

## “A different approach to the beginning of practice” Fundamental Drills for Ages 9 and Up

### Philosophy:

It seems to me that too many practices begin with the “same old thing” – get a partner and throw. I believe it might be more beneficial to find imaginative and different ways to begin practice. Starting practice with creative, challenging, fun and faster-paced activities will help ensure that players become more fully engaged and responsive during core practice time. As stewards of the game it is incumbent upon us as coaches to make sure our kids have fun learning the game.

### Goals:

1. To challenge players at the very beginning of practice to concentrate.
2. To promote an active beginning to each practice.
3. To teach dynamic throwing and receiving skills which are necessary in the development of every player.
4. To introduce and develop skills that will be used later in practice  
i.e. rundowns, outfield relays, tag plays at the bases.
5. To begin each practice in a fun and challenging manner.
6. To include a minimal aerobic component to the beginning of practice.

### Drills:

#### Rundown Relay:

XXX

XXX

Players jog/run toward each other with the ball in the throwing hand and their arm at roughly a 90-degree angle, flip the ball to a teammate at the receiving side.

Players should pass left shoulders as they exchange lines.

Coaching points: Players should hold the ball steady and not fake as they are running and should flip the ball (a dart throwing motion) to the glove of the on-coming player. This is a good drill to incorporate on the day you are teaching rundowns or plan to work on rundowns during the upcoming practice.

#### Man in the Middle:

X

R

Z

Man in the middle R (relay man) faces the player with the ball X with his arms raised and begins slowly retreating toward Z turning his body slightly sideways – the ball is thrown from X to R who while continuing to move pivots slightly and throws the ball to Z – immediately upon throwing R reverses, raises his arms and repeats by throwing back to X. Repeat numerous times before exchanging positions.

Coaching points: Player in the middle keeps his feet moving constantly, positioning

himself to make the next catch and throw. ( Having players on the ends make a full arm fake away prior to turning and throwing the ball to R. can be added once the drill is understood and mastered. You can also add a second player in the middle to simulate making a two person relay – racing two teams will add to the competitiveness of the drill)

Side to Side:

XXXXXXXX

Bucket A

Bucket B

Coach (bucket of balls)

Players run one after another from slightly behind bucket A toward bucket B. The coach throws the ball leading the player, upon catching the thrown balls players continue to Bucket B where they drop the ball in the bucket and prepare to return following everyone's turn to catch. The drill repeats itself several times.

Coaching points: The buckets should be 40' or so apart with the coach throwing from a distance his players would be comfortable with. Encourage the players to run full speed with their arms pumping and reaching only at the moment they are to receive the ball. Running with the glove outstretched is much slower and does not promote the receiving skill necessary.

Football Drill:

X  
X  
X  
X  
X  
X Coach

Coach

Each player begins the drill with a ball. When he reaches the front of the line, he hands the ball to the coach and runs a "fly route". A coach leads the player with a thrown ball. Once the ball is caught, the player returns to the end of the line on the

opposite side of a second coach to repeat the drill. To catch over the opposite shoulder coaches move an appropriate distance to the left with players lined up on the coaches left.

Coaching points: Players should be encouraged to run full speed with the arms pumping and reaching only to receive the ball, advanced players will be able to run without starring at the ball and look up to find the ball moments before the catch.

Shuffle and Throw:

XXXXXX

Coach

Player at the front of the line has a ball in his glove in a defensive position– he takes three shuffle steps toward the other line and then releases the ball and continues to follow his throw - a coach receiving the ball tosses it back to the player who then returns to the back of the line to repeat the drill. Repeat drill with two shuffles, and then with one shuffle. (This drill can be added to bucket drills)

Coaching point: This drill promotes the players to create momentum and follow through after they throw, too many times players lose momentum and direction on their throws by stopping their body immediately upon releasing the throw.

Drop Step and Run:

Coach

X

XXXXX

Each player begins the drill with a ball and when he reaches the front of the line he tosses the ball to the coach to begin the drill. Coach pump fakes the ball to the right so that the player drop steps to that side and runs away at an angle – the coach throws a lead “pass” to the player for him to catch. The player then jogs to the end of the line to repeat the drill. After a few reps pump fake over the left shoulder to allow for the drop step left.

Coaching point: Encourage the players to run full speed using the arms in a pumping motion only to reach just prior to receiving the ball.

Drop Step, Run and Reverse:

Coach

X

XXXXX

Same as above only this time once the coach has pumped fake to start the drill, pump fake again over the players other shoulder to get him to reverse directions to

make the catch.

Coaching point: Make sure the player turns his shoulders (taking his eyes off the ball momentarily) the player should turn his head as quickly as possible to pick up the ball, remember to run with arms in a pumping motion reaching just prior to receiving the ball

Bucket Drill:

X  
X  
X  
X  
X  
X

Coach (bucket of balls and an empty bucket if possible)

The coach will roll/toss the balls in the following manner to the player in the front of the line – after receiving the ball the player will run forward and place the ball into the empty bucket and return to his place in line to repeat the drill, each aspect of the drill should be completed several times prior to moving on to the next trial. Direct grounder, backhand no step, backhand a couple steps, line drives to both sides, pop ups middle, right and left and “do-or-die”

Coaching points: Using the rolled/tossed ball allows for many repetitions in a short period of time and enables the ball to be placed accurately to simulate the action desired – often times using the fungo does not allow for as accurate placement of the ball. In doing these drills one coach can roll/toss while the other stands near the receiving area reinforcing the desired technique. This is also a good time to check glove positions since you are already close to the players

### Big Square Drill:

A (third base)

B (second base)

D (home plate)

C (first base)

The square should be about half the size of a regulation infield.

Drill variations:

The ball travels around the square in a clockwise manner with each player adjusting his feet to facilitate a quick release by turning only his shoulders. (2) Counter clockwise turning hips and shoulders and feet to facilitate the throw (3) Counter clockwise with players making a full body turn, turning to the glove side. (right-handed)(4) Clockwise and counter clockwise with a quick tag (5) clockwise and counterclockwise with a short hop.

Coaching points: Make sure the players are moving their feet and shoulders as the drill prescribes, also make sure there are receiving the ball with both hands to facilitate speed of release. These drills should be done by all players and are not exclusively for infielders.

### Small Square Drill:

A (third base)

B (second base)

D (home plate)

C (first base)

The square should be about 15' from base to base. Drill variations: the ball travels around the square in a clockwise or counter clockwise manner flipping the ball from base to base in an underhand fashion or travel counterclockwise with a thumbs down backhand flip.

Coaching point: The player "flipping" the ball should verbalize by saying "flip" to

indicate to the receiving player how the ball will arrive – “flipped” as opposed to thrown. Continue your momentum to the base being “flipped” to by taking the place of the receiver of the ball.

### Diagonal/Right Throwing Drill

3 (third base)

2 (second base)

H (home plate)

1 (first base)

This is a good drill to end practice and because it requires throwing the ball a longer distance and thus it is NOT a good drill prior to a proper warm up time. To learn this drill the square should be about half the size of the infield, as the players become familiar with the drill and acquire the skills desired the full infield would be the ideal size. This drill takes 8 throws to complete and requires some concentration. A ball caught from a diagonal throw will be thrown to the base on the right and a ball caught from the right will be thrown diagonally to the base in front i.e. H-2, 2-3, 3-1, 1-2, 2-H, H-1, 1-3, 3-H

Coaching points: A variation to the drill is to have each player simulate making a quick tag upon receiving the ball. If not remaining at the bag to make a tag have the players use good footwork and upper body positioning to receive the ball – each throw should involve one shuffle prior to the throw and the throw should be followed with one good step toward the base to maintain momentum and accuracy. To add interest you can determine an acceptable time and then compete against the time.

### Base Running Drill

XXX 3B

2B XXX

XXX H

1B XXX

Divide available players equally at each base  
Sacrifice Fly Drill:

Have each player take a three step lead from each base, have a coach in left field toss a ball into the air, while the ball is in the air all players return to their base to tag up with their eyes on the ball. When the coach catches the ball all players should advance one base full speed– do this at a relatively fast pace until players return to their original base (if time doesn't allow advance the players two bases instead of four)

Coaching points: Make sure players are in a relaxed position at the base and they do not leave early, several repetitions in a short amount of time will reinforce these concepts. Watching the ball being caught keeps the player from guessing when to go or responding to a coach's command. Seeing the ball caught will speed up the process.

Advance two bases drill:

Divide the available players equally at home and second base. The player at home slaps his hand together to start the drill. (lead arm extended and slap with trail hand simulating a swing – I recommend no bat for safety reasons) On the slap runners advance two bases (H-2B and 2B-H)

Coaching points: Have base coaches signal the players to advance. Encourage players to make a small arc and to accelerate thru the base. Runners finishing at second should throttle down so as to not overrun the base when a slide is not warranted.

Notes about these drills:

1. These drills are to promote essential and fundamental skills and should be executed at full speed once the players have become familiar with the drill.
2. Players should be encouraged to go full speed although their chances of completing the drill successfully will diminish.
3. Perseverance on everyone's part will allow the players to get to the point of success with speed and then you will have something!
4. Familiarity with the drills will lead to a fast paced beginning to practice!

**Whenever possible return you players to their parents sweaty, dirty and tired – it will ensure that they had a good time.**

Good luck and have fun! Coach Ed Walton (coachwalton13@aol.com)