the game harder, do the following:

- Don't allow leadoffs if they were allowed earlier.
- Don't allow the runner to take off on the pitch if that was allowed earlier. Instead, the runner must wait until the ball gets to the plate.

**Multitasking:** You can have players practice other team fundamentals using this drill. The pitcher can work on holding the runner on first base, and the middle infielders can practice communicating who covers (shortstop always determines), getting to the base as quickly as possible so that the catcher has a target to throw to, and straddling the bag properly to receive the throw.

## Baserunning Practice

### First to Third Game/Drill

**Goal:** To help baserunners develop a sense of when they should try to advance from first to third on a base hit and provide an opportunity for the defense to work on cutoffs and relays.

**Setup:** Put an entire defensive lineup in the field. The rest of the players on the team will serve as baserunners at first (see figure 9.5).

**Description:** Have a pitcher either throw a pitch or simulate a throwing motion to home. The coach hits balls out of his hand, re-creating singles, balls hit in the gap, fly balls that runners should go halfway on, and bloopers. The ultimate goal of the runner is to make it from first to third base on a ball that drops. However, the most important goal is to read the situation and run the bases correctly. Divide the runners up into teams, rotating them every so often with fielders to make sure that they get the same amount of chances on the bases. Award one point to a team when a runner handles a situation correctly and two points for runners who read the situation correctly and advance to third base.

To make the game easier for runners, do the following:

- Hit balls between the outfielders.

To make the game easier for fielders, do the following:

- Hit balls straight at the outfielders.

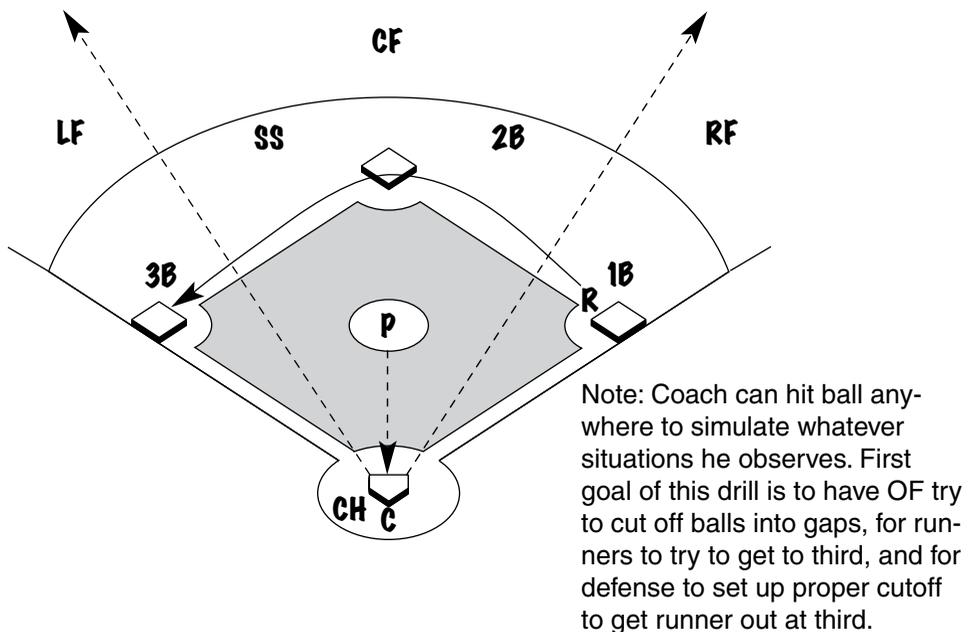


Figure 9.5 First to Third Game/Drill.

To make the game harder for runners, do the following:

- Bring the outfielders closer in, and hit balls more directly toward them.

To make the game harder for fielders, do the following:

- Add a runner at home plate who will act as the batter. Award a bonus point to the team whose runner starts at home if he or she advances to second base on the play.

**Multitasking:** Other team fundamentals can be practiced during this drill. Pitchers can work on holding runners close and making it harder for them to get a jump and take the extra base. Outfielders can practice fielding basic ground balls and fly balls, throwing after the catch, throwing quickly and accurately to the cutoff and relay people, and throwing to the proper base. Remember that a routine ball that is fielded or one that is cut off in the gap by an outfielder is thrown to a cutoff player to keep trailing runners from advancing extra bases. If a ball gets through an outfielder so that the fielder can't throw the ball all the way to the base where the lead runner is heading, a relay situation arises. The player who was the cutoff player needs to get out farther to assist the outfielder in getting the ball to the proper base. The other middle infielder should set up as a trailer, about 10 feet behind the relay person. If a throw is low or high to the relay, he or she should let it go to the trailer. The third baseman and catcher should communicate about where the final throw should go, and the first baseman should make sure that second base is covered.

Also remember that on defense situations exist in which a runner is on first and the throw should come into second base. For example, if the tying run is at bat with a runner on second and there is a base hit to the outfield, the cutoff should be set up to second instead of home. If the cutoff is set up for home and the throw is errant, the tying run can advance into scoring position. The defense would much rather prevent that runner from getting into scoring position and keep the double play in order.

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## Defensive Tactics and Strategies

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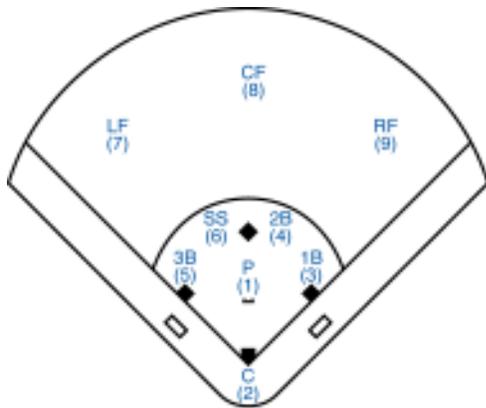
Effective team defense starts with teaching players about correct straightaway positioning, how to provide backups, the difference between cutoffs and relays, proper execution of cutoffs and relays, and how to complete specific defensive plays. Remember that all of your players may not understand baseball terminology, so take extra time to explain exactly what you mean the first time.

### Positioning

Positioning is a primary concern of any team defense. In baseball, it's not as simple as telling your players, "If your opponent does *this*, you do *that*." Instead, you'll have to base your positioning instructions on the hitter's preferred batting side, your pitcher's abilities, the game situation, and how the batter reacts to pitched balls.



## POSITIONING/BACKUPS: FREEZE FRAME



**GOAL:** Get in proper position

**SETUP:** 9 players (entire defense)

- PLAY:**
1. Hit to various locations.
  2. Players field the ball.
  3. Blow a whistle.
  4. Players freeze where they are.

**SCORING:** Everyone in proper position for fielding and backing up = 1 point



### OBSERVATIONS

Either make notes on individual performance, player by player, or on the team's overall ability to perform the key components of the tactic: *communication, know responsibilities, be familiar with batter's tendencies and power.*

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### KEYS TO POSITIONING AND BACKUPS

- Be familiar with batter's tendencies.
- Watch for signals from coach on position adjustments.
- Shift left or right based on batter's tendencies.
- Play deep or shallow based on batter's power.
- Know your backup responsibilities.
- Be involved in every play.



### COMMON ERRORS

- Playing too deep or too shallow
- Not shifting for batter's tendencies
- Standing around



### QUESTIONS FOR PLAYERS

- What was the goal of the game?
- What did you have to do to be successful?
- How can you improve your positioning?

## Hit-and-Run Drill/Game

**Goal:** To execute the hit-and-run play.

**Setup:** Set up an entire defense and place one runner on first base.

**Description:** A coach should pitch and control the velocity and location of pitches, asking the batters to try to hit toward the hole vacated by whomever is covering second in an attempt to advance the runner to the next base and avoid a double play (see figure 9.2). Remember to ask the batters to try to make contact no matter the location of the pitch. The runner should advance as far as possible without being thrown out. Let the group of offensive players have two at-bats each and then rotate in that many players from the defense. Award points to each hitting group this way:

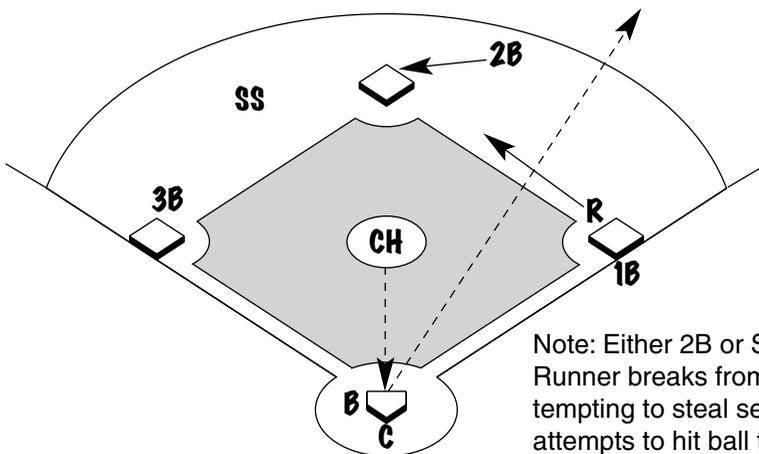
- Two points for a hit that advances a runner to third or home
- One point for a hit that advances a runner only to second
- Zero points for plays that do not advance the runner

To make the game easier, do the following:

- Have batters hit off a tee.
- Instruct infielders to let the ball go through to the outfield.
- Allow leadoffs.

To make the game harder, do the following:

- Throw faster pitches.
- Allow no leadoffs.
- Throw pitches outside the strike zone to make the hitters protect the runner.



Note: Either 2B or SS can cover. Runner breaks from first as if attempting to steal second. Batter attempts to hit ball through vacated hole. OF optional. If you use OF, runner should try to go to third and defense should set up cutoff to third.

**Figure 9.2** Hit-and-Run Drill/Game.

A point to remember for the defense is that games have certain hit-and-run situations. If there is a 3-2 count on a hitter who doesn't strike out much, teams are likely to hit and run. In these situations the middle infielders need to hold their ground as long as possible and not move toward second base so that they don't open up big holes in the infield. With a runner on first with two outs and a 3-2 count on the batter, the runner will always be going on the pitch. The middle infielders must stay in their positions on this play, because the end result will be a walk, a third strike, or a ball put in play. There will be no play at second base.

## Signals to Players

Develop a simple system of hand signals to set plays in motion, and teach your players that a sign stays on until you signal that it no longer applies. Have your players watch the entire series of signs instead of picking up a sign and turning immediately to look at the pitcher, because you may still be giving additional decoy signs. However, don't overload your players. If they have trouble grasping a strategy or remembering a signal, simplify or drop it. Usually you should try to have one sign that is an indicator, such as touching the bill of the cap with the right index finger. The next sign given after the indicator is the play that you want to put on. This technique is designed to keep the other team from figuring out your signs. You might give some decoy signs that don't mean anything unless preceded by the indicator. If your players have trouble understanding this type of system, consider making the real sign the first sign you give. Players can't execute what they can't understand. Table 9.1 shows some hitting and baserunning signals you might use (see also figure 9.3).

**Table 9.1 Coaches' Signs**

Sign	Message
Right index finger to bill of cap	Indicator
Right hand to ear	Bunt
Right hand to chest	Steal
Right hand to top of head	Hit and run
Grab both ears	Take (not recommended in younger age groups; let them hit!)
Rub either arm	Wipe off sign
Delayed steal	One finger extended down and to the left of body

## Lead Runner Drill

**Goal:** To execute force plays at second base.

**Setup:** Place players at each infield position. The offense begins with a runner on first (see figure 9.27).

**Description:** Coach pitches balls that are easy to hit or has a pitcher simulate throwing a pitch or actually throw a pitch. Batters hit or coach hits balls fungo-style. The defense tries to make force plays at second. Each batter hits until he or she hits a ground ball. Each play begins with a runner on first. All six batters for the offense take one turn hitting, then they go through their rotation and hit one more ground ball each (so that they hit 12 ground balls in all). If you are hitting fungo-style, let each baserunner take the same number of turns going from first to second. At that point, switch the offense and defense, and repeat the game. Score one point for the defense for every force made at second; score two points if they turn a double play.

Stress that the player receiving the throw at second gets to the bag as quickly as possible to be a stationary target. The second baseman should place the left foot on the bag and take the right foot to the ball. The shortstop should do the opposite.

**Multitasking:** If your players are hitting, have your baserunners work on their fundamentals, too. Shuffle to a good secondary lead (if it is allowed), go hard on ground balls and go halfway on balls in the air. Runners also should practice a bent-leg slide into second base.

To make the game easier, do the following:

- Hit ground balls fungo-style.
- Roll ground balls to the defense.
- Don't allow leadoffs.

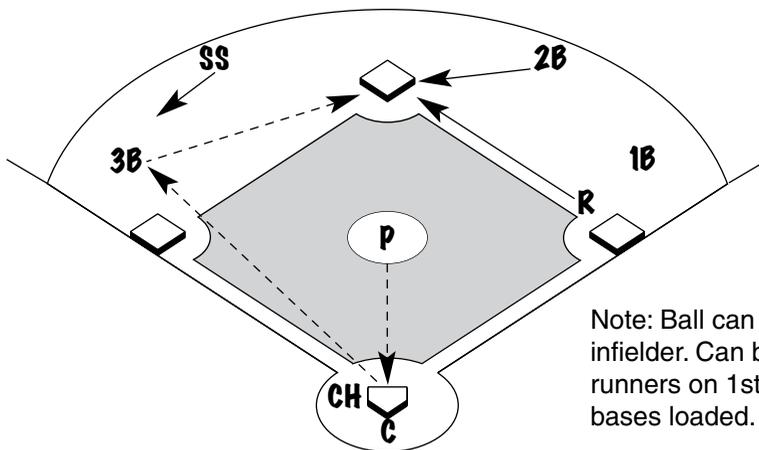


Figure 9.27 Lead Runner Drill.

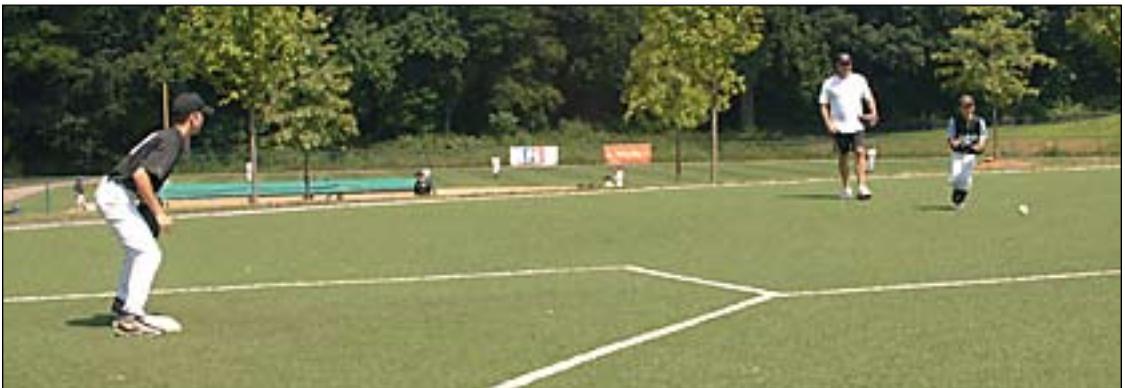
- Don't allow the runner to take off on the pitch. Instead, the runner must wait until the ball gets to the plate.
- Have batters hit off a tee or hit soft toss.

To make the game harder

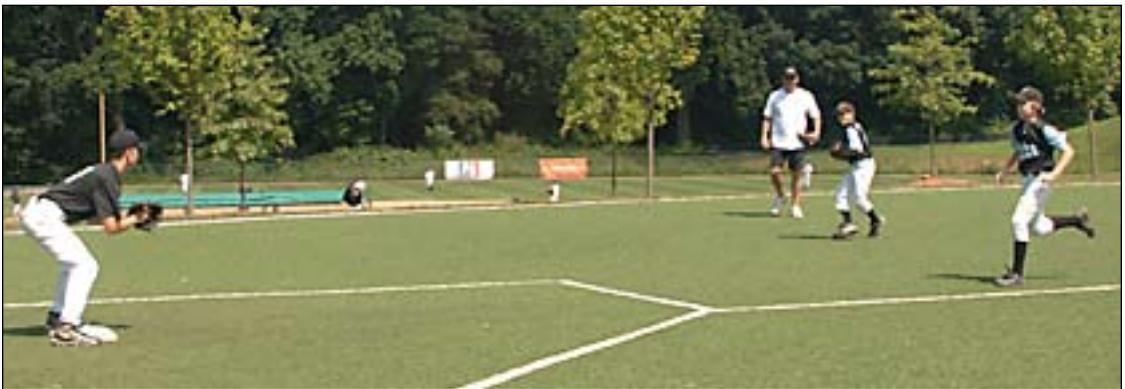
- Allow leadoffs.
- Allow the runner to take off on the pitch.
- Hit or roll ground balls to locations that will make the play difficult.

## Tag Plays

The tag play is another fundamental defensive concept. A potential tag play situation occurs any time a runner is not in contact with a base and time is not out. For example, a runner overrunning second base can return safely to second by retouching the base before being tagged. To put out a baserunner with a tag play, the defensive player must tag or touch the runner with the ball, or with the glove holding the ball, when the runner is off the base (see figure 9.28).



a



b

(continued)

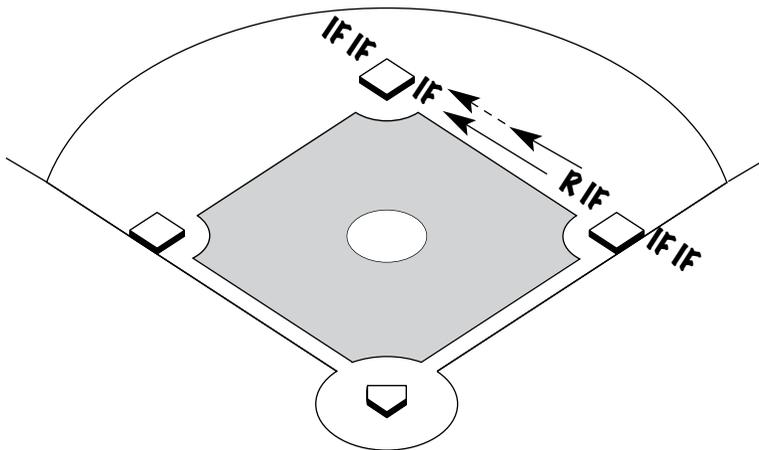
**Figure 9.28** A tag play at third base.

## Pickle

**Goal:** To execute effective rundowns.

**Setup:** Four stations should be placed far enough apart to avoid confusion. Each station consists of two bases placed 30 feet apart (see figure 9.45).

**Description:** Designate one base to be second base and one to be third. Assign three players to each station, two fielders, and one runner. The runner starts in a rundown and then tries to reach a base safely.



**Figure 9.45** Setup for the Pickle game.

Award points to the defense using the following system:

- Two points for getting the runner out on the first throw
- One point for getting the runner out on the second throw
- Zero points if the runner reaches second base safely
- Minus one point if the runner reaches third base safely

When a rundown is completed, restart by having the runner begin part of the way between the bases again. Players rotate whenever the defensive players at that station score four points.

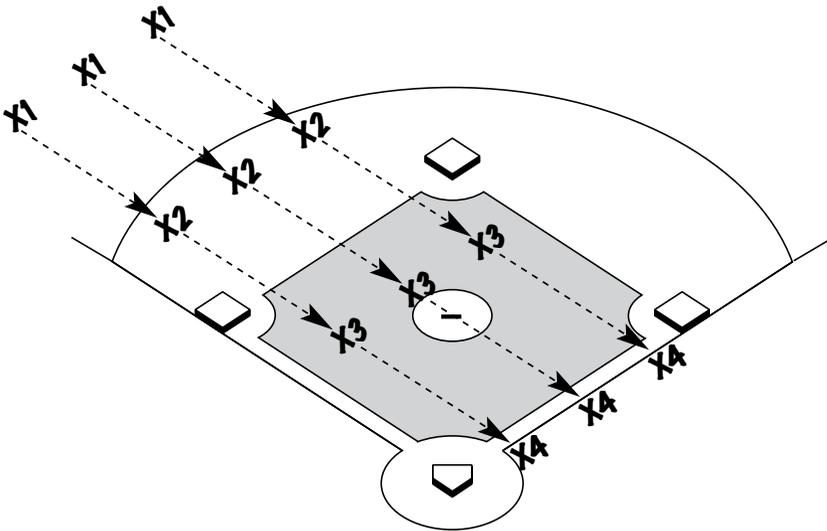
Note that it is important for players to understand the goal of a rundown and the actual execution before introducing the positioning and rotation of players. Make sure that all of your infielders, pitchers and catchers understand the concept of getting the player moving at full speed before making the throw and are able to execute before complicating the play and introducing the other aspects.

## Cutoff Relay Race

**Goal:** To work on catching with two hands, making a quick transfer, and proper footwork when receiving and making throws

**Setup:** Bucket of balls, small groups of players

**Description:** Create groups of three, four, or five players to race. Players stand in a straight line with the others in their group, beginning at the spot where the ball is picked up, spaced evenly. All groups go at the same time. An outfielder picks up a ball lying on the warning track next to the fence and throws to his first teammate. That teammate turns his body, catches, generates momentum, and throws to the next teammate (see figure 9.22). This continues until the ball reaches the last player. The team that finishes first wins.



**Figure 9.22** Relay Race Drill.



a



b



c

**Figure 9.23** Players hone their skills and have fun during the Relay Race Drill.

## Tag-Out Drill

**Goal:** To make good throws to bases, set up properly to receive throws in tag-out situations, and apply the tag.

**Setup:** Place a complete defensive lineup in the field (minus the pitcher) and set up situations where there could be tag outs (see figure 9.30).

**Description:** Start with no one on base and hit a ball in one of the outfield gaps, but not past the outfielders. Make it short enough so that the throw can be made all the way to the base without a cutoff person. The running group is attempting to get to second base no matter what. The outfielder's job is to cut off the ball and make the throw all the way to the bag. The proper middle infielder should straddle the bag, receive the throw, and attempt to make the tag. Keep score. The running group gets a point for making it to second, and the defense gets a point for recording the out.

**Change the situations:** Have the runners attempt to go from first to third and from second to home. Also bring the infield up and have players try to score from third on ground balls to the infield. This also can be done in leagues that permit stealing by having the runners try to steal. You will need a pitcher to do this.

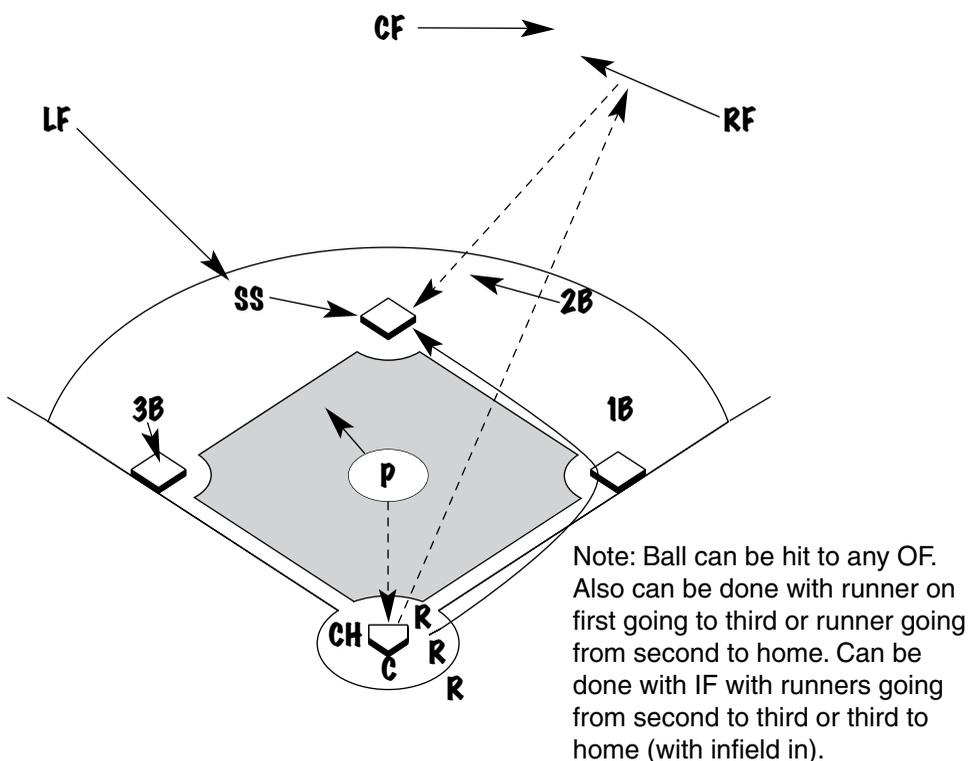


Figure 9.30 Setup for Tag-Out Drill.

To make the game easier, do the following:

- Don't use an outfielder.
- Don't allow leadoffs.

To make the game harder, do the following:

- Allow leadoffs.
- Hit the ball to spots that make the play difficult.

**Multitasking:** You can work on many facets of offense and defense during this drill. Baserunners can practice making proper turns, sliding to avoid tags, and getting jumps on stolen base attempts. You also can mix in some fly balls, ground balls to the left side, and so on to simulate certain tricky baserunning situations. Balls can be hit a little deeper to allow the defense to work on cutoffs and relays. Pitchers can be incorporated and taught how to back up throws to the bases.

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